

4.11 Offering Encouragement – Encouraging Service

To lead in education is to give courage to teachers and children, rooted in energising memories and summoned by radical hopes. Leaders advocate for their people, noticing things going well, cheering on and never missing an opportunity to praise. Their encouragement and coaching nurtures leaders who go on to achieve even greater things than the leader themselves. They encourage generous acts of kindness, inspiring children to respect and serve others first.

Encouraging Service

The upside-down economy of biblical leadership calls us to serve first, choosing generosity and preferring the other, loving them as ourselves. Jesus' ministry shows this to be central to his calling and identity: "I am among you as one who serves" (Luke 22:27); "I have come not to be served, but to serve" (Mark 10:45), offering a model for education leaders as they work with adults, children and communities. This service does whatever is called for, including practical help if needed. Matthew 25:31-46 gives a list of "works of mercy", including giving food, drink, clothing, healthcare and prison visiting, but the variety of possible services is endless. In schools, dinners are to be prepared, premises cleaned, rubbish disposed of, security provided, as well as many administrative, pastoral and teaching tasks fulfilled. But there are also vital tasks of leadership relating to distribution of resources, determining policy and strategy, recommending for promotion, dealing with problematic people and situations, and more. Here especially the power of leadership is exercised, and in the words of John Stott, "Leaders have power, but power is safe only in the hands of those who humble themselves to serve." (Stott 1990: 375)

Service encourages the sacrifice of self, defined by a humility offered by Paul as the ultimate example for our own

relationships, first in his Philippians poetry: "...he made himself nothing, by taking the very nature of a servant... he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross..." (Philippians 2:7-8), and then later more fully in Romans 12, in the practical guidance of devotion and honour, prayer and hospitality – considering our worship lifestyle to be one of "a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God." (Romans 12:1). Paul's concept of service and sacrifice is grounded in the earlier promises of a saviour who would not come to dominate and coerce, but to suffer and to serve as outlined in Isaiah 53.

An education grounded in encouraging service may stand counter to dominant cultural messaging for young people for simply acquiring more, yet schools are well placed to offer a vision of a life in all its fullness where service becomes a habit not simply a project. Acts of service evidence our connectedness as leaders offering intense dignity to the served. The servant leader shapes their community not by force and power but by grace and meekness, not by instruction and policy but by example and action.

1. What kinds of practical acts of service could you engage with in your community? What is the impact of servant leadership in your teams?
2. How does our character develop through acts of service and social action?
3. What might it mean for 'service to become a habit not simply a project'?
4. What can we learn from Jesus' example of service, both in terms of his words and actions? How might this relate to other leadership paradigms and models?