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# Models of Spiritual Leadership: Strategies for Bridging the Gap Between Policy and Ethics

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MODELS OF SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP:  
STRATEGIES FOR BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN POLICY AND ETHICS

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the Educational Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership

San José State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

by

Rebecca O'Brien

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MODELS OF SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP:  
STRATEGIES FOR BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN POLICY AND ETHICS

by

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## ABSTRACT

### MODELS OF SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP: BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN POLICY AND ETHICS

by Rebecca O'brien

Public institutions are finding that strict policies premised on value-free research are incapable of dealing with the social and ethical issues facing schools. Increasingly, research is identifying how spiritual practices can be a source of insight and guidance on ethical issues and other soft leadership skills. Spiritual and servant leadership is a burgeoning area of study in the business world and health care field, but it just beginning to be examined as a guiding tool in the education field. In the current study, I interview educational leaders who self-identify as having a spiritual practice and who are responsible for oversight of personnel and student policy, as well as for forming connections to social equity and community building. The project will review spiritual leadership and critical spirituality theories and how educational leaders incorporate that spirituality into their practices when making ethical decisions. Research questions addressed in the current study include a review of spiritual leadership models and a review of specific spiritual principles that guide educational leaders and how they apply those principles to the promotion of social justice, generating a sense of connectedness, and building a sense of community within their organization. Finally, the study considers what situations prompt educational leaders to look beyond policy and procedure for additional ethical guidance. Conclusions indicate that interviewees utilize various methods of spiritual practices to make decisions in the absence of policy.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Natalia<sup>1</sup> was a bright, enthusiastic girl, which is why teachers were a bit confused when her parents requested that she be tested to see if she was eligible for special education services. Teachers' observations were that even though she was bilingual, and English was not her first language, she was doing quite well and making good progress in their classes. Her parents, however, were adamant and began to write letters to the district office, insisting that she be assessed for a learning disability or emotional problem. After meeting with her parents and observing the anxiety and concern in their tone and demeanor, I decided that perhaps we, as educators, were missing something that her parents were seeing. After all, she spoke two languages and was having mild difficulties understanding everything said in the class. Our team decided to complete an assessment to help determine if these delays in understanding were a function of language acquisition, or a more significant underlying problem. Additionally, the parents were concerned about her behavior, so I also completed some social-emotional assessment. Natalia's assessment identified that her overall academics and English language skills were commensurate with her ability, which was in the average range. Additionally, she appeared to be a happy, well-adjusted, socially appropriate young lady. Teachers were not surprised by these findings, but they were surprised that her parents had indicated on a rating scale that they had several social and emotional concerns for her. After explaining the results, I suggested to her parents that if they had additional concerns about Natalia's behavior or emotions at home, they should contact their

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<sup>1</sup> This name is a pseudonym

physician and discuss next steps. After final discussion with the parents, I closed the case and moved on. In the following weeks, however, Natalia's parents called me several times, asking me to please see her for her behavior, or to write a letter saying that she needed help with her emotions so that the doctor would refer her to a psychiatrist. Now, her parents' behavior seemed out of the ordinary. I firmly expressed that I could not make a referral and that the assessment team was not seeing any of the behaviors that they were indicating. That same day, Natalia's mother showed up at school; she was crying and revealed that her family was going to be deported. Their deportation hearing was in a month, and their immigration attorney told them that if their daughter had a problem and was receiving services in the United States that she could not receive in their home country, then they might be able to stay. I was stunned. These were hard-working people, who were responsible and obviously wonderful parents. As this mother continued to cry, telling me about what they would face in their home country of Brazil if the family was deported, a sense of dread overcame me, as I realized that I was facing a monumental moral decision. There are no statutes in the education code or the district board policy that identify how to address this situation, nor did my graduate school ethics class prepare me to handle this kind of circumstance. I was facing something beyond policy and needed guidance beyond policy to help me decide on my next steps.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Public institutions are finding that strict policies premised on value-free research are incapable of dealing with the social and financial problems plaguing schools. Spiritual practices can be a source of insight and guidance on ethical issues and other soft

leadership skills, such as listening, self-awareness, and empathy (Marques, 2013). Spiritual and servant leadership is a burgeoning area of study in the business world; MBA programs devote units to understanding the topic (Garcia-Zamora, 2003; Marquez, 2013). Books, websites, webinars, retreats, and entire conferences are dedicated to teaching business leaders and entrepreneurs to access their spirituality in order to be better leaders (Driscoll & McKee, 2007). Likewise, a diverse range of non-business scholars are working in areas as varied as psychology, health care, education, and philosophy and coming to similar conclusions; researchers including Michael Dantley (2003), Luis Fry (2003), Paul Houston and Steve Sokolow (2006), and Cornel West (1988, 1989) emphasize the importance of spirituality to leadership and of understanding the spiritual condition as part of leadership. Spirituality fosters a sense of connectedness and community, and because leaders who have a spiritual practice also see their job as more of a calling that gives meaning to their lives, they often work to establish an organizational culture based on altruistic love (Bezy, 2011; Fry, 2003; Houston & Sokolow, 2006; Tesdell, 2003; Zwissler, 2007).

This scholarship addresses the gap between policy and ethical questions that educational leaders must negotiate. Specifically, my study identifies models of leadership informed by spiritual practices, which I argue offer leaders guidance on addressing complex and difficult ethical questions. Additionally, it invites us to reflect on our own spiritual practices, their influence on our leadership decisions, and our responsibility to acknowledge that influence.

The recent interest in spiritual leadership has only begun to extend to education scholarship or educational leadership programs; yet, personal observation leads me to believe that spirituality is already a source of insight for educational leaders, if an unacknowledged one. In my own work, I am interested in how educational leaders' spiritual practices manifest as specific activities and characteristics that foster healthy organizations and promote social justice. I am interested, too, in how educational leaders draw on their spirituality in their work while navigating the separation of church and state, which strictly prohibits religious influence in public schools.

To investigate these questions, I interviewed educational leaders who self-identify as spiritual, or who have a spiritual practice. Educational leaders are current or retired public school personnel who are or were responsible for oversight and management of persons and programs in a school, district, or programs within the context of the school or district, such as special education. Spirituality in this context is defined as a unique relationship to nature or to someone or something greater than one's self, which is perceived to be a profound mental or emotional connection; it is the quality of being concerned with personal transformation, as opposed to material or physical things, for the sake of growth, service, transcendence, overcoming suffering, union with a higher power, and/or internal freedom (Dantley 2003a; Gerzon, 2006; Keating, 2008; Mabey, 2016). The project reviews how educational leaders incorporate that spirituality into their practices when making ethical decisions.

My project aims to identify what specific spiritual principles guide these educational leaders and to document how they apply those principles to the promotion of social

justice, generating a sense of emotional interconnectedness within the organization, and building a sense of community that fosters the ability to address social, emotional, and financial challenges that are not easily answered by institutional policy. I am interested in how these guiding principles incorporate social justice and promote an atmosphere of tolerance and interconnectedness in schools. Additionally, I am interested in how often leaders look to spiritual sources for guidance with ethical questions regarding issues that educational policy and procedure do not adequately address. Current trends away from positivist rationalism to poststructuralist and postmodernist theory leave a gap in understanding how to address these issues. To ascertain whether these leaders offer a model for bridging that gap for future educational leaders, this project poses the following research questions:

RQ 1: What specific spiritual principles guide educational leaders and how do they apply those principles to 1) the promotion of social justice, 2) generating a sense of connectedness, and 3) building communities.

RQ 2: How do educational leaders access their spiritual practices to engage in self-reflection, open mindedness toward alternative realities, and transformative action when clear public policy and guidelines are not present?

**Significance of the problem.** In recent years, educators and scholars have increasingly embraced spirituality as an important element to educational leadership (Boyd 2012; Dantley, 2003 a,b, 2005, 2010; Fenwick & English, 2004; Heubner, 1995; Tisdell 2012, Yasuno, 2008). Part of the reason for this new willingness to discuss spirituality is because it is no longer necessarily tied to a religion, thus avoiding violation

of the separation clause of the First Amendment. Spirituality as a professional practice has become more of an opportunity for people to explore their strength, joy, and calling tied to a concept higher than themselves. Additionally, public institutions are increasingly finding that strict policies premised on positivist value-free research are incapable of dealing with the social and financial problems plaguing schools and do not address the ethical dilemmas that educators regularly face. Spiritual leadership holds promise as a source of insight, offering guidance in bringing about positive change to address social issues and ethical complexities, and helping leaders to access their inner strength for personal sustenance and to facilitate that change (Yasuno, 2008).

Positivist, dualistic binary traditions of education have done little to address substantive and meaningful ways to implement change in our schools (Dantley, 2003b). The empirical paradigm does not address the heart and wisdom of educational leadership.

If a group of individuals with a specific ethical vision promote care, concern, compassion, and humility as the catalyst for social change (West 1989), then people can no longer consider themselves to be value-neutral, or untouched by presuppositions (Dantley, 2003b) which are the cornerstones of dualistic humanistic traditions of leadership. Spiritual leadership theory and critical spirituality describe characteristics of altruistic love, which encompasses a focused intent to a spiritual practice and traits of gratitude, connectedness, openness, trust, and empathy that are operating in tandem with attributes identified as needed for social change. The concept of spiritual leadership suggests that leaders draw on the strength of a connection to nature or a power greater than themselves in order to transcend the struggle before them and fight for equity

(Dantley, 2003a; Houston & Sokolow, 2006). Therefore, spiritual leadership may be an important piece necessary to implement the leadership needed for social change and for critical pedagogy.

Strom (2017) suggests that patterns of thinking that encourage us to remain neutral are rooted in the dualistic epistemological perspective of rational humanism. Humanism perpetuates an anthropocentric worldview, and therefore implies that we, as educators, are objective and neutral in our rational thought and that we can, as neutral and unbiased leaders, make decisions outside of context and thus ensure rationality and truth (Haraway, 1988). In practice this means that while educational leaders increasingly face complex ethical decisions, they have few resources beyond instrumental policies to look to for guidance.

Public educators are increasingly asked to deal with issues that go well beyond the realm of teaching. Every day, school leaders are faced with ethical and politicized decisions in the face of increasing polarization on topics that touch students' lives and ability to learn. With no clear policy on many factors that fall on the shoulders of the education system, educators are forced to confront the anger, anxiety, and confusion that young people and communities live with, surrounding issues that go far beyond the curriculum. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents are waiting outside of schools to arrest parents, and students are feeling empowered to make ethnic and racial slurs without pause (Boggs, 2018). We still have children coming to school hungry and tired, yet trying to learn when issues of health, poverty, and lack of sleep from legitimate fear of safety are much more immediate than doing homework. The ongoing debate over



whether education influences society or society influences educational practices is irrelevant when schools are being asked to do more with less (Labaree, 2012). Although some regions are making an effort to include school climate in their educational goals ("State Performance Overview," 2018), there is little agreement over the meaning of school climate and even less agreement on how to address it. What is known is that the nature of organizational climate is closely tied to leadership values and ethics (Gerzon, M. 2006; Greenleaf R. 2002; Grojean, M, 2004). Policies and procedures primarily focus on academic structures and outcomes with mandates that fall short on helping school leaders understand how to make decisions about difficult issues that occur in schools on a regular basis. Educators increasingly look to other disciplines to find resolutions to issues of ethical basis and to find answers that have little direction from traditional educational research and theory.

The trend away from rational humanism and positivism in education literature has brought educational leadership to a critical point (Dantley, 2002, 2003b). The current political climate creates a moment of opportunity for us to shift our focus to different ways of thinking, and several theoretical approaches address that need to change our way of thinking. Posthumanism, postmodernism, and poststructuralism are presented as alternatives but have common threads. All of these theories challenge binary structures of traditional theory and suggest that there are methods of problem solving that lie beyond the immediately observable. These theories question deterministic thinking and the tendency to value objectivity over subjective experience. They have opened scholarship to the possibility that different subjectivities offer different bodies of

knowledge (Braidotti, 2016; Haraway, 1988; Kenway, Willis, Blackmore, & Rennie, 1994; Strom 2017). We may also look to spiritual guidance to think in terms of what lies beyond our observable constraints. We may utilize this guidance to better understand the ethical reasoning behind the ideas of the enlightener and enlightened, or ethnocentrism, in order to address questions of complex physical and cultural differences. In shifting one's paradigm from binary thinking, one should not assume that spiritual leadership theory presumes a traditional set of religious rules. Instead, it provides an opportunity for leaders to draw on their own interconnectedness to a higher power or nature to help guide them when they are faced with difficult ethical decisions and while navigating leadership in the face of sociopolitical complexities. Spiritual leadership theory helps leaders to recognize the role that spiritual practices may play in the lives of people we work with, and it emphasizes the diversity among us. It suggests that leaders emphasize interconnectedness, servitude, and community building, often drawing on a spiritual identity or practice (Fry, 2003; Houston and Sokolow, 2006). Additionally, in the wake of a paradigm shift from positivist rationalism and strict binary, observable leadership to postmodern practices of education, many leaders may be reluctant to acknowledge their spirituality in a secular world (Riaz and Normore, 2008). The definitions and distinctions of religion and spirituality will be explored.

Paulo Freire (1998) said, "I teach because I search, because I question, and because I submit myself to questioning." In the spirit of Paulo Freire, it may be time to remove educational focus from strictly humanistic theory and concentrate more on the methods of

elevating the human spirit. Can educational leaders draw on their spirituality to address issues of social injustice and ambiguous ethical dilemmas?

**Unresolved issues in education.** The growing body of research that spiritual leadership provides is helping practitioners to learn the importance of accessing one's own beliefs as one tool in making leadership decisions. The positivist rationalist paradigm that emphasizes quantifiable measures of success, routine, and predictability has confounded educational leadership practice in the face of ethical dilemmas. The shift to the theoretical basis of poststructuralist and postmodernist theories has, among other things, challenged that universal, deterministic formulaic way of thinking.

The turn to spiritualism within management training was prompted by similar concerns over the gap between policy and ethics that business managers face, and educational leadership may benefit from a similar program of study. There are, however, few studies or examples that put theory to practice examining how leaders implement these practices to navigate ethical concerns, such as social inequities, immigration reform, subversive prejudice, and cultural and socioeconomic divides.

In this scholarship, I discuss Spiritual Leadership Theory, Restorative Practices and their place in spiritual leadership, and the concept of critical spirituality, introduced by Dantley (2003a, 2003b) and grounded primarily in the black prophetic spiritual movement (West, 1988). I turn to this literature because it offers the most developed account of spiritual leadership and its relationship to social justice movements. I highlight how these practices work to address faith, spirituality, and social justice. Critical spirituality provides a theoretical framework for melding the concepts of critical

race theory and spiritual leadership in education, but no work has been done yet that guides these educational leaders in practice, especially when leaders attempt to embody them in their goals to promote social equity, generate a sense of connectedness, and build communities.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **History**

A small body of literature has developed theoretical models of spiritual leadership, but few studies exist that show those models in practice. I review that literature, including concepts relevant to the scholarship, as well as models of spiritual leadership, and I explain why I believe that Dantley's model of critical spirituality is the most responsive to educators' equity and social justice commitments. Dantley's model is informed by African American spiritual traditions and social justice movements and provides a framework for leaders to negotiate the gap between policy and ethics, especially where those gaps pertain to systemic inequities and racial injustice.

The landscape of social justice and spiritual leadership in education is not dualistic in nature. If one subscribes to West's (1989) conceptual framework for prophetic pragmatism, one must consider his analogy of experimentation and improvisation through jazz and apply it to critical spirituality in education. While a classical banking, rational humanistic, positivist model (Friere, 1970) of education would show us a scripted model for procedures that lead to a well-ordered landscape of social equity in urban and multicultural centers of education, what that model does is relegate any who do not fit that landscape into the category of "other." West describes a cadence and rhythm that liberates educators and students to improvise the style of the education to fit their harmonic structure. Like jazz, this style does not imply that there is no foundation of solid educational principles from which to work; it merely suggests that the artist or

leader has the freedom to change the structure based on instinct, knowledge, training, and wisdom, in order to fit the circumstance and therefore create a work of art. This is art in which the participants, or students, are integrally involved. What West (1989) describes, and Dantley (2003) later creates a theoretical framework around, is the Greek philosophical concept of phronesis, a necessary component for conscientization and personal critical awareness. Aristotle (trans. 1999) frames phronesis as a practical wisdom, bound with action. The moral action is not bound, however, within the action, but rather within the character of the person performing the action; it is not learned in books, but through life experiences. Phronesis, like jazz, is the unifying characteristic that encompasses that practice of the performer, or in this case, the educational leader. At a time when success is often reduced to quantifiable measurements, and societies' moral questions are often polarizing and emotion-laden, phronesis, embedded in a sense of community, requires intense self-reflection (Birmingham, 2004). Dantley proposes specific steps to engage in critical spirituality and is very clear not only that it requires a maintenance of spiritual practices (Covey, 1989) but also that these practices allow for personal interpretation, reflection, disclosure, and adaptation that also requires phronetic practice and understanding.

The educational leader who connects these concepts of leadership to critical spirituality is making a concerted effort to move away from positivist concepts of humanism, including cause-and-effect reasoning, to a pluralistic view of actions of leadership. Concepts inherent in critical spirituality encourage leaders who approach issues, such as subtle racism or prejudice, with dismissal and a reversion to rule

following, in order to learn to attempt to understand the cultural contexts and theory that might lead to greater understanding for all parties. While policy has its place, in that it is direct and expedient, spiritual leadership goes beyond policy IN that educators would benefit from applying practical wisdom to understand the biases behind the behavior so that the leader can address the values inherent in the acts of prejudice. We can no longer think of people and ourselves as inhabiting a value-neutral environment untouched by presuppositions. Rule following is the default; it may make a difference in the immediate but rarely has long-term, life changing impact required to lead students and staff to transformative action. It takes consistent and dedicated deliberate spiritual renewal to refine the development of spiritual leadership that has affective and transformational impact for the leader who engages in spiritual practices.

The traditional positivist method of teaching pedagogy risks minimization of students' creative power and does not resolve issues that require ethical analysis (Dantley, 2002). The positivist dualistic banking system of pedagogy is counterintuitive to any educational system that stimulates critical faculties; it seeks to promote dualistic rational humanism by seeking out ties linking observable problem to solution, thus leaving many of our students voiceless and left behind in the educational process (Dantley, 2003b; Freire, 1970). By practicing the concepts of spiritual leadership, leaders can move from this banking pedagogy to an instruction that promotes individuality and a group moral vision promoting care, concern, compassion, and humility that can be the catalyst for social change, drawing on and finding hope in their spiritual identity (West, 1989).

Dantley (2003b; 2010) provides a defined framework for accomplishing this paradigm shift in educational leadership through critical spirituality. When critical race and spiritual leadership work in isolation from each other, leaders miss the crucial point that Dantley (2003a) is making: critical spirituality begins with an understanding of spirituality; it transcends religious and ethnic backgrounds and is the basis of solidarity among educational leaders who believe that God or a transcendent understanding brings hope to the oppressed and marginalized in the face of despair. Leaders can and should draw on their spiritual strength to justify, advocate for, and effect change in areas of social justice and draw on that strength to experience meaning, joy, and freedom in that struggle (Boyd, 2012).

Educational systems grounded in spirituality acknowledge that academics have purpose that surpasses attainment of knowledge. Leaders of these systems may see that learning has the potential to empower youth and to create the groundwork for societal change. This may be particularly true for children in urban regions, for students of color, or those whom popular media and dominant culture often seek to dehumanize (Dantley, 2005, 2011). Spirituality works to connect growth and trust with purpose and destiny in places where organizations work to create a system that emphasizes community and a sense of belonging.

Dantley (2005) proposes that many leaders who have emerged as icons of social justice leadership came from positions informed by African American spiritual traditions, and whose spiritual leadership style may provide a framework for leaders to negotiate the gap between policy and ethics. As such, leaders in urban schools may flourish with



leadership grounded in a similar self-reflective spiritual position. These leaders can resource the creativity inherent in their spirituality to both critically reflect on the inequities in modern America, and to help urban students to hope, dream, and to strategize, through courage and faith garnered from their spiritual practice.

Spirituality helps school leaders integrate personal values with critical struggles rooted in “moral values, justice, equity, care, and respect and the imperative for investigating the impact of racism, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, and disability on the educational outcomes of students” (Dantley & Tillman, 2006, p.19). These personal values affirm the struggle of others and empower professionals to make decisions that positively affect relationships with one's self, his or her community, and a force greater than her or himself, for the greater good of the critical struggle for equity (Keyes et al., 1999).

### **Social Justice in Leadership**

In addition to consideration of spiritual principals that may guide one's leadership, a conscientious leader should consider the experiences of historically underrepresented populations within his or her purview (Dantley, 2003). Critical pedagogy has been presented as an epistemological and methodological tool within education to address these concerns (Ledesma & Calderon, 2015); however, critical pedagogy alone may not always be able to bridge the gap between policy and ethics.

Ladson-Billings (1998) suggests general policy that could inform education through Critical Race Theory (CRT). Because education is the avenue to success and opportunity, naturally the foundations of policy that inform CRT would best be

implemented in the educational system. With this frame of reference, critical pedagogy is the key to equity. By studying and expanding the analysis of race, power, and privilege, educators can begin to effect change in policy that keeps power structures stagnant. CRT is effective in addressing the problem of institutional structures of racism and addressing policies that perpetuate issues of racism within current political policy (Aleman, 2009). CRT fails, however, to address the critical practice of facilitating an internal transformation over external regulation (Mabey, 2016). The question remains, how does a leader who believes in the importance of CRT become a leader who initiates transformative action for social justice?

Foster (1989), however, offers educators a view of radical critical transformation when he suggests that educational leadership transform its hegemonic vision by critiquing positivism and administration as simply the avenue to success and opportunity and training students to perform. This fact-value neutrality does nothing to address the impact that schools have on society, and he suggests that schools should open discourse about critical issues and disclose those issues while creating ways to eliminate them. Foster further suggests that school administrators who adopt a critical perspective of leadership are not merely managers but are members of a higher calling.

### **Separation of Church and State**

The phrase “separation of church and state” is referenced as far back as 1802. It is mentioned by Jefferson and then clarified in 1879, when the Supreme Court accepted the phrase as a principle supporting the meaning of the United States Constitution, Bill of Rights, First Amendment religion clause. It stands as a way for Americans to limit the

influence of any particular religion on the operation of the government. (Green, 2014). While Supreme Court justices and citizens have debated over the years what, exactly, these words mean in practice, there is no debate over its foundation. This lack of debate over foundation, therefore, indicates that the government may not maintain a state religion, directly finance religious activities, or coerce actions either on behalf of or against religion. Debate arises regarding the leeway in this clause. There is not precedent to prohibit religious customs, traditions, values, symbols or discourse. This clause also does not prohibit group expressions of faith, such as prayers in legislative halls, or on public school football fields. Additionally, the government may facilitate a private religious activity in order to enhance the right of religious liberty also found in the First Amendment (Green, 2014). According to the ACLU,

teachers and school administrators, when acting in those capacities, are representatives of the state, and, in those capacities, are themselves prohibited from encouraging or soliciting student religious or anti-religious activity. Similarly, when acting in their official capacities, teachers may not engage in religious activities with their students. However, teachers may engage in private religious activity in faculty lounges (ACLU, 2018).

While the law does not differentiate between spiritual activities and religious activities, it is reasonable to assume that they are often associated if they pursue some type of behavior or activity that could be perceived as religious in nature.

### **Transitions to Spiritual Leadership**

Many educational leaders who have a spiritual practice attempt to separate their spirituality from their professional practice. Educators may feel challenged to personally access their spirituality as a source of transformational leadership because teachers have historically been trained to view research primarily from a standpoint of rational, logical

thought and empirical research and demonstrations (Keating, 2008; Riaz & Normore, 2008). Scholars argue that one may increase and strengthen one's leadership and advocacy skills by accessing his or her connection to the spiritual self (Dantley, 2003 2005, 2010; Fenwick & English, 2004; Fry, 2003; Houston & Sokolow, 2006; Tisdell 2012, Yasuno, 2008). Spiritual topics, such as spirit, soul, and the sacred, are often marginalized as superstition and separate from serious intellectual discourse. Many scholars have referred to their spiritual beliefs, but these references are often dismissed within the Western academic framework as naïve or nostalgic (Keating, 2008; Perez, 1998), but in the move away from positivist realism, this attitude is changing. Freire referenced his spiritual beliefs on rare occasions by calling himself a "friend of Christ" and "a man of faith" (Boyd, 2012), but he did not talk about his beliefs extensively. He instead tied any reference to spirituality to the focus on his life work of overcoming oppressive reality (Freire 1997). Likewise, Gloria Anzuldúa gently referenced her spirituality (Keating, 2008), but both Anzuldúa and Freire were hesitant to discuss it publicly (Fenwick & English, 2004; Freire, 1992; Keating, 2008).

Spiritual leadership is a now a burgeoning multi-discipline area of study, covering health care fields, family and human services, and business. Mabey (2016) demonstrates the distinction between religion and spirituality when he suggests that by studying the teachings of Christ, leaders can find ethical lessons that guide the development of integrity to counter the forces of greed and egotism typically found in positions of power (Mabey et al., 2016). This viewpoint suggests the importance of becoming a spiritual, ethical individual in order to become a transformative leader, for the express purpose of

counteracting the reduced empathy, compassion, and concern that often accompany positions of power (Mabey et al., 2016). Mabey (2016) suggests five specific teachings of Christ that should inform an ethical leader: 1) being outspoken about dubious practices, 2) embracing work as a calling rather than a job, 3) thinking theologically rather than materially, 4) maintaining ethical purpose rather than succumbing to financial pressure, and 4) facilitating an internal transformation over external regulation. He goes on to state that if one wants to remove the word "Christ," the principles still stand as solid, foundational ethical practices in leadership. A theological mindset, rather than a material or secular mindset, suggests that spiritual leaders should confront head-on the issues of motivation, oppression, emancipation, power struggles, and powerlessness. Whether one is tackling these issues in the workplace or society, issues of motivation, oppression, and power struggles speak directly to aspects of critical race theory, and therefore critical spirituality (Dantley, 2005).

### **What is Spirituality?**

Increasingly, people who identify as not belonging to a religion are indicating that they believe spirituality is something that they can experience (Driscoll & McKee 2007; Flanagan, 1999; Holmes, 2007; Pargament, 1999). Spirituality is a complicated term. Fenwick and English (2004) categorize spirituality into themes of life and death, soul and self, cosmology, knowledge, and then practices, roles, and responses. Others suggest that removing religion from the concept of spirituality makes the method too vague and that even when one considers him or herself spiritual without a practice, he or she usually associates it with a religion or theology (Tisdell, 2003; Zwissler, 2007). Tisdell (2003)

differentiates religion and spirituality by suggesting that religion is an organized community of faith with codes of practice, while spirituality is broader and encompasses one's personal beliefs and experiences with God, a higher power, or a higher purpose, set apart from institutional structures. The two, however, are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

Holmes also suggests that sociological education is somewhat behind other domains in the research of spirituality, possibly because it has always been seen as personal in nature. The rise of humanism contributed to the separation of social thinking and spirituality by positing humans as private, individual, and supreme thinkers (Kirkpatrick, 1986). Holmes (2007) suggests that this kind of thinking has contributed to a rise of self-centeredness, materialism, and lack of community-mindedness. He suggests that critical responses to these behaviors have ultimately led, in part, to the rise in the number of people who are increasingly comfortable with seeking out their own sense of spiritual connectedness. Spirituality enables us to connect with other human beings, allowing us to confront marginalizing conditions and look for solutions that those conditions. Our spirituality can also allow us to critically analyze, interpret, and adapt our own realities (Stewart, 1999).

The concept of religion, in its transformation from traditional dualistic nature to a more postmodern concept, has continued to be the focus of criticism, especially where it is associated with inflexible radical fundamentalism. The traditional concept of religion, in which each religion posits itself as the single path to truth and salvation, instantly leads to a position of relation, completion, and religious capitalization. Regardless of the cries

for peace from many religious leaders of all sorts, religion and violence seem to be linked in the minds of many people (Giordan, 2007). The competing negative views of capitalistic religion and humanistic self-centeredness have led to the secularization of spirituality and create an opportunity for re-spiritualization of religion (Giordan, 2007).

Schneiders (2003) presents three models for the relationship between religion and spirituality: People may consider them as separate entities with no necessary connection. People may also consider them conflicting realities that occur in inverse proportion to one another. Finally, some see them as two parts of a single concept, which may be in tension or conflict at times, but which are essential to the reality of each other.

Regardless of the structure or mechanism, spirituality has a sense of transcendence, which may be connected to an understanding of God, other people, or the universe. It is, however, an individual's transformative connectedness to something higher than him or herself (Tolliver and Tisdell, 2006) that gives an individual a sense of purpose, which then informs ethics, morals, and values (Zwissler, 2007).

Spirituality in the context of this scholarship is defined as a unique relationship to nature or to someone or something greater than one's self, which is perceived to be a profound mental or emotional connection; it is the quality of being concerned with personal transformation, as opposed to material or physical things, for the sake of growth, service, transcendence, overcoming suffering, union with a higher power, and/or internal freedom (Dantley 2003a; Gerzon, 2006; Keating, 2008; Mabey, 2016).

## **Spiritual Leadership Theory**

Spiritual leadership is born from this concept of spirituality and several key concepts that are common to scholars studying spiritual leadership (Bezy, 2011; Fry, 2003; Houston & Sokolow, 2006). Specific principles and a mission often drive spiritual leaders: they emphasize connectedness and building communities (Scanlan, 2011). They are leaders who feel a sense of calling so that their lives have meaning, fueled by hope and faith (Mabey et al., 2016). They generally establish a social or organizational culture based on altruistic love, where the leaders and followers feel a sense of membership in the community (Fry, 2003). Character traits identified as common to Spiritual Leadership Theory include concepts of trust and loyalty, forgiveness and acceptance, gratitude, integrity, honesty, courage, humility, kindness, compassion, patience and meekness, openness, recognizing and fostering unique gifts, and endurance (Fry, 2003; Houston & Sokolow, 2006; Scanlan, 2011; Mabey et. al., 2016). Additionally, many spiritual leaders identify with a higher force and commit themselves to a personal spiritual practice (Bezy, 2011; Fry, 2003; Houston & Sokolow, 2006; Tesdell, 2003; Zwissler, 2007).

Through this model of spiritual leadership, spiritual leaders and those with whom they are both understood and appreciated for the character traits that they foster in each other. Those whom they lead describe spiritual leaders as having care, concern, and appreciation for themselves and others (Fry, 2003). Leaders demonstrate a spiritual approach that encompasses a specific vision or intent, coupled with hope, faith, and a demonstration of an altruistic love that fosters membership and aims to increase



organizational commitment and productivity (Fry, 2003). Houston and Sokolow (2002) present specific principals found common in people who practice spiritual leadership. These principals are used to help determine how leaders utilize these intentions to make decisions about building awareness in schools around social equity, interconnectedness, and a sense of community.

The principals common to spiritual leadership theory as outlined by Houston and Sokolow include several concepts. Intention draws people near, brings actions into line, and gathers energy. Attention is another concept similar to mindfulness. Attention requires leaders to pay attention to their thoughts, to others, to situations and issues, and helps to reduce distractions. Houston and Sokolow also demonstrate that leaders should identify their own gifts and, in turn, help others to find their gifts as well. Leaders should regularly demonstrate and celebrate gratitude by focusing on life's blessings and by demonstrating a growth mindset when faced with challenges. Good leaders understand how small changes can make a big difference. They look for patterns and interconnected concepts that affect the organization. Houston and Sokolow also suggest that openness is a fundamental principle of spiritual leaders that is cultivated in their leadership. More than transparency, openness promotes growth in self and others. Finally, trust stems from the other characteristics and encourages members of the organization to trust the system, process, and each other (West, 1989; Freire, 1997).

### **Restorative Justice and Restorative Practices**

Hadley (2001) extensively discusses the spiritual and religious roots of restorative justice as a model for spiritual leadership. This practice evolved from the circle

ceremony of First Nations as an integral part of spiritual development within the tribe. Restorative practices then further evolved from restorative justice, which is a field of study that has the potential to build healthy communities, increase social capital, reduce the impact of traditionally suspendable offenses, decrease antisocial behavior, and focus on repairing harm and restoring relationships. Restorative practices promote social justice and result in healthier students and schools; they are based on models of community restoration taken from indigenous tribes in the Pacific regions. The premises of restorative practices have many traits common to Houston and Sokolow's (2006) spiritual leadership principles, including attention, openness, transparency, and trust.

The current predominate method of discipline, both in and out of schools, is the Roman notion of "to each his due." In other words, if you make someone suffer, you will suffer; and this often means isolation and exclusion. In the case of chronic discipline, it is often the primary precursor to drop-out, social isolation, crime, and imprisonment.

Students referred out of class for behavior miss instruction. These students are more often people of color and are more often suspended (CRDC, 2016). Traditional discipline and suspension lead to several long-term negative consequences and contribute to the achievement gap. Additionally, suspension does not promote pro-social behavior. Furthermore, traditional methods of discipline do not address restoration of the victim or give the perpetrator an opportunity to repair harm. By contrast, restorative practices require that students who have committed a harm get to hear from the people whom they have harmed, who explain in a non-threatening way how their behavior has impacted their lives and the lives of those around them. Then the perpetrators get a chance to make

it right. Rather than isolation and anger through “to each his own” discipline, perpetrators learn to develop empathy and good communication skills, while the process itself promotes social equity (Table 1). Restorative practices promote a way of discipline that uses preventative approaches and has specific restorative practices for victims and for those disciplined. Some of the features of restorative practices that are common to spiritual leadership and critical spirituality premises include acknowledging that relationships are central to building community; building systems that address misbehavior and harm in a way that strengthens relationships, focusing on the harm done, rather than only on rule breaking; and giving voice to the person harmed. Restorative practices also engage organization members in collaborative problem solving to empower change and growth and to enhance responsibility. The differences between traditional, rationalist discipline methods and restorative methods are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1

*Approaches to Discipline*

Traditional Approach	Restorative Approach
Student(s) broke rules	Harm has been done
Admin/staff determine guilt or innocence	Restorative practices determine what is needed
Guilty party meets punishment	Person who caused harm needs to understand impact and how to make things right
Discipline focuses on guilty party and ignores victim and relationships	Person(s) who harmed, victim, and community all work to re-establish relationships and address victim's needs
Rules and rubrics become more important than individuals and outcomes	Person(s) who harmed is held responsible for behavior, and making things right
Opportunity for expressing remorse are forced or irrelevant	Opportunity is given to make amends and express remorse, restore relationships

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*Note.* A summary of principals of restorative justice as developed by “Fix School Discipline: Toolkit for Educators”

An important component of restorative practices is restorative circles, which are rooted in concepts of Native American/Pan Pacific spiritual rituals. Circles help school communities develop a culture of relationships, giving members of the organization an opportunity to speak and listen to one another in an atmosphere of safety, respect, and equality.

Circles allow students and staff to tell their stories and to offer their own perspectives (Pranis, 2005). Circles can be used for conflict resolution, formative assessment in classrooms, democratic processes, sharing information, and building relationships. The very nature of a circle implies a lack of hierarchy, removing the inherent hierarchy of power or social capital and putting all participants on an equal playing field. Circles are used to help prevent harm and promote belonging, safety, and social responsibility. Restorative practices and circles are a movement that is gaining ground in school systems, partially in an effort to close the discipline gap (Fix School Discipline).

### **Critical Spirituality: The Intersection of Spiritual Leadership and Critical Race**

Dantley (2003a, 2003b) promotes a theory of critical spirituality that is rooted in Cornel West's (1988) notion of prophetic spirituality. Many spiritual practices are traditionally the center of community and therefore have become a source of hope (Dantley, 2003b). These same concepts, however, can be applied to address faith, spiritual, and social issues of any race or culture. Critical spirituality provides a conceptualization for melding the concepts of critical race theory and spiritual leadership in education. Dantley (2010) suggests that this is critical because it is grounded in the asymmetrical power of race, class, gender, and identity. It is spiritual because it requires an active and personal search for meaning, connectedness of school, social milieu, and community. It is spiritual because it promotes the development of vision and intent, coupled with faith, hope, and love.

Some of the guiding principles in the conceptual framework involve practice informed by African American spiritual traditions and supported by the tenets of critical

theory, specifically critical spirituality. Educational leaders face technical as well as adaptive challenges, and the adaptive challenges—those involving beliefs, values, and personal predispositions—impact the effectiveness of our work. Critical spirituality utilizes the premise of a transformative leader, is spiritual in nature, and allows the leader’s spiritual self to guide him or her in the execution of the leadership responsibilities. Within the context of critical pedagogy, a stance that focuses on spirituality emphasizes to students the malleable construct of world circumstance and the changeability of their own. With this knowledge, leaders and students have a responsibility to understand the world and to work to transform it. If the world circumstance is malleable, instilling a sense of community and connection leads to discourse that can uncover myths that oppress and then change the paradigm of social context (McLaren, 2000).

This is done through four main elements (Dantley, 2010, 2011). These elements are not mutually exclusive of other theoretical models, and, in fact, incorporate many aspects of the work of the preceding models of spiritual leadership. Dantley, however, lays out the groundwork for step-by-step spiritually transformative leadership and how it relates to advocacy for social justice.

First, critical self-reflection invites the leader to reflect on what he or she believes, understanding that no leader is value neutral. Second, a leader should engage in deconstructive interpretation, which involves opening one’s mind to an alternate reality, history, and philosophies. Third, a leader engages in performative creativity (Dantley, 2003a). This element involves moving the learning community from a state of status quo

to a position of allowing different voices to be heard in a legitimate, respectful, and responsive environment. Finally, a leader engages in courageous transformative action (Dantley, 2003a). This element requires the leader to involve community, staff, students, and parents to be active partners in seeing equity and fairness as a common goal, both inside and outside of the school.

**Critical self-reflection.** Critical self-reflection invites leaders who wish to actively engage in the steps outlined by Dantley in the pursuit of critical spirituality to begin by engaging in a process of critical self-reflection (Dantley 2010, 2011). This process involves different types of self-reflection that ultimately help the leader to understand that he or she is sacred, real, and critical. This leader maintains a spiritual practice that allows for personal reflection, disclosure, adaptation, and innovation of his or her current reality (Stewart, 1999), and the leader understands that student achievement is tied to a sense of connectedness and purpose (Ladson-Billings, 1994). He or she fosters conditions of love, humility, faith, mindfulness, openness, trust, and critical thinking (Houston & Sokolow, 2002; Freire, 1972) and is purposive, principled, and pragmatic (Dantley, 2003b).

**Deconstructive interpretation.** The leader engaging in critical spirituality will also engage in deconstructive interpretation. This practice requires the leader to regularly engage in personal bias audits of assumptions, values, and beliefs, both ethically and professionally. This may be formal—performed through leadership coursework—or it may be informal—using journals or regular meditation and reflection times (Dantley, 2010, 2011). This leader is pointedly not overly anti-racist in his or her classroom approach in order to allow for open connection with student’s lives (Hall, 1981; Freire,

1973). He or she engages in self-bias audits related to visions, analysis, and practices of social equity (West, 1989) and attempts to understand the cultural contexts of socialization and education of his or her students, particularly those of a different culture, or those traditionally marginalized (McLaren and Dantley, 1990). Additionally, this leader reflects on how he or she allows his or her spiritual self to assist him or her in his or her educational leadership responsibilities (Dantley, 2010).

**Performative creativity.** In order to move his or her practice toward the desired result of deliberate action, the leader who is guided by principles of critical spirituality engages in performative creativity. Creativity requires the preceding reflective process to empower educators to envision organizations that are grounded in values of democracy and social justice. Creativity is a spiritual endeavor in which the educator is able to believe that a radical reconstruction of schools is eminent and to then devise strategies to bring such reconstruction to pass (Dantley, 2011).

This leader makes a concerted effort to move the school community from status quo to envisioning a more democratic culture where voices are actively heard and students feel safe letting their voices be heard. This leader understands that conditions of love, humility, faith, mindfulness, openness, trust, and critical thinking (Houston & Sokolow, 2002) increase a sense of community and allow for more freedom of dialogue (Freire, 1972). Conditions that foster discourse are able to critique institutional political and social mechanics that perpetuate asymmetrical power structures (McLaren & Dantley, 1990). Additionally, this leader finds ways to bring issues of race and class disparity to educational discourse while also maintaining and fostering hope and open discourse



(McLaren & Dantley, 1990; Dantley, 2005). He or she uses his or her spiritual practices to creatively maintain an environment that fosters hope while simultaneously fostering change for social equity.

**Transformative action.** Leaders who participate in transformative action take opportunities to encourage dialogue on a greater scale. This element requires the leader to involve community, staff, students, and parents to be active partners in seeing equity and fairness as a common goal, both inside and outside of the school. These leaders perform bias audits so that they are aware of the bias that they need to check and then pointedly learn about the needs and concerns of students of different cultural, religious, or racial backgrounds as opportunities for greater student interaction and connection.

My study provides concrete examples of critical spirituality concepts and analyzes how educational leaders' spiritual practices inform and guide their professional practices in pursuit of transformational leadership for social justice.

## **Chapter 3: Methods**

### **Introduction**

Several theoretical frameworks for spiritual leadership have been presented, but only Dantley's model presents a framework that incorporates spiritual leadership with social justice advocacy. No work has yet been done that guides educational leaders based on actual examples of this theoretical framework in practice, wherein real leaders attempt to embody these practices in their goals to promotion of social justice while generating a sense of connectedness and community-building, coupled with transformative action when clear public policy and guidelines are not present.

To address this gap, I asked participants open-ended and semi-structured questions about how and what spiritual practices inform their decisions on social issues in their areas of educational leadership, based on characteristics that are identified in the literature as common to those who identify themselves as spiritual leaders. I then extrapolated information from the interviews that specifically addresses the areas of Dantley's framework of critical spirituality. I organized these responses within the framework by those that are inwardly focused responses and those that are outwardly focused responses, as described below. I further organized thematic representations common to responses that speak to the four areas of Dantley's framework of critical spirituality. Responses to these questions are the foundational first step in understanding how critical race and spiritual leadership operate together in practice to promote transformative work in social justice within educational leadership, and ultimately to

understanding how the interaction of characteristics of spiritual leadership and critical pedagogy are embodied by practices of actual educational leaders.

### **Research Questions**

RQ 1: What specific spiritual principles guide educational leaders and how do they apply those principles to 1) the promotion of social justice, 2) generating a sense of connectedness, and 3) building communities.

RQ 2: How do educational leaders access their spiritual practices to engage in self-reflection, open mindedness toward alternative realities, and transformative action when clear public policy and guidelines are not present?

### **Design Rational**

My method of data collection relies on semi-structured interviews and narrative inquiry, a review of interview materials, and a detailed field log (Clandinin, 2007). The interview design is semi-structured to allow for a fluid interview, clarification, and follow-up questions. I utilized narrative inquiry to allow interviewees to communicate their experiences through firsthand accounts of events and experiences, and to describe how the leaders dealt with these events, drawing on their spiritual beliefs to advance the purpose of social justice. Follow-up questions often discussed methods of reflection and understanding, as well as allowing for discussion and clarification as appropriate to understanding active pedagogy aligned with the theoretical framework of critical spirituality (Dantley, 2003). For purposes of anonymity, names were removed from interviews, pseudonyms were assigned, and random gender identifiers were assigned.

I have organized responses to questions, prompts, and follow-up questions into two categories: internal and external leadership style. Internal styles have elements of the theoretical framework and tend to focus on internal reflections, personal spiritual relationships, and methods of self-reflection that identify areas of personal growth. External leadership style tends to be community- and public-oriented and relies on methods of self-reflection that address interaction of leadership with advocacy for transformative action. I then compiled descriptive responses to give examples of the leadership styles describing active participation in critical spiritual leadership, including spiritual leadership, social equity, connectedness, and community. The purpose of the study is to highlight best practices based on the theoretical framework, therefore I only reported responses that reflect definitions of spiritual leadership and critical spirituality in particular, based on the literature review.

**Inward leadership style.** The leader who maintains an informal leadership maintains a spiritual practice that allows for personal interpretation and reflection. She attempts to understand the truths of others, including traditions, histories, knowledge, and politics (Giroux, 1988b). She attempts to understand the cultural contexts of socialization and education of children of color (McLaren and Dantley, 1990). She also attempts to understand the connection between cultural capital and a sense of community, including lessons of caring, coping, and providing emotional support (Yasso, 2005). She uses spiritual practices to creatively foster hope and conditions of love, humility, faith, mindfulness, openness, trust, and critical thinking within herself (Houston and Sokolow, 2002; Freire, 1972). She is purposive, principled, pragmatic (Danley, 2003b), and

engages in critical self-reflection in an effort to come to understand herself as sacred, real, and critical (Dantley 2010). Finally, she attempts to examine personal biases, assumptions, values, and beliefs, both ethically and professionally. These leaders may approach subtle racism or prejudice with dismissal and a reversion to rule following, rather than attempting to understand the cultural contexts and theory that might lead to greater understanding for all parties.

**External leadership style.** The leader who engages in a formal leadership style is not overly anti-racist but allows for an open connection with students' lives (Hall, 1981; Freire, 1973). He fosters open discourse that critiques institutional political and social mechanics that perpetuate asymmetrical power relations (McLaren and Dantley, 1990). He engages in self-criticism related to visions, analysis, and practices of social equity (West, 1989). This leader maintains a spiritual practice that allows for personal interpretation, reflection, disclosure, adaptation, and innovation of current reality (Stewart, 1999), and uses his spiritual practices to creatively foster hope and/or foster change for social equity (Dantley, 2005). He addresses issues of class, as well as race (McLaren and Dantley, 1990), and by doing so allows for open discourse through and for building a sense of community.

This leader also encourages students and fellow staff to affix greater purpose of practice, linking justice and equity in the broader community/society to acquisition of academic skills (Dantley, 2005). He encourages dialogue in the school community about the link of education and greater societal needs. He fosters conditions of love, humility, faith, mindfulness, openness, trust, and critical thinking (Houston & Sokolow, 2002;

Freire, 1972) that increase sense of community and freedom for dialogue. This leader attempts to understand the spiritual self of students and the school community (Dantley, 2005), and understands that student achievement is tied to a sense of connectedness and purpose (Ladson-Billings, 1994). He brings issues of race to educational discourse while maintaining and fostering hope (Dantley, 2005), and allows his spiritual self to assist the leader in educational leadership responsibilities (Dantley, 2010).

The externally-focused leader engages in critical self-reflection in an effort to understand himself as sacred, real, and critical (Dantley 2010). He engages in deconstructive interpretation examines personal biases, assumptions, values, and beliefs, both ethically and professionally. He performs personal equity audits, personal journals, other forms of bias reflection. He also engages in performative creativity: communal efficacy moving self-reflection into deliberate action and moving school community from status quo to envisioning a more democratic culture and space where voices can be actively heard (Dantley 2010). Finally, this leader engages in transformative action, which is the process of utilizing performative creativity—moving from engaging and fostering open dialogue to actively garnering community engagement—in order to see equity and fairness take shape in and outside of the school community.

### **Ethical Issues**

As observed by Theoharis (2007), trustworthiness is a crucial component of any study. I utilized the following methods delineated by Maxwell (2013) to counteract the potential bias and validity threats inherently found in the current data, including researcher bias and reactivity of participants to the researcher. Respondent validation was elicited by

consistently soliciting feedback from the participants about data and conclusions to ensure accurate reflection of what was conveyed, including frequent member checks. I asked follow-up questions related to potential discrepant evidence. Participants were informed that I was interested in understanding their own experiences, opinions, and knowledge, so there are no right or wrong answers. The project was validated by the correspondence between what participants said and my clarification, understanding, and representation of their words. I insured confidentiality and trust, further enhanced by reminders that they have a right to the transcript and to review the final report, as well as the right to withdraw from the study at any time, and if they want to say anything off recording, they may do so. This topic is sensitive in nature; therefore, I used no complete profiles to create samples of leadership styles. Pseudonyms were used to protect identity and to ensure that no profile matches identifiable characteristics of leaders interviewed. Interviews were recorded, but interviewees were informed that pseudonyms were used for recording and for confidentiality during the transcription phase. Information regarding name, age, experience, demographics, professional experiences, and personal experiences were collected; however, only information about professional and personal experiences are reported as related to research questions. I also informed interviewees that it is possible, though unlikely, that deductive disclosure could identify a participant based on the participant's statements, although no cumulative profiles were to be reported. All identifying characteristics, such as specific work place demographics and city, were omitted in order to further ensure confidentiality. I also made every effort to mask the names and locations of the participants to protect identifying information, and

no identifiable information was transmitted or transferred. I stored identifying information on a password-protected computer. Coding information for pseudonyms was also stored on a password-protected computer, to which only I have access.

In this study, I asked participants to identify their spiritual beliefs and practices. While I kept names and identifying information confidential, some people face social prejudice against their beliefs, and as such, I informed participants that they may experience distress when talking about their spirituality. Additionally, an in-depth interview about one's journey to social advocacy may raise intense emotions and memories, particularly with populations that have a history of marginalization. To mitigate this risk, I provided frequent check-in with participants to ensure that they felt comfortable with the direction of the interview, reminding them of their option to discontinue the interview.

### **Separation of Church and State**

The public school system in America calls for a distinct separation of church and state; however, no person enters a position or role neutral in values and beliefs. The law clearly states that no religion should be promoted in public schools, but it also clearly does not prohibit educators from drawing on their moral tenets of their spiritual beliefs to make ethical decisions within the school system. With those values and beliefs comes a moral responsibility to practice the specific tenants found in spiritual and servant leadership (Greenleaf, 2002). Therefore, those who have a specific spiritual practice are tasked with the moral responsibility of making particular ethical choices while maintaining the rule of the land— in this case, specifically the separation clause of the



First Amendment. A consideration of the First Amendment may be reflected in interviewees' responses; however, the First Amendment was not a factor of consideration in the methodology, as participants were not asked specific questions about religion, but only about spiritual practices.

### **Positionality Statement**

I am a white, middle class, cisgender, straight, non-disabled female. I identify as both Christian and spiritual, and consider my spirituality and integral part of my identity. I grew up in a rural suburb in central, coastal Northern California. I received a private education until college. I have two adult children in college and have been in education for over 20 years. My father is Hispanic, while my mother is Scandinavian. As such I am a recipient of white privilege while at the same time understanding some of the challenges of being a person of color in the United States. Some of the aspects of my diverse family background have led me to particular interest in advocacy for social justice, and in particular, how people with a spiritual practice, negotiate and advocate for issues of social justice.

### **Scope and Limitations of the Study**

This study reflects on the habits of public school leaders who practice spirituality in their personal lives. It is limited to the East Coast and West Coast educational leaders who agreed to participate. It is also limited by time constraints of the leaders interviewed and the inability to triangulate with observation. As leaders will have various positions within the school leadership structure, observation of practices described in interviews will not be possible.

The study is also limited in the number of participants, five in total, partially due to the nature of narrative analysis interviews that are in-depth and call for discourse analysis, and partially because of time and scope limitations. Additionally, the information is qualitative and further limited because the discourse was analyzed by only this researcher and no other validation measure was used. Due to the timing of this study, it is also limited to leaders who were willing to participate in a one-hour interview, during the academic school year.

### **Participants**

Participants were selected by referral, from public educational leaders on the East Coast and West Coast of the United States. They are all African-American leaders who identify as having a spiritual practice and who consider themselves to be advocates of social justice. The leaders who participate in the study are familiar with the spiritual traditions and advocacy practices that inform this study. All participants identify as Christian, or believing in and/or following the teachings of Christ.

Participants range from 30 to 65 years of age. Educational experience ranges from three to 39 years. Two of the interviewees hold doctorate-level degrees; one is a doctoral candidate; one holds two master's degrees, and one holds one master's degree. All work in education or an education-related field on the West Coast and/or East Coast, and all work in urban areas. Two educators work in ethnically homogeneous urban neighborhoods with a diverse mix of socioeconomic households, and three work in highly diverse ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic urban areas.

When analyzing the following findings, I distinguish between internalized and externalized examples of each of the four components of critical spirituality. By combining examples of each, I show how transformative work requires both internal and external practice.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

### **Profiles of Spiritualism and Leadership**

#### **Introduction**

Michael Dantley (2010) provides a four-part foundational framework for educational leaders who have a spiritual practice and are interested in accessing their spirituality to be transformative leaders for social justice through critical spirituality. These areas include critical self-reflection, deconstructive interpretation, performative creativity and transformative action. Within this work, I have organized specific responses to interviews from educational leaders to highlight the four parts of the Dantley's framework and to provide examples of internally and externally focused responses by these leaders so that an educator may see how a person might move from internally focused spiritual leadership to a more transformative externally focused path of leadership for social justice. These profiles highlight stories shared by interviewees. While I provide a breakdown of the four areas of critical spirituality, it is evident within the responses, particularly those that are more externalized, that leaders move in, out, and through the different areas of critical spirituality in the jazz-like cadence of practical wisdom.

Educators with a spiritual practice do not always consciously consider how their beliefs affect their practices. Spiritual practices are not something that they do, but rather are part of who they are, much like their family dynamics or their values. Applying Spiritual Leadership Theory to questions of how one responds in a crisis, or in a situation that is nuanced or "gray" is like asking someone why he or she values being kind. Upon

reflection, he or she may come up with a response, but the ultimate response is, ‘that is what I do automatically.’ How those practices manifest themselves, however, changes depending on the person and his or her life experiences.

African-American school leaders were interviewed in this study because they are familiar with and engaged in the spiritual traditions that inform this study, so they were asked how those traditions inform their approach to social justice advocacy.

When asking respondents about how they began the process of critical self-reflection in order to understand the dynamics of social justice leadership, one finds that the answer is not always clear. Many respondents find that social justice advocacy is as much a part of who they are as their spiritual practice, but they vary in the manifestation of their individual approach. Their responses varied from formal, well-defined cadences of practice coupled with intermingled changes to fit the harmony of the circumstances, to informal approaches to social justice, based on beliefs and personal experiences, informed by spiritual practices. Examples of these approaches are provided to describe how these leaders have navigated difficult, subtly nuanced circumstances that either do not fit neatly into well-defined policy, or that challenge policy, requiring a phronetic approach to address given scenarios.

### **Critical Self-Reflection**

Participants described different types and practices of critical self-reflection that help the leader to understand that he or she is sacred, real, and critical. A leader reflects on what he believes that allows for innovation of his or her current reality. Within this self-reflection, he is purposive, principled and pragmatic. The following are concrete

examples of these practices. The first two examples are internally focused and represent a self-reflection that allows for personal interpretation. Rene's<sup>2</sup> responses provide an example of the transition from internal to externally focused self-reflection, in that she sees her position as a higher calling and is attempting to understand the connection between spiritual self-reflection and the cultural contexts of those she works with. The last two examples provide a more formal presentation of critical self-reflection. These leaders engage in self-reflection related to visions, analysis, and practices of social equity. THESE LEADER'S spiritual practice allows for personal interpretation and reflection related to fostering hope and change for social equity.

Omari's description of spiritual practice demonstrates the respondent's informal approach to self-reflection. This practice provides an example of how policies fall short of providing guidance to deal with complex emotions related to our work. Spiritual practices provide solace and space for self-reflection. The respondent describes reflective time as opportunities to engage in prayer, or, more often, to listen to gospel music that is soothing and nurtures his soul. The primary purpose of these times is to deal with situations that upset or anger Omari and provide opportunities for peace. Although these moments can occur randomly, they tend to be in response to perceived provocation of some kind and allow Omari to combine exercise with spiritual practice in order to gain a sense of peace. Omari explains,

I listen to music during my runs. Well, I run and work out pretty often. So sometimes I listen to gospel music while I'm working or running in the morning. Sometimes I get dressed to it. Sometimes I'm sitting at work, I listen to it. Honestly, it's either good or bad moods where I listen to it. But sometimes when

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<sup>2</sup> All names are pseudonyms

I know that I'm completely off balance, I listen to it. When I'm completely off balance, I play gospel music and center my energy.

Kai also has an informal but consistent spiritual approach to self-reflections.

Although her practices are closely tied to a religion, they primarily manifest themselves outside of work, while practicing that religion. Kai does not necessarily deliberately integrate spiritual practice to adaptation and innovation in professional practice; however, her practice is consistent, and she receives strength to carry on in personal and professional endeavors through these practices. She explains,

Well, I usually begin the day or try to remember to begin the day with prayer. I seek. To have time, alone time, whether it's in the morning and you're waking up and you're just trying to gather your thoughts and focus on God and say a little prayer. When I'm not as busy, it seems I spend time meditating, and that just looks like being in a quiet place. Sometimes I use aids, such as journal writing. I have a journal that says my talks with God. "Dear God," and then I go through whatever my concerns are. I share them. I walk, and then I have my talks with God during my walks. I'm sitting outside in my backyard, letting the sun hit me; especially when the weather is good, I'm outside.

Kai goes on to describe how her personal spiritual practices affect her professional leadership practices. She changes environmental factors within the organization of the classroom to ensure that students have opportunities to connect with sunlight, which, in turn, she connects to energy and positive interactions as well as the deep importance of each individual and his or her place in the world.

I seek sunlight. I don't like darkness in terms of going into a room. I like to see the natural light comes in. It bothers me that children are learning in classrooms that have no windows so that they could see the blue sky or have the sunlight come in. It has to do on a broad level of how you view the world, how you interact with people that you see the other person as a child of God, or you try to. You try not to have judgments on people, and when you find yourself doing that, you have to reset and go back to your deep belief... Everyone has a special place or purpose in the world.

Kai seems to reflect on the importance of maintaining positive interactions to the full extent possible. Spiritual reflections allow her to be less judgmental and more of a problem-solver. Each moment is a snapshot in time, and the next moment or next day could be different.

Rene, sees spirituality and religion as intertwined. Her spiritual practice does not include pontification of beliefs, but it is about regular communion with her God. Rene shows up, is honest, fair, and self-reflective, attempting at all times to manifest spirituality. Rene has a long family history of church leaders involved in Civil Rights activism. She views her professional role as integrating spiritual guidance received through communion with a higher power, in this case God, with activism and advocacy for those who have been traditionally marginalized or who don't have an equal voice in society. This communion allows for deep purposive, personal reflection, disclosure, and critical thinking. When discussing her perceived role as an advocate for traditionally marginalized groups, Rene sees that role as integrated with her personal beliefs:

My responsibility that I felt was just to uphold the dignity and the worth of all the people that I worked with, and so that meant supporting [the LGBTQ community] on the measure of their identity, how they see themselves. I was a huge advocate for that reform initiative [for gender-neutral bathrooms] in my school to make sure that the students felt comfortable and that they could be themselves in the environment. That did require prayer for me, but it was more so just thinking about how would I want to be treated in this scenario... As a person in general, but also as a Christian in that space, what is my role in that effort? I just wanted to have some time to think about it and figure out what role I want to serve in this effort, and be able to name 'why' for people.

In the following example, Rene reflects principles of spiritual leadership described by many scholars, in that her work is fueled by a sense of a higher calling. She identifies



with a higher force and commits herself to leadership guided by that principle when she describes her ultimate purpose, “I’m actually working for God” (Houston and Sokolow (2006), Mabey, et. al.( 2016), Fry, 2003 and Bezy 2011).

As a professional, I find that [my spirituality] is represented in my decision-making processes all the time. On the job, I would say daily, because so much does come up, especially in my role doing diversity work. It’s very personal. It’s very complicated and complex. It just requires a lot of I would say self-control, wisdom, discernment before I get involved and really start to speak up or start to address issues. I always felt like I would seek prayer... about topics. I would just get permission from the people that I work with to have that time before I make a decision, or before I make a statement, because my role was very public. I just always wanted to be mindful for me as a person. My role is what I was hired to do. I get my compensation. I do all of that. Ultimately... I’m actually working for God. That being said, what do I need to do in this scenario?

Another leader’s story illustrates the concept of formalized critical self-reflection. Elroi is a self-identified Christian who is both deeply religious and deeply spiritual. He identifies as sacred, real, and critical, as endowed by his creator. Elroi maintains a spiritual practice that allows for personal reflection and adaptation, as appropriate within the confines of religious beliefs. He will not compromise beliefs in some areas, but always believes that the higher calling is to foster love, openness, trust, and critical thinking. Elroi quotes the book of James when stating that what the Father considers pure and faultless is to look after the disadvantaged (James 1:27, New International Version). Elroi goes on to state that this is both a religion and a relationship, and to stay in the right relationship with the Creator is to reflect one’s own behavior. Regardless of Elroi’s personal beliefs, it is “wicked” to mistreat anyone in a weaker position than your own, and he believes that the job is to approach everyone, particularly traditionally marginalized groups, with an ethic of love. Elroi sees God as one who cares deeply about

those who are mistreated and calls on His followers to specifically stand up and speak for those who do not always have a voice.

Issa also demonstrates a more formal style of critical self-reflection. She maintains a deeply spiritual relationship with God, spends time daily in prayer, and identifies as “ritualistic” in her approach to spiritual life. In particular, she takes time to regularly self-reflect on professional direction and aims to be purposeful and pragmatic, while at the same time being adaptable. When discussing a specific time when spiritual practices guided decision-making at work, Issa discussed taking the current position in a complex and complicated urban neighborhood and guiding a program that would be highly scrutinized:

By accepting this position, it fell on my shoulders to create everything from the ground up. I really had to sit and—not just reflect, but really pray and be in the Spirit—to make sure that I was making the right decision because I knew what this would entail. I knew then, not just the emotional and the mental and the physical—knew that there was going to be a spiritual piece throughout this whole thing. There *had* to be some kind of spiritual engagement just knowing the struggles of the population that we are serving. I was going to have to exhaust myself mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. I was going to have to pour into these [students] every day. I had to make sure I was ready for that.

Issa went on to talk about how there have been many times when she questioned her motivation, professionally, and that her affirmation frequently came back to spending time in the Spirit. Issa spends time each morning and each evening in prayer; at night, she also reflects on decisions. In those times, Issa is critical about the impact that she has on the school family and listens to the Spirit within, remembering that she is grounded in faith in God, and that negative actions of others cannot impact the decisions that she makes for the school family. Issa asks,

Did I respond today as a person of faith, or did I allow emotions to take control of the moment? If I did allow emotions to take control of the moment, how can I make sure I repair it, whatever harm I've created? Then make sure that I'm still walking hand-in-hand with God... How can I have a positive spirit and energy when I interact with that person the next time to ensure they feel that the decision I made was from the goodness of my heart and my spirit?

### **Deconstructive Interpretation**

The leader engaging in critical spirituality will also engage in deconstructive interpretation. Some leaders take an internalized approach to deconstructive interpretation. They may focus self-bias audits by reflecting on other's practices, and by helping others recognize their own biases. These leaders may approach subtle racism or prejudice with dismissal and a reversion to rule following, rather than attempting to understand the cultural contexts and theory that might lead to greater understanding for all parties. This approach has its place, in that it is direct and expedient; however, a more formal approach may address the biases behind the behavior so that the leader can address the values inherent in the acts of prejudice. A more formal approach requires constant and persistent self-bias and personal trigger audits, particularly guided by the spiritual self. These leaders address issues of class, as well as race, by creatively fostering hope and change for social equity. Following are one example of internally focused deconstructive interpretation and two examples of externally-focused deconstructive interpretation.

One leader explained his internal approach to self-bias audits by demonstrating an immediate reflection on what may have been important, and he gets to the importance of understanding the intent but fails to understand how helping those involved find

resolution together may lead to greater understanding of and action toward racism, in this case, for all parties.

How I've gotten through [racism directed toward me] is the belief of self-reflecting. Okay, what is it that I did if I could have done it differently, made a decision differently, or it wouldn't have mattered no matter what I did. I had to go through a process of that. Looking back some years later on it, I still call it what it was, racism. I see it as that. I think it was growth for me, not so much for what others went through, but it was growth for me to know that number one, I can be strong... So the process [of self-reflection] that I go through is I look at the situation, and I look at my reaction to it. Probably I would help the person by saying, 'Can you tell me why you are reacting the way that you're reacting? What's important to you? What is it that you need?' Go from there. Because usually the bottom line is someone has a need, and it's not being fulfilled. It may not be the thing that's so very obvious. It could be a desire to be respected or regarded in a different way. I probably would throw up a mirror and see if they could see themselves through those lenses, through the mirror. That's how I could do it.

Other leaders demonstrate concrete ways to allow open connection to students' lives.

This is done BY making connections with resources, such as counseling or providing opportunities for individual students to work out their differences with an administrator as a moderator. One educator encouraged a student of Muslim faith to share about her religious practices and clothing in an oral presentation.

Leaders who take an external approach might take these individual opportunities and encourage dialogue on a greater scale. These leaders perform bias audits so that they are aware of the bias that they need to check and then pointedly learn about the needs and concerns of students of different cultural, religious, or racial backgrounds as opportunities for greater student interaction and connection. One leader demonstrates a reflection of this nature that affected the interactions that the respondent had with her staff. Issa was raised in foster care and extreme poverty and was triggered by decisions that staff had

made regarding interactions with some of the more indigent students at the school. She wanted to react in anger but took the time to reflect and perform a bias-check so that she could ultimately open the lines of communication and create opportunities for solutions.

I could particularly think of a time where [some staff] really did a—really made some very poor decisions, in my opinion. I was extremely frustrated by some of the decisions because it wasn't for the best interest of the [students].

Issa then circles back to critical self-reflection before moving forward with deconstructive interpretation. Her reflection, which includes time spent in spiritual practices, allowed her the space to plan her next actions. Like Omari, in context of critical self-reflections, Issa reviews and examines her emotions, and her connection with God gives her the clarity needed to put her emotions into perspective. She demonstrates the growth mindset and an ability to apply practical wisdom when faced with challenges.

I was in the process of—that day I'd purposely left and said, 'No, I'm not going respond until tomorrow.' I was super frustrated. I'm at the gym, and I'm like, 'Let your frustration out. Let's get it out.' The gym happens to be a time where I feel I'm in a space with my spirit. I was... trying to fight through this frustration. There was a question, I was just like, 'What are you really angry about? What part of this really angers you? Now address that.' I was able to maneuver through the cloud of frustration, the emotions that were surrounding that one question. Which that one question grounded me back to, 'Let's be solution-oriented with this, instead of responding to the emotion.' That helped the way that I responded the next morning. Because I was now able to create a plan of action to address the situation, but to hear where [the staff] were coming from, and understand the intent of the decision. It allowed me to really think about it from another lens and make a much more informed decision, or response. To ensure that there weren't any negative feelings that came from the moment and friction that could have happened because of the sensitivity of the [staff]... Part of instructional leadership, part of education—a lot of education is a people's business. It's a customer service business. Any type of response that I have towards people has an emotional feel to it as well.

If I had responded with the frustration that I'd built up that afternoon, once I received information about the decision, I could have created an environment that would have been bad for students. Because my response would have then put

them in a space that the next day they would have a basically negative impact on the instructional day. I think that's where I'm starting to learn that you have the balance—not only the technical stuff—but you have to balance the emotional aspect of this work as well. Trying to understand people about where they are and how they receive feedback. How they receive charges. How they receive solutions. You have to understand that this is how everybody processes, or this is how they process differently, and they receive information differently. You have to figure out somewhere in the middle to ensure that again, is positively impacting the students. That's what at the end of the day comes down to. How is this decision you're making going positively impact the students?

Elroi had a very similar take on the process of bias reflection. He considers that being raised in an unusually sheltered life, and because of the privilege of upbringing, diverse neighborhood, and private education, he did not experience racism. Elroi does however, acknowledge observing racism, and that it has become a real concern to many of his students in an increasingly alarming way in the last two years. To mitigate what Elroi sees as increasing racism, he seeks to understand the cultural contexts of the students, particularly those of a different culture or religion than his own, or those traditionally marginalized. Elroi's efforts at open communication center on efforts to understand the needs and hear the voices of all people, while looking for solutions that are common and for the greater good. This approach reflects his externalized style of providing a learning environment that is not overly anti-racist, but allows for an open connections to discourse and to student's lives (Hall, 1981; Freire, 1973). In this effort, Elroi does not automatically dismiss those who have traditionally held privilege and now voice displeasure in their new disenfranchisement.

I think, the polarization of the Trump administration, some of the decisions they have made to just make people get angry... People on one side that felt disenfranchised before Trump... saw Trump as an opportunity to voice their displeasure. Whether we think it's wrong or not, that's how they feel. That's something we have to better understand. People are responding in a way they

feel, in a way that's real to them, whether or not it's the correct response, or the right way, that's how they're responding. In the same token, when black people get mad because we hear white people say, 'That happened so long ago' or 'That doesn't apply now,' then we get upset because it's how we feel.

I just feel like part of my call is to understand that and is to be a bridging force between groups. I don't consider myself to be a polarizing figure, though I am pretty dogmatic in my theology. I just find that my heart is more to see people reconcile and to understand both sides of the issue.

Additionally, Elroi likens the ongoing process of bias audits to that of the church denomination to which the respondent belongs. Elroi's Pentecostal-based organization rose directly out of the Azusa Street Revival of 1906, led by an African American holiness preacher, William Seymore. Seymore taught racial reconciliation and restoration of spiritual gifts. Soon after the church had formalized its doctrine, African Americans were banned from ordination and formed a separate denomination. By 1965, the church issued a retraction of that policy and formally condemned racism and discrimination (History of the General Council of the Assemblies of God, 2019). Elroi's bias audits involve regular meditation and reflections on what he is doing to further the advancement of social justice and encourage peace and integration.

[My church] was intentional about recognizing that what they had done was wrong and in order to right their wrong, they had to be intentional about taking steps to show people that they saw that. I think from a cultural perspective, the effects that you've seen, just in [my church], it's worked. I think culturally we're going to have to take on the same thing to figure out how can we recognize that we did something wrong and work collectively to fix it in a way that people can agree is okay. It's finding that balance between ruffling feathers, but getting things done."

Ultimately, Elroi's goal is to see the role that he plays in creating a world that reflects his view of heaven, uniting "every nation, generation, and tongue" (Revelations 7:9).

## **Performative Creativity**

In order to move his or her practice toward the desired result of deliberate action, the leader who is guided by principles of critical spirituality engages in performative creativity, which involves open discourse. This step begins the process of deliberate action. performative creativity requires the leader to make a concerted effort to move a school community from status quo to envisioning a more democratic culture where voices are actively heard. This leader actively encourages a sense of community so that members of that community can collectively learn to critique institutional policies. Unanimously, participants agree that the key to open discourse is fostering an environment of unconditional love. How they progress from unconditional love to an environment where issues of racial and class disparity can be discussed openly and without judgment differs with each leader. Following are two examples of internalized performative creativity and three examples of externalized performative creativity.

Kai is able to understand the importance of creating a community and opening dialogue but was not able to site an example of how she, personally, practices this in her work. Instead, she recalled a specific time in school when racial tensions were particularly tense. Her administrator at the time facilitated conversations with like-raced groups. These groups delineated the issues that were of most concern to them and the questions that they had for other groups. The administrator then mixed the groups up and allowed facilitators to help the inter-racial groups have hard conversations about concerns and solutions to racial tension. At the time, she felt that the approach was beneficial and



healing for the entire student body and facilitated dialogue between groups that might otherwise have chosen self-segregation.

Omari understands that open communication requires unconditional positive self-regard. He points out the importance of not being judgmental with students. He focuses on not just academics, but social emotional learning. He states that it is important to be aware of trauma-informed practices, being careful to do things with students and not at them, instead “showering them with love.”

Elroi notes that when current events arise that are particularly polarizing, he has to approach open dialogue from a place of open acceptance and unconditional love. It is easy for everyone to retreat to their cliques, especially when people are upset, but Elroi believes that if groups are not talking, they are often just hating each other from a distance. In a recent event, an African-American male was killed by police. Elroi had people in class who were pro-police and others who felt that an injustice had occurred. As the students wanted to discuss the issue, the respondent allowed for respectful dialogue, free of judgment. Elroi feels that if people cannot talk freely, no one will ever understand each other’s perspectives. Elroi told students,

I want you to know what’s going on.’ We talked about gun control. We talked about a lot of different things. Typically on things like this, I won’t necessarily give them my opinion. I try to be as neutral as I can. With exceptions. There’s just some stuff I am not going to be neutral about. I’ll have them talk about it.

Elroi also acknowledges the importance of helping those who have committed a wrong to acknowledge that harm has occurred, and to allow for a process of reconciliation. Although there is no formal process for this practice in his district, in

these instances Elroi is responding informally with Restorative Practices. He is building community and engaging students in collaborative problem solving to empower change and growth and to enhance responsibility.

Issa works in an area where the effort to move the school community from status quo to letting voices be heard is a stated vision of the school. Within this school community, students are exposed to altruistic activities that allow them to see the importance of fostering hope and open communication. This school works from a foundational principal that practices restorative justice and restorative circles. Issa's school has daily school-wide circles and regular classroom-based circles. When serious harm occurs, formal restorative conferences may be necessary to allow victims a voice in how restoration should take place and to integrate a person who has harmed back into the school community without shame. Issa shares the school's philosophy, explaining how the school fosters conditions of love, faith, and trust to increase the sense of community and allow for dialogue about issues important for fostering social change. Within this context, she shares how important it is that students believe that they are part of something bigger than themselves. We see here the concept of spiritual leadership at work. In this statement we see that regardless of the structure or mechanism, spirituality has a sense of transcendence—to an individual's transformative connectedness to something higher than him or herself—and gives individual a sense of purpose, which then informs ethics, morals, and values (Zwissler, 2007).

We want to really get our students to believe in themselves and believe that they are—that they're worthy. They're worthy of people caring for them. Generally speaking, [students of color]—especially in the media, especially and their communities—they're demeaned, and they're shown as animals, and they're

shown as this—these people who others should fear. They have never been able to—they’ve not been receptive of love before because it’s never been present. What we try to create is a spirit of love in this space. We’re grounded in that. You have to love on these kids every day; they have to feel it because nobody else is doing it for them for the most part... I believe in that spirit of love as well. You see people hugging each other in this space. You see kids coming and giving hugs, or asking to sit in your space just because they want to be around you. Because they’re struggling through something, and they just want to see how you operate on that thing. I think that’s a collection of love. They understand the people here care. That you believe in something bigger than yourself.

Issa is also taking a class that focuses on the principles consistent with deconstructive interpretation. Part of the process is finding others to share accountability for struggles, biases, and responses. Issa feels that the shared accountability with colleagues, in a space with common goals, takes leadership beyond empathy into the realm of understanding. In this way, she can process what students are experiencing, share personal experiences, and find ways to help them overcome adverse circumstances. Issa speaks specifically to the move from objective rationalism to more complex theoretical frameworks and prophetic pragmatism when she notes that too often educators feel that they have to have the “right” answer, when in fact they need to be active listeners who are willing to regularly question their own beliefs and practices. Accountability forces people to acknowledge deficiencies, have conversations about them, and then address them.

Rene shared a recent incident that required careful democratic negotiations to ensure voices were actively heard, and students felt safe letting their voices be heard. She utilized the spiritual leadership principles of understanding that conditions of love, mindfulness, openness, and trust (Houston & Sokolow, 2002) increased dialogue specifically about asymmetrical power structures and class disparity. A white, male student was using racial epithets and making offensive comments along the lines of race,

class, and gender. His family had social capital in the community and had donated a lot of money to the school. When a student finally spoke up, many students came forward with similar complaints about the student. The student was suspended, but because of the power structures involved, many of the victims felt that attention was focused on him, rather than on what he did; consequently, they felt ignored. Unfortunately Rene's organization did not engage in restorative practices, so it fell on Rene to negotiate the aspects of helping victims be heard.

Rene felt morally charged with validating the needs of those victimized and finding a way for all students to have a voice and learn from the experience. She was also charged with cultural sensitivity training for the student and his family. Rene approached the situation circumspectly, understanding that this young man was sometimes socially awkward and needed to have this situation be a learning opportunity, while the head administrator and family decided that the MLK assembly would be a great opportunity for this young man to talk about micro-aggressions. Many of the victims were angry that he was given a platform. Rene used it as an opportunity to help him reflect on how he impacted others, and how he would restore justice to the situation. It was decided that a public apology was appropriate. When the time came for the assembly, this student skipped over the apology slide in his PowerPoint, and Rene had to step on stage and physically go back to the slide to give him a very public opportunity to apologize, which he did. Rene's ultimate intent was to help facilitate dialogue and foster a situation with love and firmness that would allow him to take ownership of his behavior and make it right. Ultimately, most people were still angry with the young man, and Rene regretted

not providing the victims a chance to civilly explain how this young man's behavior impacted them and giving them a voice in how he could make it right. Rene took it as a learning opportunity on how a leader might more ably facilitate increased dialogue around hard conversations. In the end, she was able to create parent and staff trainings around micro-aggressions, which have, in turn, sparked an increased sense of community and more freedom for dialogue.

Rene demonstrates a transition from internally to externally focused performative creativity in this example because performative creativity is a spiritual endeavor in which the educator makes a concerted effort to move the school community from status quo to envisioning a more democratic culture where voices are actively heard and students feel safe letting their voices be heard (Dantley, 2010).

### **Transformative Action**

Finally, the leader who has a spiritual practice and wants to be transformative in his or her practices of social equity will engage in transformative action. This process requires the leader to move from the process of performative creativity, engaging and fostering open dialogue, to actively garnering community engagement to see equity and fairness take shape inside and outside of the school community. This leader understands the connection between cultural capital and a sense of community and allows the lessons of caring and coping to spread to the community at large. She encourages students and fellow staff to affix greater purpose of practice to learning. She helps them to understand that learning is not just about reading or writing but links education to justice and equity in the broader community and to greater societal needs (Dantley, 2005). She attempts to

understand the spiritual self of the students and broader community that she serves (Dantley, 2005) and encourages dialogue about issues of social justice that concern and affect the community and society. Following are two examples of internally focused leadership, one of a transitional form of internally and externally focused leadership, and two examples of externally focused transformative action leadership.

Omari shares an internal and personal process for connecting lessons of caring and coping to the community at large. He serves as a liaison to Child Protective Services as a consultant to discuss cultural norms within the local African-American communities. As part of this process, Omari works with social services to help workers reflect on their own biases. Additionally, Omari is undertaking research that investigates how foster care affects the educational outcomes of black men.

Kai also has internally focused concrete and personal methods of actively garnering community engagement to see equity and fairness take shape. Her examples, however, lack the performative creativity needed to challenge institutional mechanics that perpetuate asymmetrical power structures. In her example, she works with her church and sorority sisters to provide grants that improve the long-term secondary educational outcomes for African-American women. These grants may include tutoring, philanthropic work, and/or college scholarships.

Rene's spiritual reflections have led her to recognize the future opportunity in the profession to link students with services, but she is still learning how to bridge the gap between deconstructive interpretation and transformative action with performative creativity. In this example she has engaged in a process of deconstructive interpretation,

linking her self-reflection to ideas about how visions for social advocacy transform to transformative action, but she has not yet worked out the link of those two concepts with performative creativity—the critical step in which she teaches students how to become change agents. She is particularly passionate about the discipline gap and is advocating for alternatives to traditional discipline; these involve restorative practices and racial and ethnic sensitivity, and understanding retreats for students. Rene is particularly concerned that small incidences of harsh discipline can have life-long impact for students who are already marginalized. If students cannot feel welcome back into a school community after a mistake, how can they ever learn from those mistakes and go on to make positive societal impact? Rene believes that unifying instruments of change, such as mental health resources, music, spirituality, and social activism, are long-neglected tools that ultimately affix greater purpose of practice to learning, if these tools are used intentionally and not just in the name of “diversity.”

Elroi works with the community on various projects linking students to philanthropic work through the church. He also speaks at public engagements about spiritual leadership and social justice. After Elroi spoke at a public forum following the shooting death of an African-American male by local police, he was asked by the mayor to facilitate a forum that utilized the premises of a restorative circle between community members, students, and police. Prior to the circle forum, Elroi facilitated conversations among students at the school about the same topic. ELROI HAD strong feelings ABOUT THE TOPIC SO it was important to HIM to affix a greater purpose of practice to learning to address justice and equity in the broader community.

The forum gave community members the opportunity to have frank discussions with police about their concerns and gave police the opportunity to see the community members whom they service as much more than a job. Elroi was disturbed during the process when he noticed that police were having difficulty understanding the depth of fear, anger, and feelings of marginalization in the community that they served.

I went around, and one of the things that I said to them was, ‘When you’ve seen these videos and these black men being killed, I want you to give me in one word, how does it make you feel?’ So, we go around the group, and when we get to all of the police officers, they all say, ‘I need more information. I need more facts. I don’t know what happened.’ Mind you, I did say one word, but we get to the police chief. The police chief says, ‘It makes me feel sad.’ I was like, ‘You know what?’ After that period of reflection, I said, ‘When we go around—it was so predictable what you were gonna say. Predictable cops, black, white, whatever. You’re being predictable.’ I said, ‘What you need to understand is that what people on the other side want to feel, they want to feel like you felt something. It wasn’t just you saw a ‘possum in the backyard trying to get your chickens, and then you just like, ‘I stopped him from getting’ my chickens. I don’t feel any kind of way about it.’ We want to feel like this was a human being that you saw.’

Afterward we talked about it. I gave them a chance to explain, and they were like, ‘Well, you wanted me to make a decision based on—I haven’t seen the video. I don’t know if this person did this, if this person did that.’ I said, ‘I understand that... You can still exert some level of empathy for people to know like, ‘Man, this is a human being... they’re dead now. Their families are without this person now.’ I’m like, ‘The fact that you can’t do that makes it really difficult for people to be able to forgive you.’ I told them, too, I said, ‘These people out here that are angry with you, they are upset, they want to know that you care about their lives. If you could show them that you care even just a little. If you can muster enough humanity to show them that you care and not that you’re a robot. ‘I can’t have any feelings about this.’ You can have feelings about this. You can think you did exactly what was right, and maybe you did, but there is a human being, somebody’s son, somebody’s father, somebody’s brother, somebody’s nephew, or uncle, you know. Somebody loved that person. For you to just treat them like it’s just a routine thing that I do, that doesn’t help people to heal.’



Ultimately, Elroi was asked by students, community members, and school safety police officers who had participated in the forum to facilitate ongoing conversations. In this way, Elroi links the job as a church youth counselor to life lessons that encourage ongoing dialogue and community activism about issues of social equity.

Elroi is trying to help students recognize that they need to start thinking about society from a higher level. “They’re just still discovering themselves,” he says. For example, on one occasion, Elroi noticed a young Muslim woman who described many things about herself in a forum on self-identification, but did not once mention her religion or her hijab. Elroi began to initiate opportunities for discussion about different cultural and religious traditions. Eventually, she stepped out of her comfort zone to discuss traditional Muslim practices and attire. Elroi attempts to understand the spiritual needs of the community that he serves and to be sensitive to those needs. Recent conversations with students about immigration invariably led to discussions about September 11<sup>th</sup> and Islamic terrorism. Because Elroi is a minister, students are aware of his beliefs, but Elroi makes a concerted effort to show, “that I care about them as well, and that there’s not a piece of their spirituality that they need to hide from me.” Elroi models for other students that fanatics do not speak for the whole, and that everyone should be valued. “Just because you’re Muslim and I’m Christian, that doesn’t mean that I can’t love you and I can’t care about you.”

Elroi was recently asked to address the incoming students. Without sharing that it was a story from the Bible, Elroi told the Gospel of Matthew’s Parable of the Talents. In the parable, the Master leaves each of his servants with different amounts of money,

which represent talents. In the end, each is held accountable for what he did with the talents given. The point was that those given little are elevated in authority and influence when they use their talents wisely, while for those who waste their talents, what they have is taken away. Elroi asked the students to think about the opportunities that they are given and the life lessons that they would be learning in the coming year. They would be given opportunities to influence and become change agents for good. Elroi's point was to ask them what they intended to do with talents and opportunities. While academics are important, these are the lessons that will change society.

Issa's transformative practices involve, in part, garnering community resources and holding those resources accountable. She works in an area with extreme socio-economic diversity and leverages that diversity to see that resources are allocated for students in her school that are on the lower end of that spectrum. She was able to get several grants for social-emotional health initiatives to serve the population of students in the region. Issa has been challenged by agencies that are unable or unwilling to provide services in her school's neighborhood. Issa shares these concerns with the leadership team, and they work toward creative solutions. In one instance, doing so required activism at a governmental level to see policy change. Issa allows students to be a part of this process in order to show them the importance of affixing a greater purpose to learning and to give them a voice.

Dantley (2005) suggests that the formal leader attempts to understand the spiritual self of students and the school community. Issa makes a concerted effort to understand the spiritual lives of the students whom she serves. Issa knows the spiritual diversity of

the region and the students and provides opportunities for them to express their spirituality in school. Students talk about how their pastors would respond to specific scenarios in circle times, and a room is provided for prayer time for Muslim students.

Issa believes that part of the challenge of this competency is shifting the mindsets of the other adults on staff. Most staff come from middle class environments, THEREFORE regular coaching is provided to staff to address issues of biases, as well as cultural and class competence. Issa's goal is to challenge the punitive discipline paradigm. Issa would like to see staff embrace restorative practices and be reflective of the ultimate goal of education in this organization. That is, education is not just about reading and writing, but also about effecting change for justice and equity in the broader community and society at large.

Another practice that Issa shared was the importance of facilitating student appreciation of the greater good of society through student volunteerism. Students learn early on that they, personally, effect change, and the adage that volunteering is the price you pay for living is part of the culture of the school. Students serve at least 100 community service hours during their tenure at the school. Their choices are organized and include monitored mentorship. When asked about training for mentorship, Issa noted that it is part of the ongoing culture of the school, which is why it is considered monitored. She describes how they prepare students by engaging in the reflective practices that spiritual leaders engage in. They regularly negotiate the conflict of policy and ethics, and Issa is teaching students to reflect on what they believe, what their personal rules are, and how that relates to their own spiritual connections.

We want our students to see and experience different opportunities, and then create their own belief system. To ask, ‘What is something that you eventually are going to be grounded in? What are your rules? Where are you forming those? How and why?’ ‘We want you to seize an opportunity to be a career learner. That’s what I want you to do when you leave this space. I want you to always seek to learn more. Whether that’s a religion, whether that’s your career, whether that’s in your family, always seek to get better, every day. To do something more.’ I charge my staff to do that like, ‘How do we continue to better this space, where they feel comfortable enough to fail?’

‘You have to feel loved and cared for to take that risk of failing. I think that’s what schools need to talk about more like, “Are we setting up an environment and a culture or a climate in our space that allows young people to feel safe enough to fail?’

‘We want you to be a person of high character when you leave here... We want you to be a lifelong learner, in whatever you decide to be a lifelong learner of. Dive into it and stay in it and continue to grow through it. Then we want you to be an agent of change, and [understand] how are you going to do that. [What] are you grounded in? What beliefs are you grounded in? Why? How are you going have a general impact on other people? Not just selfishly being about you.’

## Chapter 5: Conclusions

### Introduction

If educators see value in social justice, why attempt to understand how spiritual practices inform advocacy for social justice? Spiritual practices are a source for insight and guidance on ethical issues in educational leadership that affect society and sociological issues (Dantley, 2003; Driscoll & McKee, 2007; Fry, 2003).

As educational leaders grapple with a growing understanding that rational, dualistic humanism has not served our leadership but has served, instead, to engrain Western traditions of banking pedagogy that do not fully represent the reality of leaders or students (Barad, 2003; Friere, 1973), these leaders look to Spiritual Leadership Theory to understand how interconnectedness and community building, and transformation of philosophical perspective provide a sense of hope from hermeneutic understanding to bring about reform (Dantley, 2003b ; Houston & Sokoulow, 2006). The educational leader who understands that education cannot be approached from a sterile, clinical, value-neutral theoretical framework seeks to be concerned not only with academic achievement, but also with involving students in the process of understanding what they believe and how they can use those beliefs to positively impact their communities and society. Dantley (2003b; 2010) provides a defined framework for accomplishing this paradigm shift in educational leadership through critical spirituality.

Participants are educational leaders WHO have a spiritual practice, are self-identified advocates for social justice, and are African American leaders who engage in spiritual practice and provide insights to spiritual leadership in practice. This spirituality

transcends religion, alone, and provides the framework that is demonstrated in the stories of this study's participants. These stories align with critical spirituality and demonstrate concrete examples for educational leaders who are interested in the paradigm shift from binary structures to spiritual leadership emphasized by the critical nature of asymmetrical power relations (McLaren & Dantley, 1990).

### **Implications of Findings**

The steps toward critical spirituality appear to build on one another. Within the context of practice, it appears difficult to be affective in transformative action without having first gone through a process of critical self-reflection, deconstructive interpretation, and performative creativity.

The leader who has an informal practice of critical self-reflection is effective in the pursuit of critical spirituality, knows what he or she believes from a spiritual standpoint, and sees him or herself as a spiritual being. As critical self-reflection becomes more formalized, he or she comes to understand how his or her spiritual practice affects his or her professional practices. He or she begins to see value in application of beliefs, particularly in areas where specific policy appears to be gray or nuanced. He or she understands how his or her spiritual practices give him or her insight in the importance of fostering love spiritual leadership skills in his or her approach to everyday interactions with students and staff. He or she takes time to reflect on what he or she believes and finds renewal and strength in the face of adversity through his or her spiritual practices.

The leader who engages in deconstructive interpretation is open-minded about the intentions of others and seeks to understand behaviors through love. Even when he or

she knows that others are on the wrong path, or that they may have impure intentions, he or she understands that confrontation leads to stunted dialogue and ultimately blocks growth and social advocacy goals. He or she has a strong internal locus of control and is constantly reflecting on his or her emotions and reactions. He or she maintains positive spirit and energy, and when he or she creates harm, he or she repairs it. He or she never assumes that he or she knows for certain another's intentions but seeks to learn from others and stay grounded in his or her spirituality. He or she allows for a dynamic approach to his or her vision and allows his or her spirituality to guide him or her in the application of responsibilities.

The leader who maintains an inward approach to performative creativity is attempting to connect fostering an environment of unconditional love and regard for and by students. The leader who demonstrates a more outward approach may have concrete policies for fostering respectful dialogue around issues of critical race, social justice, and restorative practices. He or she asks students to reflect on hard questions and remains free of judgment. He or she teaches students to believe in themselves and believe that they are worthy of love and respect, despite what pop culture and media may be telling them. He or she teaches them that there is something bigger than themselves and that they can challenge oppressive or binary systems of politics and leadership. He or she may also create partnerships with others who have common goals. These partnerships create opportunities for accountability and active listening, helping participants to acknowledge deficits and discuss how to address struggles and biases.

Finally, leaders engaging in transformative action will be moving toward formal activism, gaining perspective from the foregoing steps and spiritual practices. He is moving from concrete actions for social justice into helping students understand that learning is not just about academics. This leader is helping students to see that they can be part of a process that works for change. HE helps students learn how to be activist who critique institutionalized inequities and asymmetrical power relations. HE may create dialogue between angry community members and police. He may teach students the importance of volunteerism and understands his community and the spiritual nature of the students whom he serves. This leader is respectful of his spirituality and fosters respect for others' spiritual practices, even when it is not his spiritual practice. He expects greatness from his students, while, at the same time, allowing them to fail and helping them to understand that with failure comes great learning. This leader wants students to know what they believe, why they believe it, and how they are going to use their beliefs to foster life-long learning and make a difference in their community, their country, and their society.

### **Next Steps**

The current study was limited by several factors. Spiritual practices other than the Christian faith were not represented. Within the African-American tradition, there is a rich history of Baptist, Episcopalian, and Pentecostal faith, in particular. However, the Catholic tradition, particularly Jesuit and Assisi branches, has strong traditions of social advocacy and traditions and may have practices and perspectives that should be heard. Buddhist, Muslim, and alternative forms of spiritual practices that are independent of



specific religions should be represented in a discussion of social inequities the path of critical spirituality.

Additionally, in the spirit of deconstructive interpretation, attempts should be made to explore the cultural contexts of white Americans. An investigation that explores the practices of white Americans who have a spiritual practice and consider themselves advocates of social justice may shed light on areas of social advocacy that may need further attention and focus.

### **Lessons Learned from Critical Spirituality: Natalia's Story**

When I was faced with a dilemma about how to proceed with Natalia's potential deportation, I realized that I needed time to reflect. I spent time in prayer and reflection. I had never had a situation like this, and I had to understand that this required a paradigm shift. I had to think from my spiritual foundations and the tenets therein of love, faith, humility, and critical thinking.

When I was younger, I used to love the idea of a bullfight. I loved the tradition, the ceremony, and the romanticism. As I grew older, my sensibilities began to change. I grew in knowledge and pragmatism. While I believe that it would be wrong to impose my current sensibilities on the traditions and values of others—after all, people are entitled to their experiences and truths—I can no longer tolerate the thought of a bullfight. While there was a time when I would have considered myself too busy to be concerned about the problems of one family on my over-packed caseload, I realized that I was no longer satisfied with the status quo. What was once a matter of immigration had now become a matter of inequity and discrimination. Why are some immigrants allowed to keep their

immigration status, while others, particularly those coming from south of the American border, are not afforded the same consideration, even when those immigrants face unprecedented crime, corruption, murder, assault, home invasion, and sexual crimes at a rate higher than any country in the Western Hemisphere (Londoño & Moriconi, 2018)? Why is a family who has lived and worked in the U.S. for over eight years now being told that they have to leave? And what can I do about it without compromising my values or violating school policy? The answers to these questions required significant time in prayer and meditation to understand my place, my biases, and how I should proceed.

The self-reflection necessary to consider why this was of concern to me required partnership with another person. One of the reasons that I now considered this situation important was that I had recently taken a class in the Epistemology of Leadership. In this class, I reflected intently on my personal privileges and biases, and through that process I acknowledged a personal epistemology that included a newfound commitment to social equity. As I wrote in the final thoughts of a presentation during the class,

At this point, I have made major changes to my epistemology, based on this dramatic paradigm shift. I constantly think about and change my feelings about what my job is in this landscape, as an educational leader, an American citizen and patriot, a woman of faith, and as a human being. I can no longer be blissfully ignorant about diversity. I must move forward, doing my part to raise awareness and give voice to those who have not been heard.

I then consulted a liaison who I knew had experience in the district with issues of immigration. It was her passion, and she had personal knowledge, as an immigrant, herself. She agreed that if this felt like social inequity to me, I should do something about it. I could not compromise my professional ethics, and I was not going to make up some malady so that Natalia's family could remain in the country. The liaison had

connections with immigration advocacy groups, and she went to work, connecting the family to these groups. I also reflected my processes with a member of my cohort who had taken the epistemology class with me. I knew that she would listen and ask me hard questions. During the coming months, we all remained in contact and accountable to each other.

I had already been working with teachers who wished to begin the process of restorative practice in their classrooms. I had been working with students in those classes, creating opportunities for judgment-free dialogue and enhancing the sense of community within those classes. Students overwhelmingly loved the process because in a circle, everyone has a voice. From an administrative standpoint, those classes had fewer incidences of conflict; students who did not play together were now defending each other, and teachers were able to circle up their classes at impromptu times to discuss issues that they were learning in class, as a sort of formative assessment of learning.

Natalia was a student in one of these classes. After my impromptu meeting with Natalia's mother, I decided to try something new in the circle. During a warm-up game of "The Wind Blows," a modified version of musical chairs, I positioned myself in the center of the circle; as the center person I could call out something, and if it applied to a student, he or she could run to the middle of the circle and then go find a seat. The person left in the center is the next to call out "The wind blows." I usually start with "The wind blows if you are wearing tennis shoes," or occasionally I ask a question that I need answers to, like "The wind blows if you had breakfast this morning." On this occasion, I realized that it was time to open dialogue. "The wind blows if you know

someone who has been deported.” Students don’t have to move if they feel uncomfortable with the question, and no one will know, but on this occasion, several students moved.

During the next opportunity for a circle, the prompt for discussion within the circle was, “How do you feel about a border wall?” I was amazed that students freely talked about how they felt. The answers were diverse and accepted at face value. Students who had personal experiences were able to share their stories, and students who had only heard what their parents told them were able to hear counter-stories from their classmates. Students who had never heard of a border wall were enlightened. In this highly diverse school, many students had family members or friends who had stories of immigration. Students in this sixth-grade class were delighted. They were able to talk about things that were important to them, and no one was feeling judged for their opinions. Natalia, though, did not share her story.

In the month that followed, the students began to slowly discuss issues of social equity. They talked about what the words “Special Education” meant to them, and students in special education shared the feelings of embarrassment and shame, but also the hope of going to college. The students talked about what it means or how they feel when a professional football player takes a knee during the national anthem. The community that had been created in this space allowed students to share and to listen. And the following month, Natalia was still with us.

In the months that followed, students were coming to me and to their teachers, asking if they could bring topics of social interest to the circle. One day, the topic of the day had

circled back around to immigration, at the students' request. And now, Natalia shared her story. Her classmates were stunned and angered. Natalia was not a faceless statistic at the U.S. border; this was personal. Natalia was part of their school family.

After significant time in spiritual meditation and prayer, I pondered next steps and what I had learned from my readings about critical spirituality theory. The following week, the prompt that I chose for circle was, "What can you do, as a sixth-grade student, when you see an issue of social injustice?" The teacher had already laid a foundation for this discussion in a social studies lesson the previous week. The student responses varied from how they might address one-on-one instances of racism and discrimination, to how they might effect change on a larger scale. We were sad together when one student talked about what he wished he had done when a group of teens decided to terrorize a child in a wheel chair the previous Halloween, and we cheered together when another student announced that she was going to become president and ban all forms of discrimination. Ultimately, they met with the principle and got permission to organize a poster campaign, placing handmade posters around the school that brought attention to issues of social inequity.

The school year ended, and Natalia ended it with us. When that school closed due to budget cuts and declining enrollment, the sixth-grade class dispersed, and Natalia's family moved. I don't know where Natalia and her family are today, but I know the stories that the students shared remain with them.

The issue around liberation and its practice is not fighting against the religiousness of the popular classes, which is a right of theirs and an expression of their culture, but rather overcoming, *with* it, the vision of a God at the service of the strong for a God on the side of those with whom justice, truth, and love should

be. What marked popular religiousness—resignation and annihilation—would be substituted with forms of resistance to outrage, to perversity... This is how I have always understood God—a presence in history that does not preclude me from making history, but rather pushes me toward world transformation, which makes it possible to restore the *humanity* of those who exploit and of the weak... Having faith, believing, is not the problem; the problem is claiming to have it and, at the same time, contradicting it in action. (Freire, 1997, p57-58)

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## **Appendix A**

### **Interview and Narrative Protocol**

Type: One on one, face-to-face semistructured interviews that allow for follow-up questions. Interview questions reflect a critical theory, spiritual philosophical leadership orientation and are informed by the works of several scholars (Fry, 2003; Houston & Sokolow, 2006; Webb, Toussaint, & Dula, 2013; Fietzer & Ponterotto, 2015; Nilsson et al., 2011).

I am conducting a study to find out more about how school leaders integrate spiritual leadership into their educational and administrative practices, particularly their advocacy of social equity. I am interested in hearing your stories and your experiences, opinions, and knowledge, so there are no right or wrong answers. You are the expert, and I am trying to learn from you. This interview should take about 60 minutes. This interview is for my dissertation, and the transcript of our conversation will only be seen by myself and my dissertation committee. The interview will be recorded and then transcribed, but recordings and transcriptions will be destroyed when the dissertation is completed and all personal information will be coded and kept confidential, so that no identifying information is ever made public. If you would like, you may have a copy of the transcript. I will be eliciting personal information about your spiritual practices so I will check in with you often to ensure you feel comfortable with the direction of the interview. The benefit to this interview is giving you a chance to reflect on how your spiritual practices have informed your leadership and you will get a copy of my findings when the research is complete. Is this okay with you? You have the right to withdraw from the

study at any time. If you want to say anything off recording, just let me know, and I will turn off the recording for those comments. I know you have many demands on your time, and I really appreciate your support

Name

Age

Education level

Number of years as an educator

{Explanation of why I am studying spiritual leadership and critical spirituality and the concepts behind it}

- 1) Do you identify yourself as spiritual? Ritualistic (formal practices usually associated with religion, Theistic (personal connection to a benevolent and all-powerful being), Existential (importance of others, meaning in life, connection with nature) or combinations thereof? If so, what is your spiritual practice – (e.g., spending time in nature, prayer, meditation, reading inspirational literature, yoga, observing religious traditions, writing in a journal)?
- 2) Can you recall a time when you have been aware and reflected on how your spirituality guided your decision making at work? What were the circumstances of the decision you faced and what beliefs informed your thinking? How representative is that example of your decision-making processes?

- 3) What processes of self-reflection have you engaged in on your journey to social justice advocacy? Has there been a time when you really had to look at what you believed and how it fit in with the needs and traditions of your population?
- 4) Can you recall a time when a situation at school seemed too complicated or nuanced to be resolved through the policies and procedures that you are charged with upholding? How often do you find yourself facing situations that that you feel are not adequately addressed by policy and procedure?
- 5) Are there policies and procedures that you follow that you feel do not reflect your values? Is there an example of how that mis-alignment made it difficult to do your job?  
  
How would you like to see those policies and procedures change?
- 6) What non-educational sources do you look to for guidance on your work and in addressing the challenges that schools face? How do you apply that thinking to your everyday responsibilities? If your school could formally recognize those ideas, how would you recommend applying or adopting them?
- 7) How do those non-educational sources align for you with the pedagogical theories that also guide or influence your work? Where do you most see connection and overlap, and how do they differ?



- 8) What are the processes you use to initiate transformative action (actively garnering community engagement to see equity and fairness take shape inside and outside the school community)? How do your spiritual practices guide those processes and decisions?
  
- 9) What are the areas of your job that demand most of your attention? How does your spiritual philosophy inform what you are dedicated to or where your energy goes in your work?