SERVANT LEADERSHIP PRACTICES OF PRINCIPALS: A CASE STUDY

by

Bradley Benton Haga

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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APPROVED BY:

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**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to identify practices of servant leadership styles of principals in selected rural school divisions in Southwestern, Virginia. The theories that guided this research were Robert Greenleaf's (1970) servant leadership and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943). The central research question is: How do public school principals describe their servant leadership practices? The sub-questions include (a) what servant leadership practices are used with students? (b) what servant leadership practices are used with parents? (c) what servant leadership practices are used with faculty and staff? Participants were screened through purpose sampling by using the screening tool of Dr. Paul Wong's servant leadership scale 360 questionnaire. The results were categorized, and 10 participants were identified as high servant leadership characteristic individuals. These 10 individuals were interviewed for relative servant leadership practices they utilized as servant leaders in their school. Implications for this study provided practices of servant leaders that outlines various methods from interactions, communications, and examples of servant leadership style leaders in a naturalistic and interpretive setting. Five themes from this study were identified, listening/open door, relationships, growth of people, leading by example/modeling, and communication. Moreover, this study identified 55 servant leadership practices that can be utilized on a daily basis.

*Keywords*: leadership, servant leadership, practices, principals

**Dedication**

This terminal degree, and a labor of love, is dedicated to my three children and parents. I owe all my foundation and passion for education to my loving, supportive, and hardworking parents. Being educators themselves, they worked many hours apart from each other to raise three determined, bright, and hardworking children. My father had to work long hours away from home while mom kept the wheels and the house moving. I'm thankful for your dedication and persistence in the foundation you have laid for my family and me. Your love and support never stopped. I love you! This degree is also for Kelley, who laid the kids to rest many a night alone and also kept their feet quiet on the floor early in the mornings while I was studying and typing. Thank you! To my two lovely sisters, I feel your pride and support. I'm proud to be your big brother. To my three children, this degree is really meant for you. I'm sorry I spent so much time away from you, but I want you to know what can happen when hard work, persistence, love, and dedication can do when you absolutely love and adore what you do. I have never looked at my occupation as a job and it has never been work to me. For me, education has been a dream of mine, and every day I wonder why I get to have so much fun working with students, parents, teachers, and the whole school community. Find something you love in life, and do not quit until you get to the top. Be a lifelong learner, take care of people, treat people with respect, and always turn heads with manners, and most of all, love people like you have never loved before. You can and will do anything when you want too. I will be there to support you and pick you back up when you fall. Roll with the punches, dust yourself off (and just rub it, like papa says), and get back at it. Carter, MaryEllen, and Caxton, you have been my inspiration, and I love you. I hope I can give you everything in life that you deserve and more. Now, daddy's homework is done, let's get to work, play hard, and most of all, have fun!

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Servant Leadership 360-SLP-360

**CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**
**Overview**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to identify practices of servant leadership styles of principals in selected rural school divisions in Southwestern, Virginia. Building-level leaders and academic administrators are the culture builders of the school and community. Hollingworth et al. (2018) found that the principals who prioritize knowing their staff well, cultivate trust, and engage in purposeful conversations build positive school cultures. With these attributes and other servant leadership traits and practices, principals may have the capability to lead and manage students, parents, and the community in a more positive environment. Chapter I of this dissertation is comprised of nine sections that detail and outline the nature of the dissertation. The parts include the overview, background, situation to self, problem statement, purpose statement, significance of the study, research questions, definitions, and summary.

**Background**

For the purposes of this research, servant leadership is defined as humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment, and service to others. When individuals become healthy and fulfilled, they are a product of the guiding principles of servant leadership (Feltz, 2018). Servant leadership, in some environments, has become a trait and style of leadership that has been hard to come by in public schools. Although there has not been an explanation for the lack of servant leadership in public schools, there has been plenty of research defining servant leadership characteristics in public schools that relate to job satisfaction (Giambatista et al., 2020; Wiranwan et al., 2019). Fleming (2019) attested that the superintendent's servant leadership characteristics relate to the job satisfaction of building-level principals. Helms (2017) noted that servant leaders put others above themselves resulting is a positive climate. Engelhart (2012) noted that when leaders exhibit servant leadership skills, teachers are more impacted in a

positive way. Several research studies have individually helped shape and define servant leadership (Feltz, 2018; Greenleaf, 1977). However, actual daily public school practices of servant leadership in rural Southwestern Virginia is absent in the literature.

**Historical**

Robert Greenleaf (1977) coined the phrase "servant leadership," and he defined it as serving others holistically. Greenleaf (1977) acknowledged this visionary leadership style was known as servant leadership and incorporated guidance and fellowship in a humbled way to serve others.  Even though the term "servant" has been around historically before Robert Greenleaf, this term and style of leadership were mostly unrecognized as a specific style until Robert Greenleaf coined the phrase. He designated time and energy to highlight, define, and characterize this leadership style. Before the recognition of "servant leadership" by Greenleaf's, the term "servant" was largely recognized as part of the Judeo-Christian heritage. Parris and Peachey (2013) maintained that in recent years servant leadership has found its way into leadership and organizational research.

In general, some authors explain that servant leadership, in different contexts, is a paradox. For example, Northouse (2013) explains that servant leadership is a paradox since it depicts leaders as being viewed differently than of the traditional leaders who have others serve them rather that serving others.  The history and definition of servant leadership has not changed much over the years. Still, current attention and research have helped keep it at the forefront of many leadership philosophies and company visions (Giambatista et al., 2020; Spears, 2019). Helms (2017) claimed that servant leadership was gaining popularity across many occupational sectors in very successful leaders.

The Robert K. Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership is located in South Orange, New

Jersey, on the campus of Seton Hall University. The long-time President and CEO of the

Greenleaf Center was Larry Spears. Spears (2019) was in that leadership position for the

Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership from 1990-2007. In 2008, he opened his own servant

leadership center. The Spears Center for Servant Leadership is located in Indianapolis, Indiana,

and is a not-for-profit 501 (C) (3) organization. Spears and Greenleaf crafted a respected view of

servant leadership in America and beyond.

**Social**

There are social implications regarding servant leadership in public schools. Social

religious, and professional backgrounds of individuals, including principals, have changed

generationally over time. Throughout the previous decades, leadership styles have also changed.

In many instances, the authoritarian style of leadership leads to unhappy and unproductive

workforces and noted by Kelly and McDonald (2019) who commented that when the

authoritarian leadership style is used, there is less solidarity, and job satisfaction is low. Certain

social aspects of school leadership have led many leaders to downplay the importance of servant

leadership in their leadership roles. For example, administrators who are busy with the day to

day managerial issues may not have time to serve others since they are busy with their own

responsibilities. Witcher (2003) emphasized that principals are so busy they cannot give time to

building ethical and moral leaders of society. Further, Witcher (2003) explained that leaders

could use servant leadership skills to help develop leaders for the future, but the problem is the

lack of practical and personal background knowledge in servant leadership style for leaders in

public schools.

In the same respect, there seems to have been a lost connection in servant leadership

characteristics across the educational arena. Engelhart (2012) disclosed that servant leadership

traits should be exhibited in a higher-stakes educational arena. Servant style leaders are more prone to lead in a shared leadership manner in some respects. Engelhart (2012) said that servant leaders promote and foster a more positive culture in educational settings. Servant leadership for educational leaders has proven to impact 38 different dependent variables through the individual and 16 dependent variables through the organizational level, that are directly and indirectly influential in educational settings, Sawan (2020).

Socially, servant leadership has positively impacted schools and companies. For instances, Chen and Manning (2015) explained that servant leadership is the reason they are successful and servant leadership drives the organization of their culture. Several fortune 500 companies successfully implement a servant leadership approach. Spears (2019) documented that Starbucks, Southwest Airlines, Men's Wearhouse, and The Toro Company are companies that have prospered off of servant leadership styles of leadership. Sipe and Frick (2009) found that servant leadership was successful in their business The Container Store. Leadership consultants Ann McGee-Cooper and Duane Trammell (2002) explained that servant leadership cannot be about a personal pursuit of power, title, or prestige, but that servant "leadership begins with a true motivation to serve others" (p.144). This is furthered by Wheeler (2012) who indicated that servant leadership empowers others in the organization. Servant leadership will continue to transpire, and reform leaders as more attention and research evolve in this area.

**Theoretical**

The servant leadership theory began with Robert Greenleaf in 1970 when he coined the phrase servant leadership, and the advent of an already popular leadership style gained in popularity by his work. Gandolfi et al. (2017) stated that servant leadership is sometimes associated and assumed historically as a Christian leadership model, servant leadership style

leaders have influenced many different cultures. Leadership styles change with the individual, and character traits influence leaders and their choice or style of leadership style. The proposed research and further information could lead principals to change their outlook on their leadership style, so their view and understanding of servant leadership may be enhanced at the school level. McBath (2018) emphasized that servant leadership initially began from the individual complexities of the services given to others. Some leaders are called to lead for the right reasons, and others may be consumed by promotion, greed, money, or power Ishak et al (2019). Giambatista et al. (2020) stated that servant leaders build their foundation on developing their followers as the whole human being, not just company or organizational goals or bodies. In many situations, there is a lack of vision related to humans, and the organization is more important than its people. This research project will continue to highlight the building-level public school leader's practices that are exemplary of servant leadership skills and abilities.

**Situation to Self**

The topic of servant leadership has intrigued me for many years. From the transcendental paradigm lens there is a lot of servant leadership definitions that are in the soul of the leader. Servant leadership will always be a problem and deficit for some leaders to understand and utilize in public schools. I'm currently a Director in a public school central office, and servant leadership skills and traits are sometimes hard to come by. As a central leadership team member, I have realized that preparation and professional development are crucial for this type of leadership trait. Still today, there are many assumptions and perceptions involving servant leadership. Teaching, exhibiting, and modeling this type of leadership is essential in spreading an appreciation and understanding of servant leadership. This is where I think that my division has enormous room for growth in the area of servant leadership. Building-level leaders can become a

more caring and compassionate educator in utilizing servant leadership characteristics.

Philosophical assumptions in this study fall into the realm of ontological which means that I seek to understand servant leadership as seen through the multiple views of students, parents, faculty, and staff (Creswell, 2013). Epistemological is based on knowledge and how the knowledge claims justified through subjective evidence in which the researcher collaborates and spends time with the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Axiological assumptions deal with the role of values and biases are prevalent in the study that lead to a narrative and interpretations by the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The research paradigm is pragmatic, as I plan to focus on the outcomes of the research rather than the antecedent conditions (Creswell, 2013).

This research project will delve into the philosophical assumption of servant leadership being a prominent style of leadership. While servant leadership characteristics are extensive, there is a need to define and relate the different perspectives and experiences of the many various public school leaders. Post-positivism interpretive frameworks will best guide and help shape this study during the research process. This research project will help reform and develop a better understanding of servant leadership practices. Case study research is the best research because reforming and exploring servant leadership practices will be explained by people and their experiences. Having a social science theoretical and logical background will help mold and interpret the multiple perspectives throughout the results in this study (Creswell, 2018).

**Problem Statement**

The problem is the lack of building-level practices of servant leadership by public school principals. Mulongo (2020) found that principals were aware of the servant leadership style however the style was not adequately practiced. Mulongo (2020) also noted that there needs to be certain measures in place so that servant leadership practices can be exhibited ore often.

Fleming (2019) noted when servant leadership behaviors were exhibited then the overall level of principal job satisfaction was affected. There is a need to investigate servant leadership practices in public schools to increase the use of these practices. Helms (2017) found that the use of servant leadership practices influenced teachers' decisions to remain in the teaching profession. Job satisfaction and teachers having a shared leadership in the school also was indicative of servant leadership styles being utilized in the building by principals (Cansoy, 2019). The central phenomenon is that servant leadership practices can be recorded and explored to gather sufficient data of principals in southwestern Virginia. Personal experiences, day to day interactions, and principal beliefs may alter servant leadership practices on a day-to-day basis. Helms (2017) observed that there is a substantial gap concerning servant leadership and public school administration. Servant leadership practices for building-level leaders throughout rural Virginia have not been an area of focus. This research seeks to cultivate an interest in the importance of educational leaders to know why and how servant leadership may help lead public schools to establish a more positive school environment. Black (2010) pointed out in his research that there was a significant positive correlation in servant leadership perceived practices and a positive school culture. Black (2010) also recommended that there needs to be more research to understand the implications and effects of servant leadership at all levels in public education. Black (2010) also proclaimed that further research in public education would help others to understand school reform and the improvement of public education. The way that professional leaders handle and react to individuals is essential to the frameworks of servant leadership. Servant leadership practices can alter or impact school communities in the public school setting, which is why it is important to understand these practices. In the public school setting, there is still much to learn about servant leadership practices by school leaders.

This proposed research is needed to add to empirical data and is significance to the field of educational leadership and servant leadership. Recent research regarding servant leadership has indicated not only a lack of knowledge but a lack of appreciation for servant leadership practices. Tai and Abdull Kareem (2019) noted that school leaders must possess emotional leading skills, along with emotional engagement and involvement. The problem is leadership styles are sometimes indicative of the leaders that are lacking them. There is a need for continuous valid research and clarification on the topic of the principal's servant leadership capabilities. Practices, backgrounds, and educational leadership development could be an underlying catalyst for understanding servant leadership in public schools.

## Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative case study, is to understand and describe the practices of servant leadership style principals in rural school divisions and to get an "in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" (Merriam, 2009, p. 40). For the purposes of this research, servant leadership is defined as humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment, and service to others. When individuals become healthy and fulfilled, they are a product of the guiding principles of servant leadership (Feltz, 2018). The theories guiding this research are Robert Greenleaf's (1970) servant leadership and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is applicable to this research since it physiological needs, safety needs, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. Utilizing servant leadership theory and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory, this research sought to reveal servant leadership practices by public school principals in rural southwestern Virginia.

**Significance of the Study**

Servant leadership is defined as humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment, and service to others. Building-level leaders need to possess leadership qualities for the success of the school and there is a significant correlation instructional leadership and servant leadership characteristics (Martin, 2018). The importance of servant leadership practices is essential in public school leadership roles since servant leadership qualities created exponential autonomy as proof positive in increased learning and self-esteem (El Amin, 2013). Servant leadership characteristics of principals have been empirically studied and well defined, empathy, healing, self-awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, stewardship, growth of others, and the ability to build community together are just to name a few (Watson, 2019). However, one of the significant aspects of this research is to understand the practices of building-level leaders who may or may not utilize a servant leadership style and to further understand the phenomenon. Authoritarian leadership styles, versus servant leadership styles, is another aspect of this research that could affect the outcome of whether principals utilize a servant leadership style of leadership. As noted previously, authoritarian leadership results in less solidarity and low job satisfaction (Kelly & McDonald, 2019).

The significance of this study is relevant due to a lack of research into the practices of servant leaders in public education, especially since it is largely related to Judeo-Christian principles which are not taught in the public school system. This study is essential because of the lack of research in servant leadership concerning the practices of building-level leaders. The researcher is interested in adding to the overall body and knowledge in the field of servant leadership and practices of building-level leaders. If there are empirical knowledge and findings, then professional development and training can be added to help principals learn and understand

about servant leadership practices. Fleming (2019) stated that when superintendent's exhibit

servant leadership behaviors, they are more satisfied with their job. The significance of servant

leadership type leaders have proven to make positive impacts in the educational work

environment (Goniam, 2019).

## Research Questions

As the study of servant leadership evolves in education, it is also gaining speed and

clarity for building-level leaders. Educational leaders are trying to harness the relevance and

importance of a servant leadership style leader. Several research questions surface as the

literature unfolds from servant leadership and its impact in the educational setting. When

administrators have a working understanding of servant leadership, the positives will out way the

negatives. Below are research questions indicative of the necessary stakeholders that guided this

study.

The central research question is: How do public school principals describe their servant

leadership practices?

The sub-questions include:

1.  What servant leadership practices are used with students?

    In the participant interviews, it is essential to gather descriptions and information from their

    perspective on how they define their leadership style concerning servant leadership practices

    amongst the students they serve. This research question helps shape a critical reflection of

    how participants think student interactions affect the importance of servant leadership.

    Giambatista et al. (2020) stressed that servant leadership is characterized by vision and

    integrity. In this question, it will be interesting to see what the participant's practices are with

    students.

2.  What servant leadership practices are used with parents?

This question helps build on and expand servant leadership practices with stakeholders outside the building. Through the detailed interview questions, there will be an in-depth clarification of their practices, education, and backgrounds. Public school leader participants will help readers understand their perception of leadership abilities and the ethical behaviors that shape their interactions with parents. Wirawan et al. (2019) suggested that servant leadership is positively associated with public service within particular cultures. This question will help define parent interactions and the cultural practices in Southwestern Virginia.

3.  What servant leadership practices are used with faculty and staff?

This question highlights the importance of interacting with the staff daily. As educators, most know the importance of leadership and interactions from the principal are crucial to a happy environment. Most school staff would comment about their happiness depending on the direction and demeanor of their principals. Building-level leaders should always consider that their day to day interactions will still set the temperament for the whole school community. Servant leadership has been linked to both teacher and student satisfaction (Sahawneh & Benuto, 2018).

## Definitions

1.  *Servant Leadership* - Is defined as humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment, and service to others. When individuals become healthy and fulfilled, they are a product of the guiding principles of servant leadership (Feltz, 2018).

2.  *Transformational Leadership* – This leadership style has sound guiding principles that lead to a vision that is followed by the staff. The leader inspires others by implementing

sound practices towards a vision and goals that are cohesive and efficient to impact

change within the organization (Parascandalo, 2014).

3. *Empathy* -Empathy is defined as reading one's emotions and being able to listen and take

things in from the other person's perspective. An empathetic leader must listen to others

and be sensitive to their feelings and interpretations (Goleman, 1995).

## Summary

Chapter I began with an overview and background of the study which focused on servant

leadership through this case study public schools in rural southwestern Virginia. It continued

with overview, background, theoretical, and related literature. Educational leaders across the

public setting are prone to the scrutiny of parents, teachers, and the public. Pouramiri and

Mehdinezhad (2017) found that there is a positive and significant connection between

organizational trust and servant leadership; therefore, servant leadership in building-level leaders

is a skill and a knowledge that leaders should consider crafting from the early stages of their

administrative placements. Public school leaders must understand the advantages of leading in a

servant leadership style manner. Cerit (2009) found that there was a significant predictor of

teacher satisfaction when a servant leadership style was utilized. Servant leadership skills and

knowledge can help leaders become successful and build positive school cultures in the process.

Leadership styles can alter or impede the transformation of the entire school community. Servant

leadership skills and characteristics can also teach and help mold leaders to lead in an exemplary

manner. Educational leaders must connect and appreciate the ability to interact with all the

constituents they are serving in public education.

**CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Overview**

Few studies have been conducted in regard to servant leadership in public schools, yet research indicates that servant leadership is beneficial (Hollingworth et al., 2018). There is a need to investigate servant leadership in public education since a servant leadership style can be essential relevant to public school leadership. Principal interactions, day to day practices, and servant leadership characteristics are critical to learn about from public school administrators. Schaubroeck et al. (2011) expressed there is an increased interest in the effectiveness of servant leadership due to the decline in educational outcomes. Additionally, Ronfeldt et al. (2013) expressed a growing concern regarding teacher attrition rates in education, this is especially true since COVID-19 in Philadelphia (Pierce et al., 2020). Spears (2002) mentioned that the goal of the servant leadership model is based on serving others like customers, employees, and the whole community; thus, serving faculty, staff, parents, and students may increase educational outcomes

The interest and efficacy related to servant leadership are essential to be highlighted in the field of education. Schroeder (2016) stated servant leadership is one of the more effective leadership styles of today's leaders and noted that when principals lead in a servant leadership style, the teacher's effectiveness increases and they are more honored to serve all stakeholders. Different leadership styles continue to be a focus of educational research to help all educational leaders be a more effective entity for the whole school community.

The purpose of this literature review is to provide an overview of the current literature that pertains to servant leadership, especially in regard to public education. The theoretical framework for this literature is grounded in servant leader theory and Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Greenleaf's (1970) servant leadership theory is relevant to this research since it is the

founding research of servant leadership. Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs is relevant to this study since the individual needs of oneself are important to servant leadership style leaders. To adequately address the practices of servant leadership, this literature review is organized and divided into distinct sections. The first section explores in depth the roots and origin of servant leadership and the work of Robert K. Greenleaf (1970) and how other imperative authors have shaped servant leadership definitions and research over the years. The second section will highlight the principal's evolution and importance as a school leader, an explanation of the standards and the expectations of the evolving school leader. The third section analyzes servant leadership's empirical studies relevant to school leadership and business examples of servant leadership. Therefore, this exploratory study attempts to address the perceived gap in the literature of the practices on a day to day basis of servant leadership style principals.

**Theoretical Framework**

This paper's theoretical framework consists of two significant theories of thought, Greenleaf's (1970) servant leadership theory and Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs. Most of the servant leadership research and initial work go back to the research and development of Robert K. Greenleaf, over 45 years ago, drafted an essay titled "Servant Leadership." The main parts of the essay related to a man on a journey and that leadership in its most proper form should be the desire to serve others and help everyone reach their true potential. Greenleaf concluded, in his initial research, that the United States was experiencing a leadership crisis (Greenleaf, 1977). Greenleaf formulated a solution to the apparent leadership crisis by imagining that servant leadership would improve the capabilities of future leaders. Although Greenleaf was the first researcher to single out servant leadership and bring it to the forefront of the discussion, the roots of servant leadership go back to the Bible more than 2000 years ago under the claims of

Greenleaf (2002). Biblical analogies, the history of Jesus, and scriptures related to servant

leadership will be highlighted and explored in-depth later in this chapter.

**Servant Leadership Theory, Robert K. Greenleaf**

Servant leadership is one of life's meaningful paradoxical terms that has gained

popularity and interest over the past few years. The concept of servant leadership was simply

modernized based on the belief of the servant leader (Greenleaf, 1970; Greenleaf, 1977). Robert

Greenleaf reinvigorated it through his research and focus. Greenleaf purposely stated that you

must be a servant first and a leader second. Greenleaf (1970) fundamental belief and message in

his pivotal discourse were that "the great leader is seen as servant first, and that simple fact is the

key to his greatness" (p.2). Greenleaf (1970) truly believed that a servant leader has the social

responsibility to be responsible for those who are less privileged. Greenleaf (1970) initially based

his research on servant leadership after reading a book titled *The Journey to the East.* Hesse

(1956) pointed out a servant named Leo in the book. This book started the servant leadership

interest in Greenleaf's work. Greenleaf (2007) inferred that Leo was a great and noble leader that

helped them on their journey in the book. Greenleaf realized and became very interested in the

actions and influence of Leo, the servant.

Today, the very notion or idea of servant leadership contradicts long-standing

assumptions and beliefs on the relationship between leaders and followers. Not to mention that

putting the words servant and leader together is relatively opposite to each other, which is

paradoxical. Greenleaf challenged the notion of traditional leadership approaches, along with

defining servant leadership. One goal of being a servant leader is to use less power to control and

shift the power and authority to the workers (Northouse, 2013). Page and Wong (2000)

suggested that servant leadership is attained through someone's personal and life journey of

personal transformation. Wong et al. (2007) said that servant leadership is not a standalone leadership. Wong et al. (2007) also suggested it should blend the heart of servant leader with skills of leadership, creating character, humility, serving, listening, caring, and influence rather than control.

**Servant Leadership in the Beginning**

Defining the background and characteristics of servant leadership is not an easy task. The study and research of servant leadership have been around for decades. However, in the past 20 years, the development of thoughts, theories, and research has led to a better understanding of what makes a servant leader a viable option for public school leaders. Paradoxical terms like servant and leader were challenged by Greenleaf to make sense of the inherent desire to help and serve others. Greenleaf (1970) added that servant leadership encourages the leader to serve others, and it iterates the leaders to place the followers above themselves. Even after 1970, Greenleaf continued research about servant leadership and made it a priority throughout his remaining years. Even after 50 years, Greenleaf's initial investigation, study, and literature draw attention to servant leadership.

Over four decades later, Robert K. Greenleaf's initial research and the idea of servant leadership continue to be explored and researched. Servant leadership research continues to be defined, the characteristics identified, and effectiveness explained. Blanchard and Hodges (2003) stated servant leadership is centered on the heart and the inner self of a true leader. Servant leadership was described as focusing on the true heart of a leader, their character, and having a relationship with others (Sipe & Frick, 2009). Sipe and Frick (2009) also described servant leadership as seven pillars, and servant leaders must change themselves before changing the world. Sipe and Frick (2009) listed those seven pillars as a person of character, someone who

puts people first, skilled communicator, compassionate collaborator, has foresight, a systems thinker, and leads with moral authority. Greenleaf (1991) emphasized that servant leadership is a powerful serving force of influence on others. This explanation and emphasis align with many other studies.

Greenleaf (2002) believed servant leadership would be the opposite of authoritarian leadership. Greenleaf was convinced people resisted forcible power and that servant leadership was effective due to its kind persuasion. Greenleaf spent much of his later adult life researching the twisted perceptions of leaders and traditional leadership styles. After Greenleaf's initial work in servant leadership, there was very little instrumental research in servant leadership until 1999 when James Laub's research went public. Laub (1999) published his dissertation on *Assessing the Servant Organization.* Laub (1999) crafted in his dissertation where an instrument was designed to measure servant leadership. In relation to traditional leadership, perceptions from the organizational pyramid were turned upside down by Greenleaf (Jacobson, 2013) and a modern drive of thinking was used to initiate a new paradigm of leadership. Cerit (2009) claimed that servant leadership asserts that organizational goals will be met in the long term after the needs and well-being of the organization's followers are met.

### *Greenleaf's Background & Professional History*

Greenleaf's background and family influence are possibly what led him to study and develop his research on servant leadership. His father was an intense man of skill and politics. Robert's father, George, believed that Robert did not need to be sheltered when he was growing up. Frick (2004) avowed that Robert's interactions with others and his family could have very well led his drive and ideas behind servant leadership. Robert Greenleaf (1904-1990) graduated from Carleton College and had a long prosperous, and legendary 40-year career in the 1960s

with American Telephone and Telegraph (AT&T) (Frick, 2004). At the end of his career, he

ended up in the research department for AT&T as the head of management. Robert Greenleaf

was later known as the savior of AT&T and moved them to a leader in the communication

industry (Frick, 2004).

At the end of his days at AT&T, he was a consultant at Ohio University, MIT, the Ford

Foundation, the Mead Corporation, the American Foundation for Management and Research, the

R.K. Mellon Foundation, and the Lilly Endowment (Sipe & Frick, 2009). His art of managing

employees led him start the Center for Applied Ethics in 1964. Frick (2004) divulged Greenleaf

started a new venture and career in servant leadership, and American corporations, universities,

and foundations followed his lead in servant leadership. Greenleaf had a strong hand and

influence in defining servant leadership for many organizations. Regarding organizations, the

true servant leader is selfless and is committed to the success of the organization (Wheeler,

2012). Greenleaf left the corporate world and dedicated his life to the understanding and study of

servant leadership. Mr. Greenleaf was born in 1904 and died in September of 1990.

**Servant Leadership Defined**

In a servant leadership context, personal growth and empowerment of followers are

paramount. In his eyes, servant leadership was to ensure that the lowest members of society

while ensuring people's highest priority needs received the right amount of attention. Spears and

Lawrence (2002) claim servant leaders can build the necessary relationships to be successful by

practicing listening in what they do and say. After that, they further state that servant leaders do a

great job of empathizing with the people they serve.  Spears and Lawrence (2002) found servant

leaders inspire their followers to become servant leaders themselves. Robert Greenleaf was asked

to define or describe a servant leader. However, according to Van Dierendock (2011), there is

still no consensus or conclusion about the definition of servant leadership. Nevertheless, Greenleaf (1977) gives an initial impression of the word and its meaning:

> "The servant leader is a servant first…It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is a leader first, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions. For such it will be a later choice to serve after leadership is established. The leader-first and the servant-first are two extreme types. Between them are shadings and blends that are part of the infinite variety of human nature…The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served." (p.13)

Robert Greenleaf's relationship between being a servant and leadership was based on the notion that the authority a leader has, is given to the ones who are following.  Greenleaf (1977) maintained that personal development and empowerment of followers is important.  This unique and vibrant connection between servanthood and leadership derives from Greenleaf's (1977) concept that the only authority given to a leader is passed on to the ones following. Noting this, the leader should place all others' interests above those concerns of the leader in charge.

Service of others and other individuals matter in a servant leadership style of leadership. The servant leader should work for the followers, and the leader's real purpose for leading is to help the followers maintain their goals (Wheeler, 2012). Spears (2004) indicated that people choosing to approach leadership with an attitude of service and support would bring the best potential and growth out of others. Greenleaf (1977) asked, "The best test (of a servant leader) and difficult to administer, was; do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves, to become servants?" (p. 27).

Greenleaf pointed out several different ways to utilize servant leadership characteristics to help leaders lead. The best way to lead is by example and persuasion. Persuasion is a critical skill for the servant leader to be good at while in a servant leadership role. Greenleaf (2002) related that coercive leadership destroys relationships, while persuasion and examples help build relationships. Greenleaf (1998) viewed persuasion as a tool of the servant leader. A servant leader is an advocate for persuasion to the largest extent possible (Greenleaf, 1998). Servant leaders must elicit the followers' trust because of the leader's personal values and competence by their determination to pursue goals (Greenleaf, 2002).

**Greenleaf Servant Leadership Characteristics**

Greenleaf (1970) indicated without any empirical evidence to support the effectiveness of being a servant leader, he concluded that individuals, communities, and organizations were made better by the use of servant leadership values. In fact, servant leadership is about building voluntary and lasting buy-in for the organization (Greenleaf, 1998). Greenleaf (1970) pointed out that there were 10 characteristics of servant leadership: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community. The basis and foundation of the initial study were based on these characteristics. Greenleaf (2002) propounded newer common characteristics of servant leadership style leaders. The first is,

Love- Making love known by showing others that love should be tied to the follower and the servant leader. Servant leaders always love others more than themselves. Agape love is known as doing the right thing, at the right time, for the right reasons. The second characteristic of servant leadership is humility, which is never being boastful about personal strengths and always can acknowledge one's weaknesses and downfalls. By having humility, servant leaders should take

ideas and advice from other stakeholders. Humble servant leaders must realize that their thoughts

and answers are not always the best or correct ones. Humility allows servant leaders to veer

away from other leadership styles, like a dictatorship style of leader. Humility is accomplished

through a leadership style that is not assertive or arrogant but commits to the priorities of others

(Greenleaf, 1970, 1977). The third characteristic is altruism which relates to the golden rule the

most know as doing unto others as you would want them to do unto you. Altruism is always

being there for someone when help is needed.  The fourth characteristic is vision. Vision is the

ability to articulate a mental and planned thought into action. Casting this vision onto others is

sometimes challenging to do. For servant leaders, this gift of articulating a vision through the

hands of the followers is necessary because the servant leader sees the potential that others never

see. The fifth characteristic is trust. Trust is the foundational building block between the leader

and the follower. This culture setting characteristic is the single link from the leader to all

stakeholders. Whether these stakeholders are in or out of the organization is irrelevant. In a

servant leader role, mistakes of the followers when they are made are known as learning

experiences. These experiences are due to the high level of trust between the followers and the

leaders. The sixth characteristic is empowerment. Greenleaf (2002) defined servant leadership as

a leadership style that focuses on the community, employee, and customer. This definition allows

others to take the reins, and no credit is due or received by the servant leader. Empowerment is

letting all the power go and letting others take charge when the opportunity arises. The seventh

and final characteristic is Service. Service is known as giving up the leader's time, talent, and

belongings. Service is also known that the interests, well-being, and needs of others will be met.

Greenleaf (2002) defined these seven characteristics as those of someone who leads like a

servant leader.

Servant leadership sometimes is viewed as a goal of the organization or placed on the shoulders of the leader in charge. Servant leaders exhibit a sincere concern and passion for serving followers instead of focusing on the organization (Greenleaf, 1970). This is not the fundamental basis and meaning behind the true meaning of servant leadership. Servant leadership is based on the guiding principle that all focus should be placed on the highest priority needs of the followers. All models of servant leadership must be based on the leader assuming the role of the servant, not the leader role (Laub, 2004). Black (2010) stated that data revealed the school climate was more positive because of the utilization of servant leadership type characteristics.

**Transformational Leadership vs. Servant Leadership**

Transactional, transformational, trait-based, and behavior-based leadership approaches are much different than servant leadership. Laub (2004) revealed that servant leadership cannot be like a dinner jacket to be taken on and off, depending on the situation. McFarland et al. (1994) said that servant leadership starts with the character of a person. Greenleaf (1970) made it known that servant leaders must serve first and lead second. Greenleaf (2002) specified that servant leadership is based on the idea that leaders should subordinate their interests to a higher purpose within people in the organization. Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) further described servant leaders as being selfless and puts employee's needs above their own wants and desires. Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) also specified that servant leadership is more effective than transformational leadership in their study. Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) revealed from 80 elected officials that when it came to relationships, servant leadership facilitated better leader and follower interactions over the transformational leadership style.

**Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs**

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and servant leadership are interrelated. Servant leadership characteristics are embedded in four of the five levels of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Abraham Maslow crafted and refined his research in 1948. His research is better known today as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. The first focus is on Maslow's theory of motivation. Maslow (1943) asserted that humans have basic needs that must be met, including biological and psychological, safety, belongingness and love, self-esteem, and self-actualization. However, servant leadership has little to do with the psychological needs of a human being.

There are resemblances of safety, belongingness and love, self-esteem, and self-actualization embedded within the characteristics of a servant leader. Maslow (1948) stated that self-esteem is feeling good or equal about one's self for a positive lifestyle. The foundational work of Maslow continues to be researched today and is crucial to many motivation and engagement research articles and projects that are ongoing.

Maslow (1948) defined this theory as the knowledge of basic human needs and organized it in a hierarchy. Maslow noted concerning human needs that,

"One main implication of this phrasing is that gratification becomes as important a concept as deprivation in motivation theory, for it releases the organism from the domination of a relatively more physiological need, permitting thereby the emergence of more social goals" (Maslow, 1943, p. 375).

Specific individual's needs have been satisfied by the fulfillment of the inner gratification of a person. Satisfaction and realization of one's inner self are the keys to an individual's vision and outlook on their daily life. The fulfillment of the basic needs in life is necessary for satisfaction in an individual's everyday lifestyle. Maslow (1943) proved that individuals need to have a purpose and a drive before motivation can affect a person's choices or behaviors.

Maslow's work and basic needs are the beginning foundation of the characteristics that have been completed in servant leadership. Maslow's theory and its definition bring some significant servant leadership characteristics to the forefront regarding safety, belongingness, love, self-esteem, and self-actualization. Yuliansyah and Khan (2017) found that employee's attitude predicted employees their behavior and had a substantial bearing on the employee's self-efficacy and performance. Fleming (2019) vowed that appreciation and respect help build the esteem in individuals. This notation is important because Maslow's theory can bring a sense of understanding for servant leadership and its possible positive impact on the public school setting.

## Related Literature

There are several types of related literature and contributors to the related literature regarding servant leadership through the years. Covey (2013), Kouzes (2014), Posner (2014), Wong (2007), and Spears (2019) are just a few of the leading examples that have exemplified their works by adding or supplementing servant leadership works. Common themes are shared as servant leadership is defined, and several tenets start from the most crucial part being the character of the servant leader. However, understanding, and the modernizing of servant leadership, continue to remain stagnant following Greenleaf until it was illuminated by Blanchard and Hodges (2003), Hunter (2012), Frick (2004), and most recently Spears (2010).

### Larry C. Spears

Larry C. Spears (1998) was the primary catalyst and researcher on servant leadership following Greenleaf's work. Spears (1998) was cited for making several contributions to help define servant leadership. He found that there were additional attributes of servant leaders and encouraged others to expand his research. Spears ended up being the longtime president and CEO of the Robert K. Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership. Spears (2010) served as the

Robert K. Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership CEO from 1990-2007. Spears (2010) now

has his own center in Indianapolis Indiana for servant leadership and is currently a professor at

Gonzaga University. Spears (2010) noted 10 main characteristics are indicative of leading in a

servant leadership style manner. These 10 essential characteristics are not representative of the

complete list, but they represent a necessary foundation and understanding of servant leadership.

The first is listening. Several authors conclude that in leadership, listening is one of the most

crucial skills to use as a leader. Servant leaders can only value someone's needs if they listen to

their needs first. Spears (2010) noted that listening is defined as the desire to seek and recognize

the will of the organization and to help clarify their direction. Safir (2017) indicated that listening

helps principals lead with a moral imperative, gathers all data first before making a decision by

listening intently, and sees the relationships through listening as important as the conversation.

The second is empathy. The words empathy and sympathetic are sometimes confused or misused

concerning each other. Being a servant leader in any organization requires a leader to use both

skills. Servant leaders should be able to empathize with other individuals and express a sincere

appreciation for other contributions. Spears (2010) defined empathy as recognizing and

responding to the emotions and experiences of others. Romney (2019) mentioned there are two

types of empathy, cognitive and affective empathy. Both are very important when it comes to

leadership. Romney (2019) opined cognitive is the ability to perceive what others are feeling

while affective is knowing and actually feeling what the others are feeling. The third is healing.

Healing is to help others heal, and is a talent that is hard to come by in leadership. Not only

helping others improve but learning to treat one's own self is a critical leadership trait as well.

Servant leaders are capable of healing broken and damaged relationships. Spears (2004) added

that servant leaders are always looking for ways to help others heal from emotional pain. Spears

(2010) also proclaimed one of the strengths of servant leadership is to help heal one's own self and the relationship of others. The fourth is awareness. Awareness means that servant leaders are grounded in knowing and incorporating outside information when interacting with other people. Song (2018) acknowledged that inward awareness could help potential leaders to understand their own strengths, weaknesses, concerns, and the impact of their actions. Upward awareness is much like spirit awareness in which leaders are more aware of their relationship with others. Outward awareness like other-awareness, relation awareness, and situation awareness can help move leaders to more of a stewardship type leader. The fifth is persuasion. Servant leaders have to attempt to persuade others instead of relying on an authoritarian style of leadership. Russell (2017) defined the servant leader as one that can convince other individuals in a visionary journey and willingly make it the follower's idea, not the leaders. True servant leaders will help the follower take the initiative instead of the leader. The sixth is conceptualization. Through conceptualization, servant leaders must see the big picture and envision where the organization wants to be in the long run. Lee (2019) added that servant leaders have a keen ability to conceptualize and understand another person's idea or concept. Making everyone feel welcome at the table with any ideas is an integral part of leadership. Having a progressive nature and goal-oriented direction will also help leaders conceptualize ideas and new trends. The seventh is foresight. Foresight is when a servant leader must anticipate outcomes so the future of the organization can be identified. McClellan (2007) distinctly addressed that a leader must understand and bring together the past, present, and future to anticipate and plan for the future. McClellan (2007) indicated that conceptualization and foresight are similar in planning for the future of the organization. The eighth is stewardship. Stewardship is being dedicated to serving others and is perhaps the most crucial characteristic of servant leadership. Davis (2017) affirmed

that stewardship is a steward that has constant care for their employees and always putting others before themselves as leaders. The ninth is commitment to the growth of people. Commitment to the growth of people is when servant leaders commit to the growth of every follower in the organization. Sangwoo (2017) suggested that servant leadership is one growth aspect is the leader's commitment to the growth of people. Sangwoo (2017) also relied on the diverse needs of a staff member's growth should be based on the member's traits like personality. The tenth is building community which indicates that servant leaders must realize the importance and value of building communities by using the strengths of the organization. McClellan (2007) attested that servant leaders make it a point to create a sense of family while demonstrating a caring attitude among all employees.

Spears (2010) claimed that this list of 10 characteristics is only a start to see the impact and potential of servant leadership style leaders. This list should be documented as a non-comprehensive list in regard to servant leadership. Servant leaders that are conscientious about these characteristics can start to define and explore different ways to utilize them on a daily basis within their own school communities. Maxwell (2015) explained that leadership is the sole ability to influence others. Maxwell (2015) also defined leadership as the ability to carry influence over others in a supervisory role. Russell and Stone (2002) developed a list of the attributes of leadership that were functional in a realistic setting. This servant leadership characteristic list from Marzano et al. (2015) noted that servant leadership has a unique perspective of the leader within any organization. Spears is just a starting point in defining and helping the reader understand the characteristics of servant leadership style leaders.

**Related Works of Servant Leadership**

Several related authors discuss servant leadership and its characteristics of effective leadership practices. Integrity comes up many times, and it is critically important to leaders and even to followers to maintain integrity. Kouzes and Posner (2014) surveyed individuals and asked followers what they most respected and sought out in a leader. Over any other characteristic, honesty was selected most often. Honesty and integrity are grouped tightly together and are essential when mentioning the characteristics of leaders. Greenleaf (1970) suggested that acting with integrity is connected with other servant leadership traits, and without honesty, leaders will struggle in serving other people's needs.

In the late 1980s, there was a book that came out by Stephen Covey, and it was titled *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People.* Later in the mid-1990s, Time magazine recognized Stephen Covey as one of America's top 25 influential people. Leaders in any role should make this book a must-read in their leadership library. In his book, he signifies the importance of character and personality ethics. He also highlights the importance of patience, courage, justice, and integrity as essential factors in his book. Covey (2013) noted that leadership is the process of articulating people's worth so they can see it themselves. Covey (2013) elaborated that character ethics are first, and personality ethics are secondary. Character ethics in Covey's book presumes that all humans have the ability to exert fairness, honesty, integrity, human dignity, quality, potential, and growth.

Character ethics are a focus of the seven effective habits. Covey's (2013) seven effective habits begin with being proactive. Proactive people are the ones that always are planning, and they never wait on others to solve the problem. Proactive people take the lead, and by being independent, find solutions to the issue at hand or future problems. The second character quality is to begin with the end in mind. Covey states that all goals and missions of the organization

should be based on the principles that drive any organization. Leaders should base the value of the organization behind principles that build goals towards the end result.

The third is to put first things first. He says that all individuals should prioritize what motivates them and what they want to spend time on. Being disciplined and putting first things first will help leaders prioritize and be organized in their chosen direction. The fourth is to think Win/Win. This is a directional way of thinking that stems from the heart and is solely based on relationships and human interactions. Covey (2013) emphasized that all communications must feel good, which means a cooperative environment, not a competitive environment. The fifth is to seek first to understand, and then to be understood. The root understanding of this habit is to display character and communication through interactive empathic listening. As an active listener, always understand and diagnose before any conclusions are reached. The sixth is synergize. Covey (2013) said synergy as the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Sometimes synergy is unpredictable, and the best ideas come from creativity and intellectual networking. Synergy is a collection of all the previous habits. The seventh is to sharpen the saw. Covey (2013) explained that there are four dimensions of renewal: physical, social/emotional, spiritual, and mental. Sharpening the saw is the overall well-being of the individual as a whole. Balancing all four dimensions together is known as the balanced renewal.

Jim Collins authored another great leadership book titled *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap…and Others Don't.* Although this book was primarily based on businesses' successes, it looked at the characteristics and leaders of the companies. This research was based on the success of the business at the stock market level on returns. Collins (2001) coined the phrase "good to great," meaning companies that were growing and moving in a better direction. The leadership of the companies quickly become the focus after similarities started to

surface about the chief executive officers and the research from Covey (2013) and Greenleaf (1977).

There were three main categories found in the research, disciplined people, disciplined thought, and disciplined action. The common characteristic among these 15 leaders was humility and professional will (Collins, 2001). Collins (2001) labeled these leaders as level five leaders. Consequently, level five leaders were most resembled and parallel to servant leadership characteristics. Collins (2001) expressed that the level five leaders were more like a plow horse than a show horse. One of the biggest takeaways of the book that resembled servant leadership is he noted that it was more important to see who was on the bus instead of where the bus is going. Even though not titled servant leadership, Collins's work is an extension and collection of several of Greenleaf's literature and research.

Servant leadership was later defined and explained by Patterson (2003). Through different research projects involving servant leadership, Patterson (2003) categorized seven qualities to help define servant leadership.  The first is Agape love. According to Patterson (2003), agape love is known as unconditional love with a genuine caring attitude from the leader to the followers. Recall that Covey defined agape love as unconditional and nothing in return is expected (Covey, 2013). These two agape definitions compare and are relevant to agape love. Patterson (2003) noted that servant leaders need to have humility. Servant leaders have to prioritize their role behind the follower and understand they do not have the answers to every situation. This compares to Covey (2003) by relating to the below definitions of servant leadership.

1.  Altruistic-Being unselfish and has the concern of others a priority at all times.
2.  Visionary-Having the clear ability, to begin with a clear direction and end result.

3. Trusting-Acting with integrity is a must trait with servant leadership.

4. Serving-Having the ability and desire to serve others.

5. Empowering of others-By sharing power and control, servant leaders can entrust

    followers to be invested in the end result.

Servant leadership continues to be defined, and researchers continue to explore and build theories concerning the utilization of servant leadership as a style of leadership. Parris and Peachey (2013) found in their research study that servant leadership was developed into three streams, conceptual stream, measurement stream, and a model development stream. Theory development has been steady in past years; however, there seems to be a lack of consensus of the definition streamed into one profound description. The below table depicts different authors and additions to the theory of servant leadership.

Table 2

*Significant Characteristics in Theory Development of Servant Leadership*

| Laub (1999) | Dennis & Bocarnea (2005) | Barbuto & Wheeler (2006) | Wong & Davey (2007) | Sendjaya, Sarros, & Santora (2008) | van Dierendonck (2011) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Develops People | Empowerment | Altruistic calling | Serves & develops others | Transforming influence | Empowerment |
| Shared leadership | Trust | Emotional healing | Consults & involves others | Voluntary subordination | Humility |
| Authenticity | Humility | Persuasive mapping | Humility & selflessness | Authentic self | Authenticity |
| Valuing people | Agape love | Organizational stewardship | Models integrity & authenticity | Transcendental spirituality | Interpersonal acceptance |
| Provides | Vision | Wisdom | Inspires & | Covenantal | Providing |

| leadership | | influences others | relationship | direction |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Builds community | | | Responsible morality | -Stewardship |

Amended from "Servant Leadership: A review and syntheses," by van Dierendonck, 2011, *Journal of Management*, 37(4), pp. 1228-1261, and "Leadership: Theory and practice," by P.G. Northouse, 2013, p.224, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Other leaders and researchers have excelled in research regarding servant leadership and general leadership. Most of the Ken Blanchard's (2007) interests and his company focus is on the importance of leadership behavior concerning methods, characteristics, and styles. Blanchard implied that self-perception and who a leader is must come first before effective leadership could be focused on. Blanchard stated:

> I truly believe that servant leadership has never been more applicable to the world of leadership than it is today. Not only are people looking for a deeper purpose and meaning when they must meet the challenges of today's changing world, they are also looking for principles and philosophies that actually work. Servant leadership is about getting people to a higher level by leading people at a higher level. (np.)

Blanchard and Hodges (2003) suggested that the head of leadership has to be moved and shaped by the heart. Blanchard and Hodges (2003) also maintained that when the heart is influenced or shaped, then those actions can move and drive the hand.

**Servant Leadership in Education**

School leaders and school leadership are essential in today's public schools. Educational researchers are continually studying and are finding interest in servant leadership and its potential for improving leadership in educational settings. However, servant leadership is not just crucial in school leadership. It is vital in many different areas of the educational and academic arena as well. Servant leadership displayed across the educational landscape is just as important as a principal displaying servant leadership skills and characteristics.

Sergiovanni (2005) found that leaders meet the needs of the school by being of service to others. Sergiovanni (2005) suggested that teaching and learning are improved; therefore, the needs of the students are met. Greenleaf (1977) reasoned in his theory of servant leadership: followers that embrace a servant leadership style of leadership can improve their day to day instructional responsibilities without fear of retaliation. Greenleaf (1977) Wilian et al. (2020) found that when principals exhibit servant leadership skills, there was a positive reception to carrying out character education in schools.

Finding relevant research in educational settings related to servant leadership and its influence is profound across the educational arena and there are plenty of examples. Marzano et al. (2005) observed that servant leadership has been effective in K-12 school settings. Clarence et al. (2020) concluded that there was an indirect effect of servant leadership characteristics displayed by the principal to the ad hoc teachers or paraprofessional teachers. Clarence et al. (2020) also pointed out that the impact on commitment and psychological well-being was evident through efficacy, hope, and resilience displayed in the same ad hoc teachers or paraprofessional teachers. Svoboda (2008) found in a private school setting that there was a positive correlation between servant leadership and principal job satisfaction. Research continues to resonate and identify servant leadership as an optimal style of school leadership.

Servant like leadership among public school leaders is necessary for an ever-changing educational society. Brumley (2012) thought the classroom solution was servant leadership. Brumley (2012) in his book *Leadership Standards in Action: The Principal as Servant-Leader,* Brumley mentions that principals who lead with an attitude of care and concern and also who surround and support students democratically, involve all stakeholders in the decision-making process. This is an example of a servant leadership style mentality. Brumley (2012) wrote,

"…principals as servant-leaders help create and improve schools. In turn, these schools function as healthy organizations consisting of, and for, the students, faculty, and community" (p. 20).

There are many relevant studies and research projects involving education, servant leadership, and the study of effective school leadership. Sergiovanni (2005) proclaimed that leaders meet the needs of the school by being helpful and being of service to others. Sergiovanni (2005) also noted when the previous happened, teaching and learning were improved, and the needs of students are honored. School culture has proven to be impacted in regards to servant leadership in schools. Herndon (2007) found that research demonstrated a positive relationship between school culture and servant leadership. Marzano et al. (2005) professed that school culture is an integral part of student achievement and holds substantial weight for educational leaders. Servant leaders have been known to improve people by helping them and working with them. In public education, this is one of the many reasons that servant leadership is a style of leadership worth exploring for educational settings.

Herndon (2007) focused his research on servant leadership and explored it further when there was a relationship between school climate and student achievement. This research was based out of Missouri from 62 schools and 677 teachers in a quantitative dissertation study. Two surveys were utilized, the Servant Leadership Assessment Instrument (2005) and the School Culture Survey (1998), along with the appropriate student achievement data to determine if there were significant relationships correlated or not. The results of the study profoundly suggested that principal servant leadership behaviors had a significant influence on school culture, which in turn influenced student achievement. Herndon (2007) showed through this study, there is a positive correlation between student achievement and servant leadership.

Servant leadership in today's school is imperative for an ever-changing educational society. Hays (2008) propounded and challenged the lecture-style format of a higher education school with one that embodied a teacher who led and taught with servant leadership tendencies. Hays stated if educators:

> continued to teach in ways that replicate command and control, hierarchy, and power disparities, that promote dependence, compliance, and passivity rather, than autonomy, [they] are antithetical and counterproductive at a time when flexibility, initiative, responsibility, ownership, self-direction, creativity, empowerment, and teamwork and collaboration are more essential than ever. (p. 113)

Greenleaf (2002) believed that servant leadership was the start of authoritarian top-down hierarchical style of leadership. Greenleaf (2002) also thought that servant leadership was the best and most effective leadership style. Herndon (2007) found in the previously mentioned research that there was a positive correlation between school culture, student achievement, and servant leadership. Miears (2005) commented that leaders who utilize servant leadership want to serve others. Additionally, in a study by Robinson et al. (2020) it was revealed that athletic administrators found that servant leadership was directly related to leader effectiveness, affective organizational commitment, and job satisfaction of sports coaches. These findings have shown that servant leadership is a powerful and positive leadership style. When this leadership style is used, all stakeholders are included, and the school community is positively impacted.

**Principal Standards**

School leaders across the nation have a complex and diverse job that has to meet the needs of students, parents, faculty, staff, school board, and all stakeholders in the school community. Educational leaders are currently structured in the United States to fit within a

hierarchical system. These school leaders will become successful and provide a conducive atmosphere for learning when they balance and create an atmosphere where all stakeholders can thrive and meet their full potential.

The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) is the national blueprint and training guidelines for principal leadership in America. Educational Leadership Policy Standards: ISLLC (2008) reference the ISLLC standards are six standards that help guide and train principals for future leadership positions. Educational Leadership Policy Standards: ISLLC (2008) vowed that the ISLLC standards are the foundation of practical knowledge, goals, and expectations for all aspiring administrators across the United States. The School Leaders Licensure Assessment exam is closely correlated with the six standards of the ISLLC. These standards are based on principal expectations and higher education training material, dictating what principals need to know as aspiring administrators in public schools across America.

In 2015 the standards were changed to the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL). National Policy Board for Educational Administration (2015). The new PSEL standards are more reflective of the inclusive overall leader, especially the instructional leader. The following are the latest 10 standards of the PSEL: mission, vision, and core values, ethics and professional norms, equity and cultural responsiveness, curriculum, instruction, and assessment, community of care and support for students, professional capacity of school personnel, professional community for teachers and staff, meaningful engagement of families and community, operations and management, and school improvement.

Standard 1- Mission, Vision, and Core Values. PSEL (2015) educational leaders should develop and advocate a shared mission and vision. High-quality academic success and education should be focused on the well-being of every student.

Standard 2- Ethics and Professional Norms. PSEL (2015) leaders should always have high standards of ethics and professional expectations to promote academic success and the well-being of each student.

Standard 3- Equity and Cultural Responsiveness. PSEL (2015) leaders need to ensure that equity is inclusive to all cultural norms, and each individual student's opportunity is fair and equitable.

Standard 4- Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment. PSEL (2015) principal leaders should promote and support rigorous curriculum, instruction, and assessment to enhance students' well-being and academic success.

Standard 5- Community of Care and Support for Students. PSEL (2015) leaders should be caring and supportive of an inclusive environment that promotes success.

Standard 6- Professional Capacity of School Personnel. PSEL (2015) leaders should promote professionalism and professional capacity among all staff for the success and well-being of every student.

Standard 7- Professional Community for Teachers and Staff. PSEL (2015) leaders should foster a professional community of teachers and staff to promote the academic success and well-being of every student.

Standard 8- Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community. PSEL (2015) leaders should engage all stakeholders, so there are meaningful and reciprocal ways to collaborate concerning academic success and the student's well-being.

Standard 9- Operations and Management. PSEL (2015) leaders should manage and operate the school for the academic success and well-being of every student.

Standard 10- School Improvement. PSEL (2015) leaders should continuously improve and motivate academic gains for academic success and the well-being of every student.

As the new standards are studied and researched, there seem to be high correlational occurrences between servant leadership and the standards expectations. The mentioning and noting of these standards are imperative for the literature to reflect on the practices of building-level leaders. Servant leadership traits and characteristics are reflective in every standard from the needs of the student, stakeholders, and the entire academic community. However, newer research is lacking on the PSEL standards. Brumley (2011) previously linked servant leadership with the ISLCC standards. Brumley (2011) also implied that principalship, vision, support, collaboration, and success indicate an emerging servant leader.

**Benefits of Servant Leadership**

Studies and reflections of servant leadership literature have revealed that there are practical value and positive benefits for organizations and individuals. Frick et al. (2009) argued that servant leadership significantly impacted employee enthusiasm, customer loyalty, bottom-line measures, and organizational reality. Further, Svoboda (2008) addressed that school leadership must be effective in meeting the needs of other school leaders and teachers as well. And Van Dierendonck (2011) stated, "because servant leadership is a people-centered leadership style, evidence is expected to show that servant-leaders have more satisfied, more committed, and better performing employees" (p. 1249). These researchers reveal that there are practical and positive benefits for servant leadership.

Shaw and Newton (2014) added that servant leadership in schools by building-level leaders significantly impacted teacher satisfaction and retention. This high correlation was between the teacher's perception of their principal's servant leadership interactions and teacher

job satisfaction (r=.83, p < .02). Therefore, there was a strong correlation in this study that highlights servant leadership's use, development, and education regarding the hiring of leaders. Svoboda (2008) found that servant leadership is known to show a positive relationship to job satisfaction and encourages improving others, collaboration, and decision making in an environment of trust and respect.

Empirical research supports servant leadership being a prominent leadership theory with positive benefits for the organization. One outside example from education is Liden's (2014) research in the restaurant industry. Liden et al. (2014) theorized and investigated that servant leadership and a serving culture helped job performance and unit performance. Through the sampling of 961 employees spread across 71 restaurants, the leader's behavior of serving the needs of others instead of their own was investigated. Liden et al. (2014) concluded that servant leadership had a definite relation to an employee serving culture within the restaurants studied. In the end, the employees adopted servant leadership behaviors from the modeled behavior from the servant leader (Liden et al., 2014).

Northhouse (2013) "sought to clarify the phenomenon of servant leadership and provide a framework for understanding its complexities" (p. 225). Northhouse (2013) found that leaders bring their own behaviors and ideas to every leadership situation and leaders' background shape how their servant leadership traits are demonstrated. Societal impact has been a big part of servant leadership and the Liden et al. (2014) discussed how servant leadership has had a positive impact on society. Society has endless examples of how servant leadership is impactful. Northhouse (2013) cited Mother Theresa and Southwest Airlines as examples. Their shared philosophies and commonality is that others are first (Northhouse, 2013).

Several authors have portrayed servant leadership as a traditional thought and compared it to Jesus's teachings to his disciples. By focusing on followers and others first, like Jesus, leaders think less about themselves and think more about others, which ends in a greater sense of accomplishment (Greenleaf, 2002). "The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted" (Matthew 23:11-12; New International Version). Wong and Davey (2017) is two of the authors that said servant leadership is not a new concept. Several biblical verses portray the importance of servant leadership, in Jesus's teaching, and love of serving. Below is an example:

"Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." (Philippians 2:3-8, English Standard Version)

The previous scripture help summarize and draw attention to the importance to the core of servant leadership.

As Wong and Page (2003) developed the flagship survey instrument for this research study, Wong also completed several studies involving servant leadership. Wong and Davey (2007) defined servant leadership in many different ways. They noted that servant leadership is about inspiration rather than position and title. It is about influence rather than power and control. They continued by saying that servant leadership is about character and caring rather

than skills. It is about focusing on others' strengths rather than their weaknesses. It is about creating a climate of love rather than a culture of fear. They continue with noting that servant leadership is about serving rather than lording. It is about listening rather than giving orders. It is about long-range benefits than rather than short term profits. It is about humility rather than pride. It is about global vision rather than territorial instinct. It is about the big picture rather than petty self-interest. They conclude by stating that servant leadership is about creating new futures rather than maintaining the status quo. Servant leadership depends on the attributes and vision of a leader, and those benefits will help make a bigger impact in public school education.

**Servant Leadership Measurement Instruments**

There are several different kinds of measurement instruments and surveys related to measuring servant leadership styles and characteristics. The chosen method in this research study is Wong and Page. Wong and Page (2003) is an instrument that is a values-based model for describing servant leadership. There are 12 servant leadership attributes which are which are broken down into four areas. Patterson's (2003) completed research that was seven-dimensional values-based model for defining and describing servant leadership.

Dennis and Bocarnea (2005) also developed an instrument for measuring servant leadership that was a spin-off from the Patterson instrument. Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) initially crafted a measurement tool in 2002 that was a valid option to servant leadership traits. Directly after that, Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) researched an instrument that measured 10 characteristics, which was defined and described by Spears. Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) reasoned that, "despite several conceptual papers on the topic of servant leadership, there is no consensus concerning a construct for empirical research" (p. 304). Sendjaya et al. (2008) developed a multidimensional measure of servant leadership behavior (Servant Leadership

Behavior Scale). The instrument consisted of 35 items, with 22 characteristics divided over a six-dimension measure. This instrument of servant leadership is characterized by service orientation, holistic outlook, and moral-spiritual emphasis.

In 2015, there was an explanation of how servant leadership is operationalized within organizations. Winston and Fields (2015) crafted the Essential Servant Leadership Behavior (ESLB) tool. Winston and Fields (2015) used previous instruments to develop a multi-stage research process to gather data. This process started with the identification and validation of 23 servant leader characteristics that are crucial to the servant leadership style. Winston and Fields (2015) began with 225 identifying servant leadership characteristics. After the duplicated items were removed, 116 items were then reduced to 22. Winston and Fields (2015) measurement instrument identifies and validates the behavior that is necessary for servant leadership.

## Summary

The literature review began with an introduction, which was followed by the theoretical framework. The primary theoretical framework for this study came from Robert Greenleaf (Greenleaf, 1977). The theoretical framework was followed by the narrative review. The narrative review discussed the current scholarly literature related to servant leadership. This current literature review provided existing knowledge regarding the foundational research and definitions of servant leadership. Also, this literature review provided a framework for the functional expectations a principal should exhibit on a daily basis.

Spears and Lawrence (2016) agreed that the whole basis of Greenleaf's work is value-based leadership. Spears and Lawrence (2016) also asserted that servant leadership should serve as a check, which should be a counterbalance to call the leaders that have lost focus and are in it for glorification and lionization. These leaders have lost touch and have forgotten that they are

there to serve all people in the organization. McBath (2018) narrowed down servant leadership in one primary definition, treat people with decency while taking care of them to move society forward. Greenleaf (1977) commented that servant leadership is a holistic leadership approach with relational, ethical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions that empower leaders into what they are capable of doing in a leadership role.

Unfortunately, servant leadership in public education seems to be a lost art among some administrators across public education. McBath (2018) stated that servant leadership was about re-establishing human connections, promoting communal wellness, and conceptualizing accurately of tasks and projects. Wong (2004) related that servant leadership is probably the most philosophical and difficult type of leadership, although it seems very simple. Servant leadership is and will always be a topic worth attention and expanding the empirical literature on. This literature review is meant to give guidance and base knowledge of the research and expectations regarding being a servant leader in public schools.

This research project will continue to address the gaps in the literature on the daily practices of servant leadership style leaders within the confines of public school leadership. This research study will help advance and close the gap on the practices of public school administrators. The next chapter will go deeper into interviews, journal entries, and focus group interviews to close the gap in the research and literature. The remaining chapters in this study will focus on research methods, research findings, and the conclusion.

**CHAPTER THREE: METHODS**

**Overview**

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to identify practices of servant leadership styles of principals in selected rural school divisions in Southwestern, Virginia. This qualitative case study investigates the typical practices and interactions of servant leadership style identified leaders. All of the research and interviews happened in the rural regions of southwestern Virginia. Data collection will consist of 10 interviews from qualified building-level leaders around the southwestern region of Virginia. The researcher chose this region because of its rural demographics and its proximity to the researcher. The phenomena of inquiry in servant leadership style leaders are present in most regions of the United States. This region needs additional research and investigation to gather more evidence of the practices of servant leadership style leaders' practices. Servant leadership is a phenomenon worth exploring and researching within educational leadership. There is a gap in the literature regarding servant leadership practices by rural principals in Southwestern Virginia because there is not any identifiable literature in the region selected. The applicability of an in-depth and explanatory case study will be discussed in this chapter. Additionally, the methodology, participants, research plan, analysis method, procedures, and ethical concerns will also be discussed.

**Design**

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore, define, and list practices of servant leadership style school level leaders in public education. This qualitative study will delve deep into the day-to-day interactions of principals in public education. The central phenomenon of servant leadership practices will be researched to better explain servant leadership as a possible, viable, and chosen method of leadership. While defining servant leadership is essential,

educational research must continue to look through the lens of identified servant leaders so that future and current administrators can explore the successful practices of servant leadership. A qualitative case study design best fits this type of study, so an inside view and narrative lens of servant leadership style leaders are appreciated and explored (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research is needed to understand the how, why, and what of these particular servant leadership style principals. This approach allowed a deeper understanding of the motivation, practices, backgrounds, and beliefs of servant leadership style leaders. Yin (2015) dictated that qualitative research connects a chosen study to the passion of one's own personal and professional life. This research will provide necessary literature in the direction of helping principals select and adapt their style of leadership.

The general design for this case study inquiry is to study in-depth the practices of servant leadership within the local building-level leaders (Creswell, 2018). This design was selected for a more concrete foundational explanation of how and what current servant leadership style individuals do to be identified as servant leaders within their buildings. In this research, principals will answer questions to help shape and define the practices of being servant leaders in public schools in rural Virginia. Yin (1981) defines a case study research design as a systematic research tool. Yin (1981) also likens case studies to a contemporary phenomenon in a real-life context when the boundaries of the phenomenon are not clear or well defined. This case study will lean on and delve deep into interview questions, focus groups, and journal entries that will help shape and describe the practices of servant leadership in rural public schools. This research will focus on four selected divisions in region seven because it will sample various principal and assistant principal servant leadership styles in a rural area. This qualitative multi-case study is

appropriate to explore, survey, and research servant leadership in the selected school districts in Southwestern Virginia since it will seek the perspectives of principals in this district.

## Research Questions

The central research question is: How do public school principals describe their servant leadership practices?

The sub-questions include:

1. What servant leadership practices are used with students?

2. What servant leadership practices are used with parents?

3. What servant leadership practices are used with faculty and staff?

## Setting

This qualitative case study will commence in the rural school divisions of Southwestern Virginia. Within the areas of Southwestern Virginia are several cities and towns that are sparsely and widely spread out due to the abundant amount of farmland, mountains, and valleys. Within this terrain, there are spacious miles of endless unpopulated land due to challenging topography that allows for difficult travel. This setting was chosen because it has been the researcher's home for 43 years. This area was also selected because of the ongoing pandemic and its proximity to the researcher. The features that make this site a good selection is there is constant and stable leadership that leads to optimum organizational structure that has been prevalent in recent years. The leadership at the school consists mostly consist of principals and assistant principals. Several smaller schools only have one administrator.

Rural Virginia schools continue to struggle with funding and equity in education. However, academic gains have remained at a premium level with the implementation of the Comprehensive Instructional Program (C.I.P.). The majority of the schools within this C.I.P.

consortium are located in region seven in rural Southwestern Virginia. Since these schools are rural, and there are very few cities or urban populations. Within these schools are mixed demographics, predominantly white middle-class community schools. The majority of the high schools have one principal and one assistant principal. The majority of the elementary and middle schools have only one building-level administrator. There are 51 schools, across four divisions, PreK-12, which will be included in the initial email for the leadership questionnaires. Pseudonyms will be used at all times to protect the principal and the schools within these regions.

## Participants

The participants chosen will be a purposeful sampling strategy over region seven across rural Virginia. After site selection and superintendent approval, building-level principals will be sent emails containing the screening questionnaire in the selected divisions. The demographic population will broadly be varied across gender, ethnicity, and age, depending on the participants. Elementary, middle, and high school principals and assistant principals will be utilized for participation in this dissertation study. The number of questionnaire participants will be 71 in the four selected counties. There will be a questionnaire used to categorize the evidence, or lack thereof, for servant leadership style characteristics from the participants. After the questionnaire, results will be assessed for the highest individuals utilizing servant leadership characteristics. Interviews will include 10 participants that exhibit a high level of servant leadership capabilities based on a questionnaire.

The questionnaires will be completed across all three levels of public education. Page and Wong's (2000) Servant Leadership Profile-360 (SLP-360) will be the questionnaire utilized for this research. SLP-360 is a 62-item questionnaire that has been approved for research. The SLP-

360 questionnaire is based on a seven-point Likert scale. This survey instrument questionnaire is based on the attitude and perceptions that are linear on a continuum across the 62 questions. The cumulative score under certain specific factors is a linear correlation regarding a high-level of servant leadership style attributes. The servant leadership questionnaire is based on the seven standards of servant leadership. Page and Wong (2000) note that the seven positive servant leadership qualities are servanthood, leadership, visioning, developing others, team-building, shared decision-making, and integrity.

Recruitment and site selection will primarily be emails and correspondence from the selected school superintendents in Southwestern Virginia. An email notification will be utilized, and the proper approval by division superintendents will be attained through the necessary protocols. Recruiting individuals should be easier with the implementation of selected gift cards used as the incentive. Initial interviewed and focus group participants will be given additional gift cards for their time and participation.

## Procedures

During the research and findings stage, there will be the expectation of attaining the appropriate approvals from the committee and the IRB. Prior to data collection, I will secure Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. Due to the fact, the questionnaires and interviews will be completed with human subjects, IRB approvals and informed written consents and waivers (see Appendix A) would need to be attained. I have already obtained permission from Dr. Paul Wong permitting the use of the SLP-360 questionnaire. A purposeful sampling strategy will be used and sent by email invitations to building-level leaders in the four selected counties. This survey instrument will be for volunteer leaders to complete the full 62 item SLP-360 questionnaire. An informed consent form (Appendix A) will be followed and utilized. The data

and questionnaire will be delivered and collected through Microsoft 365 forms through the Liberty IT office. Once the results are computer-scored for high servant leadership style traits, 10 interviews will be completed to gain more in-depth knowledge and background on the individual and their history regarding servant leadership.  Interviews will include 10 highly identified servant leaders who will be purposefully selected from the questionnaires. Focus groups will include the similarities or differences of the initial interviews. Journals will be recorded by the 10 participants. Interview, focus group, and journal data will be recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions will be analyzed for codes and themes. Upon completing the interviews, focus group interviews, and journal entries, the researcher will examine triangulated results by comparing categorizing the data. Common codes and themes will be identified through reoccurring frequencies in the data from the interviews, focus groups, and journal entries. The interview responses and focus group responses will be grouped and matched based on the themes and patterns that will emerge in the analysis process. Attached appendixes will be utilized if necessary to illustrate common themes and trends.

## The Researcher's Role

My role as the human instrument is to gain knowledge of servant leadership and the practices and characteristics of what makes servant leadership a possible viable option for public school leaders. My relationship to the setting will be asking tough self-reflection questions of the participant's thoughts, feelings, and reflections of their servant leadership style practices. The researcher will take an outside view and will assume the role of an objective observer. The researcher will not become bias or let their own experiences manipulate the results. The researcher will keep a journal of notes to allow for reflections, insights, and reactions of the process and results of the research.

The researcher has extensively worked in education for twenty-two years as a teacher, coach, athletic director, assistant principal, principal, and currently a director at the central office level. No participant has a direct relationship that represents a conflict of interest, family relationship, or any other personal relationship that will be impartial or bias on the nature of the research and record collection. As a former Director of Personnel and Human Resources, the researcher has been trained in questioning and interviewing techniques that will be beneficial in the record collection and interviewing in the research study.

## Data Collection

Initial screening collection will first begin by administering and scoring the SLP-360 results from the email invitations sent to the four districts building-level leaders. Permission from Dr. Paul Wong has been attained to use the questionnaire and the scoring method for research purposes. Microsoft 365 will be used to monitor and collect the results of the 62-item questionnaire. The questionnaire will be used to select qualified participants for the interviews and journal entries. The data from Likert-type instruments are categorical. After carefully calculating the questionnaire results, the selection of a higher presence servant leadership traits will be completed to select 10 individuals for face to face interviews. Creswell and Poth (2016) mention interviews help understand the participant's world and meanings from their perspective to discover their lived experiences. These interviews in this qualitative case study will be crucial for the needed data to define this research project.

In this current qualitative case study dissertation, three methods of collecting data will be utilized. These three methods of data collection will be participant journal entries, interviews, and focus group interviews. The data collections and interviews will be completed in the above order. When the participants are selected, they will be given the parameters of the journal entry

requirements. There are possible additions that will have to be made because of the order of interviews. Some of the transcriptions from the interviews could alter the focus groups as well. The systems used to record and track the data will be Delve Tool, electronic recording devices, recorded video, and journal entries completed on through email. This research study will use the semi-structured interviewing method, and all interviews will be attempted to be in a face to face format unless there are COVID-19 state restrictions. The Zoom platform will be used for interviews that will be recorded, and there will be post reflection memoing notes for the researcher to record thoughts and interview perceptions from the interview.

The selection of these data collection techniques is essential to gain a true and accurate perception of the practices of what makes servant leadership principals who they are. These representations of data will help narrow the collection of pieces of evidence and literature of servant leadership styles in public school leadership. Data collection will be completed in the following order throughout the research process; email invitation, informed consent, survey questionnaire data desegregation, participant timelines, selected interviews, focus interviews, and review of the journal entries. These data collection methods are proven and recommended in the field of qualitative inquiry.

**Journal Entries**

The selected participants, as a precursor to the interview, will record and write journal entries. These journals are beneficial in regard to the experiences and interactions of their daily and professional journey. Creswell and Poth (2016) explained about that personal documents, like emails, letters, and private blogs, faculty notes, can be useful in the journaling process. The journals upon review will also be a good icebreaker for the start of the interview. The only journal prompt will be to record servant leadership type interactions that are relavant to the

parent, staff, and student. Luu (2019) observed there was a high positive correlation with servant leadership traits exhibited, which in turn promoted a positive reaction in the employee's organizational citizenship behavior. Additional talking points will help the participant to explain parts of the journal and what has led them to a calling in education. Journal length and parameters will vary and will not be predetermined due to the principal's daily interactions and duties. Conversations, interactions, emails, letters, responsibilities, meetings, and daily time duties will all be encouraged in the journal entry log.

**Interviews**

Interviews are the most necessary and crucial part of any qualitative inquiry in a research study or project. Interviews give an inside view and perspective of the full view of the participant's outlook, opinions, experiences, and beliefs. When preparing for the interviews, it is necessary to be open and reflective of the interview process. Picciano (2006) revealed that the interviews are to gather data, and they should be well organized in the process. After the data has been disaggregated, 10 interviews will be scheduled with the building level leaders that exhibit high servant leadership skill characteristics and capabilities. The following is a list of the questions that will be utilized in the interview.

**Semi-structured Interview Questions**

1. Tell me a little about your educational and personal background that affected you?

2. Describe your philosophy on leadership and relate it to your daily interactions with the students, faculty, and parents?

3. How has professional types of leadership experiences shaped your leadership style?

4. How has your family demographics and family history influenced you as a professional school leader?

5. What life/professional experiences have shaped your views of servant leadership?

6. In your own words, define servant leadership and list some characteristics of servant leadership style leaders concerning students, staff, and parents.

7. Describe your outlook and view of servant leadership in relation to students, staff, and parents?

8. What are some relevant professional development book studies or reads that have helped shape your practices and view of servant leadership?

9. How has the institutions you graduated from affected your daily practices concerning students, faculty, and parents?

10. What schools, universities, professors, or programs make a difference in your practices of servant leadership concerning students, staff, and parents?

11. Who has had the most influence over you and affected your leadership style in your professional career?

12. How was the relationship with influential professionals that shaped your daily interactions with students, staff, and parents?

13. Leaders sometimes are unaware of the influence administrators have on the school community. On a scale from one to five, with one being very unaware and five being completely aware, how aware are you of your influence on the school community? Are you aware of the effect you have on the school community? If so, what effect do you have?

14. Explain any personal or professional struggles that have changed your daily servant leadership interactions with students, faculty, and parents.

15. What other information would you like to add regarding servant leadership?

These interview questions are meant to capture the practices, backgrounds, and lived experiences of servant leadership styles of building-level leaders. Focht and Ponton (2015) found that valuing people is a common characteristic that continually comes up. Moreover, these questions get the participants' personal and educational background, along with their lived experiences of how they have shaped who they are today. Yin (2017) acknowledged that how and why questions result in more explanatory answers and are more optimal in case study research. The first four questions deal with their personal and professional backgrounds. Check and Schutt (2012) stated that the first few questions of an interview should be simple and to gather background questions. These first four research questions will lay a firm foundation for understanding the selected participant's outlook and lived experiences.

Servant leadership continues to be defined in many different ways. Focht and Ponton (2015) define servant leadership as valuing people, humility, listening, trust, caring, integrity, service, empowering others, serve others before themselves, collaboration, unconditional love, and learning. Some of these characteristics should rise to the top in questions four through eight. They are specifically about servant leadership information that will help the participant define their own view and definition of the leadership style.

In questions nine through twelve, the questions are very personable and idiosyncratic since there will be different and varying stories that will shape the lived experiences. Influential individuals will help the researcher understand the outlook and humility of the interviewed participant. These questions will stir deep questions and focus the importance of their beliefs and the roots of servant leadership. Different worldviews, Christian views, and lived experiences will be a substantial interest in answers to these questions. The probing of some of these questions will be a priority to explore the presence or non-presence of Christianity in their preferred

leadership styles. Williams (2009) notes that biblical leadership is not acting like a boss but shouldering the responsibility of others. Christian worldviews will be an interesting background if it is mentioned and how the response is related to servant leadership.

The final questions in twelve through fifteen are responsible for closing the interview and wrapping up essential servant leadership item questions. These remaining questions also help build crucial questions regarding relationships and connecting personal and professional experiences with servant leadership. The remaining questions are indicative of relating to the participant's experiences. Page and Wong (2000) mentioned that factor three is authentic leadership, and it heavily weighs on the servant leadership's attitude, values, credibility, and motive. These remaining questions will help define credibility and reason.

**Focus Group Interviews**

The second method of data collection is focus group interviews. The focus interview participants will be selected based on the top candidates that have resembling answers, daily interactions, and responses from the first initial interview. There will be five focus interview questions related to the day-to-day practices of the principal's daily duties. While using the Greenleaf/Spears characteristics as a guide, below are the focus group questions.

1. What servant leadership qualities to you display most often and how??

This question should draw information from the leader's interactions with followers. Follower and leader interactions are crucial to understanding servant leadership because perspectives and actions are essential in framing servant leadership's daily practices. Terosky and Reitano (2016) note that the actions with their follower's highlight servant leadership interactions.

2. Describe how you intentionally serve faculty, staff, students and parents. Daily interactions are essential to frame the practices leaders have with staff daily. Principals have certain standard practices and expectations with the team they serve that need to be gathered and reported. Organizational culture also can be assessed through this question to understand staff practices. Hidayat and Maitimo (2020) mention that job satisfaction and work engagement is indicative of servant leadership and organizational culture. Staff engagement interactions must be explored in-depth to help define practices.

3. Describe your average daily interactions with parents.

This question focuses on the importance of parents and the principal's interactions. In some situations, principal interactions are indirect regarding servant leadership interactions. Schroeder (2016) noted that when the principal exhibits servant leadership skills to staff and students, it bleeds a culture of servant leadership to the parents as well. When the interactions from a principal to a parent happens, there are opportunities for parents to believe and see servant leadership skills and characteristics

4. What single trait of servant leadership characteristics do you value the most?

This question will help shape the participant's mind frame on which characteristic is most important in their eyes. Several attributes of servant leadership are revealing of servant leaders, and some are more noteworthy than others. Greenleaf (1970) concluded that the best characteristic or test of servant leadership was to see if followers became healthier, wiser, and more autonomous. Gathering the perception of characteristics is crucial in defining servant leadership building-level leaders.

5. Describe the trait from question number four that exemplifies your leadership style?

This question will help highlight the participant's viewpoint of their most influential trait that drives their practices daily. Yu (2007) mentioned that certain servant leadership qualities have similar characteristics that were modeled by Jesus. It will be interesting to categorize the responses to see if there are any common answers.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis will consist of codes and themes. One unique aspect of qualitative research is that data analysis and collection are simultaneous processes (Creswell, 2013). For the survey, although not the primary data analysis, the Servant Leadership Profile-360 will be analyzed using Page and Wong's coding and scoring key. For the survey results and data will be stored and collected on Microsoft Office forms. The coding and spreadsheet will yield a score for each of the participants and their responses. The questionnaire data will be categorized to determine frequencies. Although this questionnaire is not the focus of this dissertation, it is imperative to have the correctly identified servant leaders involved in the study. Page and Wong's scale will be used to do so and will include 10 people with high servant leadership ratings for the interviews. The data recorded that is high is servant leadership (servanthood and leadership), and the low data in abuse of power and pride will be utlized. This will begin the selection process for the identified participants. After completing the SLP-360, all scores will be compiled to show profiles of the level and demographics involved. Depending on the results, the data will be desegregated into high servant leadership factors, and then the interviews will be recorded and transcribed. After the interview, focus groups and reflections will be recorded and transcribed as well. The researcher will complete an analysis for servant leaders and non-servant leaders as related to demographics.

After the initial interviews, the researcher will have a debriefing time to record notes, verbal, and non-verbal cues, and to draw perceptions and conclusions from the interviews. After the interview process, the researcher will record and synthesize the feelings and perceptions as analyzed from the interview transcripts. Emerging ideas and themes will start to formulate into data that will be logged. After the interview, voice recordings, thoughts, perceptions, feelings, non-verbal cues, and phrases will be documented. These reactions and recordings will be crucial in conveying the meaning and representations from the interview (Creswell, 2018).

The participant's journals will be collected after the first interview to categorize and draw similarities for focus groups to be formed. Focus group interviews can help build generalizations and snapshots of the practices of the selected participants. Once the initial interviews are complete, then the codes and themes will be grouped for similarities for focus group interviews.

This research project will focus on three methods of data analysis including pattern matching, explanation building, and logic models which will help the data portray a better understanding of servant leaders' perspectives. Utilizing an initial strategy of working with the data from the ground up will help develop patterns and a sense of direction for the analytical techniques. Yin (2017) mentioned that pattern matching is one of the more desirable methods of analytic techniques. In this qualitative case study, the patterns will relate to the questions drawn from the interviews.

Explanation building is the second data analysis techniques utilized to build an explanation regarding the study. Causal sequences will be analyzed among data to statements and practices concerning servant leadership practices. Yin (2017) noted that explanation building is refining a set of ideas.

The third and final data analysis technique is logic models. According to Yin (2017), explanation building is like putting together a chain of occurrences through a given amount of time. By using the logic model process, the researcher will match the empirical data to conclude the practices of servant leadership style leaders be noting the chain of occurrences within the data. Yin (2014) stated the researcher needs to be aware of the analysis strategies before data collection to ensure the data is analyzable. Four strategies include (a) rely on theoretical propositions, (b) work data from the ground up, (c) develop a case description, (d) examine rival explanations.

In this research, a qualitative case study analysis is about drawing a story and drawing conclusions regarding participant perspectives. The interviews, focus group, and journal entries will lead to the coding and building of themes to capture emerging ideas from transcripts and memoing. Once the data analysis is complete, the researcher will use hand codes and find occurrences and reoccurring themes through descriptive coding. Saldana (2016) notes that using descriptive coding to find short phrases or common words. Several coded words and phrases will help depict common themes and emerging theories in servant leadership.

During the data collection and analysis process, all forms of participant data will remain categorized by participant (Creswell, 2013). This is essential for accurate record keeping. Recordings for the interviews will be transcribed verbatim. Information will then be loaded into a database on the computer and manually analyzed and then organized into codes and themes (Yin, 2014) in light of the research questions. Merriam (2009) stated that coding is assigning a shorthand name to data in order to categorize and group the information together. Data will be coded and categorized by themes that are revealed in the analysis process.

**Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness in qualitative research is the overall backbone and basis of how reliable the data is in the case study. Check and Schutt (2012) noted that triangulation uses two or more measures of the same variable. In an effort to provide valid and reliable findings for this qualitative case study and provide a rich, thick description of the phenomenon, the researcher will collect data from three different sources to allow for triangulation. Triangulation strengthens the data and the validity of the research. Providing and defending the truth is based on the triangulation of the data. With qualitative research being subjective, there has to be transparency and open criticism from outside academic advisors and other resources.

Triangulation will best be established through the use of other credible resources to compare the results and data, through methods triangulation (observations), and a team of researchers (committee) to vet, test, question, and validate the data. Creswell and Poth (2016) note that member checking is necessary and important in seeking participant feedback. After the interview, the transcribing should be vetted by the participant. This allows the interpretations of the data and the interview to be approved and certified by the participant. In this case study results from the interviews, focus interviews, and journal entries may lend to filling a gap in the literature.

## Credibility

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), member checking will ensure transcription accuracy, as member checking is "the most crucial technique for establishing credibility" (p. 314). Allowing the participants to review the transcriptions will increase the credibility of the research. As the current researcher placed in the study, the lens of servant leadership will help the researcher because of their educational background. The researcher has been a teacher,

coach, athletic director, assistant principal, principal, and most recently, a director in the central office. Creswell and Poth (2016) note that the reader has the right and need to know everything about the researcher. This helps validate and gives claim to the value of the research. Moreover, the researcher's lens could cast an unconscious bias, which could be reflected in the data and interpretations of the interview as well.

**Dependability and Confirmability**

Williams (2011) notes that the research will be more likely to be accepted by readers if the confirmability audit is accomplished and complete by the members of the study. Dependability and confirmability offer confidence in the data collection, analysis, and reporting procedures. The procedures were explained, in detail, in Chapter three. Transparent reporting, audio recordings, and transcribing are examples of dependability. The need for transparency and accuracy heavily weighs on the dependability and reliability of the researcher. The setting and participant are confirmed regarding the member checking, reflexivity, and the triangulation of the data. Since the environment is based in rural Southwestern Virginia, there will be a relationship of trust and dependability from the researcher to the participant. The dependability of the study will be based on the findings, interpretations, and recommendations which are supported by the data. Conformability is the level of confidence in the research from the data and research. Other qualified researchers should be able to verify the findings from the data and research. An audit trail for independent verification will help with dependability and confirmability.  The audit trail is the documentation of how the study was conducted including what was done, when it was done, and why (Donald, Jacobs, Razaveih, & Sorensen, 2006).

**Transferability**

Transferability refers to comparing and transferring this study to other types of similar situations. Qualitative research is discussed in terms of transferability rather than generalizability

(Creswell, 2013).  This study should be compared to different types of rural public schools that have explored servant leadership. Nevertheless, several other servant leadership type studies can be transferable to education as well as outside of education. Servant leadership styles, although coined in a biblical sense, is used in major corporations today, not just education. The researcher hopes that this research project will spark other servant leadership type inquiries within public education. In order to determine transferability, a detailed description of the research situation is required (Creswell, 2013).

## Ethical Considerations

Prior to conducting research, I will secure approval from my dissertation Chair, and I will secure IRB approval.  There are limited ethical considerations that would limit or alarm the credibility of the research or the participant's confidential information. All pseudonyms will be utilized in the final reports, and documents will be kept for three years and then destroyed to comply with research guidelines. Data storage and computer device with information will be locked and have keyed or password access only. All members during the entire length of the research will be able to withdraw at any time if they feel uncomfortable or unsure of their data and personal information. Informed consent will be utilized, and the protection of the participant's confidentiality is the top priority.

## Summary

Servant leadership can and has been a popular style of leadership in public schools. The data is prevalent in supporting servant leadership as a leadership style. The data from the SLP-360 questionnaires will help define the interview participants that exhibit high capabilities and characteristics in a servant leadership style of leadership. Page and Wong identify SLP-360 test results as high in servant leadership if they score high on servanthood and leadership and

produce low results on abuse of power and pride. These results will yield 10 interviews in a semi-structured type format. After the initial interviews and after reviewing the journal entries, focus groups will be categorized for similarities for another brief style interview.

Before the interview, journal entries will be separated in detail to gain knowledge from the interview participants. After the interview, before actual transcribing, there will be a reflection of the interview documented to gain insight and clarity from the interview. Throughout the entire process, there will be dialogue, member-checking, transparency, and thorough attention to detail to protect the participant's confidentiality at all times. In this chapter, the validity of the questionnaire, interviews, journal entries, focus group interviews, and research design were discussed at length to produce a firm and dependable type of data analysis for this qualitative case study research.

**CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS**

**Overview**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to identify practices of servant leadership styles of principals in selected rural school divisions in Southwestern, Virginia. The primary focus of this study was to learn from the lived experiences of current principals and assistant principals through a series of in-depth individual interviews, focus group interviews, and journal entries. This research addresses questions from a case study design by looking into and delving deep inside the day-to-day interactions of selected servant leadership style building level administrators. Chapter IV reports the findings via data and consequent analysis used to investigate the research questions and sub-questions. For this research, a servant leader is defined as a leader (a) who meets the needs of others before focusing on their own; (b) whose leadership is focused on engaging and developing followers through collaboration, strength-finding, and positive reinforcement; and (c) who fosters engagement, trust, and positive relationships in the workplace (Keith, 2016; Sipe & Frick, 2015). Servant leadership practices, while often overlooked in the educational setting, are instrumental in learning about how school administrators perceive their own lived experiences and servant leadership interactions on a day-to-day basis.

**Participants**

In this qualitative dissertation, ten individuals qualified for the research portion of this study. All participants work in small, rural public school divisions in southwestern Virginia. The four public school counties represented are Creek, River, Valley, and Mountain. All districts have 7,000 or fewer students and are fully accredited. The participants have served in positions of leadership ranging from four to eighteen years. There were four females and six males

involved in this study. These participants agreed to the study and their volunteer interest was confirmed through the superintendents of their division. Each participant was given a pseudonym to protect their identity for confidentiality. The descriptions below are factual and current demographic information.

The search and participant selection for this research began in the spring of 2021 and continued through the summer of the same year. This was during the middle of the current and ongoing COVID-19 pandemic in the United States. The selection of participants was hindered by the pandemic and was often delayed because of quarantines and lockdowns. The participants were also not readily available for interviews because of the pandemic quarantines and isolations. These ten participants were selected out of 31 servant leadership survey results. The researcher used Microsoft forms to convert the Servant Leadership Profile-360 (SLP-360) into an electronic survey format. The 31 surveys were returned through email and results were calculated to find ten participants who agreed to participate and were eligible for the research study. Qualitative data for this dissertation were derived from one-on-one interviews, two to three individuals during a focus interview, and a journal writing prompt. Below, each participant is described and their demographic and school information is detailed.

**Angie**

Angie has been the principal at her school for the past ten years. She also has 18 years of experience teaching elementary school. She is the longest tenure principal out of the ten selected participants. She is located at the newly recognized national Blue-Ribbon School Pre-K-5 Elementary in River County. Her school has 283 students and 88.3% of her student population is economically disadvantaged. Her school is ranked above the division and state average in history, science, math, and English.

She was proud to mention that being a teacher runs in her family and her mom was a school teacher and her father was a minister. She believes in building relationships in her whole school community. She mentioned that building relationships is a very important part of servant leadership. Angie also thinks that she needs to be visible, so the parents know that she is available to support them academically. She views her role as, "I'm a leader that facilitates and I'm in more of a coaching relationship, and I stay away from a top-down leadership style approach." Another point of interest with Angie's responses is that she commits to the growth of people. Building relationships and commitment to the growth of people was Angie's most frequently identified comments as a servant leader.

**Danny**

Danny is the assistant principal at a fully accredited high school is Mountain County. His high school has 456 students in grades 9-12. There are 62.3% disadvantaged students in his school and his school is at or above the state and division average in history, math, science, and English. Danny started in the business sector but switched to education and worked his way up to assistant principal. He is a big believer in John Maxwell's books, and he also studies different leadership styles and methods.

Danny commends his current principal for providing him with the most support in his leadership endeavors. He provides his staff with song quotes and motivational phrases when he sends out information by email. Danny said, "servant leadership is leading by example and don't ever ask someone to do something you wouldn't do." His most frequently talked about servant leadership trait, and one that he exhibits the most, is listening. In his focus group interview questions, he identified relationships, commitment to the growth of people, and listening as the most relevant parts of his servant leadership path.

**Gerry**

Gerry is the principal at an elementary school in Creek County. His school has 357 students in Pre-K-5 and the school is fully accredited. There are 52.7% economically disadvantaged students and they are below the state and division average in assessments in science, math, and reading. However, they are above the state and division average in history. Gerry moved to southwestern Virginia from Kansas and received his doctorate from Virginia Tech in Educational Leadership.

Gerry started his career in education as a teacher and was promoted to be a principal for nine years in Kansas. Since then, he has been a principal for eleven years in Virginia. Next year he looks forward to moving back to the classroom as an elementary teacher. Gerry talked a lot about the traumatic and crisis situations he has encountered as a principal. These events, the death of students and the death of parents, have shaped and influenced his servant leadership journey. The most prevalent and spoken topic concerning Gerry's servant leadership interactions was listening and building relationships with the whole school community.

**Gregory**

Gregory is the elementary principal of grades Pre-K-7 with 618 students attending his school. There are 60.8% economically disadvantaged students in his school. On state assessments they score well above the division and state average. Gregory started in the agriculture industry and ended up being a career switcher. He switched to education as a special education teacher and a baseball coach. Gregory mentioned "being shaped" by other administrators as an influential part of his leadership journey. Gregory mentioned communication, empathy, and listening the most as servant leadership practices. Gregory was very reserved, calm, and stoic during his interview.

**John**

John is the assistant principal of an elementary school with 496 students. There are 58.7% economically disadvantaged students at his school, and it serves grades Pre-K-5. On state assessments, his school scored above the division and state average in history, science, and math. John received his doctorate degree from Virginia Tech in Educational Leadership. He credits Virginia Tech and Liberty for his success and progression in administration.

John's life was difficult and traumatic growing up. When he was younger, he spent time in an abuse shelter due to his father and mother not getting along. His dad was historically abusive with alcohol and beat his mother on occasion. Growing up, he was a student who received a free and reduced lunch. His previous life experiences have shaped his relationship and connections to the students in his building. John credited other professionals in helping him shape his professional outlook. However, John mentioned that the Lord has shaped his servant leadership path the most. John mentioned that communication, and the commitment to the growth of people, were keys to servant leadership interactions.

**Lorina**

Lorina is the assistant principal at a high school in Creek County of grades 9-12. There are 624 students and 56.7% are economically disadvantaged. In regard to state testing, her school is above the division and state average in English and reading. They are below the division and state average in math, history, and science. Lorina attended a Christian high school growing up in the central part of Virginia. Lorina works with the whole school community to make sure she serves all stakeholders. She frequently mentioned café workers and custodians as important employees of the school and noted that sometimes they get overlooked. Relationships with her

school community were the most revealed servant leader practice that she credited during her interviews.

**Mari**

Mari is the principal of a Pre-K-5 elementary school and has 52.5% of her students that are economically disadvantaged. She has 531 students who attend her school and on state assessments her school is significantly above the division and state average. Mari has a doctorate degree in Educational Leadership from East Tennessee State University and she has been a principal for eleven years. She uses quotes to assist staff in motivation and offers many different ways to include staff on decisions that help run the school. Mari values professional book reads and book studies as an important part of her administration journey. Mari frequently mentioned empathy, commitment to the growth of people, and having an open door for her staff, students, and parents as servant leadership qualities.

**Rector**

Rector is the principal of a high school in Creek County with grades 9-12 attending his school. The total enrollment for Rector's high school is 406 students, and there are 50.0% economically disadvantaged students. His school ranks above the division and state assessment averages in math, English, and science. Rector has been in education for 32 years, and he has been a teacher, coach, counselor, and principal. He has had the most years in education of the participants. He is very blunt and to the point. He does a great job of incorporating professional book reads for his staff and for his own professional development. Rector has credited other influential professionals for his advancements in education. He mentioned that his commitment to the growth of people has been an important part of his servant leadership experience.

**Rena**

Rena is the principal of a larger middle school and has 926 students in attendance for grades 6-8. She has 43.6% economically disadvantaged students, and they are slightly below the division and state average is state testing. Rena has been a principal for six years and she has worked primarily in the middle grades as a teacher and administrator. Her father was a minister and she credits him for her learning about servant leadership. She grew up watching him lead and empower others, and she was inspired. Rena has mentioned that listening is a vital part of servant leadership. She strives for good communication in her building and values the commitment of the growth of the people who she leads.

**Scooter**

Scooter is the principal at a middle school that has 651 students in grades 6-8. The economically disadvantaged population is 55% and their state testing is at or above the division and state average. Scooter has a doctorate degree in Educational Leadership from Virginia Tech. Scooter's family has been in education all his life. His father is a retired principal, and his mother works with adult and GED education. Scooter was very personable, and his servant leadership skills, characteristics, and practices were evident. He believes that communication and listening skills are essential when it comes to servant leadership. He also makes sure that administrative interns are given a chance to learn in his building. During the interview, he mentioned listening, communication, open door, relationships, and the commitment to the growth of people as servant leadership qualities. He stated that all of these are important in servant leadership practices concerning the whole school community.

Below is a table of the participants (using pseudonyms) and their administrative role, gender, demographic information, highest degree obtained in education, and their former taught subject.

**Table 4**

*Participant Demographic Information*

| Females | Gender | Current Position | Level | County | Former Area Taught | Highest Degree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Lorina | Female | Assistant Principal | High School | Creek | English | Masters Ed. Leadership |
| Mari | Female | Principal | Elem. School | River | Special Education | Doctorate Ed. Leadership |
| Rena | Female | Principal | Middle School | Valley | History Teacher | Masters Ed. Leadership |
| Angie | Female | Principal | Elem. School | River | Elem. Teacher | Masters Ed. Leadership |
| Danny | Male | Assistant Principal | High School | Mount. | Business Teacher | Masters Ed. Leadership |
| Gerry | Male | Principal | Elem. School | Creek | Elem. Teacher | Doctorate Ed. Leadership |
| Scooter | Male | Principal | Middle School | River | Special Education | Doctorate Ed. Leadership |
| Gregory | Male | Principal | Elem. School | Mount. | Special Education | Masters Ed. Leadership |
| Rector | Male | Principal | High School | Creek | History Teacher, Counselor | Educational Specialist |
| John | Male | Assistant Principal | Elem. School | River | Elem. Teacher | Doctorate Ed. Leadership |

**Results**

The data collected by the researcher for this case study were organized, analyzed, and synthesized. Most of the relevant data is listed in narrative format while the researcher looked for themes and relevant practices to answer the research questions. The interviews were completed through virtual Zoom meetings throughout the summer of 2021. Unfortunately, the nature of the current pandemic was not conducive to onsite visits or in-person interviews.

The research from this study utilized servant leadership self-assessment surveys (SLP-360), Zoom interviews, Zoom focus group interviews, and journal prompts. This chapter presents the results of the analyses of data collected for this study. All four division superintendents from

Valley, Mountain, Creek, and River Counties agreed and approved of this study. Emails were utilized to correspond with the superintendents and principals during the research and participant selection process.

According to the ten selected and qualified participants' SLP-360 score, the above-mentioned participants exhibited a high average of servant leadership style qualities, tenants, and characteristics. The SLP-360 is a 62-item, self-assessment questionnaire of the principal's servant leadership type tendencies. The SLP-360 is categorized into seven factors of servant leadership. They are as follows:

Factor 1: Empowering and developing others

Factor 2: Power and pride (vulnerability humility, if scored in reverse)

Factor 3: Serving others

Factor 4: Open, participatory leadership

Factor 5: Inspiring leadership

Factor 6: Visionary leadership

Factor 7: Courageous leadership (Integrity and authenticity)

This instrument is designed to measure negative and positive leadership characteristics. To ensure validity and reliability, the SLP-360 uses a 7-point Likert scale. The participants determined agreement or disagreement with the statements in self-assessing their perceptions as a servant leader. Since there is an odd-numbered ordinal scale of possible answers, this eliminates forced choice and lets the participant have a mid-point or undecided option. When participants are measuring self-perception, removing a forced option can be viewed as an advantage since participants may not perceive or feel they are being obligated to make a

decision. The participants then rate themselves in each question of what they believe or have done in normal leadership situations using the following scale:

1=Strong Disagreement

2=Disagreement

3=Slightly Disagree

4=Undecided

5=Slightly Agree

6=Agree

7=Strongly Agree

Demographic variables that defined the selected individuals included gender, administrative level, highest degree obtained, ethnic background, and former subject taught. This information helped categorize and define important demographic details regarding the selected ten participants. These statistics are necessary to trace and track the tendencies of the selected participants. The top ten participants selected were the highest scores of the 31 returned surveys. Analyzing the scores of the participants was necessary and relevant to validate their servant leadership scores and tendencies. Their degrees, experience, subjects taught, and school level of experience helped better explain the participants through the qualitative findings. The following is the order from highest servant leadership tendency average to the lowest servant leadership tendency of the ten participants:

Rector=6.9506

Scooter=6.9015

Mari=6.8122

Angie=6.6860

Gerry=6.6848

John=6.5959

Danny=6.5054

Rena=6.3256

Lorina=6.2674

Gregory=6.1416

Findings from this screening tool from all ten participants produced mean SLPR scores for each factor in the following rank order, greatest to least. Factor 4: Open, Participatory Leadership (6.75), Factor 3: Serving Others (6.6817), Factor 7: Courageous Leadership (6.66), Factor 6: Visionary Leadership (6.42), Factor 5: Inspiring Leadership (6.4142), Factor 1: Empowering and Developing Others (6.064), and Factor 7: Power Pride (2.3875). Factors 1-6 should be ranked high as servant leaders. Factor 7, since it is low is another indicator of servant leadership tendencies. This clarification helps the reader understand the validity of the ten selected participants.

**Themes**

Principals work with hundreds of people of all ages on a daily basis. Schools are an ever-changing living environment, and this is especially true during the uncertainty of the current pandemic. Principals must be able to understand and manage a wide range of personalities. This is just as important in the daily interactions of servant-identified leaders. From the current data revealed, the data required categorizing, coding, and interpreting. In respect to the sub-questions, familiar servant leadership practices were prevalent throughout the interviews, focus group interviews, and journal entries. During the processes of conducting the interviews, transcribing, and coding the participants, themes and daily practices became prevalent in the assessed data

Through the analysis of participants beliefs, experiences, and descriptions, codes and themes emerged that helped narrow a gap in the literature. Structured clusters emerged into themes from the individual experiences of the selected administrators in regard to servant leadership practices. These clusters were recognized through key terms that were identified as day-to-day servant leadership practices. The Delve Tool assisted in coding through the uploading of transcripts and the coding feature helped separate and identify these themes. The themes include listening, relationships, commitment to the growth of people, leading by example/modeling, and communication. Listed below are the top five referenced themes in relation to day-to-day practices by highly identified servant-identified leaders.

### Theme One: Listening

The principal is the chief communicator in the school building. Communication modes include both verbal and non-verbal and both set the tone for the entire building. Communication is not only about talking; it is also about listening. Listening and awareness underscore the importance of ascertaining what others want (Greenleaf, 1970). Terosky (2016) asserted that leaders are responsible for fostering an environment of trust and collaboration; therefore, before verbally communicating, listening is very important to gain knowledge and perceptions of the conversation or problem at hand. Listening skills are hard for some leaders to practice and master. However, servant leaders should be able to use their listening skills to hear what others are saying.

Servant leaders should develop and articulate a personal service-related vision for themselves and carry that vision through to a professional vision for their school or organization. Part of crafting a vision is listening to all stakeholders in the educational community. In the data collection, listening was a significant part of the responses from the selected participants. As

noted, listening can look many different ways in principal leadership. Spears (2019) indicated that listening is a key characteristic of servant leadership. Throughout the data collection and coding, the principals discussed the importance of listening 48 different times.

As mentioned in the literature, listening is a vital part of the characteristics of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1970). In order to have significant changes in the educational landscape, school leaders must open themselves to others through dialogue and expressing assumptions and listening to others' beliefs (Spears & Lawrence, 2016). During the data collection, Scooter offered several thoughts and descriptions on listening, "For me, two characteristics of servant leadership that stand out are listening with purpose and awareness of those around you. I intently listen to their ideas and only ask clarifying questions when needed." Scooter mentioned listening 21 times in his three collections of evidence.

The most emergent theme throughout both sets of interviews and journals across the participants was listening. It was mentioned in all three respects in relation to students, parents, and faculty. Listening was mentioned seven times in regard to students, fifteen times in regard to parents, and twenty-six times in regard to faculty. Listening was also defined as the desire to seek and identify the will of a group and help clarify that will (Spears, 2010). Listening was a single common occurrence in six of the ten participants. Listening is found to be a critical component to building relationships because it validates the emotions and thoughts of the active participants who are communicating (Zenger & Folkman, 2016).

Through the data collection process in regard to listening, Scooter and Rena commented on listening the most. Scooter valued listening the most and commented the most on listening. Scooter stated:

Being a good listener is the biggest servant leadership characteristic to me, and just

taking the time to listen to people. My dad told me growing up you have two ears and one

mouth and you need to listen twice as more than you need to talk. Having an open-door

policy where I can listen to teachers is priority. Ensuring that we are listening to those

people and they have a voice. Be available to listen to their concerns and their ideas. I

intently listen to their ideas and only ask clarifying questions when needed. My goal

during any meeting is to listen and give stakeholders the space to share.

Rena valued parents and what they had to say. Their input was vital to her decisions. She often

mentioned the importance of listening stated and several important listening points and practices

in her data. Rena stated:

Listening is probably the biggest one (characteristic). How am I going to serve them and

get them what they need if I don't bother to listen to them? Having their input is a huge

part of servant leadership and of course listening. Listening to parents as well and we

have a strong parent support and I actually attend those meetings with sharing what the

school could benefit from and also the parents were a part of the leadership and I could

listen to them and their concerns. However, servant leadership makes you listen to them

and where they are going to go and you have to have a vision.

During Gregory and Scooter's focus group interview, Gregory stated "Listening, I think

that is the biggest thing with parents and hearing them out and basically a former principal told

me once that parents just need to listen to them first." Although listening is not new to servant

leadership, it was found that the selected principals mentioned listening 48 times. Listening will

continue to be a priority in servant leadership for public schools.

*Theme Two: Relationships*

During data collection, another relevant and frequently mentioned theme was relationships. These relationships included those with students, staff, parents, and the community. It was evident that a key part to servant leadership was to build positive and meaningful relationships. According to Dennis and Bocernea (2005), agape love is defined as genuine caring and unconditional love on the behalf of a leader toward his or her followers. The principal's relationships were built on compassion, caring, empathy, and kindness. Genuinely caring was noted as a major part of building healthy relationships. Principals described that getting to know their stakeholders, and finding people's strengths, were an important part of relationships. The principals in this study were adamant about putting relationships and people first over the job.

Overall, relationships and building relationships was mentioned 30 times. This theme emerged in the interviews as also building relationships with staff, parents, and staff. Lorina stated relationships the most with four direct references of building essential relationships and how important these relationships are in the whole school community. Lorina stated that "I think that leadership starts with relationships. People follow good people; they bind to people they have a relationship with. I always pitch in with the custodians and cafeteria workers and forge those relationships. Angie mentioned that "I try to intentionally serve by creating opportunities for relationships with my parents because I have a parent council."

Building relationships not only with staff, but also with students, parents, and stakeholders were noted as well. Sipe and Frick (2009) devoted one of their seven pillars of servant leadership to putting people first. This describes relationships and the value of people first through showing care and concern for all others. Building meaningful relationships is a true testament to the servant leadership style of the building-level leader.

*Theme Three: Commitment to the Growth of People*

A consistent message that emerged from the principals interviewed was a commitment to the growth of people. During the interviews and focus group interviews, commitment to the growth of people was referenced 19 times. Principals valued their staff and genuinely believed in the importance of promoting the growth of adults, just like the growth of their students. Providing opportunities for staff to grow, learn, and lead was an important topic noted in the data analysis. Developing and nurturing others was a key skill and belief shared by the participants in this study. A principal should listen to staff to understand if they are going to commit to growing others and developing around them. Finding people's interests and strengths is an important part of servant leadership and providing opportunities for staff and students to grow is essential for the progression of any public school.

In addition to commitment to the growth of people, to grow and learn in general was mentioned separately four times. However, in question number 4, Angie, Rena, Danny, Mari, and Rector, five out of the ten participants, referenced commitment to the growth of people. One interesting data point of this category is that four of five administrators listed have the most years involved in education out of all ten participants. Angie mentioned, "So if I'm committed to the growth of my teachers, then my teachers will be committed to the growth of my students. Whether it is a parent or professional development plan I'm working on, or the constant interactions with students I think that I value commitment to the growth of people the most because I want to see them grow." Gregory stated, "In the commitment of growth it is not going to the same people all the time, but intentionally searching out other people's strengths and valuing their strengths to make our whole school community even stronger." A servant leader is one who seeks first to serve, and through that service, leads followers (Greenleaf, 2002; Sipe &

Frick, 2009). This service is rooted in the needs of others and in a manner that focuses on helping individuals grow. In servant leadership, it was evident, especially in the focus interviews that the growth of people was valued from the perspective of servant leaders in the public school setting.

### *Theme Four: Leading by Example/Modeling*

Another very important day-to-day practice referenced by administrators was leading by example/modeling. Lorina mentioned, "I believe there is a chain reaction to any type of modeling from adults, good or bad." Many times, this reference was accompanied by, or mentioned as, modeling behavior or modeling the process of that which was to be attained. According to the participants, the principals who identified themselves as servant leaders shared that they set the tone for their school communities and stakeholders by modeling.

Leading by example/modeling was referenced 21 times in the interviews and journal entries. John stated that "It is leading by example and leading by giving others the opportunity to exemplify and show their skills and it's not about you or the accolades, it's not about you being the best, it's about setting up others for success in what they do." Lorina mentioned that "through modeling, the attitude of our staff and students toward our custodians has improved greatly." She was alluding to the fact that she picks up trash, sweeps, and mops instead of calling a custodian and saying that is their job, she is modeling behavior that she wants others to mimic. Modeling, or leading by example, can be instrumental servant leader practices for administrators. Lorina also mentioned how it leads to other positive interactions through the whole school community. Lorina said, "When our teachers see my principal and engaging in acts of kindness and service, they can model that for their students. Then students start that chain reaction with their friends and families. I do not think that I'm the only reason that happened, I just believe there is a chain reaction to any type of modeling from adults, good or bad." John stated, "I believe that a good

leader leads by example. They don't really care about the title or how they are perceived, they are always trying to do what is best for the people around them." Angie mentioned that, "it is important to model the behavior because then it seems to take root and then they start to demonstrate that to their parents and ultimately they are the ones who benefit." Modeling in leadership can be exemplified in many different ways but being models of the character we want to see as leaders is important as servant leaders so that others will model those same characteristics.

### *Theme Five: Communication*

Perhaps a more important and profound theme that surfaced was the attention and necessary occurrence of communication throughout the collection data. Communication was referenced 15 times through the collection of the data. Although communication is not initially thought of as a practice of servant leaders, it surprisingly is essential to the servant leader toolbox of skills, according to the participants. Communication, and the many modes of communication, are just as vital to a servant leader as relationships and connections are. Scooter mentioned that, "We have to be able to communicate that clearly down the road that as far as the outlook we want on communication, I think that being strong communicators and continuing to support those teachers by listening and giving them opportunities is important."

Frequent and clear communication continue to rise to the top when the participants referenced communication in the interviews. Scooter said,

> You know sometimes we might communicate too much, but we try to communicate frequently as administrators here in the main office. So we pride ourselves on communication and what is going on in building. We think that it leads to a culture of everyone being on the same page and being transparent and collaborative.

Rena also mentioned that the different modes of communication are essential, "We have to know the different routes of communication and reach parents, so they know." Angie elaborated on this stating, "We have to frequently communicate with parent's in-person, by phone, and via email to answer questions, discuss concerns, and approach a variety of other topics." John said that "I feel like effective communication can solve almost all problems." When narratives and goals are communicated effectively, parents and stakeholders are better informed. Communication can, and will, be important to any servant lead organization. Scooter said, "We don't always agree, but one of those things to agree on is we will have an open door for communication." In reference to communication, open door was also referenced through the data for a total of 12 times. This goes hand-in-hand with open communication and being open to communicate as a servant leader.

As this research has suggested, being accessible as a servant leader is an important part of servant leadership and is important to communication. Rector said "when you walk the building, you have to be accessible and communicate with everyone, teachers, parents, students, custodians, cafeteria staff, bus drivers, you just never know how you will be able to help serve anyone of these groups on any given day." Through highlighting communication techniques and prioritizing communication skills in the school setting, servant leaders can promote an open-door mentality to help solve all problems through effective and solid communication.

## Data Analysis

The data analysis began with NVivo coding and was coupled with inductive analysis. All portions of the transcripts that were meaningful descriptions of the participant's lived experiences were excerpted and regarded as significant. The "Delve Tool" program was used to analyze qualitative data and each transcript was identified from NVivo coding. These excerpts included

sufficient standalone descriptions that conveyed similar abstract meanings relevant to the research questions. Similar initial codes were then grouped to form themes. After the transcripts were checked and prepared, the coding and theme development process ensued.

Creswell (2018) described coding as the process of segmenting and labeling text to form descriptions and broad themes in the data. Portraying the words of the human interaction into the words of the interviewees is complex and has to be conveyed and understood by others. Using the aforementioned coding process, the qualitative interviews and focus group discussions yielded information on specific practices that principals utilize to support a servant leadership approach.

The qualitative interviews and focus group discussions generated information on specific practices, actions, and tendencies that southwestern Virginia principals utilize to support their claim of exhibiting a servant leadership approach. This self-perception of servant leadership is based on Page and Wong's (2004) seven factors of servant leadership assessment survey. During the qualitative data analysis process, information was investigated and categorized into five emerging themes. Principal quotations and remarks were analyzed from the interviews, focus group interview, and journal notes to form 23 different principal servant leadership themes with 55 servant leadership practices.

This study investigated one central research question and three sub-questions. The central research question is: How do public school principals describe their servant leadership practices? The following are three sub-questions related to the central research question. The sub-questions include:

1. What servant leadership practices are used with students?
2. What servant leadership practices are used with parents?

3. What servant leadership practices are used with faculty and staff?

**Interviews**

All interviews were recorded via Zoom and manually transcribed through the Delve Tool program. This transcription was needed to clean up and clarify misidentified dialect words (Southwestern Virginia dialect) and altered vocabulary. The interviews were completed in a one-on-one setting and the average interview lasted 24 minutes. Due to the current pandemic and visitor protocol, Zoom was the best option for interviews and focus group interviews. At the conclusion of the interviews, the data was coded, and interview notes were cross-referenced for clarity.

The interviews were upbeat, transparent, and informative about the participant. Their backgrounds, philosophies, and servant leadership practices were reflective of their day-to-day interactions with students, staff, and parents. While utilizing Zoom, all interviews were completed by the participant while they were in their school office, and their body language indicated that they felt comfortable. Approximately five days after the interview, the researcher corresponded with each principal the completed transcription to do a member check. This was necessary for participants to review the transcripts and make sure that the data and transcriptions were accurate (Creswell, 2019). To reduce bias and to solidify reliability and credibility, member checking was also completed to obtain possible feedback and to see if any changes were necessary. All participants were satisfied with the transcriptions, and no further input was needed. The responses were then coded and analyzed to determine themes for servant leadership practices.

All participants in this study shared similar stories with common themes regarding their perceptions and understanding of servant leadership. Through the interview, these servant

leadership participants identified stories, practical examples, and daily interactions that showed resemblances of servant leadership characteristics. At times, more often than not, the interviews turned emotional and very personal. During the interviews, participants were reflective of their practices and displayed a sense of enjoyment talking about their buildings and their staff, students, and parents.

The term "whole school community" was referenced a lot instead of breaking it down into staff, parents, and students. However, participant's life experiences and personal struggles helped shaped their views of servant leadership and administration. All participants answered all of the questions and their responses were tailored towards staff, students, and parents. The interviews have been recorded and stored in case any additional information was needed.

**Focus Group Interviews**

After the ten one-on-one interviews were conducted, the researcher solicited participants to further engage in a focus group interview to triangulate the data. After completing the initial interviews, possible themes were identified, and interview questions were reviewed to identify connections between trustworthiness and transferability. There were five focus interviews in pairs and they were completed via Zoom and transcribed for accuracy. The focus group interviews were shorter in length than the individual interviews and averaged seventeen minutes. Much like the individual interviews, there was constant eye contact with the researcher and the participants were interviewed in their school offices.

In all focus group interviews, the principals were dressed in a professional manner, were prepared, and were curious about the interview and research process. Each focus group interview, as well as the individual interviews, proceeded without interruption. Summer school session was still active, so they were still involved with their daily responsibilities. With only

five pinpointed servant leadership questions, the answers were more direct and to the point than the individual interviews. Servant leadership practices and characteristics were mentioned in greater detail than the individual interviews as far as day-to-day interactions with staff, students, and parents.

At the conclusion of the focus group interviews, I was able to identify emerging codes and themes and by identifying commonalities in the participant's responses. The data generated and verified the five common themes mentioned earlier (listening, relationships, commitment to the growth of people, leading by example/modeling, and communication). Moreover, commitment to the growth of people surfaced most often during the focus group interview phase of the research. The results of the focus group questions mostly aligned with research sub-question number 3, which related to faculty and staff. During the five focus group interviews, reflective notes were taken throughout the process to record my reflections during each of the interviews. Additional notes and reflections of possible questions and inferences surfaced during the interviews.

The repeated characteristics and practices mentioned in the focus group interviews gave additional empirical value to the 23 themes and 55 essential servant leadership practices mentioned previously in this chapter. The five themes: relationships, commitment to the growth of people, leading by example/modeling, communication, and listening, all emerged in the focus group questioning, along with the individual interviews. These emerging themes are described in the participants' introductions and also throughout the research process. The focus group interviews were completed in pairs and were more concise with servant leadership practices.

**Journal Entries**

Journal entries varied from emails, faculty notes, motivational phrases, faculty meetings, newsletters, song lyrics, and weekly summaries. These interactions were at best, random, but

very informative to get a better understanding of leader communications, day-to-day practices, and interactions. Several servant leadership and motivational phrases were referenced. Also, there were reflective thoughts that saturated some repeated data from the interviews and the focus group interviews.

Angie found that sending praise and positive emails helps explain examples of the behavior she is trying to display. Angie said in an email to staff, "Pay attention to those seemingly acts of encouragement or collaboration that speak volumes in regard to your respect for others. We are models of the character we wish to see in our students each day." Gerry stated, "It is vital to know your staff and know about their families, we are all in this together and when one member of the team experiences suffering or loss it can be a shared burden to the whole staff. Empathy is important and school leaders need to understand where people are coming from." In Gregory's journal entry he stated, "Your stakeholders have to be heard and you need to show empathy and take into account their individuals situations."

In John's journal he stated, "Parents appreciate the time I give to them because I make them feel welcome. We don't have to all agree, but we all need to keep what is best for students as what drives us in our decision making." As journal entries came in Mari's resonated with me the most. She stated, "Modeling attributes of servant leadership with staff, students, and parents is a goal that I have for myself. It is very important to be approachable and to be known for listening to the thoughts and opinion of others. By modeling attributes, servant leadership will hopefully become an integral part of the school culture."

The journal entries were one of the more enjoyable parts of this data collection. The reason is the journal entries were a written collection of their evidences and they were not prompted by conversation. They got to articulate a strong sense of servant leadership practices through their

written descriptions. The journal entries were informative and relevant across all ten participants'

reflections of servant leadership experiences.

## Outlier Data and Findings

The following table represents data from all participant's responses based on frequency in

relation to the top five themes: listening/open door, relationships, commitment to the growth of

people, communication, and leading by example/modeling. Some qualitative frequencies and

themes are irrelevant and were excluded in the analysis process. Participants emergent themes

and tendencies help explain the day-to-day practices that emerged as themes in the interviews,

focus group interviews, and journal prompts.

**Table 4.1** *Participant's responses for the top five themes*

| | Listening/Open Door | Relationships | Growth of People | Leading by Example/Modeling | Communication |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Angie | 8 | 7 | 9 | 5 | 3 |
| Danny | 10 | 2 | 5 | 1 | 0 |
| Gerry | 4 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Gregory | 7 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| John | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 |
| Lorina | 0 | 9 | 2 | 5 | 0 |
| Mari | 11 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Rector | 3 | 5 | 2 | 4 | 0 |
| Rena | 4 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| Scooter | 21 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 7 |

The following is a recap of the 23 themes and repeated responses from the ten selected participants that were repeated in the interviews, focus interviews, and journal entries.

- At least one parent in education-3

- Giving individuals a voice-8

- Connections-13

- At least one parent a minister-2

- Foresight-7

- Family Approach-5

- Gather Input in Decision Making-12

- Team Approach-11

- Improving-7

- Trust-7

- Culture-13

- Collaborate-8

- Commitment to the growth of people-19

- Communicate or communication-15

- Christian References-16

- Empathy-11

- Empowering-8

- Grow and learn-4

- Listening-48

- Lead By Example/Model-21

- Have an open door-12

- Relationships-30

- Shaped positive by other administrators-13

Perhaps some of the most important outlier data are how the identified leaders defined servant leadership themselves, in their own words, while in the interviews. Definitions of servant leadership varied between the participants when they were asked to define it in their own words. The question from the individual interview was, Define servant leadership in your own words and list some characteristics of servant leadership style leaders concerning students, staff, and parents? The quotes below represent how the participants individually defined servant leadership and how they interacted in their day-to-day servant leadership practices. Angie referenced humility, input, listening, and being visible as important parts of being servant leader.

> **Angie:** "I think servant leadership is to have a vision or what you want your school community to be and then to have an ability to take that vision into each classroom and each meeting to get people on board, I think it requires humility. I think that it requires character traits and being able to bring people on board and to make sure that it is not all my idea you know I think as a facilitator and that is what I see myself as but then I had to do a lot of listening a lot of asking questions and getting them on board and getting them ideas and I have to get the ball rolling cause again I'm amazed every time amazing every time ask for input what do you think the path needs to be what do you think we need to do, what's your suggestion? We are giving them that vested interest and validating their feelings. Therefore, you know once they're validated they're on board and then they then they start to come to me what do you think about this and do you think we could try this? Then they also start to reciprocate and bring those things back to me."

Gerry's reflective comments and definitions of servant leadership mentioned he will do anything it takes and servant leadership does not involve ego.

> **Gerry:** "Servant leadership defined by the principal is, they are there to make the whole community function in a better way to really serve the community. Servant leadership does not have a lot of ego involved. My beliefs are I need to do any job that I ask the staff to do. So yes the same is true with my assistant principal and you can see both of us sweeping up a mess or a mop in our hand. When the night custodian is out I will help with going around and getting all the trash and people see that and realize that you are behind them and the same goes for filling in in the classroom and being helpful in that regard."

Gregory profoundly was the first one to mention being a Christian and how important faith and Christ was to him and his style of leadership. Growing up he had fond memories of being a servant through his mother and her actions.

> **Gregory:** "The first one is Jesus. He was a servant leader, and my upbringing is you do for your neighbors and you do for your family and the elderly that are without. That is sort of what I saw growing up between being in church and being with my mom. My mom would get a neighbor something for Christmas and make me run it over to their house. I didn't like it at the time but I would talk to those ladies and it made their day. I didn't realize it had that big of an impact on them but it did. My old principal in elementary school passed away and he was always that way. Danny was a servant leader and he helped everybody. It hurt me when I did not please him and he really shaped me into the administrator that I am today."

John mentioned that honesty and transparency when mistakes are made are important. Bringing the best out in others and their successes rank above personal accolades. John stated that being honest is important.

> **John:** "It is leading by example and leading by giving others the opportunity to exemplify and show their skills and it's not about you or the accolades it's not about you being the best it's about setting up others for success in what they do. So the qualities are kind, compassionate, hardworking, forgiving, understanding, and always honest no matter if it hurts. It's also willing to tell on yourself when you make mistakes and asking for forgiveness. Because we all make mistakes and people always respect you more when you tell them you know what I thought it was a good idea, we tried, and it didn't work. I made a mistake but let's move forward."

Lorina believed in leading by example and how your actions state a lot about your direction and believe of servant leadership.

> **Lorina:** "It is being the force that is driving your vision and mission. I feel like but instead of leading and pulling that team there is a graphic of pushing that team. I don't need to be in front. Be in the back and be there for others that are left behind. I think that with students they have seen me moping hallways instead of calling a custodian. Kids have picked up on kindness and helping others."

Mari believed in putting others first, listening, and empathy as her hallmarks of servant leadership.

> **Mari:** "Servant leadership is putting others before yourself and seeing their needs as a person first. Not as s staff or faculty person. I think that listening and empathy and being

aware of things that are going on and have the foresight to learning from past experiences

and what I might be able to apply to other situations."

Rector believed that the willingness to serve goes well beyond the school day. He also

believes that there are plenty of different roles included in servant leadership as well.

**Rector:** "Just a willingness to serve, my job is not a title. You know we have to be able

to accept many different roles that come along with being an administrator. The role of a

supervisor is changing and it's not just coming and meeting the 8:15-3:15 needs of our

kids. The thing that we have done here are being big into trauma informed care. We have

started in this building a clothing closet and have a ways to provide females personal

hygiene needs in our bathroom. We set up other personal hygiene places in our building

at least once a week. Students can come and get and knowing the needs of your school

and community and go a little above and beyond. You know we go beyond what people

think our role is and help our communities."

Rena believes in the success of your followers, listening, and shared input are important

parts of the servant leadership definition.

**Rena:** "Insuring that all of your followers will be successful in their roles. Listening, that

probably is the biggest one. How I'm I going to know what students need if I actually

don't take the time to listen to their concerns or even teachers? How I'm I going to serve

them and get them what they need if I don't bother to listen to them. A lot of the decisions

I make at school I need their input because those shape the school and I know to as a

leader we have blind spots and are some things that we won't know or notice until we get

input from those that we are leading. I like having their input on the decisions and those

shared decisions have more accountability in it and they have skin in the game. They will

be more a part of the team to be successful because they had input and then outcome. Having their input is a huge part of servant leadership and of course listening."

Perhaps Scooter has the bests overall definition of servant leadership. His detailed approach and description of servant leadership resonated with me the best.

**Scooter:** "Being a good listener is the biggest characteristic to me, and just taking time to listen to people. My dad told be growing up you have two ears and one mouth and you need to listen twice as more then you need to talk. And I think that one of the biggest characteristics is having an open door policy where I can listen to teachers. The number one thing that I can do is let teachers and students have input in what we are doing. So we can communicate to all the stakeholders around us. When I think about defining servant leadership, it's just being available to people. I don't want to be that guy where no one wants to talk to. I want to be able to be available to everyone. Be available to listen to their concerns and their ideas. A lot of times we can come out stronger with their ideas. In the end we can set an example for people. For me I think about working alongside people and not just being the principal of young teachers and veteran teachers. I try to have that relationship where we can feed off of each other and grow from each other in a certain leadership capacity."

When defining servant leadership there are plenty of different perceptions and definitions. These leaders have proved to not only understand servant leadership, but they live it through their daily duties as an administrator. Time and time again, there are leaders that have the wrong views and outlook of servant leadership. These identified leaders have done a great job in leading conversations of what it means to be a servant leader. Their definitions were

honest and from the heart during the interviews. This process meant something to them and you can tell through their reflections and demeanor.

## Research Question Responses

The research questions developed for this study were derived from the research of servant leadership literature and the need to narrow the gap in the literature of the day-to-day practices of servant leaders. Currently, there is a gap in the literature regarding the day-to-day interactions and practices of school building leaders in southwestern Virginia. Through the details of interviews, focus interviews, journal entries, and researcher notes, it can be noted in this study that there are lived experiences that may help narrow the gap in the literature. The documented experiences of these servant leaders in this region are very much needed. The questions have been answered with evidence to answer the central research question and the sub-questions.

### Central Research Question

The central research question is, "How do public school principals describe their servant leadership practices?" These experiences, conveyed through the educational lens of the selected leaders, have helped explain and answer the central research question and sub-questions. Through their educational journey and lived experiences as administrators, the participants helped illustrate important findings in this research study. The participants stated several different ways their servant leadership practices are prevalent on a day-to-day basis. Angie said "I think that servant leadership is to have a vision or what you want your school community to be and have the ability to take that vision into each classroom and each meeting to get people on board." Scooter mentioned that "you have to be a good listener, which that is the biggest characteristic to me, and just taking the time to listen. Teachers have to have input in what we are doing here at school. So, insuring we are listening to them and giving them a voice is important."

Data analysis generated summaries and collections of the participant responses in relation to the sub-questions. Findings and conclusions presented for each research question are based on the qualitative data from the lived experiences of ten the participants.

**Sub-Question One**

"What servant leadership practices are used with students?" Lorina practices servant leadership with her students through modeling, positive actions and words, being present, using financial resources, and building connections and relationships towards her students at the high school level. She stated, "So instead of preaching to them about giving grace and respect, I try to every day to model it for not only my students, but my staff as well. Through that modeling, the attitude of our staff and students toward our custodians and our building has improved greatly."

Lorina continued to focus on resilience and opportunities to help students though many different modes of showing care and concern towards her students. She stated, "After being cursed out by a parent or student, I try to find opportunities to speak to them again about positive things. We also started a really big drive for homecoming and prom dresses and men's clothing for students that need it. Our students will come and get what they want for homecoming and prom. We have a student that is homeless, and we had a teacher who volunteered to take him to Walmart during her planning period and get him things every week he needed and even drove him to the dentist appointment when his mother could not because of a lack of transportation. But in turn when those students know that there are people who care about them and are there for more than just telling them what to do each day, success and growth is going to be inevitable. Students need to see me moping the hallway instead of calling a custodian." These examples from Lorina are evidence of servant leadership practices utilized by her and her staff.

Angie mentioned being student centered and committed to the growth of students several times throughout her interview, but below is a snippet of her response. Angie stated, "Ours is focused around being student centered and are focused on their success and so if we are not doing that, we are missing the whole point of why we are in education. So, if I'm committed to the growth of my teachers, then my teachers will be committed to the growth of my students. The constant interactions with students I think I value you that one the most because I want to be committed to the growth of people."

Gregory stated one of my favorite quotes in all of the interviews. Everyone has to know that you care about them. His quote on caring resonated with me on many levels because it proves the importance of meaningful and caring relationships. Students have to like you before the will respect you. Gregory stated, "Well, what you have always heard, they don't care what you know until they know that you care. That has never been truer with leading students, they have to like you. You don't want to be buddies with them because you're going to have to make tough decisions either students or faculty, but I feel like if the students like you they will try to please you and not disappoint you and that will help you in the realm of discipline."

Rena's interactions with her students were prevalent. The gathering of input was not only for staff but students as well. Through Rena's below statement, one can understand why students need to be heard and why their opinions are important. It also explains why this is an important servant leadership practice for in relation to students.

> How I'm I going to know what students need if I actually don't take the time to hear their concerns or even teachers? Getting input from all parties and also getting that input from students as well. Middle school students can voice their opinion on things as well because what we do impacts them the most.

John shared experiences from his past that helped him shape his leadership style. He also values building leaders within his student body as well.

> With students, I talk to them about what a leader looks like. I also think it is important for students to know that I too make mistakes. I tell my students how I made mistakes and what I should have done when I was younger. They are always shocked by that, but it builds relationships. Part of being a student leader, a big part, is being honest. I try to make students feel welcome and try to help. We don't have to agree, but we all need to keep what is best for students as what drives us in our decision making.

Although pandemic related, Rector believed that the pandemic surfaced issues within their school communities that they could help with. The pandemic shed more light on trauma informed care and family issues that affect students in their learning environment. Rector's servant leadership student interactions have led to him having a better understanding.

> During this pandemic I have done more home visits and worked in more cafeterias, delivered more food and knocked on more doors and called more students. Students can come and get items knowing the needs of your school and community and go a little above and beyond. I started a trauma informed care intuitive in my own building and the faculty chose one student and they worked with that student in an anonymous way all year. Then they took them fishing or hunting. You know we obviously come to serve these students and we want to see our students do well and I've said many times in speaking with students. When you are successful, I'm successful and when you fail, I fail.

**Sub-Question Two**

"What servant leadership practices are used with parents?" Angie had the most intriguing servant leadership conversations about parents because administrators need to get to know their

parents on a personal level and really listen to them. Her attention to listening and empathy was highlighted in the conversation below.

>Listening, I think that is so important and it leads to empathy because I think we need to listen to not only hear our teachers, our parents, their stories and where they are coming from because I don't think that we can truly affectively lead until we know where that person is coming from and their strengths and weaknesses and I learned so much from listening, because they don't think they are really able to reveal everything about themselves but they really are. Just the fact that listening allows me to be empathetic because the more I listen, the more I learn about the true character and expertise of that person and what I was saying we can't mandate personality or character but we certainly lead by example and we can tap into the areas of someone that is not a good communicator or they don't see something from a different perspective and that's where I feel like I can tap into that and I don't know that unless I listened, as I tell my teachers all the time you know communication is not really key it is comprehension, you know we have to listen to understand before we can be understood.

Angie continues to explain how she engages parents and how she communicates with them in meetings, open-door policies, and parent councils.

>So, parents can have a meeting and just open up to the forum to say what they feel like we need to do, what they feel like we can improve on, what they just need to feel like they can talk about in more of a private level. I try to intentionally serve by creating opportunity for relationships with my parents because I have a parent council. So, parents can have a meeting and just be opening up the forum to say what they feel like we need to do what they feel like we can improve on what they just need to feel like they can talk

about and a more of a private level. They know that I have an open-door policy. An open-door policy creates more work on me but anything I can do at home is paperwork and when I'm in the building its people. So staying in contact with parents and getting students matched up with what they need based on their skill level.

Angie mentioned that conversations and face to face interactions are important when it comes to servant leadership type practices. Below she mentions how important different type of interactions are with parents.

I typically will have 8-10 phone conversations with parents a day and then we send out a mass email, but it is my policy if I talk to a student that day then I have to talk to that parent before that child gets home that day. I love calling and saying hey nothing is wrong, but I just wanted to brag on your kid a little bit just wanted to tell you what really went well today, and how proud I am of your kiddo. I think it is important to tell parents that they are good parents and even when there is a discipline issue that I'm working alongside them and not a top-down approach. Often, I call them and say what your suggestion is because you know them better than I do. I'm also trying to commit to the growth of parents because I have often said if they can do better, they will do better. So, I have lots of interactions and if I hear a parent in the office I will go out and have that face-to-face meeting because what I have found is that often things are misinterpreted via email or even on the phone and those face-to-face interactions are much better.

Although this a long reference about Angie's practices, it has a lot of important servant leadership practices embedded with its details. Angie as an elementary principal has gone above and beyond building relationships and listening. It truly earmarks her passion for communicating

and involving parents on a daily basis. Angie has truly led the way for parent type servant leader practices within her collection of data.

Rector believed in daily interactions with parents and to check in on them. He felt like during the pandemic his communication and servant leadership tendencies got better. Below are some examples of servant leadership practices.

> Sometimes I call just to say hello to parents and just want to check the students as well. My interactions during the day would usually start with parent drop off and you try to greet parents and see how they are doing, and I learned from my predecessor that he did his best work in the parent drop off and pick up line. It should be daily that we have interactions with parents. I have called more parents and have gotten a more humbling experience and put my feet more on the ground of what my purpose is.

Gerry mentioned that some parents only have relationships with the school, and they value each interaction they can have with the school. Gerry's parent servant leadership practices below are some additional daily interactions he had with his parents.

> My interactions just would usually start with parent drop off and you try to greet parents and see how they are doing. The relationships that you make with the parents and grandparents it is true and it goes a long way to have those small interactions that happen on a daily basis. We try to help parents when they have a concern and you have to listen and see where they are coming from and sometimes the school is very important to some families and they really rely on us in the office or with teachers as part of their daily fabric of their lives and even we had one parent that called three times a day with an off the wall question of checking on their daughter and you know we do whatever it takes and that is what we do to develop those relationships with parents and families and help

them be more comfortable with school, because you know some of them didn't have a

good experience with school and so we always try to make it welcoming and develop that

relationship.

Scooter mentioned several times that over communication or too much communication with

parents is a good thing. Communicating to parents is an important servant leadership practice

that helps answer the parent sub-question.

I spend a lot of time on the phone and texting back and forth with parents and we use

school messenger and we send out messages weekly on Sunday evenings. I spend quite a

bit of time here with parents because we want to have an open door and parents get that

voice here.

Lorina grasped the importance of utilizing technology when it comes to servant leadership and

corresponding with parents in a servant leadership type manner.

We will show parents that we are there for their kids needs not just school needs. Before I

started my position, we didn't have a lot of communication between parents and

administration on a daily basis, so I've started a Google form that I have on Facebook that

I put up every Monday. So, parents can fill out the form for anything, I have 45 minutes

of parent drop off in the morning and then I'm there in the afternoon. I would say directly

about an hour and a half. You know with games it is a bit more. But an hour to an hour

and half a day with parents.

When answering the sub-question about servant leadership type practices in regard to

parents, the list could be endless. However, communication, open-door, listening, and visibility

are just a few of the important types of servant leadership practices. Administrators should note

the importance of parent interactions and how they lead to servant leadership type perceptions on a daily basis.

**Sub-Question Three**

"What servant leadership practices are used with faculty and staff?" Scooter believes in flexibility, collaboration, and communication when it comes to displaying servant leadership practices with staff:

> I also let them be creative and it's worked well for me over the years to let those teachers have that flexibility and that creativity within their own classroom, which I think that has led to that culture of collaboration where teachers are going into other rooms and observing on their own time without having us dictate times. I tell my teachers that we don't ever have a situation where parents don't know what is going on in the classroom. So, we challenge our teachers to communicate frequently here in the main office. My assistant principal does a really good job of school messengers and emails and there is sometimes that maybe we do too much. It seems to be welcomed by the parents in the community. I tell my teachers that we don't ever have a situation where parents don't know what is going on in the classroom.

Scooter continues to mention the importance of having an open-door policy for his staff. He stated:

> And I think that one of the biggest characteristics is having an open door policy where I can listen to teachers. I think that you have to start somewhere, that has to be a clear starting point and a baseline of where we are and how we do that here at our school is we kind of have that opening faculty meeting and say ok, this is where we are. And this is where we want to be and we have to able to communicate that clearly down the road so

as far as the outlook and I think that just continuing to be strong communicators

continuing to support those teachers by listening and giving them opportunities for input

and giving students opportunities for input. Also continue to work on the teacher's

mentors' program and working alongside those teachers as they start their career. We

look to give teachers more opportunity to grow as they start their career. These areas in

my eyes are under the servant leadership umbrella and I think that we continue to work

on.

Angie values her employees with many examples of servant leadership. She works hard

to promote professional development, teacher communication, and responsibility.

So, for my teachers to know I will stop whatever I'm doing if possible, to be with them

and talk and have those conversations and build those relationships. Not a big fan of

surprises and I don't like to surprise my teachers. So, I probably bombard them during

this time and during the summer and have them pre-read this so when we get together

you have an idea of what we going to be talking about so that you can add some things as

well. Intentionally creating schedules, plans, and then offering input from their thoughts.

Angie also stated that there needs to be communication from teachers to parents and to

model the way for staff especially. Angie stated:

I encourage the teachers to make those parent calls, so the students don't fall so far

behind. I typically will have 8-10 phone conversations with parents a day and then we

send out a mass email, I don't do a newsletter type because I feel like teachers send that

individually. So, if I'm committed to the growth of my teachers then my teachers will be

committed to the growth of my students. I feel like it goes back to that modeling and I

didn't realize this would happen but the more I have modeled things for my teachers

come in the way I treat them and I ask their opinion and ask their suggestions. I've seen

them improve in their parent communication. Accountability and responsibility for the

direction that we're moving but as far as the success that we that we have I really do owe

that to our staff. We don't talk about aids and teachers, we are all teachers in the building.

Rena mentioned that taking care of staff is a top priority. She makes sure they have what they

need to professionally carry out their duties as a professional:

My job is making sure you have what you need as a teacher. For teachers, I would often

open up opportunities for professional development (PD) so that teachers can increase

their tool belts.  I even have used teachers as PD Facilitators to share their expertise

within our school.  I love it when this happens because teachers do a great job with PD

because they know the kind of PD, they would like to participate in themselves.

Lorina implied that modeling leadership behavior for the staff is an important servant leadership

trait that spreads to the students as well:

Giving the expectation of being outside of your classroom to greet students in the halls,

has a lot more merit when administration also stops what they are doing and walks the

halls with students and teachers. When our teachers see my principal and I engaging in

acts of kindness and service, they can then model that for their students, and then students

start that chain reaction with their friends and families.

Rector agreed with Lorina in mentioning that modeling the behavior is important. He stated, "I

think that we lead by example and there is nothing in the building that I wouldn't do, and I even

think that whether its teachers or café staff managers or whatever job it is."

Lorina stated that taking care of the staff and giving them a break is important. Just being there and providing coverage for them will help them on their off days. She also mentioned listening and be available is important for staff. She stated:

> Teachers would come in and say can I come in and talk to you for a minute. Then they just talk to you for a second. Lots of that happened. Same thing with a teacher's anxiety, just stepping in and say do you need a minute, if I know that she is having an off day. And I will cover her class for 10-15 minutes for her to cool down, so I think that knowing your people and knowing what their needs and that awareness will help a servant leader and I think for myself its part of our success here at our school that we know our people and we know the pulse and we know which kids are mad at who that day and who just looks off today.

The following list of 55 servant leadership practices is needed to gain a better understanding of the identified leaders. This list of 55 servant leadership practices helps answer the central research question. Also, these servant leadership practices are instrumental in understanding what type of interactions are needed for a servant leadership style public school leader. Servant leadership practices were prevalent and expansive of these ten identified servant leaders. The below is compilation of the data with the relevant stakeholder/sub-question research question identification attached in parentheses. This servant leader practices identification is also needed to understand which research sub-question is defined or addressed. This list of 55 essential day-to-day servant leadership practices is paramount in defining this research study and answering the research questions. Even though this list is expansive, it was evident that these leaders are entrenched in day-to-day servant leadership practices.

1. Address decisions with the mindset of having input from all stakeholders when possible. (students, staff, and parents)

2. Always intently listen to everyone in the whole school community. (students, staff, and parents)

3. Listen with an empathetic ear and value their backgrounds. (students, staff, and parents)

4. Contribute and be an active part of bus duties, parent drop-off and pick-up duties, hall duties, and cafeteria duties. (students, staff, and parents)

5. Have a vision and have the ability to move others to make that vision a reality. (students, staff, and parents)

6. Validate stakeholder's feeling and intently utilize their ideas to promote positive change. (students, staff, and parents)

7. Model and lead by example to show the way. (students, staff, and parents)

8. Be available and promote an open-door policy for everyone to communicate with you. (students, staff, and parents)

9. Do not ask anyone to do anything unless you have done it before, or you would do it with them. (students, staff, and parents)

10. Make it a priority to promote the use of appropriate social media platforms and promote your school and students. For example, involve yourself in tiktok dances or other appropriate social media outlets to build relationships with students and spread good news about your school. (students, staff, and parents)

11. Promote continuous improvement for teachers, staff, and students. (students, staff, and parents)

12. Prove to people that you care and value their sense of belonging. (students, staff, and parents)

13. Utilize and spread relevant servant leadership quotes, for example, "It's amazing what you can accomplish if you do not care who gets the credit." By Harry Truman. (students, staff, and parents)

14. Leave it better than you found it. (students, staff, and parents)

15. Be a lifelong learner. (students, staff, and parents)

16. Make all decisions based on what is best for students. (students, staff, and parents)

17. Set the tone and have the mindset, "I'm always there to help." (students, staff, and parents)

18. Build a culture of collaboration and communication. (students, staff, and parents)

19. Welcome administrator internships and observations by aspiring administrators. (students, staff, and parents)

20. Share your own stories so you can relate to everyone. (students, staff, and parents)

21. Treat the school and the community like family. (students, staff, and parents)

22. Steal other people's good ideas. (students, staff, and parents)

23. Put yourself in other people's shoes (students, staff, and parents).

24. Have a great relationship with community businesses for support when needed. (students, staff, and parents)

25. Listen intently to the whole conversation, however, be patient and a very good listener at the beginning of conversations. (students, staff, and parents)

26. Lead because you want to help others. (students, staff, and parents)

27. If you do not have the right answers, find the right answers and get back to them. (students, staff, and parents)

28. Be in the classroom every day. (students and staff)

29. Learn about Trauma Informed Care. (students and staff)

30. Administrators need to prioritize home visits for students. (parents and students)

31. Be willing to accept responsibility for own actions, do not blame and ask for forgiveness, when needed. (staff and parents)

32. Provide, facilitate, empower, and promote meaningful and realistic professional devolvement for staff. (staff)

33. Treat the whole staff as teachers. That includes custodians, bus drivers, para-professionals, secretaries, café etc. (staff)

34. Lighten their workload by eliminating unnecessary teacher responsibilities. (staff)

35. Send positive, inspirational, and gratitude emails. (staff)

36. Stay ahead of instructional updates and have the foresight to implement new trends. (staff)

37. Introduce new motivational book studies to your staff that are relevant to leadership, education, and relationships. (staff)

38. Hire strategically to ensure high quality faculty and staff. (staff)

39. Don't micromanage staff; give people space to do their job. (staff)

40. Help out wherever you are needed, custodial, cafeteria, etc… (staff)

41. Acknowledge that everyone is equal on the staff, no matter what their job classification is. (staff)

42. Let the teachers proceed with great ideas and only help where needed. (staff)

43. Give access to resources to make their job easier when possible. (staff)

44. Distribute different responsibilities and leadership roles to faculty and staff. (staff)

45. Check on staff to see what they need. (staff)

46. Call home and notify parents if you have disciplined any students that day (the same day, before they get home). (parents)

47. Communicate with parents. Make positive and constructive comments. (parents)

48. Have as many face-to-face interactions with parents as possible. (parents)

49. Over communicate to parents and tell them you will be available to help. (parents)

50. Listen intently to the students' parents, they will tell you their personal and family situations that affect the student. (parents)

51. Value students' opinions through planned breakfast or lunch groups to get their input. (students)

52. Listen to students, they will help you make a better school. (students)

53. Try to remind students that we cannot control where we come from, but we can control our future and where we go. (students)

54. Initiate programs at school that help the lower socio-economic students with needed items. (students)

55. Build meaningful and lasting connections with students. (students)

**Summary**

Chapter IV presented an analysis of the data collected through a series of interviews and journal entries conducted with current public school principals. The concepts presented in this qualitative case study through interviews and journal entries built a wealth of valuable information to illustrate servant leadership practices in rural southwestern Virginia principals.

The results of this study provided resourceful and pertinent data that charted success for enriching and supporting aspiring servant leadership style principals. The results from Chapter IV help narrow the gap in the literature on servant leaders in public schools and their servant practices on a day-to-day basis.

Each participant was described in a participant profile before five emergent themes were discussed. After conducting ten individual interviews and five focus group interviews, the researcher collected data on participants' thoughts and experiences that were significant to their daily servant leadership duties as a building level leader. The central research question that guided this study is: How do public school principals describe their servant leadership practices? From multiple initial codes, five main themes emerged during data analysis to address the research question. The most mentioned themes were listening, relationships, commitment to the growth of people, communication, and leading by example/modeling.

More importantly, related data to this study was the identified empirical list of 55 servant leadership practices from identified servant leaders that surfaced in the data collection. With the list of 55 servant leadership practices and the five identified themes, it seems that the identified servant leaders have helped define servant leaders in rural Virginia. In this research I have found a wealth of knowledge in the participant responses and was able to build trustworthiness through a process that included two types of interviews with each participant.

In conclusion, my goal was consistent to narrow a gap in identifying servant leadership practices through the research of lived experiences of principals in southwestern Virginia. The five common themes and the list of 55 servant leadership practices emerged throughout the interviews, focus group interviews, and journal entries to define those practices. Each participant provided in-depth, lived examples of how they utilize servant leadership traits and day-to-day

practices on a daily basis. Chapter V includes a description and discussion of the practices that

were identified through the research of this dissertation.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

### Overview

The purpose of this case study was to explore how principals exhibit servant leadership practices in southwestern Virginia. Chapter V provides a summary of the findings from the in-depth individual interviews, focus group interviews, and journal entries conducted for this case study of servant leaders in public schools across southwestern Virginia. Creswell (2013) explained case studies as a focus on a specific issue with a case to illustrate that issue. In an attempt to narrow the gap in the literature, this case study research attempted to illustrate day-to-day practices from selected principals in southwestern Virginia leading in a servant leadership type manner. The majority of the research conducted for the literature review in Chapter II included the history, general attributes, and characteristics. However, the literature is void of specific examples of servant leadership day-to-day practices within the context of a school in southwestern Virginia. This study was driven by research that indicated the characteristics and definitions of servant leadership. Chapter V presents a summary of thematic findings and interpretations of the findings. Following those are the implications for policy and practice, theoretical and empirical implications, and the limitations and delimitations. Finally, the recommendations for future research are described in detail.

### Discussion

As the researcher in this project I have had the honor of spending an enjoyable amount of time with some extremely professional identified servant leaders. It truly has been a dream of mine to study and become a profound expert in servant leadership. At one time, I thought I might have been identified as a servant leader. However, after reading and researching this topic at length, I have much more to learn and study about servant leadership. As a novice researcher in

the field it has become evident that my topic has taught me so much more than when I started. The participants and committee have helped make this a project worth studying and building on in the future. Once a gap in the literature, the participants have helped build a case study that details the daily practices of servant leaders in Virginia. The discussion section will help the reader gain a better understanding of the data revealed in the research. The discussion section is laid out in the following manner: (a) Interpretation of Findings; (b) Implications for Policy or Practice; (c) Theoretical and Empirical Implications; (d) Limitations and Delimitations; and (e) Recommendations for Future Research. These findings and discussions will help provide meaningful and vital resources for servant leadership practices in the future.

## Interpretation of Findings

The interpretation of findings can be captioned as, identified servant leaders have displayed servant leadership style practices on a daily basis in southwestern Virginia. These daily practices were prevalent in answering the central research and sub-questions for students, staff, and parents from Chapter IV. The literature review and the empirical data in this document have portrayed and defined servant leaders in region seven. This research helps narrow the identified gap and verify the day-to-day practices of servant leaders in southwestern Virginia.

Data saturation is known as when there is enough data to replicate the study, no new information is obtainable, and when further coding produces no new evidence or themes (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Saturation was obtained in this study because there was no new data prevalent and coding was producing the same results. The easiest way to determine the validity of research is deciding on rich and thick data. Thick data is a large amount of data and rich data is many-layered (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The depth of data is evident in this research project because the evidence of new themes was exhausted. Through this study, the five themes and 55 daily

practices can define servant leadership practices and can be interpreted as thick and rich data.
Not only can this dissertation be replicated, but the lived experiences of the participants have
been well documented to help close the identified gap through answering the research questions.
This qualitative case study has helped share these lived experiences of servant leadership
practices in southwestern Virginia. Through this process, the findings have produced valuable
information for servant leadership practices.

This research study, through the data collection process, has helped expand and define
what actual servant leadership practices are of identified public school leaders. Dependability
can be established, and similar results would be attainable in a resembled study in region seven.
However, dependability cannot just be the same results, the results have to make sense and be
dependable and consistent. By using step-by-step procedures from this study, dependability
could be audited, and the views of the participants could be correctly understood.

The findings have confirmed to be helpful in gaining a better snapshot of the daily
practices across region seven. Through the identified five themes, one could interpret that these
findings could be helpful in assisting principals and assistant principals leading in a servant
leader type role. As noted earlier, the school environments could also be interpreted as successful
academic environments since all schools are accredited and are highlighted academically. The
following is a more detailed summary of the thematic findings of this research study.

*Summary of Thematic Findings*

Summary of findings from this case study revealed that there were five common servant
leadership practices themes that were evident by ten identified servant leaders. In addition to the
five emerging main themes, 18 other relevant themes, and the 55 essential servant leadership
practices were identified through collection of the data. For this research, I examined the

perspectives and the lived experiences of principals in order to understand if they engage with any of the values of servant leadership and in what ways they enacted servant leadership practices in their perspective school community. Principals were selected as participants based on their servant leadership style and day-to-day interactions. Ten building-level leaders (three assistant principals and seven principals) were identified as servant leaders in public schools in southwestern Virginia. The SLP-360 was utilized to survey 82 leaders and 31 leaders replied to the survey.

As mentioned, there were only ten servant leadership participants identified who agreed to participate in an interview, focus group interview, and a journal writing prompt. Five common themes surfaced through the analysis of data and are listed as follows: listening, relationships or building relationships, modeling/leading by example, communication, and the commitment to the growth of people. These were the most referenced items during interviews, focus group interviews, and journal prompts. Future principals and assistant principals, if they choose to, could follow these five themes to lead their school buildings in a servant leadership style of leadership. Moreover, the list of 55 practices are findings of practices of the identified servant leaders.

### *Interpretation # 1*

The results of this research can be interpreted that servant leadership practices are successful in regard to ten fully accredited public school communities in Virginia. Even though Sergiovanni (2005) referred to servant leadership as being an upside-down leadership practice. This study could be used for school systems and leaders to learn from servant leaders and their personal reflections on their daily practices. With limited research, in rural Virginia on servant leadership practices in public schools and their effectiveness, there is still room for growth and

advancement in this area. It also seems that this study found that higher self-perceived servant leadership principals have more leadership experience and a higher level of education.

*Interpretation #2*

The findings, through the interviews and journal entries, are representative of the top factor that surfaced during the SLP-360, Factor 4: Open, Participatory Leadership was identified at 6.75. These ten participants conveyed their common practices of servant leadership and this was evident that Open, Participatory Leadership could be interpreted through open-door philosophy, empowering others, and collaboration. While this is in important in proving the validity of the ten participants. This study also could be interpreted that rural principals demonstrated a belief of empowering others. Conventional leadership style models portray subordinates serving their leaders, it is known that in servant led organizations the leaders serve the organization (Spears, 2002). This research supports the magnitude of how influential principal leadership is within a public-school environment.

## Implications for Policy and Practice

Increasing demands for public school accountability have increased the pressure on building-level leaders across the landscape of public education. However, it is important for principals to focus on leadership styles that best support the whole school community, not just to increase test scores. In this study, current and aspiring leaders can develop and craft their own style of servant leadership practices. The practices identified in this research may serve as suggestions for the training of servant leaders in public schools.

*Implications for Policy*

Public school districts should consider implementing and adjusting policy to reflect servant leadership practices for their administrators. These servant leadership practices and tenets

displayed by principals can possibly retain employees in their perspective school systems. Shaw and Newton (2014) reached and came to three conclusions: a significant positive correlation between teachers' job satisfaction and their perception of their principals' level of servant leadership; a significant positive correlation between teachers' perception of their principals' level of servant leadership and intended occupation retention, and a strong correlation between perceived servant leadership level, job satisfaction levels, and teacher retention rates. With this being known, districts can retain employees and have a higher correlation to job satisfaction when servant leadership practices are utilized. Therefore if chosen school divisions should adjust their policy for administration hires to take a servant leadership screening test and answer difficult interview questions related to servant leadership.

The current dynamic and demands of being a school principal are very demanding. Educational research has concluded that principal leadership is the most important factor influencing a school's environment (Black, 2010). Terosky (2016) argued that in recent decades the neoliberal approach to education has dominated public schools. Policy could be adjusted to focus less on command and control and more on servant leadership type practices. The findings and proposed solutions from this research study could help support finding the right qualified servant leader candidate.

Through professional development policy changes, public school administrators should be committed to the growth of staff, parents, and students. It is common for administrators to commit to the growth of staff and students. However, several administrators overlook and are not involved to the growth of parents and the community. Professional developments and community engagement, are two policy implications that could be focused on. This will help with public perception and be better committed to the growth of the whole school community.

Furthermore, based on the findings, the five themes and 55 practices would suggest for educational leadership programs and or universities to consider moving from management type leadership experiences to servant leadership focused policies, theory, and curriculum.

Results from the study could advise policy readers of possible servant leadership recommendations that could change the overall school environment. The results provided practical information regarding the day-to-day servant leadership practices used by public school principals in southwestern Virginia. In nearly all of the interviews conducted, participants placed value on the characteristics of servant leadership. This study, through its five themes and 55 servant leadership practices, has possible implications for public school leaders and aspiring principals in public education. The researcher gathered information and historical empirical literature on the basis and origin of servant leadership and how it is related to education and public school. For this study, the researcher collected information based on prior studies conducted on the need to expand policy research in this area and expand the breadth of data in the region of southwestern Virginia.

### *Implications for Practice*

A principal, as the leader of the school, serves as a role model for the whole school community. It is the hope of this researcher that this study contributes to the ongoing practice recommendations among building-level principals in southwestern Virginia and beyond. The following practice recommendations are explained in-depth with an emphasis on the themes that surfaced from the research.

- Public school administrators should listen intently and rely on the words and experiences of everyone they are serving. Staff, parents, and students' opinions should be valued and

utilized to lead and make better decisions for the whole school community. As Scooter said, "we have two ears and one mouth; therefore, we should listen more then we talk."

- Public school administrators should build wholesome and meaningful relationships with staff, parents, and students. As theme two (relationships) states, school leaders must understand the context and build relationships within their school communities to better promote a more collective and shared vision. These relationships should be long lasting and emotionally relevant to the point they are impactful with the whole school community.

- Public school administrators should communicate effectively and frequently with parents, staff, and students. Frequent communication was repeatedly mentioned as an important part of everyday servant leadership day-to-day interactions. Scooter mentioned that sometimes he wonders if he over communicates. Administrators should communicate effectively across many different modes of communication. Email, home visits, phone calls, social media posts, weekly letters, school messengers, and visibility on campus and in the community are just to name a few that were mentioned.

- Public school administrators should implement an open-door policy for all staff, parents, and students. Open-door policy is a saying that means, readily accessible at all times in public education. Open-door was mentioned twelve times in relation to always being available for the whole school community. Administrators should be easy to talk to and always be available through different modes of communication. A building principal serves many roles in their school community and must provide multiple and varied opportunities to build relationships with staff, parents, and students so on one feels

isolated or not heard as vital stakeholders in the school community. Principals can be better informed if open door policies are utilized and welcomed.

- Public school administrators should learn and actively engage in empathetic listening skills with staff, parents, and students. Empathy is defined as reading one's emotions and being able to listen and take things in from the other person's perspective (Spears, 2010). Putting yourself in the shoes of others is recommended for understanding the situation. In the role of the principal this often includes students, parents, and staff. Principals must support and empathize with the entire school community. Leaders must have a skill set that develops overtime in being a better empathetic leader. Principals are dealing with people constantly. These people are coming from many different backgrounds and perspectives. It is imperative for principals to understand where their people are coming from and listen to what is important to them. Empathizing with students during discipline situations is an important part of being an administrator. Principals deal with parents daily mostly when it comes to discipline issues that are difficult to navigate. Empathetic listening skills are crucial when it comes to "The servant as leader always empathizes always accepts the person but sometimes refuses to accept some of the person's effort or performance as good enough" (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 20). An empathetic leader must listen to others and be sensitive to their feelings and interpretations (Goleman, 1995). In other words, to be empathetically supportive means that the principal encourages their followers by being aware and sensitive to others feelings and concerns. Utilizing this skill is important and administrators should use this technique as much as one can in a servant leadership type chosen role.

- Public school administrators should consider to leading by example. This significant response by administrators was revealed nine times from the data collection. John had mentioned this a total of three times in his interviews. Refer to John's comment about leading by example: "So I believe a good leader leads by example, they don't really care about the title or how they are perceived, they are always trying to do what is best for the people around them. It is leading by example and leading by giving others the opportunity to exemplify and it's not about you or the accolades, it's not about being the best, it's about setting up others for success in what they do."

- Principals can use the information from this study to reflect on their own practices and implement more servant leadership style practices. A variety of leadership styles are evident across the educational landscape. Existing educational leaders need researched based data about servant leadership styles and how they affect educational environments. Several studies were provided in the literature review to discuss the basis and foundation behind servant leadership style leaders. The findings in this research study could lead to the conclusions of Chiniara and Bentein (2016), who stated that servant leaders establish a culture of trust and respect.

The 55 essential servant leadership practices are paramount in understanding southwestern VA building servant leaders. However, the themes were similar in nature of servant leadership characteristics being utilized by principals as a daily practice in relation to students, staff, and parents. Thus, it is advisable for prospective principals to focus their attention on the list of 55 servant leadership practices and place an emphasis on the referenced five themes into their daily routine. These type practices will help aspiring servant leaders.

**Theoretical and Empirical Implications**

This study's findings address the gap in the literature and how relevant and supportive empirical research is to servant leadership practices. The theoretical framework in support of this study derives from the initial research of Robert Greenleaf and Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Greenleaf's research is grounded in the belief that a person's desire is to serve others first while inspiring others to invest their development and well-being for accomplishing tasks and goals for the common good (Greenleaf, 1977). In Maslow's hierarchy of needs, there are four of the five levels represented as servant leadership characteristics. Those characteristics are: resemblances of safety, belongingness and love, self-esteem, and self-actualization are embedded within the characteristics of a servant leader.

This research study helped further the theoretical body of evidence. Through the five themes and 55 servant leadership practices, this research could add more literature for future research projects. The results of this study brought light on day-to-day practices and can transform the readers understanding of highly identified servant leaders. The findings serve as potential discussion points for developing and implementing practices and strategies for servant leadership practices in public schools. This study may change the insights and direction of current and future administrators who choose to inquire about servant leadership practices.

The theoretical research in chapter II was reflective of this study's findings. Robert Greenleaf's relationship between being a servant and leadership was based on the notion that the authority a leader has is given to the ones who are following. Several inferences through the interviews were mentioned regarding principals giving up their authority to empower others. In the interview with Angie, she said "I feel like my role and whether its philosophy or just my view of my role as a leader, I'm a facilitator, I just I'm not comfortable with the top-down leadership style. I enjoy working alongside more of a coaching type relationship."

The first theoretical implication is that servant leadership was evident in the perceptions and practices of servant leaders in southwestern Virginia. The identified servant leaders were validated because of the SLP-360 quantitative screening tool that identified the leaders as low in Pride and Power. The qualitative findings from the interviews, journal entries, and the quantitative results from the screening tool identifies that the ten selected servant leaders use servant leadership practices on a daily basis. Therefore, if school leaders are identified as servant leaders, they must be vigilant of the individual needs of their followers and seek to act in ways to help them grow and develop as professionals in education. Given that this study narrowed gaps and added relevant data to servant leadership in the region of southwestern Virginia, it is imperative to understand that the interviews led to more detailed explanation of daily practices.

Empirically, the list of five themes and 55 daily servant leadership practices are what this research is grounded in. Through observations and experiences the majority of participants felt they had a good handle and representation of servant leadership practices and characteristics. Moreover, these servant leaders were professional in their interactions and enjoyed serving their school community. This research helped explore and define the culture of servant leaders and their daily practices in their relative school communities. Building-level leaders are known as the culture builders of the whole school environment in their buildings.

At the conclusion of the study, an abundant number of themes (23) and day-to-day practices surfaced. This research study produced 55 different servant leadership practices to help narrow the gap in the literature. Moreover, it also helped understand the principal's reasons for their servant leadership actions. These actions will help define and test servant leadership traits better in the eyes of building-level administrators. This, in turn, will be used for leaders to grow and become servant leaders themselves. Furthermore, the results from this study are consistent

with previous educational research and servant leadership theoretical framework. As aspiring

servant leaders choose to adapt their leadership styles, this research's themes and practices may

be useful to learn from, if servant leadership is the chosen style of leadership.

## Limitations and Delimitations

Since delimitations are intentional restrictions imposed by the researcher, one

delimitation to this study is that the study was limited to four small rural school divisions in

southwestern Virginia. The pandemic made it difficult to secure enough school divisions for the

research in southwestern Virginia. Due to this delimitation, this study may not be applicable or

relative to other urban and city populations. The rural and country demographics of this region in

Virginia are limited in cultural and ethnic diversity. Larger populations and more urban areas

may not appropriately equate with other locations and leadership styles. Therefore, along with

education level and experience, certain regional demographics and cultural barriers could affect

studies like this one. This, in turn, could affect the outcomes of perceptions and perceived

servant leadership styles.

A low survey response rate of 37% is a significant limitation of this study. Since only

four counties were utilized, the number of responses was a concern due to the nature of the

ongoing pandemic. Since this survey instrument was distributed over email, emails are

sometimes easily dismissed or ignored. However, email surveys in this research project was the

quickest and most efficient way to obtain data in the research setting. The COVID-19 pandemic

impacted and limited this research study due to the demands of quarantines, teaching and

learning oversite, virtual learning oversite, and principals having to run summer school and

additional duties. The interviews, although more brief than non-pandemic qualitative interviews,

were informative and still beneficial to the data collection process. Another limitation was the

lack of observations. These observations were not completed due to COVID-19 restrictions but could have been beneficial to see interactions and engagement in the school building.

Another factor to this research is one that is common to qualitative research, the researcher as the main instrument. For this study, I was the primary research tool and developed the research questions, conducted interviews, and analyzed the data. The qualitative information in this research is also limited because it was the leading source of data from the principal's point of view. I did remain neutral and removed personal bias from the process. I also did not interject or lead any participant in any way during the one-on-one interviews or focus group interviews.

The results of this study do not indicate that servant leadership style leaders are more successful leaders. Nor does this study indicate that buildings that are managed by servant leaders are more successfully academically or have a positive climate. Delimitations and the author's stance was not a factor because there was not a controllable part of this study. More importantly, another delimitation is the use of one type of surveying instrument. The theoretical background, objectives, research objectives, and variables under study were based on research based studies. I have been transparent and had to reject some sampling techniques because of my position close to the selected counties. This research study adds to the research on servant leadership practices in public schools and warrants replication and further research.

## Recommendations for Future Research

According to Yin (2017), recommendations for future research should represent a progression in research. Yin (2017) also stated that excellent research questions for future studies often result in findings from previous research. This study was designed to narrow an identified gap in the existing literature. The current study yielded results that were significant and instrumental in servant leadership practices. Future research projects could be replicated and

continue to add to the limited constructs of servant leadership in public education. Future research is needed to compare the different factors of servant leadership to the qualitative results of the findings. The results of this study should prove to be beneficial, but more research should be conducted in the area of servant leadership and building-level leaders for public schools all over the United States.

One recommendation would be to increase the sample size of this study to include more principals from other geographic regions is very much needed. The results of this study are not generalizable beyond the rural region of southwestern Virginia. Also, a more diverse cultural and socioeconomic backdrop could reveal additional findings to support theoretical ideals of servant leadership through a broader lens of current educational leaders. Determining how servant leadership is practiced and perceived in other counties, educational leaders could help close the gap in the literature.

Furthermore, school systems may choose to take appropriate steps to consider the type of leadership training and development for an aspiring administrator. School systems should also carefully draft interview questions that target servant leadership type scenarios and tendencies. If a school division wants to incorporate servant leadership practices, then along with servant leader interview questions, there can be a focus on servant leadership training. However, the completion of this study raises other possibilities for research for those Human Resources personnel who wish to broaden or deepen the work of this study. Superintendents and school boards, if they desire, could gain knowledge for hiring possible servant leaders.

This study was bound to one region of the state of Virginia and did not show a relationship or validity between servant leadership perceptions and school performance. Schools with very high levels of school success or low achievement could gather more information

regarding the impact of servant leadership skills. Servant leadership style leaders and perceived school effectiveness would provide additional data to the validity of servant leadership in the field of education. Furthermore, school leaders with a presence of servant leadership practices in high performing schools could be examined as well.

The findings discovered through this research suggest that further research is needed to compare leadership styles. The findings from this research study focus on a principal's perception of their own servant leadership tendencies or practices. The expansion of servant leadership research into other types of educational related positions would be advantageous to explore and study. Although this study is not a mixed methods approach, it would be beneficial to measure the construct of servant leadership, while factoring in the leader and follower perceptions and reactions. This approach would help initiate findings to better support leaders in public school buildings.

This study did not examine the theoretical construct of servant leadership through the perspective of the follower. Therefore, this limited the findings of this study to the self-perceptions of the school principals selected for this study. In other words, future research studies, I would recommend for the faculty and staff to take the servant leadership servant 360-degree assessment. The 360-degree assessment is to check the self-assessment of the leader's answers. This would ensure that the effects of the perceived leadership are assessed through the perspective of the followers. The perceived notion of the leader scoring high on listening skills would be a false claim by the leader, if the faculty and staff rated their own servant leader low on listening skills on the 360-degree assessment survey. This 360-degree follower assessment could also reveal that the principal's day-to-day interactions of listening characteristics or practice could be effective or non-effective. All in all, there would be better creditability if the principal's

self-evaluation answers were vetted by the perceptions of the staff and parent community. For

future research related to this study, it would be advantageous to meet with every participant and

interview staff, students, and parents as well.

For other future research studies, it would be beneficial for additional or even multiple

screening tools to be utilized when selecting highly identified servant leaders. When validating

the selected participants there could be other screening tools used in the selection process. The

screening tools are necessary is selecting the correctly identified individuals to further the

research. Instead of Wong's SLP-360 utilized as a screening tool, the Servant Leadership

Assessment Instrument (SLAI). The SLAI was designed by Dennis (2004) and the instrument is

known for its high level of reliability. The purpose of this instrument is to assess specific areas of

a leader. There are seven servant leadership characteristics aligned, they include:

- Leading with love

- Acting with humility

- Being altruistic

- Having vision for followers

- Trusting

- Serving

- Empowering others

The SLAI has 42 statements to measure principal servant leadership behavior. The SLAI also

utilizes a 1 to 7 Likert scale with seven being the stronger agreement.

The recommendations above represent thoughts on future research focusing on servant

leadership and building-level leaders. Additionally, further resembled research like this study,

should expand sample participant sizes and regions. This could increase the transferability and

expand this study's findings. The stress and multifaceted demands of being a successful principal is very demanding. The public perception is mostly aligned with student success and achievement that is based on academic data and numbers. Therefore, the principal's success is embedded in that data as well. However, servant leadership data and school climate are much more difficult to research and gather information. Servant leadership practices have the potential to change the climate and school environment in a positive manner. Additionally, since the variables of education and experience were found to influence servant leadership perceptions in this study, it could be found that other variables might be influential in the relationship between servant leadership and principal day-to-day practices.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to identify practices of servant leadership styles of principals in selected rural school divisions in Southwestern, Virginia. This research study told the stories and gave a snapshot of servant leaders in rural southwestern Virginia. This study was accomplished through researching principal and assistant principal's interactions, correspondence, and daily practices with their faculties, students, parents, and staff. The principals provided thick descriptions of their daily roles, along with their servant leadership practices that match their identified servant leadership style.

Through the collection of data, I found repeated confirmation through multiple participant examples of servant leadership. I conducted ten interviews, five focus group interviews, and reviewed ten journal entries to gather a snapshot of lived experiences of identified servant leaders in public schools. Thematic analysis of the data yielded five common categories across the entirety of the research. Based on those five findings, there would be five recommendations for public school leaders: (a) promote a climate and build a culture of listening

and have an open door with students, faculty, and parents; (b) build relationships and foster

meaningful relationship connections with students, staff, and parents; (c) place value and

importance on committing to the growth of people; (d) practice in leading by example/modeling;

and (e) prioritize communication. The findings of this study revealed that the participants

prioritized listening and building relationships as important daily interactions with students, staff,

and parents. Moreover, these identified public school servant leaders were committed to the

growth of all students, staff, and parents. In addition to the five themes there were 55 servant

leadership practices that were instrumental in filling the gap in the literature.

Spears (2002) stated servant leadership is this emerging approach and it is centered upon

the central concept of serving of serving others as the number one priority. If principals

implement partial or all parts of servant leadership then there could be positive gains in the future

for their school communities. The study of servant leadership provides a beacon of awareness for

school leaders. New or aspiring school leaders should study and value servant leadership as a

possible and pliable method to lead schools for the benefit of the whole school community. The

findings from this study and future studies could suggest that servant leadership is an acceptable

approach to an effective, positive, and productive school environment.

As a novice researcher in this case study, I thought I had a good handle on servant

leadership and what happens with servant leaders in the building. However, after the interviews,

results, and desegregation of data, it was evident that there is more to learn from identified

servant leaders. This research found 55 servant leadership practices and identified five themes.

Leaders must do a great job listening, building relationships, placing value on the commitment to

the growth of people, communicating, and modeling the way. These themes were evident across

students, staff, and parents. Although further research is needed to assess the transferability and

generalizability of the findings in this qualitative study. The most significant practical

implication is that servant practices are not difficult and very practical. Therefore, it seems

apparent that though the practicing of the five mentioned themes and prioritizing the list 55

servant leadership practices, there could be substantial benefits of leaders leading schools in a

servant leadership manner.

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**APPENDIX A**

Appendix A Consent Form

A Case Study on Practices of Servant Leadership Styles in Building Level Leaders.

Dear participant,

The following is a participation agreement form provided for you to decide if you would like to participate in this research study. You need to know that at any point in time, you can withdraw and decline to answer questions without penalty or consequences. There is also no penalty for participating in the research and declining the interview. If you decide to leave the research study at any point in the research, all data will be erased and shredded.

As a participant, you will be briefed on every phase, information, and details explained to you that are relevant to the study. Please be advised that the research and interview will be conducted in a one-month time frame. By signing and reviewing this policy, you agree that there is no compensation, and your interview will be recorded.  All data and responses will be kept anonymous by changing the names and keeping all information confidential regarding the participant's name.

There are parts of the interview that will be quoted, that only the participant will agree to after the transcription is finalized. Under the freedom of information legislation, the participant is allowed at any time to securely look at the recorded or documented notes related to their interview and responses. Lastly, the participant can freely discuss and seek guidance from outside sources on the aspect and processes of the study.

Date

_____
Signature of Participant