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Spiritual dimension in educational leadership

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SPIRITUAL DIMENSION IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

A Dissertation

by

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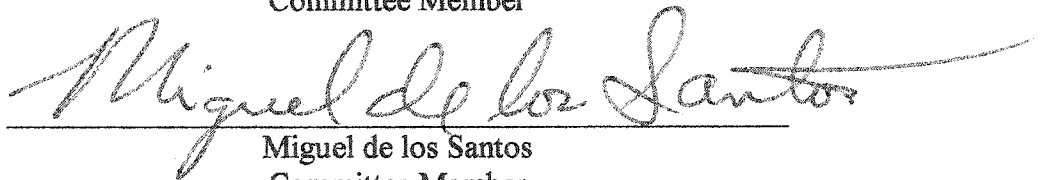Approved as to style and content by:

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ABSTRACT

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Spirit-filled experiences have been customarily silent in the discourse of education. This area has been misunderstood and solely left to the religious arena to discover its development creating compartmentalized concepts and depriving other organizational systems from implementing its rich resourcefulness. This study seeks to provide ontological and epistemological knowledge to uncover and understand the power of the spiritual dimension in the life of successful educational leaders. By conceptualizing spirituality in educational leadership, this qualitative study seeks to explore successful educational leaders' use of spirituality to strengthen their effectiveness as it relates to school and their performance.

Based on the major findings emerging from the study, four conclusions related to educational leadership are warranted: accountability and compliance, curriculum and instruction, planning and decision-making, and community involvement.

A proposed conceptual framework for a new view of leadership is recommended. This interactive atom shaped model, symbolizing energy, interconnects the spiritual element in the educational leaders' intra-personal, interpersonal, and ecological relationships producing new life for the educational system and global organism.

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iv

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Many research topics related to educational leadership are addressed in academic

literature. The database, *Academic Research Premier*, by itself cites 8,917 topics

associated with educational leadership, but when the adjective *spiritual* is added to it, no

results are found. If the second qualifier *educational* is subtracted, only thirty-one entries

are listed for the subject spiritual and leadership. Nonetheless, "There is a growing

consensus that human spirituality is an ontologically existent or real phenomenon, and it

has become a prominent subject in the media and various professions and disciplines,

including psychology, sociology, education, health care, social work, and corrections"

(Moberg, 2002, p. 47-48). For purposes of this study, spirituality is perceived as a

universal concept applied to religious and non-religious people alike. Although the role

of spirituality in education has been gaining attention at national and international

conferences, seminars, and workshops, the topic, per se, is still monitored and only

apprehensively discussed in schools (Haynes, 1999; Kessler, 1998/1999; Palmer,

1998/1999; Solomon & Hunter, 2002; &Watson, 2000). As a real phenomenon,

spirituality is embedded in individuals, impacting their being and actions within their

existing environments. The school setting is no exception. Educational leaders not only

bring to their working environment their professional experience, but their personal

values, beliefs, and emotions, as well. Hoyle (2002) illustrated, "The role of school

system leader calls for a power greater than mere human knowledge and experience. The

spiritual and administrative sides are of equal importance when guiding a school system

dedicated to helping each student become a successful, ethical individual" (p. 19). An

incident in my professional experience illustrates this view.

> Another school year was almost finished. The academic performance results had
> been received rating the school as recognized by the state's appraisal performance
> system. Cheers and euphoric voices were heard all over campus, and happiness
> was evidenced in celebrating the school's academic success for that school year.
> Conversely, on that same day, the newspaper reported that one of our former
> students was given the death sentence. This student continuously excelled in
> academic performance. Grades were always above average and no difficulty
> existed in passing all the assigned tests. Nevertheless, problems in getting along
> with others and the need to address personal issues were evidenced early in life by
> school behavioral records during elementary, middle, and high school years.
> Attempts to resolve this issue were made by the implementation of character
> education, and this particular student completed all the assignments well.
> However this person did not succeed in life. After reading the newspaper, I had
> two emotionally divergent stories and many questions rushing through my mind.
> In regards to academic attainment, this student contributed to the school's
> academic recognition, but to what extent was the school instrumental in helping
> this young person succeed? When is a school really successful? What does it
> mean to successfully lead and educate?

Definitely, successful educational leadership means more than addressing only the

academic performance component (Solomon & Hunter, 2002;Tan, 1999). It requires a

holistic approach. Stressing this concept, Dantley (2004) stated, "Leaders who are called

transformative understand that schools perform more than an intellectual or academic

function. The adaptive challenges that involve beliefs, values and personal

predisposition, more than likely enhance or retard the effectiveness of their work"

(p. 3-4). Educational leaders are challenged to create an environment that fosters

stakeholders' education for life and not only for a living. Educating for life is a never-

ending process that involves teaching and learning in all areas of development: cognitive,

social, psychological, physical, economic, political, ecological, and also spiritual. It is "A continuous learning process for creating meaning and value through service with and for others" (Neal, 1999, p. 182). On the other hand, educating for a living takes a materialistic and compartmentalized perspective, emphasizing fragmented facets of a school or individual's life. For instance, this fragmentation leads schools to focus toward high reliance on standardized curriculum and testing in order to measure their successful performance. Gutierrez-Zamano and Yasuno (2002) expressed, "Required scores for campus accountability ratings drive the educational system without regard to the needs of students in the formulation of skills and resources critical to perpetuating a connected, caring, and loving society of people" (p. 4). Fragmented approaches keep talented individuals (stakeholders) from developing their creative potential, causing a loss of attraction for education, and suppressing the joy and passion for learning. Mark Twain's witticism quite succinctly reinforced this point by declaring, "Don't let schooling interfere with your education" (Rasmussen, 1998, p. 84).

Thus, educational leaders are challenged to provide an environment where stakeholders are given opportunities to holistically develop their talents and are acknowledged as whole subjects not objects of fragmentation. Palmer (1998/1999) expressed, "I have seen the price we pay for a system of education so fearful of things spiritual that it fails to address the real issues of our lives. The price is a school system that alienates and dulls us" (p. 8). The answer in building an atmosphere that continuously educates for life is given by Beattie (2002) who expressed,

> The interconnectedness of teaching, learning, and leading are acknowledged by teacher-leaders whose work is based in an understanding that the intellectual, emotional, social, moral, spiritual, and aesthetic dimension of human beings are inextricably interconnected. The focus for school leaders is on working to co-

create a learning environment which emphasized authentic self-expression, the development of relationships, and the development of the whole person within the school, the local and global community" (p. 200).

Statement of the Problem

This research is designed to investigate the ontological and epistemological phenomena of the spiritual element in the lives of outstanding educational leaders, and explore the contribution that their spirituality has made, if any, in the effective performance of their educational leadership role. Spirituality has been silenced, and it is loudly claiming its place in our schools, organizations, and global society as a factor that creates connectivity among the elements (Falk, 2003; Holton, 2002; Kessler, 1998/1999). Consistent with this idea Palmer (1998/1999) mentioned, "Spirituality is the ancient and abiding human quest for connectedness with something larger and more trustworthy than our egos –with our own souls, with one another, with the worlds of history and nature, with the invisible winds of the spirit, with the mystery of being alive" (p. 8). Confusion also arises in not feeling comfortable addressing spiritual experiences in the workplace due to the mistaken interpretation of the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. Reinforcing this concept, Halford (1998/1999) stated, "The First Amendment doesn't prevent teaching about religion. We need to teach about religion as part of our cultural heritage" (p. 28). Furthermore, Wolf (2004) reinforced this concept by declaring, "Even with the separation of church and state, schools do not exist in a spiritual vacuum; most children and adults have some kind of loosely defined personal spiritual belief system" (p. 2). Therefore, there is a need to determine if spirituality is a contributing factor that enhances the development of the school leader and increases school effectiveness. Along this line, Malone and Fry (2002) concurred "Leaders who more deeply integrate their

spirituality and their work are more positive in their relationships and effectiveness, and employees who work for organizations they consider to be spiritual are less fearful, more ethical, and more committed" (p. 4).

Purpose of the Study

This qualitative research explores the contribution of spirituality, if any, to the success of educational leaders. Even though there is a close connection between religiosity and spirituality, this study does not focus on religiosity nor does it compare religious and non-religious leaders, but it is an exploration of what gives meaning and value to the daily tasks and challenges performed by successful educational leaders. This study investigates spirituality as a possible factor in contributing to the success of successful educational leaders, and it explores how this spiritual variable, if present, strengthens their effectiveness as it relates to the performance of school leadership. Furthermore, this exploratory study assesses the ontological and epistemological phenomena of spirituality in educational leadership through the normative criteria of a Judeo-Christian tradition. This tradition, according to Seicol (1997), emphasized two complementary sides: "Issues of self, identity, and internal integration on one hand, and issues of relationship, interactions, and external processes on the other" (p. 4).

Research Questions

Given the fact that the purpose of the study is to explore the spirituality phenomenon in the lives of successful educational leaders, the research questions that guide this inquiry are the following:

1. What is the spiritual dimension in educational leadership?

2. What is the spiritual dimension in successful educational leaders?

3. How do successful educational leaders use spirituality to strengthen their

   effectiveness as it relates to school and its performance?

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms are defined:

Epistemology: the origin, nature, methods, and limits of human knowledge.

Higher Power: God, Jesus, Budha, Dharma, Allah, Source of Energy, Creator, Presence.

Mysticism: intimate loving relationship with a Higher Being.

Ontology: the branch of metaphysics that studies the nature of existence or being.

Phenomenology: the study of the phenomena under investigation.

Snowball effect: one successful leader recommending another successful person.

Spirituality: refers to the relationship of the individual to a Higher Power. For purposes

   of this study, spirituality and spiritual are considered similar terms, and therefore

   are used interchangeably.

Stewardship: the spirit of service toward other people.

Successful Educational Leaders: exceptional, outstanding leaders recognized by Region

   One Education Service Center as teacher, assistant principal, principal, or

   superintendent of the year and those individuals recommended.

Teleological: the use of ultimate purpose or design as a means of explaining phenomena

Considerations and Challenges Facing the Research

Two challenges are presented to educational leaders as the discussion of spirituality is being added to their educational environment. First, many people do not feel comfortable addressing their spiritual experiences in the workplace due to the compartmentalization of concepts. Thus, a first challenge is to illuminate this view of spirituality and clarify how its implementation contributes to the holistic growth of educational leaders. Secondly, some individuals see the research as very subjective and not contributing to the generation of new knowledge. Therefore, a second challenge is to demonstrate that this study contributes to the generation of pure and applied knowledge by expanding the landscape of spirituality in the educational leadership discourse. These two challenges will be addressed by employing the scientific process as a system for inquiry interviewing successful educational leaders to explore how they incorporate the spirituality element into their leadership experiences.

Limitations

I see two limitations to this study. First, given the geographic region under investigation, the interviewed participants follow the Judeo-Christian tradition excluding other forms of spirituality such as those practiced by Hinduism, Buddhism, or Muslim religions. It poses a limitation, because it studies spirituality from a specific point of view leaving out of the scope the contribution of other faiths. A second limitation to the study is the selected group of participants. Even though there are other educational leaders who are considered highly successful in the region, the study selected several participants who were recognized by Texas Education Agency, Texas Association of

Secondary School Principals, and Texas Association of School Boards under Region One

Education Service Center as teacher, assistant principal, principal, and superintendent of

the year. A limitation is posed by not knowing if this selected group of participants is

representative of how successful educational leaders incorporate spirituality in their role.

Significance of the Study

By exploring spirituality as a voice that has been silent in the discourse of

education and as an element present in the successful performance of the educational

leadership role, it may add new insights to the discipline. "In terms of leadership

development, this area has been seen as too 'personal' or too elusive to be regarded as a

significant factor" (West-Burnham, 1997, p. 239). This exploratory study provides

ontological and epistemological strategies to understand spirituality as a source of vision

and creativity in the lives of successful educational leaders. According to Dantley

(2003), "The pragmatic character of this spiritual phenomenon is critical by nature and

offers opportunities for reflection and transcendence demanding an agenda of aggressive

activism to bring about substantive systemic change" (p. 32). Therefore, this research

alerts us to the consciousness and reflexivity entailed in finding meaning and purpose in

life, and in providing confidence, perseverance, and inner peace amidst the turmoil and

stress pertinent to educational leadership. Furthermore, its reflexive character challenges

relationships with other individuals, seeks to transform educational environments, and

creates learning communities essential to successful leadership.

Summary

This first chapter addressed the importance of incorporating the spirituality element in the holistic ongoing development of educational leaders in order to educate for life. It pinpointed the problem as focusing on compartmentalization of concepts that deprive talented individuals of the joy and passion for learning. Likewise, it addressed the problem as existent confusion between religion and spirituality and the mistaken interpretation of the Establishment Clause in the First Amendment. Based on the implementation of its spiritual character, two considerations and challenges were discussed: the perplexity in openly discussing the topic in the workplace and the contribution it makes to the generation of new knowledge. The general assumption of the study is that a genuine spirituality is regarded to be too highly valuable to be ignored and kept silenced in the discourse of educational leadership. The study is significant because it adds new insights to the body of knowledge by exploring the spiritual element as a contributor to possible success in the lives of educational leaders.

The following is an overview of the remaining chapters. The second chapter discusses the related literature review and presents a theoretical conceptualization of spirituality and its application to the educational leadership discourse. In the third chapter, specific design and procedures following a qualitative approach in the study are illustrated. Chapter four addresses the findings of the research using a qualitative approach to the data. In fairness to the interviewed participants, chapter five presents the findings through a dialogical and conversational approach using counter-story narrative as data analysis. Information found in the individual interviews takes an active role by simulating a virtual encounter around a round table, allowing the sixteen individually

interviewed participants to discuss the concept of spirituality in the discourse of

educational leadership. Finally, chapter six summarizes relevant results and their

implications for professional practice, policy, and further research.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Educational leadership can be studied from different perspectives. However, once it is seen through the inside lens of the inaudible language of the heart, it establishes a relationship that forms the foundation of a spiritual experience. Different organizational, psychological, and educational leaders (Argyris, 1982; Herzberg, 1974; Maslow, 1943; McClelland, & Burnham, 2003; McGregor, 2000; Ouchi, 1992; & Sergiovanni, 1990) have developed theories leading to successful management, administration, and leadership of organizational systems, but limited research has been done regarding the basis of successful educational leadership from a spiritual perspective (Dantley, 2003; Gutierrez-Zamano & Yasuno, 2002; Hoyle, & Slater, 2001; Kessler, 1998/1999; Palmer, 1998/1999; Sergiovanni, 1990; & West –Burnham,1997).

This research primarily explores the spiritual element in the life of successful educational leaders by interviewing recognized and successful superintendents, principals/assistant principals, and teachers who are actively engaged in the field of education. In order to obtain a more precise understanding of the existing connection between spirituality and successful educational leadership, it is essential, to first comprehend spirituality's theoretical conceptualization followed by the historical

background on both elements. Secondly, it is highly important to examine the connectivity of spirituality and educational leadership and the contribution it makes to the educational field.

Theoretical Conceptualization

      This qualitative study follows a critical constructionist epistemology embedded in a human relational ecology and critical theoretical perspectives. According to Crotty (1998), "Constructionism is the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in an out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context" (p. 42). The study seeks to understand the meaning and constructs made to spirituality in the daily practices and human interactions of successful educational leaders.

      "The ecological model of internal relations applies to inter-human relations: in a biological, psychological, and social sense we are all constituted by our interactions among other humans, and our social, economic, and cultural institutions." (Eckersley, 1990, p. 749). The body is made up of molecules, cells, tissues, systems, and organisms. The body and its parts are functionally interdependent. As part of a whole body all the members are tightly linked together into one system. Babbie (2002) stated, "A social system is made up of parts. The body as a whole cannot survive unless each of these parts does its job, and none of the parts can survive except as a part of the whole body" (p. 32). This evolutionary perspective asserts that "System processes revolve around the material maintenance of the species and its survival" (Turner, 2003, p. 219). Spirituality

in educational leadership embraces not an isolated unit, the educational leader per se, but the unity of the whole body, the learning community of stakeholders and the contribution made to society at large.

On the other hand, by using a critical theoretical perspective, this study creates a "Contrast between a research that seeks merely to understand and a research that challenges; between a research that reads the situation in terms of interaction and community and a research that reads it in terms of conflict and oppression; between a research that accept the status quo and a research that seeks to bring about change" (Crotty, 1998, p. 113). The study also contemplates the "Lifeworld as a process that exerts an influence on everyday communication by way of the differentiation of knowledge systems, and that thus affects the forms of cultural reproduction, social integration, and socialization" (Habermas, 1984, p. 341). Hence "The goal of critical theory is to document those facets of society in which the lifeworld - cultural reproduction, social integration, personality formation- has been colonized and to suggest approaches whereby situations of communicative action –interaction among agents using speech and nonverbal symbols-can be reestablished" (Turner, 2003, p. 220).

The study also depicts a micro-macro sociological point of view by focusing on individuals, families, communities, and society. According to Guajardo and Guajardo (2004), "The micro-macro deliberation is an organic process that helps us make sense of the world around us. Schools as micro communities also employ structural agency and help shape the larger society" (p. 506). Generally, a genuine spirituality does not stop at the personal level. It expands its horizons to provide life and continued existence for people, systems, and organizations (Kessler, 1998/1999; Sergiovanni, 2000; & West-

Burnham, 1997). From this human relational ecology and critical theoretical perspective, educational leaders are challenged to make a difference in their whole school system and organization.

Historical Background

Taking a look at previous research in the areas of educational leadership and spirituality helps the reader to comprehend what others have done in these fields. This study will consider the historical background of these two areas. In addition, it will connect spirituality to the educational leader's role in order to provide information in the field of educational leadership.

Educational Leadership. Efforts in understanding educational leadership have been made in the past through theorist and practitioners in the field. Different studies show their consistency in reporting the requirements for successful educational leadership. For instance, through an analysis of effective leaders' attributes, McClelland and Burnham (2003) concluded, "The top manager of a company must possess a high need for power; concern for influencing people; and power directed toward the benefit of the institution as a whole" (p. 118). In a study conducted by Schmieder and Cairns (1996), 450 principals and 206 superintendents were surveyed to determine which skills administrators needed to be successful on the job. Ten skills were the most salient of all: "Have a vision, make a significant difference, evaluate staff, understand change, have self-awareness, be facilitators, possess self-confidence, assess job responsibilities, encourage involvement, know ethical limits" (p. 3). Similarly, another study reported effective leaders' skills as,

First, they are decisive, organized, efficient, and task oriented. Second, they are good communicators who respect and promote the qualities of cultural and intellectual diversity. Third, effective leaders facilitate the development of a positive school culture in which safety and welfare of students are protected. Fourth, they set high expectations for staff and students, and create an atmosphere of purposeful scholastic work. Fifth, they are visionaries who can galvanize and mobilize school-community support around shared beliefs and goals for the school. Sixth, effective leaders are self-reflective individuals who are honest about their shortcomings as well as strengths, and are not afraid to seek assistance from others when confronted with complex problems or tasks (Davis, 1998, p. 2).

It is commonly believed that to be effective, leaders must exert a broad array of knowledge, abilities and skills pertinent to their field, including self-awareness and reflexivity (Dantley, 2003; Davis, 1998; Kessler, 1998/1999; Schmieder & Cairns, 1998; & Senge, 1990). Along this line, Argyris (1982) recommended creating a learning environment where new reasoning processes are learned. "Double-loop learning," he suggested, "requires plenty of practice, and its beginning is to reflect, to take a double look at the situation by inquiring about the issues present" (p. 8). In order to respond to the demands of a changing society, this re-learning and co-learning attitude is a key component in effective leadership. Neal, Lichtenstein, and Banner (1999) stressed this point by declaring, "Individual transformation is needed because managers and leaders must be proactive leaders, open to change, and flexible enough to adapt to constantly shifting demands from their organizations" (p. 175). Consistent with this view, Dantley (2003) stated, "Transformative leaders are called to propose ways to resist the structures of undemocratic practices in educational organizations and to bring new and inherently different voices to the educational leadership discourse" (p. 15). Moreover, a study reported by Deblois (2000) found that after looking at a group of high performing schools, suggestions for effective leadership were published and adopted by other

schools. However, different results with no positive changes were obtained. The explanation for this undesirable phenomenon was that the successful schools had gone through a long and difficult process of self-discovery, practice, learning from mistakes, and hard working days. This arduous endeavor of failures and successes resulted in their organizational identity of becoming effective schools.

Spirituality. Conversely, great confusion and a lack of consensus are found in the literature in regards to understanding the concept of spirituality. Even though, there is not a clear definition of spirituality per se, McCreery (1994) declared that upon examining the literature, he found that most definitions of spirituality fall into one or more of the following three basic categories: spirituality as a fundamental aspect of human nature, spirituality as something other, and spirituality as power or essence. Even though this research does not study a religiosity connection to successful educational leadership, it is vital to understand the spiritual dimension to it. Spirituality is perceived as something shared by all human beings, religious and nonreligious people alike. For instance, Beck (1986) listed thirteen characteristics of spiritual people including awareness, breadth of outlook, holistic outlook, integration of mind, body, soul, and spirit, wonder, gratitude, hope, courage, energy, detachment, acceptance, gentleness, and love (p. 148). Spirituality as something other, refers to the concept that while spirituality is beyond the known and explainable, spirituality strives to improve and change both itself and the world around it (McCreery, 1994, p. 94). Examples of this modality are given by Kirk (2000) who defined spirituality as, "A state of consciousness in which we experience a sense of wholeness and connection" (p. 58). It is an awareness of the interconnectedness of all things and a compassionate attentiveness to the present moment.

"Spirituality as power and essence is understood as the revitalizing power" (McCreery, 1994, p. 94). Elaborating on this concept Beck (1986) stated, "Spirituality combines interiority, consciousness residing in the heart, and a power that we can strive to reach" (p. 149). "Spiritual wellness is the search to create a personal sense of life's meaning, value and purpose in relationship to the process of spiritual connectedness with family, community, society, and the world" (Seicol, 1997, p. 4). Spirituality engages a constant interconnectivity, and the first essential component in this interaction is awareness of the presence of a Higher Power or to be present to Presence. Out of this awareness and relationship diverse effects are received and manifested in the actions of those being in His/Her presence.

Spirituality in Educational Leadership. Effective educational leadership and spirituality have been distinctly analyzed and both elements are separately reinforced through literature reviews. However, when these two concepts are placed together, not enough theoretical information and even less empirical research is obtained. Consequently, it is quite important to incorporate this element in trying to understand to what extent spirituality is present and a contributor to the success of effective educational leadership. At a quick glance, it may seem difficult to find a relationship between spirituality and educational leadership, but after a close scrutiny, it can be seen that they are interconnected.

In combining both terms, it is found that spirituality as an energetic source of educational leadership and educational leadership as a spiritual experience have been recognized only lately in theoretical and empirical research. For instance, Carlson and Apple (1998) acknowledged, "Education is, in the fullest sense, a spiritual experience. It

changes the way we experience our being in the world, it reconnects us to the cosmos,

and it transforms us in ways that affect our everyday relations with others" (p. 197).

Spirituality as a powerful intrinsic motivator and strongly held principles influence the

educational leadership role. Consistent with this view, Covey (1992) stated, "Principles

are deep, fundamental truths. We can be secure in the knowledge that principles are

bigger than people or circumstances, and that thousands of years of history have seen

them triumph, time and time again" (p. 122). Similarly, Etzioni (1988) acknowledged

that the importance of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation goes even further. He

contended,

> Ultimately what counts most to people is what they believe, how they feel, and
> the shared norms and cultural messages that emerge from the groups and
> communities with which they identify. Morality, emotion, and social bonds, are
> motivators far more powerful than the extrinsic concerns of transactional
> leadership and the intrinsic concerns of the early stages of transformative
> leadership (p. 58).

By taking it a step further and adding spirituality as a bonding motivator, the outcome is

an extraordinarily powerful element in successful leadership. Dantley (2004) stated,

> Leaders who use as a source of motivation their spiritual selves actually are the
> wherewithal to serve as activists or public, transformative intellectuals who not
> only articulate an agenda for the radical reconstruction of schools but who then
> implement such an agenda. Spirituality dares to ask the hard ontological and
> teleological inquiries that help people to determine who they are and what their
> contributions to life will be. It is the instrument in our lives through which we
> build connectivity and community with others (p. 5).

Educational leadership cannot be separated from the natural call to spirituality or to be in

oneness with a Higher Power. Haynes (1999) expressed, "First Amendment neutrality

doesn't mean being neutral on values. From the moment schools open their doors, values

are taught and modeled in countless ways" (p. 25). An integrated body cannot be

compartmentalized to leaving one of its components, for this purpose spirituality, outside

the gate as professional life is experienced. Spirituality is part of who an individual is. It

is carried within him/her wherever that person goes, and it is manifested in whatever

he/she does. A leader's connectedness or oneness with a Higher Power is beautifully

expressed in the following poem.

> *A fish cannot drown in water,*
> *A bird does not fall in air.*
> *In the fire of creation,*
> *Gold doesn't vanish:*
> *The fire brightens.*
> *Each creature God made*
> *Must live in its own true nature;*
> *How could I resist my nature,*
> *That lives for oneness with God?*
>
> Mechthild of Magdeburg (1210-1297)

Moreover, in her article, *Taboo No More,* Johnson (2004) recognized, "When

people are conscious of their spirituality and live according to their spiritual beliefs,

effective results are maximized in professional lives" (p. 24). By developing, nurturing,

and strengthening a relationship with a Higher Power, spirituality effects reach toward

the *being* and *doing* of educational leaders. This relationship is of particular interest to

educational leadership because education involves a constant interaction among the

distinct members that make up the educational system: students, parents, community,

teachers, and administrators. A relationship with a Higher Power contributes to effective

leaders' self-awareness and vision, acknowledgement and empowerment of stakeholders,

and development of school culture (Dantley, 2004; Emmons, 1999; & Sergiovanni,

1999).

Self-Awareness and Vision Essential to Effective Leadership

When considering the attributes of effective leaders, studies concur that self-aware and self-reflective leaders tend to be effective in the performance of their leadership role due to a constant analysis of their individual and corporate shortcomings as well as strengths (Argyris, 1982; Davis, 1998; Schmieder & Cairns,1996). In fact, this is not a simple task, as stated by Jones (1995), "If you have not been tested by fire, you do not know who you are. And if you do not know who you are, you cannot be a leader" (p. 3). DeBlois (2000) agreed, "Being a good leader is neither more nor less complicated than knowing who you are and what your job is" (p. 3). Previously, it was discussed that to grow in intimate relationship with a Higher Power, the person needed to be present to Presence. Likewise, awareness of one's own identity as person and leader are essential principles for successful and effective leadership. Furthermore, Paulo Freire cited in an interview by Bell, Gaventa & Peters (1990) expressed, "The more people become themselves, the better the democracy" (p. 145). For purposes of this study, Freire's idea can be reconstructed *to the more people become themselves, the better the educational leadership.*

By living a spiritual life, not only self-awareness is obtained, but also acknowledgement of an individual's mission, purpose and place as part of the whole body. Using Gardner's (1999) terminology, this self-identity is called intrapersonal and existential intelligences, "Intrapersonal intelligence involves the capacity to understand oneself, to have an effective working model of oneself —including one's own desires, fears, and capacities- and to use such information effectively in regulating one's own life" (p. 45). Existential intelligence is described as,

> The capacity to locate oneself with respect to the furthest reaches of the
> cosmos –the infinite and the infinitesimal- and the related capacity to locate
> oneself with respect to such existential features of the human condition as the
> significance of life, the meaning of death, the ultimate fate of the physical and
> the psychological worlds, and such profound experiences as love of another
> person or total immersion in a work of art (Gardner, 1999, p. 60).

Similarly, Adair (1992) acknowledged, "Spiritual experience is the transcendence of the self into greater awareness. It is the experience of connection to all of life, the merging of the existential, isolated 'I' into the 'whole'" (p. 32).

In a story provided in the book *The Alchemist* by Coelho (1991), Santiago –the character of the story- set himself into a journey in the desert searching for his dreamed treasure. When Santiago was finally able to see the interconnections between the self, nature, and the broader universe, he came into his power as an alchemist and found the 'treasure' from his dreams. Worthier than the tangible treasure found, he recognized that his real treasure was actually the accumulation of his experiences and reflections on the journey through the desert: his own story. Being aware of one's own identity, one's own individual and group story is crucial to educational leadership because as Paulo Freire bluntly expressed it in the interview by Bell, Gaventa, & Peters, (1990), "People begin to get their story into their hands, and then the role of education changes. How important it is to learn that we are being made by the history we make in the social process inside of history." (p. 215).

Moreover, finding one's own spiritual and self-identity sets the tone to discovering the meaning to one's own mission projected into a common vision. Davis (1998) declared, "Effective leaders are visionaries who can galvanize and mobilize school-community support around shared beliefs and goals for the school" (p. 2). Being spiritual prepares the way to openness, to change, and to creativity. Adair (1992)

concurred by saying, "The Spirit is the source of creativity and vision" (p.32) and the same idea is reinforced in the book of Isaiah (61:1), "The Spirit of the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed." As educational leaders, the task is not only to manage an educational setting, but also to create a vision for the school. Block (1987) presented the concept of vision as,

> An expression of optimism demanding that we eliminate caution, reservations, and that we have hope in the face of the history of our limitations. The act of leadership is fundamentally the act of articulating a vision and acting in pursuit of that vision" (p. 104).

In explaining successful leadership, multiple motivation theories have been written. For the purpose of this study only the highest levels of motivation will be pinpointed: self-actualization (Maslow, 1943), achievement (Herzberg, 1974), and personal power (McClelland & Burnham, 2003), but there is not one as powerful as the motivation to pursue a vision as stated by Senge (1990), "Few forces in life and the business world are as powerful as shared vision" (p. 44). Sharing a vision is an act of leadership not management. Hersey and Blanchard (1972) stated, "Management is thought of as a special kind of leadership in which the accomplishment of organizational goals is paramount. Leadership is a broader concept than management. It also involves working with and through people to accomplish goals" (p. 4). Anyone properly trained in performing the required tasks can manage an organization, but not everyone can lead. Consistent with this thought, Block (1987) expressed, "A bureaucratic culture constantly drives toward a maintenance mentality. Holding onto what we have causes us to stay away from the frontier and to surround ourselves with corporate insulation of structure and predictability" (p. 11). On the other hand, leadership is difficult to replace because it

entails a visionary. A leader does not emerge by maintaining the status quo, but by being courageous and willing to disrupt undemocratic and unjust practices as expressed in Quantz, Rogers, & Dantley (1991) "Transformative leadership does not imply the diminishing of power, but the diminishing of undemocratic power relationships" (p. 102).

Acknowledgment and Empowerment of Stakeholders

"It is after leaders have gone through the arduous task of critical self reflection and deconstructive interpretation of self in context that they are ready to craft a new construction of school" (Dantley, 2004, p. 12). Just as consciousness of the relationship with a Higher Power and an awareness of one's own identity and story transform a life, so it happens with the acknowledgment of the presence of the other person. It transforms a life, an organization, and a system (Neal, Lichtenstein, & Banner, 1999; Solomon & Hunter, 2002). Speaking only of productivity outcomes, the Hawthorne Studies experimentally exemplified how people responded to being acknowledged (Morgan, 1997, p. 35). The experiment studied the effects of productivity and work condition. It found out that neither physical nor environmental factors influenced workers' productivity as much as recognition did. According to Davis (1998, p. 3) attentiveness and being sensitive toward other individuals is a key factor in effective leadership. These concepts do not imply using control or caretaking skills in a patriarchal manner, but affirmation and empowerment where individuals take responsibility and ownership of their own actions and gifts (Block, 1996, p. 50). Acknowledgement is an awareness of people's strengths and weaknesses and openness from the educational leader to the expertise of others (Solomon & Hunter, 2002, p. 2-3). It is "A continuous learning

process for creating meaning and value through service with and for others" (Hench, 1998, p. 8). Furthermore, educational leaders look beyond and create a vision for what all together can accomplish and/or can become. Paulo Freire in an interview held by Bell, Gaventa, & Peters (1990) exemplified, "While having on one hand to respect the expectations and choices of the students, the educator also has the duty of not being neutral. The educator as an intellectual has to intervene" (p. 180). This intervention extends to the social, political, economic, and cultural fields.

When spirituality in educational leadership is projected into the social arena, it envisions a place where people's talents get nurtured, challenged, and/or transformed (Quantz, Roger, & Dantley, 1991). Torres and Mitchell (1998) argued, "Schools do not merely produce, distribute, and reproduce knowledge, cognitive or moral skills, and disciplinary molds; they also constitute places for the formation of subjectivities, identities, and subcultures" (p. 35). According to Dantley (2004) "Leaders who operate from their spiritual centers are predisposed to a critical examination of schools" (p. 6). All forms of inequality, discrimination, injustice, and oppression are confronted due to their suffocating effects on personal and social development and growth. Iannone and Obenauf (1999) stressed this importance, "A final aspect of greater awareness of our world and fellow human beings is an educational process that recognizes social needs and justice" (p. 4). Framed in this way, spirituality in educational leadership is a means of empowering the disenfranchised and promoting social equality. Along this line, West (2001) declared, "Any disease of the soul must be conquered by a turning of one's soul. This turning is done through one's own affirmation of one's worth – an affirmation fueled by the concern of others" (p. 27).

Political points of view with a spiritual perspective entail an empowerment zone in which individual potential is energized and power is transmitted to each of its members to construct a system that benefits all. Etzioni (1965) distinguished "Leadership from the concept of power in that it entails influence, i.e., change in preferences eliciting the followers' voluntary compliance while power implies only that, subject's preferences are held in abeyance (p. 691)." However, leading with spiritual perspective changes the way power is used to bring forth that voluntary compliance, that guides the development and enhancement of individual and collective talents. By incorporating spirituality in educational leadership, the leader is not the center of power, but its steward and facilitator (Block, 1996, p. 50). Power is shared and growth of self and others is simultaneously sought. According to McLaughlin and Davidson (1994) a new political paradigm has emerged. "{It} is a post-materialist one, based on the image of healthy human growth. A successful society is one that places the physical, social, and spiritual health of the people above all else" (p. 28). Moreover, from a Judeo-Christian perspective, power is acquired through service, "Whoever wants to be first must place himself last of all and be the servant of all" (Mk 9:35). Consistent with this concept, Block (1993) affirmed, "Authentic service is primarily a commitment to the larger community; and there is a balance and equitable distribution of power in which decision making is shared by all" (p. 21). Furthermore, Wilpert (2001) expressed,

> The practice of integral politics requires a spiritual orientation because it is a vision that lies beyond ordinary rationality. Integral politics is based on a vision that is capable of integrating opposites and of holding them as non-dual. This means that one needs to realize that political reality, just as all reality, involves individual and collective, internal and external, earlier and later levels of development, the embrace of the many and the striving for the one (p. 47).

When the topic of economics is addressed, one may speculate how it relates to spirituality in educational leadership. Hubbard (1992) explained, "By sharing our relationships, talents, skills and knowledge, we can enhance our individual and collective potential and have a greater economic impact on the businesses and communities we serve" (p. 7). According to Rutte (1998) "It would mean that work would move from being merely a place to get enough money to survive to being a place of 'livelihood,' a place where we both survive and are fully alive" (p. 60). Along this line, Davis (2004) expressed, "It is a life affirming experience where thoughts, words, and deeds increase our personal well being, individual potential, quality of life, and sense of fulfillment. Though society may be built in consumerism, much greater riches are to be found in our relationships and life-affirming values" (p. 2). Economic development under a spiritual perspective is geared to the well-being of the community, restructuring ineffective economic practices and providing equal opportunity and justice to all. According to Block (1993), "Reframing the distribution of power and privilege means reassessing financial practices that are deeply ingrained in our way of thinking about our organizations" (p. 136). Moreover, Tyndale (2000) declared,

> It is not, after all, only a question of becoming empowered by having more income, or by acquiring skills which enable you to compete in the market, or even of learning how to organize and thus to increase your social status and political bargaining power. 'Empowerment' involves the concept of personal dignity, of self-worth, of a kind of contentedness, which does not depend either on the opinion of others or on fulfilling immediate desires. This sort of empowerment brings hope and vision with it (p. 9).

Development of School Culture

Spirituality in educational leadership also expands to cultural interrelationships, which entail recognition, respect, and reverence for the other through a caring learning community that nourishes cultural diversity. "Leaders who can effectively understand, appreciate, and promote colleagues in multiple cultures will become an increasingly valued resource" (Hesselbein, Goldsmith, & Somerville, 1999, p. 162). Awareness of cultural diversity involves: "Exploring other cultures and the tensions that overlap between them; exploring other belief systems; experiencing other cultures through the artistic genres; developing a critical stance of intolerance and prejudice; and encouraging cultural sensitivity" (Brown, 1988, p. 157). More than any other century, cultural awareness and sensitivity are of primary importance due to the globalized age in which we live. King (2002) expressed, "Ready or not, the fast moving world of the Internet, global markets, and international politics has overtaken Chicago, Chechnya, and Chaing Mai. First worlds, second worlds, and third worlds have passed, and One World is emerging" (p. 25). In citing Shoghi Effendi –Guardian of Baha'I Faith-, Rifkin (2003) explained, "Unification of the whole of mankind is the hallmark of the state which human society is now approaching" (p. 115).

This same unification is exemplified in the relationship with nature and through an understanding of biological processes where the body is made up of molecules, cells, tissues, organisms, and systems. The body and its parts are a function to each other. As part of a whole body all the members are held tightly together into one system. Organizations have been depicted as living organisms and systems. According to Morgan (1997) "The systems approach builds on the principle that organizations, like

organisms, are 'open' to their environment and must achieve an appropriate relation with that environment if they are to survive" (p. 34). If this concept is projected to individual educational leaders, it can be stated that to adapt to the shifting environment, they likewise need to be open and flexible to change. In an analysis of the new expectations posed by globalization, Malhotra (1999) asserted, "This new organizational world demands precognition and adaptation. It is a world in which organizational theories of business, education, and the social arenas need to be continuously reexamined for their alignment with the dynamically changing external reality" (p. 18). Common characteristics to the living system entail, first of all, that they be closely intertwined open systems. It also requires that they exist in a continuous exchange with their environment. They are to be self-regulatory and have the ability to maintain a steady state, as well as be able to sustain themselves by importing energy to try and offset entropic tendencies. These systems are to be differentiated and integrated, but at the same time flexible to move to more complex forms facilitating their ability to deal with challenges and opportunities posed by the environment (Baker & Richards, 2004; Malhotra,1999 & Morgan, 1997).

This same living or ecological concept applicable to systems can be incorporated into individual and collective organisms made up of educational leaders, educational personnel, students, parents, and community members. Educational leaders are challenged to possess the common characteristics previously outlined if they are to survive in a changing environment and if the are to respond to the demands of the whole system. In summary, the ecological system requires cooperation and team effort from all

its members, in which "Decisions made by members change the decision maker as well as the other members of the organization" (Baker & Richards, 2004, p. 20).

Educational leaders in an ecological system are challenged to bring life to the system. This concept per se entails a spiritual perspective, "I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly" (John 10:10). According to Sergiovanni (2000) "Culture, meaning, and significance are parts of the 'lifeworld' of the school. This 'lifeworld' can be contrasted with the 'systemsworld.' The latter one is a world of bureaucratic formalities usually experienced in schools as management systems" (p. 2). These systems are supposed to help schools effectively and efficiently achieve their goals and objectives. "This achievement, in turn, ideally strengthens the culture and enhances meaning and significance. When things are working the way they should in a school, the lifeworld and systemsworld engage each other in a symbiotic relationship" (Sergiovanni, 2000, p. 4). It is under this perspective that learning communities in organizations emerge. "These learning communities are ecological in nature because they bring new life to the system and are continuously evolving and adapting to a changing and interdependent environment" (Kofman & Senge, 1993 p. 2). A spiritual dimension to educational leadership is always in constant dynamism. It brings life to the system. As it was stated by Kofman and Senge (1993),

> Shifting from a fragmented, competitive and reactive organization to one that is systemic, cooperative, creative, and alive requires a 'Galilean shift' toward building 'communities of commitment.' In this regard, commitment goes beyond personal loyalty to include a commitment to societal changes through one's organization" (p. 12).

This 'Galilean shift' is exemplified in Jones'description of Jesus' leadership traits. She states that He "Kept in contact with His Boss, became I statements, empowered people

acknowledging them in public and private, took action, managed from the inside out, formed a team, and built a community" (Jones, 1995, p. 1). His life illustrated how spirituality in educational leadership intertwined the lifeworld and systemworld discussed by Sergiovanni (2000, p. 4). This concept is accomplished by being present to the Presence of a Higher Power, acknowledging one's own personal identity, creating a vision, empowering others, managing the system, and building a learning community.

Summary

When spirituality is brought into the educational leader's role, a totally different experience is produced. Life is brought to the workplace enhancing self-awareness, acknowledgment, and empowerment of individuals. Self and collective affirmation of values is enhanced and visions generated. As power is shared and undemocratic practices challenged, a new school culture is created bringing together the lifeworld and systemworld or an ecological system into the school environment.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

The methodology in this study is based in an inductive grounded theory. Strauss and Corbin (1998) stated, "In grounded theory a researcher does not begin a project with a preconceived theory in mind; rather, the researcher begins with an area of study and allows the theory to emerge from the data" (p. 12). Similarly Miles and Huberman (1994) noted that qualitative research, "Obtains information from natural occurring, ordinary events in natural settings in order to understand what real life is like by contrasting, comparing, replicating, cataloging, and classifying the object of study" (p.15). Moreover, Strauss and Corbin (1998) declared, "Theory derived from data is more likely to resemble the reality than is theory based on experience or solely through speculation. Grounded theories are likely to offer insight, enhance understanding, and provide a meaningful guide to action" (p. 15).

Methods used for this study of spirituality in educational leadership were two focus groups, sixteen individual interviews, participant observation, field notes, narrative, conversation analysis, interpretative methods, theme identification, and document analysis. However, data from focus groups were only used to refine the interview questions. These data were not used in the data analysis section. To acquire information

from naturally occurring ordinary events, observations of educational leaders' worksites and field notes were also recorded.

Research Questions

Given the fact that the purpose of the study is to explore the spirituality phenomenon in the lives of successful educational leaders, the research questions that guide this inquiry are the following:

1. What is the spiritual dimension in educational leadership?

2. What is the spiritual dimension in successful educational leaders?

3. How do successful educational leaders use spirituality to strengthen their effectiveness as it relates to school and its performance?

Participant and Site Selection

A guiding principle that informed the selection of participants for this study was to choose successful educational leaders from the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas. Successful educational leaders in this study refer to those individuals who were recognized by The Texas Association of School Boards, The Texas Association of Secondary School Principals, or The Texas Education Agency as regional superintendent, principal, assistant principal, or teacher of the year for the period 2001-2003. These educational state agencies compiled a list of candidates from each of the twenty education service centers. For instance, The Texas Association of School Boards selected superintendents from any of Texas' 1,040 school districts who were eligible for nomination by their local board of trustees. District nominees were presented to a

regional selection committee, which submitted one nominee per region to the state selection committee for Superintendent of the Year (TASB On Line, 2003). The same process was applied for principal and assistant principal of the year by the Texas Association of Secondary School Principals (TASSP). Four nominees were selected by each of the twenty regional selection committees under the categories of high school principal, high school assistant principal, junior high or middle school principal, and junior high or middle school assistant principal and submitted to TASSP for Texas Principal and Assistant Principal of the Year (TASSP On Line, 2003). This study also includes an elementary principal who was nominated for the National Distinguished Principal of the Year.

In selecting Teachers of the Year, The Texas Education Agency and State Board of Education proceeded as follows, "District nominees automatically advanced to regional competition, which was coordinated by each Education Service Center. A panel of judges in each region, composed primarily of various teacher associations, met to evaluate the written applications and select a Regional Elementary and Secondary Teacher of the Year" (TEA On Line, 2003). The names of regional elementary and secondary teachers of the year were submitted to The Texas Education Agency for nomination as Texas Teacher of the Year. For purposes of this study, only those candidates who were listed under Region One Education Service Center (ESC 1) as superintendent, principal, assistant principal, and teacher of the year were selected. Even though ESC I covers seven counties, only Hidalgo and Cameron counties' educational leaders were recognized during 2001-2003. Three school districts were represented through the selection: Palm ISD, Sycamore ISD, and Huisache ISD. For confidentiality

purposes, pseudonyms are used for campuses and districts to protect disclosure of participants' identities. There were originally thirteen selected participants, but two could not be contacted due to relocation. A third participant was deleted from the study due to conflicts in interview schedules. Therefore, only ten participants were selected as teacher, assistant principal, principal, and superintendent of the year: two superintendents, three principals, one assistant principal, and four teachers. Only one assistant principal was interviewed because at the time of the participants' selection, some principals were occupying the position of assistant principal. Once the actual interview took place, two assistant principals had been promoted to a principal's position.

In addition, a snowball effect was employed in the selection of six more participants who had been suggested by the previously mentioned group. The names were mentioned once, but high emphasis was placed on their recommendation. The snowball effect is a process of either positive or negative word of mouth. "Folk wisdom speaks of reinforcing loops in terms such as 'snowball effect,' 'bandwagon effect,' and 'vicious circle' and in phrases describing particular systems: 'the rich get richer and the poor get poorer'" (Senge, 1990, p.83). Participants selected through the snowball approach were from Laurel ISD, Redwood ISD, Palm ISD, and Sycamore ISD, and their positions were two superintendents, three principals, and one teacher.

Moreover, for this particular study, two focus group sessions were conducted to field-test the interview questions. Participants for the focus group were selected through the snowball effect approach. The first group consisting of one principal and two teachers was recommended by one of the principals of the year, whereas the second group, one principal and a teacher, was suggested by a teacher of the year. The

participants in these focus groups represented three different school districts: Oak ISD, Palm ISD, and Huisache ISD.

In all, sixteen participants were selected for one-to-one interviews and five participants were chosen for the focus group sessions in order to field-test interview questions. The personal or one-on-one interview took place in each of the participants' place of work. The two focus group sessions were held at the office of one of the members being interviewed.

Research Design

According to Creswell (1994), qualitative research is interested in meaning. In other words, it asks how people make sense of their lives, experiences, and their structures of the world, as well as with process" (p. 143). I am the primary instrument for data collection and measure. Data collection for this study included phone calls and e-mails to set up appointments and obtain trustworthiness of data by checking information gathered from the participants. Participants' responses to verbal or written requests were used in the analysis of data as willingness or resistance to participate in the study and for member checking in making appropriate corrections to provided data. Likewise, data collection included field notes, observations, public records, autobiographies, cassette recordings and transcription of one-to-one interviews with sixteen educational leaders serving in the positions of district superintendent, principal, assistant principal, and teacher in schools and districts in Cameron and Hidalgo counties of South Texas.

The first focus group discussion session was conducted to field-test the original ten interview questions (Appendix A, p. 167). A principal and two teachers formed this focus group. Superintendents were not contacted for focus group discussion sessions due to their time availability. Initially, I had an explicit interview guide addressing aspects of spirituality in educational leadership. Sample questions were, "How do you define spirituality? Is there any difference between successful educational leadership and successful spiritual educational leadership? How do you define successful spiritual educational leadership?" The input from the focus group led to reframing the questions for clarification purposes. Some questions were deleted due to their tendency to produce closed responses with no in-depth information and others were deleted because they generated data already provided. Other questions were vague causing confusion among participants. From the focus group participants' responses, new questions were created for the interviews.

Ten questions were elicited from the focus group session, and they were used as springboards, not limit-setters to start the interviews (Appendix A, p. 167). Moreover, by following a grounded theory approach, more questions were asked based on the path the interviewees' data were taking. All the interviews started out with the same set of questions, but in some cases, the participants' conversation created new questions differing totally from one interviewee to the next. Sample interview questions were, "What do you consider are the qualities of successful educational leadership? How would you describe your success as an educational leader? Do you see any relationship between your success as educational leader and your spirituality?"

In following a grounded theory approach, information provided after each interview session was analyzed by the dissertation chairperson and me to understand where the data were leading. After the eighth one-to-one interview and considering that enough information had been gathered to make sound judgments and interpretations of the direction the data were taking, interview questions were evaluated. Saturation was reached by finding similar themes among the participants' responses, however, it was decided that less breadth and more in-depth information was needed because explanations were too abstract and external. Participants were providing different points of view about issues on spirituality without placing themselves in the middle of the story. The inward journey is centrally important, and it was lacking. Consequently, the evaluation at this point produced a new set of questions with the purpose of generating more profound responses. For instance instead of asking a more indirect question regarding a point of view on successful educational leadership, "Do you see any relationship between your success as educational leader and your spirituality?" It was reframed as a more direct question, "What is the role of spirituality in creating healthy systems, organizations, and schools and how does it look in your life?" The original ten questions were compiled into three questions, which were used with eight different interviewees. Once again, by using the snowball approach, a second focus group, one principal and one teacher, was interviewed to field test the new set of questions, and confirm that they were generating more in-depth responses about the participants' life stories.

Data Collection Procedures

Creswell (1994) listed three steps to data collection. The first step in a qualitative study is to select informants and arguments that will best answer the research question, thus setting some boundaries to the study. The second step collects information through instrumentation such as observations, documents, and interviews. The third step is that data collection entail establishing the protocol for recording information and assurance of confidentiality (p. 148). These three steps -boundaries, instrumentation, and assurance of confidentiality- are followed in the study.

Boundaries. The criterion in selecting participants for this study included information provided by successful educational leaders recognized not only by the people they serve, but also by the whole region. In this study, successful educational leaders referred to those individuals who were recognized by their education service center and those persons recommended by the first group through the snowball effect approach. Ten participants selected were outstanding educational leaders recognized by Region One Education Service Center as the district superintendents, principals, assistant principals, and teachers of the year between the years 2001-2003. Six participants in the one-to-one interviews and five more participants for focus group sessions to field-test the interview questions were selected using the snowball effect approach.

Instrumentation. Observations, documents, reviews, and interviews for collection of data were recommended as a second step (Creswell, 1994, p. 149). Grounded theorist use several sources to gather data such as observations, conversations, e-mails, phone conversations, formal and informal interviews, autobiographies, public records, field notes, and tape-recorded reflections (Ryan & Bernard, 2000, p. 514).

Observations. Researchers engage in multiple observations recorded in field notes. Creswell (1994) stated, "Researchers can record usual and unusual aspects of situations, events, interactions, and roles as they occur, and may explore useful topics that may be uncomfortable for informants to discuss" (p. 151). Observations of school and/or classroom atmosphere were conducted including conversations, rapport, and interaction established with students, co-workers, or/and parents to check for congruence between spoken word and practice.

Documents. Document review is concerned with the interpretation of mute evidence such as written texts and artifacts. According to Hodder (1998) "This data, unlike the spoken word endures physically and thus can be separated across space and time from its author, producer, or user. Texts endure and thus give historical insights" (p. 704). E-mails used in setting up or following up with the interview sessions were analyzed to depict the willingness or resistance to participate in the study as well as for member checking of provided information. Autobiographies found on websites were used to obtain a quick synopsis about the life of educational leaders. Public records were used in the collection of newspaper clips or websites portraying events or awards obtained by the participants. Field notes documented observations made before and after the one-to-one individual interviews. Tape-recorded reflections refer to the analysis, comments, thoughts, and insights about the interview.

Interviews. According to Fontana and Frey (1994), "The most common type of interviewing is individual, face-to-face, verbal interchange; however, it can also take the form of face-to-face group interviewing, mailed, e-mailed or self-administered questionnaires, telephone surveys, or videotaped interviews" (p. 361). Individual and group consent was requested before the interview sessions. Formal and informal interviews were used in the study. Formal interviews followed the guiding questions. Informal interviews refer to information provided during the conversation that took place before and after the individual interview sessions. Sixteen tape-recorded and transcribed one-to-one interviews were conducted in this study. One-to-one interviews were between 45-55 minutes long. The two focus group sessions were not transcribed nor was information used in the data analysis because their purpose was solely to field-test the interview questions. Focus group participants who field-tested the interview questions were acquainted with each other, but they had never addressed the topic of spirituality in educational leadership as a group. The focus group sessions lasted between sixty to eighty minutes. The group sessions were moderated in such a way as to provide an opportunity for equal participation in the responses to the guided questions. Chase (1995) cited in Josselson and Lieblich (1995) wrote,

> Successful interviewers manage to shift the weight of responsibility to the other in such a way that he or she willingly embraces it. In the interview context, whether we hear stories or reports has to do with who takes responsibility for the import of the talk. If we want to hear stories rather than reports, then our task as interviewers is to invite others to tell their stories, to encourage them to take responsibility for the meaning of their talk. All forms of narrative share the fundamental interest in making sense of experience, the interest in constructing and communicating meaning (p. 2-3).

Assurance of Confidentiality. The third recommended step proposed establishes a protocol to respect the rights, needs, values, and desires of the informants (Creswell, 1994, p.152). This project was submitted for approval to The University of Texas Pan American Human Subjects Review Committee prior to its implementation (Appendix F, p. 180). According to Christians (2000) "Proper respect for human freedom generally includes two necessary conditions. Subjects must agree voluntarily to participate without physical or psychological coercion. In addition, their agreement must be based on full and open information" (p.143). All educational leaders in the sample were volunteer participants, and they were informed about the nature of the study. A formal letter written to the selected participants was sent specifying the purpose of the study and requesting their approval for an interview (Appendix B, p. 171). Some participants contacted me as soon as the letter was received while others sent e-mails expressing their interest in the study. A week after mailing the letter, I contacted those participants whose approval for the interview had not been received. Phone calls back and forth took place as a result of hectic schedules on both parties. Nonetheless, all participants were contacted. Only one interview was cancelled due to my job related emergency. A letter of informed consent involving an explanation of the purpose of the study and how the data were to be used was provided to the selected educational leaders (Appendix C, p. 173). Assurance of confidentiality was provided and computer records were coded in such a way that only pseudonyms were used as identifiers to protect the participants.

Data Analysis

"Data analysis requires that the researcher be comfortable with developing categories, making comparisons and contrasts, be open to possibilities, and see contrary or alternative explanations for the findings" (Creswell, 1994, p. 150). Several components of data analysis in regard to a qualitative method were used: transcriptions, coding, contextualizing strategies, trustworthiness, confirmability, transferability, and application.

Transcriptions. Audio recordings of each one-to-one individual interview were transcribed. Focus group sessions were not transcribed because they only served to field-test the interview questions. Additionally, tape recorded field notes of verbal and nonverbal communication were also transcribed. The participants' words were transcribed verbatim from the interviews. "Qualitative research is an emergent design in its negotiated outcomes. Meanings and interpretations are negotiated with human data sources because it is the subjects' realities that the researcher attempts to reconstruct" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290).

Coding. "Flexible rules govern how one goes about sorting through interview transcriptions, observational notes, documents, and visual materials. It is clear, however, that one forms and attaches codes to these categories of information." (Creswell, 1994, p. 153). I used Microsoft Word to code the written material. A table with three columns was created. The first column contained my own interpretation of text (Appendix E, p. 178). The second column had the verbatim text, and the third column had one or two coding words. Conceptualized labels to transcribed sentences and/or paragraphs were given to the written text. Similar phenomena received the same term.

Contextualizing Strategies. Creswell (1994) declared, "The researcher takes a voluminous amount of information and reduces it to certain patterns, categories, or themes and then interprets this information by using some schema" (p. 153). The coded written material was organized into conceptualized labels. Similar phenomena received the same label. Once the conceptualized labels were obtained, they were categorized into themes. The most salient themes were addressed to discuss the research questions. For instance, those themes that dealt with a *way of life, belief and value system* in which human beings are treated with *dignity and respect*, and in an *awareness and relationship with a Higher Power* were classified under a spiritual relationship. Issues addressing *vision, peace, and strength* were arranged under self-awareness. If the themes referred to *listening, empowering*, and *students' success*, they were categorized under acknowledgement and empowerment of stakeholders, but if they were discussing the concept of *decision-making, teamwork, building learning communities*, and *bringing life* to the organization, they were listed under a development of school culture. A counter-story narrative approach to presenting data gathered was used. Counter-story is a method used in critical race theory and art-based research. Cited in Jaeger (1997), Barone and Elliot expressed, "Storytelling encourages using written and oral biographies and autobiographies for the study of educational experiences. The aim in these studies is to entice the reader to re-conceptualize the educational process through intimate disclosures from the lives of individual educators and students" (p. 82). Similar studies using counter story narratives are found in Newmann (1995) who stated, "Though this scheme organizes the case into discrete and sequential phases, interviewee's stories suggest anything but a straightforward ordering of interpretation" (p. 256). Adding to the

practice of counter story narrative, Nee-Benham and Cooper (1998) declared, "Each woman, by relating her personal stories, affords an unusual peek into the qualities of leadership and into personal and professional attributes grounded in gender and ethnicity" (p. 63).

Through a virtual setting, the sixteen participants' individual conversations were brought together in this study and were allowed to express their voices using the counter-story approach. According to Barone and Eisner cited in Jaeger (1997), "Good art possesses a capacity to pull the person who experiences it into an alternative reality. The focus in writing and reading a piece of literature is not so much on the individual, particular physical realities as it is on a 'composed apparition', a virtual whole" (p. 74). These participants were never together in a meeting nor were they talking to each other. The setting was created. It was a virtual setting. Interviewees' most frequent and similar themes were grouped together to establish a conversation. I, as active member of the virtual dialogic conversation, served as a facilitator to add clarity, reflection, and ease the flow in discussed topics. The dialogue was arranged in response to the research questions.

Trustworthiness. The basic issues in relation to trustworthiness are simple. They are a matter of truth-value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985)

> The researcher establishes confidence in the truth or authenticity of the findings of a particular study for the subjects and the context in which the research was performed. Likewise, he/she determines the extent to which the findings of a particular research have applicability in other contexts or with other subjects. Similarly, the researcher determines whether the findings of a research would be repeated if the study is replicated with the same or similar subjects in the same or similar contexts. The researcher establishes the degree to which the findings of

the research are determined by the subjects and conditions of the study and not by the biases, motivations, interests, or perspectives of the researcher (p. 293).

I attest trustworthiness of the study by providing unaltered and true data directly from the transcribed interviews, public records, e-mails, and autobiographies. Even in developing the counter-story narrative, the participants' words are unaltered. Records of these items are kept for future references and auditing purposes. Adding to the trustworthiness of the study, my bias is not ignored. According to Drisko (1997) "The researcher must seek out and report both personal bias and interpretations that differ from those with which they began the study" (p. 190). Therefore, it is reported that I have a strong interest in the area of spirituality as a factor that affects and/or transforms human behavior in all its forms. Another bias might be found in the population interviewed. Of the sixteen participants, nine were originally from the Rio Grande Valley. This region is still considered a highly religious area and deeply rooted in the Judeo Christian tradition.

Confirmability. In showing coherence and correspondence, I have applied information gathered into four distinct categories: spirituality in educational leadership, self-awareness and vision, acknowledgement and empowerment of stakeholders, and development of school culture. According to Hodder (1998) "The twin struts of confirmation are coherence and correspondence. Coherence is produced if the parts of the argument do not contradict each other. The notion of correspondence between theory and data embeds the fit of data and theory within coherence" (p. 112). Interpretation of collected data have been consistent with educational leadership theories, and participants' responses about their points of view and personal experiences have not produced contradictory results to the literature about spirituality in educational leadership. To ensure this step was followed, data analysis included references cited in the review of

literature specifying educational leadership and spiritual theories. The literature review strengthened the data gathered, and the data shed new insight into the theory.

Dependability. There are four arguments suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) that make a research study dependable: validity and reliability, overlap methods or triangulation, stepwise replication, and research audit (p. 298). These four concepts are discussed.

Validity and Reliability. In regards to the validity of the study, Lincoln and Guba (1985) expressed that its establishment by the naturalistic or ethnographic research designs is very different from the establishment of external validity by the conventionalists. They stated,

> The naturalistic and ethnographic researcher cannot specify the external validity of the research. Nonetheless, the researcher will provide the widest possible range of information for inclusion of thick description necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility (p. 316).

Consequently, to ensure its validity I furnish a detailed description of participants and site selection, research design, data sources and procedures, and data analysis, I provide clear and precise information to make transferable judgments possible. As a matter of reliability, Lincoln and Guba (1995) suggested a five step process. They stated,

> First, increasing the probability that credible findings will be produced such as prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and triangulation; second, peer debriefing or activities that provide an external check on the research process; third, refinement of working hypotheses as more and more information becomes available; fourth, referential adequacy or checking of preliminary findings and interpretations against archives raw data; and fifth, member checking or direct test of findings and interpretations with the human sources from which they have come. (p. 301)

I have complied with these five techniques. First of all, information was gathered from different sources such as autobiographies, campus or district internet sites, field

notes, and/or observations from interaction between educational leaders and their co-workers, parents, and students. Second, receiving continuous and consistent guidance from chairpersons attained external check on the research process. Third, after each interview I discussed findings with the chairperson. At midpoint, data gathered were analyzed and evaluated, and interview questions were refined to produce less breath and more in-depth responses. Fourth, recorded and transcribed interviews allowed for checking of preliminary findings. Fifth, member checking was conducted by sending a draft of each participant's responses and interpretations to the respective interviewees. E-mails were used to accomplish this process. Interviewees were asked to respond within a week with any comments, insights or concerns of their interpreted data (Appendix D, p. 176).

Triangulation. According to Mathison (1988) "Good research practice obligates the researcher to triangulate, that is, to use multiple methods, data sources, and researchers to enhance the validity of research study" (p. 13). Data sources were triangulated by providing as many avenues to obtain information as possible: telephone conversations, e-mails, interviews, and member checking. I was the only researcher on this study who served as data gatherer and instrument of data interpretation. However, continuous guidance from dissertation committee members offered feedback and insight in complying with expected guidelines.

Stepwise Replicability. "The uniqueness of a study within a specific context protects against replicating it exactly in another context. However, statements about the researcher's positions enhance the study's chances of being replicated or applicable to other settings" (Creswell, 1994, p.153). Consistent with this concept, Lincoln and Guba

(1985) stated, "Contrary to its outcomes, reliability is not prized for its own sake but as a precondition for validity, and unreliable measure cannot be valid, and it is usually tested by replication" (p. 296). My position is based on the conviction that spirituality in educational leadership transforms our school settings from within, changing school agents from managers to leaders. Out of a genuine spiritual interaction with a Higher Power relationships are transformed creating vibrant and dynamic learning communities. By selecting successful educational leaders, I sought to add validity to the study under the assumption that spirituality is not a personal nor an affective issue, but a matter of effectiveness in the workplace. This study is built around the belief that by experiencing an authentic spirituality individuals are personally changed, and by applying this same concept to educational leadership, stakeholders' lives are transformed. By following all the steps outlined in the data collection procedures, this study ensures its replicability. Results of this study can be likewise applicable to other settings within any field, but more importantly, it may be beneficial to personnel in school districts, universities, and working environments where the expression of spirituality has been silenced.

Research Audit. According to Baxter and Eyles (1997) "Evaluation is critical if qualitative evidence or findings are to gain acceptance outside the community of practitioners, especially given the widespread recognition of the appropriateness for different approaches to investigation" (p. 505). I held periodic meetings with both co-chairs and committee members where continuous evaluation and feedback in regard to method, data analysis of the research and findings of the study were provided.

CHAPTER IV

DATA ANALYSIS

The purpose of this qualitative research is to investigate the ontological and epistemological phenomena of spirituality in educational leaders. Its aim is to explore how educational leaders use their spirituality to strengthen their effectiveness as it relates to school and its performance. The selected participants were educational leaders who were recognized by Texas Association of School Boards, Texas Association of Secondary School Principals, and Texas Education Agency as regional superintendent, principal, assistant principal, and Teacher of the Year for the period 2001-2003. Data provided by the individual in-depth interviews, autobiographies, electronic mail, and observations of the sixteen participants was coded to identify the salient topics of the conversations. The data is presented through the use of a qualitative approach. A summary of each individual's life is provided next in order to understand who participated in the study.

Participants

Roland. He is a Hispanic male who was named Superintendent of the Year, 2001. He did not speak much about himself but focused the interview on his professional experience and philosophy of spirituality. However, as little as is known about him, he shared that he was born and grew up in Pecan, TX. He had one sister and one brother

who died when he was three and a half years old. He stated that Pecan was a small community and that his family lived close to the church where he spent a lot of his time. He attended Catholic Church and was very familiar and involved with its practices and the ceremonies. He started working with his father in the fields when he was six years old. At a very early age, he had the idea of working hard, but he realized that working long hours in the fields was not what he wanted to do the rest of his life. His father always told him to give the best of his abilities at what he was doing, not doing things half way. When he entered college and got married, he started looking at alternatives to Christianity.

During his educational experience, he served in different capacities in the field of education for thirty-five years. He started teaching in middle school, and later on became the assistant principal and principal of the high school. He left the Valley only to go to West Texas as an assistant high school principal in Fort Stockton and to initiate at a later time his doctoral work in Austin, TX. Completing his doctorate, he had an opportunity to become an assistant superintendent for instruction at Palm, TX. His aspiration was to become a superintendent. He accomplished this dream by periodically serving in that capacity for fifteen years. During the times that he was not working as superintendent, he held the position of Director of Administrative Services at a Regional Service Center. He collaborated with principals and superintendents in a variety of leadership programs. Similarly, he also worked at the Region X Education Service Center as Deputy Director, Executive Director, and as an educational consultant. Moreover, he had an opportunity to work at the Texas Education Agency as an executive assistant to the commissioner of education. An article about him at the Equity Center, *Advocating School Finance Equity*

and Adequacy in Texas, stated, "Roland has long been recognized as an active advocate for education by serving on several state leadership and community based committees which include: University of Texas Pan American Center for Applied Academic Research in Education, Committee President for the Equity Center, Committee President for the South Texas Association of Schools, Chairman for the Texas Migrant Council and Member of the City's Economic Development Council" (http://www.equitycenter.org/news/fullstory.asp?I.62). Last but not least, he also worked as Director of Head Start programs. A comment from a member at the Texas House of Representatives stated "This is a man of integrity who has served our communities in a variety of capacities and has amassed a very impressive range of experience in public education" (http://www.house.state.tx.us/news/release.php?id=699). In an excerpt from *My School Online,* Roland described his philosophy of education as "Educational Excellence: The right of every student, is our philosophy, and through the diligent and professional efforts of our teaching staff, we provide students the best education possible. It takes everyone working together to guarantee educational success" (http://myschoolonline.com/page/0,1871,48479-4665-51-7485,00.html).

Ruben. He is also a Hispanic male who was named Superintendent of the Year, 2003. He was born and raised in Sycamore, Texas. His father died when he was nine years old, and his mother raised all the eight children by herself. She never remarried, but spent her time providing for her children's education. All of Ruben's K-12 years of education was completed in Sycamore ISD. While growing up, he worked part time at grocery stores to help support the family. He remembered working in different jobs since he was eleven years old. He married and had three children. As most upper and middle

Rio Grande Valley students, Ruben attended The University of Texas-Pan American and graduated with a bachelor's degree in education. He was the first in his family to attend and graduate from college. The four older siblings dropped out either from high school or college. As the fifth member of the family, he set the example for his three younger siblings, two brothers and one sister, who also pursued higher education through Masters' degrees. Ruben has 34 years of educational experience, and all of it in the same school district. Ruben started as a classroom teacher, and continued as coach, assistant principal, and principal. He was principal for about twenty-two years. He is currently in his ninth year as a superintendent of the school district. In 1999, the Texas House of Representatives named him Exemplary Educator, and the Texas Educational Secretaries Association and Texas Classroom Teachers Association named him Administrator of the Year. An article on him from the district described him, "Under his leadership, the district has excelled tremendously. He has continuously inspired students and staff to excel and expand their horizon, commitment, and dedication" (http://www.huisache-isd.net).

Frances. She is a Hispanic female superintendent selected through the snowball effect. She is originally from Cameron County, where she graduated from high school. Her mother died when she was two years old, and her father was always working to support a family of eight. He was a cook-baker by training with an eighth grade education. When her mother died, France's oldest sibling was thirteen years old. Her mother had three sisters, and one of the sisters took all eight children to live with her, her husband, and their own six children. In total it was a family of sixteen. Frances expressed that her mother's family was strongly devout Catholic as well as very fond and

loving of each other. They also developed an early formation where all believed in God. Her oldest brother actually became a priest.

Shortly after the aunt and uncle took the eight children into their family, they all moved out to the country. They lived out there somewhat in isolation. However, but not really because it was such a large family, they still ended up seeing the cousins with whom they lived more as brothers and sisters than they did with the families of the other two aunts. Her father was always away working and remarried when Frances was seven years old. He had four more children. Her father took back his eight children from the first marriage to live with him, the other four half brothers, sisters, and the new wife. As soon as the children became of age, five of Frances' siblings joined either the seminary or convent. Only the oldest one took his vows, the others did not. Left with three children from the first marriage and four from the second one, the family migrated to Colorado, then to California, and later on to Texas. When her father was remarried and she started migrating, that is when Frances started bonding with her alternate family. Even though her father was always working, the family could not afford a college education. Frances completed her college education through National Defense Student Loans. When she started teaching the loan was cancelled out. She paid back about $200. Frances also attended The University of Texas-Pan American, which was Pan American College at that time. Only four out of the twelve children obtained a college education. Her bachelor of science degree was actually in physical education with a minor in English. She married and had five children. She began teaching at the district in which she is currently the superintendent, but when her husband was elected to the school board, she moved to another district due to the nepotism law. She worked as a reading and English

teacher in Maple-Pine-Birch, and for about four years, she served as a counselor to special education in Peach School District. Once her husband left the school board, she returned to the first school district as Special Education counselor for one year. The following year, she was selected as director of special education, and worked in that position seven years. During that time, she returned to the university and received her Master's degree in guidance and counseling. Later on, she worked as junior high assistant principal, middle school principal, alternative school principal, administrative assistant to student services, assistant superintendent for human resources and student services, and finally as superintendent. An article on the district website provides brief biographical information describing how she is not a stranger to the district, but an active member, not only of the district, but the valley. It stated, "She has served as a member of civic organizations such as Our Lady of Angels Parish, South Texas ISD, Palmer Drug Abuse Program, Lions Club, Valley Alliance for Mentoring and Scholarship Opportunities (VAMOS), United Way, and the Hidalgo County Headstart Program" (http://www.redwoodisd.com/about/newsuperintendent.html).

David. He is a White male superintendent selected through the snowball effect. He was born in Delaware and moved to the Rio Grande Valley when he was three years old. He grew up in Willow City. At that time his father died in an accident. His father was a Baptist minister. He was the fifth of ten children. There were eight boys and two girls, and they lived in the country. He recalled that from the early age of seven years old, he was picking cotton in the field and helping at the church where his father was the minister. All his siblings attended college, but only half of them obtained a degree. He graduated from Willow High School and moved to Oak City. When he was in college, he

lived in the fire station in Oak City working as a fireman. That was the way he paid for his college tuition.

He received his bachelor and master's degree from The University of Texas-Pan American back in the seventies and his Ph.D. from The University of Texas at Austin in the late 1990s. His wife is a school nurse; they have three beautiful daughters. Two of the daughters are pursuing a college career already, and the third one is still attending high school. He has been in education for twenty-seven years and twenty-two have been as an administrator. He started teaching and coaching in the same district in which he now leads as superintendent. After three years as a teacher, he went to Maple, TX and taught in the classroom for two more years. Later on, he took the position of assistant principal followed by the principal's position. He had the privilege of building and opening the first campus in Maple, TX and two elementary schools in Cedar, TX where he was the principal for five years. David came back to the district where he started teaching to serve as high school principal. Seven years later, he took on the position of assistant superintendent, and after another seven years, he assumed the leadership of the district as superintendent. This is his fifth year in that leadership position and his twenty-second year in the district.

Isaac. He is a Hispanic male selected through the snowball effect approach. He is a native of the Valley and has lived most of his life in this region. He has two brothers and one sister. He was the third child in the family. His father worked cleaning professional offices early in his life and later on selling household products; his mother worked as a nurse. He remembered helping his father going from house to house selling the merchandise or collecting the money. Even though the family had limited financial

resources, with sacrifice and financial assistance from the school, the couple sent the

three children to Catholic school for their first years of education. However, due to his

mother's illness, Isaac stopped attending Catholic schools and went to live with one of

his aunts. His educational experiences in elementary, middle, and secondary school were

filled with discrimination and humiliation. When he was a senior in high school, he was

faced with the dilemma of dropping out of school or moving out to another high school in

the area due to teachers' discrimination. He was not getting credit for his assignments

even though they were completely and timely turned in. His mother and older sister

motivated him to stay in school since the older brother had already dropped out. He

listened to their advice and was determined to graduate from high school; thus he decided

to move out even though it required a hardship in getting a ride with different people or

walking for several miles every morning. He stated that a lot of things happened to him

in school, in high school, and in college in regards to being discriminated, but he always

remembered his mother telling him to confide in God with all his heart. This upbringing

is still alive in him. In his several administrative positions, held at different places,

whenever he was confronted with crisis, he expressed that the very first thing that came

to him was to pray and commend himself into the Higher Power's hands. He married and

has three children; several years later nine grandchildren have joined the family. He

pursued a bachelor and a master degree in education at The University of Texas-Pan

American. After his graduation, he worked at Redoak, Redbud, and Sycamore as teacher,

counselor, and diagnostician. He left the Rio Grande Valley to pursue his doctoral degree

at the University of Houston. He interrupted his studies to work at the Texas Education

Agency; but, upon the completion of his degree, he came back to the Rio Grande Valley

to work as superintendent at one of the local school districts. Upon his retirement he went to work as principal in one of the local schools. In all he has more than forty-three years of experience in the educational field.

Marissa. She is a Hispanic female selected as Assistant principal of the Year, 2003, but currently has the job as principal of an elementary school. She is originally from Sycamore City and graduated from Sycamore High School. When she was going through her elementary and secondary schooling, everybody in the school knew each other. Marissa attended and graduated with a bachelor's degree in education from The University of Texas-Pan American. She married to a young man from Sycamore and had a child. Her first two years of classroom experience were in Birch, TX. Later on, she moved to Huisache ISD where she taught for six or seven years. While she was teaching, she decided to continue her studies, and years later she obtained her master's degree and mid-management certification.   Given the opportunity to work as a core facilitator on a fifth grade campus in Sycamore, TX, she accepted the position. This choice brought her back to her home district where she knew the parents and their children. She expressed that this fact made her establish a quick connection with the district. After two years in this position, she became the district coordinator for the K-12 language arts program. Realizing that she lacked secondary experience, she decided to go to junior high as an assistant principal for four years. She perceived this to be helpful in her goal to one day work in Central Office. She mentioned that her team worked really hard at the junior high to get it to a Texas Education Agency recognized status, and after a couple of years, they succeeded.   It was an accomplishment in itself because only the elementary and high schools had been recognized in Sycamore, but not the junior high. She took pride in

the fact that she had worked hard and that her reputation spoke for itself; thus, she decided to accept the position as principal at an elementary campus. In general, she has been in the field of education a total of fourteen years.

    Raymond. He is a Hispanic male recognized as a Principal of the Year, 2003. He was born in Cactus, Mexico. He lived his first two years under his grandmother's care. At the age of two, he moved to Sycamore, TX where he had spent all his life thus far. He graduated from Sycamore High School and then attended the The University of Texas-Pan American, to get his bachelor's degree in business administration. Even though most of his life has been spent in Sycamore, he traveled to Cactus City during the summer every single year until he started college. He mentioned that he would look forward to each summer for a visit to Mexico to interact and communicate with his grandparents. Once he obtained his business degree, he worked several years at a men's clothing store managing his own business. He mentioned being successful until a big economic collapse around 1982 hit the market and caused him to lose a lot of money. It was at this time that he decided to change careers and teach. Raymond had married and his family of four children was still very young. He felt that he needed to spend more time with them. So, he went back as a full time student to the university to obtain the credit hours needed for a bachelor's degree in education. His first years as a teacher were at Sycamore ISD. While he was full time teaching, he decided to enroll in the Master's degree program at The University of Texas-Pan American to obtain his mid-management certificate. When he graduated, there were no vacancies in Sycamore ISD so, he decided to accept the position as an assistant principal at Huisache ISD. He stayed there for a couple of years. Later on, when an administrative position opened in Sycamore ISD, he

transferred back to the district. He worked in Sycamore ISD as an assistant principal and later as a principal. He stated that in all the schools in which he has been principal, the schools have been recognized campuses by the Texas Education Agency.

Sean. He is a White male selected through the snowball effect and recognized as National Principal of the Year in 2003. He was born and grew up in Ohio. When he was five or six years old, his father took a job with the Department of Defense School System, resulting in the family living in Lima, Peru for two years. Living out of the country for two years, profoundly influenced his life as he learned another language and experienced another culture. Certainly, the greatest influence in his life was his mother and father who gave him a sense of values, a sense of purpose in life, and a sense of work ethics. Both of his parents were educators, and both pursued advanced degrees. He remembered that his house was always full of books; they had more books than shelves to put them on. He reported that being raised in such a family had a tremendous influence on who he was as a reader and as a learner. Similarly, he recalled that there were a few teachers who also impacted his life as he was growing up. He remembered his third grade teacher and how she read aloud to the class everyday. After his elementary school years in Ohio, the family moved to West Virginia where Sean attended middle and high school. Sean also recalled a high school Spanish teacher and how she took a personal interest in him. Another person that he has never forgotten was his high school chemistry teacher and how he was probably the only teacher in his growing up years that allowed him to use a constructivist approach to learning. The teacher gave materials to the class and let them work with them to see if they could figure out the concepts. Once he graduated from high school, Sean decided to pursue a career at The Ohio State University. He obtained

his bachelor and master's degrees in the field of education and worked in Ohio school districts for some time. In 1981, he moved to the Valley to teach deaf students. In all, he taught for ten years, was a principal for ten years, and held other positions as an administrator for fifteen years. While he was supervising the school, he enrolled at The University of Texas-Pan American in the educational leadership program where he obtained his doctoral degree.

Jane. She is a White female selected through the snowball effect. She grew up in a farm in Northern Iowa and was the youngest of nine children. She had seven brothers and one sister. Since she lived in the country, she reported spending most of her time outdoors, listening to the birds, seeing the flowers bloom, and enjoying nature itself. She claims her spirituality from her childhood. Jane considered nature and her family as her first church. She did visit too many places, which helped her establish a very close bond with her parents, especially her mother. When her brothers started graduating from high school, her parents sold the farm. They moved during her junior high years to Southern Nebraska. She enjoyed her first years there because it was thirty miles out into the country. During her senior high school year, she moved to Jefferson, South Dakota. She had always been in Catholic schools; South Dakota was her first experience in public schools.

She realized what a difference there was in the distinct types of education she had received. Her first years of high school were spent having all sorts of healthy fun such as, going to dances, playing sports, and enjoying her friends. However, her senior year was when she realized that not everybody was focused on studying, but rather many were in drugs, truancy, and sex. She remembered that once they were going to a football game

in another town; she climbed into a car with her friends, and they pulled out a suitcase with all sorts of things to drink, sniff, or inject. All this was foreign to her and even though she knew that not all public schools were like that, she felt sorry for her peers. This was when she valued her Catholic education and decided to enter the convent. She joined the Presentation Sisters, a religious order focused on the education field. At that point she didn't want to be a teacher; however, she decided to volunteer and help at the school for one year. She enjoyed it and graduated with a bachelor's degree in education. Jane worked for eleven years, first as a teacher then as a principal. She was transferred to Western Iowa and worked there for four more years as a principal. Years later, she left the order, got married, and decided to move to Texas where her parents lived.

Roderick. He is a White male selected through the snowball effect. He was born in Western Iowa and lived in a very small town. He was the oldest of five children, and from kindergarten through high school he lived a very sheltered life. After his graduation from high school, he went to college and got a bachelor's degree in education. A couple of years later, he joined a missionary religious order and became a priest. His work in the priesthood led him to be involved with the International Peace and Justice Commission. Through this involvement, he got to travel around the world to countries such as Africa, Sweden, Germany, and England. When that experience was finished, he was transferred to a small town in the United States. But after being so used to traveling, he could not find joy in being a pastor in a small town. He requested to continue with the missionary work and was sent to Bolivia. While he was doing all that in the priesthood, he was also involved in teaching and school administration for several years. He left the priesthood and later on got married. He obtained a job at a private Catholic school and

has been there for the past five years. He has worked very hard from the beginning to make this facility a family. To him that is the essence of his success.

Criselda. She is a Hispanic female selected as being recognized Teacher of Year, 2002. However, at the time of the interview, she was already occupying the position of assistant principal at a high school. She was born, grew up, and went to public school in Huisache, TX. She came from a very poor family; both of her parents were migrant workers. They decided to stop migrating so that her brothers would be able to stay in school. Her mother dropped out of school when she was in eighth grade and her father completed high school. Both of her parents played an important role in her education. Seeing her father wake up at five thirty in the morning and go to work at six or six thirty and getting home twelve hours later, made her realize that she needed to pursue a career. Even though she barely saw her dad, he was always very supportive and available when she needed him. On the other hand, it was her mother who promoted education in the family. Criselda remembered that when she was young, she would save up some money and go to the store to buy many books and math workbooks for her mother to read to her. Trips to the public library were frequently taken; her mother was taking the family to read. Her mother was really her first teacher, and the best teacher she ever had. Criselda's mother stressed the meaning and importance of getting a good education and working hard. Both of her parents were very hard workers and she learned her work ethic from them. Criselda reported that she always stretched to be the best in anything she did, whether being a wife, a mother, sister or educator. When Criselda graduated from Huisache, she was more involved in athletics than in everything else. While she was in elementary and junior high, she did well academically, but in high school she was

a B student because she was so focused on sports. She was one of the fastest running students in fast track in the Valley; that quality got her a scholarship to go to The University of Texas-Pan American which otherwise she could not have afforded. She was the oldest daughter in the family; she was expected to finish high school and help with the household expenses. However, she recognized that without more education her financial situation would not change much. Therefore, she accepted the scholarship and graduated with a bachelor's degree in finance with a minor in business administration. While she was working in a bank, work that she did for three years, her present superintendent invited her to work as a teacher through an emergency permit or certification program. She accepted the opportunity, and has been teaching at Huisache Independent School District for about twelve years. For the past year, she has held the position of assistant principal. Criselda reported that throughout the time that she taught, she tried to instill in her students, a work ethic of responsibility, dedication, and commitment.

Larry. He is a Hispanic male selected because he was recognized as Teacher of the Year, 2002. Both of his parents were professionals. His father was a teacher and his mother started as a social worker, but later on became a teacher. Spanish and English were spoken by both parents, but they raised Larry up speaking only English. Larry learned to speak, read, and write Spanish at a later time. He did not start speaking Spanish until about fifteen years ago when he went to school in Costa Rica for a year and lived in Mexico for about eight years. He reported that growing up with parents who are both professionals is kind of difficult. They really thought he had a learning disability. He had such a difficult time in first grade that he had to repeat it. He always struggled

through school and did not do very well in it; by the time he was in high school, he was getting into a lot of trouble. A number of his friends went to prison. It was at that time that he met the woman who would become his wife; that changed him quite a bit. He joined the Air Force and spent six years there. He got married and became a missionary and pastor doing a lot of family involvement with the National Presbyterian Church in Mexico City and Tamaulipas, Mexico. During that period even though he was working as a ministerial pediatrician, he did a lot of teaching mostly on preventive medicine. He also taught English as a second language at the Ibero-Americana University. At that time, there were a lot of things happening with that particular board; so he decided to change his plans and careers. Instead of growing in development, he considered it more important to promote a relationship within the community itself as another way to get away from that dependency the board was creating. Instead he helped in community building among the citizens of those places. There was a big irreconcilable difference of opinion and philosophy on how to work, and he thought it was a good time to make the change. Growing up in a bilingual context influenced him to select bilingual education as his second career. His education and background were in teaching English as a Second Language. Having to learn Spanish as a Second Language made him relate to the problems and difficulties of learning one language and then another. Including his church experience, he has been teaching for ten years in the public setting and ten more years in the church setting.

Noemi. She is a non-Hispanic White female selected by being recognized Teacher of the Year, 2001. She grew up in the Rio Grande Valley. She went to school in Orange-Lemon-Lime ISD and graduated from the only high school in the district at that

time. Instead of going directly into college, she took a year off from her studies to find herself; she decided to spend it working. During that year she met the man who would become her husband; they have been together now for thirty-eight and a half years. Noemi graduated in 1963 from high school and got married in 1965. She started a family in 1968 when her first daughter was born. Her second daughter was born five years later. Both of them are educated and very successful in their careers. After fourteen years of staying home to raise the family, she decided to go back to school, get her degree, and get certified with a major in elementary education and a minor in English. She also obtained two endorsements: one in ESL and the second one in kindergarten. Two years later, she obtained her Master's degree. Upon graduation she took a job at an elementary school and has been there ever since. Her entire career has been teaching either kindergarten or first grade. Now she teaches a mixed age group of both grade levels. In the morning she has kindergarten and first graders together. In the afternoon the groups are separated, and she teaches only the first graders. This is her eighteenth year at Palm ISD. She reported that three or four of the teachers have been there since the school was built creating a very unique environment in which the community concept is reinforced.

Ernest. He is a non-Hispanic White male selected because he was recognized Teacher of the Year, 2003. He was born in 1954 in Pecan, Texas to a middle class family. His father was a businessman who owned his own business, a record sales and jewelry store. Ernest recalled his parents being extremely hard working. Most of the people that came up during the time of the Depression War run their own business, and his dad is one of them. Ernest had one brother and one sister. His parents never gave them an allowance. However, as soon as they were old enough to sweep the floor, they

went to work in their father's store. Even though, it was not appreciated at the time, it established an extremely strong work ethic in all of them. Ernest went to West Elementary School and made good grades. He was in the top ten percent of the class and graduated eleventh or twelfth out of one thousand five hundred students in high school. When he got out of high school, he went to Junior College choosing math as his major because he enjoyed math quite a bit. He was also in the choir at the Junior College. After a year of college, he decided that math was not much fun; therefore, he switched his major to music. Ernest obtained his associate's degree and continued his studies at Texas Christian University as a music education major. A combination of scholarships, his parents' income, and his part-time jobs helped him pay for his college career. When he was in college, he was working part-time in his father's store in the afternoons. He also had a job in a gas station, Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. On Wednesday nights and Sundays, he was the choir director at his church. His daily routine was hectic. He finished school around 3:30 or 4:00 p.m, went to work for his father for about two hours and then changed clothes to work at the gas station from 6:00-10:00 p.m. He never minded putting in the many hours it took to get the job done. He was really active in the Baptist Church Music Program; he was not in the choir program in the school until his senior year in high school, but he was always in the choirs at the church, which led him into this field. After his graduation, he moved to Palm, TX and has taught in this district ever since. For the last fourteen years he has been a music teacher and greatly enjoys teaching young students how to sing. He reported that even though the first couple of years he made a lot of mistakes, he realized that he learned through experience. He did not mind working hard, and recalled doing an awful job in the

classroom; he made up for it before and after school staying extra time working with students privately. He has felt successful and happy all of those fourteen years.

Sylvia. She is a non-Hispanic White female selected by being recognized Teacher of the Year, 2001. She was born and raised in Palm City to a middle class family. Sylvia remembered that her parents were very devout Christians who prayed every day with the family before going to bed. She went to public elementary, middle, and high school in Palm, TX. There were four siblings and her mother stayed home with them until they were of high school age. At that time, her mother started thinking about college. Both parents had obtained their GED. After seeing how much their parents struggled to get them formally educated, all of the children gave a promise to their father that they would not get married before finishing college. They kept their promise, and all had a college degree except for Sylvia's brother who was killed his senior year in an automobile accident. Her parents were very encouraging as far as her education. They were also a very close family. She attended The University of Texas-Pan American and obtained her bachelor's degree in education with a major in secondary mathematics. Since the time she was a freshman in high school and started taking algebra one, she immediately knew that she wanted to be a high school mathematics teacher. Years later, she went back to school and acquired her Master's degree in supervision. She has been teaching for twenty-three years. Her first two years of teaching were spent at the middle school. She interrupted her teaching career for nine years to raise her children. Once her children were in elementary school, she continued with her teaching profession at a high school and has been there ever since.

Karen. She is a non-Hispanic White female selected through the snowball effect. She lived in a small town in North Dakota. Her father was a veterinarian and her mother assisted him with the secretarial tasks of the clinic. Her mother had been in business school for about two years. She has two brothers and two sisters, and she is the youngest of five. She had a strong family life in which the siblings grew up very close to each other. A family vacation was taken every year reinforcing family ties and a strong family foundation. The town was a small community with a population of less than a thousand people. The elementary school was the only one in town with about two classes of each grade. Being an average student with no major problems, Karen did well in school. When she was eleven years old, the family moved to a bigger city of about thirty thousand people. Her father's job changed, and he took on a position with the state in regulatory work. The children attended middle and high school there. There was no mention of the university that she attended, but she reported that all her brothers and sisters graduated from college. She obtained her bachelor's degree in education and has been working as a teacher for the past twenty years. For ten years she worked with the Regional School for the Deaf and the rest with kindergarten and first grade students. She moved to Palm, TX and has worked in the district ever since.

Participants' Profile Summary

Overall, the participants' profiles can be summarized as follows: Though some participants were not originally from this area, their professional experience has been mostly in South Texas. All the participants were highly experienced in the field of education. The majority of participants had more than twenty years of experience, and

there were no interviewees who had less than ten years of practice in the discipline. Participants' diversified personal and professional environments and broad spectrum of educational experience (ranging from fourteen to forty-three years) as well as a variety of teaching and administrative positions invigorates the vast array of data provided.

Participants' gender was almost equally distributed. There were two more males interviewed compared to females. The professional positions occupied by females were one superintendent, two principals, one assistant principal, and three teachers. On the other hand, the professional positions occupied by males were three superintendents, four principals, zero assistant principal, and two teachers. Information obtained from this report showed that males were occupying most of the higher level order administrative positions.

Given the fact that the Rio Grande Valley is mostly a Hispanic population, it is worthy noting that an equal number of White and Hispanic educational leaders were represented in the study. However, Hispanic participants such as three superintendents, three principals, one assistant principal, and one teacher occupied most of the higher administrative professional positions.

Similarly, the Rio Grande Valley is also characterized by a Judeo-Christian tradition. Six participants did not specify a religion. Ten participants reported spending a lot of time at church since their childhood. They also reported that their parents used to pray before bedtime or that they were devout Christians. The other six participants did not openly express nor deny any religious link to their childhood.

Another interesting factor reported by the participants was that eight of them experienced difficulty in pursuing a college career. They held multiple jobs, worked in

the field, grocery stores, and/or obtained scholarships to attend the university. Eleven participants reported going to The University of Texas-Pan American to obtain their bachelor and master's degrees. The University of Texas Pan American is the local university; several participants pursued their education there mostly due to being unable to finance their education at a university out of the area.

Emerging Themes

An overview of the interview sessions' salient themes is outlined through a cross-case analysis. In a cross-case analysis the researcher is more interested in comparing concepts rather than individual cases, "We are interested not in how many individuals exhibit this concept but rather in how often this concept emerges and what it looks like under varying conditions" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 95). The researcher used Microsoft Word to code the written material. Once the transcribed interviews were coded, conceptualized labels were given to the written text. Similar phenomena received the same term. After the conceptualized labels were obtained, they were categorized into themes. The following most salient themes were identified: establishes a personal relationship with a Higher Power; turns to a Higher Power for guidance; centers source of beliefs and values in Higher Power; finds inner peace and calm; acquires strength and courage; expands territory and vision; strives for excellence and success; listens and shows care and concern for stakeholders; acknowledges and empowers stakeholders; is open to communication and decision making; fosters sharing, cooperation, and teamwork; creates family and/or community building.

Establishing a Personal Relationship with a Higher Power. This theme lists issues related to seeking a Higher Power through a personal relationship, reflection, and prayer. Participants alluding to this theme concurred with Kirk's (2000) description of spirituality as, "A state of consciousness in which we experience a sense of wholeness and connection" (p. 58). Sample interviewees' comments in regards to seeking a Higher Power in a personal relationship included, "To me spirituality is a personal relationship with Jesus Christ," "I also have a personal relationship with God, and I don't apologize for my faith," "Well, when I think of spirituality, I think of something that is personal to me, lived, and in turning to my Higher Power and Educator and Life," "From a teacher's perspective, I don't think a teacher can survive and not have a relationship with God," and "I choose to relate to My Higher Power everyday, everyday, every morning."

A personal relationship with a Higher Power was strengthened through prayer, reflection, and meditation. For instance, some participants reported, "Every single day, I dedicate time to meditation and reflection," "Personally my faith is such that makes things better," "Every day I begin with prayer," "We pray all the time every day at our school," "Personally, I pray about every day," "I always say a prayer and that is how I start up my day," "Prayer is a big thing with me, but also with my administrative staff," "There is a lot of prayer that goes up," "In a leadership position, it is more a matter of closing the gap, opening the door, meditating, praying for good leadership," "Answers come to me at night when I fell on my knees to pray," and "Whenever I have been confronted with crisis or difficult situations, the very first thing that comes to me is my prayer and commending myself into God's hands."

Turning to Higher Power for Guidance. In a similar context, turning to a Higher Power for guidance produced a high response among participants. Sample participants' responses in this area were, "All these years have always turned out right not because of what I have done, but because of the spiritual guidance that I have within me," "I turn to God as my source of inspiration and guidance," "I need guidance. Spirituality guides and strengthens me," "I ask God to lead me into doing what is best for the children," "Also in regards to my spiritual experience, God plays a big part in my life, in everything I do, and I lean on Him a lot," "When I am by myself, God is with me guiding me," and "Every day I pray to God and ask Him to guide me and to lead my work, hands, and voice in the decisions that will be taken on that day."

Centering the Source of Beliefs and Values in a Higher Power. A high incidence of responses was likewise observed when participants related to a Higher Power as the source of their beliefs and values. Sample expressions included, "Spirituality for me is a way of life," "Nearly all of them who are great leaders do emphasize the value and dignity of each human being, and they are leaders who nurture teachers as oppose to leaders that bosses teachers," "My spirituality is the foundation for my values about human beings. I believe human beings are valuable, worth, and special in God's eyes because He created us in His image," "It is driven by my sense of spirituality and my values, which evolve from my spirituality," "If you look at who are those that have the strongest faith, then it will be those who have the strongest values bounded on those teachings," "Spiritual life is very important to me. My philosophy of life springs up from it," and "In living my spirituality, I have found out that it is people uplifting each other instead of tearing each other down."

Other participants referred to their spirituality as the foundation for treating other individuals with dignity and respect. For instance, it was reported, "My spiritual foundation as a way of life has led me to see my life and those people with whom I work with respect," "I think that as a human being, it is my spiritual responsibility to value individuals and to treat each one with dignity and respect," "I see them as human beings worthy of dignity, of the highest dignity and some of that comes out of my religious beliefs," "I think this comes also from my spiritual understanding that we are created in the image of God and deserve all dignity and respect," "My spiritual foundation as a way of life has led me to see my life and those people with whom I work with respect," and "I also think that respect, respect, respect at all levels, in teachers, children, and staff needs to be emphasized always." Reinforcing these comments, Covey (1992) stated, "Principles are deep, fundamental truths. We can be secured in the knowledge that principles are bigger than people or circumstances, and that thousands of years of history have seen them triumph, time and time again" (p. 122).

Finding Inner Peace and Calm. Interviewed educational leaders reported that their personal relationship with a Higher Power produced peace and calm. Beck (1986) stated, "Spirituality combines interiority, consciousness residing in the heart, and a power that we can strive to reach" (p.149). Some of the participants' responses were, "I realize that answers come to me when I am at peace. Those answers come to me at night when I fell on my knees to pray," "Spirituality is something that especially provides me with peace and calm, and it keeps me going day in and day out," "Finding meaning in life and finding peace within you comes from contact with a Higher Being," "If they find their peace, then they can go through life being successful," "I am a peaceful person. I think

the work ethic and the spiritual and ethical background that my parents instilled in me has a lot to do. It has a lot to do with the kind of person I am," and "Sometimes people tell me that I am calm, but that is because many times I have to give it over to the Lord."

Acquiring Strength and Courage. Similarly, participants reported that their spirituality provided them with strength and courage in the performance of their leadership role. Sample comments were, "I ask them to find their Source of Strength. It affects how you respond to the pressures of your job, your life, and your relationships," "To get the job truly done, you need to find that Source of Strength," "They'll have a real life and strength to face the issues or pressures expected of their job," and "I need strength and courage that sometimes I don't have to do things. It's taking all that from my relationship with the Higher Power."

The educational leaders' spirituality was manifested as a source of courage, amidst the turmoil, stress, and conflict of their job, when they left their concerns into a Higher Power's hands. "I feel that maybe the crisis, the toughest crisis of life, in the darkest time of your life, when you still wait to see light at the end of the tunnel, spirituality works," "I think people are spending a lot of energy with tension and worry especially during TAKS testing rather than prayers laying the burden on God," "There are some instances when you have to let God intervene and ask Him to take care of things because there is no way that I can solve them by myself," and "I found out that my faith helps me survive my frustrations. My blood pressure will be always up should it have not been for my faith."

Expanding Territory and Vision. Some participants also reported that spirituality had expanded their territory and vision. Sample responses on how the concept of

acquiring a vision was mentioned included, "There were a lot of complaints from the business world that our students were not ready for it, so my vision actually is to have leadership teams of teachers and students actually working the summers out in the businesses," "Reach to your Source of Strength for a different outlook about life. This is how you might get a vision," "If you think about it, we didn't have to come back to this town, but for some reason we did. I think it was just God's way of telling us, 'You go back to your own people and help them,'" and "I think that my vision here is to expect that each and everyone of these students as far as any other school kid be provided with an opportunity to succeed."

Educational leaders also expressed their spirituality had enhanced their territory. They stated, "There is something in me that attract them to trust their concerns or problems. I do not know what it is that makes them attracted to me, but I know it is not I but God," "By the nature of the realm of responsibilities, we have to be like a super person. In my belief, you don't get this knowledge by yourself; you get it from a Higher Person," "It expanded my territory. With the help of the Lord, I have come to the place I am. As my territory gets bigger and bigger, I tell the Lord, 'Wherever you want to take me, I will go,'" and "I believe in God assisting my accomplishments in whatever I aim on this life, and that's the spiritual element. It is Someone that can open doors in your life."

Striving for Excellence and Success. Excellence and success were a key ingredient for ten participants who reported that their spirituality helps them in striving for excellence. Noteworthy to mention, Johnson (2004) recognized, "When people are conscious of their spirituality and live according to their spiritual beliefs, efficiency results are maximized in professional lives" (p. 24). Sample participants' comments

were, "My goal is to create a school system that will meet the individual needs of each student and to give them the opportunity to use their God given talent and intelligence," "Our biggest effort is the education of children, so they leave the school with the best education they can," "I motivated them to have 'the ganas' (willingness) to be the best and succeed," "You ensure that all students succeed, and I mean everyone, all students. I want all the students to be successful, to graduate and to be lifetime learners," "I expect that each and everyone of these students as far as any other school kid be provided with an opportunity to succeed," "I am driven to succeed, but also I am driven to make my students succeed, and I'll be in as much as I can to help children," and "If the staff is happy, they will commit and give all that it takes to make the school successful performing well even beyond expectations." Consistent with this line, McCreery (1994) reported, "Spirituality is beyond the known and explainable, it strives to improve and change both itself and the world around it" (p. 94).

Listening and Showing Care and Concern for Stakeholders. Likewise, participants reported that listening and showing concern for others is important to them. Supporting this finding West (2001) declared, "Any disease of the soul must be conquered by a turning of one's soul. This turning is done through one's own affirmation of one's worth –an affirmation fueled by the concern of others" (p. 27). Interviewees' comments were, "The students know they can talk to me. They'll know I will listen, and I am very honest with them," "I do a lot of listening as principal. I listen to my staff with their personal or professional problems," and "I think that by listening, a big difference is made, and a better response is provided to the working environment."

Care and concern for others was also expressed in their responses, "When parents, teachers, and students have a concern or problem, they look at me for support or advice," "Employees get to know, value, and appreciate each other's work. They care for each other, and most importantly, they care for the children," "I always pray for the safety of the children because they are under my guidance and my care," "I love children, and I want all my staff to bring hope to the people they work," "I try to reflect that to the students by caring about them, guiding them, and giving them advice," "Give your smile to the children. Make them feel loved, and they will respond in return," and "They know that we care and put the children first."

Acknowledging and Empowering Stakeholders. Acknowledging and empowering students, co-workers, and parents was also reported by several participants. Consistent with this point of view, Tyndale (2000) declared, "For the faiths, 'empowerment' involves the concept of personal dignity, of self-worth, of a kind of contentedness. This sort of empowerment brings hope and vision with it" (p. 9). Some participants' comments were, "I think one thing that ensures success is acceptance of the students as they are," "We make a difference in students' life when we recognize them as persons," "We talk to each other, our philosophies are the same, but we are very different. So our principal empowers that on us," "We believe in empowering children here as much as it is possible. That is good for the students, and we give them lots of choices," "I can't emphasize on the negative because that's something that discourages the students, and I have to focus on what they can do," and "Empowering children is capturing their hearts by being aware of their presence."

Being Open to Communication in Decision Making Processes. In support of this concept, Block (1993) affirmed, "Authentic service is primarily a commitment to the larger community; and there is a balance and equitable distribution of power in which decision making is shared by all" (p. 21). Sample participants' comments in regards to how spirituality helped in the decision making process were: "If a leader has to make a decision that is right or wrong or at least may be in conflict with what the person believes that is when faith manifests itself within a leadership role," "Sometimes one has to make tough decisions about bad employees, and I think when making those decisions, it helps to be spiritual," "I think that every time that there is a hard decision to make it always helps to be able to pray to get the answers," "I think that it helps in giving you peace of mind in the decision that you make. It helps you to focus on doing what is best," and "My spirituality shows its effects in finding strength and direction in no matter what obstacle I've come across. In many instances, it has led me to make the right choices."

Fostering Sharing, Cooperation, and Teamwork. Sharing, cooperation, and teamwork were strongly emphasized during the interview sessions. Likewise, Carlson and Apple (1998) supported this concept, "Education is, in the fullest sense, a spiritual experience. It changes the way we experience our being in the world, it reconnects us to the cosmos, and it transforms us in ways that affect our everyday relations with others" (p.197). Sample comments expressing sharing and cooperation were, "The spiritual leader is more a communicator, empathizes more. There is more like sharing," "We communicate and share our spirituality with each other," "If I have leadership ability, it becomes my responsibility to share that ability with others. Again it is founded in the belief that God has given us the capacity to become what we choose to be," "Even though

it is still stressful due to the many demands imposed on testing, paperwork, evaluations, and scores, sharing and supporting each other makes the burden easier to carry," and "All of us are here to assist each other, and if one of us is hurting in some way, all the others are there to help and support them."

Several participants also highlighted the concept of teamwork. Their comments were: "The idea of the grant was to have educational and business' leaders together learning together to solve the problem facing our community," "If employees learn to work as a team, their work is more enjoyable and the load becomes easier, they are more creative," "What really helps to succeed in our endeavor is the network that as principals we have established with each other. We support and help each other in the district," "We are very united as a team with the City. We also work as a team with our neighboring school district," and "When employees are happy, they commit themselves to work. Teamwork adds a new dimension to their job."

Building Family and/or Learning Community. Educational leaders commented on how their spirituality helped them to see each other as a family and instilled in them the desire to create a learning community. Beattie (2002) declared, "The focus for school leaders is on working to co-create a learning environment which emphasizes authentic self-expression, the development of relationships and the development of the whole person within a community" (p. 201). Participants' comments were, "We help each other as a caring family, and you see that in the employees," "Our school is like a family, but we also have a sense of community. We are like a community within the community," "If we are going to build this sense of community within our school, it is very important to make this sense of connection between the school and home," "Creating a learning

community has a lot to do with communication and relationships," "It is very powerful for the students' success to be part of the community," and "A sense of community is very big with the adults surrounding each other."

In summarizing the most salient themes, it can be inferred that spirituality is a strong factor in assisting leaders to strengthen their effectiveness in their leadership role. It creates an environment where each individual, despite position held, is strengthened, acknowledged, empowered, listened, and cared for as an individual in striving to excel and succeed. Their organizations are healthy systems characterized by sharing, cooperation, teamwork, and communication. All these factors together create a sense of family and community where life is enjoyed and brought to the system.

Research Question One

What is the spiritual dimension in educational leadership?

This research question addresses the ontological perspective of spirituality in educational leadership. In response to this question, educational leaders viewed their personal relationship with a Higher Power as the means to strengthen their spirituality, which in turn influenced their beliefs and values. Interview questions asked were: do you see any relationship between your success as an educational leader and your spirituality? What is the role of spirituality in creating healthy systems, organizations, and schools and what does it look like? Participants' comments in this regard shed insight into this ontological perspective. Themes emerging from responses to these research questions were: establishing a personal relationship with a Higher Power, centering the source of

beliefs and values in Higher Power; treating other persons with dignity and respect. For

instance, Roland responded,

> I think that as one grows older, the relationship with God gets better in understanding where we are and why we are right here, our beliefs, and the way that we're living. It is something that I believe it's been a strong response of my behaviors, my values, my hopes, and the type of person I am. It also impacts how I relate to others, and how I behave myself in a leadership position or out of it.

Consistent with this concept, Criselda added, "Well, when I think of spirituality, I think

of something that is personal to me, lived, and in turning to my Higher Power and

Educator and Life. I don't remember being as spiritual when I was growing up as I am

now." Another participant, Sean, also concurred with the concept that the foundation of

his values resides in his relationship with a Higher Power. He mentioned,

> To me spirituality is a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. My spirituality is the foundation for my values about human beings. I believe human beings are valuable, worth, and special in God's eyes because He created us in His image. I think that as a human being, it is my spiritual responsibility to value individuals and to treat each one with dignity and respect. My sense of the value of human life drives me to treat each of my employees, students, and parents with dignity and respect.

Roland, Criselda, and Sean's words echo Covey (1992) who stated, "Principles

are bigger than people or circumstances, and thousands of years of history have seen

them triumph, time and time again" (p.122). Contrary to a norm value from a behavioral

point of view, the spiritual value reaches to other human beings in connecting solidarity.

These values are transformative in nature. Seicol (1997) stressed this importance in

saying, "Spiritual wellness is the search to create a personal sense of life's meaning,

value and purpose in relationship to the process of spiritual connectedness with family,

community, society, and the world" (p. 4). Frances exemplified this idea by stating,

> I also have a personal relationship with God. In effect, I always ask my staff to be spiritual with one another, with everyone that they interact. These are spiritual

values. Once again, I think this comes also from my spiritual understanding that we are created in the image of God and deserve all dignity and respect.

Furthermore, spirituality in educational leadership as a belief system also includes the values of dignity and respect for each individual created into God's image. These concepts are enhanced as the spiritual relationship with a Higher Power is nurtured and strengthened. Spirituality is not a personal matter per se, but it reaches beyond the self. According to McCreery (1994) "Spirituality, beyond the known and explainable, strives to improve and change both itself and the world around it" (p. 94). Raymond illustrated, "Spiritual life is very important to me. My philosophy of life springs up from it. I also think that respect, respect, respect at all levels, in teachers, children, and staff needs to be emphasized always." Similarly Larry mentioned, "I think that part of it is respect. All my children, all my students, I see them as human beings worthy of dignity, of the highest dignity. They are made in the image of God, and we share a sense of brotherhood and sisterhood." David also reinforced this concept by stating, "I think spirituality is probably a matter of respecting, you know respecting everyone's beliefs. From my perspective, I think that it is a matter of respecting the spirituality of those who choose to express it." Likewise, Sylvia concurred with the group by commenting, "I think if we are spiritual, if there is spirituality in the school, we work to get along and respect each other." Moreover, Isaac also expressed and exemplified that spirituality was understood as the source of respect. He added,

> My spiritual foundation as a way of life has led me to see my life and those people with whom I work with respect. I've been working more than forty years in education, and more than twenty have been in leadership positions. All these years have always turned out right not because of what I have done, but because of the spiritual guidance that I had within me.

Based on the participants' comments, spirituality has been defined either as a continuous relationship with a Higher Power in an awareness of His/Her Presence; a belief system; or the foundation for values especially in treating others with dignity, respect.

Research Question Two

What is the spiritual dimension in successful educational leaders?

This question, more specifically, refers to the ontological and epistemological perspective of spirituality and how it can be identified in successful educational leaders' lives. Interview questions addressing this topic were: Do you attribute your success to anything in particular? What causes your success? Please share with me your spiritual formation (stories, experiences, or visions), and how this has impacted your relationship with God, yourself, your family, and co-workers. In response to this question, educational leaders viewed their relationship with a Higher Power as the main contributor to their knowledge, expanded territory and vision; strength and courage; inner peace and calm; and guidance in the midst of crisis within their leadership role. Participants placed great emphasis on the element of prayer to obtain each of these themes and gave practical examples on how this element is performed.

In reference to spirituality being considered as an area for the acquisition of knowledge Ruben expressed,

> The superintendent needs to know what is going on at all the different jobs, programs at the district and have the answers on everything. You don't get this knowledge by yourself; you get it from a Higher Person. You turn to the Source of Knowledge out there that I believe is right next to me, guiding me in what I have to say or do.

Similarly, Criselda mentioned, "My spirituality has also expanded my territory. With the help of the Lord, I have come to the place I am. It's taking all that from my relationship with the Higher Power." Consistent with this point of view, David commented, "My vision is to create a school system that will meet the individual needs of each student and to give them the opportunity to use their God given talent and intelligence to be able to do whatever they want to do." Along this line and in reference to describing the qualities of effective leaders, David (1998) expressed, "They are visionaries who can galvanize and mobilize school-community support around share beliefs and goals for the school" (p. 2).

Moreover, a personal relationship with a Higher Power not only provides knowledge expanding leaders' territory and vision, but it also provides the needed strength to face stressful and challenging situations pertinent to the leader's role. According to McCreery (1994) "Spirituality as the power and essence is understood as the power that revitalizes us" (p. 93). Reinforcing this concept, Ruben expressed,

> Your Source of Strength affects how you respond to the pressures of your job, your life, and your relationships. Reach to your Source of Strength so that you can be more successful in life. You cannot let the pressures of the job or problems affect you throughout the day. Reach to your Source of Strength for a different outlook about life.

Similarly, Criselda added,

> Because of the long hours that I have here and all the stress of this position, my relationship with a Higher Power guides and strengthens me. I need strength and courage that sometimes I don't have to do things. It's taking all that from my relationship with the Higher Power.

Likewise, Sylvia commented that her spirituality has helped her to face barriers encountered in her life. She expressed, "My spirituality shows its effects in finding

strength and direction in no matter what obstacle I've come across." Reinforcing this concept, Pankake, Schroth, and Funk (2000) stated, 'The way in which an individual confronts, deals with, and moves beyond difficulties, mistakes, and failure experiences plays a critical role in leadership development' (p.143). Exemplifying this concept, Noemi agreed, "I have problems in my life that probably somebody who is a nonbeliever also does, but how we handle it makes a difference."

As this strength is obtained, inner peace shows its effect. In this regard, Criselda commented, "Spirituality is something that specially provides me with peace and calm, and it keeps me going day in and day out." Likewise, Noemi declared, "I just think peace makes your life just more balanced. Sometimes people tell me that I am calm, but that is because many times I have to give it over to God." Furthermore, Ruben stated,

> Finding meaning in life and finding peace within you comes from contact with a Higher Being. If you find your peace, then you can go through life being successful. I don't think some one can find his/her peace in everyday job without having to go to their Source of Peace.

In addition, David expressed,

> Certainly I thank God first for the ability He gave me and for the opportunity to be in the right place at the right time. I am a peaceful person. I think the work ethic and the spiritual and ethical background that my parents instilled in me has a lot to do. It has a lot to do with the kind of person I am.

Some participants expressed that inner peace was obtained due to their relationship with a Higher Power. Similarly, this peace was achieved because they trusted or commended their lives and their problematic situations in the Higher Power's hands. They transcended the mere objective circumstances to find meaning beyond the event. Reinforcing this concept, Noemi stated, "Because I am a believer, I do not think that anything that has happened in my life is by chance or a mere accident and the teacher

that I am today is because I ask the Lord to help me." This element of trust is very

similar to the one obtained in an interpersonal or organizational relationship. Knowing

that the other person has a sincere interest in an individual's well-being, allows this

person to confide and rely on decisions made. Highlighting this element of trust, Ouchi's

(1982) expressed, "Trust is that kind of deep understanding requiring an intimacy of

contact. Only with intimacy can there be mutual understanding and the possibility of

mutual influence" (p. 71). Emphasizing the importance of this theme, Raymond

commented, "There are some instances when you have to let God intervene and ask Him

to take care of things because there is no way that I can solve them by myself, so I

decided to leave everything in God's hands." In a similar context, Isaac shared,

> I've always believed that if I commend myself and had complete trust and
> confidence in God, all things will be possible. In my different leadership positions
> whenever I have been confronted with crisis or difficult situations, the very first
> thing that comes to me is my prayer and commending myself into God's hands.

From a spiritual perspective, linked together with the theme of trust is the element

of prayer. Prayer is the means to communicate with the Higher Power, and it is

frequently practiced by the educational leaders interviewed. For instance, Sean

mentioned, "We pray all the time every day at our school. Our school is a school that

does a lot of praying together. Personally, I pray about every day." Similarly, Marissa

commented, "I always say a prayer and that is how I start up my day. I always ask for the

safety of the children because they are under my guidance and my care." In addition,

Noemi declared,

> When parents, teachers, and students have a concern or problem, they look at me
> for support or advice. We pray about it together even though it might be Friday
> afternoon and I have too many things to do. I have the time for prayer. I pray with
> people very easily.

In summary, spirituality as manifested in participants' lives is considered as the source of knowledge, strength, inner peace, and trust furnishing them with the necessary intrapersonal tools to perform their leadership role. However, since spirituality is not only a personal matter, but extends into the field of interpersonal relationship, its effects there are worthy of consideration. The data in research question three expands on how spirituality includes also a social interaction.

Research Question Three

How do successful educational leaders use spirituality to strengthen their effectiveness as it relates to school and its performance?

A genuinely lived spirituality takes us beyond our own personal interests. It makes of us a person for others. A true spiritual experience gives to the educational leadership role a sense of stewardship in the development of its mission (Adair, 1992; Dantley, 2004; Hay, 2000). In response to this question, the following salient themes were identified through participants' interviews: striving for excellence and success; listening and showing care and concern for stakeholders; acknowledging and empowering stakeholders; being open to communication and decision making; fostering sharing, cooperation, and teamwork; and family and/or community building.

In regards to the connection between spirituality and striving for excellence and success, Frances' responses focused on establishing quality interpersonal relationships. For instance, she commented, "We have to gain an understanding of how being spiritual to one another will make us better co-workers. Certainly more compassionate, more considerate of one another, and more importantly more respectful of one another." From

a different perspective, Sean saw success as the place to be. He added, "In pursuing success, I look at our school as a special place where children love to learn and teachers love to teach." The focus of Criselda's success is seeing the students as lifetime learners. She commented,

> Success is obtained as you ensure that all students succeed, and I mean everyone, all students. Sometimes we focus on maybe the top students and forget the middle, the average student or maybe the students in special populations like the special education or limited English proficient students. But no, we need to ensure that all of them succeed. I want all the students to be successful, to graduate and to be lifetime learners.

On the other hand, Ernest's success is concentrated on the element of being attentive to listening. He shared, "The students know they can talk to me. They'll know I will listen, and I am very honest with them. I think they know that they can talk to me, and they do." Similarly, Raymond responded, "I also do a lot of listening as principal. I listen to my staff with their personal or professional problems. Sometimes I cannot solve anything, but only listen to them. I think that by listening, a big difference is made, and a better response is provided to the working environment."

A different perspective of being successful is an emphasis on acknowledging and empowering stakeholders. Consistent with this perspective, Williams (2002) stated, "Spirituality adds a sense of direction and an impetus for growth; a sense of involvement, purpose, and significance; a focus on what is important; long term enthusiastic motivation; and empowerment of people" (p. 25). In reference to the empowerment provided by her principal, Noemi commented, "Our lesson plans look completely different, and yet we are team teaching. We talk to each other, our philosophies are the same, but we are very different. So our principal empowers that on us." This same

process is projected in the classroom as she shared, "We believe in empowering children here as much as it is possible that is good for the students, and we give them lots of choices." Likewise, in empowering stakeholders, Frances added,

> I think that leadership has some obligation to help others grow. The fact that whatever talents or abilities we have comes again from the perspective of understanding that all that is good comes from God. Then it is my obligation to create opportunities for people to demonstrate that. Again it is founded in the belief that God has given us the capacity to become what we choose to be.

Furthermore, Larry saw empowerment as a process. He mentioned, "I love teaching because you learn more about yourself. Teaching is a process. You take somebody from where they are and you put them further along in life whether it is ethically, morally, spiritually, or academically." In a similar context, Karen expressed, "One thing that ensures success is acceptance of the students as they are. Taking them from where they are requires not seeing that a child is deficient just because they are not where the other ones might be."

In further analysis of how success is perceived, other participants referred to it as a shared power in decision-making, teamwork, and community building. Illustrating this concept, David affirmed, "The spiritual identity has to do from within from my relationship with God, and I think it shows its effect everyday on the decisions that I make in terms of ethics and leadership and everything." Likewise, Roland concurred, "If you believe and trust in God, you get to understand and make decisions based on that direction that you understand and believe." Moreover, Raymond added, "Every day I pray to God and ask Him to guide me and to lead my work, hands, and voice in the decisions that will be taken on that day." Similarly, Larry commented, "Teachers make hundreds of decisions a day. That's probably the biggest challenge. Every day, every day, I turn to God for help to make the right decision."

In regards to teamwork, participants' responses saw it as an essential element for effective and successful leadership. Raymond affirmed, "I think the cause of success in a healthy organization resides more than anything else in the staff. If employees learn to work as a team, their work is more enjoyable and the load becomes easier, they are more creative." In addition, Criselda commented, "The spiritual leader is more a communicator, empathizes more. There is more like sharing." Jane concurred on this idea by stating, "All of us are here to assist each other, and if one of us is hurting in some way, all the others are there to help and support them. It doesn't mean that we don't have to do our own work first, but also we don't stop there." Likewise, Frances stated, "If I have leadership ability, it becomes my responsibility to share that ability with others because I believe everyone has some level of leadership." Teamwork was emphasized not only among members of one campus, but among administrators in the district. For instance, Raymond commented,

> What really helps to succeed in our endeavor is the network that as principals we have established with each other. We support and help each other in the district. We communicate and share our spirituality with each other. In some cases, we even ask for advice from others. We mutually see how we can solve the problems together and what will work better, but most of all we enjoy our work. Sharing and supporting each other makes the burden easier to carry.

This concept of teamwork is further expanded as educational leaders strive to connect to the community at large. Consistent with this perspective, Kofman and Senge (1993) expressed,

> Shifting from a fragmented, competitive and reactive organization to one that is systemic, cooperative, creative, and alive requires a 'Galilean shift' toward building 'communities of commitment.' In this regard, commitment goes beyond personal loyalty to include a commitment to societal changes through one's organization" (p. 12).

Illustrating this concept, Roderick expressed, "A crucial element of success is not to work alone, but in connection with the students, their families, and community. We had tried to work very hard here since the beginning to make this facility a family. That to me is the essence of our success." In addition, Jane commented, "We make a difference in students' life when we recognize them as persons. I make the best of it and enjoy them as a family. Family is a group you love and feel close to. You look for the well being of each other." Along this same line, Noemi stated, "Our school is like a family, but we also have a sense of community. We are like a community within the community. A sense of community is very big with the adults surrounding each other." Understanding the concept of community within a larger spectrum includes working in partnership with agencies not only within but outside the district. David, illustrated this approach by commenting,

> Creating a learning community has a lot to do with communication and relationships. I think that it requires developing a tie and bond both inside the district and outside the district. We work well with the City. We are very united as a team with the City. We also work as a team with our neighboring school district. We have a very close connection with the Community College, and not as closely, but we also have a working relationship with our local university. We work in the same line with the City's Economic Development Corporation, and we are working with a lot of businesses.

In summary it can be stated that spirituality enhances the effectiveness of educational leader's role. It works by strengthening educational leaders in their endeavors to strive for excellence and success; listening and empowering stakeholders; sharing power in decision making; fostering teamwork, and building learning communities. When a genuine spirituality is lived, it does not remain at the personal level, but extends to reach out to the community and society at large creating change agents that challenge undemocratic practices. Through a virtual counter story dialogical

approach among the interviewed participants, the next chapter will specifically illustrate how educational leaders use their spirituality to strengthen their role and school performance.

CHAPTER V

COUNTER-STORY TELLING AS DATA ANALYSIS

Scene I: Overview

This qualitative research explores the contribution of spirituality, if any, to the success of educational leaders. Its aim is to explore how educational leaders use their spirituality to strengthen their effectiveness as it relates to school performance. The selected participants were educational leaders recognized by Texas Association of School Boards, Texas Association of Secondary School Principals, and Texas Education Agency as regional superintendent, principal, assistant principal, and teacher of the year for the years 2001-2003, and individuals identified as successful educational leaders through the snowball effect. The data gathered by the individual in-depth interviews, autobiographies, electronic mail, and observations of the sixteen participants was coded to identify the salient topics of the conversations.

In the previous chapter, research findings were presented following a traditional approach to data analysis. In this chapter, the data is presented through the use of a counter-story narrative approach in response to the three research questions, which form three scenes in the story. In all, five scenes are presented. The first scene presents an overview of how data is analyzed in a dialogical process using a counter-story approach, whereas the second scene gives a brief synopsis of the cast of characters. The third scene

responds to the first research question followed by the fourth and fifth scenes, which answer the second and third research questions. A general introduction to scenes three, four, and five is given reporting the most salient themes found during the sixteen one-to-one interview sessions.

Counter-story narrative is a method used in critical race theory and art-based research. Cited in Jaeger (1997), Barone and Elliot expressed, "Storytelling encourages using written and oral biographies and autobiographies for the study of educational experiences. The aim in these studies is to entice the reader to re-conceptualize the educational process through intimate disclosures from the lives of individual educators and students" (p. 82). Likewise, Delgado (1989) declared, "Counter-storytelling is a method of telling the story of those experiences that are not often told" (p. 2421).

> Counter-stories can serve at least four theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical functions: 1) they can build community among those at the margins of society by putting a human and familiar face to educational theory and practice; 2) they can challenge the perceived wisdom of those at society's center by providing a context to understand and transform established belief systems; 3) they can open new windows into the reality of those at the margins of society by showing the possibilities beyond the ones they live and demonstrating that they are not alone in their position; and 4) they can teach others that by combining elements from both the story and the current reality, one can construct another world that is richer than either the story or the reality alone (Delgado, 1989; Lawson, 1995; & Solorzano & Yosso, 2001)

A fictitious setting used for this purpose is a very large and well-lit conference room where all participants are sitting at a round table. This imagery implies no restrictions imposed on the participants by providing an atmosphere of ample space to bring to light their experiences and ideas. Additionally, the concept of sitting at a round table implies a place of no distinction or honor where all participants have been considered equal to each other despite positions held. This concept has a historical

background. First of all, the well-known legend of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table exemplified the idea, "Arthur and his knights would gather on special occasions around a round table, round to denote the equality of its members. The Order of the Round Table came to represent all that was most noble in medieval chivalry, including protection of the weak" (Snyder, 2000, p. 79). Secondly, the Round Table of Great Britain and Ireland is a businessmen's organization that regularly meets to exchange ideas, broaden practice by learning from the shared experiences of colleagues, learn the art of leadership, play a collective part in the town's civic life by enhancing their role as responsible citizens, and form lasting friendships. (http://www.rountable.co.uk./history.htm).

Furthermore, as facilitator of this storytelling or virtual conversation, the researcher uses data gathered from interviews, observations, district internet sites, existing literature, and personal and professional experience to accommodate the flow of the communication among the educational leaders. In the description of participants' qualitative profiles in order to ensure their confidentiality, pseudonyms have been used to conceal interviewees' identities, campuses, and school districts.

Scene II: A Cornucopia of Educational Experience

Another school year with all its multiple demands has come to an end. All the systematic and regular routines of academic programs, extra-curricular activities, budgeting, curriculum and instruction, staff development, testing, district and campus reporting, personnel hiring and termination, decision making, and graduation ceremonies to name a few have left their mark in history for the school year. But before putting a

close to it, a cornucopia of information and insights about bringing life to their own districts and campuses is found in quilting sixteen regionally recognized successful educational leaders' experiences and ideas into a virtual encounter. The idea of quilting goes back to my childhood years when I used to help my mother select pieces of similar texture from the left over fabric used in making our dresses. By making a quilt of personal shared stories instead of fabric or by presenting the data using a counter-storytelling method, I am trying to do justice to the interviewed participants using as much pertinent information possible in the creation of a piece of art that illustrates our understanding and transforming effectiveness of spiritual educational leadership.

As people arrived to the virtual conference room, they sat around the round table. I looked at each of them. It was the first time that these educational leaders had gotten together to share their experiences and ideas as teachers, principals, and superintendents of the year. Each one in his/her own way had successfully exhibited educational leadership in the district, but bringing their talents together in a common enterprise, produced a strong and powerful collective force where experiences were broadened by learning from other colleagues. I had the privilege of individually meeting with them before the session, thus I was at an advantage in knowing the wealth of information that they were bringing to the meeting. Without being aware of each other's personal and professional experiences, all of them had something in common: their spiritual dimension to educational leadership rooted in the Christian tradition.

Once everyone had taken their seats, I expressed my deepest gratitude to the group for their willingness to participate in the meeting. Thus, I said, "Your willingness to respond to this invitation amid the many other activities that you have, especially

towards the closing of the school year has been remarkable and astonishing to me. Without hesitation you agreed to be part of this session. Some of you even contacted me as soon as you received the letter to schedule a time for me to meet with you prior to this meeting. Your immediate feedback was that the research sounded interesting and that you wanted to be part of it. I know all of you, but you may not know each other, therefore, please introduce yourselves to the group by sharing who you are."

With this invitation, Roland jumped immediately into the conversation. As long as sharing did not have to do directly with his personal life, he was willing to take the lead. Otherwise, he preferred to step back.

Roland initiated, "I had served in different capacities in education for thirty-five years. I started teaching out in middle school, and later on became the assistant principal and principal of the high school. From there, I went to Region X Education Service Center as Director of Administrative Services. I worked with principals and superintendents in a variety of leadership programs. Afterwards, I had an opportunity to become an assistant superintendent for instruction at my district for four years and later on became the superintendent. Once I left the district, I worked at the Education Service Center as Deputy Director and years later as an Executive Director. I also had an opportunity to work at the Texas Education Agency. I serviced there as an executive assistant to the commissioner of education.

With similar experiences, Isaac intervened, "I am also an ex-superintendent and presently a principal, and I have been in education almost my whole life. Sixteen years as a student and forty three years as teacher, counselor, diagnostician, assistant principal, principal, TEA consultant, assistant superintendent, and superintendent."

If it was a matter of years of experience, Ruben also fit into this category. He said, "I have been in education thirty seven years. I'm starting my thirty-eighth year and all have been in this school district. First I started as a social studies teacher. Later on, I became assistant principal followed by the principal position at the middle and high school level. I was principal for about twenty-two years. Now, I'm starting my ninth year as a superintendent of this school district. All my career has been here."

In a very soft though assertive voice Sylvia commented, "Well, my name is Sylvia. I have been teaching twenty-three years. I taught two years in middle school or junior high, and then I stayed nine years at home with my children. I am a secondary mathematics teacher at this high school. I have my bachelor's degree and my Masters in secondary supervision from Pan American."

The University of Texas-Pan American is the local university and several participants pursued their education there mostly due to being unable to finance their education at a university out of the area.

Criselda said in a cheerful voice, "Well. Criselda has always been a young girl from the Rio Grande Valley. I was born in the Rio Grande Valley, grew up in the Rio Grande Valley, went to Rio Grande Valley public schools, and I am still here as an assistant principal. I've been in education for fourteen years."

Also with fourteen years of experience, Ernest replied, "For the last fourteen years I have been teaching students how to sing. I was born in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metropolitan area, but for reasons that will need more explanation than an introduction, I ended up right here."

Looking at Marissa, I said, "I don't know if you call it coincidence, but we also have with us another person with the same years of experience..."

Marissa interrupted, "Yes, I've been in education fourteen years. I taught in elementary and middle schools. I was facilitator at a fifth grade campus and district coordinator for the language arts program for two years. After that, I became the assistant principal at the junior high school for four years, and now I am an elementary principal."

A little introverted at first, David replied, "I've been in education for twenty-seven years, and I have been an administrator for twenty-two. I taught and coached for five years. I started my teaching career right here in this district back in the seventies. I was a classroom teacher, assistant principal, principal at the high school level for seven years. Then, I was assistant superintendent for seven years. Now I am completing my fifth year as superintendent of this school district. This has been my educational experience."

Quite close to David's years of experience, Frances shared, "Mostly all my experiences have been at this school district. I have had many levels of school experience that anyone could hope to go through: classroom teacher, counselor, assistant principal, principal, alternative school principal, central office level quite a bit, administrative assistant to student services, special education services, alternative school services, assistant superintendent for human resources and student services and now superintendent, a total of about twenty-two years administrative experience. I had those many experiences I would say."

Rather hesitantly, Karen replied, "Well, I have been working as a teacher for twenty years. The first half of that I worked with the Regional School for the Deaf. I

worked for ten years with deaf students, and now for the other ten years I have been a kindergarten and first grade teacher."

Larry also had twenty years of experience. He stated, "Including my experience in church, I've been teaching ten years in the public setting and about ten years in the church setting. That is about twenty years in total. My education and background is teaching English as a Second Language. I also taught at the Universidad Ibero-Americana in Mexico City."

Sean, who was named National Distinguished Principal added, "I've been a principal for ten years. I've been an administrator for fifteen years, and before that I was a classroom teacher for ten years in Ohio and then here in the Valley. That is where most of my experience has been. I am currently a principal at this elementary school. I didn't grow up in Texas. I was born in Ohio, went to elementary school in Ohio, and then moved to West Virginia."

With a very tender and calm voice, but without hesitation Noemi intervened, "I don't have as many years of educational experience because I started late. I stayed home to raise the family for fourteen years. Afterwards, I went back to school, got my degree, got certified in elementary education with a minor in English and an ESL and kindergarten endorsement. Two years later, I got my Master's degree. After graduation, I came to teach at this school, and I've been teaching here ever since. This has been my school. My entire career has been here at this elementary school teaching either kindergarten or first grade. Now I teach a mixed age. This is my eighteen year at the district."

Jane shared next, "All my educational experience has been in Catholic schools. I worked for eleven years, first as a teacher then as a principal. Then I moved back to Iowa where I was originally from and worked there for four years as a principal. Then I moved to Bolivia and worked there as a principal for two years. A total of seventeen years spent in education."

Roderick declared, "I am also from Iowa. I joined the priesthood and was involved in the International Peace and Justice Commission so I got to travel around the world. I was in Africa, Sweden, Germany, and England. While I was doing all that in the priesthood I was also involved in teaching and as school administrator for several years."

Neither Roderick nor Raymond specifically mentioned their years of experience though they were many. Raymond was barely recovering from a surgery, but still decided to participate in the group. His response to the introduction was terse, but his added insight to the study was highly valuable.

He said, "I worked in this district as a classroom teacher, then assistant principal and later on as a principal."

"Amazing!" I expressed, "With all these years of experience, so many diverse positions at different levels, and being recognized as successful educational leaders, your contribution to this meeting is an extremely valuable treasure in understanding the spiritual dimension in educational leadership."

Scene III. Research Question One:

What is the spiritual dimension in educational leadership?

This first research question addresses the ontological perspective of spirituality in educational leadership. In response to this question, educational leaders viewed their personal relationship with a Higher Power as the means to strengthen their spirituality, which in turn influenced their beliefs and values. Interview questions asked were: Do you see any relationship between your success as educational leader and your spirituality? What is the role of spirituality in creating healthy systems, organizations, and schools and what does it look like? Participants' comments in this regard provided insight into this ontological perspective. Emerging themes found in responses to this research question were establishing a personal relationship with a Higher Power, centering the source of beliefs and values in a Higher Power, and treating other persons with dignity and respect.

After the group had finished introducing themselves, I commented, "All of us are gathered here to try to understand spirituality from an empirical viewpoint in your daily life as successful educational leaders. This topic has not been discussed much in the literature, and it is only lately being researched as a contributing factor in promoting success for individuals, organizations, and systems: Based on your personal experience, what is your standpoint on this issue?"

It took me longer to express it than for Roland to reply. He stressed, "Well, the place that we live in is composed of different people with different beliefs. Those beliefs, just like in our public schools or in any other organization, are driven by people's knowledge and their learned beliefs. People would say, 'I'm different when I am with

the family, at church, or at job, or doing leisure activities. I behave differently here than I do in different places.' But the reality is that we all have those core values that drive us. For those values to be considered really values, they are so important to us that we are not going to change regardless of the setting. How does that impact leadership? It depends how strong we hold to those beliefs that determine the set of values, whether we really value it or not, or whether it is really important or not. And if you look at who are those that have the strongest faith, then it will be those who have the strongest values bounded on those teachings. So you will see people that have a very strong faith, holding very strong beliefs. I think that as one grows older, the relationship with God gets better in understanding where we are and why we are right here, our beliefs, and the way that we're living. It is something that I believe has been a strong response of my behaviors, my values, my hopes, and the type of person I am. It also impacts how I relate to others, and how I behave myself in a leadership position or out of it."

Interestingly enough, Roland's words echoed Etzioni's (1988) "What counts more to people is what they believe, how they feel, and the shared norms and cultural messages that emerge from the groups and communities with which they identify" (p. 22). Along this line and equating principles to beliefs for this purpose, Covey (1992) stated, "Principles are bigger than people or circumstances, and thousands of years of history have seen them triumph, time and time again" (p.122). In other words, it can be stated that spirituality is a belief system impacting our educational leadership role. "Is that it?" I asked.

"Spirituality for me is a way of life," Roderick uttered.

Isaac seconded that statement, "To me, it is also a way of life. My spiritual foundation as a way of life has led me to see my life and those people with whom I work with respect. I've been working more than forty years in education, and more than twenty have been in leadership positions. All these years have always turned out right not because of what I have done, but because of the spiritual guidance that I had within me. I do believe in God's plan for me and try to live up to those expectations. That's my goal. It keeps me focused and in a humbled perspective in my position as leader. Every single day, I dedicate time to meditation and reflection. Even in my current workday whatever I do, whatever e-mail I send out, whatever faculty meeting I have, I've always started them by commending them in God's hands."

Sean retorted, "My spirituality is the foundation for my values about human beings. I believe human beings are valuable, worth, and special in God's eyes because He created us in His image. I think that as a human being, it is my spiritual responsibility to value individuals and to treat each one with dignity and respect. My sense of the value of human life drives me to treat each of my employees, students, and parents with dignity and respect. I don't yell. I don't push. I wait to come in. I don't order. I do a lot of asking. All of that is about treating people with dignity and respect. It is driven by my sense of spirituality and my values, which evolve from my spirituality. To me spirituality is very specific and of great importance. Nearly all of the principals who are great leaders do emphasize the value and dignity of each human being, and they are leaders who nurture teachers as opposed to leaders that boss teachers. I believe that every human being is created with a yearning and a need for something. That something is God. We are all born with a hole in our lives, a hole in our heart, and that hole is God shaped. The

only thing that can fill that hole and satisfy us is God. In my world, the only way to fill up that hole with God is to accept Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Savior. To me spirituality is a personal relationship with Jesus Christ."

Our spiritual relationship cannot be concealed or ignored in our role as educational leaders. Contrary to a norm value from a behavioral point of view, the spiritual value reaches to other human beings in connecting solidarity. These values are transformative in nature. Seicol (1997) stressed this importance, "Spiritual wellness is the search to create a personal sense of life's meaning, value and purpose in relationship to the process of spiritual connectedness with family, community, society, and the world" (p. 4). Illustrating this theme, Isaac stated that his spirituality keeps him focused and with a humble perspective on his position as leader, whereas Sean presented it as the means to treat his co-workers with dignity and respect. As spirituality is reinforced and strengthened, it provides the leader with a broadened perspective of his educational leadership role transforming his/her power into the empowerment of his colleagues, students, and community members.

David declared, "I think spirituality is probably a matter of respecting, you know respecting everyone's beliefs. From my perspective, I think that it is a matter of respecting the spirituality of those who choose to express it. I think that spirituality definitely contributes to a healthy organization and its leadership."

"I think that part of it is truly, truly, truly respect," stated Larry, "All my children, all my students, I see them as human beings worthy of dignity, of the highest dignity and some of that comes out of my religious beliefs. They are made in the image of God, and we share a sense of brotherhood and sisterhood. Sometimes the reverence is a response

to the respect. You don't come to the room and see bowing down at all, but it is more a subtle thing. I think it is part of the spiritual relationship, kind of a light in children about life."

"Well, I also have a personal relationship with God, and I don't apologize for my faith," assertively and confidently, Frances stepped into the conversation. She commented, "I am not saying that you have to become holy rolly. In a leadership position there is constant exchange with one another. There is a difference between being religious and being spiritual. Being spiritual is being attentive, respectful to one another. It is all of those values that a healthy organization needs in its employees. In effect, I always ask my staff to be spiritual with one another, with everyone that they interact. These are spiritual values. Obviously having my formative first eight years grounded in Catholic faith, impacted my personality. Once again, I think this comes also from my spiritual understanding that we are created in the image of God and deserve all dignity and respect. In a leadership position, it is more a matter of closing the gap, opening the door, meditating, praying for good leadership."

I intervened, "Please allow me to expand on the distinction between being religious and being spiritual. Religion most distinctly refers to doctrines, prayers, and rituals of a specific faith: Christian, Jewish, Muslim, or Buddhist. Haynes (1998) defines it, 'Religion typically refers to faith communities with their dogmas, rituals, and places of worship' (p. 4). These practices are reared to increase spirituality in the individual. Spirituality on the other hand, deals with the relationship with a Higher Power regardless of the religious practice involved. Kirk (2000) illustrated this concept by defining

spirituality as, 'A state of consciousness in which we experience a sense of wholeness and connection' (p.12)."

Ruben replied, "I also believe in God. Whatever I have, I believe comes from God. My faith is in whatever accomplishments and success I have or aim in life. My mother always taught us, 'It has to be a Higher Being, God assisting.' That is what I believe. I believe in God assisting my accomplishments in whatever I aim on this life, and that's the spiritual element. It is Someone that can open doors in your life."

Criselda in turn responded, "Well, when I think of spirituality, I think of something that is personal to me, lived, and in turning to my Higher Power and Educator and Life. There is a lot that He taught us and I tried to live like that. I don't remember being as spiritual when I was growing up as I am now. I choose to relate to My Higher Power everyday, everyday, every morning, every…when there is a moment of silence, I ask him to be with me."

I added, "What you have shared so far is that the spiritual dimension in educational leadership is not only a belief system, but it also includes the values of dignity and respect for each individual created into God's image. Furthermore, these concepts are enhanced as your spiritual relationship with a Higher Power is reinforced leading me to infer that spirituality is not a personal matter per se, but it reaches beyond the self. According to McCreery (1994) "Spirituality, beyond the known and explainable, strives to improve and change both itself and the world around it (p. 94)."

Sylvia assertively articulated, "That is true. In living my spirituality, I have found out that it is people uplifting each other instead of tearing each other down. I think if we are spiritual, if there is spirituality in the school, we work to get along and respect each

other. We work and learn to love our enemy, to forgive, absolutely to forgive. From a

teacher's perspective, I don't think a teacher can survive and not have a relationship with

God"

"In all my life, to take decisions, to implement new things, to talk to staff, and to

have a philosophy of children first, I turn to God as my source of inspiration and

guidance," explained Raymond. "Spiritual life is very important to me. My philosophy

of life springs up from it. I also think that respect, respect, respect at all levels, in

teachers, children, and staff needs to be emphasized always."

Marissa intervened, "Also in regards to my spiritual experience, God plays a big

part in my life, in everything I do, and I lean on Him a lot. Prayer is a big thing with me,

but also with my administrative staff."

"In describing their spiritual experience," I added, "Sylvia, Raymond and Marissa

eloquently expressed in practice what Adair (1992) mentioned in theory, 'A spiritual

experience is the transcendence of the self into greater awareness. It is the experience of

connection to all of life. The merging of the existential isolated 'I' into the whole' (p.

32). From an ontological perspective, spirituality has been defined either as a continuous

relationship with a Higher Power in an awareness of His/Her Presence; a belief system;

or as the foundation for values especially in treating others with dignity, respect, and

forgiveness. However, it is noteworthy to point out that as men and women from two

distinct ethnic backgrounds: White and Hispanic, no difference, based on gender or race,

has been detected in your responses to your understanding of your spiritual relationship.

Based on this observation, I conclude that spirituality creates a common ground as

expressed in Galatians 3:28, "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."

Scene IV. Research Question Two

What is the spiritual dimension in successful educational leaders?

This second question, more specifically, refers to the ontological and epistemological perspectives of spirituality and how they can be identified in successful educational leaders' lives. Interview questions addressing this topic were: Do you attribute your success to anything in particular? What causes your success? Please share with me your spiritual formation (stories, experiences, or visions), and how this has impacted your relationship with God, yourself, your family, and co-workers. In response to this question, educational leaders viewed their relationship with a Higher Power as the main contributor to their knowledge, expanded territory and vision; strength and courage; inner peace and calm; and guidance in the midst of crisis within their leadership role. The element of prayer to obtain each of these themes was highly emphasized giving practical examples on how this element is performed. These salient themes are discussed next.

Ruben took a deep breath and shared, "The superintendency is a very honorable, but lonely job. You become all the stops. You have to have so much knowledge in everything that goes around the district. The superintendent needs to know what is going on at all the different jobs, programs at the district and have the answers for everything. The person, he or she, has to have certain knowledge and has to be willing to be even a counselor at conflicting personal problems. You have to be ready to survive the multiple pressures of the job. You have to be more of a super person to wear all the hats. I am not

saying that I am a super person, but what I am saying is that by the nature of the realm of responsibilities, we have to be like a super person. In my belief, you don't get this knowledge by yourself; you get it from a Higher Person. You turn to the Source of Knowledge out there that I believe is right next to me, guiding me in what I have to say or do. Those answers come to me at night when I fell on my knees to pray. When I am by myself, God is with me guiding me. I don't hear God speak to me. The answer is just in my mind. They come to me not because I am smart, but because I believe that God is answering me. He is not saying, 'Ruben this is what you need to do.' He doesn't say that. The solution to the problem comes just to my mind. People tell me, 'You know Ruben, how did you come out with that solution? How did you think of that?' I laugh. To me it is God telling me what I need to do."

Similarly, David added, "One of my goals from the time I have been high school principal was to give the students the opportunity to compete in an equal field with everybody else, and I think we have come a long ways in doing that. Now we are usually one of the top schools. I think that my vision here is to expect that each and every one of these students, as far as any other school kid, be provided with an opportunity to succeed. My vision is to create a school system that will meet the individual needs of each student and to give them the opportunity to use their God given talent and intelligence to be able to do whatever they want to do."

Criselda affirmed, "My spirituality has also expanded my territory. With the help of the Lord, I have come to the place I am. As my territory gets bigger and bigger, I tell the Lord, 'Wherever you want to take me, I will go.' It's taking all that from my relationship with the Higher Power."

As Ruben, David, and Criselda spoke about their vision or how spirituality has expanded their territory, I remembered the biblical passage from David. 2:20-22 "Wisdom and power is His. He changes times and seasons; He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. He reveals deep and hidden things." Likewise, Ruben and Criselda' reminded me of the following statements, "Spirituality as the power and essence is understood as the power that revitalizes us" (McCreery, 1994, p. 93). Along this line and in reference to describing the qualities of effective leaders, David (1998) expressed, "They are visionaries who can galvanize and mobilize school-community support around shared beliefs and goals for the school" (p. 2). This revitalization is strengthened by the interconnectivity of the person with the Higher Power in a constant awareness of His presence contrastingly producing energy within us. That energy is considered the source of creativity, hope, and vision or as Block (1987) declared, "The act of leadership is fundamentally the act of articulating a vision and acting in pursuit of that vision. It demands that we eliminate caution, that we eliminate our reservations, and that we have hope in the face of the history of our limitations" (p.103).

Ruben added, "Also as a leader, I approach my spirituality by telling my staff, 'All of you have something. All of you have something to lean to. All of you have what I call your Source of Strength. Whatever way you can find that Source of Strength, reach to it. It affects how you respond to the pressures of your job, your life, and your relationships. Reach to your Source of Strength so that you can be more successful in life. You cannot let the pressures of the job or problems affect you throughout the day. Reach to your Source of Strength for a different outlook about life. This is how you

might get a vision. To get the job truly done, you need to find that Source of Strength.' I don't go out there using low innovation. I cannot go out there and preach the Bible. I cannot do that, but my approach is to ask them to find their Source of Strength. They'll have a real life and strength to face the issues or pressures expected of their job. I believe that your Source of Strength enables you to have success in whatever you do."

Similarly, Criselda replied, "Because of the long hours that I have here and all the stress of this position, my relationship with a Higher Power guides and strengthens me. I need guidance. I personally need guidance to help others, to guide others. Also, I need strength and courage that sometimes I don't have to do things. It's taking all that from my relationship with the Higher Power."

"In my case," Sylvia shared, "My spirituality shows its effects in finding strength and direction in no matter what obstacle I've come across. In many instances, it has led me to make the right choices. I believe that everything is a choice in life. I think I have the power to make the right choices and fight the wrong ones."

"In other words," I intervened, "Spirituality is considered as the means to the Source of Knowledge where persons acquire clarity of mind allowing them to go beyond expected outcomes and seeing beyond limits or with a vision. Through interactions with their Source of Strength individuals find the energy to equip themselves with the necessary hope, resiliency, and persistence to face the pressures of the job. According to Pankake, Schroth, and Funk (2000) 'The way in which an individual confronts, deals with, and moves beyond difficulties, mistakes, and failure experiences plays a critical role in leadership development' (p. 143). Authentic spirituality furnishes the person with

the necessary skills to cross the hurdles of life or the test of fire producing an inner

equanimity in the midst of all turmoil and success in life despite the odds."

Reinforcing this point, Criselda concurred, "Spirituality is something that

specially provides me with peace and calm, and it keeps me going day in and day out."

David added that his spirituality is also the source of his peace and calmness. He

stated, "It is kind of funny, but I remember the time that I used to pick up cotton. I

remember that I would see the long, long, long lines of cotton and thought that I would

never get to the end of the line that I will never finish. Many times I see difficult

problems or tasks where it seems that there is so much to get done, and I will never get it

done. And I go back in my mind to that and just pick one ball of cotton at a time, and it

may seem a small task, but step-by-step, little by little the lines of cotton were done. The

same things happen when there is a big task, and I have seen situations when sometimes

people may tend to give up or feel overwhelmed. To me it is a matter of staying on task

one step at a time. I think the work ethic and the spiritual and ethical background that my

parents instilled in me has a lot to do with it. It has a lot to do with the kind of person I

am."

Ruben commented, "Finding meaning in life and finding peace within you comes

from contact with a Higher Being. If you find your peace, then you can go through life

being successful. I don't think some one can find his/her peace in everyday job without

having to go to their Source of Peace. If you don't find that peace, all you have are a lot

of people feeling very miserable and turning to alcohol or drugs to find that missing

peace. Without peace, this can happen. It could be the richest guy on earth, but the most

miserable. Without peace you are not successful, without being spiritual you are not at peace."

Noemi added, "I just think peace makes your life just more balanced. It does not mean that everything is wonderful in your life. I have problems in my life that probably somebody who is a nonbeliever also does, but how we handle it makes a difference. Sometimes people tell me that I am calm, but that is because many times I have to give it over to God. I put things in the right perspective, and what I do or say shows up in what the parents, teachers, and students see in me."

"By giving it over to the Lord, I see that the element of trust is implied," I commented. "Trust especially under difficult circumstances or crisis is an important factor to sustain that peace. Do you see this element of trust in God having anything to do with your success in educational leadership?"

Isaac interrupted, "I've always believed that if I commend myself and had complete trust and confidence in God, all things will be possible. A lot of things happened to me in school, in high school, and in college. Then, there were times I was confronted by teachers based on my race, but I always remembered my mother's words, 'Trust in God.' I've always confided in God with all my heart. In my different leadership positions whenever I have been confronted with crisis or difficult situations, the very first thing that comes to me is my prayer and commending myself into God's hands. It is not that He talks to me, but some answers come to my mind. I believe it is God communicating with me. There are some things I don't understand. My mother always said, 'Even though you don't understand, keep praying. God is listening. We might believe in Him.' I learned to do this throughout my career, throughout my life."

Larry intervened, "Every day I begin with prayer. I just ask God to please give me the right word I need to say and in the right way. Definitely, there is a lot of prayer that goes up, especially when I feel that it is a situation totally out of my control. I haven't always been that way. Now, I can let go. So I am not spending that energy. I think people are spending a lot of energy with tension and worry especially during TAKS testing rather than prayers laying the burden on God. He knows even the sparrow that falls and cares for them so we can trust in Him."

"There are some instances when you have to let God intervene and ask Him to take care of things because there is no way that I can solve them by myself," expressed Raymond. "When I was audited, some people did not share my philosophy and tried to put me down with the auditors. At the time of the exit conference with the superintendent and auditors, I was asked to leave the room. I felt there was not a positive report, so I decided to leave everything in God's hands. To my surprise, the superintendent spoke highly of me and things were clarified in the closed meeting. The overall result was very positive. I felt that if I had stayed, I would have tried to defend myself and probably get things worst. I was not expecting this response from the superintendent who defended me by analyzing the whole report. There was not a coherent response from the results generally obtained from the community and the majority of staff compared to a couple of individuals who mentioned things totally opposite to the general feeling of the staff. As the misunderstanding was clarified, the auditors gave the school a high rating. I was commended for my integrity and honesty and very deep in my heart, I saw God's work clarifying all this confusion."

Ruben immediately pointed out, "I feel that maybe the crisis, the toughest crisis of life, in the darkest time of your life, when you still wait to see light at the end of the tunnel, spirituality works. It helps you find the way out of the problem. Tomorrow is another day. One of the things in describing the existence of a Higher Being is that He does not leave you by yourself to solve your problems."

Noemi concurred, "If it was not because of my faith, I do not know what I would have done. I do not think everything will be the same especially my relationship with the community, parents, teachers, and students. Personally my faith is such that makes things better. That is probably why I started off not yelling at the students. I found out that my faith helps me survive my frustrations. My blood pressure will be always up should it have not been for my faith. Because I am a believer, I do not think that anything that has happened in my life is by chance or a mere accident and the teacher that I am today is because I ask the Lord to help me. I have the responsibility to teach these children, and His help is needed to reach to their hearts."

"Now I clearly understand why trust is an important element in contributing to the success in educational leadership," I mentioned, "But I have not considered its profound impact at the spiritual level. By trusting in the Higher Power, problems, worries, or concerns are deposited on Him who in turn provides to the individual peace, hope, and freedom to think creatively thus being effective in their endeavors. It makes sense. Trust requires intimacy of contact or a relationship, and prayer is the vehicle to establish that communication or intimacy with a Higher Power." According to Ouchi's (1982),

> Trust is that kind of deep understanding requiring an intimacy of contact
> sufficient to provide each person a view of the underlying desires and goals of the
> other. Only with intimacy can there be mutual understanding and the possibility

of mutual influence. Only with these can there be freedom, and only with freedom can there be efficiency in social and economic life (p. 71).

Sean reinforced this concept by stating, "We pray all the time every day at our school. Our school is a school that does a lot of praying together. If somebody, if a family member is sick or in the hospital or struggling, it is not uncommon for somebody to stand up at the end of the faculty meeting and say, 'Some of us are going to say a prayer for these teachers that are in the hospital. If you can stay just for few minutes, do so.' Those who don't want to stay just leave out. But it is not uncommon for forty people to stay and pray together. Personally, I pray about every day, but I would confess that in the busyness of the school day, I don't often stop to pray even when I probably ought to. I know for example, we had a bellicose situation the other day, maybe a month ago where a father came into this office. We thought that probably he would start destroying furniture. We thought that he was going to throw and crash things. A teacher found out that this man was in the office. I would not know if she passed through the office or in what way she knew that he was here. She immediately got a teacher's friend and apparently went to the lady's restroom and began to pray for me, for him, and for the situation. It turned out, even though we all thought that he was going to break into twelve things, that he didn't touch anything and ended up walking out. I happen to believe in this supernatural intervention of God. I think that the prayer of these two teachers while the man was yelling in my office was effective."

I intervened, "By listening to Sean, I remember a plaque in his office received when he was named National Distinguished Principal, 'The ability to lead flows directly from warm personal relationships. When students are scared or angry, their learning is

impaired. But when they're safe and happy, they learn more. In the same way, teachers strive to excel when they love and respect their principal.' Obviously, by praying for the safety of their principal, the teachers showed their love and concern. There is also another point I want to make. Sean, when you mentioned that the ladies had gotten into the restroom to pray, it convinced me even more that our spirituality is not something to be ashamed to the extent of hiding it away. It has been recognized as source of knowledge, strength, and creativity. Why should it be concealed? Haynes (1998) stated, 'First Amendment neutrality doesn't mean being neutral on values. From the moment schools open their doors, values are taught and modeled in countless ways' (p. 24). Hence, liberation from oppressive structures is needed."

In order to reinforce the concept that spirituality is not to be kept silent, Marissa added, "Actually, our superintendent always tells us. 'Remember, it is God first, then family, then your job.' Every morning when I come to work, I say the same thing to myself, 'Please, Lord.' I always say a prayer and that is how I start up my day. Every morning we have a moment of silence, and I said, "Please, Lord." I always ask for the safety of the children because they are under my guidance and my care. Yesterday I told my staff, 'You know, the first and second graders are not testing, please ask them to reach to their spiritual side and help us.' I don't go out and say pray for us, but I say, 'Reach for your spiritual side, whatever that may be, whatever you may believe in, and please help us that way.' God comes into play a lot. I think I was sent here for a reason. As a matter of fact my husband and I were talking about that last night. I said, 'If you think about it, we didn't have to come back to this town, but for some reason we did.' I

think it was just God's way of telling us, 'You go back to your own people, and help them.'"

Likewise, Noemi emphasized how spirituality is not something to be kept silenced. She added, "When parents, teachers, and students have a concern or problem, they look at me for support or advice or they just come to me looking for something. There is something in me that attract them to trust their concerns or problems. I do not know what it is that makes them attracted to me, but I know it is not I but God. I do not turn them off. We pray about it together even though it might be Friday afternoon and I have too many things to do. I have the time for prayer. I pray with people very easily, but I give God the honor because it is Him who touches the hearts of his people. I think it makes a difference how effective can a teacher be in the classroom when he/she is a believer."

"Once again, the point that spirituality is not only something personal is being made," I commented. "Noemi, by saying that there is something in you that attracts parents, teachers, and students, you are expressing that spirituality projects itself. One of the effects of a genuine spiritual relationship with the Higher Power is the inner peace produced in the individual. However, this inner peace is dynamic not static. It is a peace that strengthens and provides courage and trust necessary to handle the most adverse situations within the educational leadership role. Spirituality in educational leadership not only gives us knowledge, strength, and peace, but it also provides us with the necessary tools to be receptive and open in our relationship with other persons."

Scene V. Research Question Three

How do successful educational leaders use spirituality to strengthen their effectiveness as it relates to school and its performance?

A genuinely lived spirituality takes us beyond our own personal interests. It makes of us a person for others. A true spiritual experience gives to the educational leadership role a sense of stewardship in the development of its mission (Adair, 1992; Dantley, 2004; Hay, 2000). Sample interview questions were: "Do you attribute your success to anything in particular? What causes your success? My dissertation topic explores the spiritual dimension of educational leadership. Please share with me your spiritual formation (stories, experiences, or visions), and how this has impacted your relationship with God, yourself, your family, and coworkers.

In response to this question, the following salient themes are discussed: striving for excellence and success; listening and showing care and concern for stakeholders; acknowledging and empowering stakeholders; being open to communication and decision making; fostering sharing, cooperation, and teamwork; and family and/or community building.

I intervened, "In the discussion of effective leaders, Schmieder and Cairns (1996) listed the ten most salient administrative skills needed to be successful on the job: "Have a vision, make a significant difference, evaluate staff, understand change, have self-awareness, be facilitators, possess self-confidence, assess job responsibilities, encourage involvement, know ethical limits" (p. 3). From your own empirical experience, how does your spirituality shows in your successful educational leader's role?"

Frances assertively intervened, "Relationships. I am confident that the cognitive abilities that everyone needs to have are in place. Sometimes not quite to the level we would like them to be, but we have managers to take care of that. But we don't have a true leader or someone else monitoring the personal relationships that are part of the work that we do everyday. We have to gain an understanding of how being spiritual to one another will make us better co-workers. Certainly more compassionate, more considerate of one another, and more importantly more respectful of one another. Nine out of ten times problems in our work site have to do with how we treat people."

Sean added, "I also think that there is a difference between someone who does a job everyday, even a job in management and a leader. However, I think that the difference is that a leader has a vision. He sees how he wants his or her organization or institution to grow or change or develop, and then he leads the people that work with him, for him, and beside him to make that change occur. I think a leader is one that can help create a special school and not just pick up where the school is and do the same thing that everyone has been doing: maintain the status quo. The leader probably will change the status quo and is able somehow to get people to agree to go through that difficult change process with him or her."

"That is so accurate!" I exclaimed, "Your responses fit right along with Hersey and Blanchard (1972) who stated, 'Management is thought of as a special kind of leadership in which the accomplishment of organizational goals is paramount. Leadership is a broader concept than management. It also involves working with and through people to accomplish goals'(p.4)."

Ernest commented that definitely by listening to his students, his effectiveness as teacher was enhanced. He stated, "The students know they can talk to me. They'll know I will listen, and I am very honest with them. They know that I am in a good mood always. When I have and enjoy all things that are great that's what keeps me in a good mood. On the other hand, our students ninety nine point nine percent come to school in a bad mood. I think they know that they can talk to me, and they do. They tell me if there is something wrong or if they are failing a class or have difficulties doing their homework. I am an older person, and they feel comfortable talking to me. Most of the times, I don't give much advice. If something inspires them is my attitude to laugh and towards life in general because it is fun. I am laughing and in a good mood. I want to be a person that enjoys life, smiles most of the time, and laughs a lot. I believe that life is for living. I believe this life is the most important thing in the world God has given us, and we should live it and enjoy it as much as we can."

Consistent with Ernest, Raymond responded, "I agree that a smile has a lot of power in it. It melts the hearts and communicates to the children that they can succeed. I always tell my staff at every possible circumstance, offer a smile to your coworkers, to the parents, and to the children. A smile can make a big difference in a child's life, and it does not cost much but to acknowledge the person in front of you. Smile, smile, smile. Give your smile to the children. Make them feel loved, and they will respond in return. I also do a lot of listening as principal. I listen to my staff with their personal or professional problems. Sometimes I cannot solve anything, but only listen to them. I think that by listening, a big difference is made, and a better response is provided to the working environment. Also, I always recommend my staff to be happy in the work they

do. To me success is to be filled with pride in teaching the children. Being the smallest or biggest job at the school, I tell my staff to take pride in what they do. Life is short and we need to enjoy our work."

Criselda agreed, "As administrator, your job takes another approach. Your success is obtained as you ensure that all students succeed, and I mean everyone, all students. Sometimes we focus on maybe the top students and forget the middle, the average student or maybe the students in special populations like the special education or limited English proficient students. But no, we need to ensure that all of them succeed. I want all the students to be successful, to graduate and to be lifetime learners. Allow me to share a personal experience. I remember a teacher. She cared so much about students. Well this teacher knew how much talent I had, and tried her best to help me get scholarships. She knew that one day I was going to make a difference. She was the one who wanted me to become a high school teacher and a coach, but I told her, 'No, no, no. I want to make a lot of money, you know. I'm tired to be poor. I know teachers get paid well and coaches too, but I want to get paid more. I'm tire of being poor. I'm tired of struggling.' I didn't listen to her and went into a business career, but look where I am now. And now, I try to reflect that to the students by caring about them, guiding them, and giving them advice. For example when I was a teacher, my job had a lot of implication with the students, and it was up to me to instill in them the love of learning not just the subject taught. I motivated them to have 'the ganas" (willingness) to be the best and succeed. They really liked that. The relationship that we had, I will cherish it forever. As a teacher, I built some relationships with my students because I was with

them day in and day out, but now as administrator I want to ensure that all students succeed."

Sean commented, "In pursuing success, I look at our school as a special place where children love to learn and teachers love to teach. Here, we connect people to create community, connect the curriculum to achieve coherence, connect classrooms and resources to enrich the learning climate, and connect learning to life to build character."

"All your comments," I intervened, "are quite consistent with McLaughlin and Davidson (1994) who mentioned that a new political paradigm has emerged. "{It} is a post-materialist one, based on the image of healthy human growth. A successful society is one that places the physical, social, and spiritual health of the people above all else" (p. 28). By listening to your educational staff and students and communicating to them that success, pride, and joy are feasible tasks within the educational environment, you are enhancing not only cognitive skills, but a holistic educational development. Furthermore, you are also acknowledging their human worth in their job that either as an educator or student is being performed. Please share with us how do you empower stakeholders through your educational leadership?"

Frances intervened, "Well, I think that leadership has some obligation to help others grow. The fact that whatever talents or abilities we have comes again from the perspective of understanding that all that is good comes from God. Then it is my obligation to create opportunities for people to demonstrate that. Again it is founded in the belief that God has given us the capacity to become what we choose to be. How I feel that I can help others become leaders themselves? I led our leadership team through a book study on the book *The Road Less Traveled* by Scott Peck this past year. I was very

pleased to see the response. I had principals, a total of about sixty-five. All the campus principals and their assistants, department directors and leaders and everyone, and I used it primarily to make the point that we are all one. When our personal relationships are genuine, and when they are founded in respect for one another for the dignity of one another, then we will be more effective and more productive."

"I think our principal has gone a long way in empowering us," said Noemi. "If you go to each classroom door, you will find -it is about fifty teachers- you will probably find about fifty different lesson plans. Everyone gets his/her lesson plans differently. Everyone works his/her own plan. Every lesson plan is different. It is unique. It is YOU, and if the format is given to us, it will not fit our style of teaching. We make our own lesson plans according to the needs of our students. Our lesson plans look completely different, and yet we are team teaching. We talk to each other, our philosophies are the same, but we are very different. So our principal empowers that on us."

"Frances and Noemi's comments quite vividly have illustrated a strong point," I pinpointed. "Once again, spirituality is not a personal matter. Its own nature is not egotistic, but it reaches to others by stimulating the development and growth of their talents. Johnson's (2004) statement reinforced this concept, 'When people are conscious of their spirituality and live according to their spiritual beliefs, efficiency results are maximized in professional lives'" (p. 24). Empowering others contains such dynamism that the giver is also transformed into the receiver. It is not a static process. Spirituality in educational leadership has that effect. It empowers the person being served as well as the leader. Reinforcing this concept, Williams (2002) stated, "Spirituality adds a sense

of direction and an impetus for growth; a sense of involvement, purpose, and significance; a focus on what is important; long term enthusiastic motivation; and empowerment of people" (p. 25).

Larry's approach to empowering his students was slightly different. He illustrated with an experience by expressing, "The things that I love about teaching in whatever setting I have been in is that you learn more about yourself because teaching is a process. Well, you take somebody from where they are and you put them further along in life whether it is ethically, morally, spiritually, or academically. To me the most rewarding thing about education is that it challenges me to know about myself, to reflect about how I do my job, and I never approach it the same. The way I teach one student is not going to work for another student or for a group of students. I always have to change my methods. I really have to look at myself, and how I approach my students so I win them over. When I win their confidence, that's when they start growing. For me teaching isn't just giving them the facts, for me it is winning their hearts, earning their trust, and by doing this certain connection takes place. When I connect to the students, that is when I touch their lives and they touch me. It is never a one street way. I impact them, and they impact me, and it energizes me. It doesn't happen every day. It is not that I come in, and I just connect with the students automatically. Sometimes it is spontaneous, and sometimes it takes a long time. It is fun. It is hard work. It is exhausting, but at the end of the day, there is a sense of accomplishment."

I commented, "Larry has made a strong point. Leader and follower are energized in their mutual interaction. He emphasized that it is necessary to win the students' trust and confidence to connect with them and influence their academic growth. Winning

stakeholders' trust and confidence is the vehicle to mutual empowerment and bonding. According to Sergiovanni (1990), 'Leadership by bonding is the cornerstone of an effective long-term leadership strategy for schools because it has the power to help schools transcend competence for excellence by inspiring extraordinary commitment and performance' (p. 24)."

Karen also shared how she empowered her students. She declared, "I think one thing that ensures success is acceptance of the students as they are. Taking them from where they are requires not seeing that a child is deficient just because they are not where the other ones might be. Both my team teacher and I have a philosophy of taking the students from where they are when we get them. And being a kindergarten teacher, I am going to get children who had been in pre-school, head-start, no school, children who had been gifted at home, and had had a lot of opportunities to explore things. Some have been in pre-K. I might have one child who is already reading, and I may have another child who has no earthly idea of what a letter is. Being able to take them from where they are is essential to provide them with a strong foundation."

Moreover, Noemi declared, "When you come to my classroom, the very first thing you will see as you wait for us to enter is I shaking hands with every single student every morning. Every teacher of the school shakes hands in the morning with every child in their classroom. Now if you think about that, you will see only a handshake, but it is more than just a handshake because at that moment when you are doing the handshake, the child is making eye contact with you in the morning. You can tell instantly if the child has had any problems the moment they come in. I know what kind of morning they had. It is reflected in the way they shook my hand, looked at me and said, 'Good

morning, teacher,' or not. I know immediately. It is that moment in the morning when you notice the new outfit that they have on or the new shoes or when you notice if they are not looking at you when they greet you. Moreover, as you come into my room, you'll see children making lots of choices. We believe in empowering children here as much as it is possible that is good for the students, and we give them lots of choices. We do a lot of talking in my room. Talking is very important. It helps children learn. They feel good about taking the risk and answering because they know they will not be ridiculed. They will come to school and feel good about it. We have a program that we call Capturing Kids' Hearts. This is saying that if you don't have a child's heart, which is very true, they don't learn. Empowering children is capturing their hearts by being aware of their presence."

I added, "Empowering staff and students has exemplified how educational leaders' spirituality is lived in their daily routine. However, in trying to further understand how spirituality strengthens effectiveness as it relates to school and its performance is important. Spirituality brings life to the individual leaders and organizations by providing openness to communication and decision-making, teamwork, and community building. Block (1993) affirmed, "Authentic service is primarily a commitment to the larger community; and there is a balance and equitable distribution of power in which decision-making is shared by all" (p. 21).

"I think that most of the people in leadership positions do have a spiritual dimension that helps in leadership itself, mostly in making decisions," David affirmed. "The spiritual identity has to do from within from my relationship with God, and I think it shows its effect everyday on the decisions that I make in terms of ethics and leadership

and everything. I think the spiritual dimension has its place. I think an example will be always focusing on what we are about here and in the schools. Always focusing on children and keeping what is best for them is an essential element for decision-making. For example, let's say purchasing practices. I think having honesty and ethics in distributing money, millions of dollars for the last few years is essential. We have spent millions of dollars on construction, and I always make sure that the district gets the best dollar value for the taxpayer's money. I've always tried to be honest in evaluating money and purchases made in the middle of the year. Another example will be personnel issues. Sometimes one has to make tough decisions about bad employees, and I think when making those decisions, it helps to be spiritual. Probably the biggest challenge that I have found is personnel issues, especially if you have an employee that is accused of wrong doing or if you have an employee that maybe it is not doing a good job in the classroom. It is an employee whose way of treating the children is not the best. In those cases you have to focus very strongly on what is best for the children. It's making a balance. You have to be fair to the employee, but you have to focus on what is best for the children. I think that every time that there is a hard decision to make it always helps to be able to pray to get the answers. I think that it helps in giving you peace of mind in the decision that you make. It helps you to focus on doing what is best."

Roland intervened, "If a leader has to make a decision that is right or wrong or at least may be in conflict with what the person believes that is when faith manifests itself within a leadership role. When we look at ethics and values, doing what is the right thing then we do them regardless of where we are. If you believe and trust in God, you get to understand and make decisions based on that direction that you understand and believe."

Raymond shared, "Every day I pray to God and ask Him to guide me and to lead my work, hands, and voice in the decisions that will be taken on that day. Sometimes the more one talks, the more trouble one gets into. So I ask God to lead me into doing what is best for the children. I consider myself a winner, always a winner. Whatever is entrusted to me, I try to do it to the best of my abilities without counting the cost to be satisfied with myself and to respond to God's expectations."

Frances illustrated with an example, "I have had to non-renew an administrator's contract. I remember thinking about non-renewal for weeks. I have given a lot of opportunities to this individual, but did not respond, so I have to not-renew the contract. I remember that I prayed a lot about how to do it. I knew what I had to do, but I didn't know how to do it without hurting this individual. I prayed for intervention in helping me find the way, whether it was a matter of meeting with this person over and over again explaining what will be happening. I moved on in a matter of taking the time to speak to this person. I could say that it was small steps that were taken all along that I have to do it. I didn't hesitate. I knew where I was going. We spoke to one another in trying to find an alternative solution. I tried to tap those skills that needed improvement having slowly explained the situation. When I mentioned non-renewal, it was not a surprise anymore. This individual was ready for the outcome. I recognized this person's contribution to the district and treated the individual with dignity and respect."

Larry commented, "A challenge that we face as teachers is that we make hundreds of decisions a day. The beautiful thing about being a classroom teacher is that you get to know your students, and you do what is good for your children. But it is mountains and mountains of laws and paperwork. All the way, your life is regulated from 7:30 in the

morning till the time you leave. In a sense, part of the challenge is getting beyond that, and part of the challenge is getting to the heart of the issues in people's lives. For instance, there was the story of a Vietnam Pilot, and he was very successful. People wanted to know how would he decide how to go into one of the most Dangerous places for airplanes to go and survive. He was being interviewed, and he said, 'What I do is take off and as soon as I take off, I start turning things off.' I relate to the strategy because I used to work in the Air Force. Fire airplanes are just full of switches and gadgets, and pilots have about four or five people talking to them when missiles are being shot at them, lights go out, all things are turned off, and the pilot turns everything off even the back seat pilot. The guy on the back will turn and yell and scream at him, and he will turn it off. He will focus on his target and whatever target it is, he just focuses on that. As Texas teachers, we just have to do that. We have to just forget about all the stuff and focus in what is good for children and focus on what is right. Part of it is about knowing what to turn off and what not to turn off so we don't get shut down and lose focus. Teachers make hundreds of decisions a day, and just constantly knowing how not to be distracted by those decisions and knowing how to focus in what is to be important. That's probably the biggest challenge. So every day, every day, I turn to God for help to make the right decision."

I intervened, "I don't know if you have noticed it, but except for Frances a gender contribution has been made. Contrary to no distinction found on the theoretical understanding of spirituality, in practice, it has been mostly males talking about spirituality impacting their decision-making process. Most importantly, it has been communicated that by trusting in a Higher Power during decision-making, life is

communicated to the stakeholders. Another facet in bringing life to the school environment is teamwork and community building among the members in the organization. According to Baker and Richards (2004), 'An ecological system requires cooperation and team effort from all its members, in which decisions made by members change the decision maker as well as the other members of the organization' (p. 21).

Agreeing with this concept, Frances reinforced, "Well, whatever we receive that is good is for the sake of sharing with others who may not have as much. And if I have leadership ability, it becomes my responsibility to share that ability with others because I believe everyone has some level of leadership."

Criselda with her peculiar simplicity added, "You know, I see the more spiritual leaders are the more they keep communication open, concern for others, and treat people with dignity and respect. The spiritual leader is more a communicator, empathizes more. There is more like sharing. They would do everything from picking up trash or getting a mop in the cafeteria and answering the telephone. Other leaders that I don't see as spiritual won't dare getting to the chemical room. They won't answer the telephone and would say that they didn't get their Masters to do that or help the custodian. They are very, very different. As teachers, you see them very cold, unconcerned, and really mean."

Raymond affirmed, "I think the cause of success in a healthy organization resides more than anything else in the staff. If the staff is happy, they will commit and give all that it takes to make the school successful performing well even beyond expectations. Staff is the key to success in any business or institution. If employees learn to work as a team, their work is more enjoyable and the load becomes easier, they are more creative.

Teamwork needs to be tirelessly emphasized. When employees are happy, they commit themselves to work. Teamwork adds a new dimension to their job. It is like having an educational community within a larger community. Employees get to know, value, and appreciate each other's work. They care for each other, and most importantly, they care for the children. Children are first at all times. We need to work with them as they come. When we see that they are so deficient, our efforts as a team need to be strengthened in working together to bring their skills up. The same concept of teamwork is also employed outside my campus and within the district. When the superintendent asks for things from us, I try to work as a team with other principals to accomplish the expectations successfully. I am also part of a bigger team. What really helps to succeed in our endeavor is the network that as principals we have established with each other. We support and help each other in the district. We communicate and share our spirituality with each other. In some cases, we even ask for advice from others. We mutually see how we can solve the problems together and what will work better, but most of all we enjoy our work. Even though it is still stressful due to the many demands imposed on testing, paperwork, evaluations, and scores, sharing and supporting each other makes the burden easier to carry."

"I am driven to succeed, but also I am driven to make my students succeed, and I'll be in as much as I can to help children," replied Larry. "If it means a home visit, I will do it. I give it a hundred and ten percent. I am never satisfied because with this kind of work, you are never done. So I think that part of it is my work ethic. I work very hard. I know and I'm just passionately in love about my job, and I put myself forward in a positive life. I think that I do that with my students, my colleagues, and the parents in

my community. I think that all that has helped a lot with my experience. It is very

powerful for the students' success to be part of the community. Actually, getting to know

the context in which the students live and to see them in their own home environment

develops certain level of trust. If it is a positive visit, the student comes back to school

and says, 'Mr. V. went to my home, yesterday.' When the children hear, 'I know where

you live, and I'll be there,' they know that I mean it. It changes their trust level. When

you win the trust and the confidence of the children and the parents that is REALLY

powerful. I mean EXTREMELY powerful, and some parents have been amazed as to

what happens in the academic and social progress of their child."

I commented, "Undoubtedly, sharing, cooperation, and teamwork are essential

ingredients in a successful educational environment. Kofman and Senge (1993)

expressed,

> Shifting from a fragmented, competitive and reactive organization to one that
> is systemic, cooperative, creative, and alive requires a 'Galilean shift' toward
> building 'communities of commitment.' In this regard, commitment goes
> beyond personal loyalty to include a commitment to societal changes through
> one's organization" (p. 12).

Furthermore, Larry's emphasis on developing the trust of students and parents is a big

contribution in working together to reach a common goal. Spirituality helps in the

approach of shifting values from individualism to interdependence in such a manner that

vision is expanded to include the community at large. Consistent with this point of view,

Hoyle and Slater (2001) stated,

> If we are to redress the imbalances in our society caused by a growing
> individualism and mistrust, we must create schools that lay the foundations for
> community that give our children the experiences that will stimulate their
> desire to be connected to other human beings in a common enterprise" (p. 4).

"A crucial element of success is not to work alone, but in connection with the students, their families, and community," intervened Roderick. "We had tried to work very hard here since the beginning to make this facility a family. That to me is the essence of our success. Each person is looked as a member of your own family. That to me is spirituality. I insist spirituality for me is a way of life. You don't always see us in our office behind the desk. We go outside and help supervise, care, and spend time with our employees and children. They see us interact with them and this makes it possible to care for them. Student success is more than academics, it is looking for the subject —not objects- establishing eye contact with the individual child and making them feel that they are important in your life. All that matters is that when they are gone from your side, you have touched a life. That is the point. Their vulnerable lives are entrusted to us to empower them. To create that family atmosphere, it is imperative that we see each other as our family member. Sometimes, we tend to forget that as little as our students are, they are also people. In many occasions, the stress imposed by tests makes you see them as objects. And when they are treated like an object, they can tell right away. It makes all the difference when you treat them as people."

I added, "Roderick's point of view is worth exploring. Education is a spiritual experience per nature because it avoids dehumanizing people and treating them like objects. Carlson (1998) acknowledged this concept stating, 'Education is, in the fullest sense, a spiritual experience. It changes the way we experience our being in the world, it reconnects us to the cosmos, and it transforms us in ways that affect our everyday relations with others' (p. 197)."

Jane affirmed, "We make a difference in students' life when we recognize them as persons. I make the best of it and enjoy them as a family. Family is a group you love and feel close to. You look for the well being of each other. We are a family made up of many parts, just like the body. Most of the time everybody does his/her share, but there are some times when we have to pull towards one side and assist one person. There are other occasions when my load is too big and I need the help of other people. We help each other as a caring family, and you see that in the employees. They don't see their work as a burden, but enjoy doing what they do. I love children, and I want all my staff to bring hope to the people they work. I feel very close to them, and we have worked well together. If they like it they stay, and that makes a big difference. I don't have much of a turnover of employees. Most of the ones I have employed have stayed here for several years. This is an opportunity to love our children, and it doesn't matter what our position is. If we are the administrator, supervisor, teacher, secretary, janitor, nurse, or cafeteria worker, nobody is more important than the other. All of us are here to assist each other, and if one of us is hurting in some way, all the others are there to help and support them. It doesn't mean that we don't have to do our own work first, but also we don't stop there."

I interrupted, "That reminds me of a biblical passage, 1 Corinthians 12:12 'The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts and though all its parts are many, they form one body' or in Durkheim (1947) words, '{We} shall recognize only two kinds of positive solidarity: the first binds the individual directly to society without any intermediary. In the second, he depends upon society, because he depends upon the parts of which it is composed' (p. 3). Moreover, it can be comprehended that teamwork is

open, energetic, self–regulatory, sustainable, differentiated, integrated, and flexible. (Morgan 1997; Baker & Rubens 2004; & Malhotra 1999). It also produces cost-effective outcomes by adding stability of personnel and consistency of programs where individual employees are encouraged to co-create learning opportunities for each other. In other words, teamwork brings life to the educational community in its dynamism, creativity, and willingness to assist, support, and empower each member of the group. These characteristics have been demonstrated to be successful in community building or rather in the creation of learning communities by bringing life to the educational system."

Noemi shared. "I would like to tell you that the environment in my room is also like a family. Our school is like a family, but we also have a sense of community. We are like a community within the community. We work very hard to keep it like that. A sense of community is very big with the adults surrounding each other. Our principal firmly believes and has worked very hard here to build it within the whole school. When a child is at home, he feels very safe and secure. We are looking for that same feeling of safety and security at school. When they come into my classroom, they experience a sense of community and that makes them feel safe and secure. And then from there, we build with the parents. If we are going to build this sense of community within our school, it is very important to make this sense of connection between the school and home."

Furthermore the concept of learning community as a whole is broadened as businesses and other school districts share in partnership to achieve a common goal: students' success. This concept is exemplified in David's district.

David shared. "When I started my professional career, I had the opportunity to have a great mentor and being able to be helped in developing my abilities made a big difference. I am working to make this same concept come to life in our district for all the students. Creating a learning community has a lot to do with communication and relationships. I think that it requires developing a tie and bond both inside the district and outside the district. We work well with the city. We are very united as a team with the city. We also work as a team with our neighboring school district. We have a very close connection with the community college, and not as closely, but we also have a working relationship with our local university. We work in the same line with the city's Economic Development Corporation, and we are working with a lot of businesses. Starting last summer, we got groups of teachers working in the business world. We initiated the project last summer, and this summer another district got in it with us. We are sending teachers to work in hospitals, lawyers' offices, and places like that. The idea is for teachers to get an understanding of what our students are going to be expected to know when they graduate out there in the real world. It helps them know what they should do as teachers at the high school level to get students ready for the higher walks of life. So we have an initiative with businesses. We pay half a teachers' salary, and the businesses pay the other half for a period of five weeks. And they work in anything that is expected from students to know, hospitals, lawyers offices, industrial settings, factories, border patrol, you name it, architecture, construction companies, etc. In this matter, it is helping us create a tie between the school districts and the business communities so when our teachers do that kind of work, they look for ways to connect and tie their coursework in academics. They have found out that writing the curriculum

from that point on is more meaningful to them. The idea of getting the teachers connected to the business world is going on very good. This in turn helps to make ties for our students. My goal eventually, I don't know if I will find the funds to do so, but my goal actually is to have leadership teams, apprenticeships of teachers and students actually working the summers out in the businesses. And based on whatever the results are, we will continue building from there. We want to start connecting the students in acquiring a good understanding of the true expectations on the real world, and also to have a better idea of the next step in their educational career."

I commented, "Undoubtedly, David's concept is powerful and visionary, and it is vividly supported by Malone and Fry's (2002) statements, 'The employees of learning organizations are empowered with committed leaders at the strategic, empowered team, and personal levels that constantly strive to listen, experiment, improve, innovate, and create new leaders' (p. 7). This concept is even further explained by Kofman and Senge (1993) who declared, "These learning communities are ecological in nature because they bring new life to the system and are continuously evolving and adapting to a changing and interdependent environment'" (p. 4). Furthermore, listening to David made me realize that globalization does not exist only within nations, but it can be acquired within districts. The unification of forces in creating apprenticeship opportunities for teachers and students is certainly the road less traveled, but the most successful enterprise ever taken. Small steps might be taken to build unity within the educational community and the community at large, but in general they are bringing unity and life to the educational system."

Scene VI. Summary

In summary, spirituality in educational leadership is understood as follows. First, the study's results showed that by living a genuine spiritual relationship with a Higher Power, a strong belief and value system is sustained and nurtured. This belief and value system has assisted educational leaders in keeping a focused and humbled perspective of their leadership positions demonstrated in their integral and ethical performance as diverse issues and dilemmas are presented.

Secondly, as individuals have cultivated and developed their connectivity with a Higher Power, they have been provided with peace, strength, knowledge and vision to carry on different tasks and handle the pressures encountered on the job in the daily operations of their educational leadership role.

In a third instance, this spiritual relationship with a Higher Power enhanced quality interpersonal relationships where the educational leader treated each person with dignity and respect. Empowerment was supported by listening to students, educational staff, and parents; capturing or winning students' hearts and trust; and providing opportunities to develop students and staff's God's given talents. From a critical race theory point of view, it can be implied that spirituality is a process of empowerment, a journey away from oppression allowing the educational leader to treat fellow co-workers, parents, and students with equity, dignity, and respect and have the freedom to be the best person or leader they can become.

Moreover, a fourth result was obtained on the dynamic interaction that has brought life to their educational systems by creating an ecological relationship where decision-making, teamwork, and learning communities were created. The study showed

that mostly males talked about spirituality impacting their trust in a Higher Power as decision-making was discussed. Teamwork was reported as the key ingredient in the educational leaders' success. There were many parts, but all formed one body. In regards to the learning community concept, it was demonstrated that developing, nurturing, and strengthening an individual's spirituality was not considered a personal task, but it involved the whole community within and outside the district. Creating partnerships with different businesses and inviting other school districts to participate in a common endeavor created a learning community that has brought life to the educational environment.

Based on conclusions obtained from the information gathered through the interviews with successful educational leaders, the next chapter will explain the implications that spirituality has for school organizations. It also provides a new view to educational leadership by integrating spiritual, intrapersonal, and interpersonal relationships to create an ecological approach that brings life to the educational system.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This qualitative study explored the ontological and epistemological phenomena of spirituality in successful educational leaders. The study responded to three research questions that guided its inquiry: What is the spiritual dimension in educational leadership? What is the spiritual dimension in successful educational leaders? How do successful educational leaders use spirituality to strengthen their effectiveness as it relates to school and its performance? Furthermore, this research sought to add new insights to the body of knowledge by exploring the spiritual experiences of successful educational leaders and their values that emanate from an authentic spiritual encounter with a Higher Power.

The methodology selected in this research is qualitative and the framework for data collection is grounded theory. Participants for this study were selected in two ways. First, educational leaders who through their outstanding contribution to the educational field were recognized by Region One Education Service Center as superintendent, principal, assistant principal, and teacher of the year between the years 2001-2003 were invited to participate. Secondly, a snowball effect was used to find other participants recommended by the previously mentioned educational leaders. In all, sixteen individual

interviews were conducted. Additionally, two focus group discussion sessions were held to field-test the interview questions and refining, modifying, and reframing the original set of questions as needed. Consistent with the interpretivist epistemology, the researcher was the primary instrument for data collection of documents, observations, interviews, and transcribed recordings. Data presentation and analysis were reported in two ways, a traditional qualitative approach and a counter-story narrative approach. Both approaches addressed the three research questions. The following section summarizes the major findings from the study.

Major Findings

When educational leadership is lived with a spiritual dimension, it gives a new perspective to the manner in which visions are created, stakeholders are acknowledged and empowered, and learning communities are built. It is at this point that learning communities become something more than educating for a living. They become more authentic as they educate for life. Stakeholders benefit and echo the message given in the story of the *Velveteen Rabbit, "*Once you are REAL you can't become unreal again. It lasts for always" (Williams, 1976, p. 18). In being REAL, educational leaders become the change agents in the construction of a better educational system. The following major findings from this research help in understanding how this change is brought about in their educational environment.

First, a spiritual relationship with a Higher Power was significant in creating, developing, and reinforcing the belief and value system of the educational leaders in this study. For instance, it was found that by nurturing a spiritual relationship, educational

leaders focused and lived their positions with a humble perspective, which in turn maximized effectiveness on the job. They acknowledged co-workers, students, parents, and community members with dignity and respect. Consistent with this thought, Johnson (2004) recognized, "When people are conscious of their spirituality and live according to their spiritual beliefs, efficiency results are maximized in professional life" (p. 24).

In support of this position, Roland declared, "If you look at who are those that have the strongest faith, then it will be those who have the strongest values founded on those teachings. You will see people that have a very strong faith, holding very strong beliefs." Additionally, Isaac expressed, "It keeps me focused and in a humbled perspective in my position as leader," whereas Sean retorted, "My spirituality is the foundation for my values about human beings. I think that as a human being, it is my spiritual responsibility to value individuals and to treat each one with dignity and respect."

Secondly, a spiritual dimension alerted participants to consciousness and reflexivity in order to find meaning and purpose in their lives as educational leaders. Compartmentalizing spirituality and leaving it outside the door becomes absurd. Spirituality is part of who individuals are. It is carried within them wherever they go, and it is manifested in whatever they do and in their relationship with others. A genuine and profound spirituality not only created a vision, but also empowered and energized educational leaders. Schmieder and Cairns (1996) reported that successful educational leaders needed to: "Have a vision, make a significant difference, evaluate staff, understand change, have self-awareness, be facilitators, possess self-confidence, assess job responsibilities, encourage involvement, know ethical limits" (p. 3). On the other

hand, Adair (1992) stated, "The Spirit is the source of creativity and vision" (p. 32).

Through the acknowledgement of their life stories, interviewees revealed that a spiritual

relationship with a Higher Power provided them with knowledge, strength, and inner

peace amidst the turmoil and stress pertinent to an educational leadership role. Their

spiritual relationship with a Higher Power was considered their source of creativity and

vision. It was reported by participants that they turned to a Higher Power for guidance

and knowledge under distinct circumstances and positions held.

Ruben expressed, "I believe in God assisting my accomplishments in whatever I

aim on this life. In my belief, you don't get this knowledge by yourself; you get it

from a Higher Person. You turn to the Source of Knowledge out there that I

believe is right next to me, guiding me in what I have to say or do." Ralph

declared, "I turn to God as my source of inspiration and guidance." Roderick

mentioned, "It (spirituality) is something that I believe it's been a strong response

of my behaviors, my values, my hopes, and the type of person I am. It also

impacts how I relate to others, and how I behave, myself, in a leadership position

or out of it.

Third, by incorporating a spiritual relationship into their work, connectivity within

and among individual educational leaders was created rather than fragmentation of life.

This approach produced freedom to become change agents, offsetting divisibility,

individualism, isolation, and limitations. On the contrary, by empowering each other,

animosities, competitiveness, individualism, and resistance to change were dissipated.

McCreery (1994) expressed, 'Spirituality strives to improve and change both itself and

the world around it" (p. 94) and Seicol (1997) declared, "Spiritual wellness is the search

to create a personal sense of life's meaning, value and purpose in relationship to the process of spiritual connectedness with family, community, society, and the world" (p. 4). Bonding with others was strengthened through empowerment of each of the members of the organization energizing leaders and followers in their mutual interaction. Acknowledgement of each other resulted in trust, commitment, and high quality education. Students, co-workers, and community members experienced a sense of belonging to the school leading them to develop their skills and God given talents to the best of their abilities. Such empowerment created a bond among members leading them to work cooperatively with each other.

> Noemi supported this concept by articulating, "I think our principal has gone a long way in empowering us. We believe in empowering children here as much as it is possible. Empowering children is capturing their hearts by being aware of their presence." Larry concurred, "You take somebody from where they are and you put them further along in life whether it is ethically, morally, spiritually, or academically."

Fourth, by experiencing a spiritual relationship in the workplace, the educational environment became alive. Living organizations were not about things, but about relationships, teamwork, and community. The research found that participants were open, dynamic, and creative risk-takers who emphasized teamwork in their workplace. Carlson (1998) acknowledged, "Education is, in the fullest sense, a spiritual experience. It changes the way we experience our being in the world, it reconnects us to the cosmos, and it transforms us in ways that affect our everyday relations with others" (p. 197).

Different participants mentioned several times that teamwork caused the effect of unity among them. Supporting this finding Baker and Richards (2004) declared, "The ecological system requires cooperation and team effort from all its members" (p. 20).

> Raymond expressed, "Teamwork adds a new dimension to their job. It is like having an educational community within a larger community. Employees get to know, value, and appreciate each other's work." Jane reported, "I don't have much of a turnover of employees. They don't see their work as a burden, but enjoy doing what they do. All of us are here to assist each other. It doesn't mean that we don't have to do our own work first, but also we don't stop there." In regards to establishing strong relationships, David commented, "Creating a learning community has a lot to do with communication and relationships," Frances declared, "Being spiritual to one another will make us better co-workers. Certainly more compassionate, more considerate, and more importantly more respectful of one another."

Fifth, by working together in achieving a common goal, employees saw each other as family members of the educational learning community. This finding was consistent with Sergiovanni's statement (1990), "Leadership by bonding is the cornerstone of an effective long-term leadership strategy for schools because it has the power to help schools transcend competence for excellence by inspiring extraordinary commitment and performance" (p. 23). Along this line, Kofman and Senge (1993) stated, "Commitment goes beyond personal loyalty to include a commitment to societal changes through one's organization creating learning communities that are ecological in nature because they bring new life to the system and are continuously evolving" (p. 12).

Noemi reported, "I would like to tell you that the environment in my room is like a family." Likewise, Ron added, "We had tried to work very hard here since the beginning to make this facility a family. That to me is the essence of our success. Each person is looked at as a member of your own family." Jane affirmed, "We make a difference in students' life when we recognize them as persons. I make the best of it and enjoy them as a family. We help each other as a caring family, and you see that in the employees."

Sixth, another finding indicated that educational leaders' ethical, political, and economic points of view were enhanced to include a communal and global perspective. Along this line, Block (1993) expressed, "Authentic service is primarily a commitment to the larger community" (p. 21). Educational leaders' clear vision and defined mission of their role in their leadership position was projected in their ethical actions. Spirituality nourished their work, and their work nurtured their spirituality. Their work was seen as a means to authenticate and strengthen their spirituality.

Consistent with this thought, David affirmed, "The spiritual identity has to do from within from my relationship with God, and I think it shows its effect everyday on the decisions that I make in terms of ethics and leadership and everything." Similarly, Roderick expressed, "When we look at ethics and values and doing what is the right thing, then we do them regardless of where we are. If you believe and trust in God, you get to understand and make decisions based on that direction that you understand and believe."

Under a spiritual outlook to economics, funds employed for the well being of the community were used as indicated by restructuring ineffective economic practices and

providing equal opportunity and justice to all. Moreover, by sharing individual talents, the organization becomes more productive. Hubbard (1992) explained, "By sharing our relationships, talents, skills and knowledge, we can enhance our individual and collective potential and have a greater economic impact on the businesses and communities we serve" (p. 7).

David expressed, "I think having honesty and ethics in distributing money is essential. I think when making those decisions, it helps to be spiritual." Frances affirmed, "Well, I think that leadership has some obligation to help others grow. The fact that whatever talents or abilities we have comes again from the perspective of understanding that all that is good comes from God."

Furthermore, spirituality in politics was pertinent to the use of educational leaders' shared power to change educational structures. Dantley (2003) stated, "Transformative leaders are called to propose ways to resist the strictures of undemocratic practices in educational organizations and to bring new and inherently different voices to the educational leadership discourse" (p. 15). Power is shared. It is not focused on control of coworkers, attaining positions, or holding prestige, but on stewardship, empowerment, and love. In living with genuine spirituality, educational leaders used their power to reach other people, i.e. "To proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed" (Is. 61:1). Educational leaders' power enhanced their relationships with a Higher Power, with themselves and with their stakeholders. Through a spiritual perspective to their power, they transformed their educational environments into learning communities that were

creative, dynamic, integral, resourceful, self-confident, committed, empowering, efficient, and productive.

Sean affirmed, "To me spirituality is very specific and of great importance. Nearly all of the principals who are great leaders do emphasize the value and dignity of each human being, and they are leaders who nurture teachers as opposed to leaders that boss teachers." Frances reinforced, "Well, whatever we receive that is good is for the sake of sharing with others who may not have as much. And if I have leadership ability, it becomes my responsibility to share that ability with others."

Conclusions

Spirituality created a new operational system for educational leaders. By presenting a new outlook to administrative leadership, educational leaders' effectiveness resided not in an urge to succeed for the sake of succeeding or for selfish reasons, but to develop God's given talents and fulfill their mission. Based on the major findings emerging from these analyses, the following four conclusions seem warranted: accountability and compliance, curriculum and instruction, planning and decision-making, and community involvement. Each of these is discussed.

Accountability and Compliance. A spiritual perspective produced a strong effect on accountability and compliance due to educational leaders' focus on their leadership position. Their role emphasized service, care, concern, empowerment, and connectivity of stakeholders. Through their unconditional service and long hours of dedication and commitment, students' success was emphasized.

For instance, it was stressed, "I consider myself a winner, always a winner. Whatever is entrusted to me, I try to do it to the best of my abilities without counting the cost to be satisfied with myself and to respond to God's expectations" and "If the staff is happy, they will commit and give all that it takes to make the school successful performing well even beyond expectations."

Even though this research did not capture any relationship between the spirituality of educational leaders and students' test performance or accountability, the fact that students were not seen as objects or instruments of high stakes testing, strengthened students' love for learning and students' holistic educational development. Gutierrez-Zamano and Yasuno (2002) expressed, "Required scores for campus accountability ratings drive the educational system without regard to the needs of students in the formulation of skills and resources critical to perpetuating a connected, caring, and loving society of people" (p. 4). Contrary to this concern, spirituality in educational leadership produced the desired effects as stated by interviewees.

For example, "My goal is to create a school system that will meet the individual needs of each student and to give them the opportunity to use their God given talent and intelligence," "Our biggest effort is the education of children, so they leave the school with the best education they can," and "I think it is our job to keep that hope alive, to make them want to come to school, to feel excited about learning."

Curriculum and Instruction. The spiritual dimension in educational leadership has shed some light onto instructional leadership approaches by informing that education is not teaching only about facts, but about the value of individuals. Curriculum is aligned

to courses, programs, and activities that actively engage students in learning by providing

opportunities that make their educational experience meaningful and connect learning to

work and life applications.

For instance, Dan reported that when teachers created a bond between school and

the business community, "They found out that writing the curriculum from that

point on is more meaningful to them. Based on that, we are going to build the

counseling program to assist on that." In regards to instructional leadership,

Roderick expressed this idea quite beautifully. He commented,

> Student success is more than academics, it is looking for the subject –not
> objects- establishing eye contact with the individual child and making them
> feel that they are important in your life. All that matters is that when they are
> gone from your side, you have touched a life. That is the point.

By acknowledging each person with their own story, personal growth is

reciprocally attained as expressed by Larry, "When I connect to the students, that

is when I touch their lives and they touch me. I impact them, and they impact me,

and it energizes me." Instruction is student centered allowing students a sense of

belonging without the fear of being ridiculed, as stated by Noemi, "We do a lot of

talking in my room. It helps children learn. They feel good about taking the risk

and answering because they know they will not be ridiculed."

I opened this study with the story of the boy on death row. In reference to his

educational experience and instructional practices, character education was not sufficient

to allow him to internalize social skills. Facts about life, even though they are social

facts, do not suffice. It is acknowledging one's personal story and that of others as well

as living with a spirit of teamwork and connectivity that teaches individuals how to

internalize social skills and obtain meaning in life.

Planning and Decision-Making. When these two areas of educational leadership were addressed, it was shown that planning and decision-making took place by adding a spiritual dimension to it. Planning was a process, especially under problematic circumstances. These leaders did not quickly arrive at a decision, but carefully planned it. It was observed that reflection, prayer, and needed guidance were underway as decisions were made.

> Frances expressed, "I knew what I had to do, but I didn't know how to do it without hurting this individual. I prayed for intervention in helping me find the way." Likewise, Sylvia added, "My spirituality shows its effects in finding strength and direction in no matter what obstacle I've come across. It has led me to make the right choices."

Furthermore, in their decision-making process, educational leaders were more open to communication and other points of view. Their position was perceived as a means to facilitate growth and empower other members of the educational community and not necessarily as maintaining the status quo. Power was shared to enhance creativity and effectiveness. As administrators facilitated the development of stakeholders' God given talents, decisions were planned and made as leaders rather than managers.

> Illustrating this point, Sean added, "A leader has a vision. He sees how he wants his or her organization or institution to grow or change or develop, and then he leads the people who work with him, for him, and beside him to make that change occur. The leader probably will change the status quo." Moreover, Ralph stated, "We support and help each other in the district. We communicate and share our

spirituality with each other. We even ask for advice from others. We mutually see how we can solve the problems together and what will work better."

Community Involvement. The study found that a strong sense of connectivity, bonding, teamwork, and community involvement were experienced by the interviewed participants. Even though there are many parts that make up the educational environment, there is still only one body. Empowering and acknowledging each individual nourished a healthy body. The creation of a learning community where all stakeholders' interests were acknowledged and power was shared was extremely powerful in giving meaning not only to the individual educational leader, but to the whole organization. For instance, Raymond mentioned,

> "When employees are happy, they commit themselves to work. Teamwork adds a new dimension to their job. It is like having an educational community within a larger community. Employees get to know, value, and appreciate each other's work. They care for each other, and most importantly, they care for the children."

In reference to the student who was on death row, living in a community environment might have contributed to recognizing and acknowledging of his/her individual holistic needs and developing in him/her a sense of belonging thus avoiding isolation and individualism. Through the creation of a school culture that reinforces community building, it is no longer each part working in isolation, but rather united parts into the whole.

A Proposed Conceptual Framework for a New View of Leadership

In living a spiritual dimension in educational leadership, individuals do not settle for letting people and structures be what they are, but create a vision for what they can become. By being aware of their spirituality, acknowledging their own stories, listening

and empowering each other, and working as a team, stakeholders will grow as a community that experiences a sense of belonging, commitment, and effectiveness.

The information from this research has resulted in a conceptual framework to aid in the understanding of the spiritual dimension in educational leadership. Borrowing Gardner's (1999) terminology of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and spiritual intelligences, the framework synthesized here proposes these same three concepts but related to relationships. In the endeavor of creating a relationship of interconnectedness among the elements, a fourth variable is added: ecological. This framework views educational leaders in a constant and dynamic interconnectivity with a Higher Power enhancing the quality of intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships. This quality of interactions produces an atom-shaped figure (See figure 1) symbolizing energy, thus bringing new life to the system and organization through an ecological perspective. If one of the four elements of this interaction is enhanced, the other three are affected, and conversely, if one element is missing, no eminent energy or life is produced on the other three. The strength and quality of the relationship with one part, i.e. spirituality, determines the strength and quality of interaction with the other elements. This ecological model is illustrated as follows:
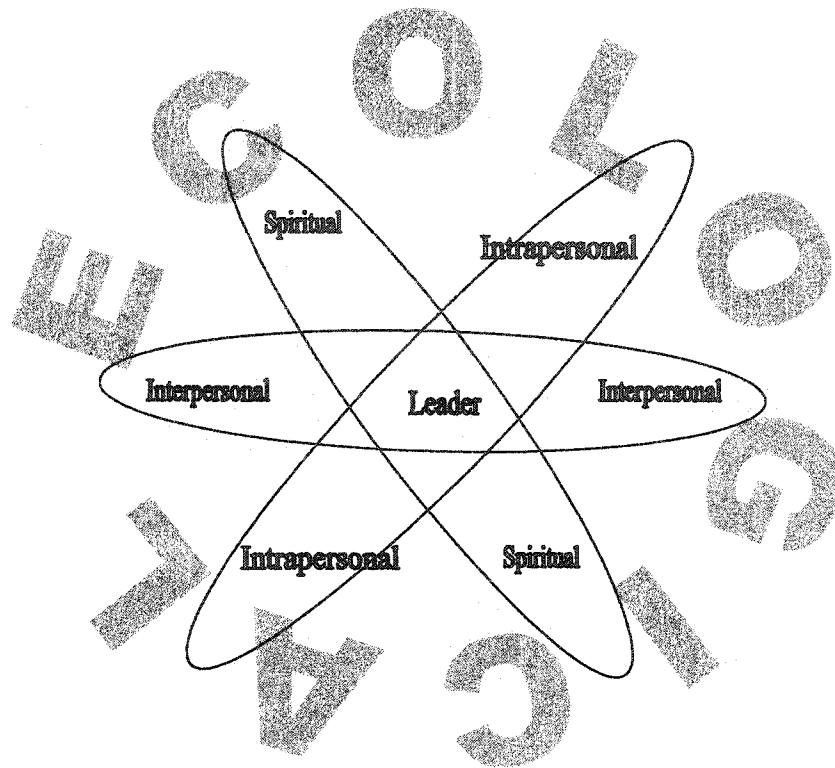
Figure 1. An Ecological Framework Model

This interconnecting approach of spiritual, intrapersonal, interpersonal, and ecological relationships creates an educational system that reinforces lifelong learning experiences for all stakeholders. By getting the Higher Power out of the box and allowing spirituality to flourish in the workplace, a new paradigm emerges for educational leadership. First of all, by validating one's own personal life story, educational leaders discover their personal and professional self-identity. Once they are aware of and acknowledge their own story, a new vision of their mission and the development of their own educational leadership role is achieved. Effective results are maximized because all energy is channeled in pursuit of that vision. It is at this point that an educational leader incorporates different developmental aspects of their life into one

unit without creating a discrepancy or fragmentation of life, but an extension of their personal mission into the professional world.

Secondly, effective leadership deals mostly with communication and relationships, therefore, by acknowledging spirituality in the workplace, intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships are strengthened to the point of creating healthy organizations where educational leaders value and empower each member, not only for their doing but also for their being. This concept creates an effective educational environment where teaching and learning are enjoyed and sought by leaders and followers alike, thus producing a co-learning environment for all stakeholders. In this co-learning environment, personal experiences are shared, bonding is reinforced, teamwork is enhanced, new apprenticeship opportunities are sought, mentorship is procured, and successful experiences for students, co-workers, parents, and community are obtained. Elaborating on this concept, it can be found that as life stories are shared, each individual is not seen anymore as an object, but he/she is acknowledged and valued as a unique subject. As individuals are known in their weaknesses, strengths, struggles, and successes, solidarity and empathy are produced creating a bonding among individuals. This bonding reinforces a sense of trust and belonging in a common enterprise leading individuals to freely express themselves and explore new horizons without any fear to be ridiculed or belittled. As stakeholders value each other, their work is also individually and collectively appreciated. Teamwork at this point is not an imposed task, but a natural need to enhance creativity, unity, and commitment. In working together to produce new ways to enhance co-learning experiences, apprenticeship opportunities are developed where leaders and followers teach and learn from each other by their mutual interaction.

Once again, this mutual interaction strengthens bonding among individuals procuring a mentorship relationship where performing tasks collaboratively is not only sought, but also the professional quality of life is enhanced. Through all this process, life itself is brought into the educational environment, producing lifelong learning relationships, and improving the educational leaders' role.

Suggestions for Further Study

After a close analysis of this exploratory study more questions or concerns related to spirituality in educational leadership were created. Therefore, the following three areas of research for further study are recommended:

This particular study explored spirituality experienced by different leaders in their educational leadership role. Some key points were emphasized in the participants' interviews such as enhancing decision-making, teamwork, and community building. One area that will require further study is to investigate a particular district or campus in an effort to understand the relationship between educational leaders' spirituality and the bonding, commitment, performance, and effectiveness among its members.

A salient theme in the participants' interviews was to acknowledge each individual as created in the image of God. Consequently, another area of research could include an analysis of the acknowledgment of one's own life story approach to building social skills, belonging, bonding, and lifelong learning compared to other approaches such as character education.

Strength, inner peace, and knowledge were reported as a gain by turning to a Higher Power. Further research in this area will also include an exploratory investigation

of other different strategies leaders use to discover and strengthen their personal and professional mission. Once these are obtained, a comparison study of their effectiveness could be evaluated and contrasted with the spiritual motivation to succeed.

While the research focused on the successful educational leaders, another study might begin with locating successful schools and/or districts and determining what, if any, role spirituality plays in the success of the organization.

An ecological framework model is suggested as a way to enhance organizational and relational effectiveness in the educational leader's role. By interconnecting spirituality, intrapersonal, interpersonal, and ecological relationships, a new operational system is produced, learning community bonds are tighten, and performance results are optimized. Another area of research will be to study the strength and effectiveness of this model for individuals and organizations.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

FIRST FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW GUIDELINES

1. How do you define spirituality?

2. Is there any difference between successful educational leadership and successful spiritual educational leadership?

3. How do you define successful educational leadership?

4. How do you define successful spiritual educational leadership?

5. How is it manifested in person's daily life?

6. Is there any connection between your personal relationship with God, your relationship with others and your working environment?

7. Should spirituality development be taught or practiced in our schools? Why or why not?

8. Are there any specific circumstances that as a leader, you turn to God?

9. What would happen if it does or does not?

10. Is there something else that you would like to tell me that I did not asked?

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW GUIDELINES: FIRST SET

1. Tell me a about your growing up years and your family.

2. Who were the individuals in your life that significantly influenced you in your education, career? How?

3. What do you consider are the qualities of successful educational leadership?

4. How would you describe your success as educational leader?

5. Do you attribute your success to anything in particular? What causes your success?

6. Are there any specific circumstances that as an educational leader have caused you to turn to God/Higher Power?

7. Do you see any relationship between your success as educational leader and your spirituality?

8. Do you see any difference between successful educational leadership and successful spiritual educational leadership?

9. In your practical experience as (teacher, principal, superintendent) do you see a need to provide spiritual development opportunities for students in your school settings?

10. Is there anything else that you would like to share?

THIRD SET OF INTERVIEW GUIDELINES

1. I'm interested in learning about your identity formation at the personal, relational, and professional level. Please walk me through your formative and educational experiences from the earliest you can remember...both formal and informal experiences.

2. My dissertation topic explores the spiritual dimension of educational leadership. Please share with me your spiritual formation (stories, experiences, or visions), and how this has impacted your relationship with God, yourself, your family, and coworkers.

3. What is the role of spirituality in creating healthy systems, organizations, and schools. What does it look in your life?

APPENDIX B

LETTER TO REQUEST APPROVAL FOR INTERVIEW

Rosalina Ruiz
7209 North 28th Street
McAllen, TX 78504
(956) 289-5565
e-mail: rruiz15@panam.edu

May 6, 2004

Dear Ms._____:

I am Rosalina Ruiz, a doctoral student of the Department of Educational Leadership at The University of Texas-Pan American, who is presently conducting a study on the spiritual dimension on educational leadership. The purpose of the study is to learn if successful educational leaders apply a spiritual dimension in their leadership decisions and daily activities as teachers, principals, and/or superintendents. Your name was selected as being nominated by Region One as "Teacher of the Year, Principal of the Year, or Superintendent of the Year" between the years 2001-2003. This dissertation has been approved by the Human Subjects Research Committee and the Department of Doctoral Educational Leadership at The University of Texas-Pan American.

I am asking for your permission to participate in a one-hour interview session. The session will be tape-recorded. At your convenience, I would like to discuss your point of view on leadership and your reflections on the development of a successful leader.

A pseudonym to protect your identity will be used, and rest assured that all information shared will be used only for the purpose of this study. Your identity will remain confidential. Tapes will be transcribed and kept on the Office of Doctoral Educational Leadership in a locked file cabinet, and will be destroyed after a year. Only my dissertation committee chair and myself will have access to the tape and solely for educational and training purposes. I do not anticipate any risks of harm associated with your participation in this study.

Your participation in this study will be greatly appreciated. I will be contacting you by phone within a week to answer any questions and schedule a convenient interview time for you. Feel free to contact me by phone at (956) 289-5565 or by e-mail at: rruiz15@panam.edu.

Sincerely,

Rosalina Ruiz

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Spiritual Dimension in Educational Leadership

The University of Texas-Pan American

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I, _____, have been asked to participate in research being conducted by Rosalina Ruiz. I am one of approximately 20 participants among university faculty, superintendents, principals, and teachers who have been asked to volunteer on an hour interview for this research on "Spiritual Dimension in Educational Leadership". This proposed research project is reared to investigate the spirituality of educational leaders as a source of strength, integrity, and commitment among many other qualities. As a participant in individual and/or focus groups interviews, I will be instructed to answer openly and honestly questions about my perceptions of spirituality in educational leadership. Sample questions will be "How do you define spirituality? How do you define success in educational leadership?"

I understand that the health risks associated with my participation in this research investigation are non-existent, and there are no direct benefits to participants. However, I may benefit indirectly from a better understanding of spirituality in education leadership.

This research has been reviewed and approved by The University of Texas-Pan American Institutional Review Board-Human Subjects in Research Committee and by the equivalent body at the district level. For research-related problems or questions regarding subject's rights, the Human Subject's Committee may be contacted through Dr. Mark Granberry, Chair, at (956) 272-7309. Additionally, you may contact the Educational Leadership Doctoral Program at (956)316-7176, or Rosalina Ruiz at (956) 380-0365 ext. 1505. Data will be kept at the College of Educational Leadership Doctoral Program Office (COE Portable A-Room 9), and only the researcher and committee chair will have access to this data.

I have read and understand the explanations provided to me and voluntarily agree to participate in this study. If at any point during the research I would like to withdraw from this study I may do so.

Signature of Participant _____ Date _____

Signature of Witness _____ Date _____

VIDEO/AUDIO TAPE RELEASE FORM

I voluntarily agree to be video- and audio-taped during the research being conducted by Rosalina Ruiz. I understand that the videotapes and audiotapes will be used for research purposes only and only Rosalina Ruiz will have access to them. These video and audio-tapes will be identified by date and subject numbers. The videos and audio-tapes will be kept for three years and will be stored in a locked file at the researcher's residence. After data is collected the videos and audiotapes will be erased.

_____   _____
Signature of Participant   Date

_____   _____
Signature of Researcher   Date

REFUSAL TO BE VIDEO/AUDIOTAPED

I do not agree to be video or audio-taped during this research conducted by Rosalina Ruiz. By refusing to be video or audio-taped, I understand that I may not continue to participate in this study.

_____   _____
Signature of Participant   Date

_____   _____
Signature of Researcher   Date

APPENDIX D

SAMPLES OF MEMBER CHECKING E-MAILS

From: Participant
Sent: Thursday, September 16, 2004 7:46 PM
To: Rosalina.Ruiz@tyc.state.tx.us
Subject: RE: Interview on Spiritual Dimensio in Educational Leadership
Dissertation

Hi Rosalina. I read with interest my part of your dissertation. It was
interesting to "hear" my own words again. There is nothing that is
important for you to change; however, I did find a few little things to make
it read more smoothly. In the 3rd paragraph, it reads "My blood pressure
will be always up should it have not been..." I doubt that I worded it as
such, but if so...you have permission to correct it! Ha ("My blood
pressure would alwys be up if it were not for my faith."
Also, in the 6th paragraph, it reads "...to enter is I checking hands....";
it should be "to enter is my shaking hands with...." Later in that same
paragraph it reads "I know what kind of life they had." It should be "what
kind of morning they had." On down in the same paragraph it reads
"capturing students' hearts"; the name of the training is "Capturing Kids'
Hearts". 2 paragraphs from the end it reads "So actually we thought of a
happy environment where there is life coming to school." I don't understand
what that means. Did I say that? Ha! Perhaps you can work on that wording
to make sense! Thanks for sharing this with me. I enjoyed talking with
you. Best to you.
Participant

-----Original Message-----
From: Rosalina Ruiz
To: Participant
Sent: 9/14/04 12:30 PM
Subject: Interview on Spiritual Dimensio in Educational Leadership Dissert
ation

Last spring, I interviewed you regarding your philosophy and practices
on the spiritual dimension in educational leadership. I thank you for your
time and your commitment. The recordings have been transcribed, but not all
of it will be used on the dissertation otherwise I may have to write an
encyclopedia. The data gathered will be presented on a
counter-storytelling narrative where a virtual dialogue has been created among all the
interviewees. The section regarding your input is attached; please feel
free to comment on any item that you see did not express your ideas
correctly. Pseudonyms will be used on the narrative, but for drafting
purposes I am using them as such. Should any changes be made to the
information you provided, I need to hear about it no later than Sept.
17, 2004. Otherwise, once again I express my sincere gratitude for your
participation on this research.

From: Participant
Sent: Wednesday, September 15, 2004 10:03 AM
To: Rosalina.Ruiz@tyc.state.tx.us
Subject: RE: Interview on Spiritual Dimension in Educational Leadership
Dissertation

Thanks, Rosalinda. Good luck. (God's blessings!)

-----Original Message-----
From: Rosalina Ruiz
To: Participant
Sent: 9/14/04 12:30 PM
Subject: Interview on Spiritual Dimension in Educational Leadership
Dissertation

Last spring, I interviewed you regarding your philosophy and practices
on the spiritual dimension in educational leadership. I thank you for your
time and your commitment. The recordings have been transcribed, but not all
of it will be used on the dissertation otherwise I may have to write an
encyclopedia. The data gathered will be presented on a counter-storytelling narrative
where a virtual dialogue has been created among all the interviewees. The section
regarding your input is attached; please feel
free to comment on any item that you see did not express your ideas
correctly. Pseudonyms will be used on the narrative, but for drafting
purposes I am using them as such. Should any changes be made to the
information you provided, I need to hear about it no later than Sept.
17, 2004. Otherwise, once again I express my sincere gratitude for your
participation on this research.

APPENDIX E

SAMPLE ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEW TEXT

Interpretation	Transcription	Code
	TRANSCRIPTION TITLED: PARTICIPANT ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL HUISACHE EAST HIGH SCHOOL ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL OF THE YEAR INTERVIEWER: First of all, tell me about yourself. Who is Participant? Your growing up years....your family....	
Lower socio-economic status Hispanic Family ties were emphasized Sacrificed career outside Valley to help parents with their financial problems	PARTICIPANT: Well. Participant has always been a....a young girl from Huisache. I grew up...I was born in Huisache, grew up in Huisache...went to Huisache public schools Huisache. I came from a very poor family, economically disadvantaged....both of my parents were migrant workers but they decided to stop migrating for my brothers....so they sacrificed a lot to be able to keep us in school....My mom dropped out of school when she was in eight grade...my dad did complete high school...and the....it was mother who really pushed me to study and promoted education in the family....she....I remember when I was young, she would, you know... save up some money and go to the store to buy many books and math workbooks so that she can read to me...we also walked to the public library...took the family to read.....so my mom was really my first teacher, and the best teacher I ever have....and...uhhhh....she stressed the meaning and importance on that...in getting a good education and working hard...Both of my parents were very hard workers so that work ethic, for example I learned from them, so I am really a hard worker... I stretch to be the best in anything that I do whether is being a....a wife, a mother, sister, and...that is just me...I tried to be the best that I can be in everything that I do...also when I was a teacher, coach, and now as an assistant principal...I want to be the best	Huisache Economically disadvantaged Migrant workers Mom drops out Mom promotes education Mom first teacher Hardworking parents Best possible all around (Excellence) Engaged in school Oldest daughter

	that I can...and uhhh....It's worked out so perfectly....I graduated from Huisache....I was just an average student...uhhh.....more involved in athletics than in everything	Finance Degree
Risk taker Changed careers as opportunity knocked on the door	else...school was...I liked it...up the elementary and junior high I did really well....in high school I was a B student, but I figure out that I could run fast....I was one of the fastest students in the Valley... and I got a scholarship to go to Pan American...so that helped with my school because my parents couldn't afford...uhhh.....to send me somewhere else and....I wasn't really pushed to go away from home....I am the oldest daughter...and so everyone was, "You have to stay here and help us out"...and be with my family still who was having financial trouble...so I stayed here at Pan Am. Great school, yes...so stayed here and graduated with	Thirteen years teaching experience

Awards winner |
Insecure	a bachelors in business because my goal was to be an accountant...I graduated with a finance degree and minor in business administration.... worked in a bank for about three years...I run into my superintendent who was the former Huisache high school principal and he	
Child oriented	said..."Participant, I need a teacher, are you willing to get in some type of an emergency permit or certification program and teach."...so I jumped into the opportunity, and taught at Huisache High School for about nine years...transferred to Huisache East High School for ...and I've been here for three years	Advice Students
	as a teacher... and now I am the assistant principal....so I've won many teacher	
Very supportive and hard working dad...	awards....I've been recognized as the campus teacher of the year, district teacher of the year, regional teacher of the year which was one of the awards funded by H.E.B.	
	INTERVIEWER: You were mentioning that you're putting your best foot forward...and that	
Strong family ties...	is how it shows	Dad hard working and supportive
	PARTICIPANT: Do you think so...	
	INTERVIEWER: That is your work	

	ethics…dedication and commitment….	Dad worked long hours
Empowered by her teacher who believed she will make a difference	PARTICIPANT: So I tried to instill all that when I was a teacher, I always instilled it in my own children…now even though as an administrator you see…you don't really see the children in your office every day, but you see the ones that maybe cause trouble the more…you tried to help them out…give them advice, and hopefully it pays off…	Dad present when needed
	INTERVIEWER: Earlier you mentioned that your mom had a lot of influence in your life as you were growing up…was there another individual that may have had significantly influenced your life?	Assisted by caring teachers to help her read and get scholarships
Holistic student success based mostly on values	PARTICIPANT: You see, my dad played a big important part because seeing him wake up and go to work…He was…he worked for Ford…Motor Company for thirty plus years…he would get up at five thirty in the morning…go to work at six, six thirty…get home twelve hours later…and knowing that I had such a hard working dad…and very supportive…he was always around when I needed him…in my athletic events, he was always there…always asking how school was going…my dad was always around…he was very helpful…..I had two teachers…elementary teachers….that got….that really changed the way I felt about reading….and that's when I…my mom started taking us to the library….they work…one of them still works in the school district…I still keep in touch with her…she cares so much about kids…I knew she cared so much…and the other one was a second grade teacher…the other one was the third grade teacher…my second grade teacher…… she introduced us to chapter books…she read to us so I really enjoyed that…they are two of my favorite teachers…and my high school recalls…she…she knew how much talent I had, and tried her best to… help me get scholarships…and she knew that one day I was going to make a difference…she was the one	Concerned for all students' success

Concern for all students' success

Respect Maturity Dignity |

		Diversity
Goal getter Highly Committed Success attributed to her own effort	who wanted me to become a high school teacher and a coach, but I told her…"No, no, no…I want to make a lot of money…you know…I'm tired to be poor…" I know teachers get paid well and coaches too, but I want to get paid more…I'm tire of being poor…I'm tired of struggling..and I didn't listen to her, and look where I am now…she is a principal in Houston…we giggle about that…'Si, I told you,"	
		Education and hard work
	INTERVIEWER: Really?	Love of learning
	PARTICIPANT: Yes…she was like a second mom…very special person.	The ganas
	INTERVIEWER: How would you describe or what do you consider are the qualities of successful educational leaders?	
	PARTICIPANT: Ensuring that all students succeed….and I mean everyone…all kids…Sometimes we focus on maybe the top kids and forget the middle…the average student…or maybe the students in special populations liken the special ed kids or limited English proficient kids….ensuring that all of them succeed…for example here…I want all the students to be successful and to graduate and be lifetime learner.	
Spirituality perceived as a personal experience reflected on caring relationship with students	INTERVIEWER: In this case, success would be equated to… academics?	Reflect Jesus Christ's teachings to students
	PARTICIPANT: Oh academics and develop in them, maturing into good citizens, to be respectful, to treat people with dignity and respect….accept diversity because of the way our country is becoming…	Caring Guiding
	INTERVIEWER: So you are looking for success in all areas of their development…	Relationships with students
	PARTICIPANT: Yes.	
Spirituality	INTERVIEWER: Do you attribute your success	

perceived by students due to treatment by teacher.	to anything in particular?.... Would you say that you have been successful due to something in particular?	Making a difference due to treatment
	PARTICIPANT: Education and hard work...and I would say "the ganas"...the motivation of knowing that my job...for example when I was a teacher...my job has a lot of implication with the students...and it is up to me to instill in them the love of learning...not just the subject whatever it might be grammar, or whatever it is... writing...it is me to get them to have 'the ganas", to be the	
Difficulty in defining spirituality	best...to succeed...I don't know.....	
	INTERVIEWER: You look at me as if you want to know if you are answering correctly...You are answering correctly....I am not evaluating you ok.... (both laugh) and there is no right or wrong answer...I am looking at you because I don't know what to ask next with what you are telling me..(both laugh)...I kept thinking and trying to understand what you meant by implication...but no...there is no right or wrong answer. It is your perception	Hard to explain spirituality
	what counts...Feel comfortable and open to say whatever you want to share without feeling judged...	Cannot define spirituality
Strength, vision, and wisdom to do job acquired in relationship with Higher Power.	PARTICIPANT: Ahhh Ok.... INTERVIEWER: Do you see any relationship between your success as educational leader and your spirituality?	
Hesitant in mentioning God's name...	PARTICIPANT: Yes.....uhhhhh....let's see...well...when I think of spirituality, I think of something that is personal to me...lived...uhhhh.... in turning to my Higher Power and Educator......and Life...and there is a lot that He taught us...that Jesus Christ taught us...and I tried to live like that...I tried to...I tried to reflect that to my students...so...for example...and it is more for....to me there is a	Divine intervention needed Peace and calm
Constant and continuous	lot of violence nowadays...uhhh....I thing for me caring about my students...and the....	Endurance and perseverance

relationship	guiding them and giving them advice…they really liked that…and then… the relationship that we had…uhhh….I will cherish it forever…and that is one thing I missed about teaching…this is my first year as an administrator…because you…you build some relationships with them as teacher because you are with them day in and day out…and sometimes they turn to you more so than as an administrator…as an administrator they come to you for ten minutes or so for something that they don't suppose to…and so you are not with them to constantly to give them advice…and as a teacher my spirituality, my guidance was more so evident than now….because of the relationship…then could see in me…students would even say…uhhh…"You are always at church or you are a church lady or you are at this and this." It wasn't that I mentioned anything about spirituality, but they…I don't know… they could see that in me…because I guess I cared for them or because I was different from the other teachers in the way I treated them…	due to lived spirituality Strength and courage
Prayer is concentrated on the needs of others…universal prayer… Stress on TAKS Relationship with God is a matter of daily living not Sunday practice… Divine intervention requested in daily and simple circumstances of life. His Presence is recognized.		Turn to God for guidance

Praying for students' safety

Praying for good TAKS results

Turn to God asking for right words in evaluating teachers |
	INTERVIEWER: Actually, while I was waiting outside, I saw how you were talking to some of the students, and you show a genuine concern for them…	
	PARTICIPANT: It's hard to explain it…	
God's divine inspiration perceived in simple events.	INTERVIEWER: Yes, because we are not use to talk about it…By the way how do you define spirituality?	Awareness of God's presence Way of life
	PARTICIPANT: To me it is something personal…it is something…that I….I can't even define it….(laughs)	
	INTERVIEWER: How do you nurture it?	
Spiritual vs. non-ethical Spiritual = open	PARTICIPANT: To me it is something that I need, especially now with this job…that I have….Do you want me to relate it to my leadership as a teacher or as an administrator?	Awareness of God's presence on the job

communication concern for others, and treats people with dignity and respect, empathy, sharing, humble service	INTERVIEWER: Either one...whatever you feel more comfortable sharing... PARTICIPANT: Ok. It is something that...that I always needed... divine intervention...growing up...I don't remember being as spiritual as...of course, I am now as adult...and, but it is something that especially provides peace and calm...and it keeps me going from day in day out....because of the long hours that I have here...the stress...the...it guides me...I mean, I need guidance...I need...I personally need guidance to help others...to guide others...to...you know, actually I need strength and courage that sometimes I don't have to do things...it's taking all that from the Higher Power that I ..that I choose to relate to. INTERVIEWER: Are there any specific circumstances that as a leader you turned to God for guidance? PARTICIPANT: Everyday...everyday...every morning...every...when there is a moment of silence...I ask him...do you want to know what I pray...	Difference of nonbelievers as not ethical...disrespectful and no dignity, cold, unconcerned. mean Believer... keeps communication open Concern for others Treats people with dignity and respect Sharing labor
God as source of personal success and expanded vision	INTERVIEWER: It's up to you... PARTICIPANT: First to keep us all safe because we never know with... today teenagers...and with our society the way it is...to keep us all safety...to keep violence away...whether it may be fighting or any horrible things as drugs or alcohol or destruction from things for all kids that are here...right now a lot has to do with our state test or TAKS test that are coming up...to help teachers...to give them strength...and you know to guide them...to do their best...and for students to do their best...for adults we are sometimes pushing and doing...and working so hard and we are concerned about our school...and then for me to guide me on...for	Nonspiritual = cold, unconcerned, mean
Afraid of expressing faith in workplace, though it is		Expanded vision... God as helper Global view

seen as needed for person's holistic fulfillment	example, I knew that I had to deal with a teacher that was not doing a good job in the classroom…and I had to evaluate the teacher and sure enough the teacher was not doing an effective job…so I turned to God to guide on what to say and how to help this teacher…No, I turn to Him every day, every morning, every night, every moment…every moment that I have because…and that is me…that's…and I know He is there so I say…please help….	Willingness to do God's will
Worried about not doing a good job as a mother and developing spirituality in own children due to excessive work…extra assistance will help	INTERVIEWER: Is there any specific situation in which you felt that He helped you out and you haven't taught on doing this or that….?	Spirituality missing as part of whole
	PARTICIPANT: Yes, and you know what… I even tell the students…."How funny the Lord put me right here in this place right here or right now." For example if I may suspect that students are skipping or doing something else…it may happen that I am just walking doing something else or going to another place, and it just happens that I am here where I needed to be…Those are some examples that I even say…Wow…	Beneficial to include it in curriculum
	INTERVIEWER: Do you think there is a difference between successful educational leaders and successful spiritual educational leaders? Sometimes people may say that they can be successful without any need to be spiritual…is there any difference in both?	Overworked Help needed in developing spirituality in children
	PARTICIPANT: You know, I see a big difference in…like those that are not so spiritual…they are not as ethical …from the ones that are spiritual…from the ones that I know, they do some unethical things…the more spiritual person a leader always has that in the forefront…as far as you know…the…keeps communication open…concern for others and treats people with dignity and respect…and they try to live their life to reflect…whoever you believe in…but specially in administration…that's where I have	Wonderful and blessed

noticed...they maybe abuse their power because they are in a position with authority...they're disrespectful and don't treat people with dignity...the spiritual leader is...uhhh... more a communicator...empathize more their....there is more like sharing...they would do everything from picking up trash...or getting a mop in the cafeteria and answering the telephone...and other leaders that I don't see as spiritual...they won't daaare getting to the chemical...they won't answer the telephone and would say that they didn't get their masters to answer the telephone or help the custodian....They are very, very different....as teachers, you see them very cold, unconcerned, really mean...even though I don't know how spiritual they are...

INTERVIEWER: Has your spirituality help you personally to become the person you are?

PARTICIPANT: Oh Yes, it has helped me a lot....as a matter of fact, when I got all these teaching awards...I needed to speak in banquets...and speak at a lot of different schools....before that I had asked...it expanded my territory...and boy...I asked for it and I got it...so I would share my story to all the new teachers in different school districts that I came from a poor family and struggle, but with the help of the Lord, I have come to the place I am...getting bigger and bigger....so and even with administrator, I have a global view...and it is...my territory gets bigger and bigger...so I tell the Lord, wherever you want to tell me, I will go...so...

INTERVIEWER: Do you think it is necessary to instill in children or youth or teachers the need for spiritual development or nurture spiritual development in our schools?

PARTICIPANT: I think it should be done. I think it is important. It is a component or part of the person's life....to be whole...and I think that if spirituality is missing...is like the person

not complete...but as far as in school we are always so concern about violating the First Amendment that I don't know how it can be done...I mean probably after school you can have a group meeting or something like that...I know it can be done after school...but building it in the curriculum if it can ever be done, it would be beneficial...but I am sure that it may have to be limited as to what is going to be discussed...I don't know...

INTERVIEWER: Do you think, it should be left to the family?...

PARTICIPANT: Like me, I am so caught up in work and everything else...when... we all have problems...we all have difficulties...and we get so caught up in getting through the day that we fail to make sure that our child is complete...you know...that we take time to help them to guide them...we don't do a good job on that...you know, I myself am here twelve hours a day...so...I know that there at times when I have failed and I would like for something else to help me out...whether it be after school or a group meeting, whatever it be...because right now e are neglecting our children...

INTERVIEWER: How would you describe your life in general?

PARTICIPANT: In general? It has been wonderful...It has been blessed...

INTERVIEWER: Is there something that you would like to tell me that I didn't ask?

PARTICIPANT: No.

INTERVIEWER: Earlier you mentioned that there was a teacher who influenced you greatly as a child as she is still working in the district...would you recommend her to be interviewed? What's her name?

| | PARTICIPANT: Oh Yes, she has also won many awards...her name is

....

INTERVIEWER: Thank you very much for your time and contribution. | |

APPENDIX F

IRB APPROVAL TO CONDUCT STUDY

MEMORANDUM

TO: Rosalinda Ruiz
           Educational Leadership

           M6~

FROM: Dr. Mark Granberry
           Chair, Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects in Research

DATE: March 29, 2004

SUBJECT: Protocol for "Spiritual Dimension in Educational Leadership"
           IRB #331

The above referenced protocol has been:

           _____ Approved (committee review)
           __X__ Approved (expedited review)
           _____ Conditionally approved (see remarks below)
           _____ Exempt from IRB review
           _____ Tabled for future consideration – re-submit with corrections
           (submit 2 copies of your protocol)
           _____ Disapproved (see remarks below)

by the Institutional Review Board Federal Wide Assurance Number (FWA 00000805).

As stipulated in the guidelines of the IRB, this protocol will be subject to annual review by the IRB and any deviations from the protocol or change in the title must be resubmitted to the board.

For additional information you can contact the IRB University website at http://www.panam.edu/dept/sponpro/Policies/Policies.html

AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY, YOU MUST FILL OUT THE ENCLOSED REPORT FORM

cc: Dr. Wendy A. Lawrence-Fowler, AVPR.
       Dr. Miguel Guajardo
       Dr. Velma Menchaca

VITA

Rosalina Ruiz was born in Tijuana, Baja California Norte, Mexico on October 28, 1960, the daughter of Rafael Ruiz and Ana Maria Vasquez. At the age of sixteen, she entered the convent with the Missionary Daughters of the Most Pure Virgin Mary in Aguascalientes, Ags. Mexico. A year later she requested to move to the novitiate in Kingsville, TX. Upon completion of her first formative years in religious life, she was transferred to Sunnyside, WA. to pursue her education. She obtained her General Education Development (G.E.D.) certificate and enrolled at Heritage College in Toppenish, WA. for two years. Once this period expired, she was transferred to Guadalajara, Jal. Mexico to start her studies in Sacred Scripture. Upon completion of this certificate, she was sent back to Kingsville, TX to obtain her Bachelor of Arts degree in education at A & I University in December 1990. She was subsequently employed at St. Martin of Tours Catholic Elementary School in Kingsville, TX. At that time she started preparing for her Masters of Arts degree in education in the field of Mid-management at the same university. In September 1988 she became a United States citizen.

In August 1993, she was transferred to McAllen, TX to be employed by Our Lady of Sorrows Catholic School to work as a middle school teacher. A year later she obtained the position of Director of Catholic Ministry at the University of Texas-Pan American in Edinburg and worked there until January 1996 when she decided to leave the convent and join the Secular Order of Discalced Carmelites.

In August 1995, she started a second Masters of Arts degree in Clinical Psychology at The University of Texas-Pan American to assist her in the development of her duties and responsibilities at the Campus Ministry Center. She graduated in December 2000. In August 1996, she worked at La Joya, ISD as a middle school social studies teacher with recent immigrants. In May 1998, she obtained the position of assistant principal at Evins Regional Juvenile Center and has been working there until the present time.

The first year that she left the convent, she adopted three nephews: Alfonso, Luis Carlos, and Eli. She also took care of a fourth nephew, Cesar, but the adoption did not proceed. Three years later, her elderly parents came to live with her.

In June 2001, she began her doctoral studies in educational leadership at The University of Texas-Pan American. She was conferred the Ed.D. in Educational Leadership on May, 2005.