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Spiritual Leadership as an Effective Leadership Style for the Public School Superintendent

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SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP AS AN EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP STYLE FOR THE
PUBLIC SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENT

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Interdisciplinary Doctoral Program for Educational Leaders

School of Education

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Education

By

Sherri L. Smith

October 2007

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Sherri L. Smith

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PUBLIC SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENT

By

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Approved October 17, 2007

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ABSTRACT

SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP AS AN EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP STYLE FOR THE PUBLIC SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENT

By

Sherri L. Smith

October 2007

Dissertation Supervised by Dr. James A. Ryland

Historically, the job of a public school superintendent has been to manage the operations of the district. With the pressures and changes in today's world, there is a requirement for school leaders to command more skills than merely management skills. In order to understand what skills effective school leaders need, more research into effective leadership techniques and skills is necessary. More current research has begun to study a higher moral method of leadership, one in which the leader allows his spirituality to guide all of his decisions and relationships. The study of spiritual leadership focused on education, specifically, the superintendent, is greatly needed to provide insights into the professional development of future educational leaders. The purpose of this study was to determine if spiritual leadership is an effective style of leadership for superintendents of public schools by describing how it looks in practice and identifying the varying

characteristics that are held in common by those superintendents identified as *spiritual leaders*. A qualitative design was utilized to achieve an in-depth understanding of the leadership characteristics that the two selected superintendents displayed under the conditions of the superintendency. Through a case study approach, the investigation was conducted using the following research methods: semi-structured one-on-one interviews with the superintendent, key members of the administrative team and School Board, onsite observations, and document analysis. Data was analyzed in two stages; a with-in case analysis and a cross-case analysis, to find core consistencies and reveal patterns and themes within each case and secondly, make comparisons between the two cases. This study may have implications for those in educational leadership positions for their own spiritual leadership development and their support of others. Awareness of the factors that influence the participants, recognized for their spiritual leadership, may promote an understanding of spiritual formation factors. Insight into the practices and daily interactions of superintendents perceived as spiritual leaders by their assistants and other key administrators and stakeholders may provide knowledge into how to recognize a spiritual leader in the hiring process and an understanding of successful spiritual practices in education.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Historically, the job of a public school superintendent has been to manage the operations of the district, including maintaining a multi-million dollar budget, ensuring that the schools are safe and that students are assigned to classes appropriate to their learning needs, and hiring and maintaining the correct number of professional and para-professional employees needed to keep the schools operational. Hoy and Miskel (2001) stated that administrator “jobs are characterized by long hours and brief verbal encounters across a wide range of issues with diverse individuals and groups” (p. 394). Although these duties are time consuming and essential for the top executive to manage effectively, there are other responsibilities of the job of superintendent, such as providing leadership and focus to the organization. Hoy and Miskel (2001) indicated “it is not clear how individuals engaged in work characterized as consuming, reactive, and fragmented can actually provide leadership to their organizations” (p. 394).

As a current sitting public school superintendent, I know that there are many more demands of my position than the management of the organization. Public schools are under tremendous pressure to respond to the political demands and societal changes that surround them. The political demands in the twenty-first century call for drastic change in public educational practices with the use of high-stakes testing and the use of data-driven decision-making in an intent to hold all schools accountable to increased measures of student learning and higher levels of accountability and proficiency.

Additionally, American society has changed for families and communities. In today’s world, where lives are much more complicated with advancing technologies, and

increased demands and stressors placed on them daily, people are in search for a common place to belong and to find themselves either in their professional lives or as a member of a community. These changes have impacted public schools as both the employees depend on a caring workplace environment as well as the community looking to public schools to be the focal point of interconnectivity within the community. As the chief executive officer (CEO) of the organization, the superintendent is responsible to provide the leadership necessary to respond to these various demands, plus provide direction to move the organization forward in achieving its goals.

Over my past four years as a superintendent, I have been confronted with many challenges. The managerial responsibilities alone in operating a school district are daunting. Coupled with the current political pressures of high academic accountability and community expectations for increased family and community events, I find my days filled with continuous demands to manage and organize the daily operations of the district. These daily demands to manage the day to day operations of the district provide little time for me to be the leader I believe myself to be. Reflecting upon my own style of leadership, I think of myself as a leader who believes in honest, open communications with others; in providing guidance, support and meaning to employees' work; and in helping others meet their personal goals while obtaining the goals set for the organization. I depend on my own internal beliefs and values as guidance to make decisions that are appropriate for all persons concerned and for the good of the organization. As a matter of fact, I find my work to be spiritual; not necessarily in a religious sense, but in the importance I place on the interconnections with the employees and all others, and in my determination to lead through my own values and moral

convictions. These self-reflections on my leadership style, in comparison to fulfilling the role of my superintendent's position, may appear to be in conflict with one another.

My decision to gain a deeper understanding of the leadership characteristics and successful practices of superintendents who are viewed as spiritual leaders is based on my own personal conflict in fulfilling the various roles I must play as a superintendent. Is spiritual leadership an effective leadership method for superintendents of public schools? If so, how does it look in practice?

Spiritual Leadership in Education

Shields (2005) stated the following:

Today's education leaders are faced with a barrage of demands and pressures to ensure equitable outcomes for students, include parents in decision-making bodies, raise standardized test scores, ensure the safety of all students, reduce bullying, develop culturally relevant curriculum, engage in site-based budgeting, develop strong communities, and guarantee broad learning outcomes for all students. Why, given the social, cultural, political, and judicial climate in recent years would any educator want to swim upstream, to go "against the grain" to make public his or her spiritual grounding or to exercise what has come to be called spiritual leadership or risking even more, to provide spiritual care? (p. 3)

With the pressures and changes in today's world, there is a requirement for school leaders to command more skills than merely management skills. In order to understand what skills effective school leaders need during these stressful times in education, more research into effective leadership techniques and skills is necessary. Fullan (1993)

cautioned that schools in these turbulent times cannot merely be managed; this no longer is enough. He stated that visionaries, those who possess the skills needed to build professional learning communities, must lead schools.

Over the past twenty years, there have been a significant number of research studies to help identify effective leadership styles of successful educational leaders. Some of the most current models that have been researched include the following: servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1970), transformational leadership (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978), moral leadership (Sergiovanni, 1992) and principal-centered leadership (Covey, 1992). Leaders who are identified to possess the characteristics identified in each of these leadership styles have also been found to possess a strong inner sense of spirituality in their personal lives. More current research has begun to study a higher moral method of leadership, one in which the leader not only possesses a strong inner sense of spirituality, but allows his or her spirituality to guide all of his decisions and relationships.

Over the past few years, the study of spiritual leadership has infiltrated the business and health professions. Klenke (2003) indicated that the latest research into the business and the health fields reflects upon the need in these turbulent times for a spiritual leader. “Spiritual leadership is one avenue for satisfying this hunger because it allows the individuals and organizations to discover ways to connect their work lives with their spiritual lives” (Klenke, 2003, p. 59). It has been slow to enter the educational fields due to sensitivity of separation between church and state.

Klenke (2003) indicated, “If spirituality were to become the new frontier in leadership thinking, elucidating the emotional, cognitive, and motivational

underpinnings of spirituality would do a great service” (p. 59). The characteristics of spiritual leadership (Solomon & Hunter, 2002; Houston, 2002; Stokley, 2002) include the ability to build interconnections with and between people and groups of people, to have people feel appreciated and important, and to provide a safe, trusting, and caring environment for one another. Building these interconnections builds the capacity to change the organization. Building trust enables people to take chances in making change. Do spiritual leaders bring meaning and connectivity to the organization, which in turn builds the capacity for the organization to thrive and be successful in meeting the increasing demands of public education?

Statement of Purpose

The study of educational leaders and spiritual leadership has begun to surface over the past few years. There has been some reluctance in the study of spiritual leadership in public education due to concerns that the topic of spirituality poses a conflict in the legality that surrounds the separation of church and state (Houston, 2002; Solomon & Hunter, 2002). Due to this conflict, it is important to distinguish between these two concepts. Houston (2002) stated “religion gives us a rubric for working with the deity, while spirituality is the energy that connects us...it is a sacred narrative that gives us a sense of larger purpose” (p. 6). The study of spiritual leadership focused on education, specifically, the superintendent, is greatly needed to provide insights into the professional development and hiring of future educational leaders.

The purpose of this study is to determine if spiritual leadership is an effective style of leadership for superintendents of public schools by describing how it looks in practice and identifying the varying characteristics that are held in common by those

superintendents identified as *spiritual leaders*. This study may have implications for those in key educational leadership positions for their own spiritual leadership development and their support of others. Awareness of the factors that influence the participants who are recognized for their spiritual leadership may promote an understanding of spiritual formation factors. Insight into the practices and day-to-day interactions of superintendents perceived as spiritual leaders by their assistants and other key administrators and key stakeholders, may provide knowledge into how to recognize a spiritual leader in the hiring process and an understanding of successful spiritual practices in education.

Problem Statement

There are many identified effective leadership styles, including servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1970), moral leadership (Sergiovanni, 1992), principal-centered leadership (Covey, 1992), and transformational leadership (Bass, 1985; Burns 1978) which support the research that the top-down management styles are outdated, and that collaboration and teaming among all levels of the organization are more effective. Although each of these theories realize that there is a common theme of leaders who are spiritual in their personal lives, the new style of leadership, spiritual leadership, moves this spirituality to a higher prominence, where the leader is just not seen as a spiritual person, but one who incorporates spirituality into their leadership practices. Scholars are struggling to define the “spiritual leader” and to explore its value as an effective style of leadership in all vocations and organizations, inclusive of the fields of business, healthcare, military, and education. The study of spiritual leadership in education is additionally complex due to the legal issues of separation between church and state.

The limited studies provide no clear findings on what types of behaviors and characteristics are displayed by superintendents who are perceived as spiritual leaders. The concepts of spiritual leadership that guide the choices of these superintendents have not yet been identified in the growing body of recent research inquiring into the practices and behaviors of spiritual leaders. A qualitative inquiry to investigate the behaviors and practices of superintendents perceived as spiritual leaders, to study the concepts of leadership that guide the choices made by these leaders, and to view the response of others to these behaviors and practices may be beneficial in the pursuit of understanding how spiritual leadership looks in an educational setting and in broadening the research base of spiritual leadership.

Research Questions

- What are varying characteristics in the practices of superintendents identified as spiritual leaders and what does it look like in practice in an educational setting?
- How does one identified as a spiritual leader define his/her leadership style and what factors do they feel impact their own spirituality?
- How do those within the district leadership circle respond to the leadership behaviors of these superintendents identified as practicing spiritual leadership?
- How does spiritual leadership serve as an effective leadership style for public school superintendents given the current political and social pressures on public schools?

Definition of Terms

Case Study – “a form of qualitative research in which in-depth data are gathered relative to a single individual, program, or event, for the purpose of learning more about an

unknown or poorly understood situation” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001, p. 114).

Connectedness – a belief that one is part of some larger force that creates continuity among all individuals (Houston, 2002; Stokely, 2002).

Constructionism – the view that all knowledge is contingent upon human practices and found within the individual (Jones, Torres & Arminio, 2006; Crotty, 1998).

Constructivism – the view that there are multiple realities constructed by people and that the implications of these constructions are important to each of their own lives and interactions with others (Patton, 2002; Crotty, 1998).

Epistemology – “the theory of knowledge imbedded in the theoretical and thereby in the methodology” (Crotty, 1998, p. 3).

Methodology – “the approach that guides how data are collected and analyzed” (Jones, Torres & Arminio, 2006. p. 16).

Ontology – “concerned with ‘what is’, with the nature of existence, with the structure of reality as such” (Crotty, 1998, p. 10).

Qualitative Research – “a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible” (Denkin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 3).

Religion - the formal, organized, collective practice of one or more of the major religions of the world (Houston, 2002; Thompson, 2005).

Spirituality - For purposes of this study, “spirituality” is not to be representative of any specific religious belief. It is defined to mean a way of living, a way of interconnectedness with one self and others, and a determination to stick to and

lead through ones' own values and moral convictions (Houston, 2002; Stokely, 2002; Solomon & Hunter, 2002).

Summary

A void in research and knowledge has existed in public education related to spiritual leadership. Over the past few years, research of spirituality in the workplace and spiritual leadership has gained the attention in other professional fields, such as the business and health fields, however due to the sensitivity toward the separation of church and state, has been avoided in the studies of leadership within schools. As public education faces more difficult political challenges, the leadership style of the superintendent of schools must respond to these needs. The demand for this change of leadership style is coupled with the increasing social struggle of students, families, communities, and staff to make meaning in and of their lives. They seek guidance, support, and stability from their community leaders, including that of the school superintendent. The intent of this research was to explore and expose the characteristics and leadership behaviors of current public school superintendents, who are identified as spiritual leaders, in an effort to extend the research base in the effectiveness of spiritual leadership.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

“If we go far enough-farther, perhaps, than ever before- in the creation of cultures of trust, openness, and shared ownership that are deeply rooted in visions and core values, we will achieve a kind of educational rain forest, with profusions of innovation and knowledge creation; a superabundance disparate fields of study; streams of inspiration, feeling, and realization; hidden springs of motivation; and continually proliferating leadership that is spirituality and morally passionate, courageous, and visionary. In this ecosystem, all of our children will thrive in vast expanses of possibility and their minds will reach into heights of creative insight beyond what we can now imagine.” (Thompson, 2005, p. 139)

Introduction

The purpose of the literature review was to comprehensively investigate ideas, issues, and themes related to the current responsibilities of the public school superintendent and effective leadership styles. I read and examined topics concerning the current state of public education, school superintendent’s job responsibilities, political and social pressures, leadership methods, and spirituality. In general, the review identified many topics in the literature, discovered findings from studies relevant to superintendents and spiritual leadership, and demonstrated that there is limited research and scholarly knowledge in this area.

The first section of this chapter will describe the current climate in public education in the 21st Century. This section will discuss how public schools across America are under great pressures from federal, state governments as well as local communities to change. The second section discusses the pressures of the educational top executive, the superintendent, with the current pressures in education. Only with effective, motivational leaders serving in the roles of top executives can school systems succeed in their efforts to change to meet new political demands, to preserve existing best

practices, and to encapsulate all of these dynamics into a focused, meaningful organization. The third section will provide the reader research validating whole-system improvements. If indeed public education is going to survive under the new political and community demands, systemic changes will need to occur. The next section discusses effective leadership, the qualities of leaders and the various models that have been explored in education literature. The fifth section explores the particular nuances of servant leadership, a style of leadership which helps provide a foundation for spiritual leadership. Spiritual leadership has become an increasingly popular researched style of leadership in both the business and health fields. The study of spiritual leadership is now entering into other disciplines, including the educational field. However, since it is recently acknowledged as an important topic in educational leadership (Houston, 2002; Wheatley 2002), there is a need for additional studies that examine school leadership and spirituality. One major hindrance in the study of spirituality in educational leadership is the difficulties in defining “spirituality” and the conflict of church and state in public education. Therefore, in the seventh section, spirituality is defined for the purposes of this study and discusses the difference in definition between spirituality and religiosity. The final section reviews the current research on spiritual leadership, specifically to the role of the school superintendent.

Times of Difficulty

“The leader must seek to fill the human void- the loss of self, of meaning, of hope, of vision. People feel inconsequential in the face of technology, and the unfathomable direction in which the society is headed. It takes soul, vision, and the ability to build a sense of community. There is a desperate need for spiritual leadership as the means of bringing meaning to life, re-energizing the soul with purpose and direction, of overcoming the void that isolation has wrought.” (Rezach, 2002, p .9)

In order to appreciate the need for change in educational leadership specific to the superintendent in the 21st century, it is important to first consider the current climate in public education in the 21st century.

These are difficult times in education. Greater demand for accountability along with the increasing politicization within school governance has challenged school systems across the nation. Thomas (2001) indicated that this trend is “largely attributed to the changing political economy in the 1980’s” (p. 13). During that time, interest in public education had a resurgence among business leaders, with the goal of improving academic achievement and, therefore, international competitiveness. Accordingly, business leaders began to hold positions on local boards, demanding greater accountability measures and more effective leadership from school administrators. When local business leaders demonstrated an interest in the problems of school district leadership, they won the support of local politicians and the news media. Today, there are additional pressures placed on School Boards and Superintendents in Pennsylvania with newly passed Act 1 law in July 2006. Act 1 demands change in district budgeting processes, caps on tax increases, as well as a shift in taxing.

In addition to political pressure, there are increased expectations placed on schools to become more than just academic institutions for students. Houston (2001) stated, “the increasing complexity of our society, the deterioration of families, and the loss of social capital available to support children and families mean that superintendents will have to be adept at creating a web of support around children and families” (p. 431). Hofferth and Sandberg (2000) found the following significant changes in time spent together as a family from 1981 to 1997: Decreases in time included household time, such

as cooking and cleaning by 11.5 percent, proportion of time studying by 15 percent, attending church by 30 percent, participating in youth groups by 34 percent, visiting families and neighbors by 31 percent, and participating in passive leisure by 24 percent. Today's families spend less time with their children in the home. Communities, church organized groups, and neighborhoods spend less time getting to know one other and to provide support to each other. Due to these decreases, there is more pressure on schools to provide additional services for children. For instance, Hofferth and Sandberg (2000) found that the proportion of children participating in sports activities increased 21 percent, participating in art activities increased 37 percent, and reports of reading increased 31 percent, between the years of 1981 to 1997. Over these years, schools have increased the amount of time they provide and care for children. In many cases, the school has become the center for community events, such as sporting and music events, and is an important connection remaining for families and their neighbors to see one another. Schools are also looked upon to provide after-school activities for recreation for children and for the entire family, such as clubs and fun nights.

Additionally, with new state and federal regulations such as the Pennsylvania Academic Standards, the federal *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, and the new Health and Wellness standards, schools are held responsible to provide learning for children in areas other than just the core academics. Schools are now responsible to ensure children are taught basic moral education, and to ensure students' basic health and wellness needs are met. Frequently, it is the school that families reach out to when they need advice and support with a child and family concern. Unfortunately many schools are not properly equipped with the personnel, financial support, and physical space to meet these

increased expectations. These pressures, without resources, are becoming a reoccurring theme in current public school systems.

Educators must cope with the accountability demands from many sources, including state and federal governments, local politicians and parents, professional associations, and a variety of marketing forces that all aim to change their behavior and increase their accountability. Bringing coherence to the many accountability demands in schools and districts is becoming an increasingly difficult challenge. Firestone and Shipp (2003) indicated that local leadership is an important response to how the school and district survives and thrives in improving teaching and learning, while coping with the demands of these outside forces. “What standards were to the 1990s, leadership is to the future. This shift depicts awareness that standards strategies by themselves are not powerful enough to accomplish large-scale, sustainable reform” (Fullan, 2003, p. 1).

With so many pressures coming from outside educational systems, the organizations as a whole and as individuals, as well as the staff relationships within the schools, are reacting to these impacts. In the midst of completing a study of the role of cognition in school leadership in the late 1980’s, Bolman and Deal (2002) uncovered the incidence of frustration and burnout in American schools. Many veteran teachers and principals told them that they were “counting the days until their retirement” (Bolman & Deal, 2002, p. 21). They also found that this pessimism was not universal. There were places where teachers and school leaders were still excited and committed even though they were facing the same frustrations as their colleagues. In their quest to find out what made the difference for those who were still positive in their positions, they “became

convinced that the answers hinge on matters of faith, soul, and spirit” (Bolman & Deal, 2002, p. 21).

There is much support from political leaders for educational reform. The enactments of Federal Acts such as the *Goals 2000* in 1995, and the most recent, *No Child Left Behind of 2001*, exemplify new expectations placed on public schools. Schools are expected to perform at established performance levels on state developed assessment systems, or face scrutiny and possible sanctions by the state educational systems. The pressure to correct the public educational system by demanding greater accountability of the school systems and increases in standardized test scores seems to only confuse those in the educational system even more. I believe such *quick fixes* create stress, not solution to the decline in educational effectiveness.

Systemic Change

Education faces the need for full system reform caused by the changing demands of the community, political groups, and families. In their research, Abbot and Ryan (2000) evaluated the learning, human behavior, community, and political paradoxes that create our current educational system. Their review of research and theories indicated that there is great need for educational reform. This reform cannot be completed by the educational system alone but by a full community effort. “To blame schools for the rising tide of mediocrity is to confuse symptom to disease. Schools can rise no higher than the expectations of the communities that surround them” (Abbot & Ryan, 2000, p. 39). The business world and current political system, which, in part, drives the focus of school effectiveness on high standards, improving test scores and accountability are seen as missing part of the central issues of preparing children for adult life. In order to

improve public schools, a whole-system transformation must be undertaken. Whole system approach to improve education will bring a level of coherence and unity to the organization. Senge noted that “We’re talking about real 180-degree change- instead of trying to control everything, we’re learning to align our intentions with emerging realities. This is a profound shift in our way of being” (2002, p. 65).

“There is a difference between being an expert in the content of an innovation versus being an expert in the change process. Understanding the vicissitudes of the change process is a key to working on large-scale change” (Fullan, 2003, p. 5). In order for public education to thrive, schools will need to embrace whole system reform through innovative techniques and through strong interrelationships with all stakeholders in the community.

Importance of Interrelationships in Change Process

“Over time one can see the emergence of an expanding recognition that the web of interrelationships that make a school a whole system extend well beyond the school” (Thompson, 2005, p. 14). In public education this wider web includes parents, community members, other schools in the same system, all staff and leaders, including the school board, superintendent, and other organizations. The interconnections between the different individuals and groups within this web are dynamically complex. They are constantly changing and multifaceted. For example, as individuals and groups react to significant events that occur within the schools, the level of interactions between the various stakeholders changes. These changes cause the dynamics of the relationships within the district, as well as within the community to change. This constant change in dynamics is problematic for school districts that are traditionally built upon a very

systematic organizational chart, such as was the school model during the times of the Industrial Revolution. “It’s a well known fact that the modern public school and school district are direct descendents of the Industrial Revolution” (Thompson, 2005, p. 14). Accepting the challenge of and managing the constantly changing interrelationships is a key to the future of public schools. Wheatley stated:

It is time to become passionate about what’s besting us humans and to create schools that welcome in our creativity, contribution, and compassion. We do this by using processes that bring us together to talk to one another, listen to one another’s stories, reflect together on what we’re learning as we do our work. We do this by developing relationships of trust, where we do what we say, where we speak truthfully, where we refuse to act from petty self-interest. (as cited in Thompson, 2005, p. xii)

In too many schools, faculty, staff, and students are still isolated from one another with little opportunities to team and build collaborative relationships. In Thompson’s (2005) book, Wheatley addressed concerns with this level of isolation and the need for collaboration:

But I do know that the only path to creating more harmonious and effective schools and communities is to turn to one another and depend on one another. We cannot cope, much less create, in this increasingly fast and turbulent world, without one another. We must search for human goodness (as cited in Thompson, 2005, p. xi).

Wheatley (2005) indicated that teachers are not invited to contribute, to create, or to care about each other. Instead it is assumed that they must be policed into good behavior.

Schools function by isolating teachers in their classrooms and enforcing many policies and procedures to make them act appropriately, by providing stringent student conduct codes so students conform to *appropriate* behavior, and by keeping parents outside of the school environment to censor their input into the schools. These barriers, which are common practice in public schools, must be removed if schools are to survive in an era of increased responsibilities and higher accountability.

Superintendency in the 21st Century

As school organizations face the growing disconnect between their current methods of operating while facing the ever increasing demands and pressures from multiple outside sources, the person who is apt to feel the greatest impact of this disconnect between expectation and service is that of the top leader, the superintendent. “Educational leaders put out fires, go to meetings, answer hordes of e-mails, and struggle to implement externally imposed mandates and regulations” (Thompson, 2005, p. 23). Superintendents are surrounded daily by many events, people, issues, and encounters that compete for their time and focus. This fragmentation in focus during each day on the job fosters incoherence and disconnections within the school system. In order to make the needed changes in public education, there needs to be a focused approach by all individuals in the school system and this responsibility lies with the superintendent. Superintendents in the future must have the capacity to lead whole-system reform which rebuild schools to match the changing needs of their communities and government, to provide a safe and secure environment where all members of the organization feel they are a vital part of the organization, and to motivate and provide opportunities for others to flourish as individuals and meet their full potential.

In order to be successful as an educational leader in the coming years, the CEO of the organization, the superintendent, must be skilled in whole system reform techniques and in establishing a team approach by all members of the organization. “Successful whole-system improvement of public education is contingent on leaders’ ability to think and act systemically, and by that I mean not only understanding the need for system-wide change, but also perceiving the dynamics at work in complex systems” (Thompson, 2005, p. 15). Whole system change in education requires “the leader to make a quantum leap from the school district as a manageable machine to the school district as a living system-complex and dynamic” (Thompson, 2005, p. 19). The superintendent needs to be less focused on external, materialistic objects, but rather on the invisible forces that work at a deeper level. These skills include the ability to answer and respond to differing facets of the organization and to build their capacity to work together as an intertwined system. Thompson (2005) stated:

Learning to *answer*, to respond to a dimension that is wider and deeper than what the senses register, is an aspect of leadership that has received limited attention in the leadership literature and seminars. Yet this ability may be central to the realization of the full potential of educational leadership for whole-system transformation. (p. 19)

In addition to understanding and respecting the processes needed to bring change to an organization, the superintendent also must focus his or her attention and efforts to building strong interrelationships between all groups of people, inside and outside of the organization. “As times grow more chaotic, as people question the meaning (or meaningless) of this life, people are clamoring for their leaders to save and rescue them.

This is truer in public education than any other profession. Educational leaders bear the brunt of all of society's dilemmas and problems" (Wheatley, 2002, p. 43). According to Senge (1990):

Leaders must redefine their job. They must give up the old dogma of planning, organizing and controlling and realize the almost sacredness of their responsibility for the lives of so many people. The leader's fundamental task then is to provide the enabling conditions for people to lead the most enriching lives they can. (p. 40)

The superintendent is expected to provide a safe, secure environment where people feel that they are a meaningful part of the organization and to assist them in reaching their full potential. In order to meet this high expectation, the superintendent must be skilled in building strong interrelationships among many different groups of people.

The very idea of creating change in an organization is stressful to all those within the system, therefore superintendents must also be skilled in motivational and inspirational leadership techniques. Thompson (2005) stated the following:

The most powerful and sustainable progress in changing institutions will result not from willful efforts to plan, control, determine, and push forward, but from a profound openness of heart and mind that allows more powerful possibilities to unfold. This kind of leadership requires faith, patience, intuition, humility, expectancy, inspiration, and spirituality. (p. 21)

The personal qualities of the superintendent during this turbulent time appear to be that of someone who is able to exhibit many humanistic qualities and build strong relationships with others. One who can open his or her heart and mind to not only manage and lead the

organization, but to bring about systemic change through strong interrelationships and the ability to motivate and inspire others, both as a whole and individually, for the common good of everyone.

Qualities of Effective Leadership

The position of the school superintendent is changing drastically due to the external demands on the organization, therefore the personal qualities and leadership style of the superintendent must change to effectively lead the organization. There is significant research into defining the qualities and attributes of effective leadership. Fullan (2003), Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee (2002), Delbecq (1999), and Kerfoot (2001) provide insight into these qualities.

In his studies of leaders from successful educational organizations and successful businesses, Fullan (2003) found that leaders across all organizations share a core set of action-and-mind sets:

Leaders in effective organizations have a constellation of characteristics that I identified as hope (unwarranted optimism), enthusiasm, and energy. It is not necessary to be born with these qualities; a leader's vitality can be sapped or enhanced by the conditions under which he or she works or lives. Successful leaders tend to engage others with their energy and are, in turn, energized by the activities and accomplishments of the group. (p. 1)

Fullan's identified five action-and-mind sets that effective leaders possess are: a strong sense of moral purpose, an understanding of the dynamics of change, an emotional intelligence as they build relationships, a commitment to developing and sharing new knowledge, and a capacity for coherence making (enough coherence on the edge of chaos

to still be created). “Improving emotional intelligence of the individual leader and the group can be done and must be done to accomplish sustainable reform” (Fullan, 2003, p. 3).

Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee’s (2002) work on emotional intelligence in leaders and organizations discussed the importance of “resonant” leaders who, because of their emotional intelligence, develop relationships that are “in-sync” with and among those in their organizations. These leaders must form “an emotional bond that helps them stay focused even amid profound change and uncertainty” (p. 21).

In both Fullan’s and Goleman’s research, they confirm that emotional intelligence is vital to effective leadership. Emotional intelligence allows the leader to effectively build relationships with various groups of stakeholders in the organization. A study by the Hay Group reiterated this need for effective relationships when they compared the leadership characteristics of 100 highly successful leaders in business and 100 highly successful headteachers. The research revealed that both sets of leaders had much in common. “Headteachers perform well, both in comparison to their counterparts in private business and against the expectations of staff” (Hay Management Consultants, 2000, p. 3). From this study, the Hay Group identified five characteristics of effectiveness: teamwork and developing others, drive and confidence, vision and accountability, influencing tactics and politics, and thinking skills by being able to see the big picture. This study also confirmed another important leadership characteristic; the ability to provide a vision. Vision not only entails the ability to see the big picture, but also the ability to convey the confidence to meet that vision through established organizational

goals, the problem-solving ability to think through problems along the way, and the dedication to stay focused on moving the organization forward to meeting these goals.

Leadership is personal; it reflects the values and personality of the person in that position. “Effective leaders manage who they are inside, which then allows them to lead effectively on the outside” (Kerfoot, 2001, p. 74). In an interview on the essence of leadership, Wheatley stated “to be a good leader these days, one must be a person of extraordinary integrity and clarity. That includes knowing what you stand for, know what you believe in, and coming to the realization that you can’t do it alone” (Shieffer, 2003, p. 69). Delbecq (1999), in interviews with Silicon Valley executives who were asked to talk about the sources of their inner strength and wisdom that informed their leadership, revealed the following: a) an orientation to work as a calling that adds a sense of vitality and purpose to the leadership journey; b) integration of, rather than separation between the “private life of spirit” and “public life of work,” and the courage to stay the course and survive with dignity in spite of the special challenges of executive leadership. For these executives, spirituality is the integrative force enabling them to engage in business leadership as a form of human service. They felt that engaging their spirituality as a force in their leadership method is beneficial because it provides a nurturing environment for productive and sustaining economic and social relationships. Effective leaders allow their personal values and beliefs to be conveyed in their profession; they do not separate who they are personally from how they lead their organization.

Over the years, there have been many studies completed that have resulted in defining the effective leader as one who connects with their staff members and who

engages them to contribute their talents to the good of the organization. Kerfoot (2001) stated that effective leaders contribute to the journey:

We are leading a journey, not an end product. This journey is better led by a structure that allows everyone to contribute his or her talents to the fullest rather than the leader providing all the direction. The ability to connect with people and to engage their spirit in the noble adventure is what really matters. (p.74)

With an understanding of the need for leaders to build personal connections to the people within the organization, two of the most notable camps of study in defining this method of leadership are Servant Leadership and Authentic Leadership. Rezach (2002) commented, “Effective school leadership can be defined in terms of servant leadership” (p. 10) which identifies leaders as having vision, creating community, and developing human resources.

Servant Leadership

In 1970, the basis of Servant Leadership originated through the work of Robert Greenleaf, a retired AT&T Corporate Executive. Greenleaf (1977) stated, “The servant leader is a servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead” (p. 12). In the 1980’s and 1990’s servant leadership became a focus in leadership writings and studies, such as the works of Stephen Covey, Peter Senge, Larry Spears and Ken Blanchard. Covey indicated that “one of these fundamental, timeless principles is the idea of servant leadership and I am convinced that it will continue to dramatically increase in its relevance (as cited in

Spears, 1998, p. xi). Spear's work (1998) summarized servant leadership as leadership that:

Emphasizes increased service to others, a holistic approach to work, promoting a sense of community, and the sharing of power in decision making. At its core, servant-leadership is a long-term transformational approach to life and work – in essence a way of being – that has the potential for creating positive change throughout our society. (p.3)

He stated that servant leadership is manifested through ten characteristics: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to people, and building community. Whittington (2004) concurred that “Servant-leaders demonstrate a deep commitment to listening intently to others” (p. 167). By listening, the leader identifies and clarifies the will of his or her followers and helps the servant-leader to understand and empathize with others. The acceptance that comes from empathy and commitment to listening provides the servant-leader the ability to help heal followers with emotional hurts and broken spirits.

Servant leadership is, not surprisingly, about service. It reverses the logic of the top-down management style where the employees are seen as the servant to the leader. The servant leader understands that by providing service to their employees and giving them opportunities to share their talents, their organizations will prosper. “This sense of service, at the heart of authentic leadership, is not only service to others, service to followers, but also service to a greater purpose, and service to followers by helping them discover and be committed to the same greater purpose” (Thompson, 2005, p. 35).

Servant leaders are driven from a deep sense of morality. “Servant leaders are impelled in their work by moral purpose, passion and courage” (Thompson, 2005, p. 36). There is no personal quest for power, material rewards, or prestige. A servant leader builds purposeful relationships, where followers feel supported while enduring change and challenges in their work. “Leadership is an ethic- a gift of oneself to a common cause, a higher calling. When their gifts are genuine and the spirit is right, their giving transforms a school or school district from a mere place of work to a shared way of life” (Stokley, 2002, p. 50).

As within Servant Leadership, there are many other identified effective leadership styles, which realize that there is spirituality in leadership. Moral leadership (Sergiovanni, 1992), principal-centered leadership (Covey, 1992), and transformational leadership (Bass, 1985; Burns 1978) are some of the theories that have led leaders to break the top-down management techniques originating from the industrial revolution. All of these various leadership theories touch on the fact that leaders who are reflective of their styles of leadership are many times spiritual in their personal lives. However, the basis of spiritual leadership is leaders who incorporate their spirituality into their daily professional practices. Researchers of this newer theory of leadership are struggling to define the spiritual leader and to assess its value as an effective style of leadership in all vocations, inclusive of education.

Authentic Leadership

Authentic leadership takes a step toward defining the spiritual leader. Authentic leaders are characterized as hopeful, optimistic, resilient, and transparent. Fry and Whittington (2005) described authentic leaders as “moral/ethical, future-oriented

individuals who make the development of others a priority” (p. 185). Henderson (1998) concluded “the authentic leader was distinguished by the aspects of accountability and admitting to mistakes, perceived as non-manipulative, and salience of self over role” (p. 18). Authentic leaders act on their set of internal values, and both their attitudes and behaviors are consistent with these values. Henderson concluded that the authentic leader “was an ethical and authentic person first, and administrator second” (Henderson, 1998, p. 18).

Although authentic leadership is based on one’s following their own internal moral beliefs and values, the “emerging spiritual leadership paradigm offers an alternative for the development of authentic leadership theory and practice” (Fry & Whittington, 2005, p. 186). Authentic leadership is a necessary component of spiritual leadership, however the spiritual leader, in addition to being an ethical person, “requires transcendence of self as one pursues a vision/purpose/mission in service to key stakeholders that satisfies one’s need for spiritual survival” (Fry & Whittington, 2005, p. 189).

Spiritual leaders are authentic leaders. However, in the basis of spiritual leadership, the leader also has a sense of receiving life meaning from their work and making a significant difference. There is a calling to their professional work. To more clearly understand the intricacies of spiritual leadership, one must first define spirituality.

Defining Spirituality

In defining spirituality, it is important to first understand the difference between spirituality and religiosity. Spirituality and religion are terms that have many varying meanings depending on who is defining them and many times are used interchangeably. Defining the difference in their definition is especially important in the discussion of

spiritual leadership in public schools. “After all, we are very concerned in our business about the separation of church and state” (Houston, 2002, p. 6). Consider also, for some, spiritual leadership may have roots in a particular religious tradition; for others, it has roots in non-religious or syncretic soil. Thompson (2004) indicated that:

Those whose convictions have been shaped by their church must not wear their religion on their sleeves – at least not on the job in a public school district. We must distinguish between subtle (or not so subtle) secretarian proselytizing and genuine spiritual leadership. We must recognize the importance of preventing entanglement of church and state. (p. 62)

Mitroff and Denton (1999) found that people have four different orientations toward religion and spirituality:

- A person can have a positive view of both religion and spirituality. They see them as synonymous. Spirituality is experience and developed only through religion.
- A person can be positive about religion and negative about spirituality. They are focused on the religious life and its rituals and practices of the particular religion.
- A person can have a negative view of religion, positive with spirituality. They see religion as organized, close-minded, and intolerant and see spirituality as individualized, open-minded, tolerant, and universal. Spirituality is viewed as a uniting and bonding force.
- A person can be negative to religion and spirituality. They see both religion and spirituality having nothing to do with the modern, secular workplace. (p.89)

Although there are many definitions and philosophies on the relationship between religion and spirituality, there are identified differences between the two. Both Houston (2002) and Thompson (2005) stated that spirituality is broader than religion. Religion is based on the beliefs normally established by a particular denomination, however spirituality is a way of thinking and living. Houston (2002) stated that in distinguishing spirituality from institutional religion, spirituality is “broadly inclusive in its transcendence of a denominational doctrine and practice” (p. 6). Thompson (2005) stated, “It is our fragmentary mental models that would have us confining spirituality to the church/temple/mosque of our selves” (p. 26). The search for meaning, purpose, wholeness, and integration is a constant, never-ending task. To confine this search to one day a week violates people’s basic sense of integrity of being whole persons. “In short, spirituality is not something one leaves at home” (Stokley, 2002, p. 50). Klenke (2003) indicated that organized religion looks outward; depends on rites and scripture; and tends to be dogmatic, exclusive, and narrowly based on a formalized set of beliefs and practices. Spirituality looks inward, tends to be inclusive and more universally applicable, and embraces diverse expressions of interconnectedness. Spirituality is usually perceived as allowing for and supporting religious beliefs, whereas the reverse is not always true. Spirituality is broader than religion; it is a part of who we are and what we portray as a person, no matter time or place.

“Spirituality is as unique as the person who tries to define it” (Rezach, 2002, p. 96). However, I believe that the literature identifies common elements to the experiences of spirituality. The three themes that continue to emerge to better define spirituality are meaning systems, connections to self and others, and values.

Meaning systems are defined as the “answers people develop in response to existential concerns” (Solomon & Hunter, 2002, p. 38) such as one’s purpose with the universe. Thompson (2005) defined spirituality 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). Spirituality allows people to understand their world, make meaning of their lives, and understand their part of the universe (Houston, 2002; Stokley, 2002). “Spirituality is a meaning system that has wide-ranging impact on the way we think and act in everyday life” (Solomon & Hunter, 2002, p. 39). Spirituality allows people to understand their world, making meaning of their lives, and understand their part in the universe.

Another theme of spirituality is of connectedness – to self, others, and universe. Solomon and Hunter (2002) stated “from our perspective, spirituality is a sense of profound connection to things beyond and/or within one’s self” (p. 39). What one experiences and believes as the spiritual must also be outwardly manifested in one’s word, deed, and most importantly, in attitude. This spiritual core provides leaders a firm ground from which to stand and a clear voice with which to speak. Without this solid core, leaders lose their focus or send motivational messages that rally no one.

The most important connection needed is within the self. Senge (1994) stated the following:

As individuals practice the discipline of personal mastery, several changes gradually take place within them. Many of these are quite subtle and often go unnoticed. In addition to clarifying the structures that characterize personal mastery as a discipline, the systems perspective also illuminates

subtler aspects of personal mastery- especially: integrating reason and intuition; continually seeing more of our connectedness to the world; compassion; and commitment to the whole. (p. 167)

The third theme indicates how spirituality forms the basis for one's values and ethics (Solomon & Hunter, 2002). Stokley (2002) stated it "serves as the standpoint from which to decide our actions and conduct in society" (p. 48). Spiritual leaders draw upon their own values to inform their individual and professional behavior. Bolman and Deal established that the quest for soul requires reclaiming and rekindling a spiritual center. "It involves building a faith that sustains you when the going gets tough. It is a personal journey in search of answers to life's fundamental questions" (Bolman & Deal, 2002, p. 23).

Within this study, "spirituality" is not to be confused to represent any specific religious belief. It is defined to mean a way of living, a way of interconnectedness with one self and others, and a determination to stick to and lead through ones' own values and moral convictions. Additionally, the orientation of one's spirituality and religiosity will not be differentiated in this study. As identified by Mitroff and Denton (1999), the person with a positive view of both religion and spirituality, as well as the person who has a positive view of spirituality and a negative or neutral view of religion, can be a participant in this study.

Faith Development

In the process of trying to define spirituality, Fowler (1981) introduced concepts and language on the processes of spiritual development through his "stages of faith". Fowler's theory is not focused on any particular religious content or context, but views

faith as a universal quality that is a powerful aspect of human growth and transformation. He defined faith as “a person’s or group’s way of moving into the force field of life. It is our way of finding coherence in and giving meaning to the multiple forces and relations that make up our lives (1981, p. 4). Fowler viewed faith as a dynamic and evolving process of which there are transitional points where major changes in the basis of one’s operations occur. The final stages of faith development that each individual reaches varies, however Fowler is quite clear that people located at each stage can experience a fulfillment of faith. The six stages of Fowler’s Faith Development Theory are the following:

- Stage 1: The Intuitive-Projective – During this stage, self is the centre of experience. Children, age two to seven, are usually at this stage of development, where life is a collage of disorganized images of both real events of daily life and imaginary fantasies of the child. The children are totally dependent on parents and adult figures. At this stage, authority is based on physical size or the power of external symbols, such as uniforms.
- Stage 2: Mythical-Literal – People at this stage construct life in a more orderly, temporally linear and dependable world. Typically, children around the age of ten are at this stage. They are better able to think logically and the bounds of their world have broadened with additional influences including teachers, movies, television, other pupils and reading. People at this stage make strong associations with people who are similar to their way of thinking and look critically at those who are different. There is a sense of cosmic reciprocity, where you believe that you get out of life what you put in. Adults at this stage tend to engage in little personal

reflection on themselves or others, and believe in “reciprocal fairness and immanent justice based on reciprocity” (Fowler, 1981, p. 149).

- Stage 3: Synthetic-Conventional – A person at this stage, many times an adolescent, has an “ideology, a more or less consistent clustering of values and beliefs, but he or she has not objectified these for examination and in a sense is unaware of having them” (Fowler, 1981, p. 173). Those at this stage are conformists and generally committed workers with a strong sense of loyalty to their church. They will tend to work for harmony and will bury conflict rather than allow it to surface.

Factors that contribute to the breakdown of Stage 3 and readiness for transition to the Individuative – Reflective stage are the following: serious clashes or contradictions with valued authority figures; or clashes with policies or practices previously seen as sacred and unbreachable; or an experience that leads to critical reflection on how one’s beliefs and values are formed and changed.

- Stage 4: Individuative – Reflection – This stage takes form most appropriately in young adulthood. Two key developments in this stage are the following: First, the self now claims “an identity no longer defined by the composite of one’s roles or meanings to others” (Fowler, 1981, p. 182). They no longer tolerate following the crowd. Rather, making their own decisions become very important to them. Secondly, there is a consciousness of one’s new boundaries and an awareness of oneself related to a “world view”.
- Stage 5: Conjunctive – Unusual before mid-life, the firm boundaries one established in Stage 4, “this stage now makes porous and permeable” (Fowler,

1981, p. 198). There are many adults who never reach this stage. With the knowledge that life is half over, in this stage a person is ready “to spend and be spent for the cause of conserving and cultivating the possibility of others’ generating identity and meaning” (Fowler, 1981, p. 198). However, stage 5 individuals remain paradoxical or divided because “the self is caught between these universalizing apprehensions and the need to preserve its own being and well-being” (Fowler, 1981, p. 200).

- Stage 6: Universalizing - The transition to stage 6 involves the overcoming of the paradox in stage 5, in which the self engages “in spending and being spent for the transformation of present reality in the direction of a transcendent actuality” (Fowler, 1981, p. 200). Rare is the individual who reaches this stage of faith development. Fowler acknowledges individuals such as Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King, and Jesus as such examples.

Understanding Fowler’s stages of faith development assists in comprehending the various levels of personal spiritual growth. People function at various stages of spirituality. It is the opinion of the researcher that superintendents who are perceived as spiritual leaders function at the higher stages of faith development, such as the Individuative – Reflective stage or Conjunctive stage, in which there is an ability to make critical choices about defining the elements of their faith and identity, as well as a deeper understanding of self and his or her connections to others and the real world.

Spiritual Leadership

“I don’t think it is accidental that questions from the domain of spirituality have moved into leadership. In fact, it is an unavoidable consequence of this time of

turbulence” (Wheatley, 2002, p. 42). Fairholm (1998) was one of the first leadership scholars who put spirituality and leadership together. He suggested that “spiritual leadership is a holistic approach that considers the full capacities, needs and interests of both leader and led: spiritual leaders see leadership as contextual relationships in which all participants want to grow and help others in their self-development activities” (p.111). Fairholm indicated that the “spiritual leadership process includes building community within the group and a sense of personal spiritual wholeness in both leader and led. Spiritual leaders set and live by a higher moral standard and ask others to share that standard” (p. 40). Part of the community-building includes vision setting, sharing, creating meaning, and sense making. Fairholm identified eight elements in the spiritual leadership process that are dynamically interrelated and manifest themselves in leader-follower interactivity, including community, competence, stewardship, servanthood, visioning, and high moral standards.

With all of the pressures that are part of everyday life in the 21st Century, there has been increased pressure for businesses and organizations to provide spiritual leadership and caring within these systems. “We need to integrate spirituality into management. No organization can survive for long without spirituality and soul. We must examine ways of managing spirituality without separating it from the other elements of management” (Mitroff & Denton, 1999, p. 91).

Development of Spiritual Leadership

One of the questions to be answered in the study of spiritual leadership is in the development or origins of this method of leading. There is even a question of whether or not the capacity for spiritual leadership can be acquired. Creighton (1999) indicated that

leading with spirit is not something easily learned by reading a book or by attending leadership workshops. Spiritual leadership is developed through one's experiences, how one responds and grows from these experiences, and from strong spiritual mentorship and guidance from significant others.

In a phenomenological qualitative study by Maldonado, Efinger, and Lacey (2003), 14 contemporary leaders were interviewed to investigate their perceptions of what they regarded as the primary influences on their own moral development. Findings indicated that there were a number of factors that influenced the participants' moral development. The most identified influence was that of their parents, with a particular emphasis on the role of mothers. Spirituality was important to nine of the participants. Other individuals who were identified as influencing their moral development were teachers, mentors, and friends. All of the participants discussed peak experiences and/or life experiences as being important to their moral development. These experiences were diverse and specific to each individual. Finally, six of the participants identified that their insights into themselves or others helped in their personal moral development.

The findings from Maldonado, Efinger, and Lacey's research confirmed that personal life experiences, reflections, and reactions to these experiences, and the connections and guidance of significant others are key to the development of moral or spiritual leadership skills. Additionally important in the development of this spiritual base, is the need to rekindle and maintain it, even during the most difficult times. Thompson (2005) outlined several personal practices that spiritual leaders have in common: some sort of quiet time each day for an opportunity to read or reflect. "The sources of spiritual nourishment and renewal, of course, can be highly individualistic"

(Thompson, 2005, p. 42). Maintaining this spiritual base takes continual effort and commitment through some form of personal reflection.

Characteristics of Spiritual Leadership

One of the most important aspects of effective leadership is to know oneself. Bolman and Deal (1995) explained that leading is giving; the giving of oneself and one's spirit: "Gifts of authorship, love and caring, power, and significance only work when they are freely given and freely received. When the spirit is right, the giving transforms an organization from a place of work to a way of life" (p. 102). Spiritual leadership is not possible without a cultivated and disciplined commitment to seeking out what is hidden beneath surface appearances. Nothing in the political context of educational leadership supports such an idea. "It must be discovered and nurtured from within, and a spiritual leader must vigilantly guard against the river of externals that is constantly ready to sweep it away" (Thompson, 2005, p. 40).

When examining the characteristics of a spiritual leader, certain traits and themes emerge in the literature. These include a caring attitude with placing the importance of the organization and all its components in front of any self-serving goals, to inspire and empower every person within the organization and to collaborate effectively with all stakeholders, and to provide a clear vision for the district, that embraces the values of the community and organization. Spiritual leaders make decisions based on their internal moral judgments rather than those based on external pressures. Creighton (1999) acknowledged that one can recognize leaders with spirit and finds these individuals to have the following personal qualities: "a combination of head and heart, mind and body, and intellect and feeling toward others. Leaders with spirit have a deep sense of values

and beliefs – and a willingness to expose those values and beliefs for inspection and dialogue with others” (p. 6).

The temptations to compromise one’s integrity abound in the current educational environment. Great spiritual leaders however, have a strong moral purpose, courage and passion. Sergiovanni stated: “The heart of leadership has to do with what a person believes, values, dreams about and is committed to. It is the person’s interior world which becomes the foundation of her or his reality” (Sergiovanni, 1992, p. 7). Spiritual leaders make decisions based on their own strong moral convictions and personal beliefs about what is best for the organizations. Decisions are not based on outside pressures and criticism. These decisions are also based upon the needs and what is best for the organization and not based on what is best or easiest for the leader. Wheatley (2003) concurred that as a leader, “you really have to work on how not to be a big ego and how to inspire people without controlling them” (as cited in Schieffer, 2003, p. 69).

Spiritual leaders are distinguished by their humility. “A self-absorbed or self-promoting over inflated human ego is not so adept at yielding to and recognizing powers and possibilities that are far greater than itself” (Thompson, 2005, p. 130). Collins’ (2001) *Good to Great*, reflected on the experiences of 11 successful leaders who built enduring greatness “through a paradoxical blend of extreme personal humility and intense professional will” (p. 20). He found that good-to-great leaders “channel ambition into the company, not the self and set up successor(s) for even greater success in the next generation” (p. 36). Spiritual leaders view their jobs as a *calling*: as an opportunity to serve others and their organization.

Another key characteristic of a spiritual leader is the ability to inspire and empower every person within the organization, and build a collaborative team environment. Covey (1998) indicated that leaders with spirituality demonstrate a true “caring” for all in the organization, so the approach to problem solving is synergistic, not adversarial. Spiritual leaders care for each person as an individual and understand each person’s importance to the organization as a whole. Thompson’s research (2003) indicated that the following attributes are found in spiritual leaders: sacrifice of self, persistence and mindfulness in all situations, even in the most difficult times, and compassion for all others. “As groundwork, spiritual leaders also practice trust, openness, and progress of social systems, such as schools and school districts” (Thompson, 2005, p. 55).

Spiritual leaders also have the capacity to bring meaning to all parts of the organization and to emphasize collaboration and teamwork to bring the organization together into an efficient interconnected system. “The spiritual leader sees the complex system or organization as being horizontal - that is, despite disparate titles and compensation levels, he or she sees others as equals working together in a learning community with a clear and common purpose” (Stokley, 2002, p. 50). The capacity to bring all members together to benefit the organization is part of the overall visioning necessary to the characteristics of the spiritual leader.

The final key characteristic of spiritual leaders is the power of vision and establishing goals. There is clarity to their vision, which embraces and guides the values of the school system. Everyone in the system should be aware of this vision and goals, and help to support it. As DePree (1989) stated in *Leadership is an Art*, “Leaders share a

clear statement of the values of the organization. These values should be broadly understood, agreed to and should shape the district and individual behavior” (p. 14). Effective school leaders ensure that change efforts are aimed at clear, concrete goals. As described by Liethwood and Riehl (2003), “Leaders know the ends toward which they are striving. They pursue goals with clarity and tenacity, and are accountable for their accomplishments” (p. 7).

The Superintendent as a Spiritual Leader

The previous sections provide an overview of the literature pertaining to effective leadership and literature pertaining to spirituality. In order to conduct a study to determine the relationship between the two constructs, existing literature and research that connect the two need to be explored as it relates to the position of the school superintendent.

There have been several researchers who have concluded that spiritual leadership is an appropriate and timely leadership style for current school administrators. Houston (2002) claimed that in today’s society, educational administrators have complex, chaotic jobs and are searching for meaning and purpose in their positions. Additionally, Creighton (1999) stated: “Administrators in the new century will need to be more focused and involved in articulating their personal values, beliefs, and spirituality than those who have traditionally held the job” (p. 6). Soloman and Hunter (2002) validated the appropriateness of the construct of spirituality in education, as it is understood as a meaning system, “it can play an important role in effective leadership without infringing upon personal or political rights” (p. 38). Finally Thompson (2005) summarized the current situation in public education in the following statement:

Our public school systems must be transformed to realize much more of the fullness of their purpose to help every child who comes to school realize his or her intellectual, social, creative and moral potential. It is my contention that the level of educational progress that is now needed will not be realized without a fuller understanding and practice of the spiritual dimensions of educational leadership. A materialistic mind-set shuts out the deeper powers and possibilities for advances in education. Spiritual leadership is indispensable. (p. 3)

Rezach's (2002) grounded theory study concluded that spiritual leadership can serve as an effective style of leadership based on her study of five independent schools in New Jersey. One limitation of her research, however, was that four of the five Heads of School interviewed in this study are heads of religious independent schools. Further research is needed involving the leaders of public schools.

The key characteristics of spiritual leadership have been found to be effective when applied to the construct and operations of the public school organization. These characteristics include the ability to put the organization before self, the ability to build connections and meaning for all members of the organization and the organization as a whole, and the ability to build a vision and common goals.

At times, the job of an educational superintendent can be seen as a "calling" by the individuals who take these positions. "The superintendency isn't so much a job as it is a calling. You may choose it, but it also chooses you. You are summoned to it" (Houston, 2001, p. 6). Being called is a spiritual experience; it is what one is meant to do with his or her life. Additionally, most superintendents were first teachers; thus those

who are educational leaders were first called to teach. “When people are called to teach, they are called to serve - to serve a purpose that is larger than one’s self interest, to serve their students’ need for education” (Thompson, 2005, p. 32). Knowing this, it seems natural to hypothesize that the leadership style of effective and successful superintendents includes their ability to draw upon their own spirituality for guidance.

“Educational 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, p. 3). Stokley (2002) stated, “As a superintendent overseeing the day-to-day operations of a school district, I believe the spiritual dimension enters when a problem arises that has a strong impact on individuals” (p. 49). With the current stress and pressures placed upon public schools, the school superintendent must have strong moral convictions and an ability to make decisions based on the best interests of the district and students, not based on outside criticism or pressures, or based on self-actualization.

In order for schools to function effectively, appropriate communication and connections must be a key focus of the school superintendent. Stokely indicated that the spiritual leader will drop whatever task they are engaged in and “give the concerned individual his or her full attention” (p. 49).

Senge (1990) indicated that inspirational leaders help people to expand their capacity to understand the complexities of the school and community and works to “breathe life into” the vision of the school (p. 340). I believe that spiritual leaders spend much of their time inspiring and energizing those within the organization. They

understand the necessity to motivate teachers, parents, and the community to work collaboratively for the betterment of children, and to build strong relationships with all of them. Spiritual leaders expose themselves spiritually and morally to others and let people know what values they hold dear, and that these values are the basis for how they lead. During this era of accountability, I believe schools that have superintendents who do not possess the characteristics of a spiritual leader will remain status quo and fail to succeed under the political pressures for change in public schools.

Case Study

As schools face increased pressures for students to perform at higher levels of achievement, there is an increasing need to define effective characteristics of the chief leader, the superintendent, in the schools. “To expand and improve this line of scholarship, more information is needed regarding the practices of superintendents in high-performing versus low-performing districts” (Thomas, 2001, p.17).

Despite an increased interest in spirituality and leadership (Wheatley, 2002; Piedmont, 1999), there continues to be a lack of studies that examine school leadership and the construct of spirituality. Research (Holye, 2002; Wheatley, 2002) also has shown that there is an increasing need to study the role of spirituality in the complex world of school leadership.

This study explored the leadership behaviors and practices of superintendents who are characterized as spiritual leaders. These understandings have implications for the training and preparation of future candidates for the superintendency. In addition, by understanding the characteristics and practices of those who are perceived as spiritual

leaders, those who are currently in key educational leadership positions can gain personal insight into their own spiritual leadership development and their support of others.

A multiple case study approach was used to gain an in-depth description of the varying behaviors and interactions of these educational leaders. Investigations were conducted through interviews with the superintendent, and key members of his or her administrative team and School Board, onsite observations, and document analysis.

Summary

This chapter included a review of the literature to investigate the ideas, issues and themes related to the current responsibilities of the public school superintendent and effective leadership techniques. First, I examined the current state of education in the 21st Century and how these pressures have impacted the job of the superintendent. Public education is under great pressures from federal, state, as well as local communities to change. The responsibilities of the top executive of the schools, the superintendent, must change in order to address these increased political and societal pressures. My next quest was to research whole-system change and the qualities of effective leadership. If indeed public education is going to survive under these new pressures, whole system reform under the leadership of an effective top executive are needed. Through exploration of leadership styles, such as servant leadership and authentic leadership, the foundation for spiritual leadership is presented. Defining spirituality, both in term and in its difference to religiosity, is an important part of my research. Finally, spiritual leadership is defined and a review of the current research on spiritual leadership, specific to the role of the public school superintendent, was completed. The review demonstrated that there is

limited research and knowledge into spiritual leadership specific to the field of education and the public school superintendent.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore the leadership behaviors that are displayed within their job responsibilities of selected superintendents, who are perceived as being spiritual leaders, in order to identify and describe, through case study, the spiritual character and behaviors of these superintendents. The factors that frame their leadership behavior, such as life experiences and use of self-reflection, and the responses of selected participants within each district's leadership circle to the superintendent's leadership behaviors, were also studied.

“Because contemporary spirituality is practiced in less established, more informal ways than traditional religion, its study demands a more qualitative, participative methodology than is conventional, either in the study of the religion or management” (Bell & Taylor, 2001, p. 2). In seeking to understand spirituality as an aspect of school leadership, a research design that incorporates both direct personal experience and other actors' interpretations is desirable. Therefore, this research adopted a case study approach to studying the individual and collective practices that constitute workplace spirituality.

A qualitative, inductive approach with descriptive methods of data collection was utilized to give consideration to the following research questions:

- What are varying characteristics in the practices of superintendents identified as “spiritual leaders” and what does it look like in practice in an educational setting?

- How does one identified as a “spiritual leader” define his/her leadership style and what factors do they feel impact their own spirituality?
- How do those within the district leadership circle respond to the leadership behaviors of these superintendents identified as practicing spiritual leadership?
- How does “spiritual leadership” serve as an effective style of leadership for public school superintendents given the current political and social pressures on public schools?

This chapter outlines the overall research design in this study. It includes a discussion of case study methodology, sample selection, data collection, and data analysis strategies.

Overview of Qualitative Research

A qualitative design was utilized to achieve an in-depth understanding of the leadership characteristics that selected superintendents who are perceived as spiritual leaders display under the conditions of the superintendency. This fostered the ability to identify and describe, through case study, the leadership assumptions and practices drawn upon by these leaders and the responses of selected participants within each district’s leadership circle to the superintendent’s leadership characteristics.

Denkin and Lincoln (2000) defined qualitative research as “a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible” (p. 3). Additionally, Merriam (1988) identified some assumptions that assist in defining qualitative research. She stated these assumptions as follows:

Qualitative research assumes that there are multiple realities-that the world is not an objective thing out there but a function of personal interaction and perception. It is a highly subjective phenomenon in need of interpreting rather than measuring. Beliefs rather than facts form the basis of perception. Research is exploratory, inductive, and emphasizes processes rather than end. In this paradigm, there are no predetermined hypotheses, no treatments and no restrictions on the end product. One does not manipulate the variables or administer a treatment. What one does is observe, intuit, sense what is occurring in a natural setting-hence the term naturalistic inquiry. (p. 17)

Qualitative research studies are completed in natural settings, using data collected from these settings in an attempt to make sense of it. I considered the assumptions concerning qualitative research that Merriam (1988) indicated in this exploratory study. The research questions provide the frame of the study that focuses on defining spiritual leadership in education, as well as the characteristics and practices of superintendents who embrace spiritual leadership. The context of these leadership behaviors, as well as the response of others to this leadership behavior, is also integral to this study.

Constructivism and Construction Paradigm

This study is guided by both a constructivism and constructionist paradigm (interpretative framework). Defining both of these principles is integral to understanding the framework of this study and interpretations made on the research. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) stated that “each interpretive paradigm makes particular

demands on the researcher; including the questions he or she asks and the interpretations the researcher brings to them” (p. 19). Paradigms contain the researcher’s epistemological, ontological, and methodological premises.

Epistemology is defined as “the theory of knowledge imbedded in the theoretical and thereby in the methodology (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). Epistemology asks the question of “how do we know what we know?” (Patton, 2002, p. 134) and can be described as “the origins, theory or assumptions about knowledge” (Jones, Torres, and Arminio, 2006, p. 9).

Ontology is defined as “concerned with ‘what is’, with the nature of existence, with the structure of reality as such” (Crotty, 1998, p. 10). Ontology answers the question to “what is the nature of reality?” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p. 19) and can be described as the study of being.

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) stated that the constructivism paradigm “assumes a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and respondent cocreate understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures” (p. 21). Constructivism “suggests that each one’s way of making sense of the world is as valid and worthy of respect as any other” (Crotty, 1998, p. 58)

Constructionism is defined by Jones, et al. (2006) as being “concerned with the individual because knowledge is found within the individual” (p. 18). Crotty (1998) further defined constructionism as

the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of

interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context. (p. 42)

Constructionism emphasizes the way our culture has shaped the way in which people view things in the world.

The combination of constructivism and constructionism epistemology is used in this research study to seek to understand the human constructs and contexts of our world. The philosophical assumptions that have an influence on this study are the nature of the participant's realities (ontological), the relationships that the researcher and practitioner have with one another (epistemological), and the methods of the research process (methodological).

Case Study Methodology

Methodology is defined as “the approach that guides how data are collected and analyzed” (Jones, et al., 2006, p. 16). The methodology utilized in this study is a case study approach.

The researcher selected a case study design of qualitative research because of the nature of the research questions that are being asked. Case studies can be defined in terms of the process used in conducting the inquiry, the bounded system or unit of analysis selected for the study, or the product, the end report of the investigation (Merriam, 1998). “Case study might be selected for its very uniqueness, for what it can reveal about a phenomenon, knowledge we would not otherwise have access to” (Merriam, 1998, p. 33). This researcher wishes to examine and gain a rich holistic understanding of a complex phenomenon in its natural setting; therefore a case study approach is the appropriate method in conducting this research study.

Case study methodology of data collection and analysis allowed the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the complex factors that surround a study of the behaviors and practices of superintendents characterized as spiritual leaders, and their effectiveness on those who work closely beside them and the organization overall. Case study data consists of all information collected about each case. “These data often include observations, interviews, documents, past records, and audiovisual materials” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001, p. 149). This research design employed interviews of selected superintendents, interviews with a key member of each of his or her administrative teams and a selected Board member, observations, as well as a review of district and local documents as a method of gathering and triangulating data regarding the superintendent’s leadership behaviors and practices.

Also considered in this holistic view of the superintendent’s leadership behaviors will be a detailed description of the superintendent’s district, administrative tasks, and the superintendent’s leadership circles. Consideration of this information and situations assisted me to form an interpretation of the leadership assumptions that frame the superintendents’ displayed leadership behaviors and practices.

Sample

Merriam (1998) indicated that nonprobability sampling is the method of choice for most qualitative research. The most common form is purposeful sampling. Merriam indicated that purposeful sampling is “based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 61). Patton (1990) argued that “the

logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth” (p. 169).

Due to the specific population this study targeted, purposeful sampling was used with specific criteria to select the participants. Criterion sampling enables superintendents to participate in this study based on their leadership characteristics. The criteria for participation in this study are as follows: 1) superintendents who indicated a willingness to participate on the questionnaire; 2) participants’ leadership approaches reflected actions and attitudes perceived to be spiritual in nature; 3) participants are employed in a Pennsylvania Public School District for a minimum of 3 years (in the same district) as the School Superintendent, and 4) the participant interacts on a daily basis with their employees so that they are perceived as the decision maker/leader of the organization.

As a first step, the snowball sampling technique was utilized to identify individuals to participate in this case study based on the recommendation and referral of others (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998; Patton 1990). This technique involves asking each participant to refer names of other possible participants back to me.

I asked the 29 current Intermediate Unit Executive Directors and the Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators (PASA) to recommend current PA Superintendents of Schools who they perceive as spiritual leaders. A Letter of Introduction (Appendix A) along with a Participant Referral form (Appendix B) was sent by mail to each of these directors. The Executive Directors were asked to complete the Participant Referral form (Appendix B) to ensure that the individuals met the selection criteria as established. Of the 30 letters sent, I received

letters back from 11 of the directors, who recommended a total of 18 individuals who they felt met the established criteria. Three of these letters of recommendation offered no names of individuals at this time.

From the list of recommendations from the Intermediate Executive Directors, letters were sent by mail to the 18 recommended possible participants. A Letter of Introduction (Appendix C) along with a Questionnaire (Appendix D) was included in the mailing. The Questionnaire included questions on the following: 1) years of service in their current district as the superintendent, 2) their interest in being considered for this study, 3) the size of the district, 4) three words to best describe their leadership style, and 5) the district's performance on the Pennsylvania State System of Assessment over the past three years. Of these 18 questionnaires sent, 11 responses were sent back to me. Nine out of the eleven responses that were returned stated that they were interested in hearing about the study in more detail.

Purposeful sampling was used to select the two individuals who I identified as the best candidates for the study. A maximum variation sampling strategy was employed to select the two cases from the eleven possible participants. Variances considered were gender differences of superintendents, size of district student enrollment, academic success of the district based on the Pennsylvania State System of Assessment (PSSA) 2006 scores, and divergent population settings such as rural, suburban, and urban areas. Phone interviews were conducted by the researcher to ensure the willingness and openness of selected possible cases to participate in the case study. In addition, review of the written responses on the respondent questionnaire concerning how they characterize

their leadership style and their personal interest in this study expressed in the phone interview assisted me in the selection of the best candidates.

Phone calls were made to eight of the nine superintendents who had returned their questionnaires and expressed an interest in hearing more about the study. One participant was not called since he did not meet the criteria of a minimum of three years of service in his current district. Of the eight phone calls made, five individuals either responded to the call or called back to me after I left a message. For those phone calls where initial contact was not made with the superintendent, a message was left with their secretary to call me back. If no response was received, a second phone call and message was left with the secretary. If a call back to me was not received at this time, it was determined that the superintendent was not interested in being a part of this study.

Final selection of the two superintendents from the five possible participants for this case study was based on the maximum variation sampling study. Variations in the two chosen cases included the following: one superintendent was female and one male, one of the district's was rural and one urban , and one district is experiencing district-wide success on all components of the state assessment system, and one of the districts is struggling in several categories to meet the state expectations on the state assessments. Secondly, in review of the superintendents' responses to the question concerning the three words that best describe their leadership style, both of these superintendents chose terms that are consistent with researched leadership behaviors of a spiritual leader. Finally, during the phone conversation with each of these participants, both of the chosen participants presented themselves as being very open to participating in the study and both expressed their desire to help others in their research just as others had assisted them

in their personal studies. They were very welcoming and excited to be chosen for this study.

Data Collection

Data were collected by the researcher at each site for a period of several days. Days selected were determined by the availability of the superintendent and others to be interviewed. Data for this study were generated from a variety of sources: interviews, observation, and document review. Given the complexity of the environment of the superintendent, the sources of data collection were varied and multidimensional.

Interviews

Interviews with both the superintendent and members of their leadership teams were a primary source of the data collection:

We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe...We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions. We cannot observe behaviors that took place at some previous point in time. We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things. The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective. (Patton, 1990, p. 196)

The interviews with each selected superintendent were semi-structured one-on-one interviews. In this type of interview, the questions are a mix of more and less structured questions. The highly structured questions in the interview were to obtain specific information from all of the respondents. The largest part of the interview was

guided by a list of questions to be explored in which neither the exact wording nor the order of questioning was determined ahead of time. Merriam (1998) stated that “this format allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic” (p. 74). At the end of the scheduled interview with the superintendent, exit interviews, interviews with members of their district leadership team, members of their school board, and observations in the field were planned. Additionally, the researcher requested at least five documents of the superintendent’s choosing that demonstrate their personal leadership style and characteristics.

After the initial interview with the superintendent, other interviews with a member of the superintendent’s leadership circle were conducted by the researcher. The member of the administrative circle interviewed was chosen by superintendent to encourage comfortable and detailed communication. The selection of the school board member was to be a member of the Board when the superintendent was chosen to determine the reason for selection of this superintendent to this position. In both cases, the current President of the School Board was chosen to be interviewed. One of these presidents was a member of the Board when the superintendent was hired, and the other was not a member of the board, however in attendance at all of the Board meetings at the time of the selection, and soon afterward became a member of the Board.

All interviews were audio taped, which allowed me to concentrate on the interview. Immediately after each interview, I reviewed each of the audiotapes to consider what main themes emerged and if additional discussion is warranted. I also kept a reflective journal to record any learning and adjustments made to the data gathering. I

used “member checking” with participants at the conclusion of the visitation to clarify any assumptions, bias, and further descriptions. All interviews were transcribed for data review and analysis.

Observations

Observations of the superintendent began with my first point of contact with the district. Observation opportunities included daily interactions of a superintendent, an administrative team meeting, and a school board meeting. During the observations the researcher remained as unobtrusive as possible. Detailed field notes, including descriptions, direct quotations, and observer comments, were taken that describe the context of the leadership characteristics and behaviors of the superintendent. Leadership functions of interest to this study are those such as problem solving and decision making, and interacting with board members, administrative team members, staff, peers, parents and community members.

After each observation, the researcher immediately summarized the field notes taken during the observation and reflected upon the field notes to find relationships between behaviors observed and the interview responses.

Document Collection

The researcher also collected a minimum of five documents of the superintendent’s choosing that demonstrate his or her personal leadership philosophy and behaviors. Letters and memoranda to the Board, staff members, parents, the community, the media, as well as the contents of speeches, newspaper articles, and minutes of formal or informal meetings are all possible documents that reflect leadership characteristics of the superintendent. I assessed the authenticity of the documents upon receipt. It is

important to determine the conditions, such the history of the document and the intended purpose under which these documents were produced. Each of the documents was analyzed for content and reoccurring themes to support both the interviews and observations.

Data Analysis

Merriam (1998) indicated that “first, a case study is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single bounded unit. Conveying an understanding of the case is the paramount consideration in analyzing the data” (p. 193). Gathering all of the data from the interviews, observations, and documents and bringing them together was the first step in analyzing the data.

“Attention to data management is particularly important under these circumstances” (Merriam, 1998, p. 193). All the information from each of the two cases was brought together – interview notes and transcripts, field notes, collected documents, and researcher notes. The information was transcribed into a database, edited for redundancies, parts fitted together, and organized to prepare for analysis. Patton (2002) referred to this data collection as the case record. “The case record pulls together and organizes the voluminous case data into a comprehensive primary resource package” (Patton, 2002, p. 449).

Data were analyzed in two stages; a with-in case analysis and secondly, a cross-case analysis. The with-in case analysis was completed for each case independently. “Each case is first treated as a comprehensive case in and of itself” (Merriam, 1998, p. 194). Therefore, the first step in the analysis was to write a report on each of the case studies to allow the reader to understand the case as a unique entity.

A content analysis was conducted to find core consistencies in the data to reveal patterns and themes. Patten (2002) differentiated patterns from themes as the following: “pattern usually refers to a descriptive finding” while a “theme takes a more categorical or topical form” (p. 453). Through content analysis, I was able to identify, code, categorize, classify, and label the primary patterns in the data. “This essentially means analyzing the core content of interviews and observations to see what’s significant” (Pattan, 2002, p. 463).

Initially, coding concepts was generated by identifying key words in the margins that were then clustered into major categories and subcategories. This same analytic process was used for the interviews, records of observations, and the collected documents. After the coding categories were drafted, data from all sources were completely indexed under the categories and subcategories through a process of highlighting relevant quotes and data. Upon completion of this coding into categories, I then began to write the first draft of the report. Revisions to the categories and outline occurred during the process of writing to bring more clarity in meaning for the reader. Merriam (1998) indicated “the combination of thinking while writing leads to seeing new ideas or revising the outline when certain sections do not make sense” (p. 225). Each case was described in rich, thick description.

After the analysis of each case was completed, a cross-case analysis was completed. A cross-case method of analysis was used to make comparisons of data collected from the two leaders and discover similarities and differences between them. Merriam (1998) indicated “the more cases included in a study, the greater the variation across the cases and the more compelling an interpretation is likely to be” (p. 40). This technique allowed

me to discover “processes and outcomes that occur across many cases, to understand how they are qualified by local conditions, and thus develop more sophisticated descriptions and more powerful explanations” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 172). A unified description of comparisons across and between both cases were developed.

Validity and Reliability

“Regardless of the type of research, validity and reliability are concerns that can be approached through careful attention to a study’s conceptualization and the way in which the data were collected, analyzed, and interpreted, and the way in which the findings are presented” (Merriam, 1998, p. 199). Merriam (1998) outlined several techniques used to assure reliability that include detailing the investigator’s position, utilizing triangulation of data collection, and creating an audit trail that details how data is collected, how categories derived, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry. To ensure the reliability in this research, all three of these techniques were utilized.

Regarding internal validity, Merriam (1998) outlined six basic strategies to enhance internal validity. These strategies include triangulation, member checks, long-term observation, peer examination, and participatory or collaborative modes of research, and consideration of bias. The use of triangulation of data including interviews, observations, and document collection, are outlined in this study. Member checks were conducted at the conclusion of the visitation, as well as through repeated observations and participant input during the data collection. Researcher bias is considered in the design of the study.

External validity is concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations. In other words, how can the results of this study be generalized to other situations? To enhance the possibility of the results of a qualitative study generalizing, Merriam (1998) outlined the following strategies: provide rich thick descriptions of the findings; describe how typical the program, event or individual is compared with others in their same class; or use a multisite design. This research study was conducted in two different sites.

As a final check for goodness, the researcher will conduct a peer debriefing to review the themes and patterns that the researcher discovered in the analysis of the data. Sitting superintendents will be invited to serve in this capacity. I will share the findings from the data and provide an opportunity for peers to offer their input and personal analysis of the data. The researcher will reflect on these suggestions and personal insights as a final check on the findings in the studies.

The Researcher's Positionality

“Positionality describes the relationship between the researcher and his or her participants and the researcher and his or her topic” (Jones, et al., 2006, p. 31). The fact that I currently serve as a superintendent of schools in Pennsylvania is an important factor to consider in this study. This enabled me to bring personal experience and insights into the current pressures and demands placed upon the position of the superintendent and in education overall. It was important for me to set aside my personal opinions I had on any educational issue and to the best of my ability, keep an open mind during the interviews and observations in both the case studies.

All individuals interviewed in this study were made aware of my position as a superintendent prior to the interviews. I believe that the impact on this study was a positive one and actually put all of the participants at ease. First, my knowledge of the current issues impacting public education avoided the interviewees spending time or energy to define specific aspects of their jobs, to define educational terms and overall political expectations of school systems. The Superintendents, administrative team members and School Board members could concentrate more intently on responding to the questions posed in the interviews, rather than explaining details to assist me in understanding specifics of educational terms and issues. For instance, there was no need to explain the specifics of Act 1 or the No Child Left Behind Act and the pressures this places on schools. This fact allowed for more direct responses to the interview questions.

Secondly, the participant's knowledge of my current position helped provide a more comfortable environment for those interviewed and encouraged more honest responses from the participants. After the first round of interviews within the first district, I was overwhelmed with the honesty and openness of the individuals that I interviewed. It seemed evident that they were very comfortable discussing with me their stories and their feelings toward one another. All six interviewees appeared very comfortable in their interviews and enjoyed the opportunity to share their true emotions and feelings. In the end, I believe that without my experience as a current superintendent. I would not have obtained the depth of responses and data that I was able to collect in this study.

Ethical Considerations

Confidentiality of information that will be attained in this study was closely safeguarded. Any information disclosed in the research is kept confidential from all unauthorized parties.

A statement of informed consent was reviewed and signed by each participant prior to the collection of any data. By signing this consent form, the participant “verifies that the researcher has met the obligation to inform participants of the nature of the study and their involvement in it, and that the participants understand and agree with what has been communicated to them” (Jones et al., 2006). Within the statement of informed consent, the participants understood that their participation in this project was to include interviews, observations, and collection of documents. Collection of this data was taken in a time frame of up to 2 hours for each of the Superintendent’s interviews, 1 hour for each of the other interviews of Board Presidents and Administrative team members, and 3 hours for each of the observations of administrative staff meetings and school board meetings. Both of the Board meetings were in the evening hours. Additionally, a set of five district documents were collected from each of the superintendents at the time of the interviews. The reviews of both sets of documents were completed at a later time by the researcher and took approximately 3 hours for each set in order to review the content in each of these documents.

General safeguards to the superintendent during the interview included the use of an informed consent form, a discussion of the interview agenda and time frame of the data collection, and the use of an audio tape recorder to ensure accuracy. Additionally, a

standard ethics protocol was read by the researcher to the superintendent prior to the interview (Appendix I).

At any time during the data collection, if a participant showed any signs of discomfort, resistance or any other emotional signs, the researcher would recognize this uneasiness and negotiate the content or questions which caused the concern. The participant was additionally free to not respond to any questions that caused him or her discomfort, as agreed upon in the statement of informed consent.

During the analysis and interpretation of data, I employed several strategies. Rich description and the use of many quotations from the transcripts offer evidence of a clear connection between the data and the interpretations. In this particular study, the positionality of the researcher is also important to recognize. Jones, et al. (2006) stated “interpretation of the data and representation of participants are integrally linked to scrutiny of research positionality and standpoint” (p. 108). It is imperative for me to analyze the data collected understanding the influence my current position has on the research process. “Goodness requires researchers to recognize themselves, their relationships with those involved in the study, and their relationship with the topic itself. “This occurs through reflexivity” (Jones, et al., 2006, p. 107). Reflexivity involves the researcher providing explicit explanations of how the researcher will address whether his or her assumptions change during the research process. I address this perspective of reflexivity in the written report by articulating how my perspective changed on spiritual leadership in Chapter 5. Additionally, by employing the technique of peer debriefing in this study, I am involving multiple perspectives to the study to minimize biases.

The use of the data collected and the written reports and interpretations of this research were used for the purpose of this study. The identity of all the participants and the districts were kept confidential. Names and any materials produced during this study and the names of the school districts are not connected to any product of the study. Only I have access to individual data. All agreements, tapes, and transcripts are kept in a locked file and will be destroyed one year after completion of the study by the researcher. A verification letter will be signed by the dissertation chair to confirm destruction of all documents and other artifacts.

Summary

This chapter outlines the methodology selected to explore the leadership behaviors of superintendents who display spiritual leadership characteristics. A qualitative, inductive approach with descriptive methods of data collection was utilized in this study. In this case study, a combination of constructivism and constructionism epistemology were used to seek to understand the human constructs and contexts in the natural settings and environment of these public school superintendents. To identify the participants for this study, a snowball sampling technique, followed by other purposeful sampling criteria such as willingness to participate, maximum variation between the districts and gender differences, were used. Using this process, the two participants were selected based on the variances in districts, and the variance in their genders. Both participants were excited to be a part of this case study and open to allow the researcher to collect all components of the data.

Data collection was conducted at each site during the months of May and June 2007. The sources of data collection included interviews, observations, and document

collection. Data were analyzed in two stages: a with-in case analysis and a cross-case analysis. Additionally, the process to ensure validity and reliability in the study are described in this Chapter. The researcher's positionality, as well as a description of the ethical considerations, are also included.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the leadership behaviors of selected Pennsylvania superintendents, who are perceived as being spiritual leaders, in order to identify and describe, through case study, the spiritual character and behaviors of these superintendents. Leadership behaviors that were collected were displayed within their job responsibilities as a public school superintendent. For the purpose of this research study, spiritual leaders displayed the following attributes: 1) clarity in their vision and establishing goals for their district, 2) capacity to bring meaning to all parts of the organization and to emphasize collaboration and teamwork for an efficient, interconnected system, 3) ability to inspire and empower every person within the organization, 4) place the importance of the organization and all its components before own self-serving goals, and 5) lead and make decisions based on their own strong moral purpose and deep sense of values.

As stated previously this dissertation seeks to answer four specific questions:

- What are varying characteristics in the practices of superintendents identified as “spiritual leaders” and what does it look like in practice in an educational setting?
- How does one identified as a “spiritual leader” define his/her leadership style and what factors do they feel impact their own spirituality?
- How do those within the district leadership circle respond to the leadership behaviors of these superintendents identified as practicing spiritual leadership?

- How does “spiritual leadership” serve as an effective style of leadership for public school superintendents given the current political and social pressures on public schools?

Results are presented in Chapter 4 in two stages. First, each of the two case studies is presented independent of each other. Data collection was conducted at each of these two sites over a period of several days during the months of May and June 2007. The sources of data collected for each case study included interviews, observations, and document collection. A content analysis was then conducted to find the core consistencies in the data and to reveal patterns and themes. These patterns and themes for each of the case studies are presented in this chapter. Secondly, a cross-case method of analysis is presented to make comparisons of data collected from the two case studies and discover similarities and differences between them. It is important to note that descriptions of the district and of the individuals chosen for this study are purposely kept in broad description to maintain the confidentiality of each of these districts and the chosen superintendents.

Case Study #1

District Description

The community of SP is a quiet community located in a rural section of Pennsylvania. To reach the schools, one must travel several miles on country roads outside of any small town. The community is known as a bedroom community for people who travel over an hour to larger cities and available work. The schools are located on these country roads, surrounded by single family homes, in a suburban type setting.

There are approximate 2,100 students who attend this district, which covers over 100 square miles and is home to over 17,000 residents. Over two-thirds of the households have an annual income of \$50,000 and more and three and a half percent are single-parent households with children.

The district has five separate buildings: high school, middle school, and three neighborhood elementary schools. The district administrative building is attached to the high school building.

During my visit to this district, I interviewed the following individuals: Superintendent, referred to hereafter as Superintendent A; the Assistant Superintendent, referred to hereafter as Assistant; and the President of the School Board, referred to hereafter as Board President.

This district's culture, according to the Assistant, is "a rural community that likes to do good things quietly." When the district hired Superintendent A, "the Board wanted this to be a world class district" and his charge as a superintendent was "to take this district to a new level." Superintendent A has been at this district for nine years.

Defining and Self-Reflection of Spirituality and Spiritual Leadership

In questioning what influences impacted Superintendent A's leadership style, he indicated that it is through personal experiences and those who he was fortunate enough to meet during his career that molded him to become a leader. "I think reality is that nobody is just themselves. That based on grace, with the opportunity to affiliate with strong, excellent, effective leaders, we have the opportunity to carve out parts of them for ourselves." In his journey to the Superintendency, Superintendent

A had several principals who reached out to him and encouraged him to enter into administration. From that point, “angels supported me in all kinds of ways” and he moved through his coursework and became a principal. When asked if he wanted to be a superintendent, he stated, “I can’t say that I did know I wanted to be. I just started to meet other superintendents and didn’t see anything magical about them that I couldn’t be one if I wanted to.” Superintendent A believes that he answered his “calling” by serving as a superintendent. He credits his difficult early journey in his life and his experiences along the way with strong, effective leaders that helped to develop his leadership style.

Defining spirituality.

Superintendent A defined spirituality as the following:

Spirituality is trying to remove myself from situations and see what is happening and what I can contribute in a positive way to produce a desirable outcome that may not even be apparent at the time but could emerge if you cultivate a kind of a trusting enough environment that people can speak openly and honestly about what they want, or think that they want because in many cases people don’t know.

The ability to have vision and to see the bigger viewpoint to situations is the crux of spirituality according to Superintendent A. He also credits “failure” in his life experiences as shaping his spirituality. To nourish his spirituality, Superintendent A indicated that “every morning I have a daily meditation book I read. I pray at night.” He specified that in the word *spiritual* is the word *ritual* and he “follows certain rituals every day to ground myself. It’s a daily reprieve.”

Defining spiritual leadership.

Superintendent A defined a spiritual leader as “when duty somehow is aligned with your passions and things that you’re excited about, then those two things come together and it’s God’s grace. It’s really clear.” He indicated that many people go through the course of their life resigned to certain fates, such as their career choices or profession. They do these jobs without much excitement, but “then there are things you find that you’re passionate about, and you look forward to doing it.” Superintendent A believes “a spiritual leader tries to align the passion with the duty.” By becoming a superintendent, Superintendent A aligned his passion with duty.

Sharing and developing this passion with duty is not only important for him, it is equally important to instill this level of passion in others. Superintendent A stated that a spiritual leader “really tries to increase a level of excitement and hope in somebody about duty.” In describing his leadership style, Superintendent A used the terms “engaging, empowering, and decisive.” He provides opportunities so that others become engaged and empowered in fulfilling their duty in education.

Characteristics in the Practices of the Spiritual Leader School Superintendent

Examination of the leadership practices of Superintendent A revealed several themes. The themes include shared vision, engagement of relationships, learning and growing, and passion and strength.

Shared vision.

Superintendent A is very focused and committed to the development and movement of the shared vision within his district. He believes this vision should be specific to the individual district and that the vision and goals must be student-focused. A member of

his administrative team indicated “he is very clear with us what he expects of us.” His Board President stated “he is clear in his concept of what education should be.” The Board President indicated that his vision for the district has been developed specific to the needs and strengths of this district. “His vision he did not bring from the last school district.” Additionally, it was stated that Superintendent A “wants our goals and everything we do to be student focused.”

This vision is collaboratively developed by all members of the team and by community stakeholders. Superintendent A indicated that when discussing district desirable outcomes, his administrative team talks long enough so that their own personal views and methods “gets burned out of the conversation” and becomes “shaped by everybody’s vision.” The Board President indicated that he “believes in having all the stakeholders involved so that we have a community mission statement, a community vision, and then he translates it to the staff.”

Yearly goals are created for each coming school year. These goals are developed by the Board and these goals become the administrators’ goals. The Board President indicated “this is the second year that the whole Board has worked with him in setting up his goals for the year. Of course, it was with input from him.” The Assistant indicated that “we always have some kind of student achievement goals, and then the others may differ.” These goals are discussed periodically at the monthly administrative meetings. “We use those meetings, especially for the goals, to talk about how we can do this more effectively. This is for all of us.” The progress to these goals is then reported back to the Board at the end of the year.

These goals are communicated throughout the district and community to ensure that all stakeholders have a shared vision. “He tries to make things very clear as to what he expects and why he expects it.” Sharing the vision and mission statement of the strategic plan is very important to Superintendent A. In asking to describe their working relationship, his Assistant stated “he is more the big picture person who goes out and talks about the mission and the vision.” It is an expectation of Superintendent A that all members of the district staff be able to memorize and recite the district’s mission statement. During the observation of an administrative team meeting on May 8, 2007, his administrative team discussed their back to school opening day for staff. During this discussion, Superintendent A discussed using this day to assist the staff to “internalize the new mission statement” of the strategic plan. In my interview with him, Superintendent A responded when asked how he sets the priorities within his day, “how does it relate to our mission?” Additionally, in review of the five district documents reviewed, the mission statement is listed on an overt part of each publication, such as the front page.

Engagement of relationships.

Relationships are very important to Superintendent A and his work for the district. To foster these relationships, Superintendent A indicated that the administrative staff has created an atmosphere that “we’re honest and open and that we value everybody’s opinion in terms of expressing them, and we try to stay committed to a desirable outcome.” To build this type of environment, there needs to first be a trusting environment. He indicated “it takes a lot to build the trust for people to risk expressing themselves openly.” His Assistant described Superintendent A as “he’s very human, so approachable.” The Board President indicated that “he is very inclusive, rather than top

down.” Superintendent A fosters this open environment with the various stakeholders within the district: students, administrative team, staff, Board, parents and the community.

One of the reasons his relationships are strong with others is due to the fact that he is very visible in the school buildings, at school events and in the community. “He is very visible and engaging with people.” His Assistant stated that “another word for Superintendent A would be very visible; he is very much out in the schools.” When asked the question as to what she has learned from Superintendent A, the Assistant included the “importance of engaging stakeholders, being visible, being out there, and getting to know the kids and families. I have learned the power of that.”

One of this superintendent’s most important relationships is with the students. “I start each day at the high school because I love interacting with the kids.” He makes an attempt to “touch base with a couple of those kids to keep them focused and keep them from getting into my office.” In addition, he plays basketball with students on Monday evenings. His Assistant affirmed this love of students in her interview with me: “He loves being with kids and the community.” Additionally, at the Board Meeting on June 6, 2007, the library was filled with many students and their parents. At the very beginning of the meeting, these students were recognized with rewards. The Assistant explained that “every board meeting starts with student recognition.”

His relationship with the administrative team is additionally strong. He meets with his administrative team monthly and smaller groups of administrators on projects in-between these meetings. The Assistant described these meetings as follows:

We all have a clear direction for the way we are supposed to proceed and what we're supposed to do, and then we meet frequently with each other and talk about how we are doing, what we've learned, and what we need for help. It's a collaborative group.

The formal meetings are just one way that Superintendent A communicates with his administrative team. Electronic mail is "huge" in his communication, but he also has many informal meetings with administrators as he travels throughout the district. His Assistant indicated that "because he is in the buildings so often, he will stop into a principal's office or find him in the hall." The Assistant described the relationship of Superintendent A with the administrative team as the following:

He makes work fun, and we work really hard here. Sometimes its just goofy events like picnics, you know, but just to know you're supported, and he always backs us. If he gets concerned about us, he might speak in private, but its over.

The working relationship with Superintendent A and the members of the Board was described by the Board President as follows:

Our current working relationship is excellent. He tries to meet with those of us who are available individually for breakfast once a week or once every two weeks, to discuss where things are going, what ideas we have, what we would like to see changed, what he would like to see changed. He knows what belongs to the Board and he knows what belongs to him and he knows what belongs to the two together.

The relationship with the Board and the administrative team is additionally made strong due to the continuous line of communication and work ethic of Superintendent A. The Board President stated “There’s a wonderful sense of communication going from the administrative staff to Superintendent A to the Board, around and around.” This was also observed at the Board Meeting that I attended on June 6, 2007. The overall environment was very relaxed and very positive, which made it conducive for members of the public and administrative team to present their opinion or expertise on an issue. Open communication and questioning was permitted among members of the Board, Superintendent A, and when appropriate, members of the administrative team.

His relationship with the staff is also very positive. He is inclusive in his dedication to all staff, including the secretaries, custodians, and other support staff. His Assistant indicated that one of the turning points in the district was when Superintendent A made changes to opening day. “We used to have opening day just for the teachers coming back, and he’s really worked hard to get everyone here. What a difference.” Making these kinds of changes, as well as his visibility in the buildings and events has empowered his relationship with the staff. His Assistant reflected “I think the staff really appreciates that fact that he’s out there. They see him at sporting events and they see him at concerts.” The Board President stated “he gets along well with the building level staff and the support staff, and, of course, the cafeteria staff loves him because he loves cookies and chocolate.”

Superintendent A also places a lot of emphasis on building relationships with parents and with the community as a whole. His Assistant stated “he speaks consistently about stakeholders. He gets kidded about the word *stakeholder*. But it works.” “He does

a lot more with networking with the community and with parents.” He meets with a group of parents once a month to share current district information and to listen to any of their concerns. These parents are chosen from each of the school buildings to attend these monthly meetings. The Assistant stated “You don’t have as many people really not knowing what’s going on.” His relationships and communication with parents have allowed parents to feel more as a stakeholder of the district. A good example of this was in working on one of their student achievement district goals where they gave surveys and collected data from parents. After a year of working on improving the issues presented in these surveys, they then readministered the survey at the end of the year.

“The community basically loves him” was the response received by the Board President. Building community is very important to Superintendent A. In Superintendent A’s interview with me, he indicated that building community is “easy and fun.”

You focus on kids; focus on things that people love. They love to feel love, they love to feel appreciated, love to be a part of a winning experience or positive recognition. Once you create an opportunity for that, the community grows around it.

To improve this relationship, Superintendent A also attends community events outside of the school environment. For instance, he attends breakfasts at the fire companies. Additionally, to assist with community relations, Superintendent A hired a public relations person this past year. The Board President indicated “He’s hired a person responsible for community relations and he works closely with him. Having no central community, it’s really hard. We have five newspapers and it’s hard to communicate.” Some of the public relations person’s responsibilities are, according to the Assistant

Superintendent, to “get the word out and listening and encouraging people to come in.” To further improve the relationship between the district and the community, one of the district goals next year is “enhancing our connection to the community.”

Learning and growing.

Learning and growing is an important aspect of Superintendent A’s leadership. Part of the mission statement for the newly developed Strategic Plan states that “we are a community of learners.” His Assistant clarified that “he wants people learning.” He supports the staff’s attendance at conferences and workshops. As a practice, he has his administrative team read books and has study groups. In the administrative team meeting I observed on May 8, 2007, there was a discussion on a book they are reading, *A Whole New Mind*. The Board President stated “He fosters learning communities all over the place” and is personally “willing to learn and grow.”

As another indicator of his commitment to learning and professional growth, Superintendent A talked about the importance of learning in the process of instituting needed changes within a district. First one must “learn enough about the change and the people’s beliefs for them to buy in.” You learn where the deficiencies are and then “you identify the staff development needs of the staff” to institute the change.

When discussing how to manage the teacher who is not agreeable to change and personal growth, Superintendent A stated:

I never met a teacher that didn’t want to be great. I’ve met teachers that have gotten tired or didn’t branch out. But you try to rekindle that fire that attracted them into the field and then help them succeed. You invest in other people’s success.

When questioned about how Superintendent A led needed changes in the district, his Board President stated “there were people who resisted, but he just kept supporting and supporting, and encouraging and encouraging, and demanding and demanding when it was needed that most people came along.”

Superintendent A also models the importance of learning in his own professional behavior. During his interview with me, Superintendent A reflected upon various researchers whose work he adopted components of when implementing change within the district. He discussed Fulton and Elmore’s work in discussion of change theories and practices. It is evident that there is a commitment to gather information from others to first grow in knowledge, analyze the needs of the district through data and research, and then to build a strong implementation plan for the district.

The Assistant, in response to the question “How would you lead in this current context in this district?” gave the following response: “What we have works. We just keep the whole model of achievement, assessment, curriculum, and professional development going, and it really works.”

Passion and strength.

“Passion” is a word that Superintendent A used frequently in his conversations with his staff and when defining who he is as a leader during his interview with me. He believes that education is his passion. “My greatest joy, as superintendent, is seeing the eager faces of our students and staff as they return for another year of rigorous learning!”, he stated in our interview. His Assistant stated “he is charismatic in his passion for the work that we do and the importance of our kids.” This charisma and passion for his work was exemplified during the administrative team meeting and the Board meeting. When

he entered the administrative team meeting, he exhibited a true caring for each member of the team by either hugging or hand shaking each administrator and having a short, private discussion with each of them. During the course of this meeting, some of the statements he made were that he was “praying for you” in response to an administrator who had a parent die in the past two weeks; “you have the passion for it” and “energize the staff; bring them all together” when in discussion of the staff’s opening day activities. His Assistant expressed that “he is a special person. He’s just inspirational.”

Through his passion for his work, Superintendent A is able to maintain his internal strength and overcome the adversities of his position. The Board President indicated that he “knows what he is about.” She clarified this thought by stating:

He’s not afraid to stay firm on what he believes is right. He is demanding, but in a very appropriate way. He stands his ground well. There has been a lot of pressure on him, but he handles the stresses of the job very well.

Surviving the Current Political and Social Pressures on Public Schools

As part of the responsibilities of a public school superintendent, managing politics is a major component of the position. Superintendent A had a difficult time deciding to take the position of a superintendent in his first district due to his lack of desire to manage the politics. “I enjoyed the closeness of the students in the principalship, and I enjoyed the control I had as a principal and I didn’t know whether I wanted to relinquish that to do a whole lot of politics.” As a matter of fact, upon accepting his first superintendent position, he indicated that the politics were “my biggest lessons.” In response to the question, how have the current educational issues and pressures affected Superintendent A, both his Assistant and Board President indicated that the new

Pennsylvania Act 1 law had a major effect on Superintendent A and their district. “We struggled with that because we didn’t want to cut programs and we wanted to stay below the cut-off of the referendum, and it’s been a real challenge” remarked the Board President. “That has put a lot of pressure on him, but he handles it very well.” The Board President also indicated that as a Board and as individuals they try “to be supportive of him” so that Superintendent A does not need to manage these burdens alone.

Additional political pressure for current Pennsylvania schools and their superintendents is brought about by the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)* and improving student academic performance. When discussing the stressors that exist due to trying to improve student achievement within districts, the Assistant reflected that these pressures were not stressful for their district, because they already had systems and practices in place that addressed the need for ongoing student academic improvement. She stated “student achievement is almost like...we’re doing it. That kind of thinking was already in place” prior to the NCLB Act.

Aside of the political pressures, there are other struggles and pressures in the leadership of a school district. One of the greatest struggles for Superintendent A in leading a district is working with others who are selfish for their own needs.

A struggle for me is when I really see other people’s selfishness so intense that it’s hard to use reason to open their minds. And so when you see someone so entrenched in their own thinking, and is unwilling to consider something else, it’s hard for me to lead the way I want to.

Superintendent A indicated that he manages individuals who act in such a way usually by “killing them with kindness in the beginning,” but then he doesn’t have any problem “just being direct and being frank.” This style of leading is not preferred by Superintendent A however, “because I know that I’ve never had anybody help me by getting angry with me.” His concern is “it really doesn’t help somebody grow necessarily until they see the outcome and buy into it themselves and own it.”

Case Study #2

District Description

The community of SW is a small inner city community located in Pennsylvania. The schools are located in the midst of this small city community, which sits adjacent to a more affluent urban community and school district.

There are approximately 1800 students who attend this district, which covers only 3.4 square miles and is home to approximately 17,000 residents. One of the challenges this district is facing is yearly declining student enrollment. In the past 2 years, this district’s enrollment has declined by approximately 300 students. Approximately seventy percent of the households have an annual income of less than \$50,000. Over forty five percent of the students are identified as coming from low-income families. Thirteen and a half percent are single parent households with children.

The district has two separate buildings. This first building houses a primary elementary, grades K-2, school; an intermediate elementary, grades 3-5, school; and a middle school, grades 6-8, school. Their second building is home to their high school, grades 9-12, and their central office.

During my visit to this district, I interviewed the following individuals: Superintendent, referred to hereafter as Superintendent B; the Assistant to the Superintendent, referred to hereafter as Assistant; and the President of the School Board, referred to hereafter as Board President.

Defining and Self-Reflection of Spirituality and Spiritual Leadership

Superintendent B never thought that she would ever be a superintendent. Her career just “evolved.” It was through a wide variety of opportunities in education that prepared her for the superintendency. “I was fortunate to have the opportunities I did in education because it prepared me so well for this position.” Superintendent B received many educational degrees and experiences that helped her to secure the next step in her career, including experiences as a regular education and special education teacher, as well as administrative positions within elementary, middle, and high school settings. “Every step I took assisted in growth and development and prepared me and trained me well for the position of superintendent because I have a broader perspective.” She also credits her doctorate program in preparing her for this leadership position. In her final journey to the superintendency, Superintendent B had several individuals who reached out to encourage her to take the next step in her career. The final step to the role as a superintendent was taken at the request of the Board to take the position. Superintendent B felt “confident” in accepting the role as superintendent at this time and believes that she answered her “calling” by serving as a public school superintendent.

Defining spirituality.

Superintendent B defines spirituality as the following:

Obviously, it is faith and strength. I feel I have a strong belief system.

We are all apostles, each individual, and we go out there and if you

believe in the word then you act the word.

Superintendent B believes that our spirit touches everyone and “it is our light.” How much light each of us shines is up to each individual, however Superintendent B stated “particularly in the field of education, when we have such a critical job and hold so much of our children’s well being and future in our hands, we have to really walk the talk.” Educators are to be the example, and remember to “not ask anybody to do anything we wouldn’t do.”

Superintendent B believes in the spiritual. She stated that “it is just who I am.” She also stated that it is “where I get my strength and my peace.” She nourishes her spirituality through many different “wells.” Church is one of these wells where she finds “peace for me.” Her family is another source of strength for her, as she indicated that “time with them always nurtures my spirit.” Spirituality is a “big part of my life now and our family’s life.” Additionally, the work that she does in the schools is very important to her, particularly for the “most challenged students.”

Defining spiritual leadership.

Superintendent B believes that she was perceived as one who exhibits spiritual leadership because she does “the right thing.” She also believes that everyone knows what the right thing is, but they do not always do it, because “it’s just not the easy thing to do sometimes.” She indicated that she is always “looking out for the best for everybody” and “does not look at people differently.” Being a spiritual leader means treating everybody the same, no matter what position they possess or who they are.

Superintendent B exemplifies this attitude by allowing everybody to call her by her first name. She also has an open door policy where anyone can come and discuss their concerns with her.

In describing her leadership style, Superintendent B used the terms “integrity, faith, and service.” She stated that as a spiritual leader, you “continue to grow and develop within the parameters that nothing is worth losing your integrity, your character.” She stated that sustaining the strength to do the right thing is “difficult to do today at anytime” therefore she depends on her spirituality. “It’s just who I am.”

Characteristics in the Practices of the Spiritual Leader School Superintendent

Examination of the leadership practices of Superintendent B revealed several themes. The themes include vision, problem-solving for accountability, open communication, and drive and confidence.

Vision.

Superintendent B stated “I always have a vision.” Setting this vision for the district is something that Superintendent B believes is the responsibility of the leader. “I believe the leader sets the tone. The Board hires administrators for foreseeability.” Even though the district’s Strategic Plan is developed by committees and is through input of staff and community, Superintendent B indicated that as a leader, she must ensure they are looking beyond and be forward thinking about the future. “That’s education: growth and change. So if we are leading the growth and change in education, we have to, to a certain degree, pretty much lead the vision as well.”

Superintendent B’s vision is student focused. In review of the five district documents, she wrote “whatever action we take must be preceded by the question: Is it

good for students?” “I have always had a vision of a more prescriptive education for kids and move away from the more chronological movement and the boxes that we teach them in and make it more fluid.” She believes that “we have to serve everybody.” She elaborated on this vision by stating that the message she is sending is the following:

What are we doing for the most challenged students? Is what we are doing getting to that student, as well as the one who can do very well in school? We should be servicing them as well. I am a proponent of remediation as well as enrichment.

Her vision is focused on academic accountability for each student. In order to address the needs of every student, Superintendent B understands that it takes time to implement this level of accountability. “I am a practical person. I know I have to move slowly to obtain my vision.” She insists on making decisions that have an impact on long-term goals and vision. “There are no quick decisions. We have to take time to research and analyze.”

When implementing change, Superintendent B stated that you must “articulate the vision and bring people on board at the building level. We have site-based committees and we have forums for participation depending on the issue.” The district vision is primarily developed from her personal vision, and then articulated and shared with the staff. Even though this is indicated as the practice by Superintendent B, the Board President and Assistant both indicated that the teachers feel they take part in the decision making process. The Board President stated that “she involves the teachers in meet and discuss and she sets up informal meetings. It is the exception that she makes a unilateral management prerogative decision.” The Assistant stated “there are many areas in which she uses a collaborative approach in her decision making.” Superintendent B stated that

it is important “to let people know their level of decision making” before they sit on a committee. Honesty in whether the administration is just looking for advice or perceptions on a decision made or whether this is really a decision-making group is vital to trust from the staff.

Problem-solving for accountability.

Superintendent B stated “I feel my job is to research, analyze, work with people, bring forth the best recommendation that I can, and the best long term interests of the district, and therefore, for the students we serve.” The Assistant indicated that due to the high level of accountability for this district, they have to trouble-shoot everything.

Everyday thinking about what are the best forms of remediation, how are we going to implement this, how are we going to fund this, how are we going to set up for smaller enrollments, how are we going to restructure the school if we have to, what curriculum are we going to use. All these questions are constantly there because there is such a high level of accountability on us.

Knowing the high level of accountability that this district must address, there is a need for continual careful planning and development of programs. Superintendent B is able to model the ability to define the problem, problem solve the issue, and bring resolution to the issue, for her staff. After she thinks through solutions to issues of accountability, she then provides a detailed plan of action to district staff for them to provide input, and finally, implements the new program and changes. The Assistant reflected that Superintendent B is “very much a thinker. She’ll think through everything, and then she will present it.” In questioning stakeholder input into the process, the Assistant stated

“Often she will take advisement from stakeholder groups, but ultimately the decision is hers.” The Board President stated that Superintendent B leads needed changes in the district “delicately.” “She is very concerned about things I would not have bothered with. She is concerned about the teachers and staff.” He also stated that Superintendent B is a “very detail oriented person. She makes decision and she sticks with it.”

Open communication.

“My job is to open up communication and see what is good for the whole. Is this best for everybody?” Superintendent B expressed that open communication is critical to the operation of a public school. She believes everyone must be treated the same and given the same level of consideration. In fact, she stated:

It’s not just taking care of a small group of people right now who are beating your ear about something. I don’t look at people differently. If I treat person A one way, then person B is going to get the same treatment.

Superintendent B believes that parents, staff, and community should have easy access to her and her office when there is a need. “I have an open door policy; it’s not jumping through the hoops.”

Superintendent B stated that their priority as an organization “is people. We are a human resource organization; we are all about people.” To her, it does not matter if a “parent is coming in the way we like or not, it is our job to just diffuse any of these stronger concerns and approaches and get to the root of the problem and just work it out.” She also believes that as a superintendent the day’s priority is dependent on the issue that is in front of her at that very moment. “The priority is the person who is in front of you at the time. You have to be flexible enough to shift and do that.”

The Board President indicated that Superintendent B's working relationship with the current School Board is good. He also stated that the administrative team appears to work well together. Forms of communication used by the superintendent to her Board and to her administrators include the use of email, mailings, phone calls, and various types of meetings. During my observation of the School Board meeting on June 18, 2007, it appeared that there was open communication and positive interactions among all the individuals in attendance, including parents, students, administrators, staff members, School Board members, and Superintendent B. Any questions or concerns that were posed by community members to the Board and Superintendent B were responded to in a very caring and positive manner. Additionally, there were multiple presentations by staff members to the Board at this particular meeting. There were presentations on assessment data, band camps, and Strategic Planning Survey Results. There was appreciation shown by Superintendent B and members of the Board for the work presented that evening. It was observed as a very proactive and productive Board meeting in which members of the administrative staff, teachers, and community members were able to share their viewpoints on programs and issues with the School Board. Comments that were shared during the meeting included ones such as: "celebrate our successes," "I want to make sure every student gets to go (to the band camp)," "concerned with the public image of our schools and morale of our staff," and "we are all ambassadors for this district every day."

The administrative staff is scheduled to meet monthly as a group to improve communication between the two buildings. The agenda for these meetings is dependent upon the most pressing issues, but in review of the agenda's for this past year's meetings,

it is clear that the focus of the meetings is to review and share information pertinent to student achievement, including curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Her Assistant reflected that his working relationship with Superintendent B was good because “in some ways, we compliment each other” in their styles of leadership. He also stated that the two of them “meet on a daily basis to discuss and debate issues as we both try to push our agendas forward” pertinent to the operations and focus for the district.

Community building is important in the planning by Superintendent B. Having an open door policy into each of the buildings is vital to the relationship with parents and the community. “I think you build community one person at a time, and you build community by having very open, welcoming school buildings and offices.” “You have to always maintain that mutual respect with everybody.”

Community input is also important in the decision making of the district. Superintendent B believes “You bring people on board and not just because it is a requirement, but you hear what they have to say and you implement their recommendations.” Superintendent B reflected on ways that they enlist parental input and stated “we also survey our parents a lot” about the schools’ operations and programs.

She also believes that it is vital to keep the community informed on the happenings within the schools. “You have to work and make sure the public is well informed, they can trust what you’re saying, and you have an open door so they can come in.” The district also informs the community through the use of their district website and a community newsletter. There are also public forums for major issues and numerous parent workshops. The district uses some of their Title I money to pay for a parent liaison to assist in the operation of a parent resource center and to help with parent

workshops. Overall, the Board President felt the community was “pleased” with the work of Superintendent B. To further improve communication, Superintendent B felt that “every district should have a public relations person” however she is aware that due to fiscal concerns, this is not an option for this district.

Drive and confidence.

Superintendent B is very committed to her decisions that she makes and to her vision. Additionally, she is confident in her ability and strength to lead her vision. Once she makes a decision, she remains consistent to the decision. The Board President stated “She is very strong-willed as to making decisions and committed to her decisions.” Superintendent B indicated that she is willing to take risks to accomplish the needed work within the district. Working with some of the challenges in this struggling district, there is a need to take risks with grant writing and implementation of new programs. Her Assistant explained that because there is lack of equity in state educational funding and “we are a small, struggling school” the district has to “apply for nearly every initiative that is out there.” Writing and applying for grant funding, as well as completing grant reports and managing the implementation of the programs is very time consuming for the both the Superintendent and the Assistant. Superintendent B stated that even though she has “taken numerous risks, and as committed as I am to my work, I will not compromise my integrity or even my principles to keep a job.”

This level of personal confidence and strength is important to the image that Superintendent B portrays to the staff and the community. “I feel the responsibility of being an example for everyone, and I always say you have to be the example of the behavior you want all the time, in all places.” This image of strength is one that

Superintendent B portrays even in the most stressful situations. She explained that during the prior year, the district went through a horrendous job action problem. “It was a nasty strike.” The Board President expressed that he “watched one of the chief negotiators say snob remarks at her (the superintendent) around the negotiation table which were totally inappropriate.” During this stressful situation, Superintendent B stated that she “maintained throughout that we just stay the course, that we are going to maintain professionalism and we’re not going to succumb to negativity, because when this is over, we’re going to have to serve these kids and work together.” She reminisced that there are several on the administrative team and on the Board who “its really hard for some people to forget” but she continues to state “its gone, we are moving forward. It’s done.” Further, Superintendent B stated that she believes that she is “principled to a fault, because I will not compromise my belief system and the fact that I have to treat everybody as I want to be treated regardless of their behavior or what they have done.”

The Assistant indicated that Superintendent B has “inspired me to continue my efforts to want to reform our current situation and to want the best for the students.”

Surviving the Current Political and Social Pressures on Public Schools

There are many challenges and political pressures on this small urban district. Throughout the past few years, they have had to face a difficult negotiation process, deep financial troubles, declining enrollment, and the need to cut existing teaching staff on a yearly basis, and other state mandates, such as *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* and student achievement.

Enduring a negative teachers’ negotiation which ultimately led to a teacher strike is still on the minds of many within the district and continues to be problematic in the

relationships among staff, administration, the Board, and the community. Her Assistant stated that the “teachers have a lot of hard feelings from the strike” toward Superintendent B and the Board.

Another challenge is balancing the finances and the education. Act 1 has added additional challenges to this district’s financial concerns. One of the most difficult tasks for Superintendent B and the Board is to cut teaching positions due to declining student enrollment and the need to balance the budget. Additionally, the Board does not want to raise taxes on an already heavily taxed community. Superintendent B indicated that “our taxpayers are in the top twenty for tax effort” in the state. The Board President stated “We’ve got probably over fifty percent of our properties owned by senior citizens on a fixed income.” The Board President also indicated that Superintendent B is “very conscious of the economics” in this district. He further explained that when Superintendent B came into the superintendent’s office over eight years ago, the district was \$1.2 million in debt. Under her leadership, the district has been able to “climb out of that debt.” Superintendent B stated that “balancing the financial and the educational” is difficult and you have to be “very careful and cautious” about finding that balance.

In addition to the financial pressures of the district, there are also the pressures of *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)* and student academic performance. The Assistant stated “the pressures of NCLB and the fact that we are one of those schools that is a small, struggling school” makes the pressures “very harsh” on Superintendent B. There are currently two of the schools on the state’s school improvement list, and this is “a really big challenge because there is no equity in Pennsylvania education.” The

district is forced to apply for all types of grants. The Assistant remarked that “we have to trouble shoot everything, everyday thinking about the best forms of remediation.”

In response to how she manages the political nature of her position, Superintendent B stated that these pressures “certainly” have an impact on her. She indicated that she always has said “I do not do politics. I am just the same with you as I am with everybody.” But, she understands that with legislators and the current political ramifications of public education that a superintendent has to be a part of defending the needs of the district. She stated “you have to present very honestly and accurately your needs and why you need them through a resolution, not by a complaint.” She works on committees with other superintendents to present their issues and methods to address these issues.

Written in one of the district documents reviewed, Superintendent B summarizes her responsibilities and role as a public school superintendent.

My role as Superintendent is based upon *minister*, my root for administrator. It is my duty to minister to district employees and assure that educational, fiscal and physical supports are in place for everyone to effectively do their jobs. This frees them to devote all their energies toward one goal- fulfilling our mission statement: “SW offers all students the opportunities to become productive, honorable citizens.” All means all. We say what we do and do what we say.

Cross-Case Analysis of Case Study #1 and Case Study #2

The following section is a cross-case method of analysis to make comparisons of data collected from the two leaders in Case Study #1 and Case Study #2, in order to discover

similarities and differences between them. This technique will allow me to discover “processes and outcomes that occur across many cases, to understand how they are qualified by local conditions, and thus develop more sophisticated descriptions and more powerful explanations” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 172).

Journey to the Superintendency

Both Superintendent A and Superintendent B indicated that they never aspired to be a public school superintendent. They began their careers as classroom teachers, and through multiple opportunities in their field, furthering their own education, and with the guidance of other leaders along their paths, they were guided toward their current positions as school superintendents. Superintendent A remarked more on the leaders and people in his life having an impact on his career and who he is as a leader today. “With the opportunity to affiliate with strong, effective leaders, we have the opportunity to carve out part for ourselves.” Superintendent B was more reflective of the various career opportunities that she had over the years, which “broadened her perspective” and prepared her for her final step into the superintendency. She additionally credits her experiences that she gained in her doctoral program for preparing her. Both superintendents felt confident in their leadership abilities as they took on their current positions. Superintendent A stated that as he met other superintendents, “he didn’t see anything magical about them” that he could not be one. Superintendent B stated that when the Board approached her to take the position, she “thought long and hard and at the end, due to my previous experiences, I thought I can do this now.”

In both of these cases, the superintendents reflected upon hardships in their lives that assisted them in becoming the leader that they are today. Superintendent A stated

that “failure” in his life is what shaped his spirituality. Superintendent B indicated that even though the “seed was sown as a youngster” her spirituality was shaped by her personal pursuit as a teenager to understand the sacraments of Catholicism. “Ever since then, it’s just who I am.”

The defining of what spirituality was very unique to the individual.

Superintendent A explained that spirituality is creating an environment in which he could “remove myself,” evaluate what is happening, and then to “contribute in a positive way to produce a desirable outcome.” Superintendent B defined spirituality as “faith and strength.” Although both superintendents indicated their Christian faith influenced their leadership style, Superintendent A included definitions of spirituality outside of a religious sense. Superintendent B’s definitions were structured to that of her religious faith, and the thought that we are “apostles” of God’s word and “our spirit touches everyone and it is our light.”

Nurturing their spirituality is important to both of these participants.

Superintendent A stated that he “follows certain rituals everyday, to ground myself.” Some of these rituals include reading a daily meditation book and praying every night. Superintendent B indicated that her “wells” include attending church and listening to the message, spending time with her family which “always nurtures my spirit,” and working in the schools which “is very important to me.”

Both of these participants were selected for this study based on the fact that they were seen as superintendents who exhibit spiritual leadership characteristics. In their explanations of defining what spiritual leadership meant to them, their responses again came from two different perspectives. Superintendent A expressed that a spiritual leader

“really tries to increase a level of excitement and hope in somebody about duty.” It’s the “alignment of passion with duty.” Superintendent A believes a spiritual leader is one who provides guidance and a working environment that assists others to discover their own passion and sense of duty in the work that they do. Superintendent B defines spiritual leadership as “doing the right thing” and looking at “what’s best for everybody.” Her perspective is more based on her vision that all people are equal. It is her responsibility to be able to step back and look at the whole picture to ensure that all decisions are based on what is the best for everyone.

Superintendent A and Superintendent B both believe that they answered their “calling” in their service as public school superintendents. They both have a strong belief of spirituality in a religious sense, and believe that their serving as a superintendent was following the path that they were to take in their lives. They have been public school superintendents in their current districts for a period of eight and nine years respectively.

Commitment to Own Values and Morals

Knowing one’s own self and trusting in his or her own self-knowledge is a link between spirituality and leadership ability. Both Superintendent A and Superintendent B are confident in their abilities as leaders and in trusting in their own judgment and style of leading. In fact, they are committed to ensuring that they are not compromising their beliefs and values in the work that they do. Superintendent A indicated that if “someone is so entrenched in their own thinking that it’s hard for me to lead the way I want to, I have no problem just being frank and being direct.” Superintendent B was more direct in her response by stating “nothing is worth your integrity.” She is willing to take risks and lead a district during difficult times as long as the decision made are in agreement with

what she believes is morally right. The confidence and strength for both of these participants comes from their spirituality. Nurturing their spirituality is imperative to their ability to focus their work and their leadership.

The leaders were asked to identify three words that best describe their leadership style. There were no duplicate answers from the two participants and there were no duplicate themes. Superintendent A used the terms “engaging, empowering, and decisive.” Superintendent B used the terms “integrity, faith, and service.” These terms again reflect the differences in their approaches with their positions. Superintendent A’s dedication is in creating an atmosphere and being a model for others where they can find their personal passion in the work that they do, while Superintendent B is more focused on her own service and dedication to her work in the schools and believes this is a part of her spirituality and her faith.

Characteristics in the Practices of the Spiritual Leader School Superintendent

Examination of the leadership practices of both Superintendent A and Superintendent B revealed several commonalities in themes. The themes include vision and leadership, learning and growing, and interconnectedness to the community.

Vision and leadership.

Vision is an integral part of both participants’ leadership. Both are confident in leading and developing the vision for their district. There are variations however, in how they derive the vision for the district. Superintendent A believes that “all stakeholders are involved so that they have a community vision.” Superintendent B believes that it is her responsibility to create the vision for the district, with some reflection and input from the staff. She stated “the Board hires the administrator for foreseeability” and that the

“leader sets the tone.” Upon developing each of their respective visions, both superintendents indicated that it is their responsibility to lead that vision with staff and the community. Superintendent A was characterized as “being very clear with what he expects of each of us” and “he is very clear in his concept of what education should be.” This is also true of Superintendent B. She is very focused on her vision “for a more prescriptive education” for all students based on their individual needs. She has been characterized by her Board President as “very strong-willed as to making decisions and stays committed to her decisions.” “She sticks with it.”

The vision and goals established by both the participants have the common characteristics of being both student-focused and driven by data-based decision making. Both are committed to processes that allow for needed changes to occur within their districts. These decisions are based on student achievement data to determine the next step in the process. Superintendent A was characterized by his Assistant in the following manner:

He wants us to look at data, make decisions that are data based. He wants our goals and everything we do to be student focused. He is charismatic in his passion for the work that we do and the importance of our kids.

Superintendent B stated that in facilitating change in her district, the staff first “takes the time to research and analyze” because “we insist on making decisions based on the long term.” She also reflected “that my job is to research, analyze, work with people and bring forth the best long term interests for the district, and therefore for the students that we serve.”

Superintendent A is more focused on creating a shared vision with all stakeholders and then ensuring that the message is clearly sent to each stakeholder concerning their responsibilities to this mission. Superintendent B is focused on developing a vision and then sharing this vision with input from all stakeholders so that they understand this articulated vision and their responsibilities to this mission.

Commitment to learning and growing.

An aspect of both of these superintendents' visions for their respective districts is for continued learning and professional development of their staff. They both model this expectation in their own careers. Superintendent A fosters "learning communities" throughout the district. One example of this is the study groups he has established with his administrative team that discusses required reading of research and education related books. Superintendent B stated in one of her documents that "we all need to be lifelong learners. Everyone, from the superintendent to the support staff members, needs to continuously strive to learn how to perform his or duties because we are all important to helping students learn."

In their commitment to goals for continued learning and development, both districts have created multiple site-based and district-based committees that work together on specific initiatives within the district. These committees allow staff to voice their opinions and recommendations. Superintendent A remarked that "it takes a lot of trust for people to risk expressing themselves openly." Superintendent B is additionally concerned with building a trusting relationship with her staff. When creating a new committee, she expressed being honest with her staff on the type of committee it was and whether it is an advisory or decision making committee. She sees this level of honesty as

important in building trust with her staff. She concluded that most of their committees, however, are decision making committees, and “the teachers over the years have seen that.”

Interconnectedness to the community.

Connections to the larger community were important to both of these leaders. They both shared examples of their efforts to build a strong sense of community within their district. Differences in how they build community are reflective of the current goals and climate of the districts. Superintendent B felt that you build community “one person at a time” and that this community is built by having “very open, welcoming school buildings and offices.” School leaders build this sense of community by having “mutual respect with everybody.” Superintendent A, having a community that is very pleased with the conditions of their schools, reflected that reaching out to the community members and building positive and working relationships between them and the schools is “easy and fun.” He indicated that “you focus on kids. You focus on things that people love. They love to feel love; they love to be a part of a winning experience.” As a district is able to be successful in reaching academic goals and in their student programs, the support of the community will also grow.

Both districts engage in perception surveys with their parents and community members to address their concerns. Both believe that there needs to be open communication with their community and both of them model this open communication in their day to day tasks and responsibilities, however in very different methods. Superintendent A shared his interactions with community by being out in the schools and by attending school and community events. Superintendent B shared mainly interactions

that occurred in the work environment. She stated that her daily priorities were established by “the person who is in front of you at the time.” She concluded by stating “our priority are people.”

Public relations within the community are an important factor to address as a district. There were differences in the community’s perception between these two case studies. In Case Study #1, Superintendent A worked on continuing to improve the image of his district with providing newsletters and media releases of all the student academic and extracurricular successes. Additionally, in an effort to improve this public image even more, Superintendent A’s district was able to afford a public relations person to assist in further educating and reaching out to their community. At this time, in Case Study #2, Superintendent B’s focus is to inform the community of all the necessary changes that develop due to declining student enrollment and building and academic improvement needs. She truly believes that her district needs a public relations person to assist with their public image; however it is not a financial possibility for her district at this time.

Surviving the Current Political and Social Pressures on Public Schools

Both participants expressed their initial desire to “not do the politics” when they accepted their positions as public school superintendents. Their interests and focus were student-focused. In fact, it was one of the areas that they have learned to manage in their positions. However, avoiding the politics in their jobs is not possible and they have both found methods to address the multitude of issues. Superintendent B’s district has many more political pressures that have an impact on their day to day operations of the district. For instance, they have two schools that have not made the state expectations on state

testing and therefore are in School Improvement. This additional political pressure is not felt in Superintendent A's district since their test scores far exceed the state's expectations.

Beyond the political pressures from the state, there are other social pressures that both superintendents must manage in their duties. Pressures from individual teacher or parent concerns, financial security, and teacher negotiations are some of the difficult issues that school superintendents must manage. Again Superintendent A has much less of this controversy to manage in his district than Superintendent B. Both of these superintendents are able to face and overcome these pressures by staying committed to their own morals and values, and gaining their personal strength from their spirituality.

Summary

Two current Pennsylvania public school superintendents, who are perceived by others to be leaders who exhibit spiritual leadership characteristics, shared their leadership experiences and practices during individual interviews. In addition I interviewed a member of their administrative staffs and a member of their School Board. I observed one of their administrative team meetings and one of their School Board meetings, and reviewed five district documents of their choice. The chapter presented the demographic profile of each of the districts, and described the themes that emerged from the data collected.

In Case Study #1, in a small affluent rural district, with a superintendent who has served the district for nine years, the following themes emerged: shared vision, engagement of relationships, learning and growing, passion and strength.

In Case Study #2, in a small struggling urban district, with a superintendent who has served the district for eight years, the following themes emerged: vision, problem solving for accountability, drive and confidence, and open communication.

In a cross-case analysis of both Case Study #1 and Case Study #2, the following themes emerged: commitment to own values and morals, vision and leadership, learning and growing as a district, and interconnectedness to the community.

In the upcoming chapter, I will provide the conclusions of the data collected in this study. I will also discuss the variances in the community impact and outside pressures for both of these districts and the impact it has on the superintendent.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This study explored the leadership behaviors of two selected Pennsylvania superintendents, who are perceived as being spiritual leaders, to identify and describe, through case study, the spiritual character and behaviors of these superintendents. Leadership behaviors that were collected were displayed within their job responsibilities as a public school superintendent. In Chapter 4, the results of the study were presented. In this chapter, interpretations and conclusions based upon the findings of the study are presented. They are organized for the reader on a case by case response to each of the study's research questions followed by overarching conclusions. The relationship of the findings to the literature and recommendations by the researcher for future research studies are also presented.

My Personal Journey

Over the past four years, I have served as a public school superintendent in Pennsylvania. As I continue to grow and learn from my experiences, I have questioned my own ability to manage the stressors of this demanding, high profile position with my personal desire to first be a caring, honest, and effective school leader. Public schools are under tremendous pressure to respond to the political demands and societal changes that surround them, and I understand that there are many more demands of my position than the management of the organization. As the chief executive officer (CEO) of the organization, I am responsible to provide the leadership necessary to respond to these

various demands, plus provide direction to move the organization forward in achieving its goals.

As a superintendent, I have been confronted with many challenges. The managerial responsibilities alone in operating a school district are daunting. Coupled with the current political pressures of high academic accountability and community expectations for increased family and community events, I find my days filled with continuous demands to manage and organize the daily operations of the district. These daily demands to manage the day to day operations of the district provide little time for me to be the leader I believe myself to be. Reflecting upon my own style of leadership, I think of myself as a leader who believes in honest, open communications with others; in providing guidance, support and meaning to employees' work; and in helping others meet their personal goals while obtaining the goals set for the organization. I depend on my own internal beliefs and values as guidance to make decisions that are appropriate for all persons concerned and for the good of the organization. I find my work to be spiritual; not necessarily in a religious sense, but in the importance I place on the interconnections with the employees and all others, and in my determination to lead through my own values and moral convictions. These self-reflections on my leadership style, in comparison to fulfilling the demands expected of a public school superintendent in the twenty first century, were the basis for my quest into this study. I wanted to explore whether a person, perceived to lead from a spiritual leadership style, can indeed thrive both personally and professionally, in today's public schools.

Research Question 1

How does one identified as a “spiritual leader” define his/her leadership style and what factors do they feel impact their own spirituality?

Defining spirituality was one of the most important tasks to accomplish for this study. This proved to be a difficult task both in the research and in the data collection due to the fact that defining of “spirituality” is unique to the individual. Rezach (2002) stated that “spirituality is as unique as the person who tries to define it” (p. 96). Within this study, “spirituality” is not to be confused to represent any specific religious belief. The orientation of one’s spirituality and religiosity was not differentiated. In review of the literature, the three themes that continued to emerge in defining spirituality are meaning systems, connections to self and others, and values.

Meaning systems are defined in the literature as the “answers people develop in response to existential concerns” (Solomon & Hunter, 2002, p. 38). Thus, spirituality is a meaning system that allows people to understand their world, making meaning in their lives, and understand their part in the universe (Houston, 2002; Stokley, 2002; Solomon & Hunter, 2002). Another perspective to the development of meaning systems is the levels of faith development as defined in Fowler’s Faith Development Theory. Fowler (1981) viewed faith as dynamic whereas people can function at and transition to any of his six stages. Stages 4 and 5 of this theory are consistent with the theory of meaning systems in spirituality. Stage 4, called the Individuative –Reflection Stage, indicates that the individual who exists at this stage exhibits two key characteristics: First, the self now claims “an identity no longer defined by the composite of one’s roles or meanings to others” (Fowler, 1981, p. 182). Making and

sticking to their own decisions is very important to them. Secondly, there is a consciousness of one's new boundaries and an awareness of oneself related to a "world view". A Stage 5, Conjunctive –Unusual Stage, person is ready "to spend and be spent for the cause of conserving and cultivating the possibility of others' generating identity and meaning" (Fowler, 1981, p. 198).

Connectedness to self, others, and universe is the second theme of spirituality. What one experiences and believes as the spiritual must also be outwardly manifested in one's words, deed, and attitude. The third theme indicates how spirituality forms the basis for one's values and ethics. Spiritual leaders can draw upon their own values to inform their individual and professional behavior.

For purposes of this study, spirituality was defined to mean a way of living, a way of interconnectedness with one self and others, and a determination to stick to and lead through one's own values and moral convictions. Within the interviews with the two superintendents in this study, both superintendents defined spirituality unique to their own beliefs. Superintendent A defined spirituality in terms of the ability to have vision and to see the bigger viewpoint on issues. Although Superintendent A provided a definition outside of his religious faith, he also defined spirituality in terms of his Christian faith. Superintendent B's definition was focused completely on her religious beliefs. They both believe that the center of their spirituality is from a religious base. Superintendent A stated "the ultimate spirituality is God." Superintendent B's stated that spirituality is "faith and strength" and that we are "apostles" of God's word and "our spirit touches everyone and it is our light."

Both superintendents also believe they are doing what they believe “God” wants them to do; they are fulfilling their call to duty. Houston stated “the superintendency isn’t so much a job as it is a calling. You may choose it, but it also chooses you. You are summoned to it” (2001, p. 6). Both Superintendent A and Superintendent B believe they have been called to their positions as public school superintendents.

In observation of both these superintendents and in their responses in interviews, I believe that both of these individuals function from a deep spiritual base within themselves. It was made very clear that the decisions, which are made by each of them, are based on their own set of values. For instance, Superintendent A indicated that if he has staff members who make it “hard for me to lead the way I want to” and are “so entrenched in their own thinking,” that he “kills them with kindness” in order to align them to his direction and beliefs. Superintendent B stated “she just can’t compromise her belief system” no matter how difficult the situation. The depth of their responses to each of the interview questions also indicate the strong connection they have to their own selves and beliefs. They understand and have a good perspective on their purpose in life and their place in the greater universe. Superintendent A discussed the ability to “remove himself from situations and see what is happening so he can contribute in a positive way.” Superintendent B indicated that she believes that she, just as everyone else, is an “apostle” and our mission is to “go out and act the word.” Additionally, as a result of the data collected, it is my interpretation that they both function on either a Stage 4 or Stage 5 on Fowler’s Faith Development stages. They make decisions congruent with their own consciousness and values and these decisions are based on the betterment of their districts and students, not what is best for them personally. Superintendent A stated that “you

invest in other people's success" as an example of his focus on the betterment of his staff, rather than the development of his personal success. Even in the more difficult environment that Superintendent B must function within, she defends what she believes no matter the pressures from others. Additionally, she stated that her job is to do "what is best for everybody" and her focus is "all about the kids."

Maintaining this spiritual base takes continual effort and commitment from both superintendents. The research indicated that this is usually accomplished through some form of personal reflection. Thompson (2005) stated "The sources of spiritual nourishment and renewal, of course, can be highly individualistic" (p. 42). Both Superintendent A and Superintendent B nurture and nourish their spirituality through unique daily and weekly rituals. Superintendent A finds quiet time to read and reflect, to play basketball and interact with students, and to pray each evening. Superintendent B shared that she attends weekly church services, spends time with her family, and time with her students in the schools. What is interesting is that not only do these daily rituals nourish their spirituality; they also revitalize them so that they are able to handle the daily pressures of the job of a superintendent. Their spirituality is an important part of who they are and they depend on their spirituality to provide them with the inner strength needed to make wise decisions and to lead their organizations.

Research Question 2

What are varying characteristics in the practices of superintendents identified as "spiritual leaders" and what does it look like in practice in an educational setting?

In order to select the participants for this study, I asked Intermediate Unit Executive Directors and the Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Association of School Directors

(PASA) to recommend current superintendents who exhibit characteristics and behaviors of a spiritual leader. The characteristics were gathered from the research as the key characteristics that describe a spiritual leader, as is presented in Chapter Two. The characteristics include the following:

- Clarity in their vision and establishing goals for their district.
- Capacity to bring meaning to all parts of the organization and to emphasize collaboration and teamwork for an efficient, interconnected system.
- Ability to inspire and empower every person within the organization.
- Places the importance of the organization and all its components before own self-serving goals. Demonstrates personal humility.
- Leads and makes decisions based on their own strong moral purpose and deep sense of values.

It is through these characteristics that both of the superintendents who participated in this study were selected. During the course of data collection, both Superintendent A and Superintendent B exhibited these characteristics in their leadership styles, and confirmed the perceptions of their style of leadership by the IU Executive Directors who recommended them for this study.

Case study #1.

The major leadership behaviors of Superintendent A, the superintendent in Case Study #1, included a focus on building a school and community environment in which there was an emphasis on a shared vision, strong and open engagement of relationships, and ongoing learning and growing throughout the staff, students, and community. Superintendent A expressed a great deal of passion for his work and presence of personal

strength. He devoted large amounts of his time and energy promoting the image of the district within the community. Superintendent A defined his leadership style as “engaging, empowering, and decisive”: three terms that I believe accurately describe his leadership behaviors observed during my visit to his district.

Case study #2.

Superintendent B, the superintendent in Case Study #2, demonstrated the following leadership behaviors: a strong personal vision for the district, an emphasis on continual review of data and problem-solving for academic and fiscal accountability, and a demand for open communication among the students, staff, parents, and community. With a strong sense of personal drive and self-confidence, she focused all her energies to work with various teams and committees to obtain academic and school improvement. Superintendent B defined her leadership style as “integrity, faith, and service,” which provided insight into who she presented herself to be as an educational leader.

Common characteristics in both case studies.

A review of the leadership practices of both Superintendent A and Superintendent B revealed several commonalities in their leadership styles. Common themes between these two case studies included a commitment to providing a district vision, a focus on continuous learning and growth, and an emphasis on interconnections with the community and other stakeholders.

Superintendent A and Superintendent B understand the necessity for a strong district vision that all stakeholders are committed to and follow. How they derive this vision for their districts is very different from one another. Superintendent A creates a shared vision that is developed by “all stakeholders” so that they have a common vision

connected to the community. Superintendent B stated that it is her responsibility to create the vision for the district, with some reflection and input from the staff. She stated “the Board hires the administration for foreseeability” and that the “leader sets the tone.” Once each of these superintendents has facilitated the development of their respective visions, they both indicated that it is their responsibility to lead that vision with staff and the community. Part of their responsibilities is to promote and ensure commitment to this vision throughout the district and community.

Superintendent A and Superintendent B also felt strongly about the need for continuous learning and growing as professionals by all of their staff members. By providing strong professional development opportunities for their staff, they can continue to address needed changes in school and academic programs for the betterment of all students. Superintendent A reflected upon pieces of research that he uses to engage needed changes within his district. He discussed the work of Richard Elmore (1979) with backward mapping, a framework of analysis to study the implementation of a needed change, and the work of Michael Fullan (2001) on leading organizational change by understanding phases in the change process that need to be addressed for it to be adopted within an organization. Additionally, Superintendent B reflected “that’s education: growth and change” and that she was hired to institute growth in her district, “not just to keep the status quo.”

Finally, both superintendents emphasized the need for interconnectedness to the community. Their philosophies and styles were very different in how to engage the community. Superintendent A believed in spending time within the community to build trust and a strong relationship. He did this by attending fire companies’ dinners, playing

basketball with the students, and attending many community and student events.

Superintendent B believed that one connected to the community by ensuring that the schools were very open and inviting for parents and community members. She stated “you build community by having very open, welcoming school buildings and offices,” and by always maintaining “mutual respect with everyone.”

Servant leadership and authentic leadership.

In addition to exemplifying the characteristics of Spiritual Leadership, both these superintendents also exemplify leadership behaviors consistent within the basis of Servant Leadership and Authentic Leadership. As is consistent with Servant Leadership, Superintendent A and Superintendent B are very committed to the students of their district and to improving the programs within their district. They serve their districts with long hours, dedication, and loyalty. They view their positions as not figure head positions, but as that of the leader of their districts with a dedication to being involved at all levels and in all aspects of the organization. Superintendent A was observed serving water to the School Board members and student representatives at the Board Meeting. Superintendent B indicated “I feel the responsibility to be an example for everyone.” She models that for her staff by remaining committed to service the district with her continual dedication and vision for improvement in student achievement, while addressing the financial constraints of the community and district.

Authentic leaders act on their set of internal values, and both their attitudes and behaviors are consistent with these values. Henderson stated that the authentic leader “was an ethical and authentic person first” (Henderson, 1998, p. 18). Superintendent A was described by his Assistant as “being very human, so approachable.” Superintendent

B stated that even though she is always willing to take risks and is “committed to her work,” she was clear that she “won’t compromise (her) integrity or principals.”

Additionally, in observation of both these leaders at the administrative and Board meetings, they presented themselves and interacted with others as they had described themselves in their interviews. It was my observation that both Superintendent A and Superintendent B performed the duties of their position and made administrative decisions based on their own thoughts and values.

Connection to the literature.

The results of this study related to the literature on leadership behaviors of spiritual leaders in three distinct areas: a caring attitude with placing the importance of the organization and all its components in front of any self-serving goals, the ability to build and provide a clear vision for the district which embraces the values of the school system and community, and to bring meaning to all parts of the organization by inspiring and empowering every person in the organization.

One of the most evident findings in both of these case studies was the deep sense of caring and passion that Superintendent A and Superintendent B had for their work. Both conveyed that their jobs were a large part of their life and they completed their duties with a sense of service and passion, not for any self-serving purposes. The work of Thompson (2005), Wheatley (2003) and Collins (2001) affirmed that spiritual leaders are distinguished by their humility. Additionally, spiritual leaders make decisions based on their own strong moral convictions and personal beliefs about what is best for the organization. Sergiovanni (1992) stated “The heart of leadership has to do with what a person believes, values, dreams about and is committed to” (p. 7). The research of

Thompson (2005), Fullan (2003), Creighton (1999) also confirmed that spiritual leaders lead and make decisions based on a deep sense of values and beliefs of what is best for the organization, not based on outside pressures and criticism.

A key characteristic of both Superintendent A and B leadership behaviors is the value they place upon and the ability to build a common vision and establish goals within their districts. Building vision is a common characteristic of spiritual leadership found in the research. As DePree (1989) stated in *Leadership is an Art*, “Leaders share a clear statement of the values of the organization. These values should be broadly understood, agreed to and should shape the district and individual behavior” (p. 14). This is also consistent with the findings of the Hayes Study (Hay Management Consultants, 2000) and the research of Liethwood and Riehl (2003) and Fairholm (1998). Effective school leaders ensure that change efforts within their organizations are aimed at clear, concrete goals.

Spiritual leaders also have the capacity to bring meaning to all parts of the organization and to emphasize collaboration and teamwork to bring the organization together into an efficient interconnected system. “The spiritual leader sees the complex system or organization as being horizontal” (Stokley, 2002, p. 50). As part of bringing meaning to all parts of the organization, a spiritual leader has the ability to inspire and empower every person within the organization, and build a collaborative team environment. Covey (1998) indicated that leaders with spirituality demonstrate a true “caring” for all in the organization, so the approach to problem solving is synergistic, not adversarial. Spiritual leaders care for each person as an individual and understand each person’s importance to the organization as a whole. In reflection of this research with

what was observed in the data collected from these two case studies, there was some disparity between the two cases. Both Superintendent A and Superintendent B are diligent about bringing their organizations together as a collaborative and team approach. Superintendent A has been successful in building an efficient interconnected system in his district, however Superintendent B has a great deal of work yet to accomplish to bring her district and community to this level of trust and teamwork. The many challenges that face her district have created many layers of distrust and angst among the staff, administration, School Board, and community.

Research Question 3

How do those within the district leadership circle respond to the leadership behaviors of these superintendents identified as practicing spiritual leadership?

Senge (1990) indicated that inspirational leaders help people to expand their capacity to understand the complexities of the school and community and works to “breathe life into” the vision of the school (p. 340). I believe that spiritual leaders understand the necessity to motivate teachers, parents, and the community to work collaboratively for the betterment of children, and to build strong relationships with all of them.

In this study, the reactions of the leadership circle to the superintendent who is perceived as a spiritual leader were considered. Members of the leadership circle consisted of the administrative team and the School Board. In both case studies, I observed great respect for the personal integrity and for the strength and commitment of Superintendent A and Superintendent B to do what is best for students no matter what pressures are upon them and the district.

In Case Study One, the administrative team and the School Board members spoke highly of their respect for Superintendent A and his style of leadership. The administrative team believes he provides a clear direction to follow, supports their work, and fosters an environment for a team approach with open and honest communication. This type of environment was observed consistently during the meetings in the district. The School Board also showed respect for the work of Superintendent A and him personally. Their support is so strong that the Board President's response to what to look for when hiring a superintendent was a "clone of Superintendent A."

In Case Study Two, the responses from the interviews and the observations at meetings were varied. In the interviews, both the Board President and Assistant discussed the collaborative efforts and strength of Superintendent B in addressing the many needs of the district. However, both also indicated the tension among many staff and community groups within the district caused by many difficult situations, such as a recent teacher strike, financial concerns, and decreasing student enrollment. Overcoming these difficult issues to create a unified team approach within the district is a challenge for Superintendent B. Rebuilding trust between the staff, administrative team, and School Board members will take time and energy in the years to come. Ironically, however, the relationships that I observed while in the district appeared to be open, friendly, and supportive between Superintendent B and her administrative team and members of the School Board, even when responding to difficult questions at an open Board meeting.

Research Question 4

How does “spiritual leadership” serve as an effective style of leadership for public school superintendents given the current political and social pressures on public schools?

The temptations to compromise one’s integrity in response to the current educational environment are great. Spiritual leaders, however, have a strong moral purpose, courage and passion to overcome these temptations. Sergiovanni stated: “The heart of leadership has to do with what a person believes, values, dreams about and is committed to. It is the person’s interior world which becomes the foundation of her or his reality” (Sergiovanni, 1992, p. 7). Spiritual leaders make decisions based on their own strong moral convictions and personal beliefs about what is best for the organizations.

Both Superintendent A and Superintendent B manage the current political and social pressures of their positions by remaining loyal to their values and moral base, and by maintaining their focus and energies on student achievement and the goals of the district. Their strength is built and nourished by their personal spiritual beliefs and by their commitment to what they believe is morally correct. These political and social pressures, however, are quite different in their intensity between the two case studies.

Leadership and vision are both dependent on the culture and individualism of each specific district and its community. There are great differences in the culture and demographics between these two districts included in this research. In Case Study #1, the district is an affluent rural district in which there is current student academic success, positive teacher relationships, community support, and financial stability. In Case Study

#2, the district is a more financially deprived urban district that is trying to overcome many negative impacts, such as declining student enrollment, student achievement concerns, negative staff interactions based on difficult teacher negotiations and strike only two years ago, and a financially unstable community. The differences in these two communities serve as a direct link to the type of leadership that is needed in creating change and progress. Superintendent A focuses his leadership on promoting positive interactions among all stakeholders and motivating staff for further enhancements and improvements within the schools and community. Superintendent B focuses her leadership on managing all of the difficult tasks needed to address the deficiencies in her struggling school system and to keep everyone focused on the vision of improving student academic achievement.

The Answer to My Personal Quest

It was refreshing for me to observe that the leader Superintendent A portrayed himself to be in the interviews was the same leader I observed in the administrative and Board meetings. There was a constant in the way that he conducted business and interacted with every person, whether they were a parent, Board member, student, or staff member. There was an unspoken air of professionalism and respect for one another. After the review of research outlined in Chapter Two, Superintendent A appeared as the “textbook” model for spiritual leadership.

Where my perspective on spiritual leadership changed, however, was during my time conducting the collection of data in Superintendent B’s district. Quite different from my experience in the first district, my first impressions were that Superintendent B did not appear to lead from a spiritual leader perspective. Her methods in which she

conducts business in the district and the current climate in the district in many ways does not follow what the research provided in Chapter Two. For instance, during the interviews, both the Assistant and the Board President shared many concerns of climate among the staff and within the community. My first impression was that Superintendent B was perceived by outsiders to the district as a spiritual leader, however she was not perceived as such within the district. Trying to keep an open mind to my thoughts, however, my perception of Superintendent B changed during my observation of the Board Meeting, the final data collection point during my visit. All the concerns that were presented during the interviews were not observed in the meetings. The interactions and discussions with each other reflected respect and professionalism among all groups, including parents, staff, and Board members. Superintendent B presented herself as a very open and caring leader who respected the voices of others, even those who were in conflict with decisions made by her and the district. At first, I was unable to understand this disconnect between the unhappiness that was shared during the interviews of the current discontent of teachers and the community with what I was observing. How can one be a spiritual leader if there is not an overall positive relationship between her and her staff, or between the district and the community?

In personal reflection of what I observed and heard in Superintendent B's district, it became very clear to me that indeed Superintendent B does lead from a spiritual leadership perspective, but what was different for her than in Superintendent A's district were the challenges that face this at-risk district. There are so many overwhelming negative impacts on this district, such as financial concerns, decreasing enrollment, and low staff morale that was brought on by a difficult strike. To overcome these difficult

issues as a leader and to be able to carry on and lead the mission the district set for their students, takes a leader with an extreme strong sense of inner strength. In many ways, Superintendent B's job is a very lonely place to be and I became convinced that it is only through her strong moral and spiritual core, that she is able to face all this adversity to continue to lead this district forward. In addition, her ability to hold no personal grudges and to remain positive is a characteristic of a person with a strong morale core and humility.

I now better understand that a person may lead from the same inner perspective such as with a spiritual leadership style, but what this leadership style looks like in practice is dependent on the environment and the characteristics of the district.

Conclusions

There have been several researchers who have concluded that spiritual leadership is an appropriate and timely leadership style for current school administrators. The information I have gleaned from this case study validates this conclusion. The study of Superintendent A presented a good case study example of a leader who embraces a spiritual leadership style in a district that has a recent history of a lot of success and is financially and academically sound. The study of Superintendent B presented a good case study example of a leader who embraces a spiritual leadership style in a district that currently is facing many difficult moral, financial, and academic challenges.

Houston (2002) claimed that in today's society, educational administrators have complex, chaotic jobs and are searching for meaning and purpose in their positions. Additionally, Creighton (1999) stated: "Administrators in the new century will need to be more focused and involved in articulating their personal values, beliefs, and spirituality

than those who have traditionally held the job” (p. 6). During this era of accountability and change in the make up of our society, I believe schools can thrive with the leadership of a superintendent who possesses the characteristics of a spiritual leader. Indeed, many schools will remain status quo and fail to succeed under the political pressures for change in public schools unless they engage a leader with strong moral will and desire to make decisions based on the needs of all students.

Recommendations for Future Research

The following recommendations are made for future research studies relative to spiritual leadership in superintendents of public schools:

- 1) Repeat this study with additional public school superintendents in diverse districts across Pennsylvania and in other states. This study could be broadened and extended by using different sorts of venues and through the use of other sorts of research questions.
- 2) This study had both a male and a female superintendent participant. Even though gender was never mentioned or approached in any of the interviews, further research could identify the impact of gender or ethnical differences in spiritual leadership development.
- 3) Personal struggles were a component of each of the two participants’ histories in this study. A future study could research the past experiences of spiritual leaders to determine if there is common theme of a personal struggle in the development of individuals who exhibit spiritual leadership.
- 4) Conduct a longitudinal study in districts led by superintendents determined to be spiritual leaders. A more in-depth, longitudinal study could include interviews

with staff, students, and community members. This study could provide information on the success of spiritual leaders over a longer period of time.

- 5) Utilizing the findings of this study in the identification of the key behaviors and characteristics of public school superintendents who exhibit spiritual leadership, conduct a quantitative study to determine the existence of these key behaviors, characteristics and overall leadership style on a larger scale.
- 6) Conduct a quantitative study to determine the number of current serving superintendents who believe they lead from a spiritual center. Do a comparative study of those districts and how they function to districts led by superintendents perceived to be spiritual leaders and those who are not.
- 7) Conduct a study to determine if the key characteristics of spiritual leadership can be learned through a graduate program, or if it is contingent upon the life experiences, both negative and positive, in the life of the leader.

Hopefully this study will serve as a catalyst for further studies that will continue to investigate effective school leadership and the educational impact of superintendents who exercise spiritual leadership.

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Appendix A

Letter of Introduction

Letter of Introduction

(Date)

Dear Intermediate Unit or PASA Executive Director,

I am writing to ask that you consider assisting me in identifying potential participants in a research study. The study is entitled Spiritual Leadership as an Effective Leadership Style for the Pubic School Superintendent.

Spiritual leadership is a fascinating, yet relatively new, subject in the area of educational leadership which is gaining more attention. I am hoping to make a significant contribution to the research in this field by trying to determine if spiritual leadership can be described as a model of effective school leadership for superintendents in PA public schools and what characteristics are held in common, if any, by those identified as “spiritual leaders”. For purposes of this study, spirituality is not defined to be representative of any specific religious belief, but to mean a way of living, a way of interconnectedness with one self and others, and a determination to stick to and lead through ones’ own values and moral convictions.

As leaders, consultants, and many times mentors to Pennsylvania’s 501 public school superintendents, you provide insights into the leadership styles and successes in practices of these superintendents. Using the criteria listed on the Participant Referral Form, I am asking you to name current superintendents who you believe exemplify the characteristics that are presented. After I receive your recommendations, I will send a personal letter of introduction and an invitation to each of the superintendents listed.

Participants in this study will have the opportunity to tell their personal stories on their journey to and as a superintendent.

This research is my final step to complete the requirements of an Ed. D. in Educational Leadership at Duquesne University and is undertaken with the knowledge and support of my dissertation committee chaired by Dr. James Ryland, Shippensburg University. I am a current sitting superintendent for the Lower Dauphin School District in Hummelstown, Pennsylvania and fully understand the challenging times that public education leaders are facing in Pennsylvania. My interest in topics related to high moral effective leadership styles, specifically spiritual leadership, is driven by my own experiences as an educational leader.

Please return the enclosed Participant Referral Form to list your recommendations for possible participants in this research study. Be assured that identify of individual respondents and names of the respondent's organizations will be kept confidential.

I hope you will consider assisting me in this timely research.

Sincerely,

Sherri L. Smith

Appendix B
Participant Referral Form

Participant Referral Form

Number: _____

Date: _____

Criteria to identify possible superintendent research project participants are the following:

_____ Employed in a Pennsylvania Public School District for a minimum of 3 years (in the same district) as the School Superintendent

_____ Interacts on a daily basis with their employees so that they are perceived as the decision maker/leader of the organization.

_____ Participant's leadership approaches reflect actions and attitudes perceived to be spiritual in nature. Characteristics of a spiritual leader include the following:

- Clarity in their vision and establishing goals for their district.
- Capacity to bring meaning to all parts of the organization and to emphasize collaboration and teamwork for an efficient, interconnected system.
- Ability to inspire and empower every person within the organization.
- Places the importance of the organization and all its components before own self-serving goals. Demonstrates personal humility.
- Leads and makes decisions based on their own strong moral purpose and deep sense of values.

Recommendations:

Please list the name(s) of current superintendent(s) that you believe meet the criteria listed on the front of this form. Anyone who is given a recommendation will receive a written invitation to participate in this study. There is no obligation by any of these individuals to be part of this research because of your recommendation.

Name: _____ District: _____

I have known this superintendent for _____ year(s).

Name: _____ District: _____

I have known this superintendent for _____ year(s).

Name: _____ District: _____

I have known this superintendent for _____ year(s).

The responses of any respondent to this request will be held in the confidence.

PLEASE RETURN TO THE RESEARCHER IN THE ENVELOPE PROVIDED.

Appendix C
Letter of Introduction

Letter of Introduction

(Date)

Dear Superintendent,

As the superintendent for the Lower Dauphin School District in Hummelstown, Pennsylvania, I fully understand the challenging times that you as a public education leader are facing in Pennsylvania. That's why I am asking for your help! You have been recommended to me as a candidate for my dissertation study because of your leadership style and success as a superintendent. I am writing to ask that you consider helping me complete my doctoral work by participating in this research study. The study is entitled Spiritual Leadership as an Effective Leadership Style for the Pubic School Superintendent.

Spiritual leadership is a fascinating, yet relatively new, subject in the area of educational leadership, which is gaining more attention. I hop to make a significant contribution to the research in this field by trying to determine if spiritual leadership can be described as a model of effective school leadership for superintendents in Pennsylvania public school s and what characteristics are held in common, if any, by those identified as "spiritual leaders". For purposes of this study, spirituality is not defined to be representative of any specific religious belief, but to mean a way of living, a way of interconnectedness with one self and others, and a determination to stick to and lead through ones' own values and moral convictions.

Participants in this study will have the opportunity to tell their personal stories about their journey to becoming and serving as a superintendent. The research is a case study approach involving interview, observation and document review. The exact

timetable for each case will be determined by the superintendent and the researcher at the time of the initial interview.

This research is my final step to complete the requirements of an Ed. D. in Educational Leadership at Duquesne University and is undertaken with the knowledge and support of my dissertation committee chaired by Dr. James Ryland, Shippensburg University. My interest in topics related to high moral effective leadership styles, specifically spiritual leadership, is driven by my own experiences as an educational leader.

Please return the enclosed Questionnaire to indicate your interest in participation in this research study. Be assured that identify of individual respondents and names of the respondent's districts will never be used in the research project: anonymity of participants and schools will be protected. Depending on your response, I will contact you to confirm your answer. I hope you will consider my request to share your obviously successful personal leadership journey in my proposed dissertation this spring.

Sincerely,

Sherri L. Smith

Appendix D
Questionnaire

Questionnaire

Number: _____

Date: _____

I have been a superintendent for this district for _____ year(s).

My district serves _____ students and is considered a (urban, rural, suburban) district.
(circle one)

What three words best describe your leadership style?

Please comment on your district's performance on the Pennsylvania State System of Assessment (PSSA) over the past three years and how you and your district are managing this state expectation of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)?

I have received your letter regarding the proposed research on the behaviors of superintendents who are seen as exhibiting the leadership characteristics consistent with the practices of a spiritual leader.

_____ I am interested in hearing about the study in more detail. Please send the abstract to me and follow up with a phone call.

_____ I would like to talk with you before making any indication of interest. Please call.

_____ I am not interested at this time to take part in this research, but contact me at a later date and I may be interested.

_____ I am not interested in taking part in this research project.

The responses of any superintendent to this request and subsequent involvement of any kind will be held in the strictest confidence.

PLEASE RETURN TO THE RESEARCHER IN THE ENVELOPE PROVIDED.

Appendix E

Superintendent's Interview Questions

Superintendent's Interview Questions

A. Tell me your story of your journey to the superintendency.

Probes:

- Tell me about how you developed an interest in a profession within education?
- What was it that led you to seek an administrative position?
- When and how did you know you wanted to be a superintendent?

B. Explain what spirituality is to you?

Probes:

- What shaped your spirituality?
- How do you nourish your spiritual self?

C. You were invited to participate in this study because you are seen as a superintendent who exhibits spiritual leadership. Can you tell me more about that?

Probe:

- Can you give me an example of how you have used your spirituality to inform your leadership?

D. Tell me about a typical day as a superintendent. How do you organize your day and set priorities?

E. How do you facilitate change in your district?

Probes:

- Give me an example of how you facilitated a recent change in your district. Include steps taken to bring about a new initiative from start to finish.
- What kinds of risks are you willing to take to see an idea through? Example.

F. Are there any particular challenges for you as a superintendent who leads from a spiritually-centered leadership style?

Probe:

- How about the political nature of your job?

G. How do you build community in your district?

Probe:

- What methods of communication do you use with your staff? Board?
Community?

H. Is there anything else you would like to share to help me better understand you?

Appendix F

Member of Superintendent's Team Interview Questions

Member of Superintendent's Team Interview Questions

- A. How many years of experience do you have in your present position?
- B. How many years have you worked under the current superintendent?
- C. How would you describe your leadership style?
- D. Describe the leadership style of the current superintendent. Other superintendents you have worked with in the past?
- E. How does your leadership style blend with the superintendent's leadership style?
- F. Describe the administrative team. Describe how the administrative team operates.
- G. How would you describe the relationship with your current superintendent and members of the staff?
- H. What methods does he or she use to communicate with the administrative team?
Staff?
- I. Describe the steps that your district takes in the development of a team goal and in its implementation.
- J. How have the current educational issues and pressures, both political and social, impacted this superintendent?
- K. Describe your work environment under this superintendent.
- L. If you were superintendent, how would you lead in the current context or environment?
- M. What have you learned from the current superintendent?
- N. How has this superintendent influenced you personally and professionally?

Appendix G

Board Member Interview Questions

Board Member Interview Questions

- A. What are the leadership qualities you expect to find in a superintendent?
- B. What are the strengths that you find in your current superintendent?
- C. What expectations did the Board have when hiring the current superintendent?
- D. How has he or she addressed these expectations?
- E. How would you describe the working relationship with your current superintendent and members of the Board? Administrative team? Staff? Community?
- F. What methods of communication does he or she use to inform the Board? Community?
- G. How does this superintendent address the difficult balance of leading needed change, while providing stability, for the district?
- H. Using specific examples, describe the leadership behaviors that you have noted in the current superintendent?
- I. How has this superintendent surprised you?
- J. How have the current educational issues and pressures, both political and social, affected this superintendent?
- K. What advice would you have for a board member who was preparing to help choose a superintendent?
- L. What would you do differently next time you prepare to choose a superintendent?

Appendix H

Matrix of the Interview Protocol and the Research Questions

Matrix of the Interview Protocol and the Research Questions

Research Questions

1. What are varying characteristics in the practices of superintendents identified as “spiritual leaders” and what does it look like in practice in an educational setting?
2. How does one identified as a “spiritual leader” define his/her leadership style and what factors do they feel impact their own spirituality?
3. How do those within the district leadership circle respond to the leadership behaviors of these superintendents identified as practicing spiritual leadership?
4. How does “spiritual leadership” serve as an effective style of leadership for public school superintendents given the current political and social pressures on public schools?

The following matrixes indicate the relationship between the research questions that frame this study and the questions and topics included in the interviews of the superintendent, member of the administrative team, and Board member. A list of interview questions can be found in Appendix E, F and G.

Superintendent’s Interview

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Q.1.			X	X	X	X	X	X
Q.2.	X	X					X	X
Q.3.			X	X	X	X		X
Q.4.			X	X	X	X	X	X

Administrative Team Member's Interview

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N
Q.1.						X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Q.2.														
Q.3.					X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Q.4.					X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Board Member's Interview

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
Q.1.		X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
Q.2.												
Q.3.		X		X	X	X	X	X		X		
Q.4.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Appendix I

Consent to Participate Forms

1. Superintendent
2. Administrative Team Member
3. School Board Member



DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY

600 FORBES AVENUE ♦ PITTSBURGH, PA 15282

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

- TITLE:** Spiritual Leadership as an Effective Leadership Style for the Public School Superintendent
- INVESTIGATOR:** Sherri L. Smith
1601 Sandbeach Road
Hummelstown, PA 17036
Home Phone: 717-533-6603
Mobile Phone: 717-215-3702
Email: ssmith@ldsd.org
Email: allizach@comcast.net
- ADVISOR:** Dr. James Ryland
Shippensburg University
Educational Leadership and Policy
Phone: 717-477-1591
- SOURCE OF SUPPORT:** This study is being performed as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Ed. D. degree in Educational Leadership at Duquesne University.
- PURPOSE:** You are being asked to participate in a research project that seeks to investigate the characteristics and leadership behaviors of current public school superintendents, who are identified as spiritual leaders. You will be asked to allow me to interview you. The interviews will be taped and transcribed. Additionally, observations and document reviews will be conducted.
- These are the only requests that will be made of you.
- RISKS AND BENEFITS:** All superintendent participants will be asked to participate in a semi-structured one-on-one audio taped interview. Superintendents will also be asked

to choose a member of their administrative team and a School Board member to be interviewed, as well as five documents of the superintendent's choosing that demonstrate his or her personal leadership philosophy. A possible risk is an uncomfortable feeling that he or she may experience in responses during interviews, observations, or document review. This risk will be minimized by the steps that will be taken to ensure confidentiality of all participants (see Confidentiality section).

There are no direct benefits to participants; however this study will benefit how superintendents are prepared in the future and increase the overall knowledge base in the study of spiritual leadership and its effectiveness in educational leadership.

COMPENSATION:

You will not be compensated for your participation. However, participation in the project will require no monetary cost to you. An envelope is provided for return of your response to the investigator.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

The audio taped interviews will be transcribed by a third party. The individual transcribing the interviews will sign an affidavit stating all of the information from the interviews will be kept confidential and information will be provided to the researcher only. All transcriptions will have any identifiers to any individual or to the district deleted or disguised in the transcribed text to provide confidentiality to the study participants. Written documents will be duplicated for analysis and all personal information blacked out on the documents. Original copies will be returned to participants or destroyed at participant's request. Identification numbers will be assigned to each document to provide confidentiality to study participants. Additionally, identification numbers will be assigned to notes taken during observations to ensure confidentiality.

The information provided by other district participants in this study will be shared with the

Superintendent, however their identity will not be directly attached to the statements shared.

Your name will never appear within any research document or publication of the study. No identity will be made in the data analysis. Your response(s) will only appear in statistical data summaries. All materials will be destroyed at the completion of the research.

RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. You are free to withdraw your consent to participate at any time.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS:

A summary of the results of this research will be supplied to you, at no cost, upon request.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT:

I have read the above statements and understand what is being requested of me. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, for any reason. On these terms, I certify that I am willing to participate in this research project.

I understand that should I have any further questions about my participation in this study, I may call Mrs. Sherri L. Smith, Researcher, 717-533-6603, Dr. James Ryland, Advisor, 717-477-1591, or Dr. Paul Richer, Chair of the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board, 412-396-6326.

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date



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Your name will never appear within any research document or publication of the study. No identity will be made in the data analysis. Your response(s) will only appear in statistical data summaries. All materials will be destroyed at the completion of the research.

RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. You are free to withdraw your consent to participate at any time.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS:

A summary of the results of this research will be supplied to you, at no cost, upon request.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT:

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Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

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