
Author	Phua, Nehemiah Wei Sen
Title	Developing servant leadership of junior college student leaders through a school leadership programme
Institute	Thesis (Ed.D.) National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University
Year	2018
Supervisor(s)	Luo, Wenshu ; Zhang, Yenming

ABSTRACT

Against the neoliberal backdrop that Singapore is situated in, there has always been concern that Singapore could become subject to the ills of individualism, and be unable to preserve its identity in the age of globalisation. The emergence of communitarian values (Chua, 1996), introduction of quality learning premised on communitarian principles (Shanmugaratnam, 2005) and emphasis on a values-driven education (Heng, 2011) were efforts made to calibrate neoliberalism with communitarianism. Notwithstanding, there is a worrying perception among Singaporeans and foreigners alike that Singaporeans have become more self-serving (Sim, 2015; Goy, 2015; Ee, 2014). This could be possibly due to the intensification of credentialism (Brown & Tannock, 2009) in a meritocratic Singapore, the influence of mass media and influx of foreigners resulting in exposure to a potpourri of cultures and diversity of value systems, and the long-term effects of character education which could be sidelined by short-term academic results. These factors have resulted in a need for a stable and self-sustaining values-based leadership philosophy in training our youths who will be future leaders helping Singapore to uphold its sovereignty. This thesis aimed to explore, by examining a current leadership training programme in a particular junior college, how effective servant leadership is in fulfilling this need, and what approaches can be adopted to engender specific servant leadership characteristics.

To this end, a 24-item servant leadership instrument was designed based on existing survey instruments, measuring servant leadership in the Singapore junior college context in the intrapersonal, interpersonal and organisational dimensions. This instrument was then used as a pre- and post-test in the first of a two-phase explanatory mixed-method design study to evaluate how student leaders in a junior college have grown in servant leadership characteristics after undergoing a student leadership training programme. The results suggested that job assignments, coupled with informal on-the-job mentoring, were necessary to help student leaders to improve in their intrapersonal and organisational dimensions of servant leadership.

In the second phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 16 student leaders to obtain their perceptions on the characteristics of a good servant leader, and the components of the leadership training programme that helped them to attain specific characteristics. A conceptual framework of servant leadership attributes from the perspective of student leaders was obtained, together with specific pedagogical and assessment approaches that helped develop the respective attributes. The findings suggested that besides job assignments and informal on-the-job mentoring, action learning and formal mentoring, complemented with 360-degree feedback were also important in helping student leaders to enhance their understanding of servant leadership.

Combining both studies, the findings suggested that although other aspects such as action learning and formal mentoring, complemented with journaling, personality questionnaires and 360-degree feedback, were important in helping student leaders enhance their conceptual understanding of servant leadership, job assignments together with informal on-the-job mentoring were necessary to make changes in servant leadership characteristics, especially in the intrapersonal and organisational aspects. Hence, an integrated approach incorporating action learning, job assignments and modelling relationships as pedagogical means, complemented by student leader journals, personality questionnaires and 360-degree feedback as assessment means, is key to developing servant leaders in the junior college context.