

PRAXIS LEADERSHIP: A MICRO-AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OF INTERSECTIONS  
BETWEEN TENSION, SPIRITUALITY AND EDUCATION

by

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to Michael, whose strong arms and patient spirit I will love forever; to Michaela, Joseph and McKenzie—given by my Heavenly Father who gives ‘every good and perfect gift’ and I will love you forever. To Skye, the wise and courageous woman who taught me that “the healing process is best described as a spiral of stages.” To my research partners, Marva and Jorge, thank you for co-creating this gracious space with me and for me.



Marjorie Dooley (1938-2006)

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores the unexpected moments of tension experienced by educational leaders who consider themselves to be spiritual leaders. The research questions that guide our work are: (a) How do educational leaders who self-identify as spiritual beings, make sense of-unexpected moments of tension with students, teachers, parents and other community members? (b) To what spaces do spiritual educational leaders go to negotiate unexpected moments of tension, and (c) Why is this concept and inquiry important to the spiritual educational leader and education community? Two research partners and I were the primary unit of analysis. The research employed micro-autoethnography with critical self-reflection as our methodology which allowed us to explore our data sources within our lived experiences, and focused on unexpected moments of tension; through interview, audio recording, poetry, artwork, song, written expression and *plática*. We created a process of analysis whereby we used these multi modal and multi layered contexts of the data as tools to paint a portrait with words purposed to find **our** collective voice and make it visual. This was a spiritual expression and undertaking, which according to Dantley (2005) “is actually a spiritual activity that ... liberates one to create what is essential to enhance and often transform the real world. Faith allows one to read the world very differently.” (p.23)

These data were then transformed into portraits of lived experiences informed by the written narratives and interviews. The contributions of this body of work invite a

different type of conversation for educational leaders; a conversation that acknowledges the complexity of the lived experiences, of educational leaders as a part of a larger community, allowing for an acknowledgement of spirituality; and one that embraces the need for using critical self-reflection for personal growth and development. Educational leaders who gain understanding of their multi-faceted selves through critical self-reflection are better positioned to serve others.

Key Words: autoethnography, critical self-reflection, educational leadership, micro-ethnography, spirituality, *plática*, praxis, third space.

## I. A FULL BODIED EXPERIENCE: THE CONTEXT & RUPTURED ARMOR

### Prelude – A Moment of Unexpected Tension in the Life of an Educational Leader

<i>“Usted es grande, gorda negra! Usted no</i>	You big, fat, black woman! You don’t
<i>tiene ninguna autoridad en esta escuela. No</i>	have any authority at this school. We
<i>te quiero aqui. Tu no eres el que manda aqui!</i>	don’t want you here. You are not in
<i>Usted es tan negra ye fea. Su cabello se ve</i>	charge here! You are so black and ugly.
<i>como una almohadilla de Brillo”</i>	Your hair looks like a Brillo pad.”

### The Body – The Story, My Lived Experience

Although in Spanish, the fierceness of hatred in Juanito’s voice and eyes was unmistakable and I was shocked, I, like many educational leaders, have learned to *put on my game face* and masquerade as if all was well. I could not let Juanito know his words were cutting so deeply. The hardest part of this situation was that I had to remain cool, calm, collected, and professional, while others watched – this was important to me.

*Once, as I told this pivotal story, a mentor asked me if my determination to remain calm, cool, and professional was code for dignity, respect, and appropriateness. As I reflect on my encounter with Juanito, I am not sure of the answer to that question. I definitely had a mask, a full suit of armor that I had created over the years to protect myself from insults, violent words, and people who I viewed as different from me. I think as an educator, this was highlighted as I developed strong classroom management skills, in part, to further protect me from personal injury. Thinking back on it now, I needed to control the atmosphere – never wanting students to say or do anything that was out of my control. I never wanted to lose control of the classroom. The more I received compliments for the management of my room, the more the drive to control was*

*reinforced. Avoiding the conflict by staying safely in the classroom management box protected me, but now I see that I missed so many opportunities to interact with students and parents on a more meaningful level.* This was quite difficult for me to negotiate as my core educational philosophy, adopted from a quote by Josh McDowell, is, “rules without relationship breed rebellion.” Relationships rendered to rules and I succumbed to the plastic, policy, schedule, and accountability way that is placed upon teachers and administrators.

Looking back now, I understand why I was in constant turmoil within myself as a teacher and administrator. I was not walking true to my own basic core beliefs. I felt forced to work within a sort of plastic replica of reality, the public school seems incapable of dealing with the realities of life, burning our energies on prescribed curriculum, managing behavior, testing, problems created within the prescribed culture, and on and on. Sadly, spending countless dollars attempting to train teachers to build relationships, with little outcome.



Juanito pulled me violently out of my box, stripped me of my fig leaves and proceeded to categorically call out what I was working so hard to conceal. He seemed to know exactly what to say to me to disarm me. His eyes were fiercely piercing into my being and his gaze left me stunned, disoriented and ashamed. I had nothing behind which to hide and I felt vulnerable, on display and inadequate. This was not acceptable to me while I was on display. Even though in moments of tension, I had learned to hide behind humor, making the quick witted comment to deter the offender, and any onlookers, I could not mask this moment behind a joke—there was nothing funny.



*Honestly, I hated the smoke screen, oftentimes taking on the role of the minstrel, (laughing and joking about things that contradicted my own deeply held values and beliefs) keeping everyone laughing in order to hide the vulnerable little girl inside. Where did this sickening, self-deprecating behavior begin? Perhaps from the violent words, insults and physical blows I endured as a child, oddly, from my mother (the place where I should have received love, admonishment and nurturing) where I hunkered down and played the innocent, obedient, and funny child, as I witnessed the brunt of her wrath directed at my sister, I wondered, If I could make my mother laugh, would she leave me alone?*



I let the words sink in slowly. This second grader knew how to disarm me. He seemed to sense that he was winning as he darted his eyes around at the faces of the growing crowd. Fueled by the gasps of his disbelieving classmates, Juanito released his insults like rapid fire from a machine gun. There was a slight smirk on his face and he seemed to be enjoying the attention at my expense. The social worker, Ms. Gomez, looked on horrified, each time the child hurled another insult at me. Her expressions alone, as she translated, seemed to only encourage Juanito to persist. I remember thinking,

*A child has to have experienced violent, demeaning words to be able to behave like he's behaving.*

### **Introduction of the Topic**

My research topic is the unexpected moments of tension in the lives of three educational leaders who self-identify as spiritual educational leaders. As autoethnography

(Ellis & Bochner, 2002) locates the researcher's deeply personal and emotional experiences as topics in a context related to a larger social issue, employing micro-ethnography, I examined and analyzed one event or unexpected moment of tension, observing emotions, words, actions, non-verbal cues using 'thick description' through narrative. Educational leaders, and campus leaders particularly have been plunged into these complex and demanding roles, with little training for how to deal with unexpected moments of tension which often present violently and aggressively against the educational leader.

### **A Roadmap**

Patton (2002) stated,

Back and forth autoethnographers gaze, first through the ethnographic, wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretation. (p. 89)

Vulnerable indeed, the complexity of telling the story (autoethnography), reliving the story through micro-ethnography and making sense of the story begged for a roadmap and explanation of my use of certain literary techniques. In this document, I weave back and forth from narrative to technical to reflection or meaning making. My reflections (meaning making) are written in italics; the technical or ethnographical work is in regular text. The dialogical nature (in text and spoken) of this work proved to be so vitally generative in making meaning that I also used italicized text to convey insights inspired from dialogue. Similar to my personal reflections, dialogically inspired insights are represented with italicized words preceded and followed with em dashes such as — —.

Each time I return to the narrative, it is indicated by using an ampersand & and I chose to transfer new veins of thought in the narrative or reflection with several dashes like this -----.

### **Statement of the Problem**

I knew first-hand where Juanito had seen and experienced violence or constant micro-aggression. His aggressive manner and words were familiar to me. Vygotsky (1978) stated “every function in the child’s cultural development appears twice, first on the social level, and later, on the individual level”. (p. 57) Juanito displayed that somewhere in his early social development he had learned how to give out insults to others in a violent, aggressive way. Sue (2008) introduced micro- aggressions as expressed in three forms defined by their actions. By this definition,

Racial micro-aggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color. Perpetrators of micro-aggressions are often unaware that they engage in such communications when they interact with racial/ethnic minorities. (p. 330)

The constant negative comments, sarcasm, aggressive acts, insults to my character as a small child left me frightened, yet quick to lash out at others, as I grew older. I understood through painful memories exactly why Juanito hated me without even knowing me. Neither anger nor hatred are rational partners. They both feed relentlessly on the faults, failures, differences, and weaknesses of

others, oftentimes without provocation. The perpetuation of their effects will go unchecked for generations without deliberate intervention.

Sue et al. (2008) went on to describe the three forms of micro aggressions as:

...microassaults, microinsults and microinvalidations. 1. Microassaults are probably most similar to what has been called old-fashioned racism because their expression is deliberate, conscious, and explicit. 2. Microinsults can be defined as actions (verbal, nonverbal, or environmental) that convey insensitivity, are rude, or directly demean a person's racial identity or heritage. 3. Micro invalidations are actions that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiences of people of color. (p.331)

Educational leaders frequently face these so-called unexpected moments of tension. There are distinct symptoms of injuries and broken pieces in educational organizations: injuries that educators bring with them, combined with injuries the students and families carry, overlaid with cultural, racial and class injuries that we have heaped upon one another. With Vygotsky's definition in mind, the problem to me is that every educational leader is encased within that definition as a child first experiencing social development in their way and then on the individual level. Each brings that level of development while being expected to lead other children, cultures, and classes.

There are definite points for transference between the spiritual into the other knowledge bases to be explored. Each of us comes with our own memories of schooling and thus ideas of how schools should be run and how its citizens should behave. Each memory or idea comes with a set belief that there may or may not be an expected level of mercy, forgiveness or compassion that educators should display. Educational leaders and

the learning communities they lead stand to pay a great cost if we do not research these unexpected moments of tension socially and spiritually. Perhaps the greatest cost being the burnout of the best, brightest and most compassionately inclined educational leaders. I believe the future of the effective school leadership will be impacted by this research. But that is yet to be researched.

As an educational leader in a public school setting for many years, I was expected to remain in a state of constant professionalism, oftentimes just as embarrassed, confused and discombobulated as I was in the aforementioned example. The current working conditions for campus educational leaders are not conducive to nurturing the campus leader through and beyond those unexpected moments of tension, oftentimes taken only as personal affronts. I believe that addressing this tense space, which the scenario highlights, will improve working conditions because campus leaders will have had opportunities to reflect and address what is important to them. For what a leader chooses to *do* based on their feelings or their default level of training, can make or break a campus, community, teacher, parent or child. The problem lies hidden within each educational leader's set of experiences and personal development or lack thereof. Addressing the educational leader's ability to handle oneself in unexpected moments of tension should prove to be invaluable in the training of future leaders.

Campus leaders are still expected to be nothing more than statisticians as McGhee and Nelson, (2005) outlined, "school leaders whose performance was once assessed using a variety of indicators that reflected the complexity of the job, are now finding their effectiveness determined in much narrower terms" (p. 368) Herein lies the potential for great tension, especially for those who are spiritually inclined. This study narrows in

focus on educational leaders who self-identify as spiritual. Introducing spirituality and its importance in human development and thus leadership development, my two research partners and I explore the tension between spirituality and education using micro-ethnography with critical self-reflection.

Because children and teachers are human, and the very job we do is social in nature, when we do not address the spiritual presence in the job, teachers and community members are left feeling used and simply a means to an end. As a campus leader, I felt this pain myself and agonized often over the tension and disconnect I felt. The situation with Juanito served as an intense reminder and example of this disconnect. I wanted to fall on my knees and pray with Juanito. But I could not do that. I had to operate within a framework of a system that ignores this huge part of student and teachers. There is an emptiness within the public school that likely comes from this ignoring of the human being's spirituality. Each of my research partners and I describe this disconnection and the tension it created for us in our positions as educational leaders and it is indicative of a larger community of spiritual leaders.

The focus on these narrower terms has left campus administrators holding a bag of numbers, oftentimes with nowhere to place them when it is time to address other duties as assigned. This further exacerbates the tearing apart of the leader as they face social realities. There is a gap that should inform the life world (Sergiovanni, 2000) of school's teaching learning and leading, while dealing with the social, personal, and spiritual issues and injuries that are more prevalent than acknowledged.

The type of verbal violence I had experienced left me grappling with many questions about myself; the Juanito(s) that educational leaders serve, and the system

which brought us together—questions that could be researched to inform the lived experiences of many people for sure, but particularly an educational leader who self-identified as spiritual.

### **Research Questions**

How do educational leaders who self-identify as spiritual beings, make sense of unexpected moments of tension with students, teachers, parents and other community members? To what spaces do spiritual educational leaders go to negotiate unexpected moments of tension? Why is this concept and inquiry important to the spiritual educational leader and-education community?

I examine the educational leader who self-identifies as spiritual in unexpected moments of tension using critical self-reflection. Oftentimes the educational leader self-identifying as spiritual grabbles with those ideals held true versus day-to-day behavior. Of this tension, Argyris (1995) noted, “when you observe people’s behavior and try to come up with rules that would make sense of it, you discover a very different theory of action —what I call the individual’s *theory-in-use*.” (p. 24) For the spiritual educational leader, a constant tension exists between what they want to do and what they end up doing, as (Galatians 5:17) depicts this as a battle between flesh and spirit, “For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.” (New International Version)



*Ms. Gomez continued to translate, but she became so visibly troubled by the child’s words that she could not conceal her shock and disgust. I remember the look in*

*her eyes – a mother and grandmother herself, I knew that she wanted to correct Juanito as one of her own. I also sensed her disappointment in Juanito and her embarrassment for both of us as leaders. Ms. Gomez also had two social worker interns with her who were experiencing this unexpected moment of tension along with the rest of us, up close and personal. I remember both of them, Caucasian females, kind of standing back and taking mental notes of this situation, which caught us all so off guard. They, both much younger than Ms. Gomez and me, were just as alarmed by the violent words and gestures that Juanito presented. As Ms. Gomez had to translate the child’s verbal rant, it made it that much more awkward for her with the watching eyes of her two young mentees.*

The nurse, a middle-aged African American woman, simply looked on in what seemed to be complete disbelief. Ms. Gomez had translated for me on a few previous occasions, and we had seen and spoken with angry and aggressive parents, but no previous situation involved translating such violent and offensive language from a child.

*With such a range of ages and cultures represented in that moment, I found myself wondering how many of us in this current situation had ever experienced verbal violence – and how much of it had to do with cultural background?*

Earlier, I described this moment with Juanito as a pivotal moment, a moment that rendered me helpless, unprotected and searching for meaning. It is this moment, in fact, that began a long, complex journey (into my own being). I was asked by a mentor, “How are we all, the recipient, the witnesses, and the perpetrator, affected by this type of symbolic violence or micro-aggressions?” The research questions that I have posed will guide my work to answer that question.





I had to remind Ms. Gomez not to respond to his insults because her reactions only served to fuel his tirade. As I worked to diffuse the situation, to divert attention away from this collective pain, it clearly was not working.

*I often reflected upon how an educational leader could diffuse something that was so personal, so blunt, violent, and in-your-face, all the while played out in public?*

Perhaps there comes a time when the fear of this private-made-public space must be faced, differently for each person, of course, but necessary in order to heal. Facing the pain of a situation by dissecting a violent moment of tension could lend to such a process. —*People tell stories to make sense of their suffering. When they turn their diseases into story, they find healing*—. Yes, I was only able to skim the surface at first, but the very act of writing about it and analyzing it has allowed me to face it gently, without public scrutiny while lifting the corners of the swept under rug. There is something about the analysis that reverses the paralysis!

*“Gorda, gorda, gorda!”* Juanito screamed.

I knew that word for sure.

*Not my weight,* I thought, *I don’t know if I can take that.*

Always working hard to present a professional and level headed front, I had to hide the insecure feelings I have about being overweight.

*This is not about me,* I told myself.

I tried to continue with the self-pep talk. I had to get beyond the self-protective feelings.

*These words really do hurt,* I thought.



I was embarrassed, humiliated and a little disoriented. The words were more difficult for Ms. Gomez to take than the objects he threw at me: the door stopper, his shoes, pens, and pencils. She is an older Latina female in her 60s with grandchildren Juanito's age.

A spiritual act was taking place here -- the ability to see oneself, humble myself in order to save the soul of another. According to Collins (2001) in his book, *Good to Great*, "A leader with a humble heart looks out the window to find and applaud the true causes of success and in the mirror to find and accept responsibility for failures." (p.35)

**The Double Minded (Spiritual Educational Leader) is Unstable in All of Her Ways**

Faith and business. Jesus and parenting. Personal and professional. Servant and Leader. "Seeing those words paired together makes people uneasy. Our sophisticated culture encourages us to draw lines and keep our spiritual lives separate from our secular lives." (p. 5)

Lead Like Jesus, Blanchard and Hodges (2005)

Blanchard and Hodges (2005) follow the above quote with, "Faith is only for Sundays or family gatherings, right?" My resounding answer to their question is "no." The root and very essence of my story of Juanito is this nagging reminder that faith and selfless leadership must be tenants of the same building of the spiritual educational leader. I cannot behave professionally without involving who I am personally. To try to do so, created great tension which compromised my spiritual health. Bensley (1991) defined spiritual health with six tenets: (a) a sense of fulfillment in life, (b) values and beliefs of community and self, (c) wholeness in life, (d) a factor is wellbeing, (e) a

controlling higher power or *god-like* force, and (f) the human/spirit interaction. (p. 287) I would add to this list, but I agree that without this unity of focus, the spiritual educational leader's spiritual health is compromised along with the same struggles to make day to day decisions because of their own personal instability. James 1:5-8 exhorts the spiritual educational leader to ask,

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is *double-minded* man, unstable in all his ways. (James 1:5-8 New King James Version)

The educational leader has to see beyond the moment at hand. Almost see through it to the future of another. I believe that a spiritual educational leader feels an additional obligation or *calling* to look deeper into situations to try to understand the reasons behind behavior. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend" (John 15:13). There has to be a willingness to expand on your vulnerability, acknowledge personal weaknesses and human flaws within oneself. Extending that same mercy and grace to others becomes a natural process. I believe that I have been forgiven of so much that I had no right to pass judgment on Juanito. I walked in his shoes and held onto remembering when I was forgiven. That belief created a tension for me as an educational leader that I kept silent for years and tried to work through. I also carried a deep sense of obligation to forgive based upon scripture, that if I do not forgive, neither will my Heavenly Father forgive me and then there is the reaping and sowing principle which

basically meant that whatever I do will come back as a reaping of blessing or cursing, and the harvest is always more than the planting. The weight of a single decision lay heavily upon me. I could make the decision, sign the paper work and move on to the next in robotic fashion, policy was on my side, or I could take the time to understand every angle of each situation. That type of leadership takes a tremendous amount of thought and reflection; not to mention the mental and emotional energy for which it calls. It requires a type or level of spiritual conviction or spiritual maturity that I mentioned earlier.

For me the responsibilities of the spiritual educational leader, are both complex and weighty. Complex because it involved wading through federal, state and district policy and campus procedure; weighty because I felt obligated to remain true to a Biblical foundation and the words of Jesus Christ, such as “Love thy neighbor as thyself,” and Proverbs’ admonition to, “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways, acknowledge him and he will direct your paths” (Proverbs 3:5-6). It was verses like these that called to me to struggle with each decision, carefully weighing out the motives of each decision and use of power. Such contemplation became burdensome because of the sheer magnitude of decisions an educational leader makes in a single hour. I often found myself troubled in my spirit – desiring to have the reputation of a strong leader, yet compassionate, thoughtful, and nurturing. I never found the balance and it was killing me. For example, I once wept with a teacher in my office about her personal dilemma of needing to be home with her teenage daughter on the same day that her class was to undergo standardized testing. My mother’s heart wept with her and wanted to spend time brainstorming a solution, but neither time, nor protocol allowed. Like a doctor who listened to the patient’s ailment, I

understood, but never assigned a prognosis or prescribed a remedy. According to Blanchard and Hodges (2005), the spiritual health of the leader is the wellspring from which a follower's trust and commitment flows.



Completely stripped, now, of my created walls of *tough disciplinarian* and fortresses of *I'm fine*, this was now a full body experience, as Juanito challenged my authority, my knowledge, my biology, and my spirit. I had experienced this type of stripping down before, but I have worked hard to quickly sew on fig leaves to hide behind. This challenged me to the core because I did not have the luxury of time or a closed door to sew on the fig leaves and gather myself, to compose my thoughts, to calculate my 'come back.' This was an all-out, public attack. I had to rely on what was inherently inside of me. This would uncover what I really believed, and test my skills of tolerance, integrity, patience, kindness.

*What was really down inside? I remembered a military leader saying that when faced with a crisis, we always fall back on our training. I had preached love, forgiveness, and turning the other cheek all these years. This was one of those moments that put me to the test, challenged me, stood boldly in my face and said, "now what?" All of that preaching, Bible studying and years of service meant nothing if I could not personify in this in this moment, if I could not employ my core beliefs.*

I found, as I worked so hard to appear in control, it was not so much about the leadership as it was about protecting myself. I was so afraid of a negative light shining on me. Though every adult involved appeared to be just as pained as I was, it was still a very embarrassing place to be. I had spoken so often about tests and trials coming to

make or break and to show what we are made of. I completely forgot all of that in that moment and I wanted to run, hide, and take whatever grade was given to me.



The last of the other children in the room exited, shocked too that a classmate would talk to the *sub-directora* that way!

*My God, how humiliated I feel.*

The real me, stood vulnerable, embarrassed and wounded, hiding behind the *strong administrator* persona I had created, as she mechanically stated. “Just write down everything he says and does, Ms. Gomez, we have to document.” Initially, I was *programmed* to document for future disciplinary purposes. But as I continued to write and edit this account, such a direct statement deserved deeper contemplation and probing. At first I wrote, “I stated that for everyone present. Performing, I found that the core of my reality wanted to make sure that everyone else was okay.” *But the more I thought about it, the more I realized how much I hated this performing, working so hard to appear fine and unscathed. Writing about this even now, is so painful. I don’t want to be the minstrel, the one act play that always has the right lines so the show can go on. How many of us are performing so much so that we do not even know who we are or why we are here? Or worse, because these moments of unexpected tension are not understood, are we performing so much that core values and beliefs are compromised?*

This process forced an entering into and going back out of my own psyche, spirit, motives, history and heart. But it speaks to the self-control that I had developed spiritually as well. As I related this story to one of my mentors he made this spiritual distinction about which I had not thought and I insert his comments as dialogue,

*—You were angry but you sinned not (Ephesians 4:22). Even in the midst of the attack you had on the full armor (Ephesians 6:10-18), you felt the blows, yet the devastation that they could have and were intended to cause were averted. You were even still able to respond to the perceived needs of others because you are a spiritually grounded leader. The grounding is in place prior to an electrical strike occurring, otherwise it would be useless. Therefore, the examination is also about the spiritual grounding and its necessity for educational leaders. Were it not for the grounding, you would have retaliated in the “appropriately disguised and protocol supported” manner in which adults do—.*

This tension between spirituality and education is complex, leaving the education leader confused and conflicted, behaving and basing decisions upon ideals that do not match up with what one believes. Greene (1973) invoked my thinking with the assertion,

Democratic education...involves provoking persons to get up from their seats, not to come to Christ or to be magically cured, but to say something in their own voices, against their own biographies...what they authentically hold dear. It involves getting them to leave their assigned places in the crowds and even in the marches, and to come together freely in their plurality. (p. 73)

That is a dangerous and loaded statement for a Christian preacher to embrace. Albeit, I must give voice to the thoughts and ideals that have persistently knocked at the door of my Pentecostal heart, I ascertain that Green is speaking of a plurality of a church or civic organization spending more time gathered comfortably together while starved and abused human beings sit on the steps, but far greater, the larger community coming together to talk about and deal with our human condition. Such a statement is getting to the essence of this research. It is sickening to finally face that I was simply performing

the play that I had no part in writing or directing, or even the selection of my role, but chose to always be a great impromptu artist, doing what it takes to *save face*, after all, the *show* had to go on. But shows do not calm the fears of a mistreated child. Nor, according to Guajardo (2015) do they inform the actions of very passionate, well trained and very smart adults who are trained by the military, traditional institutions of higher education, nor the dogmatic church.

Referencing scripture from the Holy Bible is something that I try to do in a crisis. Albeit, there are some unexpected moments of tension that can take one by surprise—in those times, I like reflecting on what emerges.



Though I remained visibly calm, I was inwardly, deeply shaken. My personal struggles were on display in a public place. I began to pray,

*“Please give me what I need to stand as a leader in the presence of all standing here. It is now that I have to practice what I believe. Please give me strength.”*

This thought came to me; *what happens to Juanito if I don’t perform?*

Therein lies another tension. Inserted here are thoughts inspired by a mentor and me, it helped me to make meaning again.

*—I get the performance link, however, I am also troubled by it. You were performing, yes it was public, and it was supposed to be. You were demonstrating what spiritually grounded leaders are capable of. Performance, but more importantly, a public display of the power and love expressed when others would have acted in contrary fashions. Explicate the spiritual as the essential, not the anomaly that needs to be examined and explained for those that may doubt its existence and/or its importance—.*



As humiliated as I was, from somewhere I found the clarity to think of others. Juanito, Ms. Gomez, the social worker interns, the substitute teacher and the nurse, for a split second, all stood still and amazed at what had been endured.

*—This is the strength that spiritually grounded leaders are able to call upon.*

*Considering the circumstances leaders are faced with in today's context, you are arguing for the greater emphasis on finding, acknowledging, and developing that component of leaders—.*

*I've got to say something*, I remember thinking, and just like that, from deep within me came these words,

“This is not even about me, this is really not even about Juanito. We’ve got to look beyond the behavior to do whatever we can to help him.”

Everyone was stunned, including me. The prevailing Spirit in the room resoundingly agreed without words that this was the right thing to do, the right words to say, the right way to treat a human being.

*—be clear, as a spiritual leader, even though the words came from your mouth, they were not “your” words alone. It was as if the words of your mouth and the mediation of your heart were found to be acceptable and you were given/granted/ prepared with the strength from your Lord, Strength and Redeemer (Psalm 19:14) —.*

Those words transformed all of us, at least within that moment. Such a moment was analogous to Freire’s (1993) observation that,

A revolutionary leadership must...practice *co-intentional* education. Teachers and students (leadership and people), co-intent on reality, are both Subjects, not only in the task of unveiling that reality, and thereby coming to know it ritually, but in

the task of re-creating that knowledge. As they attain this knowledge of reality through common reflection and action they discover themselves as its permanent re-creators. (p.69)

The common reflection and individual choice to act was profoundly transformative. I was aware that in that moment, I had the authority and good cause to suspend Juanito, expel him or send him packing to the alternative school, which would ruin his world because he would be physically separated from peers, follow a special schedule, wear a special uniform and most importantly, miss out on critical instruction for his age and grade. Frankly, taking punitive action and using one's power to punish was the administrator's recourse, or retaliation, which I knew happened very often. I knew, according to the Texas Education Code that the teacher could refuse him back into her classroom (and she had every right to do so). But those actions, those informed practices of public education, were not what I wanted deep within. I found myself being more than the school administrator I had become, dishing out discipline for bad behavior. As I reflected, I saw myself as a key player in this moment of tension in Juanito's life. A key player in this pivotal moment of tension just as Greene (1973) described it as, "to reflect in the course of situated teaching is consciously to attend to what is happening and to those who are present with the teacher in a shared moment of lived life." (p. 80)



### **Broken Knees – the Kink in my Armor**

Little Juanito's assault on me took me back to a place in my childhood, where I was accustomed to the put downs, verbal, and sometimes physical assaults. As a child, I became visibly broken, afraid and timid on the inside, but outwardly I became calloused

and distant over time, daring anyone to touch the broken part, just leave me alone to hobble along through life. Just like a physical injury, my emotional injuries went unattended, the broken pieces only festered, and the pain, instability and infection grew.

The power of reflection amazes me, even though I am frustrated by the time and patience it takes to come to reality in much of my life. I have a powerful analogy from which to draw meaning.

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I injured my knee playing basketball at the tender age of seventeen. Many other problems would stem from never having it surgically repaired, injured over thirty-five years ago. When I injured it back in 1978, I still remember feeling less than valued that my mom did not take me to the doctor. I remember my coach stating in disbelief, “You mean your mom has not taken you to the doctor yet?” No, my mom had not taken me. I continued to play on it, only wearing a knee brace.

Later, that same year, my mother left me alone in the night, I woke up in an abandoned trailer and ended up moving in with my grandparents. However relevant, this is another chapter in my story as my grandmother took me back and forth to the doctor, each time I injured my knee during my senior year of high school only to have blood and fluid drained from it.

By this time, I had gone off to college and I continued to play basketball for a little less than two years, continuing to injure my knee in both practice and games. When I could not stand yet another injury, I decided to quit basketball and join the campus Reserved Officer Training Corp (ROTC). I crammed four years of ROTC courses into two years as I decided to join the US Army. Not wanting to face the extent of my

brokenness, I ignored my injuries still and I injured my knee again playing on a couple of Army intramural travel teams. I never took care of it in the Army either – and though many have encouraged me to apply for disability payments from the Army, I did not feel right doing this, because the knee was injured before I joined. I got out of the Army, got married, bore children and gained weight.

Once I had reached this stage of my life, there was not a day that went by that I did not think of my knee, the pain, instability and what it is doing to the rest of my body. Injuries are there whether we choose to deal with it or not. Fast forward thirty five years, without proper, specialized care, the knee set up degenerative arthritis, was extremely painful and affected my gait and I began to walk and stand slightly bent over. Subconsciously, I developed special ways to walk, enter and exit vehicles, sit and even lie down. Every move and decision about activity was centered on this injury. Accepting this hobbled version of myself, I lived with constant instability and frequent bouts of pain. When I could no longer stand the pain, my surgeon said that my knee had developed the bone spurs and arthritis of an 80 year old woman. Surgery would be the only relief if I wanted the pain and instability to subside. My orthopedic surgeon gave me the option of shots to ease the pain but said that ultimately, a total knee replacement was the only thing that would help me. Those words *total, replacement* resonated with me, causing me to correlate with my emotional scars.

After the surgery, my physical therapist explained how my knee had affected other areas in my body. My back, hips, and even shoulders were out of line. Though the knee has been replaced, the surgery was a success and I rarely think about my knee any longer (except the long, thick scar it left on my knee—a constant reminder of the past pain)

even two and half years after the surgery, I am still struggling with other parts of my body that were impacted by walking, running, kneeling, standing and just living with a defective knee. The knee represents that portion of my emotional self that was damaged and rather than seeking the help that I needed, I accepted a broken version of myself. Living with this pain caused me to coddle and overly protect, walking in an altered gait and, forfeiting wholeness and healing; never using my wonderfully made body the way that it was intended to be used and it began to break and deteriorate. I developed ways to hover over and protect the injury and over the years, had created a warped way to walk, dance, and simply live (taking extra care to not draw attention to my injuries). Just as I worked hard to *hide* the knee injury from the Army, I worked to hide the emotional injuries from everyone around.

But the connectivity cannot be ignored because it was by divine design.

Corinthians 12: 13-27 explains how all of the body is connected, and this emotional self is connected as well. We are an embodiment of soul and spirit.

For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. <sup>13</sup> For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. <sup>14</sup> For the body is not one member, but many. <sup>15</sup> If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? <sup>16</sup> And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? <sup>17</sup> If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? <sup>18</sup> But now hath God set the members every one of them in the

body, as it hath pleased him. <sup>19</sup> And if they were all one member, where were the body? <sup>20</sup> But now are they many members, yet but one body. <sup>21</sup> And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. <sup>22</sup> Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: <sup>23</sup> And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. <sup>24</sup> For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked. <sup>25</sup> That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. <sup>26</sup> And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. <sup>27</sup> Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. (I Corinthians 12, King James Version)

With so much focus and energy on that knee, everything suffered and all things were off kilter because of the connection. The scriptures remind us that we can understand the spiritual world through the natural world around us, in my case, within me as my knee was a physical manifestation of what was going on with me spiritually.

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No matter how dysfunctional, Juanito had developed some personal coping strategies to ease the pains he had experienced in his young life. It amazes me that the Juanito experience happened during the same semester of my knee surgery and both have become a part of a spiritual journey that brought me to a place of critical self-reflection.

Fernandez-Balboa (1998) wrote that,  
critical reflection reaches true effectiveness when it lies between excessive  
rumination and superfluous thought, when it looks not only backward and forward  
(connecting us to the world) but also inward (i.e., self-questioning) in a constant  
cycle of coming back to our starting point and purpose. (p. 47)

The rumination which took place, and is still in effect, opened the door to new insights  
regarding my own inner turmoil and steps toward self-reconciliation. Dantley (2005)  
stated that, “the psychology of critical self-reflection involves the educational leader  
coming to grips with his or her own identity and juxtaposing that against the identity of  
the learning community.” (p.22)

At the beginning stages of this paper, I became enlightened about some of my  
own thoughts of what I assumed I meant versus what the words actually revealed. I  
learned that these are what Argyris (1995) called espoused theories versus theories in use.  
Of these binaries, he said,

...everyone develops a theory of action — a set of rules that individuals use to  
design and implement their own behavior as well as to understand the behavior of  
others...One of the paradoxes of human behavior, however, is that the master  
program people actually use is rarely the one they think they use. Ask people in  
an interview or questionnaire to articulate the rules they use to govern their  
actions, and they will give you what I call their “espoused” theory of action. But  
observe these same people’s behavior, and you will quickly see that this espoused  
theory has very little to do with how they actually behave...Put simply, people  
consistently act inconsistently, unaware of the contradiction between their

espoused theory and their theory-in-use, between the way they think they are acting and the way they really act. (p.22)

Either way, critical self-reflection provided a touchstone for me to examine myself emotionally, physically and spiritually. But I believe that this particular moment of unexpected tension would not have carried the same weight at a different time in my life. It provided an inside point of view of a system that was analogous with my body and knee injury. This personal knowledge of my own pain invited me to see the connection between Juanito's story and mine; opening the way for more critical self-reflection, which in turn granted access to an exclusive view and new perspective of a broken educational system. Unless the injuries, pain and dysfunction were addressed, healing would not come.



### **The Spirit**

I don't remember exactly what I was doing when Ms. Hernandez paged me to say that I had a parent waiting to see me. I was upstairs, out and about doing what assistant principals do best, talking to teachers and kids, clearing the hallways of tardy students, securing doors, stepping into classrooms to join the students in listening to the morning announcements and participating in the Pledge of Allegiance, stopping to chat with an educational assistant about her need to leave early today to take care of personal business, or calling into the boys' rest-room to round up some giggling stragglers to hurry on to their classrooms. I do remember that I had quite a walk to get to the front office, feeling the pulse of the school as I walked (careful not to irritate my knee). I smiled as I passed kindergarten and pre-kindergarten students walking in perfect little lines to their



classrooms, most smiling up at me so proud that the sub-directora was here to see them in action...headed into their classrooms to prepare for their day. As I rounded the corner and passed the nurse's office to face the glass windows of the front office, there sat my visitor. It was Juanito's mother. She sat up straight, still in her work clothes, smiling up at me with a huge *tres leches* cake in her lap, topped with fresh, colorful fruit. Her facial expression and her body language exuded respect and admiration for the school and I knew that she placed full confidence in me, the teachers, and the system.

*That is the most beautiful cake I've ever seen,* I thought. Juanito's mother stood up to greet me. With the burden of her two young sons in her eyes she held up the cake to me. Though she spoke in Spanish, my spirit understood exactly what she was saying.

*Now, I contemplate this moment, this pivotal moment intertwined body, soul and spirit, and I searched for its relevance and realness. I understood it innately, without words or verbal translation, but I want to describe this Spirit that forgives, crosses cultures and language and even, heals invisible wounds. What is it, where does it come from, what is its origin and what is its anatomy?*

I looked from another lens, closely examining this thing, spirituality, I thought I knew so well, but had never attempted to explain it, to understand it at a depth that I can share with others. As autoethnography (Ellis & Bochner, 2002) locates the researcher's deeply personal and emotional experiences as topics in a context related to a larger social issue, employing micro-ethnography, I will closely analyzed the spirit of this one event or moment of tension, observing emotions, words, actions, non-verbal cues while also weaving back and forth through a three tiered concept of self also known as the Ecologies of Knowing (Guajardo et al., 2013) through thick description, through narrative.

The ecologies of knowing are filtered through the lens of history, biology, culture, and politics. The story making process is organic and at times messy—and persistently about giving voice to stakeholders, their institutions, and their community. Like the fluidity of the story making process, the theory building process sometimes changes, as the stories, the values, identities, and actions of the individuals, organizations and communities similarly change.

Storytelling is to understand and a bridge to cross from theoretical knowledge to experiential. Crossing this bridge of theoretical learning and knowledge and going over to moral development can lead to loving and forgiving the flaws and offenses of others. Because the story sheds light upon darkened reasons and unknown motives, just the act of listening to someone explain their reasoning, thought process and feelings surrounding a situation can make connections. The spiritual educational leader can even listen to negative comments about themselves and grow from it.

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I ran across a story of a woman's incredibly spiritually mature act, in the face of violent, full personal attack and how she dealt with it. The thought process she had to go through to get to this point is worth dissecting, because it in this place, the treasures are found.



Sheryl Underwood shared a story on a television show that resonated with me. She explained that as she called in early to a conference call to join in, or, so she thought, she instead met a rude reality. The other participants on the call were discussing her, making rude comments and remarks about her appearance and her abilities, and even

saying they did not want to work with her. She was so shocked and surprised that she could not un-mute the phone to let them know she could hear what they were saying. What she did next completely compelled me. Sheryl kept the phone on, and took notes about herself so she could improve. She actually stated she decided to view this as an opportunity for personal growth and development. “How often do you get to sit in on a conversation about you and hear what people ‘really’ think?” (Geddie, 2014)

That moment of tension is the salient point of my research. How do spiritual educational leaders make sense and negotiate moments of tension with children, teachers, parents and/or other community members? This thought process, this pivotal moment, the reason that caused her to engage in such mature and personal examination as opposed to self-defense, retaliation and violence.

Understanding this moment is critical to the improvement of public schools. In a sense Juanito provided me with an up close, personal, front row view of someone else’s opinion of me. It was humbling. Those things that I have not fully dealt with from the past, that must be reconciled, were brought to the forefront. I was forced to not protect and coddle the injury, but seek the attention needed to heal the injury. Self-awareness was the first phase.



Before Ms. Gomez translated the spoken words, the hearts of two mothers communicated through tears and shared an understanding that cannot be explained with words.

<i>Nadie jamas me a dado mi a hijo y a mi</i>	No one has ever given me and my son a
<i>una oportunidad. Su padre está en la</i>	chance. His father is in prison and will be
<i>cárcel y se le enviará de vuelta a México</i>	sent back to Mexico when he gets out. I

*cuando salga. Me estoy disculpando por mi hijo. Por favor, dígame al profesor y sus compañeros de clase que lo siento demasiado.* am apologizing for my son. Please tell the teacher and his classmates that I am sorry too.

*Language didn't matter at this point as I reached out to embrace Juanito's mother. Words cannot convey meaning in some contexts. The deep recesses of the heart. That place in the center of my being that looked past the offense and into the eyes of a grateful mother. Clearly, our spirits connected, without spoken language we understood each other on a level that could never be captured by speaking. The pain of a mother's heart, perhaps generations of hurt passed down within that one moment of exchange.*

I looked around the hallway and realized that *coincidentally* every person that was there the previous day, present to witness Juanito's tirade and my humiliation was there to see this precious reconciliation! We all, the substitute teacher, social worker, the social worker's interns, the counselor, nurse, and I, stood there with tears in our eyes and rolling down our faces. I do not know if Juanito's mother thought about it, but to me, she was presenting me with her best. Whether she made the cake (it takes skill, time and care to make *tres leches* well) or bought it (if it was purchased, she paid a pretty penny for it) the love, attention, thought, gratitude and forgiveness was on this, the most beautiful cake I'd ever seen that wasn't at a wedding! Full of color, with fresh fruit and flowers placed with great care atop the cake, this was a peace offering, her olive branch, symbol of reconciliation and agreement that we two would join together in partnership to *be there* for Juanito, her son, my student.

*Before honor is humility (Proverbs 18:12, KJV), I thought.*

## Background

This scenario took place at an elementary school, a bilingual campus in central Texas with more than 80% of the students are on free and reduced lunch. The campus, which had a horrible reputation within the district, was struggling with dismal test scores, burned out teachers and by all definitions, dysfunctional as lack of leadership had created a hostile environment. I had been a campus leader there for about two months before the incident. The parents entered the school only to bring their little ones to the *maestra*, talk among themselves as they stayed to make sure their children ate their government granted hot breakfasts in the cafeteria. These varied from salty ham biscuits, cheese and butter toast, cinnamon rolls, or breakfast pizza, with juice and milk. The youngest children, kindergarten and pre-kindergarten, were seated in classes at the tables, while the teachers and aides opened cartons, spread butter, or cut sandwiches. I was struck by the lack of interaction between the staff and parents but more so by how there was a definite feeling of resentment among the teachers whose early morning duty began at 7:15 in the cafeteria. The older students walked doggedly and disinterested to their classrooms where they also had hot breakfast awaiting. Despite this dark and dreary place which was clearly preceded by its reputation, I was giddy with excitement of new beginnings! I arrived at the campus each morning with a renewed sense of purpose and a feeling that I could effect change here. I loved the diversity and immediately began to work on my beginning Spanish again. My bubbly demeanor was met with curiosity from the parents and distrust from the teachers who questioned the sincerity of any good administrator who chose to be at their school. The teachers had endured their fair share of administrator turnover and had internalized a self-sustaining cultural belief system that good

administrators only came there to punch their tickets to climb to the next level. A sense of hopelessness and hostility in the building was thick. Hostility was between teachers and students, parents and administrators and between the staff members themselves. I remember going from the office to the library, the nurse's office, to classrooms, to the cafeteria, the gymnasium, a meeting for a student in special education and finally car duty at the end of the day and I was drained by the negative comments I had encountered in a single day. Multiple moments of tension exploded around the building throughout the day.

## II. THE SPIRIT—MY LENS—A SPIRITUAL THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### **Spirituality - Faith a Symbiotic Relationship?**

For the purpose of my research, the terms of faith and spirituality will be intentionally interchanged throughout this work and are intended to be so, as Dantley (2005) wrote, “spirituality is expressed *through* faith, and not through the institutionalized [faith-based] religion.” (p.22) Jones (2005) also cautioned,

[any] attempts to define spirituality must often be delicate, as the field is rife with land mines. The word is emotionally charged for many people, and considerably nebulous for others. Overall, a working definition of spirituality is anything but tidy. (p.3)

For the purposes of this work, spirituality was expressed because of the researchers’ faith in a cosmic being.

There is equally as much debate about the terms religious versus spirituality. I explored the term religious in order to address the distinctions between the terms, and found distinct difference between the religiosity, spirituality and/or faith. About this synonymous usage of religion and spirituality, Anandarajah and Hight (2001) found,

Spirituality encompasses such realms as the cognitive or philosophic, the experiential and emotional, and the behavioral. The breadth of spirituality and religion along with a lack of clarity and agreement on definitions further complicates efforts to systematize an approach to assessment and to research. Sometimes both terms are used interchangeably. Some see religion as the manifestation of ones spirituality, yet a person can be spiritual without being

religious. A person can also be outwardly “religious” in performing certain actions, and yet not focus on the underlying principles of spirituality. (p.22)

Astrow , Pulchalski, and Sulmasy (2001), defined religion as a “set of beliefs, practices, and language that characterizes a community that is searching for transcendent meaning in a particular way, generally based upon belief in a deity” (p. 22), while Mohr (2006) defined it as “an organized system of practices and beliefs in which people engage ... a platform for the expression of spirituality...”(p.23), and Speck (1998) as, “outward practice of a spiritual system of beliefs, values, codes of conduct, and rituals.” (p.24) These definitions lend themselves to a notion that religion is a more rigid, institutionalized practice of ones spirituality.

The recently coined phrase *faith based* finds its origins in conservative political circles that often conjure a notion of ultra conservative, exclusive religion. Whether the untidy, emotionally charged notion of spirituality or the conservative, institutionalized religious faith, these are two extremes, to both of which I can relate. To dismiss either end of the spectrum as invalid because of these extremes is a problem because many people turn to a faith or religious practice in the face of unexpected moments of tension.

It is important to research and explore spirituality in this context because spirituality and faith are both personal and separate, meaning that faith is both an intellectualized and lived construct (Guajardo, 2015). As I research faith, I examine my own faith and as I examine my own spirituality, it must be held against the backdrop of a wider field of knowledge. Both personal constructs, yet public in purpose, as faith in most cases, involves the correct interaction with fellow human beings and creatures.



The Dalai Lhama (Piburn,1990) was quoted as saying,

Every religion emphasizes human improvement, love, respect for others, sharing other people's suffering. On these lines every religion had more or less the same viewpoint and the same goal. This is the place to where people look for answers regarding how to behave especially in hard places. (p. 54)

According to Robinson (2010),

Twenty one of the world's religions have their own *Ethic of Reciprocity*, otherwise known in Christianity as the *Golden Rule* which simply states that we are to treat other people as we would wish to be treated ourselves. Almost all organized religions have such an ethic. It is normally intended to apply to the entire human race (Religioustolerance.org).

### **The Heart of the Matter**

Faith is so intertwined with who I am that it is difficult to separate it enough to write about it. Describing my faith is like trying to describe how my heart works to keep blood and oxygen coursing through my veins to keep me alive. I know my heart is there, connected through the hardware of veins, arteries, and the capillaries that connect them, to every part of my being, mysterious, yet alive and beating. I would have to surgically remove my heart (but that cannot be done without risks), examine it and read what has already been written about the workings of the heart to understand how it works.

Guajardo (2015) maintained this is the role of research. Though I cannot see my heart, because of previous research, I know it is there, I know what it looks like, I know its role and function and I feel what it does. I know from research that,

The heart has four chambers: two atria and two ventricles. The right atrium receives oxygen-poor blood from the body and pumps it to the right ventricle. The right ventricle pumps the oxygen-poor blood to the lungs. The left atrium receives the oxygen-rich blood from the lungs and pumps it to the left ventricle.

(Chambers of the Heart, 2014)

So it goes with the description of my faith; extract it from the common, comfortable encased language that I, and those within my Christian camps, understand and make faith visible in language plain and comprehensible for those reading my work. According to Guajardo, (2015)

the role of research is to make the familiar strange so we can look at the heart we feel, the oxygen we breathe and the culture we live from a different space in order to understand it better, or simply to become curious about its existence and function.

I know my faith is there, connected to every part of my existence, alive and working. Connected through the five senses, which channel to the spirit, heart, and soul through the hardware of my physical nose, mouth, ears, eyes and touch (Hicks, 2012).

The spiritual existence of my faith is like my beating heart. With this declaration, I understand why the Holy Bible admonishes its readers that, “without faith it is impossible to please [God]: for he that comes to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him (Hebrews 11:6 King James Version). Faith is the beating heart of the Spirit and the writing of this dissertation is yet another attempt to diligently seek Him, my God. I realize there are many other ways of knowing and understanding God, but these scriptures from the Holy Bible have formed who I am as

human being, spiritual educational leader, and now researcher. Christianity (follower of Christ) is the lens from which I view the world, it informs my epistemology and thereby the method and manner in which I will go about researching and collecting data for this topic. Researching one's own faith and understanding the self as a spiritual being has opened up my thinking regarding other faiths and ways of knowing, while solidifying my beliefs all the more.

Dantley (2005) described faith this way:

Faith is a spiritual behavior that affirms existence without physical validation. The whole notion of faith solicits skepticism and repudiation by empiricists because it cannot be explained through material, measurable means. Faith does not make rational sense because it taps into a part of our selves that does not respond to empirical interpretation...The ironic nature of faith is that while it is not itself corporeal, when exercised, it defines and exacts the physical reality of persons, places and circumstances for a moment in time. Essentially, a non-pragmatic medium produces absolute materialities. The extension of our faith then brings into reality the fact of an abstraction's actuality. This seems to be oxymoronic but the exercise of our faith has the ability to concretize ideas and notions that were once only figments of our believing. Essentially, what one believes becomes one's reality. (p.6)

The concretizing of ideas and notions that were once abstract is exactly what took place with me, and others involved in the incident of Juanito. Though I did not actually think about it in the act, I *believed* that exercising my faith could reach Juanito. Choosing to see beyond Juanito's words and actions, laying aside my own feelings and choice to

please an unseen God, I was affirming faith's existence without any physical validation, or as Dantley (2003) described, "Faith simply is the extension of one's belief in the existence or the nature of something or someone. It is the suspension of our confidence in linear, empirical, quantifiable data to confirm the actuality of things." (p. 22)

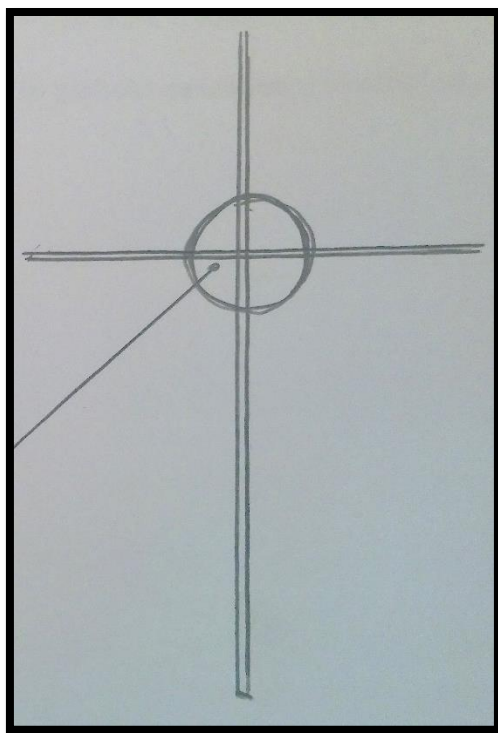
I have faith in a God with whom I have an intimate relationship. This means I can converse with Him daily and consult Him about the inner most feelings of my heart. This, I am ashamed to say, is a privilege of which, at the writing of this document, I have taken far too little advantage. I can take feelings and thoughts that I cannot tell to any human being, I can, "...come boldly to the throne of grace, that [I may] obtain mercy and find grace to help in the time of need." (Hebrews 4:16 New King James Version). I can consult God like a doctor, I can chat with him like my best girlfriend, I can lament about my deepest heart aches as a child does with a healthy parent and I feel a void whenever I choose to neglect our relationship. So, it is impossible to separate this intimacy from my everyday life and work, particularly my work as a spiritual educational leader.

### **Praxis—Where Theory Meets Practice: For Me, It Has Always Been the Cross of Jesus**

For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human.

Knowledge emerges only through and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other.

*The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire, 1993



*Figure 1.* The residence of the spiritual educational leader.

To say that I prayed about the stuff that made the narrative of Juanito, is an understatement. I did not just pray. After the fact, I was in a constant state of prayer, checking my own responses and behavior, concerned about the children, parents, educators, and health care professionals around us at that time. I needed that physical manifestation of my belief and I knew it would come. He came, He was there. He was there in Juanito's eyes, in the calming effect in my own heart. He was in Juanito's mother's tears and the hearts of everyone watching and waiting. He was there in that calming, peaceful resolve that I found, even though I was personally humiliated. I experienced Him through the words of an often misused phrase from the Holy Bible, "a peace which passeth all understanding" (Philippians 4:7, KJV). And this promise of peace comes after verse six which admonishes the reader to: "not worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, make your

requests known unto God, v. 6 and the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall guard your heart and mind.”

Dantley (2005) wrote,

Expressing faith is actually a spiritual activity that causes the one who exercises this ethereal transaction not to be removed or transcended from the real world but rather to become thrust more in it. It in fact liberates one to create what is essential to enhance and often transform the real world. Faith allows one to read the world very differently. (p.23)

I have always read the world differently, but quickly censored what I read to make it fit with in the boxes of religious conservatism. The bane of my existence has been I am extremely creative, yet feel personally boxed in by religious, racial, age, socio-economic, and gender fences. I have found through this study, that I have never really acted upon my different read of the world, but have conformed to and acted only within the confines of those parameters set for me. About this, my spiritual mentor invited me to consider,

*But you do you resolve this with you thoughts, feelings, and actions with Juanito don't you? The confines would box you to write him up and put him out. Some would ascribe that was your duty, because it would protect the learning environment for those that witnessed his outburst. It would inform him and others that his behavior was not tolerated. Instead, you acted very differently. Isn't this an expression of faith?*

I had not conformed just through the expression of my faith through spirituality, but in my very appearance! And the most outrageous of this conformity? Enter, stage left: my hair.

### **Spirituality and the Human Body and the Cultural Corpus**

I want to know my hair again, the way I knew it before I knew that my hair is me, before I lost the right to me, before I knew that the burden of beauty—or lack of it—for an entire race of people could be tied up with my hair and me. (Caldwell, 2000, p. 275)

The author's poem above causes me to ask the same question: How is it that so much of who I am can be coiled up with my hair and me? Describing my faith is like trying to explain my hair. My hair is tightly coiled and has a different texture, feel, and appearance than that of many with whom I worked from different ethnicities. Yet it is hair. My natural hair demands my daily attention and care. If I leave it to do what it will, it is very difficult to manage it. As a child, I attended all white elementary schools and remember feeling ashamed to try so hard to fit in. When questioned about my hair I was always ashamed to describe to those of other races, the process that it took to maintain my hair. I just wanted to straighten it and not see any semblance of a coil. I endured my mother straightening it with a hot comb, the pain of that process still makes me shudder; but I also distinctly remember my first chemical process. I remember my hair was very delicate and fragile, easily damaged and broken after that. I had to learn how to care for it after the chemical affect. Before that, I had to explain how my kinky and tightly woven curls one day can be bone straight, silky, and shiny, while the next day it was back to tight curls. I worked many years and spent a great deal of time and money trying to tame

my hair, relax it, chemically process it, straighten it, make it more manageable, calm it down, and make it more *presentable* and socially acceptable—attempting to make it conform to what it was not. So it is with my faith.

In *Hair Story, Untangling the Roots of Black Hair in America* (Byrd & Tharps, 2001) the authors described the transition of Black hair during the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as one that strongly encouraged straightening the hair of Black women in order to emulate their more successful European American counterparts, not only in dress but in hair appearance and styling.

Although many Black leaders [of the time] were in favor of the increased attention to grooming and appearance in the fight for social acceptance, many denounced hair straightening as a pitiful attempt to emulate Whites and equated their straightening to self-hatred and shame. (p. 37)

I can attest to this notion of self-hatred and shame, and it has a direct relationship to my reluctance to share my faith in public spaces, and remain private about it with my family and close friends. While I sometimes wore my religion like a cheap badge, behaving in ways that were condemning and offensive to those I love, the reality was that I was missing the true love that God is and I had conformed to a critical, judgmental, and hurtful religion. Critical in a way that was ironically identical to the way that I was critical of my hair, determined to change it, straighten it out, to the point of damage to my very hair shaft.



Sue, et al (2008) reflected that,

The idea that the more “Black” (i.e., natural) a woman wears her hair, the stronger the assumption that she fits the stereotype of the “angry Black woman.” It seems inherent in these messages that conforming to White standards of beauty (i.e., relaxing or straightening hair) will result in more acceptance from White coworkers and/or friends. (p.335)

I wrote the following poem as a part of my autoethnography, during my first year as a doctoral student at Texas State University, in an understanding of self, activity.

It’s all about the Hair? Really?

My hair is a strange thing

Something so...

Ever defining who I am - or trying to be

My hair? Really? I’ve placed too much stock into it...

For more years than I care to say

I can’t even *believe* I been bound this way

All the messages I’ve received through the years

Internalized and not realizing how unclear

The decisions I’ve made so that I would appear,

White? Professional, Intelligent or smart?

I was born into a lie, right from the start

I have been made to conform to some rule

Fix this stuff God gave me – it just ain’t cool

Messages from my people, our men, even my Pastor  
Preaching the message across the pulpit  
Succumbing, him too, to the rules of a Slave master  
You'd think this would have been dismissed much faster  
Than the twenty first century.

~~~

Ms. Lunkin, fix yo hair! You know you gotta represent!  
A Sistah of yo' stature can't come up in here lookin sick.  
Every little black girl is lookin' at you  
Not to mention the professional world comparin' *me* to what you do.  
God blessed me with a beautiful black man  
That man loves me no matter *what* I do  
He loves this big, black queen regardless of my 'do'  
He compliments me when I wear it straight, and he loves it when it's curled  
But no matter how much he tells me, I have to work out the kinks in my own world  
A little black girl just can't be happy  
With kinked up hair – we call nappy  
So I received the message loud and clear  
Chemically process that hair unless you appear  
Stupid, un-kept, ignorant and...Black  
Never mind the chemical burns  
The 5 to 8 hour stay in the shop  
How much could we have written?

How much could be learned?

What lies we've told ourselves.

Have we ever stopped to question from where this self-hatred came?

Did the Slave Master instill it? Was it an intentional game?

Wavy haired slave with the brighter skin

You work in the kitchen – we can stand to have you “in”

Dark skinned slave with the kinked up hair

You work in the fields – don't want our guests to stare

Always concerned about my hair

It's kinky, it's nappy, it's long, it's short

My own Sisters don't dare to mention

The silent gap and the source of our tension

I heard it all when my Pastor said

*“Our hair is not socially acceptable*

*In order to be considered respectable,*

*We can't wear our natural hair...*

*It's offensive to have our hair standing all over our head.”*

Then he said,

*“Now let me tell you how much God loves you*

*You are fearfully and wonderfully made,*

*He numbers the hairs on your head...*

*His eye is on the sparrow and I know He watches you.”*

*I sing because I'm happy,*

*I sing because I'm free,  
His eye is on the sparrow and I know He watches me  
His eye is on the sparrow and I know He watches me.*

~~~

*Am I free?*

I didn't realize till this course I took  
I've defined my beauty by some European look  
Trying to be straighter to no avail  
When so much needs tending to, besides my fake veil  
Gotta fit in at all cost  
Ashamed of a heritage long lost  
Then realizing I'd *NEVER* be white  
No matter how straight or skin we call bright  
Can't describe what I felt when natural I went,  
Though I've waited till its gray and so much money I've spent.  
The looks, the stares, the comments and praise  
I had to suspend my thoughts not to succumb to their ways...  
Freedom, liberty, and being myself

~~~

India.Arie rocks it like this  
Little girl with the press and curl  
Age eight I got a Jheri curl  
Thirteen and I got a relaxer

I was a source of so much laughter  
At fifteen when it all broke off  
Eighteen and went all natural  
February two thousand and two  
I went on and did  
What I had to do  
Because it was time to change my life  
To become the women that I am inside  
Ninety-seven dreadlocks all gone  
I looked in the mirror  
For the first time and saw that HEY....

*I am not my hair*

*I am not this skin*

*I am not your expectation no...*

*I am not my hair, I am not this skin*

*I am the soul that lives within...*

India Arie, 2005/2006

Way too old to still be dealing with this  
Gotta teach my girls that their beauty is not THIS  
Gotta learn our heritage,  
Get rid of the lies  
To get to the truth  
*I am not my hair*

*I am not this skin*

*I am not your expectation no...*

*I am not my hair*

*I am not this skin*

*I am the soul that lives within...*

India Arie, 2005/2006

~~~

*I sing because I'm happy,*

*I sing because I'm free,*

*His eye is on the sparrow and I know He watches me*

*His eye is on the sparrow and I know He watches me.*

By Karen Maxfield-Lunkin, Fall 2011



Figure 2. I am not my hair.

The time that I wrote this poem was about the same time that I was coming into a critical spirituality (Dantley, 2010).

I suggest that notions of transformative leadership can be broadened through the infusion of two radical perspectives, namely critical theory and prophetic, African American spirituality to produce a new construct termed ‘critical spirituality’ the

element of critique and deconstruction of undemocratic power relations is blended with spiritual reflection grounded in an African American sense of moralism, prophetic resistance, and hope in order to form the viscera of this hybrid theoretical construct called critical spirituality. This critical spirituality ...transformative leadership ... it deals forthrightly with notions of what is moral, democratic, and equitable in places called schools. (p. 5)

I never would have questioned those unwritten standards prior to that semester of the study of self. I wrote at that time that even Black religious leaders were preaching self-hatred from the pulpit, further perpetuating my confused image of a loving God who created me. Though this was my Black experience with religious leaders of my time, Booker T. Washington was so opposed to straightening Black hair and conforming to Euro-centric standards, he often encouraged Blacks to embrace their hair. This issue of having to straighten my hair left me more in a state of confusion than I had ever realized before I began this work. And the implications for a spiritual educational leader's self-awareness and acceptance is monumental—if that spiritual educational leader is to lead and be effective.

*If I am made in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:27 New King James Version) and if I am “fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14 King James Version), that includes my hair.*

More accurate still, that includes my faith and ability to create. Like the cultural knowings about Black hair that are entwined in the very core of my cultural existence, there are some spiritual knowings that exist, entwined within me it...faith is active.

Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, and Flowers (2005) described this level of understanding like this:

There are many types of understanding...The...standard cognitive kind that you can work with in our conscious mind. But there's a deeper level that's more fundamental—more rewarding. Instead of calling it 'understanding,' I would call this deeper level 'knowing.' When Otto asked about this 'knowing' and how it arises, Author responded, "this inner 'knowing comes from here'", pointing to his heart. (p. 3)

There are not very many conversations, or analogies, or conflicts, or attempts to teach for which I do not bring in my faith, but it is often forced and unnatural...hmmm...perhaps, like my hair? When using analogies to teach my own children, I have made an effort to explain to them how as I always say, "the natural types the spiritual." This phrase, I took from the Holy Bible in the book of Romans. The Apostle Paul explains to the early church in Romans chapter 1 verse 22, that everything that we see in the natural world, has a spiritual counter-part and that we can understand an invisible God basically by the nature that we see. But now, I am seeing that this spiritual principal is directly tied to and coiled in the locks of my hair.

Dantley (2005) wrote that,

'Faith in' and 'faith to' work concomitantly ground spiritual educational leaders in their labor to reconstruct schools so that all children can be afforded an excellent education. Leaders of this ilk see themselves called to learning sites not merely to perpetuate the status quo but to engage race, class and gender issues that obfuscate marginalized and oppressed people's hopes to participate in a just



and equitable school setting. Educational leaders must be set free to reflect and to consider their work as moral transformative intellectuals. They must be encouraged to take the inward journey to discover their spiritual selves from which their notions of morality, community, being and meaning emanate. As this happens, schools will operate from an ethic of care, faith and morality and we will see schools where the voices of many will be welcomed. (p.9)

### **Anatomy of a Spiritual/Faith-based Theory**

The Bible says faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17 New King James Version) and that, ‘all scripture comes from the inspiration of God’ (II Timothy 3:16 and 17, King James Version) “and is profitable.” With faith in these biblical declarations, I make my stand that every word from every book, from Genesis to Revelation is inspired by God. It is for me, and the more I *hear* it, the more faith I receive. With regard to faith entering the being through the ear gate, according to Hicks (2012), there are levels or realms of hearing within man’s triune being: body, soul, and spirit. Furthermore, I believe there is inspiration in the scriptures for every aspect of my life and, “All things work together for my good...” (Romans 8:28). That includes for my triune being, body, soul and spirit. As I ground my thinking about faith as the tripled natured beings that we are, I borrowed Hicks’ (2012) theory that (wo)man is created as a wheel (See Fig. 1) as substantiated in the book of Thessalonians, “May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, (1 Thessalonians 5:23 King James Version).

Hicks (2012) illustrated five spokes to the wheel, which are the five senses of man. The senses are divided according to the three parts of man...the spirit, soul, and body. The spirit of man being closest to the heart of man. Breaking it down, the hands of the spirit are worship, the mouth of the spirit is prayer, the eyes of the spirit are faith, the ears of the spirit are reverence, and the nose of the spirit is hope. The center circle is the soul. The hands of the soul are affection, the mouth of the soul is reason, the eyes of the soul are the imagination, the ears of the soul are the memory, and the nose of the soul is conscience. The center most portion is the heart which is turned, by the will of man, each spoke producing a pipe so to speak from the body all the way to the heart of the human being.

This wheel, uncannily matches the wheel of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems, also known as the Ecologies of Knowing (See Figures below)

... interactions occur at these three levels to organize conversations, identify entry points, and find spaces for interventions; these ecologies of knowing start at the most intimate, inner part, the self, and then naturally flow out toward the immediate organization and subsequently the larger community, in a three-ringed concentric circle formation. At the self level of knowing, conversations and experiences are made personal and relevant at the most micro of levels, as this level is an opportunity for the individual to own their learning and their teaching through story telling. (Guajardo et al., 2010)

The center of the Ecologies of Knowing is the self, the center circle is the organization, and the outer circle is the body, which is the community. Knowing the self first, is important before the interaction with the organization or community. The center

of the Threefold Nature of Man (Hicks, 2012) also finds the spirit encircled around the heart as the center most part of the being, which corresponds with the self in the Ecologies of Knowing diagram, moving out to the soul in the Threefold Nature of Man which corresponds with the organization in Ecologies of Knowing. Finally the body corresponds well with the community, or that vessel which houses all, yet acts as the conduit of the self to the world around it.

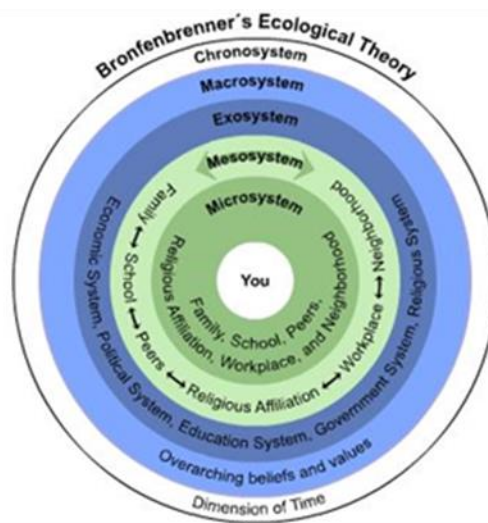
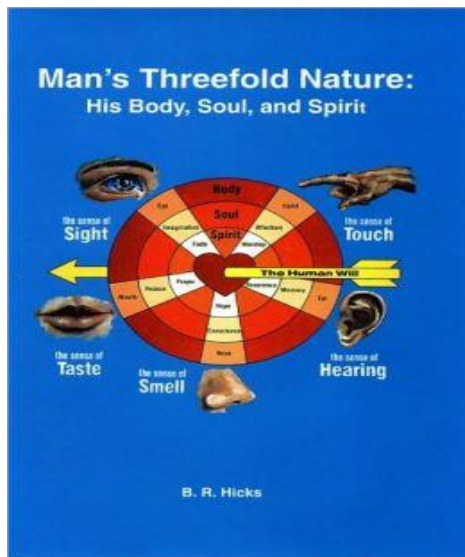


Figure 3. B. R. Hick's three-fold nature. Figure 4. Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory.

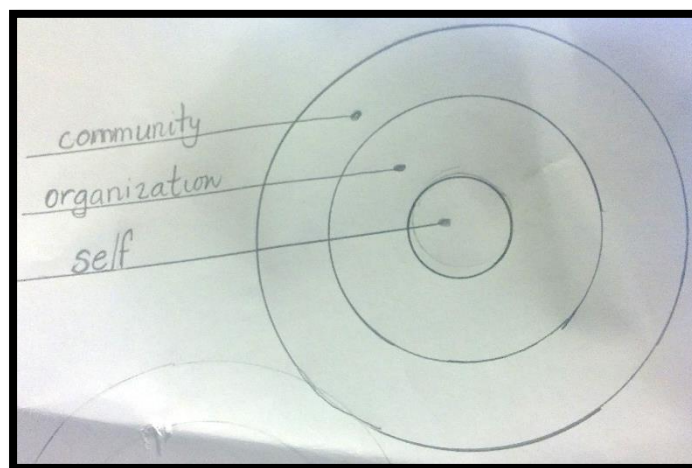


Figure 5. Guajardo, Guajardo, ecologies of knowing.

Hebrews 11:1 says, “Faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen” in the King James Version. However I like the New International Version which is translated as, “Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see” (NIV). To me, this means there is a tangible substance or essence from which human beings operate and to a higher degree, those who espouse to be educational leaders, who find themselves unexpectedly drawn into moments of unexpected tension.

When an educational leader, who operates by faith, problematizes the context of his/ her work that is actually an act of hope ... Such a creative leader embraces the struggle involved in the future rather than acquiescing to a sense of its stubborn inexorability. A leader who operates by faith hopes that she will, through dialogue and problem posing, help the learning community wrestle with issues and then diligently work to bring about a change that is grounded in justice and democracy in the school setting as well as the wider community. (Dantley, 2005, p. 9)

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Many teachers and fellow administrators said I brought an added dimension to the campus, which was counter to the prevailing culture. I saw potential in the faces of each student and burdened teacher. I wanted to collaborate and talk, to solve problems and celebrate their accomplishments, be a cheer leader and listen to their stories, and lead through love. I enjoyed trying out my Spanish with the parents at each encounter, “*Buenos dias, como esta usted?*” would almost always be met with a smiling “*muy bien gracias!*” I remember being so excited to get to work that I would laugh to myself when I thought of the challenges that awaited me while I prepared each morning. By

comparison, this school was just like the school where I taught for three years. It was a bilingual campus, in an older neighborhood, and you could sense a feeling of hopelessness among the staff. But there, we were accomplished and successful because we worked as a team under a leader who allowed and encouraged innovation, listened to our dreams as teachers, and had a genuine respect for the community in which she was adopted and reared as a child.

I know that many people have faith in a myriad of things; but I am seeking to explain why I cannot separate this faith from my work as spiritual educational leader. This is the criteria used to inform who my research partners are. I must describe how faith informs everything that I do even, and most notably, in unexpected moments of tension. I often stayed at work, desperately trying to work on or fix things that needed to be done, only to neglect my own family to a degree that sickens me now, when I think about it. I watched as the so called best administrators kept incredibly odd hours just to keep up with their jobs and hold on to a position of status as a good administrator; but their personal lives were suffering. I expected my husband to understand and carry a weight that was unfair to bear alone. So, I would doggedly work at the work and try to put family concerns at the back of my mind. That does not work. It was the war between my faith and the system. Habermas (1985) differentiated between two worlds, the systems world, and the lifeworld. The bureaucracies of the school system, and insistence on the part of the educational community to remain within the status quo, are examples of the systems world. The contrast of the lifeworld is that it is informed by social norms and ethical considerations. The well-known concept of the public sphere is located in the overlap between the lifeworld and system world.

Ketchum (2004) noted,

Habermas contends that the systems world has colonized the lifeworld, transforming people's beliefs and actions to match with the systems world's goals and terms. People increasingly gain their legitimacy through using 'systems' language, values and reasoning, ignoring other forms of reason that exist outside of the systems world. (p. 35)

Ironically, the Texas Education Code, which represents the systems world in this context, actually embraces some wording which lends itself nicely to the lifeworld, and the understanding of the self. The disconnect has happened through dogmatic interpretation of the TEC which hinders the development of the self in order to feed the systems world. It was attempting to operate within the systems world while experiencing unexpected moments of tension, which ultimately drove me out of the school setting which presented more stress than I could adequately handle while focusing on my family.

### **The Role of the Educational Leader**

There are many rewarding moments in the life of an educational leader, which include moments of unexpected tension. It is these moments of unexpected tension which beg to be explored. These moments present, in a variety of ways such as, a child expressing gratitude, or parents arguing with a teacher about why their child did not get recess today— while the teacher stands utterly exhausted thinking only of the timeline for learning under which he has been placed.

Training for a crisis increases the likelihood of doing what needs to be done in the crisis. My mind raced back to one of my old commander's favorite quotes when I was a young lieutenant in the U.S. Army, "When confronted with a crisis, you will not rise to

the occasion; you will sink to the level of your training.” I find it profound that with all of my educational training, in a time of tense crisis, I resorted to what I was taught 30 years earlier in the military. Ironically, I was sinking back to the level of my only real training for an unexpected moment of tension...the military. But should there not be real training, every day for the inevitable unexpected moments of tension that educational leaders face in public schools? While I had extensive training from my educational leadership programs regarding instructional leadership, evaluating teachers, mentoring, disciplinary procedures, and other technical educational procedures, I was not trained to deal with personal affronts that take place often and unexpectedly. I was trained in processing discipline referrals, how to run a schedule, truancy and attendance laws, special education law, discipline plans and doing teacher spot checks and evaluations. My spiritual mentor asked me to think about,

*You were in fact trained in the areas you mention. However, you seem to be really referring to training that “allowed” you to interact as a human being that had a connection and relationship with the people you lead and interacted with. It is through that relationship with people that you actually display your connection with God, therefore, also representing the cross that you bear on a daily spiritually filled existence. The horizontal intersecting and thus creating the vertical relationships.*

Still, I understood innately, spiritually, that I needed to model, a calm response, to restore order in the midst of painful and chaotic situations.

When chaos has banged down the door and is tossing us around the room, it is difficult to believe clear principles are sufficient. When things become chaotic,

this clarity keeps us on course. We are still able to make sense, even when the world grows mad. (Wheatley, 2010, p. 131)

In order to establish a guidepost, I used and analyzed the Texas Administrative Code, Standards for the Principal Certificate the State Board of Education Code (SBEC) elements guiding all state education leadership programs to inform me and my review of the literature. The Standards are broken down into five domains and are used in the development of curricula as well as assessment for principal preparation programs. Subsection (a) Principal Certificate Standards state that:

The knowledge and skills identified in this section must be used by an educator preparation program in the development of curricula and coursework and by the State Board for Educator Certification as the basis for developing the examinations required to obtain the standard Principal Certificate. The standards also serve as the foundation for the individual assessment, professional growth plan, and continuing professional education activities. (Item 16, p. 7)

As I reviewed the literature for each domain, I addressed how development of the curricula and coursework has played out in the day to day activities of campus leaders juxtaposing them with the personal standards of the spiritually mature campus leader and highlighting those moments of tension. The role of the school leader is complex enough, just dealing with the day to day expectations for leadership, however, the added measure of complexity—the experience(s) and injuries that the educational leader brings to the table. For me, my heart was in constant conflict with what was expected of me. The Texas Administrative Code appears to align in title with the more human element of the job, but time and accountability demands do not allow a leader the flexibility to act.



Contrast that with the personal standards of an educational leader who sees the problem as something to be acted upon, but cannot do so within the limitations of the educational setting. This described the constant inner tension I experienced in the scenario of this work. I knew that I needed to do some heavy lifting myself, increasing my leadership skills and developing the language to be able to communicate my concerns. Greene (1973) theorized, “a great deal depends on how the teacher adjusts his perspectives on human beings and the institutions they have made. Much also depends on how he chooses himself as a teacher, how he decides to act on what he has come to know.” (p. 65) That holds true for the educational leader, who must not fear to take political action when in a democratic setting of public education.

Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002) urged,

Guiding others responsibly must entail a deep understanding of oneself.

Developing emotional intelligence and interpersonal relatedness means coming to terms with one's own modes of relating. The challenge of a genuine leadership life is to be fully present, passionate, and committed with all of one's fears and desires in tow. The essential work always lies in self-discovery and awareness. (p.6)

Besides having knowledge in the core areas of education, the educational leader is expected to hold specific skills to be an effective instructional leader. According to the Texas Administrative Code, Standards for Principal Certification, these skills include, but are not limited to; communication, interpersonal, planning, instructional observation, skills in research, evaluation, sharing, facilitating, and guiding decisions about instructional improvement.

The role of the instructional leader is outlined by Brewer (2001) as one that requires building a community of learners; sharing decision making; sustaining the basics; leveraging time; supporting ongoing professional development for all staff members; redirecting resources to support a multifaceted school plan; and creating a climate of integrity, inquiry, and continuous improvement.” (p.30) I know from personal experience that role of the campus leader is complex at best. I learned first-hand the campus administrator is *on* at all times, meaning that they are constantly being watched from all angles, with little or no time to reflect and rejuvenate. They are expected to mask their feelings, their personal lives do not matter, above all else, they must present themselves as calm, cool and collected.

### **The Anatomy of the Unexpected Moment of Tension**

In a personal conversation with Foley (2014), he discussed symbolic violence, and described it as small things we do not notice but they are there, it is when those in power whether temporary or even perceived power continue to hurl insults and put downs at the recipient until they cannot do anything but assimilate. Juanito was in the position of power, because he had a captive audience, as he hurled the insults at me. Though temporary, his words continued to come at me to break down the authority of the black female who could not speak the dominant language of our school.

Answering in part, an earlier question, what does this symbolic violence do to the educational leader; since I had witnessed such verbal and physical violence in the past, this moment of tension deepened my personal understanding while some suppressed memories resurfaced. I found that I had a need to protect those around, including Juanito, perhaps representing a graceful transference to my younger self. As I reflected on what

this symbolic violence did to the perpetrator, Juanito in this case, and what it does to those witnessing it – in this scenario, the school social worker, her interns, the teacher and even other children, I know that neither can be left unexplored. The symbolic violence was a tool that Juanito must have experienced enough himself to master it well enough to use it with me. It was his armor.

Similar in concept to W. E. B. Dubois' (1903) work with double consciousness, "It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness...One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body..." (p.2) more involved, this research compared a profundity of spaces and identified that one spiritual educational leader must grapple with in order to make sense, understand the self and in turn be effective in the complex social educational settings. I first became interested in the power of autoethnography when writing my own autoethnography as a part of the Educational Leadership PhD program at Texas State, and I knew innately that autoethnography had the potential to transform individuals as well as entire school systems. Using micro-autoethnography has allowed me to investigate those moments of tension with dignity.

### III. THE SOUL

#### Method - A Search and Framework for Analysis

This chapter outlines the qualitative research methods I employed to facilitate the study with my two research partners and myself. We explored our stories and their negotiation of unexpected moments of tension. I took each research partner back into that unexpected moment of tension, just as I did, with my autoethnography by using micro-ethnography, thick description, and questioning, after we had conversations of personal, family, and professional background. This was important in framing and making meaning of our observations and data collection for autoethnography, written word, and voice recordings, we interrogated the narrative through interview and one team *plática*. We began each session by revisiting the following research questions as the backdrop: (a) How do educational leaders who self-identify as spiritual beings, make sense of unexpected moments of tension with students, teachers, parents and other community members (b) To what spaces do spiritual educational leaders go to negotiate unexpected moments of tension and (c) Why is this concept and inquiry important to the spiritual educational leader and education community?

Exploring unexpected moments of tension in the life of a spiritual educational leader demands a creative means to discover and represent a non-traditional unit of analysis and data set.

To navigate the complex nature of spirituality in the social setting, I chose to narrow the focus by using critical self-reflection (Dantley, 2010; Fernández -Balboa, 1998) through micro-autoethnography as method. Dantley (2010) asserted

,

Through critical self-reflection and deconstructive interpretation one finds current and prospective school leaders reflecting on themselves within a social or cultural milieu. Critical self-reflection is the process whereby practicing and prospective education leaders come to an understanding of themselves. This involves the educational leader coming to grips with his or her sacred, genuine, or unvarnished self. (p. 216)

Fernández-Balboa (1998) explained the critical self-reflection as a method of connecting the educational leader to the world,

Critical reflection helps us see how, in many cases (and even with the best of intentions), our actions are void of meaning. Critical reflection reaches true effectiveness when it lies between excessive rumination and superfluous thought, when it looks not only backward and forward (connecting us to the world) but also inward (i.e., self-questioning) in a constant cycle of coming back to our starting point and purpose. (p. 47)

Employing the same process, which I used to capture, describe and analyze the anatomy of my unexpected moment of tension, I engaged my research partners in a similar process as we went through three sets of interviews. My cultural and religious backgrounds often situate me in places of tension as a spiritual educational leader. It is from this lens that I view the world. This mix of my faith, Grandma's prayers, and a life of demonstrative worship that is starkly contrasted with the negative messages, vibes, and micro aggressions (Sue, 2008) I have received throughout my life as an African American female. Although blurred and unfocused before engaging in writing and autoethnography for one of my PhD courses, my faith is the lens through which I view

the world and this lens is what informs my work as a spiritual educational leader. Now, this lens takes some time to get used to, like when I was recently prescribed bifocals, I initially could not see to drive and the world was blurry. I had to train my eyes to look only through the small space of the reading portion of the lens to read and look up to see at a distance. There was a moment that I started to turn around, go back to the optician, and tell them that they made a mistake on my lenses, but then my husband said, “It takes time to adjust Karen.” Within a few hours, my eyes adjusted and I was seeing well. But it is interesting that there is a specific place where I look through the glasses (precisely where the reading lens is separated from the distance lens) that my vision is somewhat distorted, uneven and not out of focus. Consequently, it takes the slightest shift of my eyes to see to bring an object into view, whether distant or close. Through the method of micro-ethnography, I want to examine that space between the lenses.

Ellis and Bochner (2000) described how autoethnography, as an autobiographical genre of writing and research, displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural. In my case, the personal is spiritual. Rather than trying to find a way to tip toe around my faith in Jesus Christ, this approach allowed me to examine it and press forward making meaning with my faith. This focus upon those multiple layers of consciousness came into clearer view once the unexpected moment of tension was identified.

Patton (2002) described how,

...back and forth autoethnographers gaze, first through the ethnographic, wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and the cultural aspects of their personal experience; then they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by

and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretation: part of the challenge of autoethnographic writing is finding and owning one's voice. (pp. 89)

This finding of one's voice is critical to the transparent work of the educational leader. Working with students like Juanito, pointing them to healthy growth and development is not possible until an educational leader experiences a depth of self-examination.

Merriam (2014) describes "autoethnography as both a process and a product" (p. 27) in which I engaged my partners. The process of writing and reliving autoethnography allowed the participant to stop to examine one small aspect of our lives, a moment (of tension) in time and expand its meaning and significance.

Autoethnography from Patton's (2002) perspective is "an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural." (p. 86) Goodall (2000) described autoethnography as "creative narratives shaped out of a writer's personal experiences within a culture and addressed to academic and public audiences." (p. 9) Autoethnography according to Ellis and Bochner (2000) is "autobiographies that self-consciously explore the interplay of the introspective, personally engaged self with cultural descriptions mediated through language, history, and ethnographic explanation." (p. 742. This is also described by Guajardo and Guajardo (2011) as using critical self-reflection of personal stories. Of Micro-ethnography, (Le Baron, 2006) explained it as "research that attends to big social issues through careful examination of 'small' communicative behaviors...researchers focus on the social interaction, rather than the individual." (p. 58)

As I study the moments of unexpected tension of my two other research witnesses and myself, I analyzed the data with a matrix that used the three tiered Ecologies of

Knowing visual mentioned above and made sense of the findings using narratives as portraits of lived experiences.

According to Valenzuela (1999), “All people share a basic need to be understood, appreciated and respected” (p. 108) and “narratives are valid and viable ways of knowing for teachers and students.” (Gay, 2010, p.6) The educational leader could engage in such processes such as autoethnographical activities in order to understand the self – especially the spiritual self - before being an effective leader.

Dantley (2010) observed,

The adaptive nature of a leader’s work actually operates from one’s spiritual center. A person’s spirituality is that ethereal part that establishes meaning in one’s life. It dares to ask the hard ontological and teleological inquiries that help people to determine who they are and what their contributions to life will be.

Spirituality is the instrument through which we build connectivity and community with others. (p. 214)

My data collection and analysis started first with the event, or moment of unexpected tension, then considered my research partners, looking at the participants’ formal training, understanding and use of school policy, job description, the school system itself, public policy and finally, the communities to understand the participants’ economic status, housing conditions, history, knowledge of schools, language and symbols. I extrapolated the critical learning from data sets for micro-autoethnography such as, taped recordings of their stories through interviews, collected written stories of my research partners as their reflections. We had one team *plática*, which is indicative of a profound and multi-



resourced approach to conversation, in which participants utilize words, gestures, idioms, metaphors, past histories, and stories, among others, to bathe the setting of the *plática* with various influences and immerse its participants (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2010). The data from each of our personal stories or experiences with unexpected moments of tension was recorded in a prepared matrix for sense making.

### **Partners – Witnesses of the Moment**

I engaged two other research partners in this process and used the information from my literature review, combined with my personal observations of both of my research partners over the summer months of 2015. Our interviews included questions about their family history, education, spirituality and current place of service. Each of us are educational leaders who self-identify as spiritual (see individual profiles for their definition of spiritual). Each are also well versed in educational leadership, curriculum, teaching and administrative experience. Each of us testified of the space we witnessed as a spiritually mature, educational leader born from an unexpected moment of tension.

To frame the profile of a ‘spiritually mature’ educational leader, I considered spiritual health as a determinant of spiritual maturity. I revisit my review of the literature regarding spiritual health. Bensley (1991) defined spiritual health with six tenets: (a) A sense of fulfillment in life, (b) values and beliefs of community and self, (c) wholeness in life, (d) a factor is wellbeing, (e) a controlling higher power or “god-like” force, and (f) the human/spirit interaction. (p. 287) I add to this list that a spiritually healthy person recognizes, even in the limitations of their humanness the importance of sacrificing the wants and needs of self in order to assist another. This, is coupled with a belief or faith

that contacts with a higher power, can transcend and work beyond human limitations to improve the human condition. Spiritual health or maturity, in my mind, often manifests as the ability to extend mercy to another simply because of the mercy one has received. The spiritually mature want to practice the Golden Rule even when it is not convenient to them. Dantley (2010) also instructed that, “Spirituality is the instrument through which we build connectivity and community with others.” (p. 214)

I framed a profile of spiritual educationally mature practitioners; keeping in mind their current service and their spiritual background, practice, ideals and beliefs. These research partners and I participated as the units of analysis, as we analyzed each of our own unexpected moments of tension. I sought to explore this space with spiritual educational leaders to understand if their practices can inform and strengthen the greater educational community so we can be a better community.

### **Profile for Partner One – Marva**

Marva (pseudonym) is a 34 year old Caucasian female, wife, and mother of a 20 month old at the time of this writing. She holds a Bachelor’s of Science in Recreation Administration, a Master’s of Arts in Educational Equity and Cultural Diversity and has special training as a Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist. Working with families in crisis, her current occupation is Director of Training and Development.

I selected Marva because of her extensive educational leadership experience. She fit the profile of a spiritual educational leader, which was developed in my literature review. Marva has a spiritual sense that I recognized after a conversation she and I had when we met. In that conversation, she remembered her mother, father, and grandmother reaching out to help community folks, even when they did not approve of the person and

their behavior, yet they always brought people into their home. She said that she thought for years that her grandmother was rich, but learned later that she shared her meager resources. Marva considers herself as spiritual and said this about spirituality: “I pray daily for guidance and protection of my loved ones. I strive to practice mindfulness in actions and intentions, try to help those in need. I feel restored and closest to God in nature. Through my life's work I share in fellowship with others.” Her religious affiliation is Unitarian Universalist.

She leads a group of workers at her workplace compassionately and has a real heart for the community that her organization serves. She described her job as,

We use a strengths based approach to identify the strengths of the families and youth who are designated at risk or who may have cognitive or physical challenges. Many of the youth we provide services to have mental health diagnoses, or have been involved in the Juvenile Justice System in some manner. Our goal is to wrap families in therapeutic support services, so they can develop healthy leisure interests and meet the goals set by their treatment team. We want to ensure families can learn to lead a healthy lifestyle, improve academic achievement and avoid incarceration or institutionalization.

### **Profile for Partner Two – Jorge**

Jorge (pseudonym) is a 42 year old Latino male, who holds a Bachelor's of Arts in English/History, a Master's of Arts in Curriculum and Instruction with special training as Principal's Certificate and specialized training in English as a Second Language, or ESL, as well as bilingual education. He is working on doctorate in education. Jorge is currently working as an assistant principal in an urban school district.

I selected Jorge because he fit the profile in my literature review and I know of his extensive educational leadership experience and his spiritual sense that I recognized some years ago.

When I asked Jorge if he considered himself to be a spiritual person, he responded, “I consider myself a Catholic on my spiritual journey with Christ towards salvation.” He continued and explained his definition of spirituality,

Spiritual to me is not the same as practicing a religion. For me spiritual means believing and engaging in a transcendent world that is not bound by rules. It is believing that there is something out there unknowable and undefined but that one can somehow tap into via ritual practice. In contrast, when I say I am on my spiritual path I mean that I am working to cultivate my relationship with Christ who is very knowable through prayer and sacraments according to the defined practices of the Catholic Church.

Jorge’s religious affiliation is the Roman Catholic Church.

### **Profile for Partner Three – Me**

Partner number three is a 53 year old African-American Female. Married to the same man for almost 27 years, we have three grown children. I hold a Bachelor’s of Arts in Mass Media Communications, a Masters of Education and am working on my PhD. I have extensive military training, serving as an officer in the United States Army for six years. I was a teacher leader for 14 years and an administrator for eight years. To me, spirituality means an attitude of humility toward God and all creation – and knowing that God is in every, minute detail of my life. For the past three years my husband and I have attended and now pastor a small church in an urban area where 95% of the congregants

speak Spanish. I have been a part of the same non-denominational, charismatic church organization for the past 25 years.

### **Journey of Observables**

Each research partner participated in two or three semi-structured interviews and a group *plática* where I shared my lived experience and brainstormed examples of moments of tension. Describing my process of micro-autoethnography, I engaged my research partners in this method, weaving in and out of story to the technical to meaning making. The critical self-reflection emerged as a tool for understanding the heart of my research.

We included a place-based visit experience through *plática*. After laying out my autoethnography, I invited my research partners to remember their own unexpected moment of tension and describe that moment. Asking the partner to ‘take us back’ to the time that the moment of tension happened, proved to be a moving experience which I expound upon in great detail later.

Finally, the interviews were ordered as such:

Though the first interview, I laid the ground work and the focus of research. Again, introducing my own micro-autoethnographic work and purpose of the research, I discussed the time commitment and obtained permission from my partners. In this interview, I gathered more demographic information for the purpose of understanding and hearing their personal stories and familial backgrounds, in keeping with Vygotsky’s (1978) theory that “every function in the child’s cultural development appears twice, first on the social level, and later, on the individual level. First between people, (interpsychological) and then in the individual (intrapsychological).” (p. 57) With that

theory as the leaning post for understanding the self, it was critically important (to both my partners and me) to understand the family background.

The second interview was framed with three guiding questions centered within the spiritual educational leader's schooling and spiritual formation, this interview also provided for the context for obtaining observables. One of the questions began with the partner describing their definition of spirituality.

Dantley (2010) noted that, "Spirituality is the instrument through which we build connectivity and community with others." (p. 214) As the essence of my research is to explore the tension of and relationship between educational leadership and spirituality, Dantley's definition is a fitting starting point.

In the third interview, I had anticipated going to the actual location and asking each research partner to witness and re-tell the events of that pivotal moment, after reliving my own autoethnographic experience. We did not have to make this place-based visit as our conversations and team *plática* was more than sufficient for data collection. *Plática* is a Spanish word which implies a deep conversation informed by lived experiences of those participating. It is more than just conversing.

Again, using three guiding questions, we each described our own unexpected moment of tension, reliving the lived experience through story. An analysis was conducted after each interview which created a generative third space that I will expound upon later. See Table 1 below, for the framed questions for each interview and one *plática*.

## **A Journey Through the Timeline**

I conducted the first (introduction, purpose and family background) second (schooling and spiritual development) and third (place-based experiences and analysis) interviews during the summer of 2015. Concurrently analyzing the data as I collected it, at the end of the Summer 2015 semester I completed a final analysis the summer's data collection – making meaning, searching for common themes, determining how the research connects with my literature review and how it would inform educational practice. I began writing my findings beginning in August 2015. I presented the summation of those findings to my research partners in October 2015 and defended this dissertation in November 2015.

## **Analysis of Interview, *Pláticas* and Stories**

The analysis was informed by the personal stories of research and reconciled with the lived experiences and the literature. As common themes emerged from the lived experiences, by repeatedly sifting the data through the research questions, asking how it connected with the literature review and how it related to educational practice, a new theory emerged.

An analysis was conducted of each interview immediately after each interview and our *plática*. The common themes that emerged around the spiritual educational leadership theory and the *plática* guided and informed our research, causing my research partners to actually change his unexpected moment of tension at one point. Researchers, Guajardo and Guajardo (2004) added that, “The conversational and storytelling modes emerge as a centerpiece of collective-leadership formation, and begin to define a

leadership model dependent on groups of people engaging in *pláticas* as a foundational part of this brand of leadership for community change. (p. 8)

The guide we used for the analysis is below. Informed by the lived experiences of the partners or witnesses, I completed it after each interview and finally the team *plática*. As a framework for understanding, findings were sifted, again through the themes of the literature review juxtaposed with the Ecologies of Knowing (Guajardo, et al).



Ecologies of Knowing	Spirituality & Faith	Spirit, Human Body and Cultural Corpus	Anatomy of Spiritual Theory	Educational Leadership Training	Analysis
Literature	Many scriptures from the New International Version and The King James Version Dantley	A scriptural analysis was used as well as a pictorial representation of one research partner physically engaging in the Stations of the Cross	Freire (1993) Dantley(2005, 2010)  Presencing – Senge, et al. (2005) 3 <sup>rd</sup> Space Anzaldúa (2000)	Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002) Praxis, Freire (1993) Greenleaf – servant leadership Senge, et al. (2005) – Presence Bronfenbrenner’s Ecologies of Knowing CSR – Fernandez-Balboa (1998), Dantley (2005, 2010, 2012) Argyris (1995) Witherspoon (2010)	Info about injuries sustained while working as an ed leader, but little about injuries that the ed leader brought to the table Difference between religiosity and spirituality as seen by each research partner involved relationship, communication and accountability
Self	Each research partner shared written and oral stories about the beginnings of our faith	Each research partner shared stories about our how our biology impacted our lives as children and adults.	Courage, spiritual maturity, humility, servant leadership all important	Gap in training provided the ed leader to study the self. CSR emerged as most important	A three ringed Venn diagram used to illustrate the intersections between each research partner and another one, as well as the inner, combined most inner intersection. Weaving in and out, back and forth from the researcher’s past to present making sense at each juncture in a spiraled ascent or descent depending on the context. Marva’s spiraled depiction of healing which she termed Metamorphosis and Jorge’s journey through the
Organization	The organization of the school, the church, community and social resources	An understanding that a child’s hair physical traits, frame too small to wear religious vestige were all a part of the tapestry that informed stories	A critical spirituality which questioned established institutions regarding service to others	Schools clinical training w a mission 1st mentality, leaving human or spirit element void. Lifeworld vs. Systemsworld (Sergiovanni, 2000)	
Community	The Catholic Church, the evangelical church, family gatherings and outings	Ecologies of Knowing allowed to begin with the self and move into the community	The formation of the 3 <sup>rd</sup> space through CSR was created.	Educational leaders are expected to work well within the confines of the school setting and ignore the social aspect of the job - duty	

Figure 6. Guide for analysis, combined research partners.

### **Time for Reflection**

At times, in moments of silence when I seem to be lost,  
floating, almost disconnected, I reflect.

- Paulo Freire (Pedagogy of Freedom)



*This is a child. He MUST feel a calm, gentle spirit from me.* I quoted a familiar scripture in my head to help ground me, “*A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger* (Proverbs 15:15 New King International Version).

*It is not his fault.* I remember thinking this almost immediately following the verbal barrage to which I was subjected.

Amazingly, those words came out of my mouth to those that were around me. I have often questioned how educators can arrive at such humane reactions when under personal attack.

Critical self-reflection brings me to my spiritual education, what I have been taught, practicing what I preach, walking the talk. —*Reflection is my accountability system, bringing to the surface the difference between school accountability versus accountability of the heart and soul—*.

### **Presentation of Findings and Anticipated Contributions**

My findings were presented in a literary format, consistent with the proposal’s utility of storytelling. I went into this study with the hope that it would inform a different type of conversation for educational leaders. One that not only acknowledges the complexity of the individual spiritual educational leader as a part of a larger organization

and community but also brings an awareness of others through the individual struggle. The work delivered. The process of micro-autoethnography takes the spiritual educational leader back to those first levels of social development and weaves back through the present, informing the individual's understanding of self within the contexts of one's current cultural place. This place of tension is a short-lived space, where often long term decisions are made that effect schools and communities. For what a leader chooses to *do* within that crucial moment of tension can have far reaching implications and this body of work could prove to be invaluable in the training of future educational leaders.

#### IV. INTRODUCTORY ROADMAP

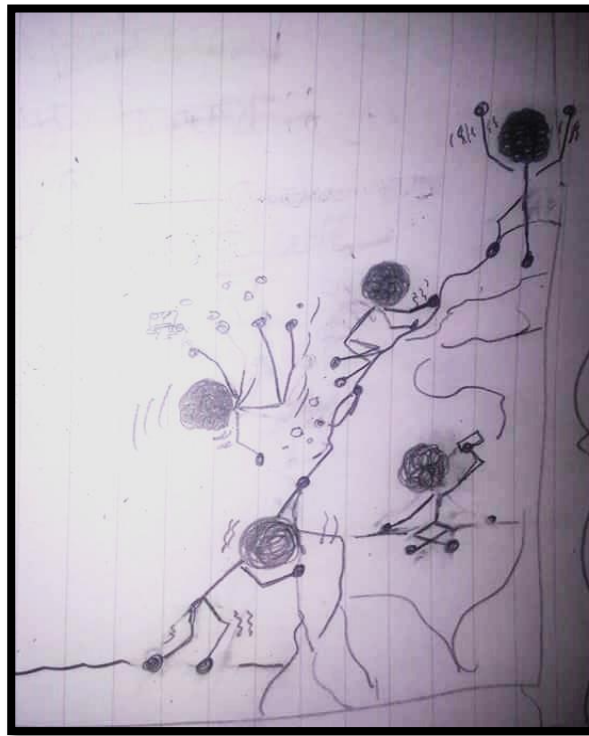


Figure 7. The journey to understanding.

I am so grateful to my research partners who agreed to go on this journey with me. Sharing our unexpected moments of tension took us through roads less traveled. In this chapter, I employ the narrative format in keeping with the previous chapters to summarize our stories and thus emerging findings. This chapter is a combination of narrative, representing each research partner's story gleaned from the interviews, and our collective *plática*. Some of the insights from the interviews and *plática* are conveyed through quotes to best illustrate the spirit of the research, honoring each partner's story as portraits of lived experiences. I used the literary device of flashback to help the reader understand the dialectics as the text shifts from past to present. A series of dashes like this ----- precedes each flashback. Because the stories are raw and emotional, flashback enhances the weaving process that critical self-reflection, through micro-

autoethnography, requires. The dialogical nature (in text and spoken) of this work proved to be so vitally generative in making meaning that I also used italicized text to convey insights inspired from dialogue. Similar to my personal reflections, dialogically inspired insights are represented with italicized words preceded and followed with em dashes like this — —. The chapter begins with a side-by-side conversation that Marva (pseudonym), my first research partner, had with the two people involved in her unexpected moment of tension. Jorge's (pseudonym) account also follows in narrative form, followed by the synopsis of our *plática*. The chapter closes with my own pictorial representation of the concepts which emerged from this work and an explication of those concepts.

The research questions guide the flow of the narrative. How do educational leaders who self-identify as spiritual beings, make sense of-unexpected moments of tension with students, teachers, parents and other community members? To what spaces do spiritual educational leaders go to negotiate unexpected moments of tension? Why is this concept and inquiry important to the spiritual educational leader and-education community?

Just as I framed the beginning of this document, I weave back and forth from narrative to the ethnographic work, to reflection or meaning making. Our reflections (meaning making) are written in italics; the technical or ethnographic work is written in regular text. Each time I return to the narrative, it is indicated by using an ampersand & at the beginning of the narrative, and I transfer new veins of thought including flashback, with several dashes like this -----.



## ***Plática – Controversial and Emotional***

### **The Umbilical Cord/Coils of My Hair —the Unexpected Ties**

A 14 year old client:

I am scared to death of what may happen.  
I don't know if my boyfriend will help me.  
Mom said I can't stay in her house if I  
don't have an abortion. But Miss, I do  
NOT want to kill my baby. Can you help  
me?

The Teen's Mother:

She's not even 14 years old yet. If she  
does not have an abortion, she cannot live  
here. She cannot have a baby and bring it  
here to my house. She is bipolar so she  
will hurt the baby, or it will be taken  
away from her just like it happened to  
me... and she can't handle that.



As Marva (pseudonym) recounted those two separate moments with the mother of one of her clients and then her 14 year client, she stared searchingly across the parking lot of the restaurant in which we sat. As she spoke, her eyes were clearly in another place, revealing a depth in her thoughts. The words she spoke were just as contemplative, “and so...I mean those are literally the words that came out of her mouth”

She paused, perhaps to hold back tears and remain composed,  
So it was umm...you know one of those situations, an ethical quandary...and at that  
moment you have to think about like how do you answer that, what do you say to  
that?...You know when they're asking you, “what should I do?” I mean what you

say to, “I don’t want to kill my baby”, you know so... (pause). Ha, it’s one of those and so...yeah.

Marva and I sat in silence, listening to the background music in the restaurant. We both relived that moment in this shared space – Marva through reflection, and me, vicariously through Marva’s story and her compassionate delivery.

I had spoken with the mom the evening before and she was very adamant that abortion was the only way for her 14 year old daughter to take. Her mother articulated very specific concerns that she felt that her daughter would lose the baby because she had a clinical diagnosis of bipolar and she had such extreme behaviors that she thought that she would maybe hurt the baby or get the baby taken away. Abortion, otherwise she had to move out of her house. This particular moment of tension was very profound on many levels for me because I had worked with my particular client that I provided therapeutic services for two years and we were coming towards the end of her graduating her program and successfully hitting all of her many goals for coping skills. However, she had risky behaviors, but this particular time, umm... I was about 6 months along expecting my first born child. And one of the things that we were very concerned about was her [14 year old] being sexually active and admitting to that... um, what her family was going to do, what she was going to do, what choices she was making and to ensure that she didn’t have an unplanned pregnancy was very much a part of why we were having the conversations that we were having.

*After working with my research partners, I was overwhelmed, overcome and overjoyed. I was overwhelmed by the depth of the information and the responsibility to*

*retell their stories in a way that both captured the spirit of our study and honored their lives. I was overcome with emotions of what my research revealed for me, to me and about me. I was overjoyed that this process was finally taking shape.*

According to Hicks (2012), faith is the eyesight of the spirit, just as imagination is the eyesight of the soul. So the realization of faith comes when one acts or moves according to what is seen in the spirit (faith) and soul (imagination). “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also” (King James Version, James 2:26). After I quoted this verse to myself, I took action. I stepped back, looked at all of the beautiful data and decided to use other media to bring the imagined into view. I audio-recorded my thoughts; I retrieved my pencil to draw three picture frames, slightly overlapping to frame our stories and paint a portrait with words in order to find **our** voice and make it visual. This When I write, I am taken to a space that is spiritual, personal and raw. This work was no different, but this time, I invited witnesses, my research partners. My research partners boldly went to that space with me and never took a cautionary look back.



Marva said,

I never felt in a sense like I controlled my body, so therefore, I was very promiscuous, lost my virginity at 14 and then didn't care about my body you know with the use of the drugs... I was into alcohol and all that and again, by the grace of God I didn't become an addict. I have lot of addicts in my family, alcoholics in my family, so then it's just been like you come back to, I'm here for this purpose, I survived this encounter so you know now what?



As she recounted the moment of tension, it was clear to me that she was making a connection with this young lady and her own past, just as I had made the connections with Juanito.

*As Marva spoke, there was something about her sharing her encounter that thrust me again into my own lived experience. I was taken back to that little girl enduring verbal blows from one who I should have only known acceptance and love. It was confusing and violent.* Marva continued,

She really felt that her daughter should have an abortion and she whole heartedly believed that that was better for the baby...then having, you know to be taken away or being raised by somebody else or having a lifestyle like she [the mom] had as a teenage mother, including getting into substance abuses and different things like that. So she told her daughter either get an abortion or you have to move out and figure it out on your own. So at the point of tension coming into that session, and thinking about spiritually, ethically as a therapeutic professional, the cross roads of cognitively, what's going on within my own self about to become a mother...all of these very powerful emotions all at once...to help guide this young lady through that process.

Marva seemed to be counseling herself at this point, as if she was granted or gifted a chance to advise her younger self.

And I had to tell her, you know, you've made an adult decision and from here on out you're going to have adult choices you're going to have to make and you're not going to have it easy, either choice that we make is not going to be an easy road...however, we can figure this out based on what you want to do.

Marva continued, the girl said,

I do not want to kill my baby and you know, we knew that that's firmly what she didn't want to do.

Marva retold the girl's emergence from this dilemma with a different energy. Still reflecting on the conversation, Marva's speech picked up and she smiled as she spoke now. *Flashing back to her own choices at the age of fourteen, she even laughed out loud once. I was completely drawn in and taken back to my own pivotal moments in my life where I laced up and got ready for life. This was a sacred moment that I counted myself privileged to be able to share.*

Marva continued with a swell of pride and respect for growth,

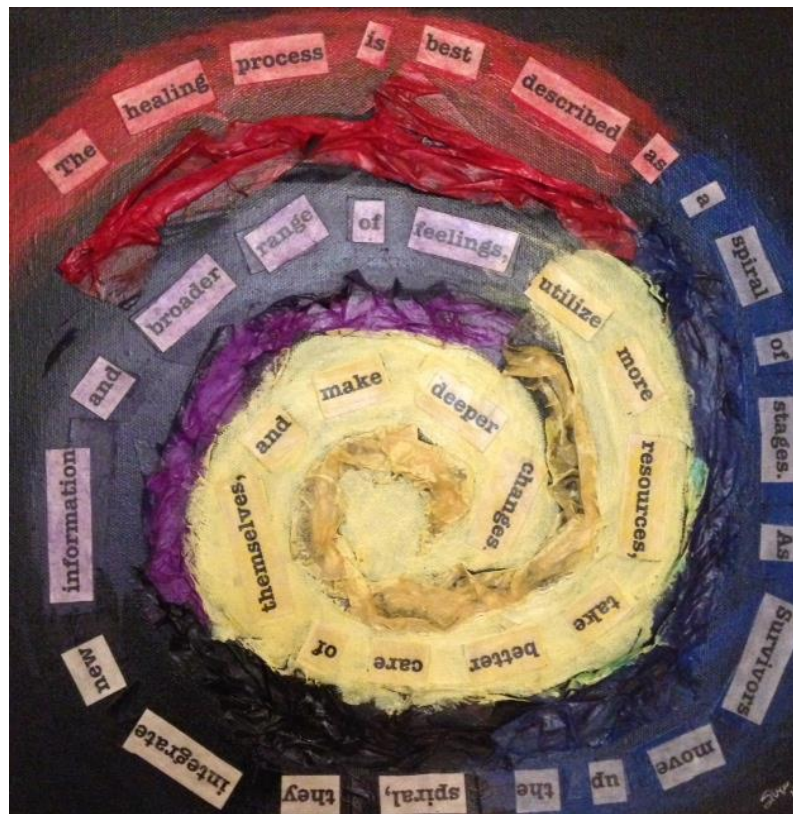
This the same young lady who previously when we first started working together, couldn't order from a restaurant alone because she had such social anxiety. I'd ask her what she wanted, she'd withdraw, would not communicate, if she had a situation at school um, would leave and at that moment. I said, Ok, you're going to have to make these phone calls, I'm not making these calls for you. And you know what? She did the research, figured out where she could go at a neighboring city that she could live in and you know supports that she could have, she made those phone calls right then and there at the table to find out how it is that she could keep her baby and move forward. And try to find the resources to be able to do so and at this time she's got a very healthy baby, she's with the baby's father, they have made mature decisions, she's more mentally stable then she has been her entire life and so that was that moment of tension. That was that crossroads of everything intersecting and not having all the right answers, and being open to helping support in that moment.

Marva's intensity in telling the story was so genuine that I was sensed that she was telling her own and it drew me in and invited me back to the same age. Because I had read Marva's written autoethnography, I was privy to a different insight. When Marva and I met the first time, I shared my own autoethnography and we talked of the possibilities of her joining me in my research. Marva shared a very personal piece of writing with me, a piece that she had been working on for some years, in an attempt to make sense of, grow and heal from abuses that stretched from her time as a young girl into her early teens. When Marva gave me the story, she said, "As you can see, I am ready for this [journey]." It was a great confirmation that I was working with the right person for my research. When I re-read her written account of several pivotal moments of tension which she has continued to craft into a very meaningful autoethnography, I found that the connections with this fourteen-year-old-girl were perhaps even closer to home than even Marva realized at the time.

Around the age of fourteen, I was plagued with homicidal ideation, convinced that no one could blame me for shooting the fat man. Aerosmith's "Janie's got a gun" was my anthem. I was filled with rage and tried to stay away from home as much as possible with an active social life. Color guard and the friends I made numbed the pain, and of course, the drugs did too. By fourteen, I had smoked pot, tripped on acid and ate mushrooms. My parents always smoked pot and didn't bother to hide it. So, naturally the fat man was the first to get me and my best friend high. I remember the two of us walking down the street laughing hysterically. To this day we are convinced the joint must have been laced with something. Fourteen was a big year. I lost my virginity and began leading a double lifestyle. At school, I

made the grades and was the teacher's pet. After school I split my time between band practices, the boys, petty theft and getting messed up. Mom let us have parties at the house; she figured we'd be partying somewhere, may as well be where she could keep an eye on us.

Along with her writing, Marva had created a pictorial representation of this time in her life which she views as a metamorphosis. The artwork reveals a spiraling figure which could be moving from an outer point to an inner or vice versa, and displays a beautiful representation of the spiritual element of the work we are doing; reminiscent of the Ecologies of Knowing (Guajardo, et al., 2010) and an emerging Theory of the Coil (Lunkin, 2015). See Figure 4 below.



*Figure 8. Marva's art—Metamorphosis: Victim to survivor.*

The educator's ability to juxtapose one's life experiences for the purpose of supporting other educators, children and community is a gift which may be overlooked in educational leadership. Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002) described this as a vulnerability to wounding, from which lessons can be learned and the educator healed,

Effective and well-intentioned leaders must learn to struggle productively with their ensuing wounds. It makes sense that people who know themselves and who can relate genuinely to others by avoiding self-protective roles have a better chance of succeeding in leadership, especially today. (p. 7)

The process of "critical self-reflection" that my research partners and I uncovered was a gift. It may be a tenet of the spiritual educational leader, this willingness to address the painful realities of the self in order to grow and move forward to understanding oneself, and ultimately service to others. The new insights gained from the reflections become scaffolding to step upon the next level. By reliving the moment of tension with me, Marva made sense of it by engaging in critical self-reflection. Dantley (2005) explained critical self-reflection as:

The psychology of critical self-reflection involves the educational leader coming to grips with his or her own identity and juxtaposing that against the identity of the learning community. That is, the school leader comes to understand who he or she is first personally and then in a social context. This entails leaders' grappling with issues such as their personal predispositions and belief systems on matters of race, class, gender and their individual sources of motivation and purpose...essentially, critical self-reflection takes place as leaders engage what

has been termed their sacred selves or their genuine personhood. This is a very interesting spiritual phenomenon. (pp. 504-505)

Marva allowed me entrée into this process of critical self-reflection which she had already begun with her writings. The spiraled conceptual representation of her journey of healing illustrates Dantley's description of critical self-reflection. As Marva grappled with issues of injury and healing, she began to re-author a story of survival and healing. She emerged with a new wisdom to engage the learning community for which she serves. Marva shared her sacred self for personal healing, the healing of one with whom she found similarities and ultimately the healing of her fellow research partners and we shared and participated in a deeply spiritual experience.

Dantley (2005) continued, "Coming to grips with identity is an extremely spiritual endeavor. It demands dealing with the truth about oneself and then embracing those verities even if done so with some reservation." (p. 504) The micro-autoethnographical process is an excellent platform for dealing with these self-truths, all experiences can be transformed and used as fertilizer for good and productivity. We struggled with our unexpected moments of tension, organically studying the moment and weaving in and out of them and back through the spoken word, art and tears. Critical self-reflection became the gardening tools.

Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002) insisted that "Leaders who strive to acknowledge all sides of themselves and who allow all sides of themselves to be acknowledged will increase their capacity to lead in difficult times." (p. 505) In a study similar to my own, Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002) researched the emotional wounds that school leaders endured and coped with when crises arose. He wrote,

Our message is ultimately optimistic: Crisis can be an emergent occasion for transformation. Crisis provides the possibility of breaking free of the current image of the leader. Leaders often experience this vision of change with intensity and distress. Although sustained and repeated wounding can disrupt lives and schools in seemingly endless ways, most of the leaders we have been privileged to meet were not incapacitated; indeed, many demonstrated the courage to learn from their wounds. (p.505)

Marva coped by writing her own narrative preparing her for the micro-autoethnography that my research employed. She was ready to pick apart, observe, analyze and make sense of every minute detail of her life. This research has led me to conclude that such a profound look at oneself requires a level of spiritual maturity, believing and depending upon a greater power to hold the master pieces of the missing puzzle, and that leadership, at its core, is an act of spirituality.

Attending to a study of self through critical self-reflection illuminated the spirit, contributing to her own autoethnography and this body of work. There is a level of maturity from the lived experience that was evident in both research partners. However, framing those experiences as educational leaders signified a willing readiness for critical self-reflection and at its core, was indicative to spirituality in practice. Of the process Guajardo, Oliver, Rodríguez, Valadez, Cantú, & Guajardo (2011), explained that, “this type of data source becomes inherently reflexive...By highlighting their observations and experiences, individuals uncover the potential of revealing commonalities and connections that may have gone unnoticed prior to their reflective process.” (p. 149) This nature of the scaffolding invited the spirit into that third space of critical self-reflection

that my research partners and I engaged, located those typically unnoticed commonalities and connections, affording a different view – be it higher or deeper.

The third space, a micro view into the intercession of praxis is a social theory idea which honors new and creative ways of relating and communicating in a mutually respectful manner. Anzaldúa (2000), conceptualizes third or borderland spaces as places or states of ambiguity, of being in-between different realities such as the intersection between being and becoming. (p. 28)

Guajardo et al. (2011) stated, “this process often identifies particular characteristics of mannerisms, or how a particular biological, historical, cultural, or political theme emerges in different contexts.” (p. 140)

There is a certain level of readiness for this research process that engages the spiritual and heightened our spiritual awareness, a spirituality that was already there, but one with which we became more aware of, having experienced it as a research team. As Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002), warned,

School leaders will almost always be vulnerable to wounding because they reside at a very public intersection and are often the knowing or unknowing recipients of the public's expectations, hopes, and fears. Many leaders we met described how they learned to deal with the requirements of their roles, developing strategies for deflecting criticism by growing “scar tissue” and “binding” their anxieties. (p. 48)

The experiences that we brought to the table were used to inform our work and assist those we served. However, engaging in the interviews and *plática* heightened the spiritual aspect of these experiences. Marva’s ability to work with her client in the manner in which she did could not have been accomplished barring her personal



experiences to which she was able to refer and ultimately transfer. I think this transference can be taught, again through such a process of micro-autoethnography that we experienced. I also believe that each of us is given gifts that can be used for the good of our fellow human beings. Marva's gift is that ability to resiliently raise her head above the waves of personal despair and tell others to steer clear of danger, or compassionately guide them through. Through this process, gifts can be recognized, embraced, cultivated and nurtured.



Six months pregnant myself at this time, I was not prepared cognitively to hear this not quite 15 year old declare with such determination what her intentions were for her baby. Never mind that her mother was adamant that she abort because of generational fears that plagued her and her daughter. I looked into her eyes and flashed back to the conversation I had with her mother the night before.

At the time, I sat there and knew full well that her argument was valid. Never mind my own beliefs as a therapeutic service provider, my job was to be an unbiased support for the family. So you know, and in that moment, I had at least the opportunity to kind of process what mom was saying and think about it. But you know to hear her side of it ... we had very, very closely worked together for like two years, you know she had gone through, almost dropping out of school, uh, they finally found a school that worked for her, but the problem was it was a half day school and we all had concerns about what she was gonna be doing in the other half of that day. Umm and this was a very big one where, again, where do you draw that line as a clinician, and as you know, someone who's preparing to

start a family themselves of your own volition? Um you know as somebody that's a part of this therapeutic team, I mean I really did suggest to her mother, you should probably take her to maybe get on birth control. We knew she had a boyfriend, we knew she was sexually active or on the verge of being sexually active and that she also had a past history of trauma, which made her more susceptible to potentially being promiscuous. So, we knew it was a very real possibility and encouraged her mother to go and take her to maybe get on birth control. So that this wouldn't happen [long pause] and, that didn't happen.

Marva's disgust was almost palpable. I believed that she and I knew on a spiritual level, that we were also talking about her own mother's lack of responsibility to guide and protect Marva as a young, budding woman. Marva did not know my own story of a mother's lack of responsibilities toward me, on a cognitive level, because I had never shared with her. However, Marva and I shared what we both termed as a special connection from our first meeting, agreeing that we met for a purpose. Much of our communication was in the third space, marked by a spiritual discernment. She is an amazingly resilient woman who has sought out her own personal counsel as she reflects back on her own childhood experiences and cultural development, like Vygotsky's theory that "every function in the child's cultural development appears twice, first on the social level, and later, on the individual level." (p. 57) Marva related her ontological view regarding birth and death as a firm belief that human beings have no control of such acts of conceiving life or taking it. Marva reflected:

It's scary to think about, but I also believe *everything* happens for a reason so when you think about spirituality guiding it that if this baby wasn't meant to be

here it wouldn't be here and I have a firm belief that we have NO control over births and deaths...it's a very grounded belief in me... I mean it's above us, that's out of our control no matter how you want to do it or say it, even the most convincing suicide or in vitro fertilization, I just believe there's something bigger than our mortal choices.

Marva's words reminded me of what I had written about the process of micro-autoethnography taking the spiritual educational leader back to those first levels of social development and weaving back through the present, informing the individual's understanding of self within the contexts of one's current cultural place. (K. Lunkin, May, 2015) This place of tension is a short-lived space, where often long term decisions are made that effect schools and communities. Critical self-reflection allows the educational leader to suspend that short lived moment to make better informed decisions, even if in retrospect. For what a leader chooses to *do* within that crucial moment of tension can have far reaching implications and this body of work could prove to be invaluable in the training of future educational leaders.

Marva's written autoethnography, her artwork, and her candid and vulnerable interview were examples of the courageous, spiritual maturity of an educational leader, as well as indicative of the spiritual maturity of an educational leader. She grew through her participation in the experience. Marva illustrated where she went in moments of tension through writing and art and her practice of talking to God and praying for guidance. It is in those spaces that she found the courage to lead those around her, even though her own story had not been reconciled. In fact, the telling of her story in our shared space invoked an old memory from our third research partner that had been long forgotten, but now a

defining moment. It was in this conversation that the unexpected moment of tension about a young girl's decision to let her baby live, that Jorge (pseudonym) changed the moment he wanted to contribute to our research study.



As Marva relived her story, and we all grappled with the words to describe her moment of tension, I noticed that Jorge was completely drawn into the story. *There are several moments like this where spoken words are not appropriate. Uncomfortable, unprepared and unwilling to go there, I violated that sacred moment when I spoke up -- from a very shallow place -- in retrospect, it was an effort to skirt the depth of the issue and move on.*

“Yeah, that’s a very grey area,” I quipped.

Jorge was visibly disturbed by my petty phrasing as he adjusted his seat and said,

But ok, it may be grey, but again this is something prior to meeting my girlfriend....umm... okay well...full disclosure here, which is hard...but obviously it’s relevant. In college I was in a relationship which did result in an abortion ...

I snapped back a defensive clarification, but the truth is that I agreed 100% with Jorge. Abortion was not a grey area to me either. And I bore my own personal experience with it that was difficult to share.

*Oh my God, I’m thinking! This cannot be. This is not what I expected. I just want a nice, neatly packaged, easy-to-deal-with scenario that we can prescribe some nice easy scriptures or spiritual quote to remedy...I’ve already disclosed enough. I put myself out there and shared some vulnerabilities...but this work is calling me deeper. After all of*

*these years, the pain is still there. But this scaffolding process is calling me deeper and higher. I am not prepared to deal with this now...okay, pull it together Karen, listen to Jorge.*

Jorge seemed to look through me when he said,

“So in the story that I told you earlier about a colleague challenging me about an abortion bumper sticker on my car?”

“Yes,”

*I said with my mouth, as I remembered with my heart. Jorge had dared to defy the political correctness of a colleague who suggested that he remove a very poignant bumper sticker from his car since he was parking at a public school every day. She told him that others might take offense.*

Well, what I told her was that what you don’t know is, I’ve actually been through that, I’ve had to actually deal with that. And the thing about it is, is that a tension that lies for me in the Catholic faith, there is no grey, between aborting or not to.

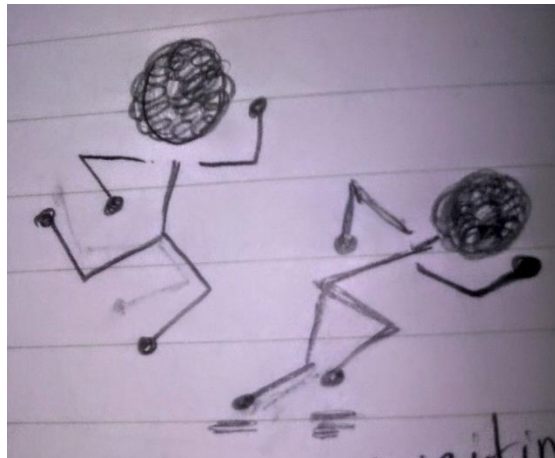
Jorge was visibly shaken. Marva and I listened. I didn’t count the seconds of silence we shared, but it seemed like an eternity. Something happened in this space. It was a moment of depth respected by each educational leader, a gracious willingness to corporately reflect on such personal and private moments.

*In this third space, I did not disclose my personal pain regarding abortion; I was not ready. Because we had gotten too close for my own comfort again, at the time of this writing, I ran from the text and pretended to be okay, just as I had always done. Even though my research partners were so candid with me, sharing their deep, personal pain, I could not yet go there, partly because I was the facilitator of this academic exercise, I*

*was afraid of the well spring of emotions that would surely come if I opened the gate and remained in this space. I feared that I could not regain composure. So I closed the gate, chose to leave the third space and ended our session.*

*Many weeks later, after being challenged by a loved and respected mentor, I knew I had to return to the third space. But I had to go through another medium to find the courage to come back and face it. I penned the below poem and doodled the afro wearing stick figure (the muse which often- shows up in my writing) running through the lines of paper. The third space encourages varied art forms of expression when the writer is stuck.*

### **Running From the Text**



*Figure 9. Running from the text.*

The Pain is too much to look at all at once  
So I ignore it and work on something else  
But there's a certain sadness that lies just beneath the surface  
The humor masks, the jokes divert focus  
Let's not go there, let's just pretend it's not there  
But the painful memory is always there  
I knew I would journey to this place  
Didn't know when, but the signs along the road told me I was close

Once there, I knew I would be released  
But the funny thing is, the closer I came, I'd dismount my horse  
Turn and run through the field of flowers  
To an place of comfort, not my home  
Trying to *be* something I was not  
Fear  
Face the fear  
Hear  
Hear the voice of the Lord  
You have been forgiven  
You've already been set free  
Get back on the journey  
Get back in the race  
Your companions are there waiting in the 3<sup>rd</sup> space  
Courageous and broken  
Transferors of Grace  
Go to it my children  
Lock arms by faith  
Look straight in the space  
Reflecting back at you  
The image of my Face

K. Maxfield-Lunkin, October, 2015

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Jorge's vulnerability left me reeling from the moment, digging in my heels and running from the power of the text. At first, I sprinted around it and cut Jorge's story short because it cut so deeply into my own. I had to turn away, talk it out, draw and write poetry to express what was happening in this space. Through this writing process, and with tears streaming down my face, I went to that space again after thirty years and wrote the above poem. Which developed in depth over the time of this writing time, scaffolding only as I gained strength, new insights and courage. The poem itself was written with scaffolding. I am eternally grateful to Jorge and Marva for co-creating with me, this gracious space (Hughes, 2004), in which I found healing after thirty long years.

*I still pondered at the writing of this first draft, why I used the words confusing and violent when I described the mother in Marva's story demanding that her daughter abort. Then it hit me. A memory returned. Just as I penned in the above poem, when I became pregnant my freshman year in college, it was my own mother who took me to have an abortion. But I did not have the courage that Marva's young client had to stand up for what she wanted, in order to stop the violence and confusion. I never would have made these connections outside of this third space. Though I know that I have been forgiven and my sins completely covered, I made a profound connection about hating the coils of my hair and my mother's subconscious passing of such hatred through the coils of the umbilical cord that connected us. I found understanding and extended grace, forgiveness, mercy, and love in this gracious third space; for my mother. So, I penned another stanza to the poem I had written before—refusing to dishonor her memory.*





*Figure 10. Pondering.*

How could a mother  
Who loves her daughter  
Not teach her beloved daughter  
To take care of her daughter's child?  
So, like the umbilical cord, life's journey is winding and complex  
What would my mother have done if she  
Had been gifted with this 3<sup>rd</sup> space?  
So I forgave my mother, extending mercy and grace  
She did what she thought was best at that time and space  
This choice tormented her for years, she never recovered  
So I must lay it to rest for the sake of others  
Who are coming down the path behind us--  
I love you Mom.

Karen L. Maxfield-Lunkin, October, 2015

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When I approached Jorge about this work, he happily invited the opportunity to be interviewed and reflect. He was definitely at a place in his job as an educational leader and in his spiritual life for this type of contemplative work.

I wanted to participate [in this research journey] because I found that it forced me to stop and re-evaluate where I am on my spiritual journey. Because I consider myself to be on a spiritual journey, this is really important to me.

I found his willingness to engage in critical self-reflection to be indicative of a spiritual educational leader's character.

And so in answering it [research questions], I think as educators or educational leaders, we are always going full bore so we never really take time to be reflective about our work. I think that what happens also in our spiritual lives is that we get so busy living our secular lives that we don't stop to just say, 'where am I at in my spiritual life?'

At first, he shared his unexpected moment of tension within the confines of the same rigidity he shared the components of his Catholic faith. It was tidy, clinical and safe. That was in our first interview. Jorge changed leadership positions between our interview and the team *plática*. He was giddy with excitement to share what he saw as a moment of tension – which had the potential to change how he interacted as an educational leader. In Jorge's old position, he worked collaboratively with multiple schools, providing academic and behavioral support to them. In his new position, assistant principal, he discovered that he would be working with a student who he had

known of in his previous position. This student had presented behavioral challenges for several administrators to whom Jorge provided support.

Jorge imagined meeting with the student's parent and determined to start fresh – pointing out that his belief that their paths crossing again was not coincidental but meaningful. In retrospect, he was not nearly as reflective when he thought of this, just another thing to do as an assistant principal. As he shared this, I found myself thinking that the job didn't fit him--Jorge seemed to have not quite found his niche, but he has a strong sense of responsibility to be where he feels that he has been “called” to duty to promote social justice which (Witherspoon, 2010) intertwines with leadership and spirituality. (p.137)

As I mentioned earlier, I believe that each of us has been given special gifts that we are to use with our fellow human beings. For this work, one of Jorge's many gifts was the ability to reflect and immediately relate with those around him. He has the ability to pull others in and invite them to reflect on the past and current issues in a place of safety and respect. Through this process of critical self-reflection, Jorge can lead others to recognize, embrace and nurture their gifts.

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Jorge was the only boy in a family of four girls. “I have four sisters, all older than me, so I'm like the *consentido*, the doted child, which my sisters didn't necessarily love.” He grew up Catholic, serving as an altar boy since the tender age of five. He smiled when he confessed that everyone in the family doted on him, the only boy who was going to one day become a priest. From a very young age, Jorge remembered his family being a part of the church. He remembered his father having to tie up his alb, which is a white

vestment worn by clergy and servers in some Christian churches, just so he could walk and perform his duties.

I grew up in a very Catholic family, all of us you know baptized in the Catholic Church , first communion, confirmation...all of us have been married in the Catholic church in some way, at some point or another. I was an altar boy from the time I was five years old, which is funny because I was talking to my mom about that today. She said most people probably won't believe that you started at five years old because most churches wouldn't let kids begin that early. But because my dad was so involved with the church, the priest was like, "okay, your kid's always here, put him in there." I was so small that the albs for the altar boy didn't fit me so what my dad would do, I'd put the alb on and then I'd pick it up and then he'd [my dad] tie the rope and then the excess would hang over so that I wouldn't trip over the alb. I was so little that during the late masses like the Christmas mass [I would get sleepy] the priest would say, "he makes me nervous I'm afraid he's gonna fall out of the chair, go get him."

Just like the little altar boy, wearing an alb too big for him, Jorge described going through the motions later in his life to please family, friends and the Catholic Church. He wrestled with this time in his life where he had to make his faith his own.

*Jorge's memory of the alb made me think of my first memories of church as a child. Every summer, without fail, my mother would send us to my grandparents' in Arkansas where we would attend the Solomon Grove Missionary Baptist Church. I remembered lying on my Papa's lap with my black patent leather shoes, my hair all pressed and shiny while listening to Papa sing. I could feel the vibrations from his chest*

*as his baritone voice boomed out in a cappella tones across the sanctuary. Church fans swaying I can still feel the steady rhythm of toes tapping out the beat on the unpolished, hardwood floor, as the church swayed in the sweltering heat, large, flashy hats bobbing, paper fans waving, no music, just voices, hands clapping, toes tapping and the kind of harmony that sank deep into my soul; took up residence, and has never left me, even when I took my young detour.*

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Just as in Marva's story and my own, Jorge had a time where he questioned his faith, stepped away and found that he fell short as a human being and therefore as an educational leader.

I was reminded that in an earlier interview Jorge had expounded on a pivotal moment of tension without going past the surface level at that time. Like setting the stage for future scenarios to be explored, Jorge recounted this moment.

One thing I will say though is there was a point in college where I basically became an atheist. I remember I was sitting once in the middle of mass at the university, sitting next to my girlfriend then who eventually became my wife. (I was divorced by then, which is another interesting thing with spirituality in the Catholic Church). I just walked out, and I honestly don't remember what he [the priest] was saying, what he said or how he said it...I just said, "I can't do this anymore", and I walked out. And so there was a long period, even when I got married in the Catholic Church, I was just like going through the motions because this is what they expected of me.

I was completely taken in by Jorge's story and the passionate manner in which he shared it. I often think about educators with whom I have been privileged to work with over the years and I know that we all would benefit from the type of critical self-reflection that my research partners and I co-created. I felt a compulsion to finish this and share it with the world. Sharing my enthusiasm with a mentor, he framed it this way:

*—When doing this kind of work, sometimes it's not going to be the reoccurrence, nor the themes, nor the events [that you researched for the proposal], this is when you'll need to listen to the spirit. And those are a lot more difficult and much more nuanced spaces. Our charge as academics is to name it, describe it and put it into a language that other people can understand—.*

I appreciate this charge as an academic and I want to make this work. I have always been drawn to pictures of winding roads or paths left up to the imagination of the beholder where the path goes. The close up is beautiful and in full view and represents a place of safety. The winding and narrowing path is a place of fear. Walking down the path with the companionship of others will to help us go beyond the safety of the close up view.

This is a place of praxis which I view as an X turned over on its side creating the Cross. Jorge remembered this analogy,

You said [to Karen] that you see the X in praxis as a Cross. But I see that intersection of the X is a crossroads. A place of decision making to go one direction or another. In that moment of tension, this is where I have to determine which road to take.

Jorge continued to bare his soul in our interviews; so many crossroads came to light and Jorge wasted no time reflecting on his choice past and present.

At that point because my fiancé at the time grew up in the Catholic Church both of our parents Catholic, so it was what was expected. It wasn't until after my divorce where I hit a point of rock bottom that I came back to the church. So I had that little pivotal moment, I hadn't done the church or confession in a long time. On my birthday, I had started to go on little road trips to celebrate my birthday. So one time and I don't know why I did it I just decided I was going to go to the Basilica in San Juan down in the valley and I went and I was going to the coast and figured I'd stop there too. I went to confession for the first time in years maybe before I got married. I had a laundry list, I got my penitence, I went the Stations of the Cross (See figure below) and I can't remember which station it happened...lots of people are around not in a quiet sanctuary, I just fell to my knees and cried. That was probably the event that made me come back to the church. It has had a lot of impact on me.

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It was during our *plática* that Jorge remembered another pivotal moment in his life and began to make sense of it. However, a new memory was uncovered as Jorge recounted dealing with the very topic of abortion with a young student when he was but a student teacher. He remembered the young girl approaching him in private to tell him that she was pregnant. Jorge seemed troubled, not only that he had completely forgotten that moment, but that he was not ready at that age to help. He began to reflect on his spiritual

maturity at the time, told us that he was only twenty-two at the time and wondered how that time related to his personal experience with abortion.

“Wow”, Jorge thought out loud, “I had completely forgotten about that.” Jorge’s emotions were written on his face. He was clearly reliving that moment, and self-analyzing the entire resurfaced event. He said that he was as ashamed that he told the young girl that he couldn’t help her and to go to a counselor or someone else that could help her. He could not believe that he had brushed the memory away the same way he had the student. But he remembered too, that he did not have the maturity to deal with it at the time.

*Detailed memories flooded in my mind like muddy debris from the Mississippi River, and I was overwhelmed with vivid memories of places, faces, smells, voices and music. I am going to have to do something different to hold my emotions together in this public space, I thought, how can so many significant memories lying dormant like this for so many years? I thought I had dealt this?*

*This became a new moment of tension for me, and Jorge’s recollections were holding up a mirror before me that I could not get around.*

Jorge’s voice brought me back to the moment at hand.

“I think that I matured a lot after attending a course in the Catholic Church that greatly impacted his life.”

Entitled, Jesus is Lord, the course challenged Jorge by asking if Jesus was Lord in his life in five areas.



“They asked, is Jesus Lord over my time, is Jesus Lord over my treasure, is Jesus Lord over my talents, is Jesus Lord over my sexuality and is Jesus Lord over my politics?” Jorge continued,

“I found through that course that I had a disconnection between my spirituality and my role as an educational leader. That bothers me.” Jorge said that he recognizes those questions as the tension between his beliefs as a Catholic and his role as an educational leader and that he struggles with the cross roads often presented in these spaces.

“I had to admit that I was in a crisis of faith.” He shared that he often wonders if he should resolve to work in a private school setting where his beliefs would more likely line up with his own. Jorge’s reflectiveness is refreshing.

Jorge genuinely believes that his life is orchestrated by God and he admits that he continues to seek God for guidance in his career. He is troubled by the limitation of the public school setting, noting that there are times when he prays before, during and after stressful situations; asking for guidance and expressing gratitude after the situations are resolved.

Jorge fondly remembers a pivotal trip to visit the Stations of the Cross (see illustrations below) as he painted a portrait with his words. He recollected that as he made his way to each station of the Cross, there as a spiritual awakening that took place. He could not remember at which station, but he fell to his knees in a broken surrender. This illustrated my thoughts that the Cross is praxis. To Jorge, praxis leadership is represented a crossroads; I agree with that analogy in that a leader must make hard decisions in this place, to take the way of the Cross which is self-sacrifice. Captured in

life sized three dimensional images, the story of the way of the Cross is made visual and participants can walk through the stations as a spiritual experience of freedom.

Jorge offered a counter argument about this freedom when he said, “People think that walking the way of the Cross is restricting, when it is actually freedom. It is at the Cross that a sinner gains the strength needed to live free from sin.”

When my spiritual mentor asked me to reflect on the images of the Stations of the Cross, he queried, *this is too powerful of an opportunity to weave this into the narrative to leave the images to stand alone. Don't get me wrong, they are powerful, but what is its connection to the greater fabric of the story you are weaving?*

And so I reflect on the meaning of the Cross in my personal life and its relativity to educational leadership. Like Jorge, I had a transformational experience with the Cross—a young army officer just below the DMZ Korean Demilitarized Zone in South Korea in 1985. The weight of my sin and past hurts and injuries bore down on me and I was an angry, foul-mouthed lieutenant, determined to take care of myself, allowing no one entry into my broken heart ever again. I had accompanied some other officers to Seoul, Korea on the weekend of Mother's Day that year and we all decided to attend church that Sunday morning. I do not remember what the preacher was saying, just as Jorge shared, but I distinctly remember the moment I thought, *I want to be saved*. I shared this with one of my friends seated next to me and he quipped,

“Just go up there and tell the preacher,”

I understood my friend's idea of an easy remedy which I had witnessed in my grandmother's church, weary souls would walk up to the front of the church as an humble surrender of their lives through a public profession of their faith in Jesus Christ.

“No, that’s not what I mean, I want to be saved; I want to live for God.”

I did not want to make a public confession of dedication only to go back to my old ways. I had very real encounter which drove me to find this salvation I was craving. I thought immediately of Benny, a fellow lieutenant who I knew lived a devoted life to Jesus Christ; and I sought him out as soon as we made it back to the officer’s quarters that weekend. When I approached Benny to tell him of my experience at the Mother’s Day church service, he was delighted. His smile beamed across his face and he was sincerely grateful. We went back to the officer’s quarters where Benny began to tell me the brand new story of Jesus Christ that I had heard a thousand times before, but it this time, it was for me. I cowered in despair as Benny told me that everything I had ever done was recorded in a book. I closed my eyes tightly remembering the life that I chose to end in my womb. The memories were over powering, and I told Benny that I could never be forgiven for what I had done; and I will never forget his performed response. He opened the large table Bible on his coffee table and demonstrated,

“You see Karen, although every word, thought and deed is recorded in a book, it can be erased.”

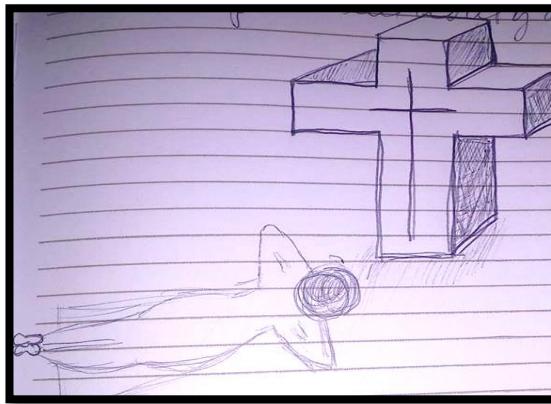
Hot tears of shame flooded my face, *I can never be forgiven* I thought.

“But when you accept and believe that Jesus Christ died on the Cross for everything written in your book, Jesus is ready to accept you with open arms (Romans 10: 9, 10). Jesus calls the Angel Gabriel over with a huge eraser of the Blood of Jesus and with strokes of love he covers every deed and blots out every sin.”

I fell to my knees and unto my face, imagining being at the foot of the Cross and I surrendered my life to Jesus. Benny told me later that he had never shared that story with

anyone before me or since. When I got up from praying, crying and thanking the Lord Jesus Christ, it was nearly two hours later. My transformation was real, as I felt an overwhelming presence of love and forgiveness. The soldiers and officers in my battalion noticed the change too; one sergeant remarked, “I don’t know what happened to Lieutenant Maxfield, but I like it. My life took a dramatic change from that point on and I will never forget it.

I understood on a personal level Jorge’s experience at the Stations of the Cross. So I reiterate, praxis leadership and life begins and ends at the Cross. Over time, I was able to forgive my mother, but most recently, through this micro-autoethnography through critical self-reflection, theory met practice and I was able to forgive myself.



*Figure 11.* Inspiration at the Cross.



*Figure 12.* Some of the Stations of the Cross Basilica of Our Lady of San Juan del Valle.

### **A Grateful Accountability**

Jorge reminded us all that our spiritual journeys would not be complete without accountability. He referred to those spiritual guidance leaders that he has had in the Catholic Church, and how their questioning throughout the years have kept him grounded. He remembered that he had a spiritual director at each pivotal moment of his life; he was able to refer back to them for accountability; from his parents' constant teachings of spiritual principles when he was a child to phone conversations as an adult which always began and ended with references to God and Jorge's relationship with God. Most recently, Jorge shared that he now considers his current girlfriend as the accountability he needs to take the right path. He speaks fondly of her as one who doesn't tell him what to do, but challenges him to think critically and base his choices upon his faith. Regarding his recollection of abortion, Jorge said, "She told me that I needed to deal with all of that." And so I did. Marva asked how Jorge would handle that moment differently at this stage of his spiritual journey and the accountability partners that are now in his life. Jorge thought for a moment and responded, "I'll have to take some time to reflect on that. But I know it will be much different."

### **Summary**

We selected this method of micro-autoethnography through critical self-reflection to bring to life and support the epistemology, my own ontology and the context and framing of my questions. This method invited my research partners and I to become comfortable in a very intimate, vulnerable and revealing process. While I did not totally understand how it would all work intellectually, I trusted my chair and committee to engage in this process unconditionally and now I know the power of its utility first hand.

This is the learning and knowing process -- going into spaces with the appropriate guidance or scaffolding, like Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, making the next step just within reach, and attainable with effort. Analogous to the concept of faith, which can only be recognized by exercising it, "For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead" (James 2:26, King James Version), so is this process of critical self-reflection. Even with the fear of the unknown, when we did not know what awaited us, was overcome by activation of our collective faith(s). Upon reflection, faith, guidance, readiness and mindfulness are major contributors to our overall learning that moved us to a process of critical self-reflection of our collective lived experiences. We are precious and powerful data sets.

Beyond my own expectations, the experience was raw, vulnerable, provocative, respectful, humble and compassionate – drawing each one of us in to join the collective story; we invited each other to reflect on an identified lived experience and to make sense of it. I do not take for granted the spiritual maturity of my research partners – for their experiences made them wise in their understanding of our pasts.



## V. THE PEDAGOGY OF THE CROSS

### The Cross & the Tree of Life

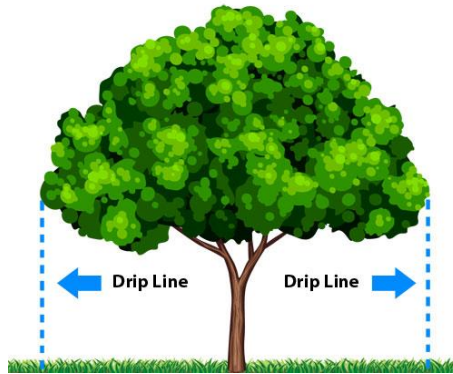


*Figure 13.* Karen Lunkin's drawing of a self-sustaining tree.



A friend told me the story of a tree that was in her front yard. The grass all around the tree was dead and the bare dirt ground looked depleted of substance and nutrients. My friend wanted to improve her yard, so she did some research. She found that the science of a tree's life is in the roots. The canopy of the leaves and branches of a tree can extend no farther than the circumference of the roots underground, forming an imaginary drip line. (See illustration below)





*Figure 14.* Drip line.

It has been almost four years since my friend shared the story of the drip line and I have since been fascinated with its significance and relevance to my own autoethnography. My friend went on to tell me that she further learned that when the tree is not nourished properly, it will begin to take the water and nutrients from everything around it like grass, hence, killing everything around it. “If that tree doesn’t get what it needs it takes from the grass to survive.” In talking with experts she learned that the imbalance was taking place in the roots. The roots of the trees compete with the grass and all life around it for the nutrients to sustain itself. My friend decided to experiment with the tree in her front yard. Since she learned that trees should be watered at the drip line, not at the trunk, she dug a trench just outside the circumference of the roots and watered there with a mixture of Miracle Grow. Once she and her husband began to feed and nourish the tree from the roots, everything began to flourish. The grass has returned, covering the bald dirt ground with a green so thick it is hard to imagine that there was ever a problem there. I told my friend at the time that,

My mother was a self-sustaining tree. Like roots from the ground, stealing all the nourishment from the grass so that it does not grow. I now see that my mother did what my mother had to do. She was that self-sustaining tree. All that they

had been going through took everything that they had just for them to be...(K. Lunkin, 2013)

This illustration reminds me of our micro-autoethnographical study with critical self-reflection. When a human being has been damaged or malnourished at the root or in childhood or past circumstances, it takes a critical, trained and discerning eye to look beyond the selfish or dysfunctional behavior, recognizing it as a manifestation of a deeper problem. A root problem. Watering too close to the trunk can cause bark and root damage and defeats the purpose. This illustration brings a couple of analogies to mind. Biologically, I internalized this picture and saw that I could grow no farther than I had grown, and growth was stifled to the extent of my injuries. Our humanity selfishly takes from our surroundings in order to sustain life, or we survive in a sad state that was never intended to be. Jesus, the ultimate Tree of Life said in St. John 10:10 “The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have *it* more abundantly” (King James Version). The downfall and evil of our humanity is to kill and destroy, but the Tree of Life is the giver of life. By faith each of us must actively seek that more abundant life. I believe that it is in the giving to and service of others – the definition of an educational servant leader.

### **The Cross as Praxis – Jesus was the Master Teacher**

The Cross represents redemption for humanity. The vertical and horizontal bars, representative of many binaries with the intersection being the praxis, the third space. The Cross is where divinity meets humanity, the Law meets Grace, and Punishment meets Forgiveness. In an educational context, praxis is the intersection where theory meets practice, but the joining factor is reflection. (Freire, 1993) Critical self-reflection in

the below model takes place in the created third space. For this study, among three research partners. The highlighted spaces represent those spaces where our stories overlap, but also serves as ushers into the inner space or the third space. Without the usher, or mentor or coach, oftentimes, we will not go into that space.

Jesus rarely operated outside of the third space. He invited people to come with Him into this space often, to reflect on the reasons for their actions. In fact, Matthew 16:24 quoted Jesus' challenge to those closest to Him, "Then Jesus said to his disciples, whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (New International Version). This denying of the self is indicative of a spiritual educational leader.

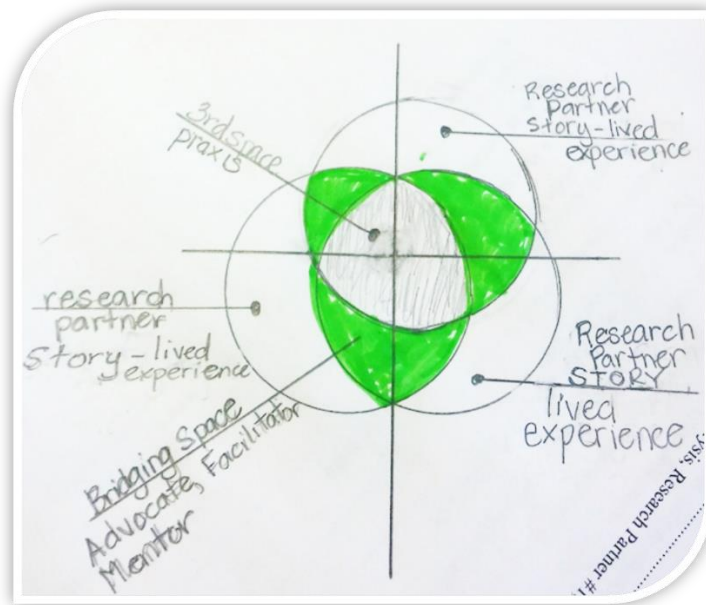
*—It is in our woundedness that we are able to connect to the wounded healer (Jesus the Christ). Were it not for the shared woundedness, the third space would not be possible. The third space is where the law gets messy; where its limitations are magnified; where we understand the need for showering compassion and mercy because we are spiritually aware that we have received it in full measure. Taking up my Cross has taken on a brand new meaning for me, in my roles as an educational leader, a mother, a minister and a citizen but also in the essence of who I am, biologically, culturally and spiritually—.*

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Finally, I get the idea I have struggled with for many years. I *am* made in the image and likeness of my God and that means the very coils of my hair are too! When that revelation came, I believe that I literally exuded light. Just as I was making sense of it, I looked up into the eyes of an elderly man passing my spot which I had

commandeered in the restaurant for many hours. I must have been beaming outwardly as much as I was exploding inside as he stopped in his tracks and complemented me, “Wow, you are beautiful! They should have you at the front of the store!” I thanked him and returned to my document, still smiling. When the gentlemen passed me again, this time on his departure from the restaurant, he stopped again and said, “You keep smiling.”

I returned to my work and drew the diagram below as an attempt to make sense of my ontological view of the power in the Cross. The three circles can represent my two research partners and me; they can represent the Father, Son and Holy Spirit or three concepts to be explored. These are over laying the Cross in my limited two dimensional depiction. However, I see the three rings as three dimensional, with the freedom to lay over the top of the Cross from an overhead view. And then there’s the fourth dimension which would involve the Spirit. See illustration below.

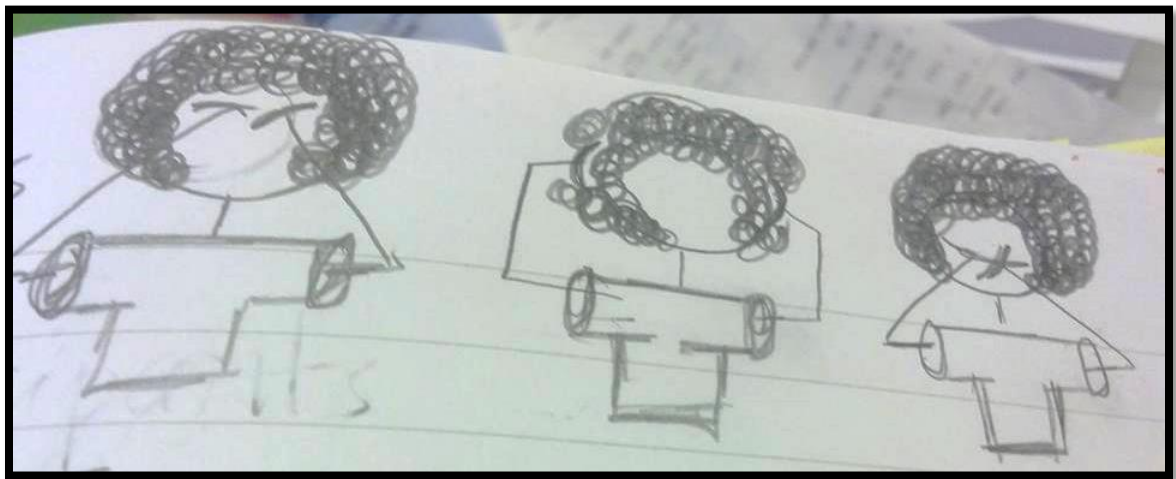


*Figure 15.* The Cross overlays and intersects with my story, our story.

Spiritual educational leaders go to this third space and honor the relationship that is there. By using critical self-reflection, the spiritual educational leader invites the spirit into this space of tension and even more so during a time of future reflection. Reflection is a spiritual act, especially when educational leaders recognize their multi-faceted selves using the unexpected moment of tension as the framework for understanding. “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known” (1 Corinthians 13:12 King James Version). In each of our cases, the willingness to accept responsibility for our part in the moment of tension became easier through the scaffolding that self-reflection provided.

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### **Pedagogy of Identity - Biology, History, and Culture is found at the Cross**



*Figure 16. Blind, deaf and silenced.*

### **Emerging Theory of Practice: Toward a Theory of the Spirit in the Coil**

When I began this journey in the fall of 2010, I came to my first class with so many reservations about myself as a learner, an educational leader and an African American woman and a spiritual leader. I was at the beginning stages of transitioning my permanently straightened African roots hair to its natural state. Like many African

American women, I had been processing my naturally coiled hair to make it straight for over thirty years by that time. I have since come to conclude that this is an act of self-hatred. I was so self-conscious about the transitioning process of my hair (growing my natural hair) that my hair made its way into every piece of writing and conversation that we had in class and out of class. When our cohort experienced the course “Understanding the Self,” I remember feeling uneasy and nervous about the journey, yet excited for the opportunity to explore myself. As a part of the class, we each needed to write an autoethnography and create a short presentation which represented the document. Naturally (no pun intended), I chose to write a poem and sing about my hair, because there was nothing that better went to the heart of who I was exploring and becoming. Nearly fifty years old at this point, I was ashamed of the fact that I was embarrassed about my Black culture, hair and roots.

*—Recognize the importance of culture, traditions... (law as part of these societal constraints) but also an authentic awareness of the limitations—.*

This shame was deeper than the roots and tight coils of my hair. As an educator, I remember literally crying out to God about my cultural shame that African Americans consistently fared lower on standardized tests, and that alternative disciplinary systems and prison systems were overrun with African American males. I ached each time our shame was discussed and highlighted as an educational milieu in our country.

While I had so much still yet to work through, professors found my work raw and refreshing and actually told me I had something to contribute. I remember writing once, “if I am made in the image and likeness of God, why is my hair such a problem?” The chance to be able to contribute and explore my passions in a doctoral program has been

an opportunity and blessing beyond anything I could have imagined. This work is a culmination of a self-study as a human being and spiritual educational leader, through a shared process of study group autoethnography. By no means do I have a sense of finality, but I am enthusiastic with the possibilities of what could be. Regardless, this is something created from the work, discovered or better yet uncovered, through this process that we underwent.

My biological self stood front and center, refusing to be ignored another year, reminding me each time I styled my hair - I am created in the image of God! As I journeyed through this layered process, starting before my first year in the doctoral program, the obsession with my hair never abated. The biological connection of my hair that I could feel but could not articulate began to develop from the dark room into full view. The genesis of the multi-layered third space is within the simple intersection created when two worlds overlap illustrated by a Venn diagram. The third space refers to the praxis or simultaneous interaction of numerous intersections through critical self-reflection. By micro examining one curl of my hair, in this case, my biological self, gave a multi lensed view into my political, historical, social and spiritual self through this third space.

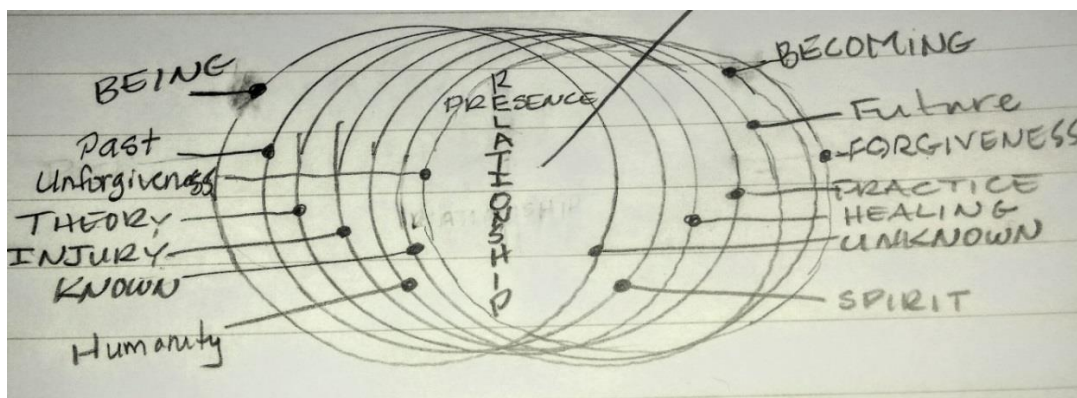


Figure 17. Karen's pictorial representation - toward the theory of the spirit in the coil.

As a teacher and administrator, I remember looking at little black girls in my classroom or school, who too, were involved in the chemical processing of their hair. I remember feeling like I was perpetuating and extending my narrative of self-hatred onto them. Conversely, I remember the looks I received from little black girls when I went "natural." It was a look of acceptance and validation in their eyes.

I kept the image below of a little black boy in the Oval office touching President Obama's hair. The boy asked the President if his hair was really like his own. President Obama bent down and told the boy to touch it and see for his self. This photo made an indelible imprint on my heart. Because it speaks to the question I have been asking all these years, how do I accept, embrace and reconcile the color of my skin and the texture of my hair as valid, valued and "in the image and likeness of God" to those whom I serve who look like me if I have not settled it for myself?





*Figure 18.* Is your hair like mine? Photo credit Pete Souza/the White House.

Engaging in this exercise of critical self-reflection with my research partners revealed a joining of a different coil – the umbilical cord. My personal story called for clarity in understanding self-hatred found in the roots of my African hair, abuses from my mother and the connection of the umbilical cord that connects us. Marva’s narrative searched for understanding abuses allowed by her mother at the hands of her step father which caused her to act out as a young woman, abusing her own body, almost to the point of death, regaining the control of her own body that she never felt she had. Later, finding herself in a position to mentor a girl who represented her younger self through a decision about abortion. Jorge’s lived experience left him with a deep need to reconcile his part in an abortion with his deeply held Catholic beliefs. I used the analogy of the coil of the umbilical cord, our biological connection, to purposefully depict the deep, personal intimacy of our shared critical self-reflection. The *third space*, a micro view into the intercession of praxis is a social theory idea which honors new and creative ways of

relating and communicating in a mutually respectful manner. Anzaldúa (2000), conceptualizes third or borderland spaces as places or states of ambiguity, of being in-between different realities such as the intersection between being and becoming. (p. 28)

*—The space between the coils is like a pendulum swinging between multiple factors that contribute depending in which direction it swings and with what force. We are spiritual beings ... becoming with an awareness that enlightening as we seek to make sense through our secular roles of limitations which are not negative, but catalysts for possibilities—.*

The multifaceted third space between each layered coil could only be reached through this shared micro-autoethnographic method of critical self-reflection. Courageous vulnerability, much like servant leadership (Greenleaf, 2002), is the oxymoronic spiritual leadership quality found within each coil.

What emerged from the data was a pictorial representation of an emerging theory. Originated from a conversation with my dissertation chair, this theory developed in complexity as it emerged as part of a three-dimensional, bridging spiral which looked much like a Slinky toy. In the description below, I used parentheses to label the individual coil of each spiral.

The coils were labeled as:

*Being (growth is spiritual) Becoming*

*Known (pictures, words, song, touch, art) Unknown*

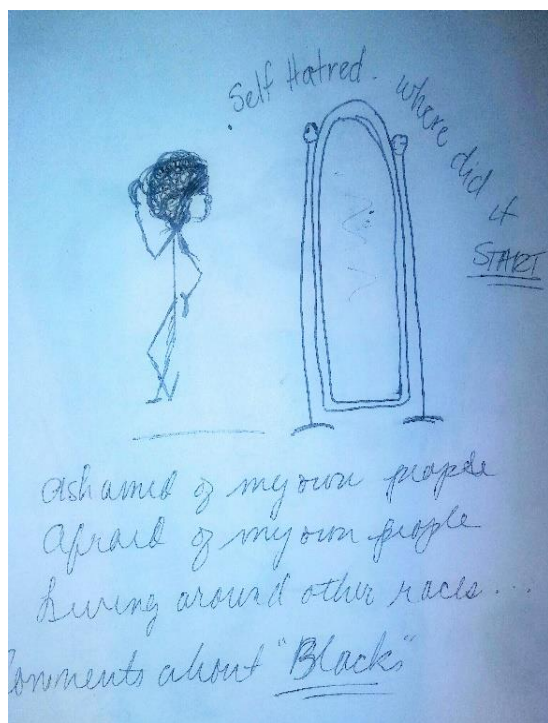
*Past (present, right now connects us with) Future*

*Practice (reflection) Theory*

*Individuality (shared experience, beliefs, culture) Collectivity.*

[illegible]

Figure 19. Hair/self-concept messages.



*Figure 21.* Trying to understand the connection of my hair, my people and education.



*Figure 22.* The struggle is real.

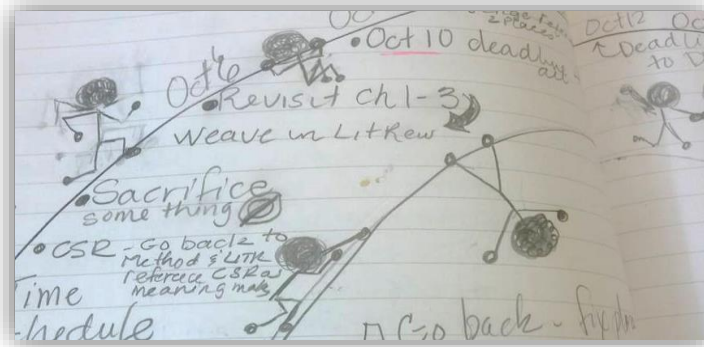


Figure 23. Making Meaning Musings through story and art.

### Being Present in the Praxis is Critical to the Cross

Senge's model of *presencing* found at the bottom of the Theory of U follows the learner(s) engagement in the first step the authors called *sensing* which involves thoroughly observing, "until [you] become one with the world." (Senge, et al., 2005, p. 92) *Presencing* as Senge, et al. (2005) described is a place to "retreat and reflect and allow an inner knowing to emerge." (p. 92) Borrowing the concept of *presencing* in the explanation of the theory of the layered coil, I positioned *presencing* in the critical center of the third space as a tool to strategically search out and usher the emergence of inner knowing. The genesis of the multi-layered third space is the simple intersection created when two worlds are illustrated by a Venn diagram. However it develops in complexity through the coils. Analyzing the concept of *presencing* in this third space, it is necessary to bring past moments of tension to the present through critical self-reflection. We experienced this in our shared *plática* during that moment of silence where each of us became suspended in reflection about abortion and leadership and past hurts and healing. This *presencing* could take place immediately upon the occurrence of the moment of

tension, or it could be explored many years later simply by suspending it through study -  
- micro ethnography employing critical self-reflection.

Initially, I wrote that identifying this moment of tension could help us to avoid future conflict. I am now sure that the tension is necessary in all human relationships – because this is where the spirit is. In fact, it is the black light that makes the spirit shine. Communication is what joins beings in a relationship. This critical self-reflection is essentially communication within oneself, reconciling or bridging those tenets on either side of the breach.

For the spiritual educational leaders in this study, the relationship with other human beings was the main ingredient or connecting factor in their individual stories as well as our collective experience. For me, it was my relationship with my mother, the coils of my hair and the coils of an umbilical cord. Interestingly, Marva's pictorial representation of her healing process was a spiral, circling inward, which read, *the healing process is best described as a spiral of stages. As survivors move up the spiral, they integrate new information and a broader range of feelings, utilize more resources, take better care of themselves and make deeper changes* (See pictorial representation)

The inner coil represented her relationship with her mother, step father, grandparents, son and eventually her client(s). Jorge's pictorial representation of his healing process was the Stations of the Cross at Basilica, Our Lady of San Juan. It was at one of these stations (inside of a coil) that Jorge fell to his knees out of desperation for reconciliation with God. The third space is where the law gets messy; where its limitations are magnified; where we understand the need for showering compassion and mercy because we are spiritually aware that we have received it in full measure. Taking up my Cross has taken

on a brand new meaning for me, in my roles as an educational leader, a mother, a minister and a citizen but also in the essence of who I am, biologically, culturally and spiritually.

## **A Pedagogy of Forgiveness – Punishment versus Forgiveness**

### **Praxis Implications**

We explored unexpected moments of tension of educational leaders who considered themselves spiritual. Understanding where spiritual educational leaders go in moments of tension was one question which guided this work. With that question as a back drop, we understand that preparing leaders to lead is most important.

Teaching and learning in a democracy is a social construct, involving multiple facets which educational leaders are expected to navigate. Simultaneously existing as a social creature within the same social construct that the educational leader is tasked to lead, motivate, manage immediately creates social tension. Adopting a pedagogy of forgiveness and grace could prove to be invaluable in the lives of educational leaders. This study proved that critical self-reflection lead to forgiveness of the self and those who had harmed or violated.

There is no forgiveness, healing or reconciliation when we refuse to go to or remain in the third space. In his book, *No Future without Forgiveness*, Bishop Desmond Tutu (1999) outlines the difference in restorative justice and retributive justice.

Retributive justice (a) relies on ideas of retaliation and severe affirmative action (b) can lead to new conflict and re-establishes a cycle of anger and fear (c) punishment is likely to be perceived as punishment for being on the other side rather than being guilty (d) constant fight of underdog vs. top dog by imposed



sanctions of the (temporary) winner. Restorative justice in his summation (a) tries to create a sustainable basis for peace by aiming for true reconciliation (b) relies on forgiveness and a common effort to grapple with the past (c) atrocities are put in context; this can constitute legitimacy of punishment and acceptance of affirmative action (d) a dialogue is set up rather than a winner's tribunal (p. 54)

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was a court-like restorative justice body assembled by the South African government after the abolition of apartheid. Witnesses included victims of gross human rights violations who spoke of their experiences. Additionally, perpetrators of violence also gave their testimonies and were given an opportunity to ask for amnesty from both civil and criminal prosecution. While the moments our study cannot be compared to the inhumane acts of hatred that many Africans and Afrikaans shared, we can draw wisdom from the TRC proceedings for educational leaders.

As Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002) noted, educational leaders have not been prepared for such socially personal (oxy-moron) work,

The landscape of education leadership in the 21st century offers an astounding range of emotional challenges rarely acknowledged or appreciated. For school leaders, developing a genuine sense of self, grounded in one's strengths and vulnerabilities, has become a primary concern. (p. 52)

The sheer number of unexpected moments of tension that arise on a daily basis, proves to be overwhelming to the educational leader. With all that is done well to prepare educational leaders to lead, teach, and manage, little is done to engage educational leaders for the socially complex nature of the job. Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski's



(2002) work focused on the things that wound educational leaders within the school setting. “Our focus is on understanding what a self-described leadership crisis or wounding experience means to education leaders and how it influences their professional and personal growth and development.” (p. 53) This work examines those moments created in the educational setting, while recognizing those moments as portals to the varied dimensions of the educational leader. Employing a pedagogy of forgiveness can free the educational leader to be healed and in turn practice a pedagogy of grace to heal others.

Just as Juanito’s mother extended the *tres leches* cake to me as a symbol of forgiveness and peace, we were all impacted by the heart and sincerity in which she gave. For instance, in the example of my research partner Marva, the current moment of tension with a fourteen year old client transported her to her childhood, allowing her to re-author historical and familial stories. She did not stop there. She was able to forgive her mother and step-father and in turn, extend grace.

### **A Pedagogy of Grace – the Law versus Grace**

#### **Contributions to Educational Praxis and Research – Enlightened Understanding**

Reminded of the Old Testament of the Holy Bible which demands strict adherence to its ordinances, rules, and laws, or punishment was swift, Juanito’s behavior demanded punishment according to school disciplinary policy; which meant that he should have been carted off to the nearest elementary jail cell. Because final disciplinary decisions are discretionary, left up to the administrator for final judgment, there was wiggle room for me. The New Testament of the Holy Bible ushers in grace and mercy which in fact prevailed and Juanito was given another chance. The Law, according to St.

John 1:17, “was given through Moses, *but* grace and truth came through Jesus Christ (King James Version of the Bible). The living interpretation of that verse is that a young boy deserved a second chance, just as I had received grace so many times before. Besides, I did not know the extent of his, nor his parents’ root damage. Juanito’s behavior was a manifestation of malnourished roots. This body of work invites a different type of conversation for educational leaders. One that not only acknowledges the complexity of the lived experience of the educational leader as a part of a larger community, but one that embraces the need for providing critical self-reflection for personal growth and development. Educational leaders who gain understanding of their multi-faceted selves through critical self-reflection are better positioned to serve others. Avolio, Gardner, Walumbwa, Luthans and May (2004) described this this type of leader as an “authentic leader” ...they know who they are, what they believe and value, and they act upon those values and beliefs while transparently interacting with others.”(p. 4) This understanding of self, beliefs and values can be achieved through critical self-reflection through micro-autoethnography.

Because the study of that moment of tension reveals the symbiotic joining of past experiences to current behaviors and beliefs. While using critical self-reflection through micro-autoethnography could be included in leadership development workshops for educational leaders, I found that this research approach lent itself well to an open, transparent and vulnerable depth of communication that yielded much fruit.

Engaging in this type of research can be a catalyst of inspiration for educational leaders to courageously act towards social justice and change. Witherspoon and Taylor

(2010) found that the concept of social justice was of great importance to educational leaders who consider themselves to be spiritual.

The concept of social justice became important and was a central strand in our findings. A desire to eradicate school realities of injustice were interwoven into the narrative of each woman we interviewed. As the educational leadership literature moves toward a social justice framework, administrative practices focus on an analysis of how administrators actually engage in the process of social justice. For our participants, spirituality was not neutral in matters of social justice and leadership in schools. Our analysis revealed that social justice and the spiritual were closely related and often intertwined. For the participants, to be spiritual was to be socially just. (p. 137)

While the literature acknowledged the wounding of educational leaders that is often inflicted within moments of tension, it did not address those injuries or personal trauma that educational leaders surely bring with them to the table, nor the power of forgiveness and grace. This body of work acknowledges both and has the power to usher in healing, depth of self-understanding and wisdom to lead.

Creating gracious spaces (Hughes, 2004) which allow educational leaders to dialogue, make sense of their own personal is vitally important for the nurturing of the educational leader and ultimately, those they serve.

### **Final Thoughts**

Before engaging in this research, I wrote, “the very essence of my story of Juanito is this nagging reminder that faith and selfless leadership must be tenants of the same building of the spiritual educational leader. I cannot behave professionally without

involving who I am personally. To try to do so, created great tension which compromised my spiritual health.” I want to extend that thought on the other side of this transformative research. There is another awareness that I have now which I did not have before. As an educational leader, working in a social setting, this confirms for me that we are all connected in spirit.

When I met with my research partners to share my findings in chapter IV we had a dinner meeting at the very appropriately named restaurant, *Tres Amigos*. To say that we were all in awe of the outcomes is a tremendous understatement. My research partners had no way of knowing how much their work had impacted me and changed me forever. When I shared my personal pain, it was a very emotional several moments, but we were there, together, respectfully waiting in this third, gracious space we had created. We congratulated, complimented, and challenged each other to continue our critical reflective work long after this work was done.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

We have a political calling as educators in a socially constructed, democratic system to understand our obligation to contribute to education and the larger community. I believe that we have a spiritual obligation to create spaces to cultivate relationship and creative communication. Before an educational leader can fully engage and contribute to those conversations, political or spiritual, they must first know their own value and from where they came. Micro-autoethnography through critical self-reflection could prepare the educational leader to imagine those new possibilities of leading from a place of personal praxis. “For it is awareness that allows you to step in and out of analysis; but it

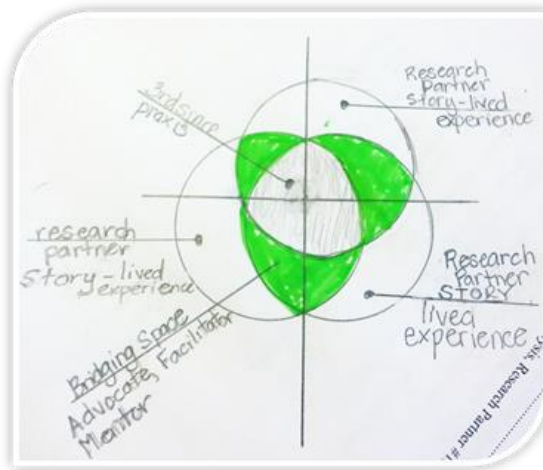
requires much less to disconnect and act out the roles independent of one another.”  
(Pharr, 2014)

The creation of a gracious space in educational preparation, daily practice and continuing development of the educational leader would be a good place to begin. It could be that a simple survey of educational leaders would yield important information regarding the educational leader’s need to participate in micro-autoethnographical research through critical self-reflection.

Given the transformational nature of the work, I recommend that further research could be done to create opportunities within public education arena that measures the impact such work has upon the educator and the communities they serve. Researching the negative impact of ignoring or failing to address such a need for educational leaders, could prove to identify a great barrier to educational improvement. During the time of this writing, a South Carolinian school resource officer, violently slammed a black teenage girl out of her classroom chair as the students sat and watched. As it was later confirmed that the teen was in foster care, having lost her mother earlier this year, I was outraged. I wrote letters, posted on social media and talked this out with family and friends. Then it occurred to me, this work is immediately relevant and needed right now, leaving me with many questions to pose to the principal, teacher, other staff members and the students who witnessed such a violent exchange. I would love to invite them to a gracious space.

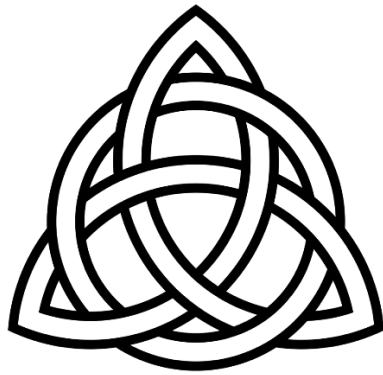
## A Pedagogy of Spirit -

When I met with my research partners to celebrate the final draft of our work, I shared with them the picture of the cross overlaid with the intersecting circles which represented our shared stories. See figure below.

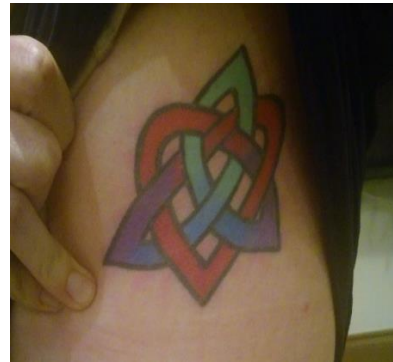


*Figure 24.* Karen's conceptual depiction of praxis, third space found at the Cross.

The three interlocking spheres represent the power of the method we employed for this study. The micro-autoethnographic study of that moment of tension with Juanito and his mother has released a lifetime of healing, hope and freedom. I am excited about the possibilities for such a method in an educational setting. This method lead the construction of a third space so unique it could never be reproduced, but it lends itself well to the possibilities of others constructing their own third space. Finally, a critical spirituality must emerge that questions the status quo or the comfort of leadership and spirituality. If my leadership does not compel me, even in the face of personal insult and injury, to inspire those I serve, like Juanito, than what good is it?



*Figure 25. Triquetra.*



*Figure 26. Celtic love knot.*

Before I could finish my sentence, Jorge began searching the internet on his phone. When I wondered what he was doing, he said he had to show me something. While he searched, Marva stood up, began pulling up her t-shirt in the back to reveal a tattoo. “Can you believe it? Is that crazy or what?” She asked. (See the picture below). Jorge found the picture he was looking for and shared the exact same image tattooed on Marva’s side. (See figure below) He told us that his girlfriend had that tattooed on her foot. He explained that this was the Triquetra which represents the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. To us, my research team and me, it represented the intersection of our lived experiences, celebrated in the third space. I could not have scripted this experience any better in my wildest of dreams.

## APPENDIX SECTION

### APPENDIX A. GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND VOCABULARY

**Autoethnography** seeks to describe and analyze personal lived experiences within their ecologies to learn and describe their cultural values, beliefs, practices/rituals and actions. This method employs deep reflection and introspection that originates with the exploration of self within their ecologies in order to understand a person's cultural lived experience.

**Critical Self-Reflection** - the psychology of critical self-reflection involves the educational leader coming to grips with his or her own identity and juxtaposing that against the identity of the learning community

**Ethnography** is a social research methodology made popular by trained fieldworkers/researchers/ethnographers who spent extended periods of time in the field as participant observers. Ethnographers paint a picture of people by employing systematic processes and techniques of data collection including observation, conversation and archival research to make meaning of the lived experiences and practices of cultural groups over an extended period of time; field work is usually over one year and the outcomes is a production represented through thick description of the lived experiences.

Ethnographers paint the picture of people within their local ecologies that represents their values, beliefs rituals, movement patterns, practices and actions. The art of ethnographies helps make the familiar strange for local citizens and informs the research community of the lived experience of people within their culture and communities.

**Micro-ethnography** - is research that attends to big social issues through careful examination of 'small' communicative behaviors. Analysts study the audible and visible details of human interaction and activity, as these occur naturally within specific contexts



or institutions -- researchers focus on the social interaction, rather than the individual.

Micro autoethnography describe the scope and time of the study with individual people during a specifically defined moment or period in time. This method facilitates and scaffolds research partners and participant observer/researcher through as they explore the lived experiences of each individual within an ecological context. This method looks at a specific moment in time and brings in the auto by holding that moment against cultural background, history and social context

***Plática*** - It is indicative of a profound and multi-resourced approach to conversation, in which participants utilize words, gestures, idioms, metaphors, past histories, and stories, among others, to bathe the setting of the *plática* with various influences and immerse its participants. (Valadez, 2012)

**Third Space** -The *third space*, a micro view into the intercession of praxis is a social theory idea which honors new and creative ways of relating and communicating in a mutually respectful manner. Anzaldúa (2000), conceptualizes third or borderland spaces as places or states of ambiguity, of being in-between different realities such as the intersection between being and becoming (p. 28)

## APPENDIX B

### Timeline for Collection of Observables, Analysis & Completion of Research

Action: Focus of Meetings & Timeline	Introduction & Purpose Research Summer 2015	Family & Analysis Summer 2015	Schooling & Analysis Summer 2015	Spirituality & Analysis Summer 2015	Place based Experience & Analysis Fall 2015	Writing Fall 2015	Defend Fall 2015- Spr 2016
METHOD INTERVIEW	IRB Permission Demographic & overview of research						
METHOD PLACE/VISIT	Share brainstorm examples of moments of tension and explore possibilities for research focus.						
METHOD PLÁTICA/ CONVER SATION	Reflect on experience						
Interview Question Format	Interview #1: Structured questions (a) Overview of the research, includes sharing my experience, (b) Obtain permission signature, (c) Gather basic demographic information		Interview #2: Self-guided (a) Tell me about your education/schooling (b) Tell me about your spirituality as you define it (c) When did your education and spirituality intersect? (d) What does that look like in practice?		Interview #3: Place based (group <i>Plática</i> ) (a)recreate the unexpected moment of tension for us (b) what was your cognitive/training response? (c) what was your personal response? (d) how did you navigate spiritually?		

## APPENDIX C

Schedule for Collection of Observables						
Timeline	summer 2015	August 2015	October 2015	December 2015		
Questions / Method	Purpose	Family	Schooling	Spirituality	Analysis	Writing
INTERVIEW						
PLACE VISIT						
PLATICA CONVER SATION						

**APPENDIX D**



**Mom, 1958**



**My Sister Mom and Me - 1965**



Combing my Paternal Grandmother's hair, while she holds my son Joseph



My two girls and me. God has blessed me with beautiful children.

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