Including a Spiritual Voice in the Educational Leadership and School Reform Discourse

Michael E. Dantley
Department of Educational Leadership
Miami University
Oxford, Ohio

A Paper Presented at the International Leadership Association
November, 2000

Pre-Publication Draft
Please Do Not Cite or Reproduce without Permission of the Author
INCLUDING A SPIRITUAL VOICE IN THE EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND SCHOOL REFORM DISCOURSE

Educational leadership literature is rife with recommendations intending to produce change and reform in schools. Many fully believe that such a project is essential to the salvation or even the total reconstruction of schools. However, some current scholars maintain that spirituality, a relatively unknown and perhaps an even suspect voice, must enter the leadership and reform discourse of schools.

The spirit is that essential innate part of us that Stewart (1999, p.2) says, mediates, informs, and transforms a human being’s capacity to create, adapt, and transcend the realities of human existence. Spirituality is that part of life and community through which we make meaning and understanding of our world. It is our source of value, principles, and influences that we implicitly exhibit in our behavior and interactions with people. (Fairholm, 1997, p. 25) The spirit also informs our sense of resistance. What this suggests is that inherent in the resistance motif, which is essential to the nature of reform, is the spiritual impetus to create projects and agendas that transcend present realities of domestication and oppression. In fact, it is the spirit that informs our exogamous relationship to a transformed future rather than our being wed to the hegemony of the present. Our spirituality provides the fodder for self and communal transformation. It allows us to create the project that transforms the vestiges of our “as is” situations into the vagaries of our “not yet” hopes and dreams. Vision, reform, transformation, or any other notions of altering a present paradigm or condition emanate from a creative, imaginative spirituality that critically reflects and then constructs actions that bring about
change in us as well as our environment. It is indeed this spiritual element, that part of us that actually defines who we are, compels us to make meaning, and motivates our actions, that must now be allowed to help inform the educational leadership discourse. In fact, the entrance of spirituality into the dialogue will bring about three results. First, spirituality will afford leaders the opportunity to unashamedly engage in critical reflection, an essential prerequisite to transformation. Second, spirituality will cause school leaders to deconstruct or demystify their present situationality and construct a project for change. Finally, this insertion of our spiritual selves will allow leaders to make real meaning and sense out of their professional lives. Indeed, reform and transformation of schools will be grounded in something more lasting than a functionalist, positivist theoretical construction and real, impacting school reform will have a holistic framework within which it can take place.

This paper will explore the traditional components of the educational leadership discourse, the insertion of spirituality into those traditionally shared images, assumptions, and meanings, and the projected changes that can occur to the whole discourse of leadership and school reform with the addition of the spiritual voice. We will examine the exigencies essential to changing a discourse as well as other leadership contexts that are welcoming the spiritual voice into their discussion.

The Progression of the Educational Leadership Discourse

A fundamental belief about school reform is that in order for substantive change to occur in schools, there first must be a shift in the ideology and definition of educational leadership. It is interesting to note that the educational leadership discourse has undergone several radical changes. School administration has been identified as a
practice grounded in Newtonian scientific management, human relations, open systems, and even a more radical postmodern frame. Some reforms have resulted in the institutionalization of these theoretical constructs, however many of the problems that have traditionally plagued our schools are still alive and well. The primary consequence of shifting mental models regarding school leadership presumes that the ensuing “discourse-practice” (Maxcy, 1994) of those who serve as school administrators will be grounded in a new paradigm from which these administrative behaviors will be birthed.

Mental models, psychic prisons, metaphors, or frames not only help to define phenomena but they also limit what those phenomena can be. These ideological lenses serve as filters and construct our perspectives based totally upon how these paradigms define the phenomena. These analogues for paradigmatic construction actually serve as what Zohar (1997) calls structure we can access. She argues that structure contains information. Indeed, structure codifies or systematizes information and therefore defines the essence of the construction it garrisons. In keeping with this line of thinking, Morgan (1997, p. 4) argues that theories of organization and management are based on “implicit images or metaphors that lead us to see, understand, and manage organizations in distinctive yet partial ways. Moreover, he asserts:

Metaphor is often regarded just as a device for embellishing discourse, but its significance is much greater than this. The use of metaphor implies a way of thinking and a way of seeing that pervade how we understand our world generally. For example, research in a wide variety of fields has demonstrated that metaphor exerts a formative influence on science, on our language, and on how we think, as well as how we express ourselves on a day-to-day basis. (p. 4)
While this is certainly the case, operating concomitantly in the issue of metaphor, mental models, or paradigms is the delimiting as well as the exclusionary nature of these handles by which we embrace and make sense of our world. They help to provide a myopic perspective that preclude differing or even antithetical perspectives from those endorsed and engrafted in the metaphor. This then constructs what Morgan (1997b) terms distortions. In fact, he argues, metaphors “use evocative images to create what may be described as ‘constructive falsehoods’”. Included in such falsehoods may be the inherent supposition that order, a homeostasis, and a concretized corpus of knowledge about our worlds are within the parameters of the metaphor. We construct a sense of comfort and solace in the tenets of these metaphors all because they circumscribe and restrict, to a tractable few, the wide arrays of mental possibilities that could marshal our realities.

**Defining a Discourse**

Synonymous with the concept of metaphor is the notion of discourse. The word discourse is not used in the traditional literature of school leadership. It is most often found in critical, postmodern, or the more liberal ideological treatments of the subject. We will pursue in greater depth the more classic definition of discourse. However, we choose to use the term discourse rather than metaphor or lens or even mental model because the word implies that intentional communication is taking place. The idea of an exchange is intimated in the term discourse.

It is important to ground the definition of discourse in some context of communication because doing so implies that the contents of the discourse have been birthed through contestation and struggle. In fact, the communicative nature of discourse implies that its essence is neither monolithic nor unending, but is transient and evanescent
at best. It seems that as divergent voices are allowed to share in the conversation the discourse is changed. As new ideas and critique of the current discourse surface, it emerges or evolves into another phase of existence. In fact, a discourse has within it what Zohar (1997b, p. 15) calls an inner capacity for fundamental transformation. The whole idea of exchange and negotiation suggests that a discourse is malleable and adaptable and is therefore a contested terrain perpetually alive with transition and flux. The communicative nature of the idea of discourse lends hope to the notion that it can, under certain negotiated circumstances, be altered and even become more representative of the social and political milieu in which it is found. This is the goal. However, there seems to be systemic properties that militate against such transformation.

A power elite who purports to represent the best thinking in any given field generally establishes the discourse. Giroux (1997) gives a description of the industry of this power elite. He writes about the role of this elite in formulating an ahistorical mindset in American schools. He maintains:

This is not meant to imply a conscious conspiracy on the part of an “invisible” ruling elite. The very existence, interests, and consciousness of the dominant class is deeply integrated into a belief system that legitimizes its rule. This suggests that existing institutional arrangements reproduce themselves, in part, through a form of cultural hegemony, a positivist world view, that becomes a form of self delusion, and in addition, leaves little room for an oppositional historical consciousness to develop in the society at large. In other words, the suppression of historical consciousness works itself out in the field of ideology. In part this is due to an underlying “self perpetuating” logic that shapes the
mechanisms and boundaries of the culture of positivism. This logic is situated in a structure of dominance and exists to meet the most fundamental needs of the existing power relations and their corresponding social formations. It appears to be a logic that is believed by the oppressed and the oppressors alike, those who benefit from it as well as those who do not. (p. 14-15)

The power elite founds the tenets of a discourse upon the research that most legitimizes their way of perceiving the world. In fact, the questions that are raised from which the research emanates, are firmly established in the hegemony that supports the language and vernacular of the existing discourse. Most often the discourse is built not around the soundness of ideas or concepts but rather upon the number of persons who subscribe to its propositions. Most often such propositions perpetuate the hegemonic notions that have become acceptable ways of making meaning out of social phenomena.

Educational leadership is a discourse that has undergone several reconstructions but most of them have left the field bereft of any real power to make important changes in the delivery of education and learning that takes place in schools. Somehow, with all of the changes, the discourse nonetheless propagates schools of dysfunction, moderate success, and a socio-economic and political system that continues to minimize and even silence voices of difference and diversity. This may be the case because the systemic components of the discourse have been given a faulty priority or because other potentially valid and viable pieces of the discourse have been excluded. Another explanation may be the discipline’s penchant for what Bohm (1980) calls fragmentation. There is no doubt that scholars have offered many insights whose purpose has been to reform school leadership and the enterprise of learning. But those offerings have been
grounded in a faulty ideology. Bohm explains the dilemma. He says that theories are primarily forms of insight, that is they are ways of looking at the world and are really not a form of knowledge of how the world is. He adds:

On the other hand, if we regard our theories as ‘direct descriptions of reality as it is’, then we will inevitably treat these differences and distinction as divisions, implying separate existence of the various elementary terms appearing in the theory. We will thus be led to the illusion that the world is actually constituted of separate fragments and as has already been indicated, this will cause us to act in such a way that we do in fact produce the very fragmentation implied in our attitude to the theory. (p. 7)

When we allow only one insight to frame the entire discourse, others are left bereft of any potential application. The notion of fragmentation implies that only one theoretical construct at a time can ground the field. Scholars are remiss when they abdicate the engagement of several insights in the theoretical discourse at one time. To allow such a discussion brings wholeness to the discourse as well as openness to what is the reality of leadership in schools. It is not that previous theories have been defective except in their protest to be engaged uniquely. Educational leadership needs the postmodern ideology, the systems models, the new science or quantum mechanics idiom, as well as the spiritual parlance to all serve to inform and ground the leadership and school reform discourse.

It becomes essential, therefore to scrutinize educational leadership from an additional perspective, one that dares to suggest that other voices need to be heard, voices that have either been silenced or muted by the sonorous positivist soliloquy that
dominates this discourse. The addition of these voices will produce changes in the
discourse that will affect reconstruction in the field.

**Discourse Responds to Dissipative Structures**

Kuhn (1979) writes the seminal work on change and how paradigms or ways of
thinking, shared images, assumptions, and practices are altered. While he tailors his
treatise to the world of scientific revolutions, many of his conclusions can be applied to
any field that undergoes reconstruction. A discourse does not alter easily. In fact Kuhn
suggests that there is a process by which a new candidate for paradigm replaces its
predecessors. He maintains:

> Any new interpretation of nature whether a discovery or theory, emerges first in
> the mind of one or a few individuals. It is they who first learn to see science and
> the world differently, and their ability to make the transition is facilitated by two
> circumstances that are not common to most other members of their profession. (p.
> 144)

Kuhn argues that those who promote a change in thinking invariably have had their
attention intensely focused upon what he calls the “crisis-provoking problem”. He also
believes that often these radical thinkers have not been in the field long enough so that
“practice has committed them less deeply than most of their contemporaries to the world
view and rules determined by the old paradigm” (p. 144) What is intriguing is the fact
that often practitioners, scientists, and researchers are actually focusing their attention on
resolving a puzzle and not testing the efficacy of a paradigm. Applying this more
intimately to our discussion, school administrators and even teachers in the field of
educational leadership, spend their efforts predominantly resolving plaguing questions
regarding schools. Within this search for answers is the inherent supposition that the
discourse that marshals the puzzle is the appropriate one. In fact, Kuhn maintains that
one who is searching for solutions never questions the rules, assumptions, or hegemonic
trappings of the game. The answers are couched in the fact that the paradigm or the
discourse is a given. It is taken for granted. What happens then, according to Kuhn is,

…paradigm testing occurs only after persistent failure to solve a noteworthy
puzzle has given rise to a crisis. And even then it occurs only after the sense of
crisis has evoked an alternate candidate for paradigm. In the sciences the testing
situation never consists, as puzzle-solving does, simply in the comparison of a
single paradigm with nature. Instead, testing occurs as part of the competition
between two rival paradigms for the allegiance of the scientific community. (p.
145)

Wheatley (1999) confirms and elucidates the position of Kuhn where paradigm
change is concerned by citing the work of Nobel Prize winner, Ilya Prigogine, on
dissipative structures. Wheatley contends:

Dissipation describes loss, a process of energy gradually ebbing away while
structure describes embodied order. Prigogine discovered that the dissipative
activity of loss was necessary to create new order. (p .21)

What Prigogine discovered is that dissipation does not annihilate a system. It is however,
a vital part of a process by which the system relinquishes its present form so that it can,
as Wheatley maintains, reorganize in a form better suited to the demands of its changed
environment. Wheatley’s treatise on Prigogine’s dissipative structures assists in our
understanding of the intricate process of altering a given discourse. She maintains that
anything that disturbs a system or in our discussion, a discourse, plays a major role in assisting that system to facilitate the process of autopoiesis, that is the procedure of self-organizing into a new order. Wheatley offers:

Whenever the environment offers new and different information, the system chooses whether to accept the provocation and respond. This new information might be only a small difference from the norm. But if the system pays attention to this information, it brings the information inside, and once inside that network, the information grows and changes. If the information becomes such a large disturbance that the system can no longer ignore it, then real change is at hand. At this moment, jarred by so much internal disturbance and far from equilibrium, the system will fall apart. In its current form, it cannot deal with the disturbance, so it dissolves. But this disintegration does not signal the death of the system. If a living system can maintain its identity, it can self-organize to a higher level of complexity, a new form of itself that can deal better with the present. (p. 21)

The various theoretical changes that have shaped educational leadership have been those dissipative structures that have attempted to facilitate the reorganizing of the field. The problem is, however, that those disturbances have not knocked the discipline out of kilter enough to bring about substantive change to the system. The educational leadership discourse, like any other, is that negotiated practice that defines the activities that are performed on a regular basis. The discourse is the mediated arbitration that is actually the agreed upon or accepted regimen of a socially constructed reality. The discourse establishes the parameters of “righteousness” within some social construction.
That is, it names the rules that organize accepted behavior. It establishes the morality, the code of ethics by which a social construction operates.

**Including Spirituality in the Business Leadership Discourse**

Scholars of business leadership have already become fluent in speaking this way about their organizations and the people who lead them. (Briskin, 1998; Fairholm, 1997; Jaworski, 1996; Vaill, 1998; Wheatley, 1999; Zohar, 1997) Much is being written about the ethics and the morality of leadership from a business perspective. This discourse has welcomed ideas such as spirituality, the soul and the spiritual journey as idioms in the business vernacular. Many scholars in business leadership have found that organizations have begun to welcome the whole self in the workplace and that with the entrée of the whole self a new thinking emerges that catapults the organization into broader venues while accomplishing their primary vision. Zohar (1997) describes this kind of thinking. She calls this quantum thinking or the brain’s spirit. She writes:

> The third kind of thinking we can do is creative, insightful, intuitive thinking. It is the kind of thinking with which we challenge our assumptions, break our habits, or change our mental models, our paradigms. It is the kind of thinking that invents new categories of thought that creates new patterns and new language. This third kind of thinking is also rooted in and motivated by our deep sense of meaning and value. It is our spiritual thinking or our vision thinking. (p. 36)

Education, however, seems reluctant to open the boundaries of its sedimented discourse to such musings because the fear is that the legislated chasm between church and state may be abridged. The other issue with engaging spirituality is the discourse’s commitment to fragmentation or the subscription to only one leading theoretical
construction at a time. But if the system is to be radically changed and the paradigm altered so that the educational process is far more efficacious for the host of those who are a part of the enterprise then dissipative structures such as spirituality, the soul, ethics, morality, righteousness, and Wheatley’s notions of the invisible influences of field theory must be allowed to contend for inclusion along with present codes and forms sustaining the hegemony of educational leadership. The tyranny of hegemonic psychic prisons, mental models, or discourses which ground educational leadership may scoff at or even marginalize the prospect of incorporating the language of spirituality into their canons. This is so because while the Euro-centric culture, which has dominated the establishment of the hegemony where school leadership is concerned, has been accommodating to religion, it has not been particularly ebullient in its endorsement of spirituality. There is a poignant difference between spirituality and religion. Religion serves as the structured embodiment of moral codes and the institutionalized guardian of the forms and anatomy of our performed reverence for a supernatural power. Religion systematizes and canonizes the rites and rituals, the parcels and practices that are deemed legitimate in humans’ encounters with the divine. However spirituality has a much broader definition. Stewart (1999, p. 1) defines spirituality as, “…the full matrix of beliefs, power, values, and behaviors that shape people’s consciousness, understanding, and capacity of themselves in relation to divine reality”. He amplifies his definition by proposing:

Spirituality is also a process by which people interpret, disclose, formulate, adapt, and innovate reality and their understandings of God with a specific context or culture. It signifies a style or model of existence, an ethos and mythos that creates its own praxis and culture and compels identification and resolution of human
problems through divine intervention. These processes involve adaptation and
transformation of internal as well as external conditions. (p. 1)

Given this definition of spirituality and other notions of the incorporeal that are
substantially different from the hegemony of institutionalized religion, there has therefore
resulted in a Euro-centric context a reticence to support ethereality because empyrean
notions have been historically affixed to ideas of spiritism, the occult, and the world of
the mystique and exotic. However, it seems to be advantageous for education, as the
business world has found, to explore the frontiers of spirituality through accepting rather
than distrusting eyes. It may also prove efficacious to fathom the complexities of
spirituality from an Afro-centric lens, as the realm of the ethereal has been a
quintessential constituent of African and African American life.

**African American Spirituality A Model for Educational Leadership**

Spirituality has served as an agent of advocacy for African Americans. The
resiliency and commitment to traverse through perpetual crises by African Americans in
the American culture has emanated from a spiritual center. Stewart (1999) comments:

Black spirituality has thus enabled African Americans, as the despised and
rejected, as the devalued outcasts of American society, to create a hermeneutics of
existence, a soul culture, a living archive of soul force empowering them to
interpret, decode, recode, translate, and ritualize social terror, oppression, and
adversity into creative and meaningful liturgies of human existence. The manner
in which the chaos and brutalities of oppression and racism have translated and
ritualized into black culture are manifested in everything from the spirituals to
jazz, from black foodways to black folkways, from the Signifying Monkey to Brer Rabbit. (p 17)

This spirituality is not merely an instrument for creating and collecting cultural swatches in the whole fabric of African American life but also it serves as a catalyst for the articulation of a living, reformative resistance to and intervention of reality. The creative nature of the spirit releases African Americans to passionately prescribe and labor toward the necessary alterations in the hegemony that will bring about a purer manifestation of democracy in the American society. Again, Stewart comments:

Black spirituality has given African-Americans the capacity to endure and overcome the perils of their plight in America enabling them to assimilate, translate, and transform the larger culture for survival purposes. (p. 21)

This ability to decode and recode, two vital components of the spiritual process, allows for a hermeneutic transaction that informs the resulting project. Change then takes place through critical reflection, deconstruction, and the articulation of a reformative project. Such a project is intended to address the facets of reality that are immoral and “unrighteous”. Were education to legitimate a spiritual voice, such a moral project could bring about essential change in the teaching/learning practice.

Consonant with this idea of righteousness and spirituality is Foster’s (1986) notion of educational leadership as a moral science. Foster uses the word moral in what he calls its cultural, professional, and ethical sense. Indeed, he maintains that the social sciences, though often empirically grounded, must also incorporate hermeneutic and critical dimensions. He writes:
Social science has increasingly recognized that it must be informed by moral questions: the paradigm of natural sciences does not apply when dealing with human issues. As a moral science, the science of administration is concerned with the resolution of moral dilemmas. A critical and a literary model of administration helps to provide us with the necessary context and understanding wherein such dilemmas can be wisely resolved. (p. 24)

Foster purports that school administration involves the resolution and possible transformation of dilemmas. These dilemmas are not necessarily centered on positivist or rationalist problems that historically acquiesce to empiricist remedies. Rather, the dilemmas of which Foster writes are those administrative forms and structures that abate democratic practice and inform themes and the agenda of what Freire (1970) terms dehumanization. He argues that school administration involves making moral decisions around themes such as control, curriculum, and the role of schools in the society. He raises the following questions in this regard,

Should the schools be oriented to ameliorate the so-called deficits that some students bring with them, or should they see different cultures and groups as strengths? Should schools be seen as agents of change, oriented to the creation of a more just society, or as socializers that adapt the young to the current social structure? (p. 26)

These kinds of questions warrant a reflective thinking that does not settle for politically expedient resolutions. These questions and others of their ilk demand a kind of reflection that takes place in a center or the core of an administrator and not merely from the resources of one’s intellect. These are moral issues that cannot be resolved from purely
pragmatic thinking or analysis. One struggles with these kinds of questions through a spiritual context or what Zohar calls the brain’s spirit.

**The Role of Reflection and Spirituality**

Freire (1972) takes the whole issue of reflection to an even deeper position. He argues that reflection must be purposive, that is, there ought to be an agenda that assuages the vestiges of dehumanization that results from such an introverted exercise as reflection. He builds a case by asserting that people, by their very existence, are in a “situation”. In fact, because of this positioning we are prone if indeed not inherently summoned to reflect upon our own situationality. Freire says:

> Men, as beings ‘in a situation’ find themselves rooted in temporal-spatial conditions which mark them and which they also mark. They will tend to reflect on their own ‘situationality’ to the extent that they are challenged by it to act upon it. Men are because they are in a situation. And they will be more the more they not only critically reflect upon their existence but critically act upon it. (p. 100)

Implied in Freire’s statement is really the juxtaposition of the temporal-spatial and the ethereal or spiritual. It becomes essential for one to transcend one’s situationality in order to reflect upon it. Reflection is an exercise that defies empirical analysis.

Reflection involves the spiritual dimension. It explores more of the depth of the situation to unearth the greater implications as well as its actual genesis. In fact, Freire (1972, p. 100) says that reflection upon situationality is reflection about the very condition of existence. Situations lose their density through the process of reflection. They are no longer obtuse or unfathomable when they are subjected to reflection. Reflection results in the discovery of the other positioned in her/his own situation. The spiritual reflection
is essential in Freire’s eyes to bring about three necessary movements in people’s lives. The first is that reflection causes us to no longer be submerged under the trappings of the situation. The reality of any given situation is revealed through reflection. From submersion one moves to emerge. Emergence is an intriguing phenomenon. It is not sufficient that one reflects and through that spiritual process becomes freed from the bondage of situational submersion. The reflection then leads to one’s emersion, a real coming forth, almost a prolific articulation of one’s existence absent the bondage of the situation. This accentuation of self results in what Freire calls the ability to intervene in the reality as it becomes unveiled.

Issues such as Freire’s notions of situationality, the alleviating of oppressive organizational mechanics, and the formulating of a pedagogy of liberation are not issues of mundane administrivia. Rather, the decisions that resolve these dilemmas emanate from what Stewart (1999) refers to as one’s spirituality. To him spirituality is a process that we use to make meaning of our worlds, to create our realities, and adapt and/or modulate the contexts and indeed the cultures in which we find ourselves. Were we to apply this to the educational administration discourse we would understand that spirituality informs the daily routinized decisions school leaders make. Questions such as the following should be dealt with from a spiritual center:

1. Is there equity in the master schedule?
2. Are all teachers served equally in the requisition and the distribution of teaching supplies and materials?
3. Is the school a site that encourages creativity and the use of students’ and teachers’ many gifts and talents?
Does the school leader affirm the students and faculty?

Are procedures handled in an egalitarian fashion?

Are students placed in classes through a democratic process?

How as a leader do you see your work as serving a mission or calling?

Do you see your work as an educational leader as fulfilling a deep commitment to something greater than yourself?

How does your work as a school leader give meaning to your life?

What creative strategies and solutions to educational issues have you established through times of self-reflection?

**Postmodernism, A Fertile Field for Spirituality**

A postmodern assessment of the whole issue of discourse can assist in founding the framework from which these questions may be answered. In fact the postmodern and critical ideologies call for a hermeneutic engagement that projects the posing as well as the resolving of questions such as these. The grounding of educational leadership in the postmodern context could be very receptive to sharing the theoretical framing of the discourse with spirituality. A postmodern discourse takes into account two separate categories of systemic language. The first and most familiar is what Fazarro, Walter, and McKerrow (1994) call the technical language game. The second and the one that would welcome a partnership with spirituality is what they term the moral discourse-practices of school administrators. They enter into this exercise of categorization by first alleging that besides technical and managerial practices, which are grounded in the technical language game, school administration must concern itself with all aspects within the “problematic” of education. They define the problematic of education as that which focuses upon issues...
of epistemology and transmission. Fazarro, et.al. site the work of Bates in defining the clarifying questions of the problematic. They write:

Bates describes the problematic of education as issues related to the following six questions: (1) what counts as knowledge? (2) how is what counts as knowledge organized? (3) how is what counts as knowledge transmitted? (4) how is access to what counts as knowledge determined? (5) what are the processes of control? (6) what ideological appeal justifies the system? These are questions about values; therefore, the technical language game is inadequate when it comes to legitimating the policies and practices associated with their resolution. Likewise, the technical language game frustrates critical social change because it excludes debate about value systems. (p. 91-92)

There must therefore be a language or a medium of dialogical exchange that clearly articulates the substance of these axiological issues. This is a language that goes beyond the syntax of the techno science discourse, which produces a narrative that is legitimated by the vernacular and discursive symbols of scientific management. Rather, a language must be used to describe the moral and ethical exigencies as well as the articulation of meaning for the plethora of disparate events with which all school administrators contend on a daily basis. Fazarro, et.al. cite the work of Philip Phenix who suggests that the concept of meaning has essentially four dimensions:

1. the experience of the reflective self-consciousness
2. the logical principles by which the experience is patterned
3. the selective elaboration of these patterns into productive traditions
4. the expression of these patterns by means of appropriate symbolic forms (p. 93)

From this Phenix has developed the six realms of meaning. These include: symbolics, empirics, aesthetics, synnoetics, ethics, and synoptics. The first three, according to Phenix, more predominantly inform the nature of the discourse of schooling. Symbolics comprise language, mathematics, rituals, and gestures. Empirics include the sciences and aesthetics consist of music, linear art, movement, and literature. The final three, however, Phenix argues, must exert an equal grounding for what happens in schools. Synnoetics include personal knowledge, relational insight and an interrogation of Buber’s “I-thou” construction. Essentially, synnoetics involve grappling with self-consciousness especially as it relates to the social milieu. Ethics include moral meanings and behavior based on free, responsible, and deliberate decisions. Finally, Phenix defines synoptics as that which refers to meanings that are integrated in nature and includes areas of knowledge such as history, religion, and philosophy. The last three are spiritual in nature in that they transcend the physicality of the traditional curriculum but are essential to making meaning of schooling.

**Conclusion**

If a spiritual syntax is to help shape the structure of the educational leadership discourse in elementary and secondary schools, present and prospective school leaders must be challenged personally to contend with the nuances of synnoetics and the making of moral meanings. In their preparation programs and professional development opportunities, school leaders must engage in reflection and the sharpening of their processes of making ethical decisions. When school leaders and those who train them
augment the linguistics of school leadership to include the language of spirituality then school administration will have a way as Stewart (1999e) maintains to legitimately and openly discuss issues of interpreting, disclosing, formulating, adapting, and innovating reality as well as the adaptation and transformation of internal and external conditions.

The time is right for the inclusion of spirituality into the discourse of educational leadership. This incorporation must include three distinct entities. First, the discourse must become permeable to the notion of critical reflection. This type of spiritual deliberation will cause practitioners to consider the broader implications of their decisions and behaviors. Its critical nature will compel the reflection to center on issues of marginalization, aggrandizement, and asymmetrical relations of power. Though power differentials are probably forever embedded in the fabric of educational institutions, critical reflection may lead to a praxis that minimizes the undemocratic performances that emanate from such contrasts in the possession and practice of power.

Second, the spiritual discourse will promote an active deconstruction of situationality. It will invite the engagement of serious thought about transforming the “as is” into the “not yet”. The demystifying of the current situation of the educational project will release creativity, dreaming, and a hope for a teaching/learning process that engages the learning community in projects of reform, optimism, and agency. Through this segment of the spiritual discourse those who participate in the work of education will be encouraged to think beyond current parameters. Advocates for their release of creativity, élan, and imagination will serve as leaders in schools. Students and teachers will be encouraged to go beyond curricular confinements to explore frontiers of learning
collaboratively with the hope of revelation and disclosure of new knowledge at their core. Life for learning will infiltrate heretofore-dead sites called schools.

Finally, the inclusion of the spiritual into the educational leadership discourse will allow leaders to make meaning out of their professional lives. It will allow practitioners to become comfortable in their choice of professions. They will be able to settle within themselves as well as announce publicly that they are in educational leadership not for financial self-aggrandizement but because being in schools is a passion for them that makes meaning for their lives. This is a significant issue with which we must deal. The kinds of projects in which schools must engage demand leaders of passion. Hope, life and a pedagogy of liberation can only be birthed through passion, commitment, and a genuine sense of mission. Educational leadership emerges then from a profession one enters through hierarchical posturing and gamesmanship to one of mission and passion. Zohar (1997, p. 153) refers to this as a sense of engagement and responsibility, a sense of “I have to”. In fact, these leaders’ work becomes one of servanthood. They sense the myriad possibilities in learning. They understand the spiritual nature of what can happen in learning communities and they see their lives as absolutely essential to that process. In essence, they are “called” to be in the midst of the teaching/learning conundrum and nothing else will provide meaning for the professional segment of their lives. They have to be leading in learning communities.

Reflection, deconstruction, and the making of meaning are the three spiritual components that must enter the educational leadership discourse. These will help to transform the field through the inclusion of the whole self in what actually is a life-changing endeavor. School leadership that is grounded in spirituality will push for
transformation in education. Those who lead from a spiritual center will be dedicated and committed to changing schools because they are compelled to do so by their very deep sense of mission, calling, care, and need to make meaning.
References


