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# The Teacher as Servant Leader: Revisited

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## The Teacher as Servant Leader: Revisited

Dr. David Anderson

**Editor's note:** What follows are two articles, the first, The Teacher as Servant Leader: Revisited, by Dr. David Anderson came about at the editors' request to the author to create a follow up to one of our most downloaded articles, published in 2013, The Teacher as Servant Leader. The newer, shorter piece contains the author's current thinking. The original article was a reprint from an earlier book chapter from the proceedings of the ICCTE Conference, published in 1997, and follows the new article in this document.

### I am Nobody's Servant!

The desire to be a servant-leader is probably not foremost in the minds of college and university students who seek to become schoolteachers. When Bethel College (now University) shared the model of teachers as servant leaders with a cadre of our graduate students, one student in the educational leadership program responded vehemently "I am nobody's servant!" — revealing a negative association with the term "servant." She apparently did not understand the concept of servant leader as we explained it. The intensity of her response effectively halted the flow of the discussion. Perhaps the negative reaction of this student resulted from her association of serving with subservience or submission. But servant leadership does not imply weakness or servitude. In fact, because servant leadership emphasizes the students' best interests, it requires strength, competence, compassion, and focus on the students. I resisted the urge to challenge her with questions regarding, for example, whether she made dinner for her family or what she thought teaching, as this would have cut off communication. Instead, I simply restarted our explanation of the teacher as servant leader.

The concept of servant leadership stems from the work of Robert Greenleaf (1991) whose writing influenced the leadership style of CEOs in several major corporations. However, the idea of servant leadership significantly predates Greenleaf, being taught and modeled by Jesus during his earthy ministry as he contrasted his style of leadership with that of the rulers of the Gentiles:

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great [a leader] among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave — just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. (Matthew 20:25–28, NIV)

Peter echoed these words, writing that Christians are to live as servants, both of God and others (1 Peter 2:16, 4:10). Van Brummelen (2004–2005), building on Paul's instruction to have the same attitude as Christ (Philippians 2:5–7), described teachers who are servant leaders as those who willingly serve and invest in the lives of others in the school community, thus creating "a vibrant and loving sense of togetherness and common purpose" (p. 21). In doing so, teachers serve not only their students, but also their colleagues and the school itself.

### Transformational Servant Leaders vs. Transactional Leaders

Perhaps the student who rejected the idea of teachers being servant leaders would have been more comfortable with the concept of transformational leadership (Lewis, 1996), but servant leadership and transformational leadership are not dissimilar, and in what follows I

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will frequently combine the terms. A transformational leader serves the best and highest interest of others and seeks to establish a healthy community — in our context, a classroom and whole-school community in which partnering among students and among faculty is desired, and in which learners who have a disability or struggle with a particular topic gain a sense of hope through the teacher's attitude, actions, and words. Teachers who are servant leaders seek transformation in the lives of those they lead, while at the same time being open to their own transformation by learning new skills and approaches to teaching and through increased understanding of the learners they serve.

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“Transformational leaders inspire others to excel, give others individual consideration, and stimulate people to think in new ways” (Lewis, 1996, p. 6). Lewis' description of transformational leadership contrasts directly with transactional leadership which employs rewards in exchange for performance. This form of leadership can be found in many classrooms where grades or personal privilege are offered as rewards (bribes?) for academic growth or appropriate behavioral performance. Transactional leadership is more akin to what I experienced in secondary school, where some of my teachers seemed to understand their role as simply passing along academic knowledge or, at best, encouraging us to develop innate skills and follow our interests. Many were giving and personable; most remained emotionally distant from their students, seemingly tolerating us out of necessity. But just as Jesus did not lord it over his disciples, we must not lord it over those we disciple. McCloskey and Louwsma

(2014) distinguished transactional leaders from transformational leaders using contrasting terms: transaction leadership stresses contracts, control, and incentives; transformation leadership advocates covenant, empowerment, and inspiration. Thoughtful readers will recognize that transformational leadership operates on a higher and more respectful level consistent with the idea of servant leadership.

## **Transformational Servant Leadership as Relationship**

Relationship is at the heart of servant leadership and, at its core, is a spiritual element, emanating from our character and reflecting who we are as Christian educators and whose we are as children of God called to be Christ in the world. A Christian's calling is not, strictly speaking, a call to teaching, but a call to be Christ, demonstrating in and through his or her life the heart of Christ. “Wherever we live and work is the place where God has called up to represent, encourage, and further the kingdom of God” (Anderson, 2012, p. 6).

Transformational servant leadership calls for establishing a positive relationship with teaching colleagues and with students, and requires spiritual maturity, passion, wisdom, integrity, and open, honest communication. Our leadership style should reveal that we are part of the family of God, even if our students (or colleagues) have no idea what that means.

Since leadership is a relationship rather than something a leader provides (Nelson, 1996), servant leadership is a relationship process in which the servant leader's goal is to recognize and release the potential of those who are led. A servant leader leads, not from a position of authority, but as one who serves. In the Lucan account of Jesus' instructions on leadership to the disciples (Luke 22:25–27), Jesus pointed to the Gentile leaders referring to themselves as “benefactors.” The Greek word used (*euergetēs*) means workers of good, or philanthropists. The implication is that their service was self-centered, designed to bring honor and praise to themselves. Teachers, as transformational servant leaders, must not fall into that pattern of thinking. True greatness is to be like Jesus and serve others; in

our context, focusing on our students' advancement, not our own. Jesus helps us recognize that the relationship we establish with our colleagues and students will either enhance or diminish our ability to serve and to lead.

## The Heart of a Servant Leader

The primary issue for teachers as servant leaders is the heart — our heart toward God in response to his gifting as a teacher, and our heart toward those we servant lead. One's approach to teaching and to those taught reveals much about the heart of the servant leader. A teacher who espouses the idea that he or she is the authority in the classroom and is not to be questioned, may be exhibiting limited assurance of God's call or gifting as a teacher, a lack of self-confidence, or even fear of or disrespect for the students (or all three).

Faculty in teacher-education programs also need to examine their own heart and their approach to their students. Do we model servant leadership as we work with our students? Do we seek to transform them as they develop skills in teaching, and are we being transformed through our relationships with our students and through continued professional development?

Moen (2005) argued that leading like Jesus has more to do with the transformation of the person who leads than with those who are led. The real issue, wrote Moen, "is not what is happening in my head. It is what is happening in my heart" (p. 18). Moen described leading like Jesus as a lifestyle. Being a Christian transformational servant leader requires commitment to those we lead and a strong relationship with them and with God. Nouwen (1972) wrote, "The beginning and end of all Christian leadership is to give your life for others" (p. 72), adding that "Christian leadership is accomplished only through service" (p. 77).

As believers, we are (or should be) continually growing or progressing in our own transformation toward Christlikeness in every aspect of our being, our personal and spiritual character (Romans 12:2, 2 Corinthians 3:18). But as servant leaders, our goal is also to encourage growth or transformation in others (colleagues and students). We need to look for signs of our students' academic, behavioral, and social growth

and help them recognize their own progress, no matter how small the changes may be. But if we are not being transformed, through our interactions with the students we teach/lead, it is likely that they are not being transformed, either.

## Distance vs. Humane Leadership

In writing about Jesus' counter cultural approach to leadership, Thomas (2018) discussed "high power distance" leadership and "higher humane orientation" leadership. High power distance leadership is what the Gentile authorities modeled, lording it over, exercising authority over them (Luke 22:25). Teachers who take this stance, seeing themselves as benefactors or helpers to their students, psychologically place themselves above the students with an implied (demanded?) idea that students should be grateful for the teacher's patronage. Jesus modeled a higher humane orientation by identifying himself with the youngest and the one who serves. In presenting himself as an example of a servant, Jesus reduced the power distance (Luke 22:25–27).

For some teachers, this alteration from high power, in which teachers distance themselves from the students, to high humane orientations, in which they identify with and serve students, is threatening. Perhaps this is another reminder of God's words in Isaiah 55:8-9 (NIV):

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. "As the heavens are far higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts."

Granted, teaching is hard work, especially in an age when students are sometimes critical and demanding. It is hard to tell who is more eager for the school year to end, the students or the teachers. But a teacher's real desire, based on the relationship of transformational servant leadership, should be to help students improve the skills they have already acquired while also developing new skills leading to ongoing success, not to see the end of the school year so the students can be passed on to another teacher.

Perhaps it is best to think of the classroom (at all levels of education) as a place where students and

## THE TEACHER AS SERVANT LEADER: REVISITED

teacher do life together. Not simply as a place where knowledge is (hopefully) passed on from one generation to the next, but where knowledge is shared, perhaps leading to growth in both students' and teachers' understanding and skill. Within the framework of special education, the role of student and teacher may even be reversed, as the student's difficulty in grasping what is being taught forces the teachers to learn a new, potentially more effective, approach which can be used with other students. A student may even solve a problem using a method other than what the teacher typically uses, thereby helping the teacher to grow. Teachers who are servant leaders will welcome this new learning and find it useful in working with other students who are having difficulty.

### Head, Heart, Hand, Habits

I have often used the idea of head, heart, hand, and habits when speaking of inclusion of students with special educational needs in the regular classroom (credit goes to Pudlas, 2007, for stimulating my thinking on elements). These four dimensions are useful in understanding transformational servant leadership. They seemingly could provide an evaluation system for determining leadership effectiveness or to assess commitment to servant leadership. But to be used for assessment, there would need specific observable behaviors to be assessed in each dimension. Even then, such rating would involve a degree of subjectivity, especially when considering things like motivation and character (heart) or daily commitment to develop into an effective leader (habits). Beliefs and assumptions about leadership (head) can be specified and leadership behaviors (hands) documented, but again, reliably assessing them is problematic. Perhaps their best use would be in self-assessment, but these four dimensions are important to understanding how to teach as a servant leader. Perhaps their best use would be in self-analysis. Christians who seek to be transformational servant leaders could periodically, perhaps even daily, review their performance vis-a-vis these four dimensions.

The head-heart-hand-habits dimensions are highly interrelated and somewhat hierarchical. It is the heart (motivation and character) from which one's assumptions regarding leadership

(head) are derived. These assumptions and beliefs show in leadership behaviors (hands) and skills (habits). Anything that interferes with this process — in any of the four dimensions — will weaken a person's leadership. Prayer is necessary, as is continued study of a biblical perspective on leadership, in order to keep the proper focus for leading. The model of leadership seen in Jesus is something toward which we strive, but we must recognize that sin is still active around and even in us. Focusing on Jesus, on the principles of Christian living described by Paul, and acknowledging our sin will help us to keep our heart right. Just as our physical heart plays a more important role that our hands, our spiritual heart plays a critical role in keeping our head on straight, on leading our hands, and establishing our habits. There are many good books on leadership written from a Christian perspective, but our heart must stay focused on the Leader. We must, with the help of the Holy Spirit, remember that even as we lead, we are also being led by God. What we do is not to glorify ourselves, but to bring glory to God. We, as servant leaders, must care about those whom we lead and be ready to be led by them as together we serve of Lord. We must, as John 15:7 says, abide in Jesus and let his words abide in us. "Christian teachers, as servant leaders, are servants first. While serving, they lead out of concern for the needs and welfare of their students" (Anderson, 2013, p. 3)

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## The Teacher as Servant Leader

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Any Christian philosophy of education must begin with acknowledging God to be the Creator of all that is, and as the source of all Truth. All knowledge is derived from, or in some way related

to, the Creator God. Three elements that inform our understanding of education are:

- our having been created in the image of God;
- the creation mandate; and
- the principle of stewardship.

The fact that humans are created in the image of God (Ge 1:26-27) sets the stage for our educability. Essential to our understanding of that image are such attributes as language (communication), reasoning, imaginative and creative ability, and the need for social relationships. The appetite to learn can be understood as a manifestation of our having been created in the image of God. The aspiration to know, explore, discover, invent, and discern the relationship and order in God's world is innate because of our having been created in God's image. That image remains despite the fall into sin.

The creation (or cultural) mandate, found in Genesis 1:28 and 2:15, is God's command to rule creation under his authority as landlord (Reichenbach & Anderson 1995), and to explore and develop creation, discovering the particulars and the possibilities of God's handiwork. In the words of J. I. Packer: "God made us with the intention that we should control our environment by harnessing and managing the forces of nature; thus our lives become an image of God's own lordship over all things" (1978:23). Through this mandate, God sanctified the exercise of those communicable attributes that are part of his image in us, making our quest for knowledge and understanding an act of obedience to God's command.

The biblical principle of stewardship emanates from this mandate and rests upon the knowledge that God is both Creator and Lord: the Owner of all has entrusted his domain to the care of those created in his image, who stand in his place. Our subduing or ruling over creation does not grant us arbitrary power, answerable to none. Rather, God has placed us in the position of working and caring for his world as co-regents with him (Van Brummelen 1994). Being stewards requires that we make wise and responsible use of what God

has given—both in the world and in ourselves—with an attitude of guardians rather than owners. Caring for and developing our own intellectual, artistic, creative gifts is as much a part of being faithful stewards as caring for and developing the world. As Van Brummelen (1994) pointed out, the biblical picture of ruling and leadership always involves service; the authority God gave is to be lived only within servanthood (Walsh & Middleton 1984). "God has given us the business of stewarding for him, and he will call us to account for what we have done for him, for ourselves, and for that over which we rule" (Reichenbach & Anderson 1995, p. 55).

These three elements (the image of God, the Creation Mandate, and the principle of stewardship) impact Christian teachers both inwardly and outwardly. Inwardly, teachers as image-bearers and stewards, seek to develop themselves and their own knowledge of God's world. Outwardly, they see their call to stewardship or responsibility to involve disciplining their students and encouraging students' endeavors to understand God's world and their place in creation.

The Christian educator's concern should be for the students' total development in all domains—cognitive, affective, physical, and spiritual. Within this framework, teaching is viewed as a form of Christian service or ministry, the purpose of which is to help individuals develop their full potential, discover their unique gifts and talents, and understand their responsibilities as stewards of what God has placed at their disposal (i.e., "to prepare God's people for works of service," Ephesians 4:12). Being concerned with the total development and functioning of individuals, including those who have some impairment, disability or disorder, Christian educators follow the example of Jesus who was teacher, healer, and servant. While we may not be able to bring physical healing to the disabled as Jesus did, we can help students with disabilities grow within the limitations of their physical or intellectual capacity (perhaps even going beyond what we, or they, perceive those limitations to be), and to accept the handicapping condition as simply one aspect of who they are as individuals, as just another facet of their personhood.

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The servanthood of the Christian educator is part of the ministry of reconciliation to which God has called us: reconciliation with God, with other humans, and with creation itself. Basic to that ministry is education about the world and its people as created by God, about redemption through Christ, and about helping people (with or without disabilities) become whole. As stewards, Christian educators serve God in obedience to His call to teaching and in the exercise of the teaching gifts he has given. They also serve society at large in helping to develop an educated and responsible people. Christian educators most directly serve those whom they teach, however, helping them grow and develop wholly. By fulfilling this calling, Christian teachers are faithful stewards of what God has entrusted to them while also helping their students become faithful stewards of all they have received from God.

### **The Teacher as Servant-Leader**

Most people entering the field of education recognize that teaching is a service profession. The Department of Education at Bethel College acknowledged this in adopting for its programs in teacher education the organizing theme The Teacher as Servant-Leader, and stating its mission as preparing educational leaders for service in public and non-public schools. The concept of servant-leadership is modeled in scripture in the person of Jesus Christ who used terms like servant, salt, and shepherd to depict his ministry and ours. Though Lord of all, Jesus described his earthly ministry as one of service (Mt 20:28; Mk 10:45). Our attitude, said Paul, should be the same as that of Jesus who, though "being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant" (Php 2:5-7). Peter also taught that we are to "live as

servants of God" (1Pe 2:16) and to use the gifts we have received "to serve others" (1Pe 4:10).

The biblical teachings on living and loving; on relationships with God and others; on sin, grace, redemption, and forgiveness, all have direct relevance to the educational servant-leader. Scripture teaches that all persons are created in God's image and have inherent worth because of that image. Because all persons are image-bearers, Christian teachers must model respect for children and youth and consider their response to students in light of how Jesus would see them (cf. Lk 18:16).

Christians who function as educational servant-leaders regard teaching as a ministry or helping profession in response to God's call to serve and assist others to become all they are capable of becoming. Teachers are in a position to servant-lead others by helping to meet their students' developmental, intellectual, affective and spiritual needs. Their orientation toward others motivates them to use their gifts, talents, and abilities to help their students grow as persons. The philosophy of servant-leadership helps Christian educators maintain a focus on the needs of individual learners in order to help the students learn or discover methods that capitalize on their strengths while at the same time addressing their weaknesses. The desire is to servant-lead their students in such a way as to enable them to acquire academic skills, knowledge, and dispositions that will facilitate their growth and display the attitudes of discipleship and stewardship.

Although not professing a scriptural basis for his ideas, Greenleaf popularized the concept of servant-leadership through his book *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate*

*Power and Greatness* (1991). Greenleaf influenced the leadership style of CEOs and boards of trustees of several major corporations and organizations with whom he worked. In 1964, Greenleaf founded the Center for Applied Ethics, renamed in 1985 the Robert K. Greenleaf Center for Servant-Leadership (Spears 1995).

Spears' (1995) analyzed Greenleaf's idea of servant-leadership and identified ten key

properties of the servant-leader. A Christian evaluation of the key principles reveals that they are consistent with biblical teaching. The ten key properties are

- listening, characterized by strong communication skills and an intense commitment to listening to others,
- empathy, shown in a deep understanding of others which communicates acceptance and recognition of their uniqueness,
- healing, demonstrated by seeking wholeness of self and others,
- awareness, both general and self-awareness,
- persuasion, attempting to convince rather than using one's authority to coerce when dealing with others,
- conceptualization, revealed by being able to see beyond the day-to-day problems or realities to envision long-term outcomes,
- foresight, illustrated by being able to understand past lessons, present realities, and the probable future consequences of decisions,
- stewardship, marked by dedication to serving the needs of others,
- commitment to the growth of people stemming from belief in the intrinsic worth of others and a commitment to their development, and
- building community among those who work in the institution by promoting positive interpersonal skills and relationships, and a spirit of interdependence.

Other writers have built on Greenleaf's ideas on leadership to distinguish between managing and leading. Genuine leadership, wrote Walters, is supportive: "It leads people: it doesn't drive them" (1987:11). Such leadership seeks to involve and encourage those who are led, attempting to strengthen them in their work, their creativity, and their own development as leaders (Walters 1987). Hawley described leadership as an act of giving: "Giving whatever the situation needs.... Giving yourself. Giving others the freedom to



THE TEACHER AS SERVANT LEADER: REVISITED

pursue their dreams. . . . giving heart-deep support for human dignity and excellence" (1993:172). Rieser spoke about "the servant within" (1995:49), characterized by the desire to help and to serve others. Similar to Greenleaf, Rieser stressed that servant-leaders can be identified by the consequences of their influence on others. Servant-leaders see themselves as stewards and ponder what they have been entrusted with and what they will hand on (Kiechel, 1995). Service, then, is an attitude that places others first:

People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. . . . They want to know if you care about them as a person, if you care about helping them solve their problems. Then your knowledge and experience become important. (Bethel 1990:19)

Such leaders display qualities of supporting and enhancing others, inspiring creativity, and ensuring understanding. These are leadership skills that enable others "to invest in themselves and discover their own best" (Bethel 1990:115).

These notions of servant-leadership from the world of business have easy and direct application to the preparation of Christians to teach in public or non-public schools. Teaching must not be viewed as a managerial position involving directing others. Rather, Christian teachers, as servant-leaders, are servants first. While serving, they lead out of concern for the needs and welfare of their students. Qualities such as listening, empathy, healing, commitment, and building community are critical characteristics of Christians as educational servant-leaders.

The teacher as servant-leader moves away from a hierarchical view of leadership, the essence of which is taking charge. Instead, servant-leadership is relationship-oriented. Rather than being bosses, teachers travel educational roads with their students, as co-learners or co-investigators. This encompasses an egalitarian, rather than military, sense of leadership in which the teacher does not send, but goes alongside the learner on the educational journey. Lontos (1992) and Mitchell and Tucker (1992) referred to this as transformational leadership, leading to dual outcomes of student growth and teacher growth. Schools then become places of inquiry where

activity centers around students and teachers learning together.

As Christian teachers display the properties of servant-leaders (e.g., building community, commitment, listening, healing, empathy), the current school culture may change. They break through the isolation of doing their own thing behind closed classroom doors. They may begin to champion inventiveness and creativity. They may avoid channeling students whose learning or behavior does not meet arbitrary standards into "special" education. Servant-leadership encourages collegial relationships and collaborative endeavors in serving students and their families. We daily experience the growing diversity of students, the increase of at-risk students which has resulted in a blurred distinction between general and special education, and the rapid expansion in information and technology. Such changes necessitate changes in schools and a new paradigm of the teacher. The teacher as servant-leader meets this need.

## Conceptual Framework for the Teacher as Servant-Leader Model

As part of a Christian learning community at Bethel College, the Department of Education seeks to prepare educational leaders for service in public and non-public schools. In developing a conceptual framework for the teacher as servant-leader, five principles were embraced which draw upon current thinking in the field of education and are consistent with Christian ideals. Educational servant-leaders:

- possess a Christian worldview which is characterized by integrity and compassion,
- are reflective practitioners pursuing continued personal learning and professional renewal,
- are knowledgeable and competent in their subject matter,
- understand how students learn and develop and facilitate learning through effective teaching, and
- establish collaborative relationships with students, staff, parents, and community members

of varying personality, racial/ethnic background, family characteristics, socioeconomic status, and ability.

- The remainder of this paper provides a brief explanation of these five principles.

### **Principle #1 The educational servant-leader's Christian worldview provides a strong moral framework**

The Christian worldview begins with the Bible as "God's authoritative Word for life" (Van Brummelen 1994:25). This leads to the acknowledgment that God is Creator, and that all persons are created in the image of God and, therefore, have uniqueness, individuality, and worth. Although the five principles of the conceptual framework are not mutually exclusive, but inform one another, this first principle is particularly important in understanding the Christian teacher's role as servant leader. The Christian worldview gives direction to servant-leaders in their capacity as reflective practitioners and to their sense of professionalism and self-discipline. The biblically-based beliefs, values, and attitudes of the Christian educator provide a frame of reference that impacts "educational objectives, curricular decisions, the selection and handling of course content, teaching methods and student guidance" (Holmes 1995:ix).

Christian faith is relevant to all facets of human knowledge and experience, including the content of the curriculum. Christian faith is particularly germane to how one interacts with others, which is the primary focus of this principle of the teacher as servant-leader model at Bethel College. The Christian worldview provides a strong moral framework from which the teacher servant-leads others in an ethical, fair and respectful manner. This biblically-based worldview directs educational servant-leaders to display integrity, personal discipline, justice and compassion in their actions with others (students, parents, school personnel). They seek to model that moral and ethical framework in the decisions they make as part of their personal and professional activities, following the example of Jesus. Educational servant-leaders recognize and value democratic ideals that are consistent with Christian faith. They respect cultural diversity, and

seek to develop skills and understanding, instill character, encourage responsible citizenship, and promote the attitude of stewardship and the value of life-long learning in their students.

Increasing violence and materialism, coupled with decreasing morality in the present society, have provided an incentive for educators to suggest the need for a "curriculum of care" and to issue a new call for "character education." Noddings (1992, 1995) and Charney (1991), for example, have written about the need to organize the curriculum around themes of care—"caring for self, for intimate others, for strangers and global others, for the natural world and its non human creatures, for the human-made world, and for ideas" (Noddings 1995:675). While character education is something that can be taught (Kilpatrick, 1992; Lickona, 1991), it begins when teachers themselves model moral character. Character education has been referred to as a process rather than a program, an ethos or character of the school (Character Education: A Gift to Students, 1996). Christian educational servant-leaders are able to establish such an ethos within their classrooms as they live out the Great Commandment: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind . . . and . . . love your neighbor as yourself" (Mt 22:37-39). Christians exhibit the character of God as they demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23).

Christian teachers significantly impact their students through the instructional decisions they make; the attitudes they communicate toward and about students, their families, the school, and the community; and in the relationship they establish with their students. In short, they reflect the person of Christ in their interactions with students and others. Individual morality is the basis of a civilized society, particularly a democratic society. Since education affects the life of each person in our society, educational servant-leaders who display and teach a strong moral framework based on Christian truth are critical to the future of our society. The epitome of this moral framework is the concept of agape love and caring.

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Such Biblical love characterizes classrooms that are alive. . . . It means classrooms filled with a mutuality of care and respect, with constructive and fair relationships, with teachers driven by a deep desire to do everything possible to help children be and become what God wants them to be. It means providing a spectrum of learning activities suited for students with diverse learning styles. It also means using assessment and evaluation practices with such variety that every student can shine in at least one or two types. It means giving students meaningful responsibilities and trusting that they will fulfill them unless contrary evidence suggests they need help and direction. It means choosing curriculum content that deals with issues of strategic importance to our Christian community and to our culture, issues where our love can make a difference. (Van Brummelen 1994:38)

A Christian worldview which provides a strong moral framework characterized by integrity and compassion is foundational to being an educational servant-leader.

### **Principle #2: Educational servant-leaders are reflective practitioners**

Effective practitioners critically reflect on the academic content they teach, on content-specific pedagogy and curriculum, on general pedagogical matters including knowledge of the learners themselves, on collaborative relationships, and on the moral framework (including personal and social values) with which they approach their function as teachers/servant-leaders. Reflectivity is part of the servant-leader's professionalism (Schon 1983). From reflective questioning comes recognition of the need for continued personal and professional growth. Servant-leaders consider

the social and spiritual contexts of education and reflect on their actions, their students' response, and the role of education in preparing an effective and responsible citizenry for participation in the local and global community. A further consequence of this reflectivity is a commitment to continue the process of acquiring and using pedagogical and subject matter knowledge on behalf of the students, while also seeking to advance their own understanding of God's world.

Schon (1987) described two aspects to being a reflective practitioner. One aspect is that teachers reflect on what they have done in the teaching act and consider the response of the students (reflecting on action). Evaluation of a lesson taught exemplifies this aspect of reflection. The second aspect Schon calls reflecting in action; i.e., pausing in the midst of a lesson to think about the variables and making spontaneous adjustments as needed to facilitate learning. These elements of reflection enable teachers to gain added insight into their own understanding of the content being taught and the relationship of ideas, concepts, and facts, as well as to experiment with new ways of presenting instruction. "Through reflection, we develop context-specific theories that further our own understanding of our work and generate knowledge to inform future practice" (Killion & Todnem 1991:14). Reflective decision makers are "motivated to analyze a situation, set goals, plan and monitor actions, evaluate results, and reflect on their own professional thinking. As part of this process, the teachers consider the immediate and long-term social and ethical implications of their decisions" (Colton & Sparks-Langer 1993:45).

Becoming a professional educator is an ongoing process that continues throughout one's career. Critical reflection enables educational servant-leaders to advance their own growth. They will realize their need for continued education and skill development, and learn from (and with) their students. Such reflectivity is particularly important given the increased multicultural nature of schools. As educational servant-leaders, we are called upon to work with diverse students, families and colleagues of varying cultural and racial/ethnic backgrounds. To be effective, the reflective practitioner considers the impact of teaching decisions on all students, making

necessary accommodations or adaptations to capitalize on students' strengths.

**Principle #3: Educational servant-leaders are knowledgeable and competent in subject matter This aspect of the model of education focuses on the three categories of content knowledge**

identified by Shulman (1986):

- subject matter content knowledge,
- curricular knowledge, and
- subject matter pedagogical knowledge.

Subject matter content knowledge refers to mastery of the facts and concepts of a domain. It involves understanding the structure and interrelationships of concepts, topics and ideas that make up the domain of study, along with the relevant multicultural perspective. Why something is deemed warranted or worth knowing, and knowing which elements can be omitted without damaging the integrity of the discipline is also part of subject matter content knowledge.

Curricular knowledge refers to understanding the design and content, origin and purpose of the curriculum for a domain of study. Beyond "scope and sequence," this entails awareness of the range of programs designed to teach a particular topic or subject at a given level, and knowledge of the variety of instructional materials available for the domain. Also included is understanding characteristics that indicate or contra-indicate use of specific curriculum or program materials in a particular situation, and making appropriate educational decisions based on that understanding.

Subject matter pedagogical knowledge relates to how ideas within domains are represented and made comprehensible to students. Educational servant-leaders seek to understand what makes certain topics easy or difficult for individual learners to comprehend, in order to accommodate the varying learning styles, cultural and experiential backgrounds, and abilities of their students. This is much as Jesus accommodated his

message and approach to individuals to whom he ministered and as Paul became all things to all people (1Co 9:22). Knowledge of subject matter pedagogy allows educational servant-leaders to choose strategies that will help students reorganize their understanding of subject material and assimilate new ideas.

As reflective practitioners operating from the ethic of Christian love, educational servant-leaders consider the response of their students to their teaching, and seek to expand their knowledge of teaching methods, strategies, and technological advances appropriate to their discipline in order to be able to adapt instruction to their students. At the same time, their pursuit of personal learning and professional renewal causes educational servant-leaders to remain current in their discipline and to further their understanding of the relationship of their particular field of study to other "bodies of knowledge."

**Principle #4: Educational servant-leaders understand how students learn and develop, and facilitate student learning through effective teaching**

Knowledge of principles of typical and atypical human development, of individual learning styles, and of learning and motivational theory are all crucial to the effectiveness of servant-leaders as they seek to provide their students with age- and developmentally appropriate educational activities. Educational servant-leaders recognize the effect of cultural, familial and environmental factors on their students' development and ability to process and benefit from formal and informal learning experiences. Awareness of and respect for individual differences is important in enabling educational servant-leaders to adapt, design and evaluate developmentally appropriate curriculum that is sensitive to multicultural, gender and ability issues.

The attitude of servant-leadership is reflected in the role Christian teachers assume in approaching their students. Rather than view themselves experts who possess knowledge the students must reproduce, teachers as servant-leaders, out of the love and servanthood that stems from their Christian worldview, seek to lessen their own

THE TEACHER AS SERVANT LEADER: REVISITED

importance while enabling their students. While not totally relinquishing the authority that goes with the position of teacher, educational servant-leaders seek to encourage their students' development. Servant-leaders' commitment to the growth of students implies a desire for their students to display stewardship in the decisions they make and in how they work with and care for their environment. Thus, teachers as servant-leaders must be flexible in their planning and must give students some "authority" by inviting them to take ownership of their own learning.

Recognizing that knowledge is not something passively received, teachers as servant-leaders see themselves not as dispensers of knowledge, but facilitators. They provide materials and incentive for new learning, create cognitive conflict for their students, and encourage student experimentation and involvement in the learning activities. Christian educational servant-leaders attempt to fashion the curriculum and design activities to further students' understanding of God's world and their appreciation of the awesomeness of the Creator. Effective facilitation of student learning means assisting students to actively work with new ideas or knowledge. The relational quality of servant-leadership is seen as the teacher works or studies alongside the students. The constructivist view of teaching/learning (Brooks & Brooks 1993) is consistent with the teacher as servant-leader. Servant-leaders guide rather than direct student activity, treat students as works in progress rather than completed products, and look for what their students can generate, demonstrate and exhibit rather than what they can repeat.

This principle also deals with the more pragmatic aspects of teaching. Effective schools are characterized as having a well-articulated instructional focus, providing a safe and orderly climate for teaching and learning, holding high expectations for students' success, regularly monitoring students' achievement, and actively involving students in their own learning and construction of new (to them) ideas or knowledge (cf. Block, Eftim & Burns 1989; Brophy & Good 1986; Davis & Thomas 1989).

Pivotal to being a servant-leader is the Christian teacher's ability to create a positive learning

environment that provides a sense of physical and psychological safety and models the community of love, an increasingly important concern in many or America's schools. Aside from practicing effective classroom and instructional management techniques, community building requires that educational servant-leaders understand and accept the diversity of their students and accommodate their teaching to the students' cultural and experiential backgrounds, interests, needs, learning styles, and developmental and ability levels. Teachers draw on this knowledge when reflecting on their teaching and curriculum and decide what pedagogical approach to use with their students (and further reflect on the effectiveness of the chosen approach).

Knowing each student and adapting instruction to the student's needs, developmental level and individual learning style are crucial components of the teacher as servant-leader paradigm and exhibit several key properties of the servant-leader such as listening, empathy, healing, and awareness. Greenleaf (1991; Spears, 1995) identified these components. The components also model the approach which Jesus, the Master Teacher, demonstrated with his disciples and others with whom he came into contact during his earthly ministry.

### **Principle #5: Educational servant-leaders establish collaborative relationships**

The concerns of love and community building require that educational servant-leaders understand the necessity of working collaboratively and cooperatively with students and their families, with school staff and colleagues, and often with community resource persons or agencies, especially as the "at-risk" population continues to increase and as teachers encounter greater cultural and economic diversity in the schools. Team teaching becomes critical, partly as a result of greater interest in including students with disabilities in the least restrictive/most normal setting. Further impetus for collaboration stems from the growing interest in site-based management and issues of professionalism, and the trend toward more complex forms of instruction such as those

involved in active and cooperative learning strategies (Pugach & Johnson 1995).

Welch and Sheridan (1995) define collaboration "as a dynamic framework for educational efforts that endorses collegial, interdependent, and co-equal styles of interaction between at least two partners working jointly together" (11). The partners in this collaboration may be two or more teachers, a teacher and student(s), or students working together on a project or assignment. These authors see collaborative educational partnerships as benefiting the classroom, the school, the home, and the community. Effective educational servant-leadership necessitates competence in collaboration in order to build a "community of learners . . . that embraces the diversity of cultures and languages" found within the school and which "promotes a positive sense of personal identity and thus greatly enhances the possibilities for academic success" (McCaleb 1994:xii).

Building community, a key property of servant-leadership, requires collaborative endeavors that seek to establish connections between home, school, community, nation and world. The rapid and continuing expansion of knowledge and technology necessitates cooperative teaming among teachers and collaboration with what has traditionally been seen as external to the educational system (for example, business and industry, social service agencies, government, higher education) in order to develop curricula which have a global and interdisciplinary focus and which will prepare students for living in the 21st century. Continued reflection on teaching and schooling is necessary as Christian servant-leaders pursue responsible stewardship in the use of their gifts and in their work with and care for the world (including their students), and as they encourage the attitude of stewardship in their students.

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*Building community, a key property of servant-leadership, requires collaborative endeavors that seek to establish connections between*

*home, school, community, nation and world.*

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## Implementation of the Teacher as Servant- Leader Model

Each of the five principles of the conceptual framework described above draws from relevant knowledge bases that contribute to current educational philosophy and best practices. Included in these knowledge bases are reflective practices; the social, historical, and philosophical context of education; typical and atypical human development; learning and motivational theory; learning styles; general pedagogical principles; multicultural awareness and sensitivity; and interpersonal and communication skills.

Key performance outcomes and descriptors for each component of the conceptual framework are presented in the Appendix to this paper. Each course in the teacher education programs at Bethel College has been linked to these key performance outcomes, and the manner in which the outcomes are developed and assessed have been identified to assure that coherence exists between the conceptual framework and student outcomes, courses, field experiences, instruction, and evaluation. As the principles of the teacher as servant-leader are explicated in the courses, modeled by college faculty, and practiced by the teacher-education students, future teachers learn how to teach/lead in a Christ-like manner, and recognize the integration of effective teaching practices and biblical principles. Obviously many of the principles of servant-leadership can be emulated by anyone in the education profession. They can be best exemplified, however, by Christian teachers whose lives are characterized by the attributes of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal 5:22-23), and who model the servant-leader attitude of Jesus Christ.

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THE TEACHER AS SERVANT LEADER: REVISITED

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## Appendix

### The Teacher as Servant-Leader: Key Performance Outcomes and Descriptors

1. Educational servant-leaders whose Christian worldview provides a strong moral framework characterized by integrity and compassion are teachers who:

Provide dedicated service to others: Act and respond to needs of others; demonstrate interest in student holistic well-being; provide opportunities for students to fulfill their potential.

Demonstrate ethical decision making: Identify pertinent ethical issues; articulate and apply ethical principles (e.g., love [seeking the good of others], fairness, justice).

Treat others with fairness and respect: Demonstrate acceptance of others and an open mind to the ideas of others; treat each person as having uniqueness, individuality and worth.

2. As reflective practitioners pursuing continued personal learning and professional renewal, educational servant leaders:

Engage in ongoing reassessment of their personal role as educators: Articulate a personal philosophy of education; have an awareness of own teaching/learning style; recognize the influence on themselves of culture, family, personal style, and ability.

Reflect on professional practice and the underlying assumptions: View themselves as professionals and communicate to others what teaching as a profession involves; evaluate effects of choices and actions of students, parents, other professionals; actively pursue professional growth opportunities.

Cultivate a broad perspective about education in its social context: Maintain current understanding of the interaction of education and society; evaluate educational decisions in light of historical perspectives, current trends, and surrounding circumstances.

Model the value of continued personal learning and professional development: Show enthusiasm for their discipline and see its connection to everyday life; reflect upon their own strengths and areas for growth, and use that knowledge to make decisions about continuing personal and professional development; model life-long learning to their students.

3. Being knowledgeable and competent in their subject matter, educational servant-leaders: Demonstrate appropriate content skills and knowledge: Demonstrate skills appropriate to the content area; seek to understand the content, scope, and structure of a specific body of knowledge; have a sense of personal scholarship through concentrated subject matter study; seek to keep abreast of current information in the particular field of study.

Think critically and reflectively about current research, theory, and practice specific to their subject matter: Within their discipline, examine different viewpoints and theories, analyze different methods of inquiry, and evaluate methods of instruction and developing information.



THE TEACHER AS SERVANT LEADER: REVISITED

4. From their understanding of student learning and development, to facilitate learning through effective teaching educational servant-leaders:

Create and maintain a positive learning environment within the classroom: Provide clear and appropriate behavioral expectations and establish corresponding rules and routines; exhibit awareness of simultaneous classroom activity; reflect on possible causes of student misbehavior and employ strategies to promote a more positive climate; recognize and promote opportunities for growth of self-discipline in learners; model respect, enthusiasm, self-discipline, and consistency of intention and action.

Adapt, design, and evaluate developmentally appropriate curriculum which is sensitive to multicultural, gender, and ability issues: Design curriculum which reflects the cultures of our diverse society; design or adapt the curriculum to accommodate students with differing backgrounds, learning styles, and learning rates; apply current theories about typical and atypical human development to the choice of classroom learning experiences and instruction.

Design appropriate learning outcomes: Reflect on the nature of the subject matter, community, school and parental expectations, personal philosophy, and students' needs and interests in setting goals; use learning objectives to plan curriculum and select appropriate resources, activities and strategies; state clear curriculum outcomes/objectives that are realistic and attainable; communicate the goals and purposes of learning to students and parents.

Make teaching decisions based on assessment of student learning: Use a variety of assessment strategies and tools to measure student progress; modify curriculum, objectives, plans, teacher behavior, and instructional strategies based on observation and assessment of student performance.

Use a variety of teaching strategies to accommodate diverse backgrounds, interests, and needs of students: Select a variety of teaching methods based on current learning theories; use strategies shown by research to be consistent with effective teaching; incorporate available resources

and technology to enhance instruction in their field of study.

Actively involve students in their own learning: Maximize learner participation through a variety of strategies (e.g., questioning, journaling, role play, group work, etc.), and modify approaches as needed to increase student involvement; teach and model critical thinking skills, problem solving strategies, and reflection; promote students' awareness of growth by providing support, feedback, and the opportunity to assess their own learning; assist students in developing learning strategies and independent study behaviors.

Are resourceful and creative in meeting the needs of students: Foster and model creativity in teaching and learning; become familiar with resources of school, parents and community to assist in delivering instruction appropriate to students' needs.

Communicate effectively: Demonstrate effective listening, verbal and non-verbal, and presentation skills; seek to understand and to be understood.

5. As teachers who establish collaborative relationships with students, staff, parent, and community members of varying personality, racial or ethnic background, family characteristics, socioeconomic status and ability, educational servant-leaders:

Relate positively with students having varying needs, abilities, and learning styles, including children with special needs: Model and encourage an accepting and respectful attitude of community within the classroom; recognize strengths and contributions of each student; acknowledge that everyone can learn and make appropriate accommodations to the needs, abilities, and learning styles of individual students.

Contribute in a positive manner to the school climate: affirm students and staff; demonstrate enthusiasm; Seek to do more than the minimum (desire to do the best job possible); promote physical and psychological safety in school environment; support the school in the community; work for consensus with fellow staff and school families.

Serve as a resource and referral agent to students, parents, other professionals, and outside agencies: Establish rapport and partnership with parents/caregivers; demonstrate proper use of internal processes for consultation, pre-referral and referral; know procedures for referral to service agencies and consult and collaborate with them; participate as team members in providing assessment and services; adhere to data privacy laws.

Deal sensitively with families from diverse backgrounds with varying belief systems: Invite and welcome participation by family; communicate the importance of family/school cooperation; act in a fair and impartial manner; demonstrate an understanding of the cultural context of each family; communicate with parents in a manner sensitive to each family's situation.

Work positively with school personnel: Communicate concerns and confront issues in a positive and collaborative manner; seek to collaborate with others in problem solving/decision making; seek to build positive relationships by respecting and affirming others; communicate effectively with school personnel; take initiative/responsibility for problem solving; maintain a service orientation; maintain confidentiality.

The servanthood of the Christian educator is part of the ministry of reconciliation to which God has called us: reconciliation with God, with other humans, and with creation itself. p.2

Christian teachers significantly impact their students through the instructional decisions they make; the attitudes they communicate toward and about students, their families, the school, and the community; and in the relationship they establish with their students. p. 6

Servant-leaders' commitment to the growth of students implies a desire for their students to display stewardship in the decisions they make and in how they work with and care for their environment. p. 9