Self-Directed Learning and the Impact of Leadership: Analyzing Keys for Success from a Covenental Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The current state of education seems to beg for visionary changes to truly impact students and prepare them for the future. Self-directed learning models purport to do just that, by preparing students to be self-motivated, lifelong learners. While many educators seek to apply self-directed practices, research reveals that there are several obstacles that can hinder self-directed learning. Duby's 2006 study of schools employing self-directed learning investigated how leaders successfully overcome these hindrances via specific leadership attitudes and behaviors that not only effectively overcame these obstacles, but are also reflected in the covenantal perspective of leadership. Using content analysis, this paper further explores the findings of Duby's study of educational leaders, analyzing them within the covenantal construct developed by Fischer (2003), in order to better understand the relationship between effective leadership practice and the covenantal perspective. This study revealed intriguing similarities between particulars of the CFA model and the leadership practices exhibited in the self-directed learning schools. These similarities also present opportunities for future study, including whether visionary organizations are more apt to be motivated by covenantal principles and examining the type of for-profit organizations that are more apt to embody the tenets of CFA.

Keywords: Educational leadership, self-directed learning, learner-centered, covenant

Introduction

One of the most exciting developments in education in recent years is the increased emphasis on the self-directed learning model. Though the importance of directing one's own learning is not new, its relatively recent promotion has prompted many educators to look much closer at its many facets—its roots, its processes, and its potential—in order to more clearly define its role in America's classrooms.

But what has been missing thus far in the literature is a discussion of how leadership can help ensure a successful self-directed learning environment. This is especially important since Wehmeyer, Agran, and Hughes (2000) identified several obstacles that hinder self-directed learning, obstacles whose solutions appear to be leader-oriented. In 2006, Duby interviewed leaders and teachers of two schools that facilitate self-directed learning to better understand how leadership addresses these obstacles for success in such an environment. Duby's initial findings revealed certain leadership practices that helped these schools overcome the obstacles identified by Wehmeyer et al and attain their desired learning outcomes. As a means of further developing those initial findings, this study will reexamine the leadership practices from a covenantal perspective as articulated by Fischer (2003). Fischer's covenantal model provides a historical and practical framework for leadership and organizational behavior "best practices." Before discussing how covenantal principles can be applied by leadership to support the self-directed learning community, this paper will provide a brief overview of both the self-directed learning context and the definition and history of the covenantal idea.

Leadership and Self-Directed Learning

Duby (2006) investigated two schools to understand how leaders equip and encourage teachers to overcome obstacles and best facilitate self-directed learning. Self-directed education is a unique learning model that emphasizes non-centralized classrooms and participative learning and presents a rich context for reviewing the leadership practices of the selected schools. Early studies by Knowles (1975) suggest that the self-directed learning environment helps students become proactive learners. These findings are consistent with later studies by Bandura and Wood (1989), Hofer and Yu (2003), and Dynan, Cate, and Rhee (2008) who also suggested that enhancing a student's opportunities for self-directed learning contributes to his or her academic performance. Research has suggested that self-directed learning processes are necessary for students to develop lifelong learning skills (Candy, 1991; Lapan, Kardash, & Turner, 2002; Palmer & Wehmeyer, 2003), achieve academically (Chen, 2002; Hofer & Yu, 2003; Zimmerman, 2002; Dynan et al., 2008), and attain desired outcomes in many aspects of life (Wehmeyer & Sands, 1998; Grow, 2003; Perry, Nordby, & Vandekamp, 2003). Indeed, Martinez-Pons (2003) warned, "The failure of students to become sufficiently self-regulatory to manage learning on their own is of considerable social concern" (p. 126).

Yet Zimmerman (2002) found that few teachers effectively prepare students to learn on their own. Some researchers believe this is due to the staid, traditional classroom methodology present in most of today's classrooms which, according to Baum, Owen, and Oreck (1997), may discourage or limit self-direction. Patrick and Middleton (2002) stated, "These opportunities for students to be self-directed, rather than others-directed, are not always plentiful in traditional classrooms" (p. 29). For instance, Hofer and Yu (2003) noted that although self-directed learning is an important aspect of student performance and achievement, it is seldom an overt goal of classroom instruction.

Some have suggested that school leaders are also resistant to incorporating self-directed learning concepts in the classroom. One reason for such resistance was described by Eshel, Kohavi, and Revital (2003). Their research suggested that some school leaders believed making students more active in the learning process would diminish a teachers' responsibility to ensure learning. But, these researchers noted that no research has supported such a position and contended that there is no contradiction between granting students a greater share in classroom decision making and retaining, at the same time, teacher responsibility for student learning. Indeed, Sierens, Vansteenkiste, Goossens, Soenens, and Dochy (2009) found that granting students autonomy for their learning increased self-directed effectiveness, and Dynan et al. (2008) reinforce the importance of the teacher in this process.

Though this research demonstrates that teachers enhance a student's learning, classrooms employing self-directed teachers are not the norm. Self-directed learning involves processes not typically found in conventional classroom environments. As Wehmeyer, Palmer, Agran, Mithaug, and Martin (2000) stated, "Teaching students to take greater control over and responsibility for their own learning and to become causal agents in their lives is a process that often does not lend itself to traditional models of teaching" (p. 440). A learner-centered education can only occur in schools committed to developing a learner-centered culture and the processes and structures that are necessary to support that culture.

Similarly, Gibbons (2002) suggested that self-directed learning "requires a different approach by the teacher and demands new skills from students" (p. 3). Silén and Uhlin (2008) use *collaboration* to describe this approach for self-directed learners. Thus, it will require a concerted effort on the part of leaders to ensure that this type of learning occurs. As Horng and Loeb (2010) note, "strong instructional leadership is essential for a school to be successful (p. 69).

In his review of leader practices in non-profit schools, Duby (2006) investigated two schools that employed the self-directed learning model. One school had fewer than 40 students, was located near the farms and fields of a relatively small town in Central Virginia, and was rather limited in its available resources and budget. The second school was a large, multi-campus school comprised of hundreds of students, was located in an affluent suburb of a large metropolitan city in Northern Virginia, and possessed considerable advantages in resources, facilities, and in its financial standing. Duby's research sought to answer how leaders—regardless of school size and with appreciable differences in available resources—partner with teachers to ensure self-directed learning. Duby employed multiple-case study analysis to examine this question.

According to Yin (2003), research that seeks to address *how* questions tends to be explanatory in nature, and explanatory studies are often examined with case study methodology. Though Yin posited that a good case study can be accomplished with just one sample, he suggested that examining more than one case may lead to a stronger study that enhances the prospects for generalizability. Therefore, Duby's research employed a multiple-case study that examined two

cases purposefully selected to ensure an information-rich context in which to conduct the research.

The subsequent analysis and discussion of the data revealed important leadership practices that positively addressed the obstacles that Wehmeyer, Agran, and Hughes (2000) suggested hinder self-directed learning. These barriers included limited information afforded to teachers, the inability to properly instruct students to self-direct their learning, and the lack of authority granted to teachers to provide instruction in self-directed learning. This consideration led to an important question regarding a leader's role in promoting self-directed learning. What type of leadership is needed to overcome these obstacles? Duby's (2006) investigation suggests several important leadership practices that positively affected teacher autonomy, encouraged participative practices, and revealed servant leadership tendencies, all of which helped overcome the obstacles identified in the study. Since Duby's original study, there has been little attention given to leadership practices in self-directed learning institutions. For example, while Silén and Uhlin (2008) note the complexity of self-directed learning, they focus on the need for the teacher to properly implement the model. And while Dynan et al. (2008) stress the importance of structure in self-directed learning, they too leave the responsibility for structure in the hands of the teacher. Pata (2009) also focuses on structure, identifying the need to model spaces conducive to self-directed learning, yet the type of leadership needed to effectively design such spaces is not addressed.

Although leader types or behaviors are not prevalent in the literature, Reeves (2006) explored "the essential transformations of leadership for learning" (p. 158). While Reeves did not identify a leader type to address specific problems of such new learning models, he did present key leader behaviors that help ensure the best possible learning, such as visionary, relational, and collaborative leadership. While Reeves' study focused on American schools, a study of Asian schools by Triwaranyu (2007) revealed the necessity of similar leader behaviors. Triwaranyu suggested several strategies for implementing new learning paradigms and noted that school leaders should be open-minded and knowledgeable with "the ability to elicit opinions and ideas from all group members" (p. 60). Though Triwaranyu acknowledged leadership issues, an overarching leader approach or model is not suggested.

While these studies focused on traditional schools, other research has examined leader behaviors in organizations that implement self-directed learning. Smith, Sadler-Smith, Robertson, and Wakefield (2007) examined the role of leadership in twelve for-profit companies that utilize self-directed learning for worker development. While the study did not identify any particular leader types, it did present strategies important to leadership and self-directed learning, including fostering a culture and organizational environment that is supportive of self-directed instruction. The researchers also reflected on the importance of developing skills that value, encourage, and support self-directed learning. Thus, research reveals that some of the more effective leader practices for self-directed learning are similar to those identified in Duby's (2006) study.

The revelation of these practices led to a new research question: was there a conceptual framework for this type of leadership, one that might reveal other effective practices that these leaders could adopt? A cursory review of leadership theory indicated a possible relationship between the leadership practices Duby identified and those found in covenantal leadership, a perspective described by Fischer (2003) as embracing the processes and attitudes of a healthy organization. Therefore, this paper seeks to further examine the leader practices revealed in Duby's 2006 study from a covenantal perspective, comparing these leader behaviors with those identified by Fischer (2003) to see if covenantal leadership was displayed. If covenantal leadership is apparent in the two cases investigated by Duby, it may be a leader model that should be encouraged in schools embracing self-directed learning.

What Is Covenant?

The term *covenantal framework of action* (CFA) or *covenantal leadership* was introduced by Fischer (2003) as a means of articulating a framework of leadership which embraces the structure, process, and attitudes of a healthy leadership team and organization. Furthermore, Fischer sought to use concepts and ideas that were not merely confined to the field of leadership theory/organizational development alone (which often becomes the victim of fads and passing trends). Instead, the notion of *covenant* was embraced because that term and its related principles have had a significant positive impact upon Western civilization, and more specifically, upon the organizational soundness of American government and politics (2003).

The term *covenant* denotes a mutually agreed upon relationship in which the various members of the party commit to serving and caring for one another in clearly defined ways (Elazar, 1995). The covenantal idea is a Biblical one, in which God covenants with man by allowing man to choose to covenant with God—the relationship could not be coerced. As a result, covenantal relationships are "based upon morally-sustained compacts of mutual promises and obligation" (Elazar, 1980, p. 6). This all encompassing notion of covenant has far reaching implications for interpersonal and organizational relationships. First of all, it affirms the individual rights, freedoms, and responsibilities of all members of it. It is both a theological and political construct (Elazar, 1980), and as Bratt (1980) argues, "politically, covenants have been made by entire societies—with God, each other, and/or themselves—and by single groups (the Puritans and Covenanters) or institutions (churches of various types) within societies" (p.1).

Associated with the sense of mutual obligation is the Hebrew term *hesed*, which means, "loving fulfillment of covenant obligation", or covenant love (Clark, 1993; Elazar, 1995; Glueck, 1967; and Kincaid, 1980). Members of the covenant have to go beyond just mere contractual agreement to serve one another…*hesed* speaks of the importance of members having to love and serve one another. Therefore, rules are not meant to be means of limiting services and actions of kind regard toward one another, for covenantal members are meant to go "beyond the letter of the law" by obeying the "spirit" of the law.

Acting upon this notion of *hesed¸* leaders are quick to receive feedback from those who will be implementing major decisions—even frontline employees. This is particularly important from a business standpoint because it is the frontline employees who have a sense of what customers need and want and are familiar with the constraints that they face in the daily operations of their particular departments. Leaders, therefore, would be unwise to initiate and implement major decisions without this valuable feedback.

Covenant, then, is at its core about relationship and *empowerment*. Interestingly, the reason that the idea of covenant is so focused on both of these concepts is because first and foremost it focuses upon the individual—his rights and obligations to others. Covenant members choose to love one another, based upon moral obligations and to go beyond the "letter of the law" (Elazar, 1995). Kincaid further argued, "Covenant love directs attention beyond the self to the good and goods of others and to a common good of the community, thereby tempering individualism without destroying individuality" (1980, p. 45).

The History of Covenant

Though largely a Biblical idea initially, the notion of covenant and its emphasis on a "human community based upon love and faith" (Kincaid, 1978, p. 70), challenged social and political hierarchies in the West, especially during the Protestant Reformation (Elazar, 1979). The non-centralized nature of covenants led many reformers to challenge political authority (Reid 1981; Skillen 1980; and Walzer , 1985). Rulers had an obligation to protect the people, and could be overthrown if they broke such a covenantal bond. This belief developed into the idea of civil resistance (Reid, 1981). Indeed, the covenantal idea, and the freedoms that came with it, spread not only throughout much of Europe (McCoy, 1980; Skillen 1980) but also into America. In fact, many colonies adopted covenantal ideas in their founding documents, a practice which continued on in the era of statehood (Elazar, 1980; Elazar & Kincaid, 1979; Lutz, 1980, 1988; McLaughlin, 1961; Schechter, 1980).

State constitutions and various other legal documents contained frequent references to covenantal terms and concepts (Lutz,1980; 1988) and the covenant idea formed the basis for its Declaration of Independence from Great Britain (Elazar & Kincaid, 1980; Lutz, 1988) as well as its government (Lutz, 1980). Covenantal ideas were "used for a variety of very public enterprises from the establishment of colonial self-government to the creation of the great trading corporations of the seventeenth century" (Elazar, 1979, pp. 7-8). Furthermore, the American emphasis upon individual liberty represented a step forward in covenantal ideas, since American colonies and eventually its national government allowed for a much higher degree of popular sovereignty than did her European counterparts (Lutz, 1988). It should come as no surprise then, that it was the disregard of the covenant idea that lead to a justification of slavery (Greenstone 1985; Kincaid 1978).

CFA versus other Approaches to Leadership and Organizational Behavior

There are of course many leadership and organizational behavior perspectives which offer sound ideas for leaders in any context, and certainly the context of self-directed learning. But the authors chose CFA over those other approaches for two primary reasons: First, as Fischer articulated (2003), CFA speaks not just to leadership behavior, but also to organizational processes, structure, and culture, and as such, it provides a unified approach to tackling the challenges mentioned by Wehmeyer, Agran, and Hughes (2000) for leaders in self-directed learning institutions, as will be seen below. With regards to leadership behavior, CFA calls for leaders to engage in behavior that involves mutual accountability and empowerment of employees, so that the vision, processes, goals, etc. of the organization are agreed upon by everyone involved in the organization and the covenantal relationship. With regards to organizational processes, CFA emphasizes participative decision-making, because it affirms the dignity of everyone in the relationship, and thereby values their insights and expertise when it comes to organizational decisions. With regards to organizational structure, CFA calls for "noncentralization." Noncentralization implies that rules, regulations, and contracts do not supplant real and sometimes intimate relationships with customers and employees. Regarding use of the term *noncentralization*, Elazar (1984) argues that "partnership implies the distribution of real power among several centers that must negotiate cooperative arrangements with one another in order to achieve common goals." And finally, with regards to organizational culture, CFA calls for mutual care and support, embodied by a spirit of teamwork.

Secondly, as established above, the foundational principle of covenant is that of *empowerment*—individuals freely choosing to be in covenant with one another, to be accountable to one another and to care for one another. This is important for two reasons. First, all of the problems described by Wehmeyer et al. (2000)—limited information afforded to teachers, the inability to properly instruct students to self-direct their learning, and the lack of authority granted to teachers to provide instruction in self-directed learning—are specifically related to a lack of empowerment for the teachers. So it is vitally important that this root cause be addressed by leaders. CFA certainly embodies the principle of empowerment. Secondly, the research reveals that empowerment is a key principle of many of the leadership and organizational best practices found in literature today. For instance, because a key tenet of transformational leadership is helping followers understand and capture the vision, and giving them the skills and freedom to carry out the vision, this approach to leadership has been linked to empowerment in numerous studies (Gellis, 2001; Zhu, Chew, & Spangler, 2005; Jandaghi, Matin, & Zarei, 2008; and Gumusluoglu & Ilsev, 2009). Likewise, servant leadership, which calls for leaders to serve followers and ensure that they are properly cared for, also emphasizes empowerment (Lytle, Hom, and Mokwa, 1998; Russell, 2001; Polleys, 2002; Roberts, 2006; McCuddy & Cavin, 2008).

Empowerment is also a key idea found in the literature pertaining to organizational structure. A major theme in the literature in this regard is *decentralization,* in which employees have more

decision-making ability and power. This idea in turn has been linked to employee self-management (Shipper and Manz, 1992) and self-managed teams (Hassan, Hagen & Daigs, 2006). These are all informed by the notion that empowered employees can be more productive and effective.

Related to decentralization is a popular organizational process found in the literature: *participative decision-making* (PDM), in which followers have more input into key organizational decisions and leaders make space for employee feedback and insight when making decisions, as well as delegation (Yeung, 2004; Rosenblatt & Nord, 1999). In this sense, PDM also focuses on employee empowerment.

Finally, studies on organizational culture focuses on definitions of healthy organizations based upon empowered followers (Joo and Lim, 2009; Johnson, 2009; Chan, Taylor & Markham, 2008; and Jacobs, Christe-Zeyse, & Keegan, 2008). A related notion is S*pirituality in the Workplace* (SIW), which has also been linked to empowerment (Tischler, 1999; Gockel, 2004). SIW is a cultural construct that emphasizes the importance of creating an organizational culture in which employees can truly make a difference—both within their organization and the larger community (Gockel, 2004; Bonewits, 2006; and Bygrave & Macmillan, 2008) and in which employees are encouraged to be all that they can be through the workplace experience (Johnson, 2007).

In summary, CFA was chosen to address the above-mentioned leadership challenges not because other leadership and organizational behavioral concepts are irrelevant, but rather because in focusing on empowerment, CFA links and unifies these varied ideas by filling in the gaps between and among them (Table 1):

Table 1.
CFA compared to key leadership and organizational perspectives

	Leadership Behavior	Organizational Processes	Organizational Structure	Organizational Culture
Transformational Leadership	Vision-casting, empowering employees			
Servant Leadership	Serving, empowering employees			
Participative Decision-Making		Increased decision-making to employees		
Decentralization			Sharing power with employees	
SIW				Supportive, empowering atmosphere
CFA	Mutual accountability, empowerment	Participative decision-making	Noncentralization	Mutual care and support

As mentioned earlier, the problems described by Wehmeyer et al. (2000)—limited information afforded to teachers, the inability to properly instruct students to self-direct their learning, and the lack of authority granted to teachers to provide instruction in self-directed learning—are specifically related to a lack of empowerment for the teachers, parents and students. Duby's study (2003) analyzed how leaders operated in two self-directed learning institutions to ensure the success of the learning process. This study focuses in particular on these three issues related to empowerment, and how a covenantal approach (CFA) would further address those issues.

Limited Information to Teachers, Parents and Students

For self-directed learning to work, parents need to be made aware of the vision and rationale behind it, and teachers need to be on the same page with administrators. This requires leadership to not only provide information about self-directed learning to parents, but also to encourage them to be active participants in the self-directed learning community. This can be seen in the fact that in the schools investigated, both leaders and teachers spoke about the need to educate parents in the basic tenets of self-directed learning in order to achieve true success in the classroom. One of the most helpful practices is to let parents observe the class and the teacher in action.

Each leader interviewed understands her or his responsibility to appropriately introduce parents to the self-directed model, furnish materials to enhance understanding of the philosophy behind the model, and provide opportunities for continued education to build support for the model. Though there were differences between the leaders as to the regularity, breadth, and scope of the educational materials and learning opportunities afforded to parents, both worked diligently to ensure that parents stayed informed and continued to develop their understanding of the self-directed method of learning. These actions are descriptive of the covenantal notion of servant leadership, because, again, the leader is required to ensure that all members of the covenant are willing to accept the terms thereof. Self-directed learning is a paradigm with which many parents are unfamiliar. For parents to be willing to commit to this somewhat unconventional approach to learning, they have to have a proper understanding of the "terms of the covenant"—i.e., the ideas and principles associated with self-directed learning. In a covenantal relationship, all parties to the covenant must know the terms of the covenant before agreeing to the relationship—this means of empowerment protects everyone involved.

However, feedback from teachers revealed that leaders need to strike a careful balance between opening up classrooms to parents and visitors in hopes of educating them in self-directed learning and protecting the classroom from excessive distractions that disrupt the learning environment. The teachers interviewed welcome visitors to their classrooms yet maintain that visitors should first be instructed on how to conduct themselves while in the class, a responsibility they feel belongs to their directors. Both directors offer materials to instruct parents on what to expect and what to look for when observing. Both leaders also require parents and visitors to obtain permission and reserve a time before observing a class.

Once a covenantal relationship is established, mutual accountability is required—parents have to agree to commit themselves to supporting the vision of the school. In this case, the vision of the covenant relationship is to achieve true learning on the part of the students. Self-directed learning has been chosen as the means for doing so, and since the self-directed model presents changes and questions for many children and parents alike, the need to develop strong parent-teacher relationships is essential. Mutual accountability will only be successful, therefore, if a spirit of *hesed* is upheld wherein all the members of the covenant commit not only to the terms of the covenant, but also to care for and respect one another.

But sometimes, even as leaders do their best to empower parents by communicating the benefits of the self-directed approach to learning, parents are not willing to fully embrace that vision. In this respect, both directors acknowledged that there were times when differences with parents about the vision of their institutions were insurmountable. When this occurred, the parents were encouraged to withdraw their student and seek enrollment in another school. Though neither the director nor the teacher believed this to be a happy solution, they understood it was sometimes the best solution for the situation. Teachers expressed appreciation for a director who would "lose" a student rather than compromise their authority and, subsequently, the learning environment. This presents strong encouragement for the teacher to continue their work in the classroom.

In summary, CFA mandates that the covenant is not a rigid and "closed" system; outsiders are not shunned but rather welcomed. This of course is an example of empowerment. However, with empowerment comes responsibility, mutual accountability, and obligation. It is also understood that outsiders should understand the purpose, vision, structure and rules of the covenant, and respect them. We see this principle being upheld by the leaders of these self-directed schools in how they keep the lines of communication open between them and the teachers, and how they help parents understand and experience the vision behind the self-directed learning environment.

Empowerment and Equipping Teachers to Properly Instruct Students

Not only do the leaders of each school understand the importance of nurturing the development of parents, they also understood the importance of ensuring the continual development of each teacher. Both schools employed only teachers certified in self-directed instruction, and both leaders encouraged assistant teachers to receive formal training as well. This is not necessarily an easy task, since the self-directed method is not a common learning model in many schools of education. More than hiring certified faculty, however, leaders need to ensure that faculty are provided opportunities for *continued* training and development in self-directed methodology. In a covenantal relationship, all parties must be willing to accept and live by the terms of the covenant, and leaders are responsible for ensuring that the terms of the covenant are upheld. One major way of doing so is by hiring those people who are decidedly committed to the ideas and terms of the covenant.

Even teachers espousing a belief in the merits of self-directed learning may not utilize the model they support due to lacking the necessary training and support. Therefore, it is the responsibility of educational leadership to provide information about self-directed learning and training in how to effectively promote self-directed learning principles, techniques, and curriculum in the classroom. Research has suggested that providing teachers with such opportunities for growth and development works. Young and Ley (2003) found that teachers benefited from instruction supporting self-directed learning strategies. Additionally, the research found that providing information on a number of self-directed activities identified by Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons (1988) was especially helpful.

Dunn, Hongsfeld, and Doolan (2009) posit that teachers need development opportunities to better understand the learning style of each student in order to teach him or her effectively. Without exception, each faculty member interviewed expressed the desire to receive continued training and professional development. They viewed it as essential to their professional development and the enhancement of the school's academic program. Leaders who provide development opportunities, whether in the form of in-house training, regional or national professional development conferences, or continued staff development meetings, do much to build their teacher's self-efficacy. Again, from a covenantal perspective, this goes back to the notion of empowerment and servant leadership.

Therefore, it is incumbent upon leadership to know *how* they can empower teachers in this area. For instance, leaders do their best to provide a learning environment with proper resources and equipment. "Absolutely essential" is how one leader described the importance of providing faculty with a well-equipped environment. Another action the leaders have taken to protect the learning environment is by minimizing disruptions to the morning learning time. In each school, this learning time lasts about 3 hours; therefore, enrichment classes, assemblies, and other routine disruptions are delayed until the afternoon. The directors believe that this allows their teachers to focus on fostering self-directed learning rather than on schedules, dismissals, and getting their classes to start and stop the learning process. All teachers interviewed expressed appreciation to their directors for protecting the morning learning time.

As we have seen, an environment conducive to self-directed learning is one with a supportive community of well-informed parents, classrooms designed for self-directed learning (which are different from more traditionally-designed classrooms), and an environment protected from unnecessary distractions to encourage optimal learning. This support and teamwork relates to the covenantal notion of servant leadership and the importance of creating a community of teamwork among parents, teachers, and leaders. In turn, all of this speaks to empowerment as teachers are empowered through support and an emphasis on continued training.

Empowerment and Overcoming the Lack of Authority

The teachers interviewed provided varied examples of how their directors have supported their empowerment in the sense of giving them more authority and discretion. For teachers, having classroom autonomy is essential for self-directed learning to occur. One teacher, for example, related her frustration regarding a decision made by the school's executive leadership team that hindered what she believed to be an important element in a student's autonomous development. Her director listened to her concerns and shared them with the administrator, and the directive was soon withdrawn. This provided a powerful encouragement to the teacher, and her confidence in and trust for her administrator (as well as her executive leadership team) increased considerably. Another teacher believed she had considerable autonomy in the class to direct learning activities and meet individual student needs as she deemed best. Though her director has never had to settle an issue with an administrator, she is nonetheless appreciative of her director and the level of autonomy her director provides. She believed the level of autonomy she enjoys can be attributed to their constant communication and shared vision for fostering self-directed learning.

Teachers do not expect total autonomy, nor do leaders provide it. Yet, leaders normally defer to their trust in the faculty member when handling issues such as parent-teacher conflict. One director, for example, will listen to the parent's concern but will then encourage the parent to address the faculty member directly. If this is not possible, the director makes sure that the teacher is present in any further discussion to ensure that both parties are properly represented. These actions often moderate parental hostility and temper their complaints to help achieve an agreeable solution, ensuring the continuation of the relationship.

Not only do leaders support a teacher's autonomy in parent-teacher relationships, they also encourage it by non-centralizing the classroom itself, leaving its ordering and layout to the teacher. A self-directed environment is physically different from environments found in more traditional schools. In each school investigated, gone are neatly ordered rows fronted by a grand teacher's desk. Instead, classrooms are set up with various learning centers that students may visit as they regulate their own learning objectives for the day. Teachers are seen working with individual students at a learning center, a computer, a table, or sitting on the floor with small groups as they present a topic to several learners at once. Students have an abundance of materials with which to work, and the classrooms are large enough to allow for such freedom of movement. The teachers also noted that a quality environment is essential to their success and believe their directors have worked hard to ensure a well-equipped environment. Therefore, the leaders are allowing teachers to do their jobs in a non-centralized environment, helping them effective facilitate the unique nature of self-directed learning in the classroom.

Another key way that leaders empower teachers through greater authority is through participative decision-making. Teachers were empowered by leaders to make the daily decisions necessary to serve students in the unique environment that is self-directed learning. Both

directors communicate often with their faculty to check on classroom progress and to address problems or concerns the teachers may have. The directors often use these informal discussions to garner teacher input on changes that may help the classroom or to discuss curriculum decisions. Both leaders expressed several advantages of this partnering approach, including encouraging unity and a team spirit, gleaning the wisdom and expertise of the faculty, and fostering good communication to help minimize misunderstandings when changes are made. In providing these guidelines for how parents may participate with and observe the self-directed learning environment, leaders are empowering teachers in a very covenantal manner.

Covenant-keeping requires such trust and relationship. One of the main reasons that covenant fosters such trust is the notion of "mutual accountability," wherein all the members of the covenant are accountable to one another. Duby (2006) noted that although teachers are accountable to the leaders, the leaders recognize that they are responsible for empowering the teachers and creating an environment where teachers can do their job. Teachers are accountable to the parents, but leaders help create an atmosphere of trust where parents give teachers the room to operate in their expertise. And certainly, teachers work to engage parents, answer their objections, and allow them to observe the classroom setting.

Summary and Conclusion

In 2003, Fischer's study of faith-based non-profits revealed a similarity between the leadership practices of leaders within those organizations and covenantal principles as articulated within CFA. This study has likewise revealed similarities between particulars of the CFA model and the leadership practices revealed by Duby's investigation of self-directed learning schools. It was suggested at the outset of this study that there would likely be some similarities between faith-based nonprofits and these schools because of the nature of their vision (serving and caring for constituents) and the motivations of the leaders and employees in doing so. Regarding educational institutions in particular, fostering a love for learning, encouraging independence and initiative, and helping the individual develop self-discipline have long been hallmarks of the self-directed approach. Furthermore, these values are inherent to the covenant tradition and to CFA. However, the growth in the number of educators committed to the self-directed method does not necessarily ensure that the method is successfully employed. Indeed, there is a great need for leaders in self-directed environments to ensure that teachers are properly equipped and encouraged to facilitate the self-directed model. In conclusion, though the self-directed learning model offers a viable option for educators, further research is needed to address the type of leadership needed to successfully implement such a model and overcome the unique challenges these leaders face. Since many of those challenges relate to leadership attitudes, strategies and practices, it is hoped that this paper's discussion on covenantal leadership will indeed provide educators with both principles and practical strategies for resolving these challenges.

Limitations of the Current Study and Implications for Further Study

There are some relevant questions that can be drawn from these implications for future study. For instance, are visionary organizations more apt to be motivated by covenantal principles, of CFA specifically? Though there is some evidence that this type of behavior is found in non-profits, what type of for-profit organizations are more apt to embody the tenets of CFA, and what impact does such behavior have on their bottom-line?

Secondly, the case can be made that part of researching and answering these questions involves developing a more concrete diagnostic tool for measuring CFA behaviors within any type of organization. Both Fischer (2003) and Duby's (2006) initial studies relied heavily on qualitative means—and rightly so—in order to contextualize the behaviors being observed. And this study furthers Fischer's initial findings (2003) that vision-oriented organizations seem to follow CFA tenets in their leadership practices. Moore (2009) contends that a mixed method approach to organizational studies is very effective for contextualizing research data as well as numerically quantifying and generalizing the results as a means of cross-organizational research and analysis. Accordingly, the CFA model requires a peer-tested diagnostic survey tool for further use and analysis.

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