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Spirituality and School Leadership: A Grounded Theory Study

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SPIRITUALITY AND SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY

A Dissertation

Presented to

the Morgridge College of Education

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Karen Musick

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Advisor: Dr. George Straface
Abstract

The job of public school principal can feel overwhelming and frustrating. Principals are faced with ensuring their school is meeting the academic achievement needs of students along with the social, emotional, and physical needs of students, particularly if they are serving in high poverty, high needs schools. Most principals question, at least once in their career, whether to stay in the position. While some stay, many more leave the position especially if they are at a high needs school. This study was interested in principals serving, and staying, in difficult or diverse elementary schools. Knowing the emotional toll that the principalship takes, this researcher was interested in how spirituality plays a part in principals’ professional lives.

The purpose of this grounded-theory study was to investigate public school principals in difficult or diverse elementary settings and then generate a theory or framework that explained what role spirituality plays in school leaders’ professional lives. This study sampled public elementary school principals from the Northern Metropolitan Denver area. Using classic grounded theory methodology, interviews were conducted, and the data analyzed with constant comparative analysis which included coding, memoing, sorting, and theoretical sampling.

This study generated a theory that is grounded in the categories that were discovered during the investigation. A theoretical framework of spiritual school leadership was generated from the categories of soul work, wholeness, moral authority,
transformative leadership, and connector. A major finding of the study is that the theory is process driven. School leaders are spiritual leaders who progress through a series of stages as their career matures. They initially have soul work as their core, then progress through the other generated categories until they are connectors. Spiritual school leaders progress along this path and through the categories and back through the categories as necessary. There is an inside-out process to spiritual school leadership. Spiritual school leaders resolve the leadership challenge of being a school leader that makes a significant difference in the lives of all kids, while managing all the complexities and concerns of a principal’s professional life.
Acknowledgements

This is dedicated to principals around the world who are doing the hard work of making a difference in the lives of their students. I want to thank the participants in this study for their time and willingness to be so open and honest.

I want to thank my advisor, Dr. George Straface, for his support and thoughtful feedback. To Dr. Kent Seidel, your “boot camp” made all the difference. To Dr. Ginni Ishimatsu and Dr. Nicholas Cutforth, thank you so much for stepping in at the last moment. And to Dr. Paul Michalec, thank you for your invaluable knowledge. You pointed me in just the right directions.

To all my friends and family who have been so understanding and supportive during my time away from them as I completed this study thank you for your love. Thank you to Aunt Judy who encouraged me to start this journey. I wish you could have seen its completion. To my parents, Ray and Diane, thank you for your belief in me. It matters to me that I make you proud. To my sons, Mike and Joe: you are the light of my life. Thank you for your cards and phone calls, for your support and encouragement, for your laughter and ice teas. And a special thank you to Deb for doing everything else so I could write, for putting up with poster paper and sticky notes all over the walls, for listening to me as I processed my thinking, for reading and rereading this thing, and for having such unwavering faith in me.

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# Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction .................................................................................................. 1
  Statement of the Problem ........................................................................................ 2
  Purpose of the Study ............................................................................................... 3
  Research Questions ................................................................................................. 4
  Overview of Methodology ...................................................................................... 4
  Literature Review .................................................................................................... 5
    School Leadership ............................................................................................... 6
    Spirituality ........................................................................................................... 10
    Spirituality and School Leaders ................................................................ 13
  Definitions ............................................................................................................. 13
  Organization of the Study ..................................................................................... 17

Chapter 2: Methodology ................................................................................................... 18
  Introduction ........................................................................................................... 18
  Statement of the Problem ...................................................................................... 18
  Purpose of the Study ............................................................................................. 19
  Research Questions ............................................................................................... 20
  Research Design .................................................................................................... 20
  Qualitative Research ............................................................................................. 21
  Grounded Theory .................................................................................................. 22
    Why Grounded Theory for this Study? ..................................................... 24
  Role of the Researcher .......................................................................................... 24
    Personal Interest ........................................................................................ 25
    Theoretical Sensitivity .............................................................................. 25
  Participants ............................................................................................................ 26
  Research Process ................................................................................................... 29
    Data Collection .............................................................................................. 30
    Theoretical Sampling ................................................................................ 31
    Member Checking ..................................................................................... 32
    Literature as Data ...................................................................................... 33
    Data Analysis ............................................................................................ 34
    Constant Comparative Method ................................................................. 35
    Coding ....................................................................................................... 37
    Substantive Coding ................................................................................... 37
    Open Coding ............................................................................................. 38
    Memoing ................................................................................................... 39
    Selective Coding ....................................................................................... 40
    Theoretical Sorting .................................................................................... 41
    Theoretical Coding .................................................................................... 43
  Writing .................................................................................................................. 45
  Trustworthiness and Credibility ............................................................................ 46
  Conclusion ............................................................................................................ 48

Chapter Three: Findings ................................................................................................... 49
Evaluation of Theory ................................................................. 114
Unanticipated Outcomes .............................................................. 116
Limitations ......................................................................................... 116
Conclusions ......................................................................................... 117
Implications for Action ..................................................................... 119
Recommendations for Further Research .............................................. 120
Concluding Remarks .......................................................................... 121
References .......................................................................................... 122
Appendix A ......................................................................................... 129
Appendix B ......................................................................................... 132
Appendix C ......................................................................................... 133
Appendix D ......................................................................................... 134
Appendix E ......................................................................................... 135
Appendix F ......................................................................................... 137
Appendix G ......................................................................................... 138
List of Tables

Table 1: Categories .................................................................42

Table 2: Descriptive Data of the Eight Participants .............................51

Table 3: Categories and Sub-Categories ........................................52
List of Figures

Figure 1: Constant Comparative Analysis for Generating Theory ..........................36
Figure 2: Model of Spiritual School Leadership .................................................45
Figure 3: Core Category: Spiritual Leadership .......................................................56
Figure 4: Category 1: Soul Work .................................................................57
Figure 5: Circle of Influence .........................................................................62
Figure 6: Category 2: Wholeness .................................................................64
Figure 7: Category 3: Moral Authority ............................................................72
Figure 8: Category 4: Transformative Leadership ............................................78
Figure 9: Category 5: Connector .................................................................87
Figure 10: Model of Spiritual School Leadership ..........................................103
Figure 11: Model of Spiritual School Leadership ..........................................112
Figure 12: Butterfly as Metaphor of Spiritual School Leadership ....................113
Chapter One: Introduction

One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight,

I believe it’s not too late,

Together, we can change the world (Shepard, 2007).

It was the close of the End of Year Awards Assembly, and as the student body finished singing “Together, we can change the world”, John stood in the back of the gym. His eyes were closed and he let the shivers, that always came when his students sang that song, wash over him. As they finished singing, he reflected on the day. It had been one of those days as a school principal: a parent angry that he was suspending her son for threatening another student, a crying teacher because John had not renewed her teaching position for the following year, recess duty where spring winds had battered both adult and student, and a trip to district offices for a seemingly endless series of meetings. It was in one of those meetings that John had received “the look” from his director for questioning a decision that seemed made more for the convenience of adults than the best interest of students. In that meeting, he had also found out how his third graders had done on the state assessment for the year. Every spring, this was the moment he both anticipated and dreaded. It did not matter what else he had done through the course of the school year. That one score would be the defining number that parents, staff, and superiors would use to judge the effectiveness of his leadership. The scores were okay.
Not as good as he had hoped, but not bad either. Why did he do this to himself, year after year? “God,” he had prayed, “help me lead the staff with the courage we will need to keep this school turning in the right direction.” As he thought about the entirety of this day, children’s voices raining down on him, he again realized that this spirit of song – this spirit of togetherness in something as precious as these students nourished his soul. He would be back tomorrow, and the day after that, and next year, and the year after that. He knew that, in so many other ways than test scores, he was making a difference in the lives of his kids.

The life of a school principal is filled with many days like this example. Principals make hundreds of decisions every day. In the course of one hour, a principal may strategize about how to increase achievement at the same time as they are investigating the cause of a student fight, calling parents who are not going to be happy with the investigation, arranging for lunchroom coverage, and then running off to a district meeting on how to increase the safety and security of the building. The job can feel overwhelming and frustrating. Most principals question, at least once in their career, whether to stay in the position. While some stay, many more leave the position especially if they are at a high needs school. This study was interested in principals serving, and staying, in difficult or diverse elementary schools. Knowing the emotional toll that the principalship takes, this researcher was interested in whether spirituality plays a part in principals’ professional lives.

**Statement of the Problem**

The past decade has seen school principals held to increasing high levels of accountability in student achievement. They must also be increasingly aware of school
safety, dwindling resources, parent satisfaction, and competition. The job of school principal has become difficult and draining. The essential question of this study was to determine what role spirituality plays in the professional lives of school principals. These are the areas the study was seeking to explore within that essential question:

- What are their purposes as school principals? What drives that purpose?
- Are there specific practices that reflect spiritually-centered school leadership?
- How does spirituality contribute to principals’ longevity in the profession?

**Purpose of the Study**

Previous studies suggest further research into the influence of spirituality on school leadership referring to specific behaviors that reflect a spiritually-centered leadership (Miller, 2002). There is also a need for studies to determine the relationship between spirituality and resiliency (Lyon, 2004). Research is also needed to further investigate the relationship between spiritual leaders and leadership effectiveness (Robertson, 2008). While most of the studies available have used participants in religious school settings, few studied public school principals. The purpose of this grounded-theory study was to investigate public school principals in difficult or diverse elementary settings and then generate a theory or framework that explained what role spirituality plays in school leaders’ professional lives, answering those three studies’ previously identified recommendations for further research. This theory is grounded in the data that was discovered during the investigation. The researcher felt that grounded theory would be useful in determining the struggles common to school leaders, as that is the main goal of grounded theory: finding the common struggles of the participants (Glaser, 1998). It was hoped that discovering those common struggles and identifying a theory around
spirituality and school leadership would be useful to first year principals, as they search to find meaning beyond the struggles of the job. It was also hoped to be useful to veteran principals questioning how long they can remain in the profession or questioning their effectiveness.

The subject of spirituality and school leadership is relatively new. There is not a large body of studies, or published works around the subject. This research will add to that body of knowledge.

**Research Questions**

The essential question that guided this research was:

What is the role of spirituality in the professional lives of school principals?

Research Sub-questions

1. What are school principals’ purposes? What drives that purpose?
2. What specific practices reflect spiritually-centered school leadership?
3. How does spirituality contribute to principals’ longevity in the profession?

**Overview of Methodology**

Classic grounded theory methodology was utilized for this study (Glaser 1978, 1992, 1998; Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Grounded theory provides a structure to discover theory around a topic that has limited previous study. Using a data collection and analysis process, a theoretical framework was produced (Glaser, 1992). For this study, superintendents in the Northern Metropolitan Denver area were asked to identify principals most effective in improving student achievement in diverse and/or difficult environments. From the lists provided, principals were solicited to participate. The objective was to include elementary school principals with diverse ages, experiences, and
spiritual backgrounds. Initial interviews of five principals took place at their school sites, using the Interview Protocol (Appendix A). Data was open coded. Analysis of the data was with constant comparative method, looking for emerging themes. Using theoretical sampling, three more participants were interviewed. In-depth literature research around those themes was also happening simultaneously. Follow-up interviews and email communication with all eight participants clarified categories. Member-checking was also utilized. A framework was developed, inductively, grounded in the themes and supporting literature. In grounded theory, the study does not begin with hypotheses as the goal is to discover an integrated set of conceptual hypotheses or findings (Glaser, 1992). Miles and Huberman (1994) call this a “coherent set of explanations” that is achieved by generating propositions (p. 75). Propositions are connected sets of statements which reflect the findings and conclusions of the study. In this study, a process driven theoretical model of spiritual school leadership was generated. This study’s methodology will be further detailed in Chapter Two.

**Literature Review**

Classic grounded theory does not include an in-depth literature review prior to field research (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Glaser has recommendations regarding literature reviews, one of which is to “not do a literature review in the substantive area and related areas where the research is to be done” (1998, p. 67). Interlinking the concepts (such as spirituality and school leadership), prior to field research, could create preconceptions of theories. Rather, once the field research was completed, Glaser (1998) recommended the relevant literature be reviewed and “woven into the theory as more data for constant
comparison” (p.67). As recommended by Glaser (1992, 1998), current literature was constantly compared and analyzed as data.

However, Miles and Huberman (1994) assert that it is important to have at least a “rudimentary conceptual framework” going into the research study (p.17). While acknowledging an inductive grounded approach to gathering and analyzing data, they believe the researcher should know something “conceptually about the phenomenon” even if not enough to develop a theory (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 17). While grounded theory is concerned with ongoing research and discovery, it does not mean that the researcher is unprepared for the investigation. It is helpful to be familiar with the literature concerned with the given field. “Fortune favours the prepared mind” (Gherardi & Turner, 2002, p.90).

Literature is presented here that provides background into the need for the study. For purposes of conceptual foundation, the differences between spirituality and religion are explored. Definitions for spirituality and some expressions of spirituality are also presented. A more complete literature review will be presented in conjunction with the findings and theory.

Methods literature will be reviewed in Chapter Two as the methodology is presented. As this study was a “minus mentoring” model, methods literature is continually reviewed and referred to throughout the study (Glaser, 1998, p. 76).

School Leadership

The Bureau of Labor Statistics, the federal agency charged with developing profiles of professions, has described the “often overwhelming nature of work” for school administrators in their 2008 Occupational Outlook Handbook. The handbook shows the
complexity of the job in practice. School leaders provide instructional leadership and manage the day-to-day activities of the school. Principals set the academic tone and actively work with teachers to develop and maintain high curriculum standards, develop mission statements, and set performance goals and objectives. They build consensus with staff to support needed changes. They hire, evaluate, and train teachers and other staff. They visit classrooms, observe teaching methods, and evaluate teaching materials.

In addition to instructional leadership, principals are responsible for the management of the school building. “The monumental demands on administrators range from bureaucratic red tape to keeping schools safe and secure. The level of violence has escalated so much that some schools make use of metal detectors to prevent students from bringing weapons into the buildings” (Rebore, 2001, p.33).

In addition, principals meet and interact with other administrators, students, parents, and representatives of community organizations. With site based decision making, school principals have greater flexibility in setting school goals and implementing programs. But when making those administrative decisions they must also pay attention to the concerns of parents, teachers, and other members of the community. Parts of those decisions involve overseeing various required reports such as attendance and finance. As school budgets become tighter, many principals have become involved in public relations, grant writing and fundraising as a way to supplement shrinking budgets (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008).

Principals must take an active role in ensuring that students are meeting national, state, and local academic standards. But, that role has changed markedly in the past 25 years. The focus has broadened from providing education for the “average” student to
meeting the special needs of a wide variety of students. With the implementation of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), equal opportunity and access to proficiency for all students is required. Mandates have included responsibilities for ensuring achievement and developing special programs for particular groups of students such as: children with disabilities, students for whom English is a second language, disadvantaged students, and prekindergarten children (Educational Research Service, 2008). Many schools have growing numbers of students from dual-income and single-parent families or students who are also teenage parents. To support these students and families, principals establish before- and after-school programs. Some principals have established programs to combat increases in crime and drug and alcohol abuse. “Most people enter the education profession with an expectation and desire to make a difference in the lives of students; it can be devastating to realize that making a difference often has nothing to do with learning in the traditional sense and everything to do with trying to motivate students simply to come to school” (Rebore, 2001, p.33).

While the belief exists by those not in the profession that principals have summers off, the reality is that during summer months principals are still working. They are responsible for planning for the upcoming year, overseeing summer school, participating in workshops to further their own learning, supervising building repairs and improvements, and working to make sure the school has adequate staffing for the next school year (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008).

Given the demands of the job, headlines and studies proclaim that the country is facing a shortage of qualified principals willing to take on the job. DuFour and Eaker (1998) write that administrators feel despair and have unmet expectations caused by
unprepared students, higher accountability, and beleaguered and jaded teachers. Public school educators “face daily threats to their personal and professional integrity” (Palmer, 2004, p. 10). For many in the profession, after even just a few years, educators run the risk of moving from compassion to callousness as their original dreams of making a difference come up against the hard realities of day-to-day school life (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). The number of positions in school leadership is expected to grow by as much as 20 percent in the next five years. Forty percent of current school leaders will be eligible to retire in the next six years. Annual turnover rates of principals in large districts like New York and Los Angeles have already reached 20 percent (The Wallace Foundation, 2003).

A RAND Corporation study (2004) looked at administrator turnover, given the increased accountabilities and demands of the job. The study found that schools with a larger proportion of minority and/or disadvantaged students had higher rates of principal turnover. High poverty and high minority schools have high administration turnover. These are the schools that need strong, consistent leadership the most. Schools within large, problem-plagued districts where principals must “be willing to brave additional demands, challenging working conditions and inadequate incentives” are attracting fewer and less qualified candidates to fill those positions (RAND, 2004, p. 3). In fact, the districts with the fewest applicants were those with the “most challenging working conditions, higher concentrations of poor and minority students, and lower salaries” (The Wallace Foundation, 2003, p. 4).
Despite these challenges and potential shortages of school leaders, there are still school leaders that are thriving and remaining in the profession. It is those professionals that this study is seeking to sample.

**Spirituality**

A recent Gallup poll suggests that 96% of all people surveyed report a belief in God or a transcendent, universal being and 88% of all participants in the survey said that religion is important in their lives. Another survey also suggested more than 74% of all Americans say that religion and/or spirituality were important and that those factors play a significant role in decision making (Smith, 2009). This study did not focus on a particular religious tradition. Religion is specific, giving a “rubric for working with the deity” while spirituality is more generic, “giving energy that connects” to a deity (Houston, 2002, p. 6). Houston and Sokolow (2006) use a metaphor of pipes to describe the difference between spirituality and religion. They describe all different kinds of pipes: large, small, short, long, copper, plastic, and lead pipes. They see the pipes as representing religion in all its different expressions based on theology, history, and practice. However, only one substance flows through those pipes: “the essence of spirituality” (Houston & Sokolow, 2006, p. xxiii). Different religions call that essence by different names (divine intelligence, universal awareness, divine wisdom, conscience, or our moral guidance system). But Houston & Sokolow contend “it’s still spirituality” and the difference between religion and spirituality “is the difference between form and substance” (p. xxiii). Bolman & Deal (2001), authors of *Leading with Soul*, assert that “spirituality may and for many does include religious faith, but is also broader than religion” (p. 10). Thompson (2005) distinguishes spirituality from institutional religion
by emphasizing the inclusiveness of spirituality: ‘What flows through the world’s
diversity of religions . . . . is the spiritual energy that awakens consciousness to deeper
levels of experience, purpose, values, and meaning than can be perceived from a strictly
materialistic vantage point” (p. 6). Palmer (2007) views spirituality as an inner, private
process; while seeing religion as an outward, public one. Rogers (2003) views religion as:
the “public manifestation of one’s spirituality” (p. 22).

Tolle (2005) proposes that how spiritual a person is has nothing to do with what
they believe but everything to do with their state of consciousness (p. 18). For some
spirituality is a sense of being connected to one’s whole self, all of humanity, and to a
higher power (Rogers, 2003, p. 21). Conger (1994) expresses:

Spirituality, more powerfully than most other human forces, lifts us beyond
ourselves and our narrow self-interests. When not misused, it is the most human
of forces. It helps us to see our deeper connections to one another and to the world
beyond ourselves (p.17).

Spirituality is the lens through which individuals make understanding and meaning of
their world (Dantley, 2003a). Some describe spirituality in terms of the “ultimate
belonging or connection to the transcendental ground of being” (Vaughan, 2002, p. 17).
The concepts of seeking meaning, interconnectedness, interdependency, community, and
feelings of being connected to something greater than self are consistent themes in the
literature (Groen, 2008; Bhindi & Duignan, 1997).

There are innumerable ways that spirituality can be expressed, experienced, or
represented. The spiritual journey can be taken through a belief in one God (a
monotheistic perspective) or through a belief in many forms of the divine (a theistic
perspective). Spirituality, Houston & Sokolow (2006) suggest, is best expressed as “each
human being’s personal relationship with the Divine” (p. xxiii). They believe “spirituality connects you with divine energy” (p. xxiii). Still many in the world find spirituality in nature itself rather than traditional deities and the supernatural. Naturalists have a spiritual attitude towards the awe, majesty and mystery seen in the natural world: a consciousness of unity with all living beings. Expressions of spirituality are not only internal but also involve responses to the world around us and are directed toward a higher good (Groen, 2008).

Spirituality can be expressed in terms of external religiosity, such as attendance at church meetings or group prayer meetings. Spiritual behaviors can be defined in terms of individual contemplative practices such as personal prayer or meditation, by being at one with nature, a stilling of the mind – being present in the moment (Mulcair, 2008). Faith is a “spiritual behavior” that is the “extension of one’s belief in the existence or the nature of something or someone” (Dantley, 2005).

For the purposes of this study, religion and spirituality are considered separately. The working definition of spirituality is: the diverse ways we acknowledge the soul’s desire to be connected with all of life’s energy and humanity (Rogers, 2003, p. 21). The working definition of religion is: one of many ways in which humans can experience or express spirituality (Rogers, 2003, p. 22). The researcher did not want to lead the participants in the subject of spirituality or spiritual leadership until after the first round of interviews. It was hoped that the subject would emerge through responses to other questions. Using the working definition of spirituality, along with attributes of spirituality mentioned above, the researcher would be listening for phrases that reflected that. The researcher listened for the following examples of language in the initial interviews: belief
in God or higher power, spiritual behaviors described above, concepts of seeking meaning, interconnectedness, interdependency, community, and feelings of being connected to something greater than self.

**Spirituality and School Leaders**

The desire to connect to a deity, or higher purpose, is shared by school leaders with all of humanity. However, school leaders have “learned that the desire for connection to a higher purpose can also be bruised and humiliated by the social complexities and political intensity of leading a public school or school system through fundamental changes” (Thompson, 2005). But, Palmer (2004) claims that connection is worth it as “every time we get in touch with the truth source we carry within, there is net moral gain for all concerned” (p. 19). Rogers (2003) asserts that “exceptional leadership incorporates the spiritual dimension; that leadership is transformed when infused with the spiritual” (p. 23). This researcher was interested in public school leaders and whether they make those connections as they proceed through their professional lives. The researcher was hopeful that the study’s sampling methods would lead to data collection from principals with diverse spiritual traditions and/or beliefs.

**Definitions**

For the purposes of this study, the following terms and definitions are used:

- **Bracket**: A researcher suspends preconceptions or learned feelings about a phenomenon (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 383).

- **Category**: A broad group of similar concepts that are used to generate a theory (Glaser, 1978, p. 55).
• **Codes**: Tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the information collected during the study (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 56).

• **Coding**: Marking segments of data with symbols, descriptive words, or category names (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 383).

• **Concept**: A collection of codes of similar content that allows the data to be grouped (Glaser, 1978, p. 55).

• **Constant comparative method**: The data analysis of grounded theory research, data is coded for categories and compared to other data continually through the study (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 383).

• **Fit**: How closely concepts fit with the incidents they are representing, and this is related to how thoroughly the constant comparison of incidents to concepts is done (Glaser, 1978, p. 4).

• **Grounded theory**: A general methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analyzed (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 383). The theory has fit, relevance, workability, and modifiability (Glaser, 1978, p. 4).

• **Inductive method**: A form of theory building, in which specific facts are used to create a theory. A theory is ‘induced’ or emerged after data collection starts. A bottom-up or generative approach to research (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 383).

• **Inductive reasoning**: Reasoning from the particular to the general (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 383).
• *Inductive codes*: Codes that are generated by a researcher by directly examining the data (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 383).

• *In vivo codes*: Words or phrases taken directly from the participants and used as categorical headings (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 105).

• *Memos*: The theorizing write-up of ideas about codes and their relationships (Glaser, 1978, p. 83).

• *Memoing*: Recording reflective notes about what is learned from the data (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 383).

• *Modifiability*: The theory can be altered when new relevant data is compared to existing data.

• *Open coding*: The initial stage in ground theory data analysis. The researcher is ‘open’ to codes as they emerge (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 383).

• *Process theory*: Process theory is used when occurrences are said to be the result of other occurrences all leading to an outcome which emerge from a set process (Trochim, 2006).

• *Proposition*: A statement that reflects a finding and conclusion of a study (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 75).

• *Relevance*: The study deals with the real concerns of participants and is interesting; has ‘grab’ (Glaser, 1978, p. 4, 5).

• *Religion*: One of many ways in which humans can experience or express spirituality (Rogers, 2003, p. 22).
• **Rule of parsimony:** A theory is parsimonious when it is simple, concise, and succinct; preferring the simplest theory that works (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 19).

• **Selective coding:** The final stage in grounded theory analysis, before theory building (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 383).

• **Sorting:** Memos are grouped together in concepts and then in categories to generate the theory (Glaser, 1978, 117).

• **Spirituality:** The diverse ways we acknowledge the soul’s desire to be connected with all of life’s energy and humanity (Rogers, 2003, p. 21).

• **Substantive codes:** Generated codes that conceptualize the empirical substance of the area of research (Glaser, 1978, p. 55).

• **Theoretical codes:** Generated codes that conceptualize how the substantive codes may relate to each other as propositions to be integrated into the theory (Glaser, 1978, p. 55).

• **Theoretical sampling:** The process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyzes his data and decides what date to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges (Glaser, 1978, p. 36).

• **Theoretical saturation:** This occurs when no new information or concepts are emerging from the data and the grounded theory has been validated (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 383).

• **Theoretical sensitivity:** When a researcher is effective at thinking about what kinds of data need to be collected and what aspects of already collected data
are the most important for the grounded theory (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 383).

- **Theory**: An explanation or framework that explains the subject of the research (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 19).

- **Workability**: The theory should be able to explain what happened, predict what will happen and interpret what is happening in an area of substantive inquiry (Glaser, 1978, p. 4).

**Organization of the Study**

The study is organized in a four chapter format. Chapter One gives an overview of the problem. The purpose and intended outcomes are included. Also included are the essential question and sub-questions, as well as an overview of the methodology. A literature review, grounding the study, is then presented. In that review, an explanation of the limited nature of the literature review is included. Finally, terms and definitions that are central to the study are provided. Chapter Two is a more thorough description of the study methodology. Literature specific to qualitative research and grounded theory methodology is incorporated. Chapter Three presents the findings from the research process. Data collection results, which include data from participant interviews as well as a more thorough literature review, and analysis, are detailed. Chapter Four concludes the study with the theoretical framework and corresponding metaphor. Additional current literature is included, as well as the unanticipated outcomes of the study, limitations, conclusions, implications for action, and recommendations for further research.
Chapter 2: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter will describe the methodology that was used in developing a theoretical framework to describe the role that spirituality plays in school leadership. The purpose of the study is outlined, research questions are presented, and the design of the research is explained. Explanation of the procedures that were used and are consistent with grounded theory research will be presented along with the literature that was used to guide the structure of the study.

Statement of the Problem

The past decade has seen public school principals held to increasing high levels of accountability in student achievement. They must be increasingly aware of school safety, dwindling resources, parent satisfaction, and competition. The job of school principal has become difficult and draining. The essential question of this study was to determine what role spirituality plays in the professional lives of public elementary school principals. These are the areas the study was seeking to explore within that essential question:

- What are their purposes as school principals? What drives that purpose?
- Are there specific practices that reflect spiritually-centered school leadership?
- How does spirituality contribute to principals’ longevity in the profession?


**Purpose of the Study**

Previous studies suggested further research into the influence of spirituality on school leadership referring to specific behaviors that reflect a spiritually-centered leadership (Miller, 2002). There was also a need for studies to determine the relationship between spirituality and resiliency (Lyon, 2004). Research was also needed to further investigate the relationship between spiritual leaders and leadership effectiveness (Robertson, 2008). While most of the studies available have used participants in religious school settings, few studied public school principals. The purpose of this grounded-theory study was to investigate public school principals in difficult or diverse elementary settings and then generate a theory or framework that explained what role spirituality plays in school leaders' professional lives. This would help answer the above three studies’ previously identified recommendations for further research. This theory is grounded in the data that is uncovered during the investigation. Grounded theory was useful in determining what struggles are common to public school leaders (Glaser, 1998). Uncovering those common struggles and identifying a theory around spirituality and school leadership will be useful to first year principals as they search to find meaning beyond the struggles of the job. It will also be useful to veteran principals questioning how long they can remain in the profession or questioning their effectiveness.

The subject of spirituality and school leadership is relatively new. There is not a large body of studies, or published works around the subject. This research will add to that body of knowledge.
Research Questions

The essential question that guided this research was:

What is the role of spirituality in the professional lives of school principals?

Research Sub-questions

1. What are school principals’ purposes? What drives that purpose?
2. What specific practices reflect spiritually-centered school leadership?
3. How does spirituality contribute to principals’ longevity in the profession?

Research Design

Qualitative methodology provides a research design that attempts to understand and describe the phenomenon of spirituality and school leadership. Qualitative assumptions include an emphasis on process, the interest in meaning, the researcher as an instrument, and descriptive data analysis (Creswell, 1998). In order for a comprehensive and appropriate research approach, this qualitative study was designed to be interpretive, generative, and inductive. The study was interpretive in that it looked for descriptions, explanations, and shared meanings of what spirituality means for school leaders (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). The study was also inductive in that details of the data were explored to discover important categories, dimensions, and interrelationships (Patton, 2002). Finally, the study was also generative in that it created multiple sources of data from which grounded theories emerged (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).
Qualitative Research

Broadly, qualitative research is “any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 17). A qualitative research design was appropriate for this study because the study was seeking to understand the role that spirituality plays in the professional lives of public school leaders. Understanding that role was not quantifiable. Qualitative methods were needed to provide the interpretive piece of this study; the meaning that spirituality has for the research participants and the manifestation of that meaning in their professional lives. Because this study sought to sample a diverse group of participants, in relation to their spiritual traditions and/or beliefs, it was important to use a dynamic methodology such as found in qualitative research.

The research took place in the participants’ schools, through the use of interviews. This is considered “naturalistic inquiry” (Patton, 2002). An underlying assumption to naturalistic inquiry is that the researcher remains open to themes and patterns as they emerge. The researcher guards against being guided by predetermined assumptions. As Creswell writes:

Writers agree that one undertakes qualitative research in a natural setting where the researcher is an instrument of data collection who gathers words or pictures, analyzes them inductively, focuses on the meanings of participants, and describes a process that is expressive and persuasive in language (1998, p.14).

Qualitative research is designed to gather rich data that provides information relevant to the participants’ personal experiences; their thoughts, feeling, intentions, and actions regarding their experiences within a particular context (Charmaz, 2006). Experiences are complex, “answers are not simply answers but springboards for more
questions that lead to more knowledge” (Smith, 2009). Qualitative research design is flexible enough to permit data to emerge, while understanding that due to the nature of inquiry, theories will be constructed and changes will occur over the course of the study. This is the generative and inductive piece of qualitative design. Qualitative research can also broaden perspectives and deepen understandings of what is already known or assumed about the phenomenon being studied. Utilizing qualitative research would add to what was already known about spirituality and school leadership. Grounded theory is a form of qualitative research that was employed for this study.

**Grounded Theory**

Grounded theory is a generative and inductive process. It is a design that attempts to understand the experiences of individuals with respect to a certain phenomenon. The procedures of the methodology support an “evolutionary process of discovery” (Mulcair, 2008, 34). The method was first developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in the 1960’s during a research effort to explain the phenomenon of patients dying in hospitals (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The sociologists contended that “theory should emerge inductively from empirical data” (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 380). Rather than focus on theory confirmation (the testing of hypotheses developed from established theories), they felt that researchers should focus on theory generation and construction (the development of new theories from new data) (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). The inductive process used in grounded theory does not assume a theory from the outset. The approach is begun as close to possible to “the ideal of no theory under consideration and no hypotheses to test” (Eisenhardt, 2002, p. 8). Researchers formulate a research problem
and possible variables, with some reference to literature. But, researchers are cautioned to “avoid thinking about specific relationships between variables and theories as much as possible, especially at the outset of the process” (Eisenhardt, 2002, p. 12). It is a rigorous process in which the researcher joins with research participants to gather data, from which further data is generated (Charmaz, 2006). It is a “preponderance of induction from systematically collected data” (Glaser, 1998, p. 44). By using grounded theory, a theoretical framework is built as the result of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the data that emerges from the natural inquiry. Strauss and Corbin (1990) have articulated:

A grounded theory is one that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents. That is, it is discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon. Therefore, data collection, analysis, and theory stand in reciprocal relationship with each other. One does not begin with a theory, and then prove it. Rather, one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge (p.23).

Grounded theory, as outlined by Glaser, is the “systematic generation of theory from data acquired by a rigorous research method” (Glaser, 1998, p. 3). This study strived to adhere to Glaserian, or classic, grounded theory by following that rigorous research method. This method “relies on continuous comparison of data and theory beginning with data collection” (Eisenhardt, 2002, p. 8). The grounded theory that results is a discovery of what was there, not invented (Glaser, 1978; Glaser, 1998). “While grounded theory methodology has certainly evolved over the last forty years, the basic premises of the approach as defined by one of the originators, Barney Glaser, continue to hold true for credible research study” (Candelarie, 2009).
Why Grounded Theory for this Study?

Glaser (1978) writes about the “man in the know” (p. 13). This refers to people who are in the area being researched. They have the background knowledge, the experiences, the common struggles, and the descriptions. A researcher is not going to tell them anything they don’t already know. The researcher can never know as much with his methods and research. The man in the know doesn’t want to be told what he already knows. But, he does want to be told how to handle the problems and gain understanding. His knowledge is non-theoretical. The researcher can “contribute a great deal by providing the man in the know with substantive theory” (Glaser, 1978, p. 12). A grounded substantive theory that corresponds to the realities of public school principals will make sense and be understandable. Understanding the theory may give school principals an “image of how they can potentially make matters better” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 240).

Role of the Researcher

A feature of qualitative research is that the study engages in a holistic perspective. Researchers should try to understand the phenomenon under investigation as a whole. A “holistic approach assumes that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts” (Patton, 1987, p. 40). In order to fully understand the whole, qualitative researchers are an integral part of the process of gathering, analyzing, and theorizing (Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 1998; Maxwell, 2005). They either observe or participate in the phenomena under study to fully understand. They are seen as an important contributor to the research process. While they are charged with the responsibility of stating biases and motivation,
it is not only as a disclaimer to the research but to also acknowledge that the emerging theory will be, in part, a result of the researcher’s past and present experiences (Charmaz, 2006). In grounded theory research, the researcher is the primary tool in gathering, analyzing, and developing theories (Maxwell, 2005). While the researcher must remain constantly aware of their own biases and, indeed their very reason for selecting the study topic, they do not separate themselves from the research as an uninterested third party. Personally and professionally, the grounded theory researcher is invested in the topic through past experiences and personal connections. The researcher is encouraged to “mine the experience” for the “potential gold there” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 38).

**Personal Interest**

In qualitative research, the personal values of the researcher are acknowledged and valued as an important piece in the process (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This researcher is a public school principal who has encountered the out-of-control parent, the missing student, and the abysmal test scores. During those situations, the researcher has called on their spirituality to carry them through the experience. Those experiences led the researcher to wonder if other public school principals incorporate spirituality in their professional lives.

**Theoretical Sensitivity**

Strauss and Corbin (1990) developed a concept called theoretical sensitivity as a way to assess a researcher’s capacity to engage in grounded theory study:

Theoretical sensitivity refers to a personal quality of the researcher. It indicates an awareness of the subtleties of meaning of data. . . [It] refers to the attribute of having insight, the ability to give meaning to data, the capacity to understand, and capability to separate the pertinent from that which isn’t (p. 4).
A grounded theory researcher must be able to discern what kinds of data need to be collected and what aspects of data, already collected, are important to the study. Theoretical sensitivity “involves a mixture of analytic thinking ability, curiosity, and creativity” (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 383). Theoretically sensitive researchers are constantly asking questions of the data. This data included the responses to interview questions, data from professional literature, as well as personal and professional experiences (Glaser, 1978). This researcher was theoretically sensitive enough to be able to interact with background experiences, the research participants, and the collected data while discerning the pertinent from that which was not and exploring themes as they emerged. At the same time that the researcher was interacting with the data and emerging categories, she was guarding against any preconceived theories.

**Participants**

Purposeful sampling is a method used often in qualitative research (Creswell, 1998). This is a process that researchers use to specifically choose participants that have experience with the phenomenon being studied. This allows the researcher to gather information-rich data from the perspective of participants immersed in the phenomenon (Patton, 1987). When selecting participants for a qualitative study, Creswell (1998) asserts that it is important to consider certain criteria that will differentiate participants from each other and then select participants that vary in those criteria. The goal of using purposeful sampling, then, is also to ensure that participants will provide different perspectives within the similar experiences of the phenomenon. For this study, the university’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) required that the researcher get permission
from the school districts where the purposed study was to take place, prior to IRB approval. The study was approved in four districts in the Northern Metropolitan Denver area. Upon IRB approval, superintendents in those four districts were asked to identify elementary school principals most effective in improving student achievement in diverse and/or difficult environments (see Appendix B). Superintendents, or assistant superintendents, from three of those districts responded. Twelve principals were identified from those three responses. Those twelve principals were then sent an initial invitation to participate in the study (see Appendix C). Respondents were asked to provide information to aid in purposeful sampling (see Appendix D). The objective was to have an initial sample of elementary public school principals who, while all effective at diverse or difficult school settings, were of diverse ages and years of experience. It was decided that all of the participants needed to have at least seven years of leadership experience, in order to contribute data that could answer the research question around longevity.

“Qualitative researchers usually work with small samples of people, nested in their context and studied in-depth” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 27). Eisenhardt, in The Qualitative Researcher’s Companion (2002), considers a number between four and ten to work well. With fewer than four participants, “it is difficult to generate theory with much complexity, and its empirical grounding is likely to be unconvincing” and with more than ten “it quickly becomes difficult to cope with the complexity and volume of the data” (Eisenhardt, 2002, p. 27). Of the twelve principals who responded affirmatively, ten were determined to match the seven year requirement and offered the most diversity in school
settings and ages. Of those, five were contacted for initial interviews. Using theoretical sampling, three more were subsequently contacted for interviews. This was consistent with what Miles and Huberman (1994) call “theory-driven” sampling (p. 27). That is, samples are not completely “prespecified”, but progressively evolve once fieldwork begins (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 27). The ages of all eight ranged from 36 – 51, with the average age being 44. They had 7 – 25 years of leadership experience, with the average being 13 years. All eight principals served schools with 40% or higher poverty rates based on free and reduced lunch counts. Of those, four were serving schools with 90% or higher poverty rates. Another factor in difficult or diverse school settings is the percentages of English language learners in the school. Five of the eight participants were serving in schools with 60% or higher English language learners.

Grounded theory methodology recognizes the importance of collaborative and trusting relationships between the researcher and study participants. Collaborative and trusting relationships are essential as the researcher must rely on the experience and input of the participants before a theory can emerge. Participants must feel comfortable letting the researcher into their subjective world so that the researcher can best understand the participant’s experiences and perspectives, as seen through their eyes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Through initial contacts and by revealing personal information, the researcher was able to build trusting relationships with the participants. Within the initial interview process and follow-up interviews, the interactions between the researcher and the participants grew easier and easier. During follow-up interviews, the participants revealed substantial information in the areas of personal spirituality and practices and habits. This
information came without the need for substantial probing and added to the strength of the theory. Through the data collection process, the researcher was able to ensure participants’ stories and experiences would be valued, honored, and told.

**Research Process**

Glaser (1998) asserts that grounded theory is cyclical in nature. He describes the process as the five S’s: subsequent, sequential, simultaneous, serendipitous, and scheduled. There is no particular or predetermined order to these. “Sequential is what must be done next. Subsequent is what is to be done later as part of current activity” (Glaser, 1998, p. 15). Simultaneous refers to the pieces of the process (collecting, theoretically sampling, constant comparative analyzing, coding, memoing, sorting, and writing) that will happen at the same time because the emphasis will continue to change as progress is made toward the final framework. Serendipitous refers to the need for the researcher to be constantly open to surprising new themes and ideas emerging from the data and data analysis. Finally, the project requires an overall rough schedule that sets out periods for “collecting the data, analyzing it, sorting memos and writing the product” (Glaser, 1998, p. 15).

In this study, the five S’s were reciprocal and ever-changing as the study moved forward and new ideas emerged and needed further analysis. At all points during the process, the researcher had task lists that included next steps (sequential) and plans for further analysis (subsequent), while simultaneously memoing and sorting and theoretically sampling. Serendipitous became a theme word for the project as new ideas would emerge and then be verified in other literature. Even after saturation, while doing
final theoretical sorting towards a final theory, new ways of looking at the categories would emerge. An original schedule was modified and expanded until all data was finally saturated and a theoretical framework was clarified and validated. The final timeline of the study is included as Appendix E.

Data Collection

Once committee and IRB approval was received in February 2010, the researcher was able to solicit recommendations from district superintendents and solicit participants. Initial interviews were conducted in March 2010. Interviewing is a primary tool for gathering data in grounded theory research (Glaser, 1998). Initial interviews were face-to-face with all of the participants. At the time of each initial interview, an Informed Consent form was provided to each participant (see Appendix F). The privacy of each participant was protected by utilizing a system of codes. Each principal was assigned an alphabetic letter. Specific demographic information provided either on the solicitation form or during interviews was summarized on a table that corresponded to the letter assignment. Then, the original information collection sheets, interview tapes, notes, and memos were coded and destroyed.

During initial and follow-up interviews, the researcher asked predetermined open-ended questions. The goals of the questions were to elicit narratives of the participants’ experiences and perceptions of school leadership and spirituality (Creswell, 2003). Glaser (1998) recommends taking field notes of the interview. That is, not taping the interview, but rather making notes of the responses as well as observational notes of the participant. However, others recommend the use of audio taping (Johnson & Christensen, 2004).
order to be present in the interview, and as additional triangulation, the researcher used a
digital recording device for the interviews. The researcher also used an interview protocol
for recording responses as well as reflective notes and observations (Creswell, 2003). By
using both instruments, the researcher was able to double check impressions and more
accurately record key phrases and quotes from the participants. Immediately upon
completing each interview, the researcher completed the notes on the interview with
observations and then coded, analyzed, and wrote memos – using constant comparison –
before doing another interview (Glaser, 1998).

**Theoretical Sampling**

Theoretical sampling is the hub of data collection and analysis. Glaser (1978)
calls it the “process of data collection for generating theory” (p. 36). It is the “prime
mover” of the research study (Glaser, 1998, p. 157). The researcher simultaneously
collected, coded, and analyzed the data while making decisions about what data to collect
next and where to find it (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). While in theoretical sampling, all data
(field notes, quotes, literature) was constantly compared for its relation to emerging
theories (Glaser, 1998). Rather than being used for verification of a preconceived
hypotheses, it was used to check on the emerging conceptual framework. The researcher
was able to follow their own emerging theoretical sensitivity (Glaser, 1978).

After initial data collection, theoretical sampling took over to determine what
additional data needed to be collected. This happened early in the interview process,
immediately after interviewing the initial five participants. “When the strategies of
theoretical sampling are employed, the researcher can make shifts of plan and emphasis
early in the research process so that the data gathered reflects what is occurring in the
field” (Glaser, 1978, p. 38). Emerging theories controlled the process of further data
collection. Using the initial interview protocol, the researcher was not hearing anything
new from the original five participants. The data was saturated. Three more participants
were added to the study and they were interviewed using the initial protocol. The purpose
of adding the additional participants was to determine whether those principals had the
same struggles or problems as the initial group. Glaser (1998), continually points out the
purpose of grounded theory is to find the common struggles for the participants in the
substantive area of the research. In order to meet Glaser’s (1992) requirements for fit and
workability, the new data from the second set of participants was also used to test the
emerging theory. Based on the emerging themes, the researcher did follow-up interviews
with all eight participants. The reason for doing follow-up interviews with all eight was
because as a whole they represented a fairly diverse group in terms of spiritual
backgrounds. The researcher was interested to see if their responses to the questions
would provide similar or different ways of dealing with the emerging common struggles.

**Member Checking**

The goal of grounded theory is to understand the actions, experiences, and
perceptions of participants as they relate to a particular phenomenon. Determining,
through an inductive process, what the common struggles are for participants is key to
grounded theory study. Glaser (1998) reminds researchers to “always keep in mind, that
grounded theory is an inductive approach that calls for emphasis on the experience of the
participants . . . the goal of grounded theory is to generate a theory that accounts for the
patterns of their behavior which are relevant” (p. 117). Towards that end, it was important that the responses and stories that were collected from each participant were reflective of their experiences and perceptions.

As the field notes were fleshed out with descriptions and themes, they were sent to the participants to determine if the participants felt the findings were accurate. The participants were encouraged to share reactions and provide clarification where it was determined that the findings did not accurately portray the participants’ experiences or perceptions (Creswell, 2003). Member checking was utilized a second time upon completion of the initial theoretical framework. The completed theory was sent out to the participants for feedback. Participants responded that the theory did, indeed, reflect their beliefs and feelings about the job and their characteristics as spiritual leaders.

**Literature as Data**

As mentioned in Chapter One, classic grounded theory does not include an in-depth literature review prior to field research (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Glaser (1998) has recommendations regarding literature reviews, one of which is to “not do a literature review in the substantive area and related areas where the research is to be done” (p. 67). Interlinking the concepts (such as spirituality and school leadership), prior to field research, could create preconceptions of theories. Rather, once the field research was completed, Glaser (1998) recommends the relevant literature be reviewed and “woven into the theory as more data for constant comparison” (p.67). As recommended by Glaser (1992, 1998), current literature was constantly compared and analyzed as data.
Miles and Huberman (1994) assert that it is important to have at least a “rudimentary conceptual framework” going into the research study (p. 17). While acknowledging an inductive grounded approach to gathering and analyzing data, Miles and Huberman (1994) believe the researcher should know something “conceptually about the phenomenon” even if not enough to develop a theory (p. 17). While grounded theory is concerned with ongoing research and discovery, it does not mean that the researcher is unprepared for the investigation. It is helpful to be familiar with the literature concerned with the given field.

The researcher did initial literature research for Chapter One, however as the researcher was beginning the sorting process, it became apparent that more in-depth knowledge of the literature was needed in order to more efficiently look at the codes for sorting. Simultaneous to interviewing, coding, memoing, and sorting; an intensive literature search also took place.

There is merit in open-mindedness and willingness to enter research settings looking for questions as well as answers, but it is impossible to embark upon research without some idea of what one is looking for and foolish not to make that quest explicit (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 17).

Data Analysis

As indicated with the “five S’s” discussed under Research Process, data collection and data analysis were “concurrent and continual activities” (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). As indicated above, the data being collected at this point in the research was from interviews and from the existing literature. Data analysis started as soon as the researcher had contact with the phenomenon being studied. It continued through the development of
the theory. Data analysis, which was a circular process of coding, memoing, and sampling continued through April 2010.

**Constant Comparative Method**

Data analysis in grounded theory is called the constant comparative method. It is the continual “interplay between the researcher, the data, and the developing theory” (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 383). Participants were listened to continually and thoughtfully, questions were constantly asked of the data, and analysis was compared to previous analysis. “Whether the material is research data, others’ ideas on it or the literature, it is to be compared to the ongoing data and memos for the purpose of generating the best fitting and working idea” (Glaser, 1978, p. 8). Through coding, memoing, and theoretical sampling; the grounded theory researcher was constantly relating data to ideas, then ideas to other ideas. Once categories became apparent, theoretical saturation was reached and no new data was searched for. Theoretical saturation happens when no new needs for data are happening within the categories being explored (Glaser, 1978). Throughout the process of constant comparison, it was important to stay self-aware. The researcher had to continually maintain attention on the processes involved (selection of interview questions, theoretical sampling, coding, memoing, and sorting), as the process was iterative and the theories were changing and developing (Miles & Huberman, 1994). A rudimental, visual representation of what the researcher was engaged in at this process follows (see Figure 1).
Figure 1. Constant comparative analysis for generating theory (Glaser, 1978, 1998).
Coding

One of the most important pieces of grounded theory data analysis is the coding process. Coding is a process for assigning units of meaning to information compiled during a study (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). At a very basic level, coding involves taking text or other data, segmenting sentences (or paragraphs) into conceptual categories, and labeling those categories with a term (Creswell, 2003). Those terms are called codes. In grounded theory work, coding happens by “fracturing the data, then conceptually grouping it into codes that they become the theory which explains what is happening in the data” (Glaser, 1978, p. 55). Researchers code by generating categories and their properties, by constant comparison of incidents and categories (Glaser, 1998). The code is of “central importance” in developing a final theory for the study (Glaser, 1978, p. 55). In classic grounded theory, there are two main types of codes (substantive and theoretical) which this study generated (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1998). The two types of coding often happened at the same time. However, more work happened within substantive coding in the beginning of the study. More work, in theoretical coding, happened as the researcher began to theoretically sort and integrate the memos and literature in May 2010.

Substantive Coding

Substantive codes summarize the empirical substance of the area of research (Glaser, 1978). Substantive coding is about the generation of categories and their properties by constant comparison of incidents and other categories. Substantive codes are about actions in the substantive area. They lend to the creation of images and have
“analytic power” (Glaser, 1998). They are often “in vivo”, meaning that they are specific, conceptual terms used by the participants in the research area.

**Open Coding**

The first phase in generating substantive codes is open coding. Open coding occurred anytime new data was collected. It was the first step of analysis. There were several rules that governed open coding. First, the researcher was always asking a set of questions of the data. The first, most general question: “What is this data a study of?” This question was meant to remind the researcher that what she thought she was originally studying might not stay that way. The next vital question continually asked was, “What category does this incident indicate?” or “What category or property of a category, of what part of the emerging theory, does this incident indicate?” These questions forced coding that earned “its way into the theory by its grounding in the data” (Glaser, 1978, p. 57). Finally, the researcher continually asked: “What is a participant’s main concern?” These three questions served to keep the researcher theoretically sensitive.

The second rule of open coding was to look at the data, which for this study was interview responses and literature, line by line, constantly coding each section. The section (word, phrase, or paragraph) was labeled. That section was then thought of as an incident. The label became a conceptual code. Glaser (1978) calls this phase of analyzing for conceptual ideas: “fracturing the data” (p. 45). At this point, the researcher was coding for anything and everything. Through open coding and constant comparative analysis, the researcher was able to see where theoretical sampling needed go next. While
open coding, the researcher was relating the emerging conceptual codes into categories. The goal was to generate “an emergent set of categories and their properties which fit, work and are relevant for integrating into a theory” (Glaser, 1978, p. 56).

During this study, the researcher read through each interview transcription with the research questions in mind as an initial starting point for coding. Conceptual codes were written on 3M sticky notes. Each participant’s codes were written on assigned colored sticky notes. The visual of this was important in determining the frequency and commonality of conceptual codes across the participants. The sticky notes were then placed on large poster papers, grouped by each research question. The poster papers were mounted to walls in the researcher’s home and these became known as “data walls”.

Throughout the project, as the researcher was pondering the data walls, memos could be written directly onto the poster paper near the emerging categories and concerns (see Appendix G).

Memoing

An important rule of coding, Glaser (1978) would say “vital”, is to “always interrupt coding to memo the idea” (p. 58). While asking the above questions about the data, the researcher was able to take advantage of the constant input of ideas. Memoing is what pulled the emerging theory together. It began as soon as the first piece of data was open coded and continued through the study until the researcher had a theoretical outline and was ready to write. Glaser (1998) describes a memo as any piece of writing, a few words to complex paragraphs that capture an emerging idea so it is not lost. Memos are the theorizing write-up of ideas about codes and their relationships. Researchers speak of
memoing as writing in a stream of consciousness. As coding became more complex because theoretical categories were beginning to emerge, often simultaneously, memoing became important in keeping track of the complexity (Glaser, 1998). Miles and Huberman (1994) liken memo writing to generating “minitheories” because the memos pose questions and explanations of the codes and emerging categories and properties (p. 88). During the recursive process of coding, collecting, analyzing, theoretical sampling and sorting, memos provided the “integrative binding and power” to pull all of it into a grounded theory (Glaser, 1998, p. 177).

Selective Coding

Eventually, the categories, through additional theoretical sampling and analysis became saturated. That is, new categories were no longer emerging and nothing was occurring as a surprise. It was time to selectively code for the core category and related categories through analyzing and memoing. As the researcher constantly compared incidents and concepts, they were consciously looking for the core category. During all coding, the researcher was alert for the main concern or problem for the participants. The following criteria were used to help the researcher make judgments about the core category:

- It must be central, that is related to as many other categories and their properties as possible and more than other candidates for the core category.
- It takes more time to saturate than other categories.
- It relates meaningfuly and easily with other categories.
- It has clear and grabbling implications for formal theory.
• It has considerable carry-through, carrying the researcher through the process by its relevance and explanatory power (Glaser, 1978, p. 96).

In coding for the core category, Glaser (1998) reminds: “Participants most often have one main concern and one core process or category for resolving it. It will usually emerge full blast, with many substantive, in vivo, categories and properties surrounding (by theoretical relationships) the concern and the core category” (p. 150). It became evident that the participants in this study all had one main concern: How to make a significant difference in the lives of all kids, while managing all the complexities and concerns of a principal’s professional life. Although not all school leaders of the study could articulate it, the way they resolve that concern is through spiritual leadership. Once that category emerged, it became evident that it was the main or core category. It did emerge full blast. As the researcher continued to analyze and memo, the remaining categories either proved to have a relationship to the core category or were eliminated.

After coding any, and all, new data into substantive codes, and then selectively coding for fit, relevance, and workability the researcher then sorted and coded for theory.

**Theoretical Sorting**

Sorting is the last stage in the grounded theory process before developing a theoretical framework and writing up the study. This is a hands-on physical act of sorting piles of memos into an outline of the emerging theory, showing relationships between concepts. In this stage, the researcher was constantly moving back and forth between memos, potential propositions, and a potential outline of theory. This process stimulated more memos, and required more data collection as it was highly generative. It was at this
stage that relevant literature in the substantive area was reviewed and treated as more data to code and compare with what had already been coded and generated (Glaser, 1998). In this final stage, the researcher finds the theoretical code which best organizes the substantive codes and all relationships become clear.

For this study, the researcher wrote the emerging categories and properties of categories on 4x5 index cards. The cards were manually placed on a large table. The cards were sorted, and often times re-sorted, into supporting categories that related to the core category. Each of the supporting categories supported the resolution of the main concern of the participants. The core category of spiritual leadership was supported by five other categories: soul work, wholeness, moral authority, transformative leadership, and connector (see Table 1). Fourteen sub-categories were identified: vocation, mission, journey, congruency, balance, attention, sincerity, servant leadership, prophetic spirituality, principled leadership, purposive leadership, community, culture, and symbolic soul. Relevant literature was also incorporated into the cards and more memos were written regarding the possible relationships of the categories. Propositions were developed simultaneously to the memoing of the relationships. The propositions and memoing indicated a progressive and iterative relationship of the categories. This is when theoretical coding took over.

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<th>Table 1. Categories</th>
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</table>
Theoretical Coding

Theoretical codes “describe the world” by organizing ideas or experiences into a framework (Glaser, 1978, p. 72). Theoretical codes help researchers maintain their “conceptual level in writing about concepts and their interrelations” (Glaser, 1978, p. 73). Glaser (1998) points out that a theoretical code gives a concept a new perspective. There are 100’s of theoretical codes and as part of this study, the researcher read the research literature in order to increase theoretical sensitivity. The goal of a grounded theory researcher is to have a repertoire of as many theoretical codes as possible.

Theoretical coding is a process whereby the data that emerge are conceptualized, integrated into a theory, and woven back together again (Glaser, 1978). The researcher paid attention to the substantive codes and how the core category and supporting categories related to each other. This required the researcher to “pay attention to ideas that were memoed, looking for similarities, connections, and underlying uniformities” (Smith, 2009, p. 64). While paying attention to the emerging theory, the researcher was continuing to consider a broad range of literature. This is important because the literature “ties together underlying similarities in phenomena normally not associated with each other . . . resulting in a theory with stronger internal validity, wider generalizability, and higher conceptual level” (Eisenhardt, 2002, p. 25). This literature is presented with the categories in Chapter Three. The researcher then applied a theoretical model to the data. Glaser (1978, 1998), over and over, emphasizes how important it is that the model is not forced beforehand, but that it emerges during the constant comparative process. The researcher considered several theoretical coding families during sorting and coding.
(Glaser, 1978, 1998). Initially, the data seemed to fit Interactive Family framework. However, Glaser (1978) writes that this family is used when the analyst cannot say which of the categories comes first in the theory. As the researcher continued to physically theoretically sort the category cards, it was noticed that the categories did have a progression. The most logical progression of the cards was from left to right on the sorting table. The categories did progress in stages from the soul work category through to the connector category. It was determined that the Process Family framework best fit the emerging theory. The framework is one of processes, where all the categories build on each other over time. Words used in relation to this coding family are: stages, phases, progressions, passages, transitions, steps, and cycling. The processing refers to something happening over time and is a way to group two or more “sequencing parts to a phenomenon” (Glaser, 1978, p. 74). The stages of spiritual leadership deepen as a school leader progresses through their career. The theoretical framework of process captures the progressive pattern of the categories. This will be explained more fully in the next chapters. The framework is represented by the model below (see Figure 2).
Glaser (1998) considers the completed sort the first draft of the writing, as the sort will have organized the concepts into a theory. Theory should be written so concepts are mixed with description in words, tables, or figures to optimize readability. Glaser (1998) advises the writer to “think theoretical codes, write substantive codes” (p. 197). As the researcher finished the writing, it was important to weave relevant literature into the writing. True “scholarly incorporation of literature” grounded the theory in the literature.
and legitimizes the grounded theory as a contribution to a substantive area (Glaser, 1998, p. 207).

Although the theory was ready to write, as a result of the sorting, the researcher learned much about the substantive area and the emerged theory during the act of writing up the findings. Writing is part of the act of analysis in qualitative research. It is “intrinsic” to the analysis, theory, and findings (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

**Trustworthiness and Credibility**

In order to maintain trustworthiness and credibility in this study, the researcher took three steps: a) the researcher guarded against researcher bias, b) triangulation was built into the data collection and analysis process, and c) the theory was evaluated using Glaserian criteria.

While the researcher acknowledged her professional interests in this study earlier in this chapter, she was also careful not to be influenced by her interests. The researcher suspended all pre-knowledge of the substantive area (Glaser, 1992). The researcher determinedly adhered to the data collection process, the coding and memoing process, and the sorting process. When the codes seemed as if they might not produce any cohesive category, the researcher purposely kept any prior knowledge from influencing the sorting. Instead, more data was collected in the form of interviews and literature.

Triangulation was built into the data collection process by the researcher “self-consciously” setting out to collect and double-check findings (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 267). The interviews were digitally taped so the researcher could be present in the actual interview, and so the researcher could hear the interview again as they transcribed
the interview and checked the transcription against field notes. Member checking occurred, once the interviews were transcribed and synthesized. The participants were given a mini-narrative of the impressions the researcher had gathered. At that time, the participants gave clarification or confirmation to the impressions. Once the findings were written in report form, they were sent out to the participants. This gave the participants an opportunity to evaluate the major findings of the study, a “venerated practice” in qualitative research (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 275). Of the seven that responded, all said they agreed with the findings and provided further reflections on the subject.

Grounded theory is the “systematic generation of theory from data acquired by a rigorous research method” (Glaser, 1998, p.3). It has its own criteria for evaluation. The intent of the researcher of this study was to follow classic grounded theory processes rigorously so that the study would be considered credible. Glaser (1998) reports that grounded theory’s “academic roots are from the traditionally known highest quality sociological schools of thought, theory and methods” (p. 3). This should legitimize its use. By the use of constant comparison, grounded theory is its own constant verification. Glaser (1998) asserts the emerged theory should be able to hold up to the following questions:

1. Does the theory work to explain relevant behavior in the substantive area of the research?
2. Does it have relevance to the people in the substantive field?
3. Does the theory fit the substantive area?
4. Is it readily modifiable as new data emerge? (p. 17)
These questions will be further addressed at the end of the next chapter. The theory holds up to these questions and, as the researcher has been rigorous enough, the “proof” can be seen in the outcome (Glaser, 1998, p.17).

Conclusion

This chapter described the methodology that was used in developing a framework to describe the role that spirituality plays in the lives of school principals. The purpose of the study was outlined, research questions were presented, and the design of the research was explained. Reasons for choosing classic grounded theory as the methodology for the study were articulated. Following that, procedures that were consistent with grounded theory research were presented along with the literature that was used to guide the study. Finally, the verification process to create trustworthiness and credibility in the study was explained.

Chapter Three presents the findings from the research process. Data collection results, which include data from participant interviews as well as a more thorough literature review and analysis, are detailed.
Chapter Three: Findings

Introduction

This chapter presents a theoretical explanation to describe the role that spirituality plays in school leadership. The explanation shows the relationships among the participants’ experiences, concepts, and the relevant literature. The explanation also answers the four questions that guided this study.

Research Questions

The essential question of this study was to determine what role spirituality plays in the professional lives of public elementary school principals. These are the areas the study was seeking to explore within that essential question:

- What are their purposes as school principals? What drives that purpose?
- Are there specific practices that reflect spiritually-centered school leadership?
- How does spirituality contribute to principals’ longevity in the profession?

The purpose of this grounded-theory study was to investigate public school principals in difficult or diverse elementary settings and then generate a theory or framework that explained what role spirituality plays in school leaders’ professional lives. A description of the principals that participated in this study is presented in this chapter. The core categories and their supporting sub-categories are then presented, along with an explanation of how they answer the participants’ leadership challenge; How to be
a school leader that makes a significant difference in the lives of kids while managing all the complexities and concerns of a principal’s professional life. An integrated set of propositions that were generated through the grounded theory study are presented. The theoretical framework that was developed as a result of this study is also presented in this chapter. This theory is grounded in the data that was uncovered during the investigation.

Participants

As discussed in Chapter Two, of the twelve principals who responded affirmatively to the initial invitation to participate, ten were determined to match the seven year requirement and offered the most diversity in school settings and ages. Of those, five were contacted for initial interviews. Using theoretical sampling, three more were subsequently contacted for interviews. Due to the small participant sample size, individual biographical sketches of the participants are not included in this study. This is to ensure the participants’ confidentiality. However, knowing that we are the sum of our experiences, summary information of the participants is included so the reader is aware of the backgrounds of the participants in total. This summary includes the gender makeup of the sample, whether they consider themselves to be spiritual, and the participants’ religious up-bringing (see Table 2). Prior to the interviews, it was unknown whether the participants considered themselves to be spiritual or not. The participants were asked, in follow up interviews, if they considered themselves to be spiritual. All of the participants did consider themselves to be spiritual. They also provided their own definitions of spirituality. These were compared to this study’s working definition of spirituality for
congruence. This study used the following definition for spirituality: the diverse ways we acknowledge the soul’s desire to be connected with all of life’s energy and humanity.

Table 2. Descriptive Data of the Eight Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptive Data of the Eight Participants</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consider Themselves to be Spiritual</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Upbringing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptist</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The ages of the eight participants range from 36 – 51, with the average age being 44. They have 7 – 25 years of leadership experience, with the average being 13 years. Of the six raised with a religious tradition; one leader is now no longer practicing, one attends an Episcopalian church, one mixes Catholic and Buddhist belief systems, and three consider themselves Protestant. Of the two leaders that were not raised with a particular religious tradition; one now identifies with a Protestant main-stream denomination, and one observes the “Hallmark holidays”.

Theoretical Model

Using grounded theory methodology; participants were interviewed and their responses were coded, memoed, and sorted. Follow-up interviews and emails, along with existing literature in the field, were also coded and analyzed using constant comparison. This resulted in the core category of spiritual leadership. Through the constant
comparative method, the other categories and properties that were most consistently present in the data from the eight participants was considered. The following five categories were most related to the core category and have sub-categories associated with each (see Table 3).

**Table 3. Categories and Sub-Categories**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories and Sub-Categories</th>
<th>Substantive Code</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Core Category</td>
<td>Spiritual Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category 1</td>
<td>Soul Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-category</td>
<td>Vocation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-category</td>
<td>Mission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-category</td>
<td>Journey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category 2</td>
<td>Wholeness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-category</td>
<td>Congruency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-category</td>
<td>Balance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category 3</td>
<td>Moral Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-category</td>
<td>Attention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-category</td>
<td>Sincerity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-category</td>
<td>Servant Leadership</td>
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<tr>
<td>Category 4</td>
<td>Transformative Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-category</td>
<td>Prophetic Spirituality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-category</td>
<td>Principled Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-category</td>
<td>Purposive Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category 5</td>
<td>Connector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-category</td>
<td>Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-category</td>
<td>Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-category</td>
<td>Symbolic Soul</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

In writing the results of this grounded theory study, the core category is described. This includes how the core category works to answer the leadership challenge of the participants. The rest of the categories are then described, along with their sub-categories.
and properties, and how they relate to the core category. Relevant literature is also included as it relates to the categories. Finally, propositions are presented that are a result of the findings.

**Core Category: Spiritual Leadership**

The purpose of this study was to explore and develop a framework that would explain the role spirituality plays in the professional lives of school leaders. In an effort to not lead the participants into a discussion of spirituality, that aspect of the study was not articulated in the beginning of each initial interview. All eight participants were asked the following as the first three questions of each initial interview:

1. What does effective school leadership mean to you,
2. Why did you enter this profession,
3. How would you describe your leadership?

Words common to aspects of spiritual leadership emerged from all eight. The participants talked about effective school leadership as being a service to the school community, helping others be their best, and connecting with kids at a deeper level. They felt they had been called to the profession, that it was a part of who they were, or that God had placed them in the job. When describing their own leadership they described themselves as transparent, concerned for kids, centered, servant leaders, and relational.

While not all the participants identified with a particular religious tradition, they all self-identified themselves as spiritual in subsequent interviews. Additionally, as part of continued theoretical sampling, each participant provided their own definition of spirituality. These will be referenced throughout this chapter. In final interviews,
participants were asked what the term spiritual leadership meant to them. Their responses included believing in a higher power and allowing that power to guide their work, allowing soul to be part of leadership, making a difference for kids because it’s the right thing, and having integrity.

Rebore and Walmsley, in *Genuine School Leadership* (2009) contend that every school leader is spiritual. They write that spirituality is “an innate quality” in school leaders and that “the way administrators use spiritual leadership can positively or negatively” affect a school (p. 10). Patterson and colleagues found two unifying threads in leaders who are resilient: a “belief in a cause beyond one’s self”; and a “belief in a Universal strength greater than one’s self” (Patterson, Goens, & Reed, 2009, p. 89). Wheatley (2005) believes that leadership is spiritual work and that leaders must enter into the “domain of spiritual traditions” if they are to succeed (p. 126).

Spiritual leadership is not “holier-than-thou” behavior (Thompson, 2005, p. 4). It is also not a way to get religion into public schools. It is leading from a spiritual base, which for Thompson (2005) is defined as a “state of mind or consciousness that enables one to perceive deeper levels of experience, meaning, values, and purpose than can be perceived from a strictly materialistic vantage point” (p. 5). For Thompson (2005) spiritual leadership is at the “heart” of school leadership (p. 4). Spiritual leadership is the “divine spark that guides you as you live your own life and lead others toward a brighter future” (Houston & Sokolow, 2006, p. xiv). Finally, Glanz (2006) believes that school leadership is a spiritual calling, hence school leadership is spiritual leadership.
Resolving the Main Concern

The purpose of grounded theory is to be able to identify the concerns that are common to a study’s participants (Glaser, 1998). Over and over, the participants in this study talked about their struggles with the job: isolation, loneliness, negative or ineffective teachers, demands of standardized testing and reporting, decisions by central offices, relentless emails, and lack of time to get it all done. As Principal E said, “This work isn’t supposed to suck!”

At the same time, the participants want their work to be meaningful. While they may lead schools in diverse or difficult settings, they want those schools to excel. They want to do the very best they can for every student they serve. While they worry about meeting the needs of the whole child, they also want to know that they can see evidence of student learning. The participants know that many of their students come from homes of poverty and they want to provide the students a way out of that poverty. They want to ensure they are meeting the needs of every child. Thus this study’s participants’ main concern or leadership challenge: How to be a school leader that makes a significant difference in the lives of all kids, while managing all the complexities and concerns of a principal’s professional life. Through the progressive categories of soul work, wholeness, moral authority, transformative leadership, and connector, spiritual leadership is the way the participants resolve that concern. Spiritual leadership is being able to “bridge the abyss that lies between either/or” (Houston & Sokolow, 2006, p. xii). Spiritual leadership is the whole of the effective school leader and contains the five progressive categories (see Figure 3).
Category 1: Soul Work

Spirituality, to me, is believing that things work out the way they are supposed to and you are only given what you can handle. I think it also means believing in yourself and having faith in others. In relation to school leadership, I think of it as staying positive, focused, and doing what is right to help students (Principal F).

Houston (2008) calls the work of school leadership “soul work” because the work “touches the deepest parts of who we are” (p. 2). The study participants articulated the reasons that they were in school leadership as: being called, knowing they were making a difference for kids, breaking the cycle of poverty. More than one principal started to cry when they talked about the deep passion they had for the job, their students, and their communities. The job of principal is “soul craft” as described by Cornel West (as cited in Houston, 2008, p. 8). It is “more of a calling and a mission than it is a job” (Houston,
Through theoretical sorting, the sub-categories of vocation, mission, and journey emerged as the category Soul Work (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4. Category 1: Soul Work**

**Sub-category: Vocation**

“I entered this work to make a difference in the lives of kids. I’ve known since I was eighteen that this was my calling” (Principal D). The participants in this study articulated an internal drive for the job – it is who they are. They believed they were placed in the position for a reason, whether or not they believe in God. “Everyone has a purpose” (Principal A). “God has called me to be in education” (Principal H). Some of the participants entered into school leadership early in their careers, and for others the principalship is a second career. Some of the participants left, or contemplated leaving
the profession, but found themselves back in the work and happy to be so. One principal was considering leaving the profession after a particularly grueling and difficult year. She was doing a lot of soul searching and questioning whether she should even be in education. She went to a leadership coach who helped her land on who she really was. She determined that she was at her best when working in a school. A sense of vocation is what brought three of the participants back to their jobs after being humiliated or embarrassed in front of others. “I’m meant to be with kids. I couldn’t walk away from my work” (Principal E).

Rebore and Walmsley (2009) have found that those in education have chosen their profession because they see a “societal need to work in a helping profession where they can influence and teach children in a positive way” (p. 11). They state that the choice of a vocation is based on a spiritual calling. Danah Zohar (2005) defines a sense of vocation as “feeling called upon to serve, to give something back” (p. 47). Palmer (2007) articulates vocation as life work that someone is gifted at and called to do . . . a “place of intersection between inner self and outer world” (p. 31). He believes that if a person is meant to do the work, it will make them glad over a long time and in spite of difficult days (Palmer, 2007). Wheatley (2002) writes that a vocation is work we are meant to do. The work is given to us, we don’t decide that we want do it. A vocation originates from outside of us. Our work is part of a larger purpose. Gary Zukav (2000) calls doing work that a person is meant to do a sacred task, “part of the agreement that your soul made with the Universe before you were born. When you are doing it, you are happy and fulfilled . . . in a special and wonderful place” (p. 241).
**Sub-category: Mission**

The properties of mission are kids, making a difference, and changing the world. Questions that elicited the responses, which eventually became codes and sorted into this sub-category, had to do with values, purpose, and drive. All of the participants referred to some form of making a difference for kids or a passion for kids in talking about why they do the work they do and why they continue despite the complexities of their professional lives:

“All I’m determined to break the cycle of poverty through my leadership” (Principal B).

“All I want to show kids I believe in them, give them a way out of poverty” (Principal F).

“All I have a passion for kids” (Principal A).

The participants were consistent in the belief that their mission or purpose was to make a difference in the lives of kids through their leadership in their schools. “It is my mission to get this school in a good place, systemically, for kids within three to seven years” (Principal B). As all the participants serve in high poverty or diverse schools, they all articulated their value of an effective education as a way for their students to succeed in life. A few of the participants offered up personal childhood stories of poverty, homelessness, and/or abuse as motivators for their mission.

The participants also felt that their leadership could make a difference in the school community, not only with students but with staff, parents, and the community their school serves. They viewed their purpose as being about “changing the world and
impacting people’s lives” (Principal G). Principal D felt it was important in her work to be a “blessing to all I come in contact with.”

In Covey’s book, *The 8th habit: From effectiveness to greatness* (2004), the first and most important task in developing a personal plan is to develop your mission and values. Thompson (2005) talks about the importance of core values as an anchor; values do not indicate where a person is trying to go, but they do describe the reason for being. He states there are two essential questions define core values: who are we and what is our purpose? Pellicer (2003) believes that there is no other question that a leader should ask of themselves on a regular basis than, “What do I care about?” (p. 27). This question is critical because what a leader cares about defines who they are as a human being and leader. “What you truly care about will dictate the things you will be passionate about, the things you will fight for, sacrifice for, and in extreme cases, even die for. Caring is the central quality that gives human beings a purpose in life. . .even the will to live!” (Pellicer, 2003, p. 27). The participants in this study all care passionately about making a difference in the lives of their students. It is their mission.

**Sub-category: Journey**

“Follow the highway and you’ll probably arrive at a destination; follow your heart and you may leave a trail” (Bolman & Deal, 2001, p. 11).

When asked what made them return to the principalship day after day, despite the challenges of the job, the participants talked about their calling and their desire to see the journey through. They all had a belief that they were making a difference. They talked about the work being the “right work”, “good work”, and “important work”. The
participants were asked, in follow-up interviews, what they thought contributed to principal longevity. Phrases such as faith in your purpose, faith in God, commitment to the work, and love for kids came up over and over. The participants look at the challenges of the job as opportunities for growth and as a reason to come back day after day. Principal G uses the principle of Circle of Influence to keep him going (see Figure 5). Others mentioned positive affirmations such as seeing the cup as always half full, seeking higher ground, turning the other cheek, and presuming positive intent. Principal E said, “I just say to myself, today can’t be worse than yesterday!” Principal C, when faced with challenges from central office or the state, says that she “focuses on my own building – on what I can do something about.” When the challenges of the job get too hard, many of the participants said that they would pray, meditate, or turn to their faith. Principal H goes for long walks and prays in “God’s Cathedral” – the outdoors. When asked about leaving the job, none of the participants could see themselves leaving their buildings for at least a few more years; they have too much work to do. As Principal B stated, “This is my mission. Retirement would be for nothing until the mission is accomplished.”
The decision to begin a school leadership journey and the “conviction to persevere must rest on faith” (Bolman & Deal, 2001, p. 65). This journey that school leaders embark on is difficult and complex. It can be wearing day after day. “Once a person has consciously embraced his or her leadership role and embarked on an inner journey to stay in touch with the soul’s imperatives, life can and usually does get challenging” (Intrator, 2007, p. xxxiv). As Principal B said, “You have to love this job. It is the hardest job. But it revolves around something so precious – kids!” This is the “sacred” narrative that gives principals their sense of a larger purpose (Palmer, 2007, 114). “Only by connecting to our purpose do we come to understand and to accept the personal sacrifices we must make every day. . . spirituality allows the leader to refill the well and to progress toward an uncertain future (Kohn, 2008, p. 89). Spirituality provides a way of thinking that serves leaders in times of adversity. During times of sustained stress or unexpected crisis, resilient leaders turn to spiritual reflection (Patterson, Goens, & Reed, 2009).
Spiritual school leadership means staying the course, making commitments, and keeping them. “Leaders must persevere before they can prevail” (Houston, 2008, p. 62). Bolman and Deal (2001) write that leadership work, the “life journey, is a continuing opportunity to deepen your faith, develop your gifts, and enhance your contribution to what the world becomes (p. 236). The path from soul work leads next to wholeness.

**Category 2: Wholeness**

Spirituality is a component of the human experience. For me, there is the social/emotional, physical, and spiritual components that create a whole person. Emotional and physical self are easier to understand. Spirit refers to belief in larger things outside myself, things that last outside of me (Principal A).

The importance of sub-categories of congruency and balance were evident in every interaction with every participant in this study (see Figure 6). The participants talked about the need: to know themselves, to acknowledge the connection to a higher power, to maintain emotional/physical/spiritual habits, and to keep in mind a holistic perspective for themselves. This need to connect head and heart; soul and role; mind, body, and spirit is a need for what Palmer (2004) calls “wholeness” (p. 2).
Sub-category: Congruency

The participants in this study all articulated the intensity of the job and the need to acknowledge that some sense of spirit or soul is necessary. “This job requires your whole heart and soul” (Principal G). Principal B feels “you need a healthy spirit, a good sense of self”. Principal E said it was important that principals “don’t lose their souls” in the performance of their job. Principal A felt it was important to have a “oneness with yourself” and to know your own-self well. Other participants articulated the need to keep God as their guide in the principalship. Nearly all of the participants expressed the need to lead with integrity.
Tolle (2005) asserts that it is important to find out who you truly are before you can become one with the Universe. The ancient Greeks were told to “gnothi seauton”, to know themselves (Tolle, 2005, p. 185). Early Christians were told: “Examine yourselves, to see whether you are holding to your faith” (2 Cor. 13:5 Revised Standard Version). Palmer (2007) writes that “we cannot know the great things of the universe until we know ourselves” (p. 113). West (2003) proposes a “Socratic spirituality” which asks questions about one’s self, society, and world but begins with examining ourselves (p. 11). Markova (2008) believes that in order for school leaders to be comfortable with the enormous changes and unknown future that face leaders, they “must relearn to become comfortable with the inner aspect” of themselves (p. 42). School leaders have to lead from within. She writes: “If we are bereft of our relationship with the unknown, we cannot be aware of what stories are trying to be born in us at any given moment” (Markova, 2008, p. 42). When we identify our inner most self, we identify our soul.

Our roles, our identity, are what we present to the outer world. Palmer (2007) defines identity as the intersection of the diverse forces that make up a person’s life. To live life, to live our role or identity, without acknowledging our souls is to live a “divided life” (Palmer, 2004, p.7). Dantley (2005) asserts that school leaders need to understand that “faith is as much an integral part of our secular lives as it is the religious” (p. 6). School leadership might be more effective if “roles were more deeply informed by the trust that is in our souls” (Palmer, 2004, p. 16).

Integrity, as defined by Palmer (2007), is relating to the forces that make up a person’s identity in ways that bring wholeness, “rejoining soul and role” (p. 13). Integrity
Congruency in school leadership occurs when a person’s words and actions are consistent with their beliefs and values (Pellicer, 2003). Sergiovanni (2007) writes that “each principal must find her or his way, develop her or his approach if the heart, head, and hand of leadership are to come together in the form of successful principalship practice” (p. 20). Covey’s (2004) “whole-person approach” to effective leadership is an integration of body, mind, heart, and soul (p. 313). Congruency then is the integration of a school leader’s identity and soul.

**Sub-category: Balance**

Over 100 codes were produced as the result of asking the following two questions: a) How do you like to begin and end your day, and b) what personal practices/habits are important to your work? However, when sorted using constant comparative analysis, the codes produced 48 concepts. These concepts were sorted into the three properties of emotional, physical, and spiritual.

Every participant spoke of the need for balance in their lives. Balance between personal and professional lives, and balance between the routines of the daily professional life. All of the participants struggle with having enough time in the day to do all they need or desire to do. However, all of the participants have delineated very tight schedules that include getting up early, leaving the office no later than a certain time, and drawing the day to a close with specific routines and rituals. They have all scheduled in
time to take care of their physical, emotional, and spiritual selves. These practices are individualistic. They involve some form of communion with their God, ritualistic practices, prayer, or meditation. For some spiritual practices involve “walking in the woods, jogging, writing in a journal, or finding ways of reconnecting to the passionate core of their values and beliefs” (Thompson, 2008, p. 164). Bolman and Deal (2001) would include “studying scriptures, singing hymns, following prescribed rituals, journeying to sacred places, and contemplating nature” (p. 63). Other spiritual practices or reflection included daily runs through a neighborhood, walking in the park, journal writing and reflection, time spent with family, extended quiet time alone for contemplation, or by “looking upward to the deity in the form of organized religion” (Patterson, Goens, & Reed, 2009, p. 92). The following were in response to the question: What personal practices/habits are important to your work?

“I attend church – I’m very involved – it keeps me grounded/connected”

(Principal G).

“I pray that things will work out” (Principal F).

“Prayer – for work/students, I ask for help to be a blessing with those I come in contact with” (Principal D).

“Prayer provides a oneness with myself and the universe” (Principal B).

“I write everything down, reflect on everything” (Principal F).

“I play tennis with my kids at least twice a week. We skied 25 times this year. I golf” (Principal G).
As Thompson (2005) writes, by scheduling and being disciplined in spiritual practices, school leaders are able to uncover more of what is hidden: “more inspiration, more wisdom, more creative energy, more grounding, and a greater ability to move or flow with what is naturally unfolding” (p. 44). All eight of the participants use the early morning hours for devotionals and prayer, running, or for listening to reflective music. Thompson (2005) writes that the quiet of early morning is “an indispensable sanctuary for gaining spiritual ground” (p. 41). Below are some answers to the question: How do you usually start your day?

“I run almost every morning. I need it to manage my stress. I know that” (Principal B).

“Every morning at five, I take the dog for a walk. Then I’m to the rec. center by six thirty to run” (Principal A).

“Breakfast with young son at table, everyday” (Principal F).

“I have a prayer by my bathroom sink. I read it each morning. It helps me be courageous” (Principal B).

“I have a long commute so I listen to music, pray for kids, mother, partner, upcoming hard conversations” (Principal C).

“10-15 minutes of daily devotion and prayer while I eat breakfast. I pray for this place [school], pray we make the right decisions, pray students won’t do dumb things” (Principal G).
“I sit in the dark with coffee for about an hour, in prayer and meditation. It centers me. I pray for the family, for the day. I listen to spiritual music on the way to work – it sets the tone for the day” (Principal H).

By five, I’m feeding the horses and thinking about the day. I pray and listen to praise music while I’m driving in” (Principal D).

By the time they go to bed, the participants have found time for exercise, walking dogs, yoga, playing with children, riding and feeding horses, praying while walking, journaling, contemplating nature, and having meals with families. When asked, “How do you like to end your day”, the participants’ responses included the following:

“Yoga, twice a week. It saved my life. I set my intention, ask for help sometimes for myself, sometimes for how to help families, sometimes on work. It helps me let go of crap” (Principal B).

“Try to run – I lose part of myself when I’m not running” (Principal F).

“Run or exercise. It is important – helps me think – pivotal – I take deep breaths – let energy go – work hard – wear myself out and then enter into evening time for family and new thinking about work” (Principal C).

“Long runs – provides balance – it’s my yoga. I can’t skip more than four days or I’m not the person I want to be” (Principal A).

“I work out – exercise is important – especially outdoors – I like to pray while walking” (Principal H).

“I ride my horse – it’s my balance” (Principal D).
“I have a ritualized existence: leave work about six-ish, change out of work clothes, make dinner, and clean the kitchen. That is my closure to sleep” (Principal A).

“I pray on way home, reflect about decisions or conversations from the day” (Principal G).

“Pray before bed – the Lord’s prayer” (Principal H).

A balanced life for school leaders means staying in balance: emotionally, physically, and spiritually. “When needs in one or more of these areas are ignored, we get into trouble” (Patterson et al., 2009, p. 97). Dantley (2005) writes that there is an “intimate relationship between the body and the soul” (p. 5). For the participants, the relationship between the physical, the emotional, and the physical is very much interrelated. Wheatley (2005) believes it is “essential” to attend to a leader’s personal spiritual health as a prerequisite for physical and emotional health. She suggests some practices that maintain a sense of focus and peace: start the day off peacefully, learn to be mindful, slow things down, create personal measures, expect surprise, and practice gratefulness.

While this researcher sorted the habits/practices/routines/rituals into the three properties of physical, emotional, and spiritual, the participants see the practices in more of a holistic perspective. They describe exercise as essential to their spiritual well-being. They describe emotional practices and spiritual practices as important to their physical well-being. They describe the balance between the domains to be essential to their effectiveness as a school leader. “Highly effective principals are emotionally, physically, and spiritually healthy individuals” (McEwan, 2003, p. 167). The physical, emotional,
and spiritual elements of a person interact to shape the “overall health and resilience” of school leaders (Patterson et al., 2009, p. 83).

“The search for meaning, purpose, wholeness, and integration is a constant, never-ending task. To confine this search to one day a week or after hours violates people’s basic sense of integrity, of being whole persons. In short, soul is not something one leaves at home” (Bolman & Deal, 2001, p. 43). Spiritual school leaders have congruency and balance which make up their wholeness. Their soul work becomes wholeness, which then leads to moral authority.

**Category 3: Moral Authority**

Spirituality means living in accordance with my faith, walking the walk not just talking the talk (Principal D).

Spirituality is the thing that provides that energy when I feel I have none left in the tank. It is the part of me that becomes emotional over issues that push my buttons and over the things that make me joyful. In this role, I think it is the ever present desire to push my limits and make a difference (Principal E).

Moral authority, as defined by Covey (2004), is the gaining of authority or influence through tightly held values and principles. As has been discussed above, all the participants in this study value, highly, the success of the students in their schools. They have made a commitment to ensure achievement for all of their students and to do so through modeling that commitment. Through the three questions a) when do you feel most alive in your work, b) how would you describe your leadership, and c) what drives you in your work; the properties of attention, sincerity, and servant leadership emerged (see Figure 7).
Figure 7. Category 3: Moral Authority

Sub-category: Attention

I’m risking so much to be at this school. What do I have to lose? I just go after it all. I’m much more comfortable telling people what I believe. I’m doing what I believe is the right thing – bottom line is that kids need help today. We have to make a difference for the hardest population now. Just do it (Principal B).

“I’m most alive in my work when I’m in instructional conversations or when a teacher comes in and wants to talk about instruction” (Principal G).

“I want to make the school better. We need better achievement. I need to give teachers the tools to be effective. I focus on people’s strengths. I can’t give up on a bad teacher; I believe in you, I’m going to help you be better” (Principal C).
The participants in this study give their attention to the things that can make a
difference in the lives of their students. They are disciplined, using words and phrases
such as: perseverance, consistent, commitment, dedication, drive, competitive, just do it,
do what matters, and we can do whatever needs to be done. These words and phrases are
consistent with the traits Covey (2004) has identified for discipline (p. 67). Discipline is
the physical component of Covey’s (2004) whole-person paradigm. The participants are
focused in having hard conversations about instructional effectiveness. They work with
teachers to change their practices. But they are also driven by their mission for kids, their
moral imperative. If teachers are incompetent and won’t – or can’t – change, they are
driven and focused in moving those teachers out of the profession.

The participants in this study also direct their energy toward what they can
change. “I try to understand the viewpoints of all my teachers. But I put my energy into
the larger group, not the negative group. Positive teachers get 100% of my attention and I
ignore the others” (Principal B). Principal G spoke about the frustration with a court
truancy case. He had been to court five times on one individual parent. “I’ve been
attacked, verbally. I keep wondering why I am doing this. But I know why, because it
matters. I’m doing what I think is right” (Principal G). The participants pay attention to
the systems and structures in their schools. They confront issues, ask hard questions, and
have hard conversations. They pay attention to helping teachers improve, and, as
Principal B stated above: they pay attention to the positive teachers.

Houston and Sokolow (2006) write that attention is the way to focus energy.
Attention focuses the physical, emotional, and spiritual energy for a purpose. Principal B
understands this principle: “where attention goes, energy flows” (Houston & Sokolow, 2006, p. 20). If you want something to thrive and grow, you pay attention to it. If you want it go away, you intentionally ignore it. Sergiovanni (2007) states that attention is the “ability to focus others on values, ideas, goals, and purposes that bring people together and that provide a rationale, a source of authority for what goes on in the school” (p. 134). Houston and Sokolow (2006) believe that when attention is aligned with higher aspects of a leader’s being and purposes, “the Universe will try to assist you and support you in many seen and unseen ways” (p. 21).

**Sub-category: Sincerity**

“The whole notion of being a role model flows from the principle of attention” (Houston & Sokolow, 2006, p. 21). All of the participants in this study were very cognizant of the need to be a positive role model for their staff, students, and parents. They spoke often of the need to be transparent and authentic. Principal A makes sure that his staff always knows that they are working together for kids. “I set very clear expectations. People shouldn’t have to guess where I’m at” (Principal G). Principal D says she “walk[s] my talk”. Principal H tries to lead by example, “like Jesus”. Principal G feels it is important that he models his faith as a leader. Principal C believes that “actions define you”. The participants feel it is important to be seen as trustworthy, sincere, and authentic. Principal B sends out weekly notes to her staff; reflecting on the week and admitting her own mistakes, if necessary. She also believes in the importance of transparency. Authentic transparency is also valued by Principal A: “like Jesus”.

74
“Our everyday decisions may seem small and insignificant, but I maintain that our decisions reveal us: what we are willing to commit ourselves to, our tendencies, and our values” (Bonner, 2008, p. 137). When the head, hand, and heart of a leader are joined, leaders become authentic (Pellicer, 2003). Being real in word and deed is authenticity, which is sincerity (Houston, 2008, p. 25).

**Sub-category: Servant Leadership**

Many of the study’s participants described themselves as “servant leaders”. One principal talked about her upbringing and how “servant-ship” was important in her growing up. Her father made it a point of “making us see people who had less” (Principal B). Many of the participants entered education as a way to “serve” kids. They described themselves as collaborative – wanting to build a collective sense of mission in their schools. They described their leadership as shared. Many of the participants had built structures in their schools that would allow this collective mission to continue if they were to leave. They were very much in the “trenches with” their teachers, not above them (Principal G). Many of the participants had their own daily reading groups with students. “I make sure people know they are the greatest on the planet and that we can work through things together. I don’t believe in throwing people away” (Principal C).

Sergiovanni (2007) writes that the “link between servant leadership and moral authority is a tight one” (p. 58). Where moral authority relies on the ideas, values, substance, and content of the leadership, servant leadership is ultimately about placing “oneself, and others for whom one has responsibility, in the service of ideals” (Sergiovanni, 2007, p. 58). The concept of servant leadership was developed by Robert
Greenleaf in 1970. He believed that “the only authority deserving of one’s allegiance is that which is freely and knowingly granted by the led to the leader in response to, and in proportion to the clearly evident servant stature of the leader” (as cited in Bhindi & Duignan, 1997). The participants in this study understand the importance of this sense of service to others, to followers, and also to a greater purpose (Thompson, 2005). This service is “central to moral authority” (Covey, 2004, p. 316).

Moral authority encompasses the properties of attention, sincerity, and servant leadership. Spiritual school leaders are committed to their mission. Authority is granted to people who are perceived as living undivided lives (Palmer, 2004). In the spiritual school leader, moral authority leads to transformative leadership.

**Category 4: Transformative Leadership**

Spirituality: For me, it’s about being in tune with a higher power. It is an awareness that the power greater than myself exists and I can access it as needed. It is a sense that everything in the world operates in a delicate and dynamic balance . . . how one thinks and what one does affects this balance. Spirituality is a guiding force within this balance. I find when I feel out of balance in my life it is because I am not paying attention to my spirituality. It is prayer and yet it is beyond prayer . . . it is mindfulness and a connection to the human spirit (Principal B).

The participants in this study all had, at their heart, a mission for the whole child. Despite the difficulties and complexities of their jobs, despite the demands for high test scores as a way to measure their schools’ effectiveness; principals understand that public education is about the whole child and the whole teacher. The participants in this study worked through others in their schools by projecting their mission and inspiring others to have the same mission. The participants had faith in their work and in the work of their
teachers. Through reflection and other spiritual practices, the participants believed they were changing kids’ lives.

“Kids come first, then everything else” (Principal D).

“I help people realize how to rally around common goals, and how their strengths fit into those goals” (Principal A).

Through the codes from these comments and others, the properties of prophetic spirituality, principled leadership, and purposive leadership were sorted into the category titled Transformative Leadership (see Figure 8). Transformational leadership, as a theory, “seeks to explain the relationships among leaders and others in an organization when they are engaged in such a way that the organization is raised to a higher plane of morality and maturity and is thereby transformed” (Pellicer, 2003, p. xv). Sergiovanni (2007) says that transformational leadership focuses on “higher-order, intrinsic, and moral motives and needs of followers” (p. 61). Transformative leadership involves “relationship, influence, and some notions of virtue” (Dantley, 2003b, p. 1).

Through their codes around relationships, working through others, and deep faith in their work (their moral authority), the participants are transformative educational leaders (Dantley, 2005). “When moral authority transcends bureaucratic leadership in a school, the outcomes in terms of commitment and performance, far exceed expectations” (Sergiovanni, 2007, p. 65). Transformative educational leadership is bureaucratic leadership transcended. This is a “substantive change” in the concept of a traditional school leader (Dantley, 2003b, p. 1). However, Dantley (2003b) also believes that for
transformative educational leadership to be effective it must be intersected with

“prophetic, African American spirituality” (p. 5).

*Figure 8. Category 4: Transformative Leadership*

**Sub-category: Prophetic Spirituality**

“Your heart might get broken by a kid, but you keep on loving him and showing him that you care about him” (Principal F).

“The challenges of this job are hard! It can feel lonely and isolating. But then you walk into classrooms and are energized by the kids” (Principal C).

“I struggle with teachers who want to nit-pick their commitment. I want people to argue with me about the really important stuff” (Principal B).
Prophetic spirituality is “combative spirituality” which “frames the urgency for transformation . . . [It is] “grounded in an African American sense of moralism, prophetic resistance, and hope” (Dantley, 2003b, p. 5). Prophetic spirituality looks at the truth of a situation without offering excuses, and allows the pain of the truth to be visible. It is about the “courage to love and be hurt” and still enact love again (West, 2003, p.1).

When asked about her most career-changing experience, Principal C told a story that best illustrates this property of spiritual school leadership:

I was in charge of all the early childhood programs for the district. I needed to meet with a family and they wouldn’t come in. I kept trying to get them to come into the office and I was really judgmental about it. I kept thinking that if they really cared for the child, they would have come in. And then I found out that the child had recently drowned. Of course they were devastated and didn’t care to communicate with me. What I thought I knew about people loving their kids – I found I didn’t really know. When a child dies, it hurts just as much in poverty as in the middle class. The whole experience helped my work with families in poverty.

Prophetic spirituality “enables a leader to critically engage the present, propose an agenda, or a project for transformation, and envision a better future” (Dantley, 2003b, p. 8). “Faith allows a leader to envision schools from an entirely different perspective. It liberates school leaders to journey into the vistas of the ‘not yet’ rather than confining them to the parameters of the ‘as is’” (Dantley, 2005, p. 13). For the participants in this study, prophetic spirituality is embodied in their concerns of how to improve the lives of the children in their school; while still managing the demands of standardized testing, shrinking budgets, indifferent teachers, and the belief by staffs that children of color or poverty cannot learn at the same high levels as less impacted students. They avoid the pobrecito syndrome, which is feeling so sorry for the “poor little ones” that they have
lower expectations for student achievement (Candelarie, 2009, p. 123). The participants in this study know the severity of their situations, but yet, they are making a difference. Principal B tells the story of realizing that the needs of her school were so great, that she needed to help actualize a community center, in the school, for the whole school community. “I put the needs out to the Universe. I just put the energy out there. It could be thought of as a prayer. And it is crazy, unbelievable. Stuff happens weekly to make this [community center] a reality. It is blowing my mind!” (Principal B). As Dantley (2005) writes, “They walk in educational sites by faith and not by the prevailing circumstances of their present absurdity” (p. 11).

Sub-category: Principled Leadership

“Education is not about just measuring apples to oranges (state standardized testing results)” (Principal G).

“It’s about the whole child transcending their life circumstances” (Principal D).

“Kids need to be taken care of and the kids need to know that I care about them” (Principal C).

“We must take serious the impact we have on kids. It’s about connecting with kids – believing in them” (Principal F).

“I’ve been grieved for things I’m passionate about – breakfast for kids, parent nights” (Principal B).

Principled leadership is grounded in the concept of prophetic spirituality. Dantley (2005) defines it as the “need to ground the work of education in a context of morality and meaning” (p. 15). Principled leadership is the moral dimension of our work (Bhindi
& Duignan, 1997). It is the moral purpose not only to raise the bar for student learning, but to also close the gap that exists between students (Fullan, 2001). It is also the moral or spiritual way of thinking that says that “our children simply cannot be comprehended” in terms of a standardized test score (Bonner, 2008, p. 140). Bonner (2008) sarcastically suggests that success in education is:

> to make all students in the United States – no matter what their ability or disability, emotional stability, socioeconomic situation, parental support or lack thereof, whether they speak English or not, or any of the countless issues that occur in a young person’s life – proficient on a specific test, on a specific day (p. 135).

Dantley (2003a) contends that if principals are “grounded in spiritual leadership” they are not satisfied with just the “markers of academic achievement” of their students (p. 282). They are also concerned with the students’ sense of becoming well-functioning members of society.

The participants in this study talked about the passion necessary to be a school leader. It centers on the students and families and staff in their building. They “advocate for a system that cares for all kids” (Principal A). They advocate for teachers who are there for kids. They believe in the abilities of their teachers and give them the discretion to make decisions, while ensuring that teachers are holding to the values of educating all children. They are “hopeful”, “courageous”, and “optimistic” that they will take care of the needs of the whole child and the whole system within their school. Dantley (2005) writes that principled leaders have “faith in the teachers and other staff members” (p. 17). They have faith that their teachers will come to “understand that education must be about the whole child and whole mind” (Houston, p. 43).


**Sub-category: Purposive Leadership**

“If I can change one person’s thinking (about low income students), then I can impact lives” (Principal B).

“I will always advocate for teachers, when they are there for kids” (Principal G).

“The system has to work for all students” (Principal A).

“Teachers need to know that you value their knowledge” (Principal E).

“You have to be fair with kids – even if it goes against the adults” (Principal C).

Purposive leadership is also grounded in prophetic spirituality. The participants in this study are purposed to make a difference in the lives of the students they serve. They have core sets of beliefs and are continually articulating to their staffs the importance of what they are doing. This is called “purposing” and its object is the “stirring of human consciousness, the enhancement of meaning, the spelling out of key cultural stands that provides both excitement and significance to one’s work” (Sergiovanni, 2007, p. 75). The participants understand the importance of setting a vision of what their school can be. They see themselves as “forward-thinking”, “looking for the big picture”, systems thinkers, and visionaries. “I’m always thinking about how to make things better” (Principal B).

Purposive leaders perceive their work to be not only intellectual but deeply spiritual as well. They demonstrate a stalwart faith to create new images of schools. They believe that they can construct a radically different configuration for education and sense a ‘calling’ to do so (Dantley, 2005, p. 18).

Leading with purpose means articulating those new images, or new visions, to those being led. Deal and Peterson (1999), state that school leaders must “identify a clear sense of what the school can become, a picture of a positive future” (p. 89). Sergiovanni
(2007) says that leaders must express and articulate values and dreams. When leaders are able to bring together the school community in a sharing of those values and beliefs, “a covenant is created that bonds together leader and led in a common cause” (Sergiovanni, 2007, p. 75).

When the participants in the study talked about their visions and how to make those visions reality, they said things like: “I set an intention”, “I pray it will work out”, “I put good energy, good thoughts out to the Universe”, “I visualize what I want to have happen”, or “I write my vision down and put it out there”. Houston and Sokolow (2006) categorize these actions as a spiritual dimension of leadership called the Principle of Intention. They write that “we all affect eternity by our thought patterns, our words, and our deeds . . . they emit energy fields that contribute to the fabric that is woven into the unfolding pattern of life” (p. 8). Intention is about articulating the visions a school leader has for their school, that they want to see become reality. As Principal B was finding out, intention also “serves as a powerful force in attracting people, material resources, and other energies that can help us transform our intentions into reality” (Houston & Sokolow, 2006, p. 17). Spiritual leaders are aware of their intentions and focus them on serving others.

The participants in this study were passionate about working on behalf of students and teachers, within and around the system, to ensure that their school can make a difference in the lives of all the students they serve. Principal A, while not in direct insubordination, thinks outside of the box when having to work with tightly controlled demands from central office. While working to create the school she believes her students
deserve, Principal B will frequently do things and then “ask forgiveness later”. When Principal F felt that her school was being asked to do something not in the best interests of her students, she challenged the system – all the while fearing job loss.

The district placed a student in my building that had issues. He needed one on one services. I struggled, ethically, because we were putting a kid in a place where he could hurt other kids. Parents trust you and I was putting their kids in jeopardy. I couldn’t do anything to stop it from happening and it tested my limits. I had to go bigger than I should and went above my director. I was afraid I would get fired, but I had to do it. It worked out in the end (Principal F).

“Moral leadership is rooted in a powerful sense of commitment to a purpose or mission that is too expansive to be confined to self-interests” (Thompson, 2005, p. 95). Pellicer (2003) believes that good leaders “must understand the law and bureaucracy and the policies that are a direct result of law and bureaucracy” (p. 32). But, then those leaders must “discard them . . . and do what’s best for the children” (Pellicer, 2003, p. 32). Houston (2008) writes that if “we are honest with ourselves, we must admit that schools often deny the integrity of our children and try to make them into something else . . . through failing to honor their cultures, their languages, their homes, or their learning styles” (p. 65). Barth (2001) asserts that the demands of high-stakes tests and other mandates are “neglecting the heart and killing the soul” of public education (p. xi). He writes that schools need to “become cultures where youngsters are discovering the joy, the difficulty, and the excitement of learning . . . places where we are all in it together – learning by heart” (Barth, 2001, p. 29). Bonner (2008) believes the answer lies in spiritual school leadership, that embraces the whole student. “It is not sufficient for students to become adept and proficient in reading the word without also becoming adroit in reading their world” (Dantley, 2003a, p. 282). Transformative educational leaders, grounded in
prophetic spirituality, will examine what is happening in schools and seek to create a whole system for the whole child. “They will become more politically active in interrogating high-stakes testing and the surreptitious meanings and inferences being drawn” from those tests (Dantley, 2003a, p. 282). Spiritual school leaders question the “structures that are currently forcing us into decision about children that may not be best for those children or for the future of our society” (Bonner, 2008, p. 149). Spiritual leaders can “actualize change in society, to facilitate a visioning process based on critique and possibility” (Dantley, 2005, p. 13). Instead of demanding sterile, rigorous classrooms to see if students can take tests, spiritual leaders also envision classrooms and schools that meet the needs of all students.

As transformative leaders, spiritual school leaders finally become connectors.

**Category 5: Connector**

Spirituality is when you have those translucent moments where you realize that you need something or someone bigger than yourself. Like when you go home knowing that you said something that hurt a teacher, and you mull over it all night long, and you come to the realization that you are so capable of messing up and you need help. And you swallow your pride and with tears in your eyes, you apologize. Then you see that teacher recover in such a way that there is a spring in their step and aliveness in their soul. And that is spirituality – when dead comes back to life – when humbleness turns a corner and changes the world for a moment (Principal C).

Struggles common to all the participants in this study included: negative and difficult teachers, parents who blame everything on the school, district administrations that lead “from fear and intimidation”, relentless emails, and an unrealistic focus on state testing. But the participants also verbalized their understanding that it is up to them to
manage those complexities while still creating a school place that works for all of their students.

When open coding these two questions: a) how do you make meaning of your challenges, and b) what keeps your courage from waning, concepts such as system-thinking, sense-making, and connecting kept occurring.

“The system is for the greater good – even though the move to the systematic and systemic is frustrating and hard” (Principal A).

“I have connections for kids and adults” (Principal D).

“The moment when you are right there with someone, really connecting – it’s beyond test scores. That moment when you make that deep connection with someone in your community is when you move past the challenges” (Principal C).

“I keep my courage from waning by remembering this is about my connection to values, to society, to children, to people” (Principal A).

Through sorting and selective coding, the sub-categories of community, culture, and symbolic soul emerged to support the category of connector.

The challenges and complexities common to the participants in this study are pieces that they seek to make whole. It is through “spiritual sensing, listening, and seeing” that leaders can be the connectors in their work and for their school (Thompson, 2005, p. 23). Wholeness becomes the reality when connections are seen and made. Spiritual leaders “learn how to see whole – the whole system for the whole school for the whole classroom for the whole child” (Thompson, 2005, p. 26). These school leaders see the “strategic connections among seemingly unrelated circumstances and are able to
operate with an understanding of those connections” (Houston & Sokolow, 2006, p. 96).

The participants in this study understand that every action they take, and every word they say has a ripple effect that will influence the way students are treated and learn. It is their purpose to “connect the dots” for their school community (Houston & Sokolow, 2006, p. 103). They do this by serving their community, being aware of the culture of that community, and by serving as the symbolic soul of that community (see Figure 9).

*Figure 9. Category 5: Connector*

**Sub-category: Community**

Creating a sense of community is important to the participants in this study. Principal B was working to truly develop a community center in her school building.

Principal A spoke about building collective efficacy and capacity in his school. His goal
for his staff was “we-ness” (Principal A). Principal F talked about the work she had done to create a community of teachers that had shared values and beliefs about kids, and were committed to the mission of the school. Creating a sense of community among parents was important to Principal D. She felt most alive in her work when she was able to secure resources for families, and when parents who might otherwise feel disenfranchised took leadership roles in community meetings.

The ability to create these communities is ingrained in the relationships that the participants nurtured. Taking an active interest in their teachers’ personal lives, recognizing that everyone has unique gifts and talents, and looking past weaknesses by instead focusing on people’s strengths are ways that the participants built relationships. Other participants built relationships with their staffs by praying with staff members, sharing their personal faith, or participating in prayer groups at school. Still other participants built connections and relationships with their staffs by going on retreats and other bonding experiences. Some of the participants felt it was their moral responsibility to be able to build relationships with Spanish-speaking parents in their communities by learning Spanish. Within all of those relationships, the participants were continually articulating their mission and purposes.

“Clarity of purpose at the core of the community changes the entire nature of relationships within that community” (Wheatley, 2005, p. 50). Spiritual leaders cultivate shared purposes within their relationships. They inspire others to take the moral journey with them. Their leadership is a “relationship rooted in community” (Bolman & Deal, 2001, p. 62). Houston writes that “leadership is about our ability to make a connection to
another person” (Houston, 2008, p. 20). When these connections and relationships are based on shared values and beliefs, they become “moral connections” (Sergiovanni, 2007, p. 86). When those moral connections encompass teachers, parents, and students; then Sergiovanni (2007) views that school as a “moral community” (p. 85). When moral communities are in place, the principled spiritual leaders will be able to lead the transformation of school from “places where grown-ups know and young people learn, into communities of learners where all who come under the roof of the school are discovering together the joys, difficulties, and excitement of learning” (Barth, 2001, p. 148).

Sub-category: Culture

“Culture drives behavior, and behavior drives habits” (Gordon, 2010, p. 27).

Deal and Peterson (1999) define school culture as the “unwritten rules and traditions, norms, and expectations that seem to permeate everything” specific to each school (p. 2). Gordon (2010) asserts that culture influences what leaders and teams “think, say, and do each day” (p. 28). The participants in this study, and within most of the existing literature, articulate that getting the culture of a school right and ensuring that teachers are interacting with students in concert with that culture is imperative (Sousa, 2003; Sergiovanni, 2007; Thompson, 2005; Houston, 2008). For the participants in this study, the right culture means one that is positive and believes in the work they are doing. Some of the codes around school culture emerged from the final interviews with each participant, in which these two questions: a) what does the term spiritual leadership mean to you, and b) what personal traits and beliefs do you bring to the job, were asked.
“It’s important to create an environment where people are acting at their best and the work would seep into the students and community” (Principal E).

“We need to be the people that we agreed to be. Spiritual leadership keeps that in front of the organization” (Principal A).

“Spiritual leadership means that we are all on the same page in what we want for this school. The staff is intending on the same things – there is a lot of righteous energy” (Principal B).

While there are many aspects of school culture in the literature, the properties that emerged during this study from the participants were: positive culture, trust, openness, and compassion. The participants talked about focusing their energy and attention on the positive members of their staff and on the positive events in their schools. They talked about trust, forgiveness and compassion, having open hearts, and having hard conversations.

Deal and Peterson (1999) write that in schools where there exists a lack of positive values, a lack of integrity, or destructive interactions, a toxic culture exists. These schools are “spiritually fractured” (Deal & Peterson, 1999, p. 119). Reculturing schools into places that are positive, with trust, openness, and compassion is “spiritual work” (Thompson in Blankstein, p. 156).

Many of the participants in this study talked about trusting their teachers. They believed that the teachers “really do care” (Principal C). They trusted that “teachers want to do their best for their students” (Principal D).
Trust is the foundation for spiritual leadership (Houston & Sokolow, 2006). If school leaders believe that “everyone has a divine spark, then a place to start is to trust that it is there . . . embedded in that divine spark is an innate quality of goodness” (Houston & Sokolow, 2006, p. 131). Trusting that teachers are innately good empowers them and brings out the best in them. Thompson (2005) writes that high relational trust (teacher-principal, teacher-teacher, and teacher-parent) can positively change a school culture.

Where trust is present, there’s an openness that allows for connections with colleagues and a corresponding willingness to form collaborative relationships. And most importantly, these conditions have considerable influence on the quality of teaching and learning (Thompson, 2005, p. 51).

Principal G said that as long as he could trust that his teachers had high expectations for students, then he was open to listening to their ideas about innovation in instruction. He and other participants were open-minded to teacher and community ideas. Principal F strived to be seen as open by her staff.

Openness is a “state of mind, an attitude toward people, ideas, and circumstances” (Houston & Sokolow, 2006, p. 109). Houston and Sokolow (2006) write that when a spiritual leader models openness, they begin to influence the organization to develop a climate of openness. Leaders can model this openness by “being visible, open-minded and open-hearted learners” and they “protect innovators . . . from the cultural undertow of the status quo” (Thompson, 2005, 56). “Colleagues form deeper and more trusting relationships” where there is a feeling of openness (Thompson, 2005, 55).

By “confronting everyone and everything”, Principal E wanted to encourage a culture of openness in his school. He routinely called out the “elephant in the room”.
Part of an open climate is having hard conversations about things that people prefer to keep hidden. Barth (2001) says that paying attention to the “nondiscussables”, the elephant in the room, is important to changing school culture (p. 9). Every school has its own set of nondiscussables. Often they are around race and low student achievement. By avoiding discussion, we give them power and devalue the important work of the school. “The health of a school is inversely proportional to the number of its nondiscussables: the fewer the nondiscussables, the healthier the school; the more the nondiscussables, the more pathology in the school culture” (Barth, 2001, p. 9). It takes a courageous, open, spiritual leader such as Principal E to call out the school’s nondiscussables. These are the times when “as a leader, you do what you think is right and stand prepared to take the heat so that good things can happen” (Bolman & Deal, 2001, p. 224).

If a school has an open and trusting culture where teachers are invited to take appropriate risks, there also must be a climate of compassion and forgiveness. Principal C says that as long as teachers are trying, she will always “advocate” for them. She knows that they really do care and she wants to give them the tools to be better. “I don’t believe in throwing people away” (Principal C).

Compassion and forgiveness are an important part of spiritual leadership. When transformative leaders are striving to make changes in school culture and instructional practices, teachers must feel they can take risks. Teachers may feel uncomfortable and will need a compassionate leader who can recognize the concerns and offer unconditional support (Thompson, 2005). Thompson (2005) advises spiritual leaders that compassion is
also the “ability to understand that part of being spiritually connected is understanding your imperfections well enough to be merciful and patient with those who are imperfect” (p. 47). If a principal is to be trusted, he or she must demonstrate compassion and forgiveness. When teachers see that a principal is capable of understanding their needs, they will begin to “entrust their hearts” to that principal (Houston, 2008, p. 34).

Through trust, openness, and compassion; a school culture can support wholeness in meeting student needs. As Barth (2001) says, “Show me a school whose inhabitants constantly examine the school’s culture and work to transform it into one hospitable to sustained human learning, and I’ll show you students who graduate with both the capacity and the heart for lifelong learning” (p. 19).

**Sub-category: Symbolic Soul**

The person primarily responsible for creating community and shaping the culture of a school is the school principal. Spiritual leaders who can create that wholeness are the symbolic soul of the organization (Cole, 2008). The participants in this study understand that their actions, interests, communication, and demeanor are constantly watched by the members of their school community. They understand they set the tone for the school. The culture of the school community is affected by how they interact with individual teachers, parents and students. They understand the rituals they carry out each day carry meaning to the community. They also understand the importance, that at the end of a long day, grace and gratitude reflect that symbolic soul. From the participants’ codes emerged the concepts of storyteller, presence, self-awareness, and peace. These concepts make up the sub-category of symbolic soul.
Principal B says that she likes to tell stories and bring themes into her interactions with her school community. Principal A frames his work with teachers in themes. He says, “My themes are always about being good” (Principal A). Last year, Principal C used a book filled with survival tips for life-threatening situations in her staff meetings. She used the stories to make connections to their work. “The staff still talks about survival. It’s almost legend now” (Principal C). Principal E uses songs in whole building events.

Bolman and Deal (2001) call these actions “expressive activity” (p. 147). Expressive activity summons spirit, and is central to a leader’s core. It is important for leaders to be storytellers. “It presents your humanity to the humanity of those you need to influence and connects you to their essence in the only way that counts – soul to soul” (Houston, 2008, p. 19). Stories are remembered and retold. They “carry subtle cultural messages that seep into our pores and are tattooed on our hearts and souls” (Deal, 2008, p. 180). School leaders “need to be willing to let their hearts open and to tell stories that open other people’s hearts” (Wheatley, 2005, p. 129). Just as schools need their own stories, music is also essential. Bolman and Deal (2001) write that “music is a language of spirit” (p. 150). Spiritual leaders “embrace the symbolic discourse of spirit: art, ritual, stories, music, and icons” (Bolman & Deal, 2001, p. 147).

The participants in this study talked over and over about the importance of being present in their buildings. “When I’m not here – it’s not good” (Principal B). Codes such as: presence, visible, present in work, listen deeply, and mindfulness emerged. When
asked to describe a typical day, the participants talked about routines and rituals that were important in their daily work.

“I get to school early, check in with staff, do loop of the school, then get out front and greet students and parents. I always get hugs from the kids, thumbs up from the parents” (Principal B).

“I eat lunch in the lounge with the teachers. It goes a long way – goes back to the ‘we’ factor” (Principal A).

“I come into the school through the cafeteria in the mornings, so I can greet the kitchen staff” (Principal D).

“By seven, I’m greeting staff” (Principal E).

The physical, routine act of a building tour, takes on a symbolic meaning. The actions of the principal “communicate meaning, value, and focus” (Deal & Peterson, 1999, p. 90). Bonner (2008) maintains that, although the everyday decisions that a school leader makes may seem trivial, they reveal what the leader is willing to commit themselves to and what values they hold.

In addition to the physical act of presence in a school, the participants in this study are deep listeners and practice being present in their interactions with others. Presence is an “energy that brings an unspoken rapport between and among people . . . within that presence is a sense of caring, vulnerability, and commitment of self” (Chavez & Fairley, 2010, p. 52). When school leaders are present in the moment they can observe life as it is unfolding giving them stories for repeating to their school communities (Houston, 2008). This presence, also called “mindfulness,” allows a leader to be fully
engaged at all times. Sousa (2003) defines mindfulness as “focusing completely on the task at hand, becoming fully aware of each moment, and searching within oneself to interpret that moment” (p. 205). Thich Nhat Hanh (1992) writes that “practicing mindfulness enables us to become a real person. When we are a real person, we see real people around us, and life is present in all its richness” (p. 23). This habit of mind is the ability to connect to the environment and to others, and to remain open and aware (Houston, 2008). While skills such as active listening, pausing, and paraphrasing are important, spiritual leaders are able to practice deep listening by being open. Silently and fully listening to someone is the most healing act a leader can practice. “Whatever life we have experienced, if we can tell someone our story, we find it easier to deal with our circumstances” (Wheatley, 2002, p. 88).

Spiritual school leaders listen to staff, parents, and students as they tell their stories. This is part of building connections in the community, which is part of becoming whole:

Everybody has a story, and everybody wants to tell their story in order to connect. If no one listens, we tell it to ourselves and then we go mad. In the English language, the word for health comes from the same root as the word for whole. We can’t be healthy if we’re not in relationship. And whole is from the same root word as holy. Listening moves us closer, it helps us become more whole, more healthy, more holy. It is impossible to create a healthy culture if we refuse to meet, and if we refuse to listen. But if we meet, and when we listen, we reweave the world into wholeness. And holiness (Wheatley, 2005, p. 90).

The participants in this study understand, clearly, that their actions, words, and even unspoken expressions can affect the school community:

“I always think about who/how this is going to affect. I can affect how people walk away” (Principal B).
“I want to be a blessing to all I come in contact with” (Principal D).

“We have to take serious the impact the principal-ship has on lives” (Principal F).

“I’m always thinking, searching to know if I’m making a difference” (Principal C).

Spiritual leaders are reflective and self-aware. They are practicing prophetic spirituality, written about in the category of transformative leadership. Self-awareness involves five mental processes: a) an active inner “thought-life” that is likely to include a deep spiritual aspect; b) constant “grappling with the tough issues of ethics and values in education through reflection and meditation; c) an ability to think about the future, conceptually; d) a “metacognitive ability” to be in the middle of an action, while at the same time internally reflecting and analyzing; and e) willingness to reflect “often and deeply on one’s personal effectiveness” (McEwan, 2003, p. 158). Houston and Sokolow (2006) write that this ability to reflect gives school leaders a better awareness that a lesson is unfolding. Sergiovanni (2007) calls this self-awareness, “management of self . . . the ability to know who you are, what you believe, and why you do the things you do” (p. 135).

Interconnected with self-awareness, presence, and storyteller is the concept of peace. This concept came about from in vivo codes such as courage, meekness, gratitude, inner calm, collected, even, prayer, and grace. Codes for this property came from these two questions: a) what keeps your courage from waning, and b) how do you make meaning of your challenges.

“When I get pushed over stupid things – that’s when I get courage” (Principal A).
“I try to make sense of the challenge – try to reflect on what happened and why” (Principal F).

“When I’m in the middle of conflict, sometimes all I can do is pray” (Principal H).

“Teachers can be so harsh on your ego” (Principal B).

“When teachers level me, I try to think about what might be going on. I pray – go inside myself to make the situation better” (Principal C).

“I try to hear deeply. I reflect – not about the person – about how to make it better” (Principal D).

“I remind myself to be grateful for all that I am able to do, for the ability to have this job” (Principal H).

“Your courage does wane. You have to give yourself permission to not be perfect for a moment. Then you get back at it. This is front line work. Sometimes you have to retreat and figure out what you need to get back at it” (Principal C).

“Sometimes you can’t keep your courage from waning. I listen to spiritual music. At the end of the day, I’m empty. I let that sit there, recognize I’m empty, and let myself fill with courage again” (Principal D).

Chavez and Fairley (2010) write that “courage is the ability to face danger, difficulty, uncertainty, or pain without being overcome by fear or being diverted from a chosen course of action” (p. 61). Spiritual leaders or spirit movers as Chavez and Fairley (2010) call them, “accept the need to embrace the mystery, actively seek the unknown, and accept what may unfold if they are going to realize their vision” (p. 61). Courage
comes when we open our hearts in responding to a difficult issue or person. In order to be “courageous champions”, we have to be engaged at the heart, or spiritual, level (Wheatley, 2005, p. 129).

Houston (2008), in comparing the codes of the Samurai to spiritual school leadership, reports that a key weapon for the Samurai was the “stillness of mind” that allowed them to be “centered and present” in the midst of battle (p. 25). In the middle of the battle, they went inside themselves – “to the inner source to find their truth and find their way” (p. 25). This is what the participants in this study do when they are confronted by conflict or difficult circumstances. Wheatley (2005) writes that leaders are practicing mindfulness anytime they can keep themselves from letting their reactions and thoughts lead them before they step back to choose their reaction. Instead of saying something hurtful, they pause to give themselves more options. In the middle of a conflict or crisis, or what Thompson (2005) calls the “eye of the storm”, we have to work from a place of “inner peace” (p. 103). In the midst of crisis, while a school leader’s community is watching, the leader must reach down into themselves as ask these fundamental questions: a) what is going on in my heart and b) what is my state of mind or consciousness? (Thompson, 2005) Being present, staying centered, allows leaders to “pay attention, to see the little sign by the side of the road that remind us that regardless of where we are or who we are or what we are facing, our duty as humans and as leaders is to offer blessings to other” (Houston, 2008, p. 20).

In getting through the difficulties and complexities of the job, there also needs to be time for grace and gratitude. Wheatley (2005) reminds us to practice gratefulness. We
need to take time, daily, to notice the people who helped us, the grace that appeared, and the “little miracles that saved us from danger” (p. 133). Wheatley (2005) writes that when spiritual leaders believe that they are playing a part in something more purposeful than their own small egos, they “become leaders who are peaceful, courageous, and wise” (p. 133).

My ability to handle a myriad of issues, calmly, is about myself as a leader. It is important that my whole school knows I am credible and believable. I rely on my spirituality to maintain a sense of calm in any situation. I always have a sense that I can rely on God. He gives me the ability to behave in a professional and sane manner. You set the tone for the whole building. If the principal is falling apart, the whole building is falling apart. You are the rock, the stability. Everyone needs a piece of you. If you’re solid, everyone else is solid. If you’re off kilter, everybody notices. You better have a sense of spirituality (Principal C).

Through storytelling, presence, self-awareness, and peace; spiritual school leaders are the symbolic soul of their schools.

**Propositions**

The difference between grounded theory methodology and other research methods is in the hypotheses development. When a grounded theory is begun, the researcher does not have hypotheses that they want to test. Instead, using the constant comparative analysis process, substantive codes are compared to each other. Those substantive codes become the categories that are theoretically sorted into a theoretical code. In this study, as codes were compared and memoing was occurring, it became time to “formalize and systematize the researcher’s thinking into a coherent set of explanations” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 75). This was done by generating propositions which are connected sets of statements that reflect the findings of the study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Those propositions became the theory of spiritual school
leadership. The theory generated as a result of this grounded theory study explains how school leaders resolve their main concern which is the leadership challenge: How to make a significant difference in the lives of all kids, while managing all the complexities and concerns of a principal’s professional life. The integrated set of conceptual propositions which make up this theory are as follows:

Proposition 1. Whether they identify with a particular spiritual tradition or not, all school principals are spiritual leaders.

Proposition 2. Spiritual school leaders are engaged in soul work.

Proposition 3. Spiritual school leaders seek wholeness.

Proposition 4. Spiritual school leaders develop moral authority.

Proposition 5. Spiritual school leaders become transformative leaders.

Proposition 6. Spiritual school leaders emerge as connectors.

Theory of Spiritual School Leadership

The following theoretical model represents the grounded theory that emerged from this study (see Figure 10). It was determined that the Process Family framework best fit the emerging theory. The framework is one of processes, where all the categories build on each other over time. Words used in relation to this coding family are: stages, phases, progressions, passages, transitions, steps, and cycling. The processing refers to something happening over time and is a way to group two or more “sequencing parts to a phenomenon” (Glaser, 1978, p. 74). Process theory is used when occurrences are said to be the result of other occurrences all leading to an outcome which emerge from a set
process (Trochim, 2006). School leaders are spiritual leaders. They initially have soul work as their core, then progress through the other categories until they are connectors.

This theory is very similar to Fowler’s (1981) stages of faith theory. In that theory, Fowler sees faith as a holistic orientation which progresses through six stages: primal or undifferentiated faith through to enlightenment. In many cultural and religious contexts, spirituality is seen as progressing along a path though which one advances to achieve a given objective such as a higher state of awareness, communion with God or with creation. This path has also been described as a process in two phases: the first focusing on inner growth, and the second on the manifestation of this inner growth daily in the world (Eck, 2001).

As in stages of faith or spiritual paths, spiritual school leaders progress along this path and through the categories (or stages), and back through the categories as necessary. There is an inside-out process to spiritual school leadership. As illustrated in the preceding sections, the categories of spiritual school leaders are inter-related and also build on one another. They are “stagelike” (Fowler, 1981, p. xiii). Soul work can be seen as the initial stage with connector as the stage in which the leader has reached an enlightenment of sorts. This theory will be further discussed in the next chapter.
This chapter represented the findings from the research study. This included data from participant interviews and outside literature which were all coded and memoed. The propositions that resulted from the coding and memoing were then sorted into a theoretical model using the constant comparative analysis method. The theory represents a process and includes the categories of spiritual leadership, soul work, wholeness, moral authority, transformative leadership, and connector.
Chapter Four concludes the study with the theoretical framework and corresponding metaphor. Additional current literature is integrated, as well as the unanticipated outcomes of the study, limitations, conclusions, implications for action, and recommendations for further research.
Chapter Four: Discussion

Introduction

“The fruit of silence is prayer. The fruit of prayer is faith. The fruit of faith is love. The fruit of love is service. The fruit of service is peace” (Mother Teresa, 1997).

Principals want to make a significant difference in the lives of all the kids they serve. But managing the complexities of their professional lives can feel overwhelming and frustrating. Most principals question, at least once in their career, whether to stay in the position. While some stay, many more leave the position especially if they are at a high needs school. This study was interested in principals serving, and staying, in difficult or diverse elementary schools. Knowing the emotional toll that the principalship takes, this researcher was interested in whether spirituality plays a part in principals’ professional lives.

Summary of the Study

This chapter presents a summary of the findings of the research study with the theoretical framework and corresponding metaphor. Additional current literature is included, as well as the unanticipated outcomes of the study, limitations, conclusions, implications for action, and recommendations for further research.
The Problem

The past decade has seen school principals held to increasing high levels of accountability in student achievement. They must also be increasingly aware of school safety, dwindling resources, parent satisfaction, and competition. The job of school principal has become difficult and draining. The essential question of this study was to determine what role spirituality plays in the professional lives of school principals. These are the areas the study was seeking to explore within that essential question:

- What are their purposes as school principals? What drives that purpose?
- Are there specific practices that reflect spiritually-centered school leadership?
- How does spirituality contribute to principals’ longevity in the profession?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this grounded-theory study was to investigate public school principals in difficult or diverse elementary settings and then generate a theory or framework that explained what role spirituality plays in school leaders’ professional lives, and answered questions raised in previous studies (Miller, 2002; Lyon, 2004; Robertson, 2008). The subject of spirituality and school leadership is relatively new. There is not a large body of studies or published works around the subject. This research adds to that body of knowledge.

The theory generated from this study is grounded in the data that was revealed during the investigation. It was hoped that discovering the struggles common to the study participants and identifying a theory around spirituality and school leadership would be useful to first year principals, as they search to find meaning beyond the struggles of the
It was also hoped to be useful to veteran principals who question their longevity in the profession or question their effectiveness.

**Research Questions**

The essential question that guided this research was:

What is the role of spirituality in the professional lives of school principals?

The following research sub-questions also guided this study:

1. What are school principals’ purposes? What drives that purpose?
2. What specific practices reflect spiritually-centered school leadership?
3. How does spirituality contribute to principals’ longevity in the profession?

**Review of Methodology**

Classic grounded theory methodology was utilized for this study (Glaser 1978, 1992, 1998; Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The researcher felt that grounded theory would be useful in determining the struggles common to school leaders. Grounded theory provides a structure to discover theory around a topic that has limited previous study. Eight elementary school principals from diverse and/or difficult school environments, within the Northern Metropolitan Denver area were interviewed over the course of two months. These were principals considered effective in their work and recommended by their superintendents. Using theoretical sampling, the follow up interview questions were developed from emerging concepts. The researcher found truth in Glaser’s (1998) statement: There was no need to “force meaning on a participant, but rather a need to listen to his genuine meanings, to grasp his perspectives, to study his concerns and to study his motivational drivers” (p. 32). The researcher had to be patient and trust that the
theory would emerge. Using a data collection and analysis process, five propositions were produced. A framework was developed, inductively, grounded in the propositions and supporting literature. “Grounded theory provided the framework for taking observations, intuitions, and understandings to a conceptual level and provided the guidelines for the discovery and formulation of theory” (Orona, 2002, p. 377).

Major Findings

In grounded theory, a study does not begin with hypotheses as the goal is to discover an integrated set of conceptual hypotheses or findings from which to base a theory (Glaser, 1992). Miles and Huberman (1994) call theories a “coherent set of explanations” that is achieved by generating propositions (p. 75). Propositions are connected sets of statements which reflect the findings and conclusions of the study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Through the grounded theory methodology utilized for this study, six propositions were generated. Those propositions became the theory of spiritual school leadership. The theory generated as a result of this grounded theory study explains how school leaders resolve their main concern or leadership challenge: How to be a school leader that makes a significant difference in the lives of all kids, while managing all the complexities and concerns of a principal’s professional life. The integrated and progressive set of conceptual propositions, which make up this theory are now explained further.

The Six Propositions

Proposition 1. Whether they identify with a particular spiritual tradition or not, effective school principals are spiritual leaders.
Effective school leaders are spiritual leaders by the nature of their work. Spiritual school leaders believe in a power or connection greater than themselves. They allow that power to guide their work. They acknowledge that soul needs to be a part of their leadership. “By drawing upon their spiritual strength, devoted leaders expand and improve their leadership capacity” (Chavez & Fairley, 2010, p. 2). Spiritual school leadership is a process that begins from the inside out. Soul work is inherent in all spiritual school leaders. As they progress through their careers spiritual school leaders progressively add the layers of wholeness, moral authority, transformative leadership, and connector.

**Proposition 2.** Spiritual school leaders are engaged in soul work.

Soul work is inherent in all spiritual school leaders. Spiritual school leaders view their work as a calling or vocation. Vocation comes from a voice in the soul, calling school leaders to be the person they were born to be, to “fulfill the original selfhood” given at birth by God (Palmer, 2000, p. 10). They are engaged in a mission to make a significant difference in the lives of all students. Soul work is a journey. Through spiritual school leadership, principals are able to persevere in the work and are resilient.

**Proposition 3.** Spiritual school leaders seek wholeness.

As spiritual school leaders face the complexities of the job, they seek wholeness. It is important that they are perceived as having integrity. Spiritual school leaders’ roles are informed by their souls (Palmer, 2004). Spiritual school leaders meld together the personal and professional dimensions of their lives. An important part of spiritual school
leaders’ wholeness is balance. This is achieved by cultivating practices that support emotional, physical, and spiritual health.

**Proposition 4.** Spiritual school leaders develop moral authority.

Spiritual school leaders highly value the success of the students in their schools. They have made a commitment to ensure achievement for all of their students and to do so through modeling that commitment. They are disciplined and focus their energy on the right work. They walk their talk, follow through on promises, and engage in constructive problem solving (Chavez & Fairley, 2010). They pay attention to the systems and processes for which they have control. Spiritual school leaders are transparent and authentic. As moral leaders, they practice servant leadership.

**Proposition 5.** Spiritual school leaders become transformative leaders.

Spiritual school leaders with moral authority become transformative leaders. They have prophetic spirituality. They understand the realities of their challenges and have faith that they, through the connections of their spirituality, can overcome those challenges. Spiritual school leaders are principled leaders. They have moral purpose and passion for the whole child. Spiritual school leaders are purposive leaders. While they strive for high achievement for all students, they believe that their purpose is to make a significant difference for kids regardless of the demands of state testing or the personal situations of the students (Dantley, 2003a). They are visionaries who set intentions and bend the rules, if necessary, to accomplish their missions.
Proposition 6. Spiritual school leaders emerge as connectors.

Spiritual school leaders have a holistic perspective that enables them to see that everything and everyone is connected. They value relationships and create a sense of community within their school setting. Spiritual school leaders create positive cultures through their modeling of trust, openness, and compassion. “Trust is the glue that creates shared meaning and purpose, integration, connection and community” in a school (Chavez & Fairley, 2010, p. 32). Spiritual school leaders are the connectors in their school community. Through storytelling, music, their presence, self-awareness, and their ability to create peaceful situations they are the symbolic soul of their school community.

Model of Spiritual School Leadership

In this study, a model of spiritual school leadership was generated from the propositions (see Figure 11). As explained in Chapter Three, the model is process driven. Effective school leaders are spiritual leaders who progress through a series of stages as their career matures. They initially have soul work as their core, then progress through the other categories until they are connectors. As in stages of faith or spiritual paths, spiritual school leaders progress along this path and through the categories (or stages), and back through the categories as necessary. There is an inside-out process to spiritual school leadership. This was confirmed by many of the study participants. As part of the continued member checking, the results and theory were sent out to the participants. Many of the participants replied back that they absolutely agreed with the process piece of the theory. As Principal B said “I always knew that I was meant to be a principal, I had the soul work. But, it took me many years before I felt like the connector described in
your study”. As illustrated in Chapter Three, the categories of spiritual school leaders are built on one another and are also iterative. Soul work can be seen as the initial stage with connector as the stage in which the leader has reached an enlightenment of sorts.

*Figure 11. Model of Spiritual School Leadership*

![Figure 11. Model of Spiritual School Leadership](image)

**Butterfly as Metaphor**

As this researcher was contemplating the theoretical sort and how best to make meaning of the emerging theory, she was distracted by a large butterfly landing on a nearby flowerpot. The metaphorical relationship was instant.
Metaphors are used to compare two things by looking at their similarities and not their differences. Miles and Huberman (1994) believe that metaphors have “an immense and central place in the development of theory” (p. 250). Metaphors are a way of making meaning of data. They are “data-reducing devices,” add richness and complexity, and are useful for “connecting findings to theory” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 251).

The ancient Greek word for butterfly means ‘soul’. In some cultures, butterflies symbolize rebirth into a new life. Before a butterfly reaches the imago or adult stage, they will have metamorphosed through four other stages: 1) egg, 2) caterpillar, 3) wing development, and 4) pupa (Rabuzzi, 1997). This is similar to spiritual school leaders (see Figure 12). Spiritual school leaders add wholeness to their core, which is soul work. They develop moral authority and transformative leadership before emerging as connectors.

*Figure 12. Butterfly as Metaphor of Spiritual School Leadership*
**The Butterfly Effect**

To extend the metaphor one step further is to see the relationship between the work that spiritual school leaders do and the butterfly effect. The butterfly effect is the thinking that a flap of a butterfly wing in Tokyo could affect a tornado in Texas. The theory gives explanation to why it is not possible to accurately forecast the weather. Wheatley (2006) cites this theory to illustrate that even “infinitesimal differences can be far from inconsequential” (p. 121). She cites Buddhist teaching, Jesus, Chief Seattle, and naturalist teaching to remind leaders of the interconnectedness of life (Wheatley, 2005, p. 204). As spiritual school leaders seek wholeness and holistic perspective for their work, they are aware that one small decision or action could affect a student, a teacher, the school community, or their world.

**Evaluation of Theory**

Theories are used to make sense of the world. They can be powerful, “giving us names for our experiences and ways to understand and express what we have lived” (Fowler, 1981, xiii). Fullan (2008) says theories that “travel well are those that practically and insightfully guide the understanding of complex situations and point to actions likely to be effective” (p. 1). This theory of spiritual school leadership is filled with actions that school leaders can take in order to grow as a spiritual school leader. This theory gives names to school principals’ experiences.

Grounded theory is the “systematic generation of theory from data acquired by a rigorous research method” (Glaser, 1998, p.3). It has its own additional criteria for evaluation. The intent of the researcher of this study was to follow classic grounded
theory processes rigorously so that the study would be considered credible. This study followed classic grounded theory throughout the process. Glaser (1998) reports that grounded theory’s “academic roots are from the traditionally known highest quality sociological schools of thought, theory and methods” (p. 3). This should legitimize its use. By the use of constant comparison, grounded theory is its own constant verification. Glaser (1998) asserts the emerged theory should be able to hold up to the following questions:

1. Does the theory work to explain relevant behavior in the substantive area of the research?

The theory works to explain the behavior of spiritual school leaders. The categories and propositions came from concepts generated from rigorous data collection, coding, memoing, sorting, and theoretical sampling. The categories and propositions show how the participants resolve their main concern, which is how to make a significant difference in the lives of all kids while managing the complexities of their professional lives.

2. Does it have relevance to the people in the substantive field?

The theory has relevance to the people in the substantive field. School leaders have interest in the findings and the theory that has been developed.

3. Does the theory fit the substantive area?

The substantive area is the area of school leadership. The theory, which is a process of spiritual school leadership, fits the area of school leadership.

4. Is it readily modifiable as new data emerge? (p. 17)
The theory is readily modifiable by new data. Any of the categories could be expanded to include more properties as relationships would emerge.

The theory does hold up to these questions and, as the research has been rigorous; the “proof” can be seen in the outcome (Glaser, 1998, p.17).

**Unanticipated Outcomes**

Going into the study, the researcher thought she would have difficulty finding enough principals that would exhibit characteristics of spirituality without directly asking the participants during the first interview. Using the working definition of spirituality, along with attributes of spirituality listed in Chapter One, the researcher listened for phrases that reflected spirituality. The researcher heard the following examples of language in the initial interviews: belief in God or higher power, spiritual behaviors described above, concepts of seeking meaning, interconnectedness, interdependency, community, and feelings of being connected to something greater than self.

The participants in this study were designated by their superintendents as good subjects for this study because they were considered effective in diverse and/or difficult school settings. The researcher did not anticipate the impact this study would have on the participants and on the researcher. Upon reading the findings, one of the participants responded in email that the study findings helped him see that he was involved in good work. School leaders are involved in good work.

**Limitations**

This study attempted to follow classic grounded theory closely. There were potential limitations, however. First, Glaser discourages any literature review in the
substantive area until purposeful sampling is complete. It is important to avoid having the researcher develop theories before the study and not being sufficiently theoretically sensitive (Glaser, 1998). This researcher did read some initial literature and previous studies, which is how the research questions were developed. When the researcher decided to use grounded theory as the method for the study, literature study in the substantive area was limited. Secondly, the researcher is in the field being studied. The researcher had to keep in mind the need for theoretical sensitivity throughout the study and bracket any preconceived concepts. Third, because participants viewed their experiences through their own unique lenses, the interpretations of experiences could have been subjective by both the participants and the researcher. The researcher could not really see what the participants said they did. There could have been a difference between words and actions. Fourth, while important to dealing with data, the sample size was small which limits generalizability. Finally, “in vivo” coding is a necessary part of grounded theory. These codes were taken directly from the participants and used to label some of the concepts, which were ultimately used to frame the final theory. While all of these are necessary to grounded theory, they could be viewed as limitations to the study.

**Conclusions**

This intent of this study was to develop a theoretical framework that would explain the role spirituality plays in the lives of school principals. An answer was sought for this essential research question:
What is the role of spirituality in the professional lives of school principals?

All school principals employ spirituality in the course of their professional lives. Through soul work, seeking wholeness, having moral authority, transformative leadership, and becoming connectors; school principals are spiritual school leaders.

Answers were also sought for these research sub-questions:

What are school principals’ purposes? What drives that purpose?

Soul work embodies school principals’ purposes. Their fundamental purpose is to make a significant difference in the lives of all the children they serve. School principals have a heart for the profession. They view the principalship as a vocation. Transformative leadership drives that purpose. Spiritual school leaders care about the wholeness of children. They work to ensure that the educational system works for every student.

What specific practices reflect spiritually-centered school leadership?

Wholeness, moral authority and transformative leadership reflect spiritually-centered school leadership. Spiritual school leaders seek wholeness in their professional and personal lives by being true to their spirit and work identity. They ensure wholeness by being balanced in their emotional, physical, and spiritual lives. They are purposeful in scheduling time to be with family, to exercise, and to connect with their spirituality through prayer, reflection, and stillness. Spiritual school leaders practice servant leadership. They work together with their teachers to teach students. Spiritual school leaders set intentions and have faith that, while their school situations may be difficult, they will overcome those difficulties.
How does spirituality contribute to principals’ longevity in the profession?

Wholeness, soul work, and connections contribute to principals’ longevity in the profession. Spiritual school leaders are balanced in their emotional, physical, and spiritual lives which gives them resiliency. They view their work as a vocation, a mission, and a journey to be accomplished. Spiritual school leaders are connectors who have a holistic perspective of their work. They are able to transcend the difficulties of the work which allows them to have longevity in their work.

Implications for Action

The results and findings of this study suggest implications for action in the professional world of school leadership. This study sought to discover the struggles common to the public school elementary principals and identify how principals resolve those struggles. The study generated a theory around spirituality and school leadership. During member checking near the end of the study, the participants remarked that there should have been a component of spiritual school leadership as part of their principal preparation programs. University programs and district leaders could use this theory as they work with principals entering the profession. This theory could be related to the current Educational Leadership Policy Standards: ISLLC 2008 (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2008). In particular, the propositions and process as they relate to Standard 5.0, would be a useful module for prospective principals. Standard 5.0 states that an “educational leader promotes the success of every student by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner” (p. 41). The framework would compliment coursework or professional development in this area.
Using this theory, a continuum could be developed that would help principals self-evaluate where they are in spiritual school leadership. A continuum could be useful to first year principals, as they search to find meaning beyond the struggles of the job. The theory could also be useful to veteran principals questioning how long they can remain in the profession or questioning their effectiveness.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

There are several ways that the results and findings of this study could be further researched. First, a study could be developed that would study use of the above mentioned continuum. It could look at ways to identify where principals are on the continuum; ways to build capacity in the categories, and ways that principals can be nurtured to grow on the continuum. Additionally, it would be useful to replicate the study with middle and senior high school principals to determine if the theory maintains its relevancy. Replicating this study with principals from school settings that are not considered diverse and/or difficult should also be explored to increase the generalizability to school principals in general. A larger sample, ensuring more diversity in the participants, would further validate the findings. While the participants in this study were identified by their superintendents as effective in diverse and/or difficult school settings, a longitudinal study correlating spiritual school leadership with student achievement would be useful to show how spiritual school leadership contributes to principal effectiveness. Similarly, a study that used survey methodology with a principal’s staff and school community would be useful to measure spiritual school leadership and
community building. Finally, any of the study’s propositions could be turned into hypotheses to be explored individually.

**Concluding Remarks**

The findings of this research study provide a process driven theoretical model for spiritual school leadership. This model proposes that school leaders are spiritual school leaders who have soul work at their core. As spiritual school leaders grow into the profession, they add the layers of wholeness, moral authority, transformative leadership, and connector to the professional being. Spiritual school leaders have holistic perspectives. As school leaders seek wholeness in their professional lives, they seek wholeness in their schools. Spiritual school leaders understand that “good education needs to balance mind and soul, head and heart” (Bolman & Deal, 2001, p. 207).

Just as a butterfly can affect the weather half way around the world, a spiritual school leader acting with principles and purpose can change the lives of hundreds of children. Spiritual school leaders can – change the world.
References


Miller, P. (2002). An exploratory study of the ways principals perceive that their spirituality contributes to their leadership. (*ProQuest LLC*). UMI No. 3062739.


Appendix A

Interview Protocol

Explain the focus of the research:
- Principals who, as recognized by their superintendents, are effective and resilient in diverse and difficult school settings.

Discuss Informed Consent:
- All identifying information will be removed from the data presented in the dissertation. You [participant] will be asked to review your responses prior to these responses being included in the dissertation. You [participant] retain the right to ask for any information to be deleted or to withdraw at any time.

First Interview:

1. What does effective school leadership mean to you?

2. Why did you enter this profession?

3. How would you describe your leadership?

4. What personal traits and beliefs do you bring to the job?

5. Can you describe a typical school day?
   a. How do you usually start your day?
b. How do you like to end your day?

6. What do you struggle with?

   a. How do you resolve that?

7. Every administrator has good days and bad days. What brings you back day after day?

8. To what do you attribute your longevity?
Bank of Questions for Successive Interviews:

Keeping true to the nature of theoretical sampling, most of the questions for a second interview were developed as a result of the initial round of interviews.

Possible Questions

How do you view your purpose?

What drives you in your work?

What personal practices/preferences/habits are important to your work?

When do you feel most alive in your work?

How do you make meaning of your challenges?

What do you consider the primary element of principal longevity?

Did you participate in training (as part of principal preparation program or other professional development) that helps you be resilient?

Can you tell me a story of your most career-threatening experiences?
   How did you survive?

What does the term spiritual leadership mean to you?
   (I’m using spirituality to mean: The diverse ways we acknowledge the soul’s desire to be connected with all of life’s energy and humanity.)

Would you describe yourself as a spiritual person?

If so, is that reflected in your work and how?

Was spirituality part of your leadership preparation program?
Appendix B

(Date)

(Superintendent’s Name)
(District Name and Address)

Dear (Name),

As you know, the job of school leadership has gotten increasingly difficult and challenging: diverse schools with high poverty levels, the need to close the achievement gap, disgruntled teachers, and never ending paperwork. Many principals choose to leave the profession or retire early, rather than face those challenges. I am conducting research that looks at effective principals and their motivation to continue in this profession. This research is for my dissertation work at the University of Denver. The research is approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Denver.

I am writing to see if you would be willing to give me names of elementary principals in your district that you see as effective leaders in a diverse or challenging school. I would then like to ask them to participate in this study. Participation in this study would involve:

- Completion and return of a study participation form.
- One hour initial interview.
- A second interview, a few weeks later, of about an hour.
- Follow-up either in person or by phone or email for you to review the accuracy of my impressions to the interviews.

Participation in this study is strictly voluntary and they would have the right to withdraw at any time from this study without penalty, prejudice, or negative judgments against them. The information collected is confidential and their names would never appear on any of the data collected or on the published documents.

Please return the names of principals and their schools in the enclosed self-addressed, stamped envelope, or by email, to me by (date).

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you. Please call me at 303-549-9737 or email me at Kpmusick49@gmail.com if you have any questions.

Sincerely,
Karen Musick
Appendix C

Letter of Information

(Date)

(Principal’s Name)
(School Name and Address)

Dear (Name),

As you know, the job of school leadership has gotten increasingly difficult and challenging: diverse schools with high poverty levels, the need to close the achievement gap, disgruntled teachers, and never ending paperwork. Many principals choose to leave the profession or retire early, rather than face those challenges. I am conducting research into school leaders and what drives them in their work. This research is for my dissertation work at the University of Denver. The research is approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Denver.

Your superintendent has given me your name as someone they see as an effective leader in a diverse or challenging school. I am writing to see if you would be willing to participate in the study. Participation in this study would involve:

• Completion and return of a study participation form.
• One hour initial interview.
• A second interview, a few weeks later, of about an hour.
• Follow-up either in person or by phone or email for you to review the accuracy of my impressions to the interviews.

Participation in this study is strictly voluntary and you have the right to withdraw at any time from this study without penalty, prejudice, or negative judgments against you. The information collected is confidential and your name will never appear on any of the data collected or on the published documents.

Please let me know if you are interested in participating in this study by returning the enclosed form in the addressed, stamped envelope to me by (date).

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to the opportunity to learn from you. Please call me at 303-549-9737 or email me at Kpmusick49@gmail.com if you have any questions.

Sincerely,
Karen Musick
Appendix D

Study Participation Form

School Leadership

____ Yes, I, ________________________________, am interested in participating in this study. You may use the following contact information to set up a time for the interview:

Email: ________________________________

Phone: ________________________________

Signature: ________________________________

Years in school leadership: ____________________________

Age: ________________________________

____ No, I, ________________________________, am not interested in participating in this study.

Signature: ________________________________

Please return this form in the enclosed, addressed stamped envelope by (date).

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to the opportunity to learn from you. Please call me at 303-549-9737 or email me at Kpmusick49@gmail.com if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Karen Musick
**Appendix E**

Timeline of Methodology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Procedure</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 12, 2010</td>
<td>Dissertation proposal defense and approval.</td>
<td>The researcher defended Chapters One and Two to her committee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January/February 2010</td>
<td>Permission to conduct research within districts submitted.</td>
<td>IRB reviewed application and determined that it would be necessary to have permission from the school districts before superintendents could be contacted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 2010</td>
<td>Four school districts respond with permission</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 25, 2010</td>
<td>IRB approval</td>
<td>The IRB application is approved by the University of Denver Institutional Review Board.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 26, 2010</td>
<td>Solicitation letters to superintendents</td>
<td>Letters to superintendents are sent to the four districts that will be included in the study. The letters request recommendations of elementary school principals that the superintendents view as effective in difficult/diverse school settings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2010</td>
<td>Recommendations received and letters sent to principals</td>
<td>Letters of information sent out to the recommended principals asking for participation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 10 – April 5, 2010</td>
<td>Initial interviews</td>
<td>Participants were interviewed and data analysis was initiated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April – May 2010</td>
<td>Theoretical sampling and data analysis through constant comparison</td>
<td>Subsequent interviews with participants, substantive coding, memoing, sorting,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 1-15, 2010</td>
<td>Theoretical coding and sorting</td>
<td>Continued member checking, theoretical coding and sorting while integrating the literature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2010</td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>Theory written and results shared with participants.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix F

Informed Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a research study that will explore the phenomenon of school leadership and motivation to stay in the profession. It will help principals, already in the field and those new to the profession, as they reflect on their own professions. In addition, this study is being conducted to fulfill the requirements of a dissertation in the Educational Administration Ph.D. program. The study is being conducted by Karen Musick who can be reached at 303-549-9737 or kpmusick49@gmail.com. This project is supervised by the course instructor, Dr. George Straface, Department of Education, University of Denver, Denver CO 80208, 303-871-2496 or George.straface@du.edu.

Participation in this study should take about 2 one hour sessions of your time for in-person interviews. Participation will involve responding to some questions about your work. The researcher will audiotape the interview to ensure that responses are accurately portrayed. The researcher may contact you by telephone or email to follow up on the interview or to clarify responses. Participation in this project is strictly voluntary. The risks associated with this project are minimal. If, however, you experience discomfort you may discontinue the interview at any time. We respect your right to choose not to answer any questions that may make you feel uncomfortable. Refusal to participate or withdrawal from participation will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Your responses will be identified by code number only and will be kept separate from information that could identify you. This is done to protect the confidentiality of your responses. Only the researcher will have access to your individual data and any reports generated as a result of this study will use only group averages and paraphrased wording. However, should any information contained in this study be the subject of a court order or lawful subpoena, the University of Denver might not be able to avoid compliance with the order or subpoena. Although no questions in this interview address it, we are required by law to tell you that if information is revealed concerning suicide, homicide, or child abuse and neglect, it is required by law that this be reported to the proper authorities.

If you have any concerns or complaints about how you were treated during the interview, please contact Susan Sadler, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at 303-871-3454, or Sylk Sotto-Santiago, Office of Sponsored Programs at 303-871-4052 or write to either at the University of Denver, Office of Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-2121.

You may keep this page for your records. If you agree to these statements and conditions and you agree to participate in this study, please sign below.

I have read and understand the foregoing description of the research project, “Spirituality and School Leadership.” I have asked for and received satisfactory explanations of any language that I did not fully understand. I agree to participate in this study and I understand that I may withdraw my consent at any time. I have received a copy of the consent form.

Signature: ___________________________________ Date: ________________

Please print:
Name: __________________________________________________________________

Address: __________________________________________________________________

Phone: ___________________ E-mail: _____________________

Thank you very much for your interest in this study.
Appendix G

Data Wall