Developing Spiritual Potentialities, Principles and Practices of Leadership:
A Self Study in Teacher Education

Rodney H. Clarken
School of Education
Northern Michigan University

Abstract:
How can we identify and then develop the capacities, standards and actions related to effective leadership? This paper suggests that the ability to effectively lead can be strongly and positively influenced by spiritual principles and practices. Spiritual aspects of leadership are often ignored, discounted or discredited in much of the literature. How to develop and integrate spiritual capabilities, values and processes of effective leadership is described. A self study of the author's experiences as a leader of a school of education applying these potentialities, principles and practices is briefly presented. The three guiding potentialities, principles and practice of truth, love and justice, will be presented as keys to effective leadership.

Most people acknowledge the importance and influence of leadership on individuals, institutions and communities. Effective leadership can be influential in assisting these entities to thrive and achieve their goals. Ineffective leadership can hamper individual and collective growth and development and has been cited is several studies as a contributing factor in teachers leaving teaching (Hirsch & Emerick, 2007; Ingersoll, 2003; Marvel et al, 2007). Leadership is, however, contextual: it has to be suited to the conditions and developmental levels of the individuals, communities and institutions leading and led. As individuals, communities and institutions go through unique conditions and various hierarchical stages of development, they require different approaches to be effective.

Earlier civilizations had less developed worldviews and leadership styles. Like other aspects of culture, leadership needs to evolve along with the communities and institutions within which it functions. Many leadership approaches, which were well suited to an earlier age, have yet to be discarded in our changed circumstances, leading to a growing disillusionment in the current apparently dysfunctional approaches to leadership at all levels in society and a search for more effective leadership models.

For example, on the most basic level of civilization and of human needs, the effective leader is the person that is most able to assist in meeting survival and biological needs. A skilled hunter or successful provider might be such a person. Once those needs are met, a different style of leadership is called for, one that can help people deal with and make sense of a threatening and mysterious world. A shaman is an example of a leader needed in this context. In later societies where outsiders were threats to well being, the powerful warrior leader was needed to protect and lead the community. As humanity developed a conception of a supreme being who controlled our destinies, a priest king who could represent that higher power in punishing evil and rewarding good was the leader most valued. In the last centuries, with the rise of scientific materialism, the person who can best increase resources, opportunities and prosperity is most valued. From a recent reaction to that leadership approach, a postmodern perspective has emerged that values leaders who engender love, purpose, affiliation and sharing. As society continues to rapidly change, newer styles of leadership are being explored that try to make sense

of and effectively deal with chaos and quantum theories, where change and uncertainty are the norm. As the world continues its onward rush to becoming increasingly united and facing the challenges thrust upon it, it will find it needs new values and leadership styles if it is to succeed (Cowan & Todorovic, 2004; Jacobs, Macfarlane, & Asokan, 1997).

Each of these value systems is present in the world today. We never lose our need for survival, but as those needs are met we no longer are focused on that way of thinking and being. If circumstances change, such as a natural disaster or war, we may be thrown back into that mode and seek a leadership style that is more aligned to our needs. The leadership approach of one level will not work with another. We see these mismatches all around us. Many leaders use outmoded ideas and styles not suited to the people they lead or the context within which they find themselves.

The characteristics of good leaders and how to improve leadership skills are the topics of many books, seminars and other resources. The literature on leadership is voluminous with several leadership books appearing regularly on bestseller lists. The given wisdom in some of the bestsellers in the leadership literature such as *The 48 Laws of Power* (Greene, 2000) and *Leadership Secrets of Attila the Hun* (Roberts, 1990) is that one must master the arts of deception, scheming and other vices to be an effective and successful leader. Though these leadership principles may have been effective in a system that was based on power as manifested through physical force and psychological dominance. To survive and thrive in the jungle where survival of the fittest is the guiding principle requires different skills than to be successful in a system based on cooperation and collaboration. An effective leader in each of these two systems would be a failure in the other.

There is increasing interest in more ethical and spiritual principles of leadership than those employed by such notable barbarian tyrants as Attila, however we wish to view his accomplishments and the legacy he left to the world. I suggest that the next stage in the coming evolution of collective and institutional development should be guided more by spiritual principles and less by the principles that Attila and the Huns lived by. If not, considering the current destructive force available to a modern day Attila and his Huns, our future may look like it did to those who were at the receiving end of their leadership.

There are signs that a change from the predominantly materialistic interpretations of reality to one that is more balanced with social, moral and spiritual forces is underway. Some evidence of this change is the increasing appearance of popular books such as Covey's *7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (1989), *The 8th Habit* (2004), *Principle Centered Leadership* (1992) and *The Power Principle* (Lee, 1997) that promote spiritual values and virtues like character. A host of other leadership books that are based on scientific studies, such as *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies* (Collins & Porras, 1994) and *Good to Great* (Collins, 2001), also suggest that more spiritual qualities like humility are key to successful leaders.

Houston and Sokolow, both educational leaders who have collaborated for 20 years, have identified 42 principles that they felt guided them in their work. Their recently published book, *The Spiritual Dimension of Leadership* (2006), identifies what they consider as eight key principles to leading more effectively. These principles represent aspects of the body, mind and spirit that become habits of the soul which might be characterized as wisdom. The eight principles they focus on are intention, gratitude, openness, attention, unique life lessons, trust, unique gifts and talents and holistic perspective as the key leadership principles.

All aspects of the human being must be addressed if a leader is to be effective. The physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual dimensions are all relevant. What has most been neglected is an authentic consideration of the spiritual. The spiritual dimension has several levels. Unfortunately spirituality has come to be associated with its less developed and limited forms of magic and myth. The future trend appears to be characterized by higher spiritual views and principles, while not negating the value and place of earlier manifestations of spirituality.

Self Study

I have served as a leader in higher education since 1979, most recently as head of a school of education. My professional world, that of the university and academic community, is largely focused on material reality and seeks explanations of that reality that has little regard for things spiritual. The use of the term spiritual in an academic paper and in the academic community is generally looked upon with some suspicion, sometimes hostility and derision. I have been advised not to use such terms or engage in scholarship in this area. As this advice was given by knowledgeable and caring individuals with the best intentions and with my best interests in mind, I had taken it to heart. Also, as a person who learned at an early age to read the environment to know what is acceptable and what is not and what is rewarded and what is not, it was my own assessment that spirituality and academia were not comfortable bedfellows. I have tried ways to frame my work in ways that avoided a spiritual connotation, though my orientation was deeply spiritual.

Eventually, as I gained more maturity and security, I chose to use spiritual terms and look for spiritual explanations, even though I knew they had negative connotations in the scientific and scholarly communities. I did not want to compromise what I felt was the truth. I developed more courage to face the prejudice against things spiritual. Part of my courage came from seeing that spiritual concepts and related terms were being used with greater frequency and gaining more credence in the literature and scholarly circles (Miller & Nakagawa, 2002; Miller, 1992; Moffett, 1994; Glazer, 1999). Though many leading thinkers and philosophers had emphasized the spiritual aspects of education in the past as more recent and popular writers in education began invoking spirituality (Jordan & Streets, 1972; Krishnamurti, 1953; Palmer, 1983, 1998; Noddings, 1986; Purpel, 1989; Wilber, 1995), I found more confirmation in what I was thinking, feeling and doing.

Part of my encouragement came from seeing others who like myself struggled to reconcile their inner convictions with the dominating materialistic paradigms.

Because of my orientation towards matters spiritual and my beliefs as a Bahá'í, I have gradually tried to increasingly guide my leadership by spiritual principles and practices, and use it as a means of developing my professional, personal and spiritual potentialities. I believe spiritual principles are instrumental for effectiveness when working with individuals, communities and institutions, especially when employed by those in leadership positions. In this spirit, I wish to begin an exploration of this journey here in the hope it may better inform and encourage others and my practice. It is my hope to further promote the well-being of individuals and society through describing and encouraging the spiritual dimensions of leadership and the need and importance of putting them into practice.

Using the same methods as Houston and Sokolow (2006), I have tried to identify those principles that I feel have guided my work and that have lead to increased well being and welfare for all: myself, my communities that I interact with, the institutions in which I operate and the individuals with whom I relate. I have had the opportunity to make many mistakes and to learn in my thirty-some years in education, much of that as a leader in teacher education. I have learned to develop and trust my inner guidance, partly through painful tests of trial and error. I have striven to find my inner voice and then to inspire other to find theirs as Covey describes in his 8th habit (2004). I have had to learn to drop my role identities and personas, my ego attachments and vain imaginings and my idle fancies and self-centered desires to please and be accepted by others.

I have tried to learn to live in and then lead from my more authentic self: my higher and truer self. I first had to learn how to trust myself and not be so dependent on or influenced by the approval of others. As I have tapped into those time honored core virtues that are found at the core of all the great world religions and tried to increasing make them part of my life, I have gradually become freer from my servitude to the idols I worshiped. My leadership comes increasingly from an inner core, rather than from a set of techniques, traditions and tips. It comes from an inner moral authority rather than external formal authority. It calls to the heart, mind and spirit more than to our baser needs, desires and passions. It enlists and elicits support, dedication and loyalty rather than trying to force and manipulate them. It calls on the highest powers and forces of the universe, not those that we share with animals. As such it touches the core of who we are and calls us to become the best we can become. It is a self perpetuating system that is continually renewing those involved in it.

The spiritual principles I focus on affect my values that shape my character. They affect how I behave. As I have put these principles into practice, I have developed greater capabilities for individual, institutional and community development. These spiritual principles have aided me to transcend the limiting and harmful prejudices, practices and paradigms found in my culture.

They have enabled me to replace my limited conceptions and practices of truth, love and justice with higher expressions of them.

Developing spiritual potential for leadership required me to transcend my lower passions and attachments by focusing on higher purposes and capabilities. My life and leadership has been a series of successes and failures in this regard. Every day I am tested. Every day I try to better manage my affairs and responsibilities with rectitude of conduct based on moral and ethical principles that transcend those accepted by modern society. In my daily affairs I try to take initiative in sustainable, creative and disciplined ways that enables those I work with and myself to persevere and overcome the many obstacles that are placed in our paths. I try to turn each stumbling block into a stepping stone.

All of this is grounded in my faith and practice as a Bahá'í. As part of that practice, I daily pray, meditate and read from Bahá'í literature so that I might better serve and live the life that I aspire to. My life and work are themselves a prayer and meditation. My work is my place of worship and service to my faculty, staff, students, colleagues and humanity, my worship.

Spiritual Principles, Practices and Potentialities

The development of spiritual qualities is the element most lacking today to help create a healthier individual and society. Individuals and society suffer from the lack of balance in the denial of the spiritual aspects of their reality. Leaders with well-developed mental and physical powers who lack spiritual development have been the cause of much harm. Spiritual potentials, principles and practices help develop well-balanced and healthy individuals, communities and institutions. The key principles and practices correlated with effective leadership can be found in religious and scholarly literature. When used wisely, these values work regardless of the context and challenges of the leader.

The definition of spiritual is non material or relating to the soul. The soul is defined as the "complex of human attributes that manifests as consciousness, thought, feeling, and will, regarded as distinct from the physical body" (Encarta Dictionary). Consciousness is defined as being awake and aware of surroundings; thought as thinking; feeling as something felt emotionally and will as the power to decide. These attributes represent categories of spiritual potentialities that each person possesses and is to develop. To think, feel and will are considered the key spiritual potentialities and form the foundation for realizing all others.

The attribute of thought is actualized in pursuing and practicing the principle and ideal of truth, feeling in love and will in justice. Our growing consciousness or awareness of these potentialities and principles allows us to further develop our practice of them. The practice of truth leads to greater authenticity, love to altruism and will to justice or seeing that the greatest good is done for the greatest number. These three guiding spiritual principles of truth, love and justice are correlated to the tripartite theory of cognition, affection and conation (Clarken, 2006).

Some corollaries related to these principles are the independent investigation of truth, oneness of humankind, harmony of science and religion, seeking spiritual solutions to worldly problems, equality of men and women and elimination of prejudice of all kinds. Some concepts, principles and implications of truth, love and justice are presented below.

Truth

Our perception of truth is heavily influenced by the individuals, institutions and communities with whom we interact. Because we each develop a unique perception of reality that we construct from our experiences (cause and effect relations), we must continually renegotiate our understanding of truth. Each person's worldview is a combination of truth and error that they tend to see only as truth. It is therefore important to be engaged in a continuous process of re-evaluating our perceptions in an unfettered search for truth and authenticity. A scientific thinking process helps us better determine truth from error, more accurately investigate material and spiritual reality and lessen distortions or inadequacies of knowledge. Consultation is one of the most powerful practices for developing knowledge, wisdom and unity. If our perceptions are guided by distorted theories, values, needs and desires or are otherwise biased or faulty, our spiritual development is limited. Through consultation, one has access to other perspectives of the hologram of truth, thereby creating a more accurate, whole picture.

Love

Love is an attractive and constructive force that operates according to measurable laws and principles. In practice it involves acceptance and concern. Acceptance without concern is tolerance and concern without acceptance is criticism or conditional love.

Love is more complex and deeper than feelings of emotional warmth. It has the potential and power to overcome the repulsive forces of conflict and hate. Love should strive to be altruistic: self-sacrificing, selfless, acting for others' good and giving priority to legitimate needs of others over our own needs. We engender love when we encourage beauty, happiness and the best in others' and our own lives.

Justice

Exercising will requires the capacity to strive, initiate and sustain action to develop our powers for justice and good. The principle of justice encourages us to strive for love and truth, seeking to eliminate prejudices and injustices from ourselves and our environments. Justice requires courage and generates greater intentionality and autonomy: capacity to make independent moral decisions and act on them. Acting with justice positively affects our environments and ourselves creating a cycle and culture of safety and well being.

Spiritual leadership involves positive, authentic, valid knowledge; altruistic, sincere love and autonomous, virtuous will. They each require power: the ability, skill, or capacity to do something. Imbuing our actions, feelings and thoughts with truth, love and justice is the greatest power a leader can have. As leaders build unity in diversity of expressions of truth, love and justice, the community and institution, as well as the individuals within them flourish. Consultation based on truth, love and justice is one of the most powerful methods of informing and transforming individuals, institutions and communities.

Conclusion

The world is in dire need of leaders at all levels of society who possess the core values, beliefs and actions necessary to guide their communities and institutions in these difficult times. Spirituality has been marginalized, and therefore, its influence in most arenas limited, including leadership. It is hoped that this discussion of some spiritual principles, practices, perspectives and philosophies of leadership will create more interest in its value and encourage greater exploration and application of these principles.

A review of historical and current literature from traditional religious texts to scientific studies has uncovered a host of virtues or factors that could be consider as spiritual principles of leadership. The three guiding principles focused on in this paper were truth, love and justice. These potentials, principles and practice were explored briefly, their role in leadership in teacher education was described and their value and application discussed based on a self study of a leader of a school of education. These principles are based in the ethical, philosophical and religious ideals of the true, the beautiful and the good relate to the cognitive, affective and conative domains in psychology and education.

Spiritual principles, practices, potentialities, perspectives and frameworks for leadership can be viewed historically, philosophically, psychologically and culturally. The spiritual dimensions of leadership, such as truthfulness, love and justice, can be found in the great wisdom traditions. These values are often at odds with modern-day conceptions of leadership, such as competition, power and aggressiveness.

The effectiveness and utility of truth, love and justice in administration is based on their holistic nature in addressing and representing the key virtues of the protagonist of education: the individual, community and institution. Individuals, institutions and communities are interconnected and influence one another. There is a reciprocal relationship among them. The health of one affects the health of the others.

Spirituality and leadership are not generally seen as complimentary terms, especially in the dominant Western materialistic worldviews. As a result, scientific support for spiritual principles of leadership is very sketchy. As the predominant worldview begins to shift and research methodologies and technologies become more sophisticated and refined, it is expected that more evidence will be forthcoming to document the effects of leading based upon spiritual principles.

References

Cowan, C. & Todorovic, N. (2008). *Dr. Clare W. Graves's emergent, cyclical levels of existence theory applied.* Retrieved February 2, 2008 from www.spiraldynamics.org/Graves/colors.htm.

Clarken, R. (2006, July). *Moral education in the time of global transformation.* Paper presented at the Oxford Round Table, London, England.

Collins, J. & Porras, J. (1994). *Built to last: Successful habits of visionary companies.* New York: HarperBusiness.

Collins, J. (2001). *Good to great.* New York: Harper Collins.

Covey, S. (1989). *7 Habits of Highly Effective People.* Free Press

Covey, S. (1992). *Principle centered leadership*. New York: Fireside.

Covey, S. (2004). *The 8th Habit.* Free Press

Glazer, S. (Ed.). (1999). *The heart of learning: Spirituality in education.* New York: Penguin /Putnam.

Greene, R. (2000). *The 48 laws of power*. New York: Penguin.

Hirsch, E., & Emerick, S. (2007). *Teacher working conditions are student learning conditions: A report on the 2006 North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey.* Center for Teaching Quality. Retrieved January 23, 2008 from http://www.centerforcsri.org/files/TheCenter_NL_June07.pdf

Houston, P. & Sokolow, S. (2006). The spiritual dimension of leadership. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Ingersoll, R. (September, 2003). *Is there really a teacher shortage?* Center for the Student of Teaching and Policy and The Consortium for Policy Research in Education. Retrieved February 10, 2008 from http://depts.washington.edu/ctpmail/PDFs/Shortage-RI-09-2003.pdf

Jacobs, G, Macfarlane, R & Asokan, N. (1997, November 15). *Comprehensive theory of social development.* International Center for Peace and Development, Napa, CA. Retrieved August 5, 2005, from www.icpd.org/development_theory/comprehensive_theory_of_social_development.htm

Jordan, D. & Streets, D. (1972). The Anisa model. *World Order*, Spring, 21-30.

Krishnamurti, J. (1953). *Education and the Significance of Life.* New York, NY: Harper & Brothers Publisher.

Lee, B. (1997). *The power principle.* New York: Fireside.

Marvel, J., Lyter, D.M., Peltola, P., Strizek, G.A., &Morton, B.A. (January 2007). Teacher attrition and mobility: Results from the 2004-05 teacher follow-up survey. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved January 14, 2008 from http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2007/2007307.pdf

Miller, J., & Nakagawa, Y. (Eds). (2002). *Nurturing our wholeness: Perspectives on spirituality in education*. Brandon, VT: Foundation for Educational Renewal.

Miller, R. (1992). *What are schools for? Holistic education in American culture* (2nd ed.). Brandon, VT: Holistic Education Press.

Moffett, J. (1994). *The universal schoolhouse: Spiritual awakening through education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Noddings, N. (1986). *Caring: A feminine approach to ethics and moral education*. Berkley: University of California Press.

Palmer, P. (1983). *To know as we are known: Education as a spiritual journey*. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco.

Palmer, P. (1998). *The courage to teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's life*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Purpel, D. E. (1989). *The moral and spiritual crisis in education: A curriculum for justice and compassion in education.* New York: Bergin & Garvey.

Roberts, W. (1990). *Leadership secrets of Attila the Hun.* New York: Warner Books.

Wilber, K. (1995). *Sex, ecology, spirituality.* Boston: Shambhala.