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## First Conversations With Manitoba Superintendents: Talking Their Walk

*Thirty-seven superintendents lead public school divisions in the Province of Manitoba; their role is to implement the policies set out by the Board of Trustees. In a period of rapid educational change and growth in Manitoba, superintendents are increasingly concerned with rural/urban issues; the fallout from recent school division amalgamations; and local/global educational perspectives. The leadership style demonstrated by superintendents is crucial to their ability to respond appropriately and adequately to growing issues of cultural, economic, social, and community influences. This article describes a study of Manitoba superintendents and their perspectives on their leadership style. Their narratives are analyzed through the lens of servant-leadership as defined by Robert K. Greenleaf and an inventory of 10 related characteristics: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, foresight, conceptualization, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community. It appears that this small sample of superintendents regard awareness, foresight, conceptualization, commitment to the growth of others, and building community as priorities in their leadership modus operandi.*

*Dans la province du Manitoba, trente-sept surintendants dirigent les divisions d'écoles publiques, leur rôle étant de mettre en oeuvre les politiques établies par les conseils d'administration. En cette période d'évolution et de croissance éducationnelles rapides au Manitoba, les préoccupations des surintendants tournent davantage vers les enjeux ruraux/urbains; les conséquences des fusions récentes des divisions scolaires; et les perspectives éducationnelles locales/mondiales. Le style de leadership que démontrent les surintendants est un élément déterminant dans leur capacité de réagir de façon appropriée et adéquate aux enjeux découlant des influences culturelles, économiques, sociales et communautaires. Cet article décrit une étude portant sur des surintendants au Manitoba et leurs points de vue sur leur style de leadership. L'analyse de leur récit se fait par l'optique du leadership engagé, tel que défini par Robert K. Greenleaf, ainsi que par l'inventaire de 10 traits connexes : capacité d'écoute, empathie, ressourcement, prise de conscience, force de persuasion, prévoyance, conceptualisation, engagement face à l'épanouissement d'autrui, et développement communautaire. Les surintendants qui composent cet échantillon restreint semblent percevoir la prise de conscience, la prévoyance, la conceptualisation, l'engagement face à l'épanouissement d'autrui, et le développement communautaire comme priorités dans leur façon de diriger.*

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### *Introduction*

At present the prairie Province of Manitoba has 37 public school superintendents as senior administrators in school divisions (5 female, 32 male). Although there are a few recent publications about the school superintendent (Chapman, 1997; Kowalski, 2006; Norton, Webb, Dlugosh, & Sybouts, 1996), these are all written in a United States context. No text exists at this time from a Canadian perspective on the superintendent's role, and there exists little Canadian research data directly related to their type of leadership characteristics and styles. In addition, only the province of Ontario has a formal program of certification (Supervisory Officer) in place to prepare these senior leaders. The Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (2003) reports that superintendents have many responsibilities, which include the following: administrative leadership, planning, and coordination; policy development; accountability and reporting system progress to the community; human relations, public relations, consensus building, and organizational culture; community relations and liaison; administration of human resources and collective agreements; supervision and evaluation of staff; and day-to day management of a complex education system. The educational demography of Manitoba channels superintendents' concerns inward toward rural/urban issues and to the consequences of recent school division amalgamations; and outward toward current educational concerns of accountability, the democratization of schools, and preparation of students for our global society. These concerns have led to a call for more participatory/transformational types of leadership in the educational environment. Murphy and Seashore-Louis (1999) stated,

In these new postindustrial educational organizations, there are important shifts in roles, relationships, and responsibilities; traditional patterns of relationships are altered; authority flows are less hierarchical; role definitions are both more general and more flexible; leadership is connected to competence for needed tasks rather than to formal position; and independence and isolation are replaced by cooperative work. (p. xxii)

The Manitoba educational context acted as a catalyst for our localized research, which focused on the leadership styles demonstrated by superintendents as they attempted to respond appropriately and adequately to cultural, economic, social, and community diversity. How have Manitoba senior administrators responded to these issues? And what can we learn from their responses and styles? Finally, in the light of what we learn, what are the future implications for the educational leadership and the democratization of Manitoba schools? This article is a simple starting point to invite others into the discussion.

### *Context of Study*

Hoy and Miskel (2005) define leadership as "a social influence process that is comprised of both rational and emotional elements. 'Leader' and 'administrator' refer to individuals who occupy positions in which they are expected to exert leadership" (p. 374). Throughout the course of the 19th and early 20th centuries, leadership studies focused on the leadership styles and characteristics of "good" leaders in these positions. First, the *Great Man Studies* analyzed the lives of great men (no women) for characteristics that made them

great leaders. This was followed by a *trait* approach, which included categories of personality, motivation, and skills and the belief that if only a leader possessed certain traits there would be good leadership (Bass, 1990; Hoy & Miskel, 2005). Next, the *situational* approach suggested that leaders responded to unique characteristics groups, and their styles varied according to situational context. The behavioral approach focused on the leader's task and relationship behaviors. These factors are still embedded in organizational leadership theories today (Hickman, 1998). The current contingency approach discusses leadership style as it relates to individual/group behavior, situational context, personality, and leader-member relations (Bennis & Goldsmith, 1997; Hoy & Miskel). Today leadership theory advocates for *authentic leadership* in education based on a foundation of stewardship, moral/ethical imperative, and servant-leadership (Gabler & Schroeder, 2003; Naested, Potvin, & Waldron, 2004; Parkay, Hardcastle Stanford, Vaillancourt, & Stephens, 2005; Short & Greer, 2002; Wilen, Isher Bosse, Hutchison, & Kindsvatter, 2005). Authentic leaders are moral leaders who understand their own values and beliefs.

Historically, leadership theories made three assumptions: that leaders were born and not made; that good management made successful organizations; and that one should avoid failure at all costs (Block, 1993; Hickman, 1998). In fact such beliefs stifle the opportunity for others to assume leadership or to attempt something new and different due to risk or challenge. Today there is an emphasis on the development of a democratic learning climate in educational organizations where leaders reflect genuine and sincere efforts to include participatory processes in their professional behavior. Leaders are judged by how their actions reflect this emphasis. Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, Roth, and Smith (1999) would call it "walking the talk" (p. 193).

One particular form of such moral, democratic leadership was identified by Robert K. Greenleaf (1970/1991) in an essay entitled *The Servant as Leader*. Greenleaf worked with educational, business, and industrial organizations and his goal was to develop strong, effective, caring communities in all segments of society (Greenleaf, 1975/1991; Spears, 1998b). Greenleaf (1970/1991) explains that servant-leadership "begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead" (p. 7). In his estimation, there is a difference between one who is servant first and one who is leader first.

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. The best test, and difficult to administer is: do those served grow as persons; do they while being served become healthier wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? He is sharply different from the person who is leader first, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions. 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. The best test is: do those served grow as persons; do they while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what of the least privileged in society: will they benefit, or, at least, not be further deprived? (p. 7)

Spears (1998a) identified and clarified servant-leader characteristics that are outlined in Greenleaf's (1970/1991) first essay *The Servant as Leader* and in his other writing (Greenleaf, 1962, 1972/1976, 1975/1991, 1978). The characteristics that follow provided a framework for the study, which attempted to assess whether Manitoba superintendents could articulate and demonstrate servant-leadership styles and characteristics in their respective school divisions.

The first characteristic, *listening*, is exemplified by a deep commitment to listening to others and to oneself on reflection (Autry, 2001; Bennis & Goldsmith, 1997; Frick & Spears, 1996; Greenleaf, 1970/1991). The second characteristic, *empathy*, is evidenced when a servant-leader strives to understand and empathize with others in a supportive rather than a patronizing way (Block, 1993; Spears, 1998a). Empathy is exemplified in the ability to understand others by identifying mentally and emotionally with them, but it must not be confused with sympathy or feeling sorry for someone. There is a sense of caring in the concept of empathy that can be conveyed by careful listening. The third characteristic, *healing*, "involves both what one does for oneself and what is done in concert with others" (Powers & Moore, 2004, p. 18). Servant-leaders have the potential to heal themselves and others (Gardiner, 1998; Stur-nick, 1998), particularly because sick organizations can contaminate and can effect positive growth or change in any educational structure. *Awareness*, the fourth characteristic, relates to self-reflection through listening to what others tell us about ourselves, through continually learning, and by making the connection from what we know and believe to what we say or do (Bennis & Goldsmith, 1997). *Persuasion* is demonstrated by the servant-leader who seeks to convince (persuade) others, rather than coerce compliance (Frick & Spears, 1996), which may create fear and intimidation and cause avoidance. *Conceptualization* includes the ability to have a vision, a dream, or "get the big picture." Servant-leaders seek to nurture their own abilities to dream great dreams. Superintendents are usually the visionary leaders of school divisions and set direction. Greenleaf (cited in Frick & Spears, 1996) describes conceptual talent as

the ability to see the whole in the perspective of history—past and future—to state and adjust goals, to evaluate, to analyze, and to foresee contingencies a long way ahead. Leadership, in the sense of going out ahead to show the way, is more conceptual than operating. The conceptualizer, at his or her best, is a persuader and a relation builder. (p. 217)

*Foresight*, the seventh characteristic, describes the ability to foresee or know the probable outcome of a situation (Greenleaf, 1970/1991). One uses past experiences to guide a present situation with an eye to possible results or fallout in the future. The eighth characteristic, *stewardship*, relates to the idea that all members of an institution or organization play significant roles in holding their institutions in trust (caring for the well-being of institution and serving the needs of others in the institution) for the greater good of society (Block, 1993; DePree, 1989; Sergiovanni, 1992). Servant-leaders are also *committed to the growth of people*, the ninth characteristic, and will do everything they can to nurture others (DePree). Finally, *building community* is a goal of the servant-leader, either by giving back through service to the community, investing financially in the community, and/or caring about one's community (Hes-

selbein, Goldsmith, Beckhard, & Schubert, 1998; Sergiovanni, 1994; Wheatley & Kellner-Rogers, 1998).

This study attempted to determine the extent to which these 10 characteristics were exemplified in the current leadership practice of superintendents in the Province of Manitoba and to what extent, if any, there were implications for educational leadership in the province.

### *Methodology*

Because the research questions of this study are subjective and depend on the individual leadership context and personal educational philosophy of those within the study, the methodology of choice is qualitative in nature. Creswell (1998) defined qualitative research as

An inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting. (p. 15)

At the time of this research study a total of five women were in the role of superintendent in Manitoba. It was intended that all five female superintendents and an equal number of male superintendents were to be interviewed to obtain data related to the leadership practice and experience of both sexes. However, due to illness, one female superintendent was not a part of the sample. Male and female superintendents were matched as to the educational region where they were the senior administrator and to the size of their respective school divisions. A total of nine superintendents were interviewed and were randomly identified as S-1 through to S-9. Each superintendent was interviewed once for an hour to an hour and a half depending on the length of his or her responses. A standard set of questions related to process and leadership style were asked in order to gather a sense of how these superintendents led and whether their leadership practice aligned with the 10 characteristics of servant-leadership. Respondents were asked to provide examples from practice that would corroborate their espoused leadership style in an attempt to address the limitation of self-response.

The data from the interviews were transcribed and analyzed according to qualitative research guidelines (Moustakas, 1988; Strauss & Cortin, 1990; Tageson, 1982). Reductive analysis (identifying, coding, and categorizing data into meaningful units) was used to identify themes and patterns in the data. Each narrative was analyzed for evidence of any servant-leadership characteristic, proxy events, or qualities related to each of the 10 characteristics. Commonalities and/or anomalies were determined through careful comparison of the examples provided by informants. The main question to be answered in this article is, Did the superintendents discuss in their narratives any of the 10 characteristics within the servant-leader inventory, and/or were their comments/practices reflective of servant-leadership?

### *Findings*

Findings from the study related to the characteristics of servant-leadership are presented below. Table 1 provides a visual representation of the servant-leader indicators represented in each superintendent's narrative, and the subsequent

text describes sample sources of indication. Each superintendent is represented numerically from S-1 (first superintendent) to S-9 (ninth superintendent).

Table 1 lists the nine superintendent participants and the 10 characteristics in the servant-leader inventory. All nine superintendents made comments that reflected three characteristics: foresight, conceptualization, and building community. Seven of the nine superintendents referred to stewardship and the growth of others. The comments of five superintendents reflected the characteristics of awareness and listening. This was followed by four superintendents who reflected persuasion and three whose comments represented the characteristics of empathy and healing. A total of 41 indicators were included in foresight, conceptualization, stewardship, growth of others, and building community, and 20 indicators of listening, empathy, healing, awareness, and persuasion. The comments from one superintendent (S-1) were reflective of 9/10 (90%) of the servant-leadership characteristics; two superintendents (S-5 and S-8) demonstrated responses that fell into 8/10 (80%) of the characteristics; two superintendents (S-2 and S-6) demonstrated responses that fell into 7/10 (70%) of the servant-leadership characteristics; two superintendents (S-3 and S-4) evidenced 6/10 (60%) of the characteristics; and S-7 and S-9 evidenced 5/10 (50%) characteristics of servant-leadership. Indicators from the narratives and analysis are provided below.

*Listening*

Superintendents are continually interacting with people and organizations. They must act carefully and wisely on the information gathered. Greenleaf says one must first listen to oneself and then listen to others. What do you hear from others and on reflection, what do you hear from yourself: your inner voice? When searching for evidence of the 10 servant-leadership characteristics, listening was evidenced by S-8, who said that he or she had a “willingness to listen” and S-5 who suggested the following:

I think it’s the impact it’s going to have on who and then getting those people involved. And then I listen to everybody; I listen to ideas they have and then I

Table 1  
Characteristics of Servant-Leadership

	<i>listening</i>	<i>empathy</i>	<i>healing</i>	<i>awareness</i>	<i>persuasion</i>	<i>foresight</i>	<i>conceptualization</i>	<i>stewardship</i>	<i>growth of others</i>	<i>building community</i>
S-1	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
S-2		X			X	X	X	X	X	X
S-3		X	X			X	X		X	X
S-4	X					X	X	X	X	X
S-5	X	X		X		X	X	X	X	X
S-6	X			X	X	X	X		X	X
S-7						X	X	X	X	X
S-8	X		X	X	X	X	X	X		X
S-9				X		X	X	X		X

X indicates the characteristics of servant-leadership found in each of the superintendent’s narratives. An empty cell indicates no significant evidence of that particular servant-leadership characteristic.

sit down and try to filter out what I need, what I don't and what I can live with, because bottom line is I have to stand behind it and I have to be able to support it.

S-6 advocated for listening when he or she indicated that it is important "Just to listen to them speak and hear some of their ideas and some of their takes on things that we work with... to sit down with people ... just listening to the people talking, it opens up different doors." Other comments made by superintendents reflected the aspect of listening in varied areas where this was particularly important such as in outside community consultation (S-1) and rethinking of decisions after careful reflection (S-4).

### *Empathy*

Characteristic 2 is *empathy*. Superintendents are the lynchpin between school administrators and the school board of trustees, and as such they must be prepared to empathize with groups through careful attention, sensitivity to issues and concerns, and genuine caring for the position of both parties. This trait was mentioned by four of the participants. S-2 expressed the importance of developing relationships and recognized "that people make mistakes." S-3 thought it was important to "Make people feel like they are loved." The caring for people's feelings was evident from S-5, who said, "They could phone me any time and I may not give them the answer, but I will lead them to a variety of answers. But, they have to make the final decision." S-6 also reflected sensitivity for people's feelings when he or she suggested that it was important to "Never let a person paint themselves into the corner ... you never do that to people. You always let them save face and you always let them come back out and do things." Each of these comments suggests that these leaders focus their attention on how their actions may affect the feelings and actions of others.

### *Healing*

The role of the superintendent requires leadership of a school division, particularly one that functions as a healthy, effective educational organization. Superintendents who can balance their own lives effectively may be better able to assist others in dealing with their obstacles or problems. Evidence of healing was indicated in four narratives. The first superintendent suggested that "Handling discipline; restructuring; making tough decisions even if they are unpopular. I'll go through this discomfort because that is what's right." S-8 spoke of the need to stand up against unhealthy actions and/or processes occurring in educational environments:

I succeeded by my determination that it would succeed, by my willingness to listen, and by my willingness to take a stance with (my employer) to tell them that their approach was wrong, which took a significant amount of courage, because it's not easy to tell your employer what they need to hear. To have staff feel valued and respected ... what works is to say all right, what is it that you're finding troublesome? What can I do to help you feel better, and what can we do to talk?

S-3 indicated that superintendents must "Eliminate sense of isolation between areas and build a sense of a whole division- divisional planning process" in order to achieve harmony and effective work environments.

### *Awareness*

Superintendents interact closely with the school board of trustees to implement divisional policies. They need a clear understanding of what issues are critical and current, and this knowledge can help shape board decisions and directions. In essence, superintendents need to keep their fingers on the pulse of the school division. The characteristic of awareness was expressed in general terms. S-1 realized that he or she could do the job of superintendent even within what he or she astutely described as the “highly political nature of leadership.” S-5 spoke candidly about positional awareness of the superintendent’s role:

I’ve seen too many people set themselves up on the pedestal and wanted people to treat them in a godly state rather than being part of the team or the common person. I look for people who are the common man characteristics, who can blend in with anybody.

S-6 suggested, “I found it really quite an experience to see how other people carry on a similar job but they just do it so differently.” S-8 offered the perspective that, “Positions of leadership are not the same as positions of friendship.” And, S-9 described the process of becoming aware:

Whenever you start a new task you are unconsciously incompetent. You’re incompetent and you don’t even realize it. And then at some point, you suddenly realize I don’t know what I’m doing. And that’s growth. Then you start taking steps to learn more, and eventually you become consciously competent and the next step is that you become unconsciously competent. You know what to do, but you’re not even thinking all the time about why you are doing it. You just know it’s the right way to go. Then it’s like a cycle, the world passes you by and you become unconsciously incompetent again.

Each of these comments suggests that superintendents were able to reflect and articulate their own development of awareness as they progressed in their careers, treating it as a growth process that comes with experience.

### *Persuasion*

Patience and social capital may help a superintendent build consensus among internal and external educational stakeholders. It may also build ownership of a learning organization through dialogue and inclusivity. Consistent and persistent “walking the talk” can develop trust and possibly convince others to become involved in particular initiatives or issues.

Servant-leadership emphasizes the concept of persuasion through actions or language rather than coercive behavior. S-1 spoke of a persuasive sense of presence when interacting with others such that he or she could influence agendas often nonverbally: “I didn’t have to speak for it to be known I was either concurring with what they were saying or I was not—body language, sensitizing to an agenda beforehand.” S-2 had an understanding of the board’s position and used what he or she knew to persuade the board to choose a new assistant superintendent. S-8 described a persuasive approach to working with the school board members:

The board has to appreciate that teachers have changed and they haven’t. Now you’ve got to change. Otherwise you run the risk of having disenchanted employees who will lose enthusiasm for the good things they’ve been doing ...

if you don't understand that the effect you're having on people is to drive them away, you're going to have a very hard time attracting new people. So, it's a necessity to change, not just a values laden thing.

S-6 used a more manipulative persuasive style, indicating that there were times when he or she wanted people to think they came to decisions on their own when in fact there had been some management of data, time, and process.

### *Foresight*

It is common for school superintendents to have had lengthy experience in the educational system and to have a history of teaching and administration in schools. All this experience and knowledge is helpful as a superintendent weighs the pros and cons of a decision. S-1 spoke about the use of foresight when working with the community: "You learn your lessons but you take it in positive ways. I say, what's it going to take, and I will find a way." S-2 described the need for data collection as part of the evaluation process of a program, foreseeing that this would be a useful tool to use when making future decisions. S-2 also mentioned using foresight to choose the assistant superintendent who had a complementary leadership style that would benefit the division in the longterm. S-3 explained the importance of the divisional planning process and the need for "all areas to work as one, not as separate entities; building in communication systems and forums for input." S-5 elaborated:

I think about who is going to be affected by my decisions and then I have to decide on what kind of input I need to make that decision. When I make a decision, I stick by it, I live by it, and if I'm wrong, I'll also change it if people can give me information to show that I haven't made the best decision. I don't have a problem saying you know what, it didn't turn out the way I thought—shouldn't have done it.

S-6 said, "If it didn't work well, you go back and look at things they could have done differently to ensure that some of the problems that appear don't reappear." S-9 spoke of the time factor involved with decision making ("I would imagine some people would say I'm methodical. I don't rush"), and how crucial this was for ensuring that the division continued on a successful path. S-7's technique included:

Being politically astute/savvy in decision making instances—control of information, process, and timing. I've been xx years in administration; you do learn over that period of time things to do and not do and you know what to avoid through experience ... So I figured we needed to minimize the risk involved by trying to anticipate what it is the parents really want. And so we used the teachers for the information ... I had everything worked out so that when I finally went out to meet with them, I thought I pretty much knew what they wanted, what their questions would be, and what the answers to all of those would be.

S-4 highlighted that as a superintendent he or she had learned through error and experience to make decisions that would benefit the division in the future.

### *Conceptualization*

The institutional role of the superintendent requires them to serve and guard the needs of others, that is, board trustees, school administrators, teachers, support staff, parents, and the related community. All the participants reflected

this trait. S-1 spoke of “working to build shared services to offset community economic stability.” S-2 described “a vision of educational care and excellence for students and others.” S-3 “balanced needs within the division with the financial realities and competencies within the division.” S-4 indicated that the needs of others were, “the center of our enterprise. That’s what we’re serving.” S-6 described how important determining values was in this process, suggesting that, “The whole idea of first determining what you value or what’s important and in doing that ... I would like to emulate from people that they know what they believe and can clearly state it.” A similar comment was made by S-7 who suggested that the “Vision is to focus on children, teachers, and process, convincing people it’s good for education.” S-8 expressed the need for planning together to address common needs: “The idea of the strategic plan ... I felt why don’t we create the future together ... it’s our mutual way.” S-9 described a guiding belief system that was built around protecting the needs of others.

I try very hard not to compromise my beliefs in what we’re about and to always show that. With any issues, what are our beliefs in meeting the needs of students, promoting staff development and expecting professionalism on staff? I try to proceed, as those are givens. They’re not negotiable ... stick to what our role is ... whenever you make decisions that affect the school divisions, and certainly there are changes, my belief is that if we are honest and address those according to what our roles and responsibilities are, and maintain those values in our decision making, there might be some fall-out and some disagreement, but I think we’d be on solid ground and really it works.

In each case there is a focus on finding out, usually through participatory processes, what the needs of people are and then working on ensuring that those needs are addressed and perceived as important to the organization as a whole.

### *Stewardship*

Characteristic 8 is *stewardship*. This involves service to others without a need for personal reward or gain. Seven of the respondents referred in some way to this concept. S-1 saw the superintendent’s position as an extension of the community-division and that they were inseparable and often asked others, “What do I need to do to support you”? S-2 advocated for “care for students that we serve, and also the people that we work with and mutual respect and support.” S-4 revealed humility when he or she suggested,

I don’t care who gets the credit so long as things get done. I see myself as a person who would prefer to move from the side a bit, from the back of the room. So long as things are working, that’s great. I get enormous satisfaction from that. As a matter of fact, I make conscious attempts to make sure that others get credit.

S-5 illustrated an avoidance of personal credit when he or she suggested, “I don’t think they would say that I was up on a pedestal or anything like that.” S-8 demonstrated the need to work in service to others by describing himself or herself as “caring, rooted in ideas, tolerant of opinion, collaborative, and inclusive of others.” S-9 elaborated on a stewardship approach to students whereby “this school is for all students, and they need to feel that.”

### *Commitment to the Growth of People*

The ultimate goal of superintendents is to have the school division (institution/organization) produce capable (through accountability initiatives) and responsible (through democratic policy development) students who can make a contribution to society. Ultimately, educational leaders are involved in encouraging others to learn, and superintendents oversee the leadership and management personnel in institutions who are responsible for the direct delivery of instruction. S-1 mentioned the need “to encourage and help others with self reflection, a commitment to personal learning (formally and informally), and a focus on transformational change.” S-2 “tried to provide support for people to be successful.” S-3 believed that there was “much more to gain from getting from people (nurturing), rather than using positional power to force people to do things.” The example provided described involvement in a student assessment project that “included all working together. People learned that they could work collaboratively on goal attainment. If it’s competency and knowledge in an area that you don’t have, you’ve got to build it.” The attitude of S-4 toward individual growth was clear:

You can do it. And, I can help you do it if required and if there’s a way I can help you. But I do believe in, enabling stuff that we do to help teachers out facilitating, supporting, encouraging. We encourage people to look at high levels of initiative, which sometimes means taking the risk of failing.

S-6 reinforced the empowerment of staff, “Tell me what you need to make it work; I’ll support it, and if I think that it is not going to work we’ll talk about it.” Finally, S-7 elaborated on working with teachers in the division:

On the PD committee my goal was to work myself out of it, saying, “You folks have to do it, and I’m going to be a neighbour; go ahead without me, and don’t wait.” We want them to be successful. So, that takes information, and we try to lay out options, and I try to avoid phrasing or framing the information in a way where they’ll figure out that’s just what they want to do. I want them to come to the decision on their own if they can.

In each case superintendents were concerned not only with the final results of a decision, but that each individual involved also felt empowered and successful in the process.

### *Building Community*

Ideally, a school division becomes an effective learning community through collaborative, cooperative efforts among the superintendent, the board of trustees, and the other educational stakeholders. The last servant-leadership characteristic was evident in eight of the nine narratives. A variety of comments and phrases reflected the importance of establishing and building community, that is, “collaboration, task force” (S-1); “work closely together, team working together to make education better in our school and in our community” (S-2); and “collaborative, participatory, divisional planning process, building in communication systems and forums for input” (S-3). S-5 spoke about visiting the schools in the learning community,

The Board had a priority that the superintendent wasn’t in schools enough before I came, and this was important to them. I tried not to just go; I try not to just stick my head in with the principal. I take my coat off; I go into classrooms.

I open the door; I say “good morning” and I talk to the kids. I talk to the teacher, and I try to do a buzz around the school when I’m there so that everybody sees me in school.

S-6 discussed the importance of communication with the learning community, “You call people back, reading everything and respond so that people know you’re doing things.” Both S-7 and S-8 gave lengthy answers that related to building community.

You have a budget, you have the responsibility and you run your school the way you know that you want to run it in keeping with our policies, legislation ... we’re there to support them and help them. And provide some professional development and that kind of thing, but they run their schools. (S-7).

And

It was successful because it was inclusive; it was successful because people ended up owning it, and it was successful because it’s true. It stood the test of time. I believe very much in sharing leadership. I don’t think there’s any such thing as any white knight on a horse riding around leading everybody. That may inspire people, but in the end people have to feel ownership and a part of it. (S-8).

Each comment clearly illustrates the desire to use participatory processes in order to facilitate community building in the professional learning environment.

#### *Discussion*

Powers and Moore (2004) break the 10 servant-leadership characteristics into two forms of character manifestations: the “inner components” of servant-leader character, that is, building community, commitment to the growth of people, foresight, conceptualization, and awareness. The “outer characteristics” are: listening, empathy, healing, and persuasion. The characteristic of stewardship joins the two groups together. They state,

The first can be described as inner characteristics or commitments. These inner characteristics lie near to the core of the servant-leader’s being. They are deeply held beliefs or souls imprints about the highest calling of leadership and are not as readily observed at the behavioral level in comparison to what we have labeled the outer characteristics or practices. (p. 3)

The characteristics mentioned most often by superintendents in this study included foresight, conceptualization, building community, stewardship, and growth of others. Interestingly, they exhibited a greater propensity for the inner components of servant-leader character and less for outer components. Listening, empathy, healing and persuasion were represented in 15/36 comments. These four outer areas require direct interaction and communication with people, a friendly dialogue. The inner components were represented in 39/45 comments. They can be operationalized from a distance to others, and may seem less intrusive. Given the (usual) physical, legal, and emotional distance superintendents have from stakeholders in a system, it may not be surprising that these characteristics become dominant. In fact development of these characteristics may reinforce the Manitoba superintendents’ responsibilities mentioned at the beginning of this article, that is, planning, coordination,

policy development, accountability, reporting system, and day-to-day management of complex educational systems. The concepts of listening, empathy, healing, and persuasion are very up front, personal, and intimate in nature. By the nature of their role as educational leaders and implementers of school board policy, superintendents may perform more objectively when distanced from the rank-and-file educators “in the trenches.” Also, it is possible that superintendents naturally gravitate to the inner character traits unconsciously because they are occupied with the big-picture conceptualizations that are necessary to lead a school division. The characteristic of stewardship, a 10th characteristic, binds the rest of the traits together. The educational servant-leader assumes the mantle of *steward*, a person who guards or protects something of great value, the educational welfare of the school division (Powers & Moore, 2004). Seven superintendents recognized and articulated their stewardship responsibilities in their conversations and realized the serious duties attached to their positions, which is also congruent with their visions of participatory and moral forms of leadership in their school divisions.

### Conclusion

Although none of the superintendents exhibited all 10 characteristics in the servant-leader inventory, one superintendent exhibited nine character indicators and two others exhibited eight. Findings such as these offer many seeds for further investigation, preferably with a larger sample so that comparisons could be made across other variables such as position (superintendents/assistant superintendents), sex, age, work experience, academic qualifications, cultural background, and location (rural/urban). As well, a comparative study between school administrators (principals) in schools and superintendents of school divisions for evidence of servant-leadership could prove interesting. Would their results, especially with the tendency toward the inner and outer characteristics, be different? If there were differences, what might account for them? Much further investigation is needed to address these questions. The comment made by one of the superintendents (S-4) most eloquently echoes Robert Greenleaf and reminds us of the importance of service in the role and life of the superintendent,

We also talk about serving those who serve ... in this case, those who serve in the school in this system. The teachers, you have to be serving those teachers.

Obviously, the superintendents of Manitoba feel a moral imperative to shape education through service to others.

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