

Academic Leadership: The Online Journal

Volume 9
Issue 1 *Winter 2011*

Article 44

1-1-2011


Spirituality and 21st Century School Leadership

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Recommended Citation

Fite, Kathleen; Reardon, Robert; and Boone, Mike (2011) "Spirituality and 21st Century School Leadership," *Academic Leadership: The Online Journal*: Vol. 9 : Iss. 1 , Article 44.

Available at: <https://scholars.fhsu.edu/alj/vol9/iss1/44>

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Academic Leadership Journal

Periodically, school operations come under intense review as we take inventory of what has worked and what improvements still need to be made. In fact we label time periods by major events and trends, e.g. back-to-basics (Smith, 1978). As we move into the second decade of a new millennium, we are reflecting and projecting to see where we have been and where we need to be going. We are asking what we have learned and what needs to occur to improve education and our country. The importance of teachers and teacher leadership in education is gaining attention (York-Barr & Duke, 2004; Donaldson, 2006; Silva 2000; Rhodes, C., M. Brundrett, et al., 2008). This article addresses the role spirituality plays in 21st century school leadership.

Teachers and administrators are at a heightened level of scrutiny and criticism by the public and government (Jennings & Rentner, 2006). A reflexive knee-jerk reaction to findings and suggestions often results in an even tighter noose around our teachers and administrators reflecting an assumption they the ones totally responsibly for what children take in, process, and regurgitate back, especially on tests? Forgetting that we have put men on the moon and created a sophisticated global internet and social messaging system, we tend to toss out whole programs as being ineffective rather than valuing what works (Ferguson, 2005).

In public schools, we think we are not doing well enough on benchmarks of success and so we offer a carrots and sticks along the way to reward or reprimand. If these clamp-down sanctions are working so well, then why is it that Walter Gilliam (Gilliam & Shahar, 2006) is writing about preschoolers being expelled; and why are there still problems with graduation rates (Heckman & LaFontaine, 2010)? Students should be receiving quality education since we profess to address diversity and equality with more fervor than ever (Fusarelli, 2004).

We have increased expectations for teacher performance (Jennings & Rentner, 2006); yet, we are scurrying to meet the needs of supply and demand in the fastest way. There are documented differences between traditional and alternative certification pathways for teachers (Miller, Mckenna, and Mckenna, 1998). A floundering economy has encouraged a wave of new teacher candidates, some of who may not be best suited for the classroom (Troen & Boles, 2003). There is a shortage of candidates question moving up the administrative ladder (Ferrandino, 2001). There is fear of low student test scores and increasing demands. Get tough politics hurt morale and public reprimands for performance seem demeaning and inappropriate rather than encouraging and challenging.

Perhaps our schools can benefit from successful business organizational transformations (Harlos, 2000) and heeding the advice of motivation gurus (Pink, 2009) to help set us back on the right path. Could there be some tenets that can serve as effective models, offering us asylum from the current mayhem? It is the authors' premise that the concept of spirituality and servant leadership offer insight. The literature provides suggestions for administrators and teachers to assume a role of servant leader and help students develop a sense of connectedness to a greater good (Cerit, 2009).

Daly (2005), in an article defining spirituality, gives us this quotation: "If you wish to converse with me,

first define your terms” —Voltaire, 1694-1778. The authors find this quotation presents an appropriate request because the terms religiousness and spirituality are often used interchangeably.

What is spirituality?

When we think of spirituality we often equate it with religion; however, spirituality has its own unique dimensions. Though once mostly considered a cultural reflection of eastern philosophy and theology, discussions about spirituality are becoming more common elsewhere. Daley (2005) compares religiousness to spirituality saying that to be religious places focus on external rituals of devotion; however, spirituality refers more to an inner state of being and existential meaning which focuses on the transcendence and connectedness of the universe. There are several working definitions of spirituality in the literature. Cacioppe (2000) defines spirituality as the discovery of meaning, value, or purpose for one's life and work. Fullan (2002) identifies spirituality with the identification of a moral purpose for our lives that describes principled behavior connected to something greater than ourselves. Mayes (2001a, 6) defines spirituality as “the pursuit of a trans-personal and trans-temporal reality that serves as the ontological ground for an ethic of compassion and service.” Beazley (1997) writes that spirituality consists of a faith relationship with a transcendent power that lies beyond and is independent of the material. Beazley conceptualizes as expressed in two dimensions: the definitive dimension (prayer and meditation) and the correlated dimension (honesty, humility, and service to others). The term “spirituality” describes a relationship with the transcendent and non-material and a commitment to an idea or cause that is greater than the self.

The connection between teacher education and teaching itself has largely been ignored (Mayes, 2001b; Palmer, 1998; Fraser, 2005). In this age of accountability teacher preparation programs tend to focus on developing measurable teacher knowledge and skills Collinson (1999) dismisses this approach as a “how to” version of quality teaching and calls for a new definition of teaching excellence. A new definition might be constructed around a tripartite definition of teaching. This definition would address the teacher's professional knowledge, e. g. subject matter, curriculum, and pedagogical skills; the teacher's interpersonal knowledge, which encompasses the teacher's relationship with students, the local community, and the larger educational community; and the teachers intrapersonal knowledge, which represents the teacher's knowledge of self and a commitment to an ethic of caring and a disposition toward continuous learning, both of which influence the teacher's decision making about instruction and her or his relationship with students. One's perception of self as spiritual is a component of intrapersonal knowledge and may influence the teacher's capacity to develop caring relationships with others.

Finally Fraser (2005) reports in her article on spirituality and teaching that some teachers actually view teaching as a spiritual practice because it requires certain dispositions beyond pedagogical acumen. Hooks (1994) encourages seeking knowledge on how to live in the world as well as what comes in books. Fraser, in describing a study of spirituality and secular education found that students were less comfortable exploring the topic of spirituality than were teachers; and suggested that spirituality in education was natural and conducive to meaningful connections with students and colleagues.

At the heart of spirituality is connection beyond the individual, and this connection, whether it be with people, with nature, or with an activity, enables the self to be enriched and extended. Self-consciousness is replaced by focused awareness, cynicism is replaced by awe, and judgment is replaced by appreciation. These form the basis of a community of difference an education that

expands, rather than limits, who we are and what we can become (Fraser, p. 178).

The Relationship between Spirituality and Leadership by Teachers

Mitroff and Denton (1999) report that interviews conducted with business leaders linked behaviors related to a sense of spirituality to positive organizational and personal outcomes. In her study of the relationship between spiritual values and leadership effectiveness, Reave (2005) identifies characteristics such as integrity, honesty, humility, respect for others, fair treatment, caring and concern, listening, and appreciation of others as related to spirituality. Ackerman & Mackenzie (2006); Jones (2005); Silims & Mulford (2004); and York-Barr & Duke (2004) support a connection between spirituality, teacher leadership and organizational effectiveness. Clearly spirituality has a role to play in education.

The workplace has become so complex and diverse that we must look beyond the organizational confines and to the connectedness of the organization and its members to some greater good (Avolio, Walumbwa, and Weber, 2009; Greenleaf, 2002; Klenke, 2003). Mayes (2001a) encourages us to research the spiritual aspects of teaching to ascertain if the links found in business are present and result in the same positive outcomes in education. Wellman, Parker, et al (2009) reported a link between spirituality and teacher leadership.

Gardner's (2000) constructs of multiple intelligence and Golman's (2006) emotional intelligence brought a lot of attention. Perhaps what Zohar (2005) identified as spiritual intelligence should also be taken into light when we look at leadership skills. He has identified twelve principles of spiritually-intelligent leadership: self-awareness, spontaneity, being vision and value led, holism, compassion, celebration of diversity, field independence, humility, tendency to ask fundamental "Why?" questions, ability to reframe, positive use of adversity, and sense of vocation.

Boone, Fite, and Reardon have completed two research studies looking at spirituality and leadership. The studies used the Spiritual Assessment Scale by Beazley (1997), which is an instrument proven to measure spirituality and its correlated dimensions (honesty, humility and service to others), to determine if it had transference from business to education. The underlying assumption of the Spiritual Assessment Scale is that spirituality can be inferred from the statements and actions of individuals. The intent of this study was to test whether an instrument designed to measure spirituality among business leaders could be used to ascertain the same qualities in educational leaders. The results indicate that it can.

The first study (Boone, Reardon, and Fite, 2010) measured the perception of spirituality and teacher leadership of 259 preservice teachers, undergraduate education majors, to determine if there is a reliable instrument that can be used to measure the perception of spirituality among preservice teachers. Specifically the study looked at the dispositions of honesty, humility, and service to others. A regression of perception of leadership with honesty, humility, and service to others revealed a positive relationship between perception of leadership and humility. From this analysis, we concluded that the instrument is effective and valid when used with educators.

For a second study (Reardon, Fite, and Boone, 2009), principals were given criteria to identify practicing teacher leaders in their elementary schools. All teachers were invited to participate in a questionnaire, 131 responded. From that group, 28 who responded had been identified as teacher

leaders by their principals. The average age was 41 and the experience level ranged from 1 to 43 years. In this study, no significant relationship was found between the administrator's perception of teacher leaders and the elementary teacher's perception of their spirituality based on the dimensions of honesty, humility, and service to others. Apparently the principals are not using the characteristics of honesty, humility and service to others to develop their perceptions of whether or not a teacher is a teacher leader.

Concluding Thoughts

At a time when education and educators are under great scrutiny, perhaps we should look beyond the mere academic nature of the school and into a deeper, more humanistic view of how our schools need to function and how those in charge are leading us to greater understanding and performance. Embracing the spiritual self and fostering its development in others offers great possibility in increasing leadership potential and connectedness among all involved.

Business has recognized this connection and found that, when addressed, the spiritual dimensions have contributed to organizational success. Education, however, has not examined the relationships among leadership, spirituality, and academic success. More research needs to be done in the area of spirituality in education and educational leadership so that we can better define the how and why this dimension seemingly brings greater cohesiveness and direction to an organization.

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VN:R_U[1.9.11_1134]