

AN ANALYSIS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
ORGANIZATIONAL SERVANT LEADERSHIP AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT
IN MIDDLE LEVEL SCHOOLS

A Dissertation

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by

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Abstract

The purpose of this exploratory quantitative research study was to determine if middle schools where higher levels of servant leadership are evident perform better than middle schools that exhibit lower degrees of servant leadership. Furthermore, it sought to identify contextual factors that were correlated with lesser or greater degrees of organizational servant leadership being practiced in those same institutions.

There has been little research in regards to servant leadership and the public middle school. Most of the research emphasis has been on corporate leadership, workplace environments, religious institutions, high school, or college settings. Researchers have generally ignored the middle level school setting, despite research that demonstrates the tremendous amount of influence it has on later academic success. This study contributes to the literature available on organizational servant leadership. It also provides middle school leaders, looking to operate from a more servant-focused base, with examples of leadership practices that specifically correlate with higher academic achievement.

The primary means of data collection for this study was the Organizational Leadership Assessment (OLA) instrument developed by James Laub (1999). Laub defined servant leadership as “an understanding and practice of leadership that places the good of those led over the self-interest of the leader.” Furthermore, he describes servant leadership as that which “promotes the valuing and development of people, the building of community, the practice of authenticity, the providing of leadership for the good of those led, and the sharing of power for the common good.”

Variables that were utilized to determine the relationship between servant leadership and school effectiveness included the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) test scores

in reading and mathematics and student attendance. Additionally, contextual variables were examined to determine their relationship between servant leadership and school effectiveness. These contextual variables included principal tenure, socioeconomic status of students, student ethnicity, and school size.

The results of this study indicate that organizational servant leadership factors had a minimal impact upon school effectiveness variables. Additional correlational analyses showed that the contextual factors of socioeconomic status of students and student ethnicity had a statistically significant impact upon student achievement. Essentially, these contextual factors appeared to be having far greater impact upon student achievement than organizational servant leadership practices.