

Reservoirs of Hope

LIVERPOOL HOPE UNIVERSITY STUDIES IN ETHICS SERIES

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VOLUME ONE:

ENGAGING RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Editors: Joy Schmack, Matthew Thompson and David Torevell with Camilla Cole

VOLUME TWO:

RESERVOIRS OF HOPE: SUSTAINING SPIRITUALITY IN SCHOOL LEADERS

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Reservoirs of Hope:
Sustaining Spirituality in School Leaders

Alan Flintham

**CAMBRIDGE
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P U B L I S H I N G

Reservoirs of Hope: Sustaining Spirituality in School Leaders, by Alan Flintham

This book first published 2010

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-2415-1, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-2415-6

For Jean, Andrew and Martin

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PREFACE

In the 1986 film ‘Clockwise’, the manic headteacher played by John Cleese utters the memorable words: “It’s not the despair. I can cope with the despair. It’s the *hope* I can’t stand”. This book is about hope, and how it can be sustained by and in the leaders of our schools. It argues that a personal spirituality, be it sacred or secular, is the means by which that hope may be sustained. It demonstrates the outworking of that spirituality as spiritual and moral leadership in the face of critical incidents and challenging pressures. It offers the engaging metaphor of ‘reservoirs of hope’ to promote reflection on these issues and offers a theological underpinning to it. It captures the authentic voices of practitioners as they engage in reflection on what drains and replenishes their personal reservoir of hope.

Like ripples in a reservoir, the research on which this book is based has continued to spread. It was initially conceived as a small-scale piece of practitioner research involving 25 headteachers under the National College for the Leadership of Schools and Children’s Services (formerly the National College for School Leadership, NCSL) research associate scheme. Encouraged by a remarkable 97% willingness to participate and the enthusiasm of the wider practitioner community for the metaphor of ‘reservoirs of hope’, and supported by funding from the East Midlands Leadership Centre (EMLC), Liverpool Hope University, ACU National (the Australian Catholic University), the Roman Catholic Diocese of Parramatta and a Winston Churchill Travelling Fellowship, the scope of the research grew to encompass interviews with 150 school leaders and 40 supporting educationists in the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand (as acknowledged in the Appendix). My sincere thanks go to all these colleagues who so willingly and enthusiastically agreed to be interviewed, for their warmth of welcome and openness of response. Without such ready co-operation from often hard-pressed and time-pressed colleagues, this research could not have been possible.

My thanks also go to colleagues at the National College who supported the initial research associate opportunity and colleagues at Liverpool Hope University, in particular to Dr David Torevell as series editor, together with Professor Gerald Grace of the London Institute of Education, for their encouragement and support in converting the research into a book.

Particular thanks must go to the two colleagues who supervised the research: Professor John Sullivan for his conscientious and detailed critique of my work, and Professor John West-Burnham for his insightful overview and kind permission to use, adapt and develop his original phrase 'reservoir of hope'. Any errors, omissions or infelicities remain clearly mine, however.

Above all, my thanks are due to my long-suffering family: my wife Jean and my sons Andrew and Martin, for their understanding, advice and support which have sustained me through the production of this book and ensured that my own personal 'reservoir of hope' has never run dry.

INTRODUCTION

Jack Straw, long-serving British politician and erstwhile government minister, has suggested that successful survival in political leadership is a question of possessing a number of professional characteristics:

You have got to have *a clear agenda*, but equally you've got to be ready to have your mind changed...

You've got to be able intellectually to do the job. You've got to be able to turn the paper round. That may sound bureaucratic, but you have got to *keep the show on the road*.

Keeping the show on the road is also dealing with *stuff that comes out of a clear blue sky*... Dealing with what is apparently routine...you've got to have a sixth sense...to spot things that are small but could turn big. Then when an emergency does arise, working out what the angles are and how you deal with them. (Straw 2010, 9; emphasis added)

And all this is clearly as applicable to the task of leading a school as it is to running a political system.

When constant revisions of national education policy threaten to cause change overload and system malfunction, it is to the headteacher that colleagues look to preserve *a clear agenda*, a coherence of vision and direction underpinned by integrity of values. When day-to-day pressures threaten to overwhelm the smooth running of a school, it is to the headteacher that colleagues look '*to keep the show on the road*'. When critical incidents and emergencies hit a school '*out of a clear blue sky*', it is to the headteacher that colleagues look '*to deal with all the angles*' and to keep the school on course.

And colleagues look to their leaders not only for *what* they do in such circumstances—the leadership actions they take together with *how* they do it and the skills, processes and relationships on which they draw—but also *why* they do it—the values and vision which underpin their actions and the moral imperative of their leadership.

Teaching at its core is a profession built on moral values—"scratch a good teacher and you will find a moral purpose" (Fullan 1993, 12)—and the same is surely equally true of school leaders. The research on which

this book stands (Flintham 2009) is based on interviews with 150 headteachers from a range of personal faith perspectives both sacred and secular, and a variety of school contexts, including community schools, schools of a religious character and schools facing particularly challenging social circumstances, across the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand. It captures practitioner reflections on the personal value systems, leadership styles and sustainability strategies of headteachers in such circumstances: the ‘why’ as well as the ‘how’ and ‘what’ of their leadership.

Its findings demonstrate that *all* school leaders can readily articulate a moral purpose: their core moral and ethical value system or ‘spirituality’, the ‘lived faith’ which underpins their leadership actions, particularly when the going gets tough. That spirituality may be substantially secular (as outlined in Chapter Three) or sacred (as described in Chapter Four). It is seen demonstrated in practice especially when critical incidents hit the school community ‘out of a clear blue sky’, or in facing the day-to-day pressures of leading a school facing particularly challenging circumstances (as described in Chapter Five), when spiritual and moral leadership is displayed as ‘a lived faith in action’.

The research has used the metaphor ‘*reservoirs of hope*’ to promote practitioner reflection on these issues. The metaphor of the school leader as a ‘reservoir of hope’ has been found to be a useful one by practitioners working in the challenging and demanding contexts of school leadership (Flintham 2003a, 2003b). The successful school leader, by providing the calm centre at the heart of the storm when critical incidents and incessant pressures hit a school, is called on to act as the ‘*external reservoir of hope*’, because hope is what drives the school forward towards delivering its vision whilst allowing it to remain true to its fundamental values, and “without hope the people perish”.

Napoleon Bonaparte described leaders as “dealers in hope”, an appellation which requires them not only to maintain reserves of inner self-belief and personal resilience when faced with challenging circumstances, but also to inspire and imbue those they lead with that same spirit of hope in the prospect of a better future. And the school leaders of today are equally required to be the harbingers of hope, the messengers who continue to bring to school communities buffeted by the pressures of external events, that enduring spirit of hope, “a hope that is about the potential for the future...about growth and resilience” (West-Burnham 2009, 86).

But to maintain that resilience in demanding circumstances demands the school leader drawing on an ‘*internal reservoir of hope*’ (the phrase is from West-Burnham 2002, and is used by kind permission): a reservoir

which provides the calm centre at the heart of the individual leader, which preserves their personal values and vision and which continues to allow effective inter-personal engagement and sustainability of self-belief in the face of external pressures. To successfully maintain that internal reservoir of hope requires two things:

- firm *foundations of faith* to preserve moral purpose in the face of constant pressures;
- robust *sustainability strategies* of replenishment and renewal to ensure that the reservoir of hope does not run dry.

‘Faith’ should not necessarily be construed solely in the religious terms of sacred spirituality but viewed as a universal concept of ‘*secular spirituality*’ wherein the leader’s actions are seen to rest explicitly or implicitly on the foundation of an embedded personal moral and ethical value system, the fundamental motivation and purpose that distinguishes leaders from mere efficient functionaries. This foundation of deeply-held beliefs and code of moral values not only provides a personal paradigm for living, but also gives an innate philosophy of practice which comes into play not only in the face of the day-to-day experiences of school leadership, but also when that leadership is tested by the unexpected pressures of critical incidents and external events. In the context of such circumstances:

The notion of ‘an innate philosophy of practice’ is a powerful one; and both heads with and without formal religious faith will find themselves on common ground. Very few school leaders follow a codified rule of practice in such circumstances: *what they believe is seen in what they do, how they respond to people and to situations*. (Caperon 2007b, 2; emphasis added)

Those leadership actions, engagements and responses to critical situations, when underpinned by a firm moral purpose, thereby demonstrate the definition, developed from a survey of a range of writings on leadership and spirituality in Chapter Two and used throughout this book, that *spiritual and moral leadership is ‘a lived faith in action’*.

However, the constant coping with such pressures can threaten to drain the personal reservoir of hope to dryness and destruction. Without robust sustainability strategies such as space for reflection, networks of supportive relationships, and engagement with the world beyond education, which maintain and replenish inner self-belief and emotional reserves, the reservoir of hope can run dry, there will be burn out or drop out and school leaders will withdraw from the change arena, and in the memorable words

of one primary school headteacher: “*you will die a lingering death through managing the stock cupboard*”.

How successful school leaders avoid that ‘lingering death’ is a function of both professional experience and personal characteristics (as explored in Chapter Five). A questionnaire survey for the National College of over 300 English school headteachers deemed ‘outstanding’ in their leadership and management by the school inspection agency, Ofsted, found that “outstanding headteachers are confident in their beliefs, secure in rich relationships and develop professional knowledge and skills but, pivotally, are also reflective learners” (NCSL 2009, 14).

This book seeks to capture the authentic voices of serving headteachers and analyse the learning from such reflections on their spiritual and moral leadership. It thereby generates key messages for both practitioners and policy makers regarding the importance of maintaining *a constant vision of hope* which informs and maintains moral purpose, the value of *structured reflection opportunities* in codifying it, and the necessity for the continual renewal of it through engagement in *sustaining networks of mutual support*.

But in addition to capturing that reflective learning, this book also offers in Chapter Six a theological reflection on the spiritual and moral leadership of headteachers, applying the concepts of kerygma, kenosis and koinonia to such leadership. It further analyses the leadership stories of headteachers by offering a theological reflection on their leadership as viewed not only through a secular educational lens but also through the theological concepts of kerygma as the essential message of hope that their leadership conveys, kenosis as they act as the self-draining reservoir of hope for their schools when confronted with critical incidents and systemic pressures, and koinonia as they refill and sustain their personal internal reservoirs by seizing opportunities to engage in individual reflection and networked support. Through applying a capacity for ‘bilingualism’ to enable and inform dialogue, it thereby seeks to offer a groundbreaking connecting bridge between the worlds of educational leadership and theology, to the mutual benefit of both.

And given the growing interest in ‘spirituality at work’ and its impact on spiritual leadership development across the business world (Tourish and Tourish 2010), described by Aburdene (2005) as a ‘Megatrend 2010’, these generic bridging concepts of kerygma, kenosis and koinonia and the metaphor ‘reservoirs of hope’ could also profitably be transferred to studies of leadership in other professions where there is a perceived and identified need for the promotion of reflection and support opportunities, to ensure that the reservoir of hope of leaders in whatever context does not run dry but can overflow in a ‘triumph of hope over experience’.

CHAPTER ONE

OUTLINE OF A STUDY OF SPIRITUAL AND MORAL LEADERSHIP

This introductory chapter first outlines the aims of the research study on which this book is based, the research questions that were posed and the research samples used to investigate them. Second, it identifies the need for this study both in drawing on a wider empirical base than previous extant research and also in offering a connecting bridge between the worlds of educational leadership and theology, through the application of a capacity for ‘bilingualism’ to enable and inform dialogue. Third, it outlines the assumptions made in constructing this study, namely the applicability of a universally applicable concept of ‘secular spirituality’, the value of the metaphor ‘reservoirs of hope’ in promoting practitioner reflection on spiritual and moral leadership and the validity of the methodological approach used. Finally, it offers an outline of the organisation of the research findings as set out in the remainder of the book and describes the conceptual framework that has been applied throughout.

1. The aims of this study

This book explores the spirituality of headteachers and how it is sustained and demonstrated as spiritual and moral leadership when exposed to critical incidents and day-to-day leadership pressures. Whilst recognising that school leadership is a distributed function and not simply the sole preserve of the headteacher, it argues that particularly when faced with critical incidents, it is to the headteacher above all that the school community looks for spiritual and moral leadership, in addition to the management and public relations skills necessary to mitigate any consequential negative impact. This function can be potentially draining of personal leadership energy and self-belief, and can require access to replenishing sustainability strategies and support structures.

The following research questions are considered:

- What are the spiritual and moral bases on which headteachers stand, from whence are they derived and how do they impact on leadership?
- What value has the opportunity for headteachers to reflect on critical incidents when spiritual and moral leadership was tested?
- What sustainability and support structures are deployed and valued by headteachers?
- What key messages may be drawn to influence the formation, development and support of existing and future headteachers?

These research questions were explored through a qualitative phenomenological study, using data primarily gained from one-to-one semi-structured reflective interviews carried out by a fellow practitioner headteacher using an ethnographic approach and applying the metaphor 'reservoirs of hope' as an aid to promoting reflection. A cross-sectional sample of 150 serving and former headteachers, balanced in terms of phase, gender and context and drawn from the UK, Australia and New Zealand was used, and triangulated with interviews with 40 supporting local, diocesan and national educationists.

As a phenomenological study, the research sought to focus on the lived experience of the headteachers interviewed and to express it in a language that is as loyal to that lived experience as possible (Polkinghorne 1989). It allowed those interviewed particularly to reflect on and analyse their experience of critical incidents in their leadership story (Flanagan 1954), defining 'critical' as not necessarily high level but as a testing occurrence from which learning had ensued, and thence to enable the making explicit of the underpinning value system which governed their leadership actions. It has captured and elucidated that experience from the guided reflections of practitioners obtained in the naturalistic setting of the school environment and their articulation in an authentic rendering of practitioner voice, through the use of direct quotations from those interviewed.

The headteachers interviewed had a significant range of leadership experience within a variety of school contexts, including schools of a specific religious character and those facing particularly challenging circumstances. The study sought to illuminate differences between these sub-groups, to identify any development of leadership capacity linked to length of experience and to consider whether there were any specific clusters of professional characteristics dominant in leaders of schools facing particularly challenging circumstances.

Within the three main data chapters of this book, entitled ‘Reservoirs of hope’, ‘Foundations of faith’ and ‘Labours of love’ respectively, the headteacher research sample is consequently divided into:

- A total of 50 interviews with representative samples of 25 serving headteachers and 15 headteachers who left headship early in advance of the normal retirement age in England, together with a further 10 Australian school principals. Those interviewed were perceived as apparently ‘successful’ headteachers leading predominantly secular schools as ‘*reservoirs of hope*’, or conversely those who left their headships early, possibly ‘when reservoirs ran dry’. It is recognised, however, that “often what is regarded as successful leadership can be seen in retrospect to be deeply flawed, while leadership which may appear poor can often have within it a wisdom or insight which is only valued much later” (Hanvey 2008, 32), and that significant lessons may be drawn from both categories.
- A total of 60 headteachers interviewed in England, Australia and New Zealand who were leading schools from an individual religious faith perspective which provides personal ‘*foundations of faith*’ in leadership. Such leadership may be exercised in a school associated with a similar faith perspective to that personally held, one distinct from it, or one purely secular.
- A total of 40 headteachers leading schools in the UK facing particularly challenging circumstances of context or social deprivation, or failing to meet academic ‘floor targets’, where such service may be seen as ‘*labours of love*’. Sub-sets of this sample were studied in terms of professional characteristics of leaders and the value of sabbatical support.

These samples of headteachers, as detailed in the Appendix, have been balanced as far as possible in terms of both school phase and leadership gender. Individual quotations from headteachers, as shown in italics in the text, are where necessary appropriately attributed in this latter regard. However, in the interests of economy and clarity, in the remainder of the text, leadership references should be considered as gender-neutral.

2. The need for this study

This research therefore stands on a solid empirical base of data drawn from the leadership stories revealed in interviews with a total of 150 headteachers from the UK, Australia and New Zealand (a remarkable 97%

participation rate from those approached), and triangulated against the views of 40 local and national educationists. Woods (2007, 135) has indicated that whilst there has been a growing concern to emphasise the moral, ethical and emotional aspects of leadership, and that some literature about spirituality and leadership exists (as will be described in Chapter Two), there is relatively little empirical work in this area. Although Caperon (2007a, 3), writing from an Anglican perspective, goes so far as to describe the research underpinning this book as “the only recent empirical work I am aware of which looks seriously at the spiritual dimension of school leadership”, this view takes no cognisance of studies such as Grace (2002) on 60 headteachers of Catholic secondary schools in deprived urban communities in three English cities and Reed et al (2002), who studied the role of the headteacher in leading transformation in three Church of England secondary schools compared to three community schools, nor of Woods (2007), who studied spiritual experience in educational leadership by analysing questionnaire returns from 244 headteachers (a 43% response rate) across three English local authorities. Equally, account must be taken of individual headteacher studies such as Luckcock (2004) on the distinctiveness and inclusiveness of Anglican church school headship, and Bracken (2004) on the principal’s leadership role in spiritual formation in Australian Catholic schools. Other relevant research in the field includes the study by Day et al (2000) on leading schools in times of change, which explored 12 case study schools of varying phase and context in terms of the metaphors used to describe the leadership role of the headteacher, triangulated against the views of staff and the wider school community including students. Recent small-scale practitioner research for the National College for Leadership of Schools and Children’s Services (formerly the National College for School Leadership, NCSL) has also considered how leaders and teachers in five primary schools have dealt with critical incidents and episodes (Mander 2008), and how leadership capacity to do this is seen to develop over time in six secondary headteachers (Ingate 2006). However, the author is unaware of any empirical interview-based research that has studied either the range or variety or number of headteachers involved in this present study.

This study applies the metaphor ‘reservoirs of hope’ to the spiritual and moral leadership of headteachers. If writings on spirituality and leadership are under-represented in the canon, so too are writings on leadership based on hope. Indeed Godfrey (1987, ix, cited in Halpin 2003, 12) has observed that, “as a topic for study, hope has been largely left to psychologists and theologians”. Halpin (2003, 12) points out that “it is

also a neglected concept in the academic study of education". The research described in this book contributes towards redressing this by exploring the concept of hope as an essential component of spiritual and moral leadership of schools, especially when facing pressures of critical incidents and challenging circumstances. Its particular contribution is to be found not only in the extent of its empirical base, nor simply in its sampling of a range of headteachers from a variety of geographical and faith perspectives and contexts. Rather it is also to be found in the authentic rendering of practitioner voice regarding spiritual and moral leadership and the application of a lens of theological reflection to it. One purpose of the book is to provide an analysis which offers a bridge to enable dialogue between these different groups, particularly those who are comfortable with expressing concepts in the theological language of the religious sphere and those who are more fluent in the secular language of education, a connectivity of 'engaged pluralism' which allows translation and communication rather than 'neutral pluralism' which seeks a common standard language acceptable to all.

Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor (2008) has counselled against the exclusive use of what he terms the "enclosed" or "insider" language of faith, with its taking for granted of agreed belief structures and familiarity with biblical stories and concepts, arguing instead the need to be able to communicate matters of faith "in the language of the world". In this book, the necessity is argued for a 'bilingual' capacity in a mixed economy with no readily shared language, regarding such bilingualism as the ability to be fluent in and comfortable with both the theological language of the faith community and the professional language of the education leadership sphere, and the capacity to translate generic concepts between them to facilitate not only discourse within the specialist community but also dialogue beyond it. The author's own background and experience spanning 26 years of senior leadership roles (11 as a deputy headteacher and 15 as a headteacher) in secular secondary education in socially challenged areas and over 22 years of concurrent non-stipendiary ministerial service in the Church of England (12 as a lay reader and 10 as a priest) has equipped him to act in this bilingual capacity in conducting and analysing interviews with such a varied range of headteachers.

From an analysis of the leadership stories of those interviewed and the authenticity of practitioner voice displayed in them, generic key messages may be drawn which will hopefully inform dialogue between those at local, diocesan and national level charged with the ongoing professional support and development of headteachers and those responsible for the

formation and induction of future generations of school leaders at a time of significant recruitment and retention need.

3. The assumptions of this study

In embarking on this study, three assumptions have been made: that the concept of ‘spirituality’ is a universally applicable one in a secular as well as a sacred sense; that the metaphor ‘reservoirs of hope’ has value for headteachers in promoting their reflection on their spiritual and moral leadership; and that the outcomes which have emerged from promoting such reflection have validity and value within and beyond the practitioner community. These assumptions are now considered in turn.

3.1. A concept of ‘secular spirituality’

In this book, the word ‘spiritual’ is used without a necessarily religious connotation. Rather ‘spirituality’ is regarded as a universal overarching concept which generates for each individual of whatever perspective a personal world-view which enables them to create meaning and purpose in their lives, affects their espoused values and subsequent behaviours and relationships based on them, and impacts on their wellbeing. That world-view may be linked to a particular religious tradition, have evolved from it or be completely independent of it. Indeed it can be asserted that *all* school leaders display what might be termed a ‘secular spirituality’, wherein their leadership actions are based on readily articulated foundations of ethical belief from whatever source.

Whilst the author’s own background is as a practising Anglican, this book is written with a view to offering insights across a range of faith perspectives, both religious and secular, and to be accessible and of interest to those of whatever persuasion. Therefore the use of the term ‘secular spirituality’ within an examination of the spiritual and moral leadership of headteachers is designed to accommodate this by allowing the argument to be meaningful for those for whom a religious commitment is anathema, or who wish to distance themselves from the perceived limitations and problems of institutional religion (Hanvey 2008, 16) yet who would still resist being described as “not a spiritual person” (Harries 2002, x) or as lacking in some degree of spiritual awareness, even if embarrassed to admit to it (Hay and Hunt 2000, 14). A consideration of secular spirituality can thus provide a bridge to engagement with, for example, the sceptical school leader who when interviewed said of the National College research study *Reservoirs of Hope: Spiritual and Moral*

Leadership in Headteachers (Flintham 2003a), which was the original genesis of this book: “I downloaded it but haven’t read it because of the word ‘spiritual’ in the title; I’m not religious”.

Spirituality, be it linked to a particular religious tradition or determinedly secular, is, however, more than simply possessing and articulating a static set of ethical and moral values from whatever source; rather it is a commitment to their dynamic application in the leadership challenges of life in the real world, so that belief becomes action, words become deeds, and ‘the talk is walked’. Spirituality thus becomes “a lived faith” (Wakefield 2000, 686), and spiritual and moral leadership can thus be conceived of as ‘a lived faith in action’, an operational definition which underpins this present research study throughout.

3.2. The metaphor ‘reservoirs of hope’

Personal ‘foundations of faith’ anchor spiritual and moral leadership actions in a framework of belief to ensure a coherence of vision and integrity of values when the leader is faced with critical incidents and systemic pressures which threaten to blow the school off course. This research tests the value of the metaphor ‘reservoirs of hope’ in promoting practitioner reflection and analysis of such experiences. It argues that in such circumstances the school community looks to the headteacher to be the ‘external reservoir of hope’ for the institution, for ‘hope’ is what drives the school forward towards the delivery of the collective vision in the face of such external pressures, whilst allowing the school to remain true to its fundamental values. To act in a spiritual and moral leadership role, however, also requires the headteacher to have an ‘internal reservoir of hope’. This internal reservoir provides more than what Hanvey (2008, 18) has termed “a space of resistance—a safe zone, free from demands and pressures; a sort of retreat at the end of the garden for the soul or the self”, or what Lee (2005) calls “strategic sanctuary, far from the madding crowd” to provide space for strategic reflection. Rather it is the calm centre at the heart of the individual leader from which their vision and values flows, which motivates leadership actions, allows the continuance of effective inter-personal engagement and sustains personal and institutional self-belief in the face of external pressures.

This personal ‘reservoir of hope’ has to be periodically refilled by a variety of replenishment and sustainability strategies without which there will be burn out or drop out and headteachers will withdraw from the leadership arena ‘when reservoirs run dry’. This research explores with the sample of 150 headteachers from a range of school contexts, including

schools facing challenging circumstances and those of a religious character, the applicability of this metaphor ‘reservoirs of hope’ in promoting reflection on the value systems on which they base their leadership actions, the sustainability strategies and support structures on which they rely and the key messages which need to be transmitted to those charged with their ongoing professional development and support. From interviews and discussions with these 150 headteachers and 40 supporting educationists, it is possible to capture *inter alia* an authentic rendering of practitioner voice which, it can be argued, has value, significance and relevance both for fellow practitioners and educationists.

3.3. Validity and value

The research stands on an empirical base of interviews with 150 headteachers. It must be recognised, however, that the sample, whilst constructed to be as cross-sectionally representative as possible, nevertheless is an ‘opportunity sample’ gained from personal knowledge and peer recommendation. It is assumed, however, that this sample, which had a remarkable 97% positive participation response rate from a time-stressed profession not renowned for its collective enthusiasm in contributing to academic research, is at least as representative as one which might have been constructed by other means such as random postal sampling, where experience has shown considerably less willingness to engage. Equally, the main methodological tool was that of a one-to-one open-ended semi-structured interview with a fellow practitioner. Guided by the researcher as an erstwhile headteacher, these non-judgemental interviews promoted reflection on leadership journey, and espoused value system and critical incidents when that value system was tested under pressure. Unlike other studies previously referred to (Grace 2002; Day et al 2000), no formal attempt was made to triangulate the findings against the views of other members of the school community for whom the headteacher had accountability, because of concerns over confidentiality and openness of response, particularly as regards the often painful memories of critical incidents and the deep personal feelings of vulnerability which arose out of them. However, the views of some 40 supporting local, diocesan and national educationists were also sought in order to offer perspectives from beyond the headteacher community, together with informal triangulation from school observation visits, and the analysis of documentation such as school prospectuses and Ofsted inspection reports. In the case of a sub-set of those leading schools facing challenging circumstances, a small-scale quantitative analysis of dominant professional characteristics was also

carried out to support the emerging findings from interview. Overall therefore, the validity of the data is assumed with some confidence.

Equally, the value of the emerging findings to the practitioner community is confidently asserted. Whilst the outcomes from the 150 non-triangulated headteacher interviews may be challenged as personalised and consequently the findings drawn from them as potentially less rigorous as a result, an account of the initial *Reservoirs of Hope* research associate report having received the ‘accolade’ of a press description from a former Chief Inspector of Schools as “pretty banal” research (Woodhead 2003), their capturing and analysis of practitioner voice has received significant and enthusiastic validation from both participants in the study and a wide cross-section of the headteacher and education community. Participants consistently reported, in respondent validation of the interview findings, the cathartic value of the guided reflection on critical incidents and the personal leadership journey that the interview process had offered, and appreciated the opportunity of cross-reference with the experience of others. This was rather sadly summed up in the words of one experienced male secondary headteacher (a genus not renowned for self-reflection and revelation) serving a challenging socially deprived area:

“It’s very rare in a lonely job to have the time and be encouraged to talk about yourself, and not to an inspector or advisor or deputy, but to a fellow head...and for the first time in over 16 years of headship to feel that it’s legitimate to do so.”

It is recognised, however, that the primary purpose of this research was not to provide catharsis for hard-pressed participating headteachers, but to generate messages on leadership that may be of value to the wider education community. Across that community there has been resonance with the findings as promulgated through articles and conferences. The original *Reservoirs of Hope* research associate report that provided the genesis of this present study is “amongst the most downloaded of all NCSL’s research associate publications” (Coleman 2008), and feedback from subsequent conferences on it has shown that the metaphor on which it is based has become a valuable unifying concept in the promotion of headteacher reflection strategies. For example, one serving headteacher, a female primary headteacher, was moved to remark: “*I started reading it [the original Reservoirs of Hope report] and I couldn’t put it down. The words leaped off the page because I could hear myself saying that*”. Equally the associated terminology has clearly entered the collective leadership vocabulary to the extent that a paper outlining it in the journal *Management in Education* (Flintham 2004) presently still remains as one

of the 50 most cited articles from that publication (Sage Publications 2010).

To sum up, therefore, the present research study in its genesis, implementation and promulgation appears to have significant perceived value: on participants in providing cathartic reflection opportunities which have influenced subsequent leadership practice; on the wider practitioner community through the cross-fertilisation of leadership experiences and the lessons learned from them; and hopefully on policy makers through highlighting the importance of reflection opportunities, the power of networking strategies and the necessity for the legitimisation, facilitation and funding thereof.

4. The organisation of this study

4.1. Conceptual framework applied

The conceptual framework which underpins this study is that spiritual and moral leadership is the summation of three aspects: the ‘what’, ‘how’ and ‘why’ of leadership. The successful exercise of that leadership will clearly also require “contextual literacy” (NCSL 2007, 5), dependent on the socio-economic, demographic, cultural or historical parameters of the ‘where’ of the particular situation. The concern, however, is not only to capture the ‘what’ of school leadership, the implementation of leadership actions by headteachers as they operate within the specific contexts in which they are set, and the ‘how’ of school leadership as leaders deploy their management, teamworking and communication skills in the role of headteacher, but also the ‘why’ of school leadership, its motivation, meaning and purpose which underpins leadership action and which reveals the character and personal authenticity of the individual leader.

The leadership identity of the headteacher, his or her personal authenticity both in the eyes of self and others, is to be found at the confluence of context, role and character, in the synthesis of an internal harmony between the ‘how’ and the ‘why’, which is revealed in the ‘what’ of leadership actions as ‘the talk is walked’. Such leadership actions need to be underpinned by both ‘brains, heart and spirit’ (developing Starratt 2003, 242), requiring not only cognitive intelligence—an ability in numerical, verbal and logical reasoning, honed by study and experience, which effectively enables the ‘what’ of delivery—but also emotional intelligence—a capacity to relate to, empathise and engage with the feelings of others whilst remaining in control of one’s own emotions, the ‘how’ of leadership which enables effective inter-personal engagement to

occur through caring relationships. Above all, however, there needs to be an underpinning of spiritual intelligence that allows a making sense of the world and one's role and purpose within it, and generates a set of values to inform and imbue leadership actions by providing the reason 'why'.

Spiritual and moral leadership, defined as 'a lived faith in action', also lies at the confluence of the 'why', the 'how' and the 'what'. The spirituality of an individual is formed by the 'why' of whatever faith system provides meaning and purpose to existence, 'how' that faith system is worked out in the relationships of life, and emanates in the 'what' of actions and experiences. Spirituality, which may be tethered to a particular tradition, untethered from it or determinedly secular, is therefore the admixture of 'being', 'relating' and 'doing'. Spiritual and moral leadership then draws on that spirituality as its 'why', is concerned with the sustainability of self and others as its 'how' and results in a strategy for 'what' should be done not only to deal with the immediate impact of critical incidents but also to make progress towards the achievement of the school's long-term goals, and to ensure the ongoing personal and corporate support of the leader and his or her colleagues as they continue to work towards that end. 'Being' is informed by faith and informs meaning and purpose, sustains values and is sustained by spiritual intelligence: the 'foundations of faith' of the leader. 'Relating' is informed by relationships that in turn inform the leader's role, and is sustained by emotional intelligence, the 'reservoir of hope' of the leader. 'Doing' draws on contextual awareness to inform leadership action and sustain progress and is sustained by self-belief as leaders serve their schools as 'labours of love'. This conceptual framework is summarised as Figure 1.1.

Osmer (2008) similarly identifies what he terms the 'descriptive-empirical task' of the leader with 'what' is going on in a particular situation, and the 'interpretative task' as 'why' it is going on, so that the 'pragmatic task' of leadership becomes 'how' the leader might respond. However, he also identifies the 'normative task' of what *ought* to be going on: a comparison of the complex and messy realities of actual leadership actions in the cockpit of events against the demands of trying to remain true to an espoused value system. It is therefore through a retelling of leadership story, and in particular a consideration of how personal value systems have been tested, deconstructed and reconstructed through the pressure of events, that leadership learning can occur. Opportunities for such consideration may be provided through the capacity regularly to be prepared to step back from the daily cascade of 'crises' and systemic pressures which are the school leader's lot and engage in reflection on critical incidents and epiphanies within personal leadership story.

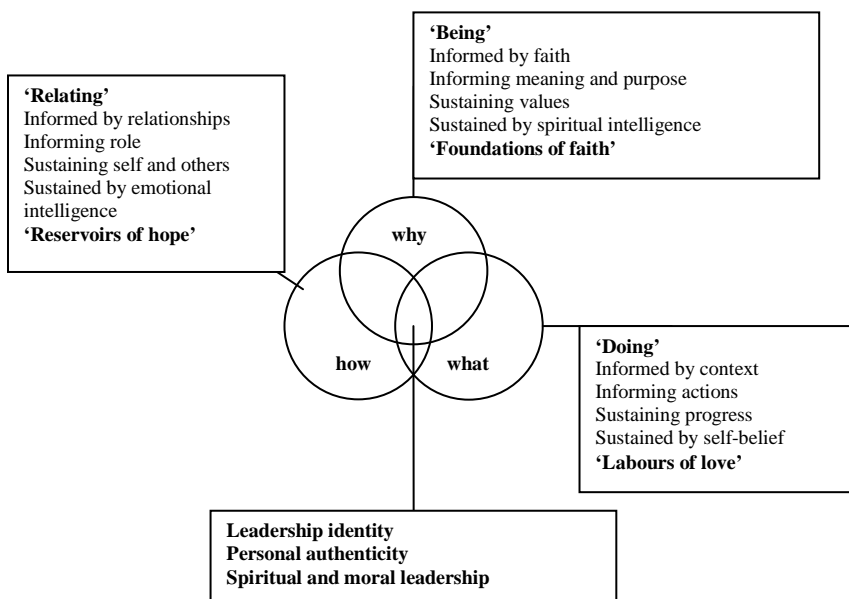


Fig. 1-1. Conceptual framework applied to spiritual and moral leadership

Such reflection opportunities may be self-generated but are better if facilitated by the support of a peer practitioner in a symbiotic model of mutually beneficial support. Starratt (2003, 236) sums this up well:

Learning takes place through storytelling... Learning the art of storytelling provides continuous practice of the grammar and rhetoric not only of one's language but also of the construction of one's life. Listening to the stories of others allows bridges to be built across the existential and cultural distances between the other. Their stories reveal the common human journey...nurture the development of imagination and the use of images and metaphors for understanding the human and natural worlds. Most of all, storytelling provides a foundation for conveying and exploring meaning...

Data collection for this research has captured the leadership stories of practitioners through semi-structured interviews that have encouraged guided reflection on the leadership journey, its meaning and purpose and the value system that has motivated and defined it. Interviews have had a

reflective focus on critical incidents within individual leadership stories, stressing that such incidents are not necessarily of high level (although many selected by participants clearly were) but were of significance to the teller. In the daily life of the school leader, ‘incidents’ happen all the time but they only come to be regarded as ‘critical’ when those involved attach a particular significance to them, a significance engendered because the individual’s value system has been put to the test, and from which leadership learning is seen to have occurred. As Tripp (1993, 8) has put it:

Incidents happen, but critical incidents are produced by the way we look at a situation: a critical incident is an interpretation of the significance of an event. To take something as a critical incident is a value judgement we make, and the basis of that judgement is the significance we attach to the meaning of the incident.

Tripp (1993) suggests that a focus on such incidents in a structured and reflective way can facilitate the development of a personal ‘grounded theory’ (Glaser and Strauss 1967) which allows increased understanding to emerge from the analysis of the data revealed in story. In the interviews conducted for this research, the use of the metaphor ‘reservoirs of hope’ has both met this point by encouraging reflection on and analysis of critical incidents of significance to the practitioner, but also Starratt’s point (2003, 13) referred to previously, that the use of images and metaphors can particularly promote understanding. From such analysis of leadership story can be drawn details of the effectiveness of the support and sustainability strategies used by practitioners in various school contexts in coping with both critical incidents and the equally challenging cumulative effects of day-to-day pressures.

4.2. An overview of the layout of the book

Chapter One: Outline of a study of spiritual and moral leadership

This chapter has set the scene for such an analysis of leadership story. It has identified in outline the concept of ‘secular spirituality’ as ‘a lived faith’, so that spiritual and moral leadership can be conceived of as ‘a lived faith in action’, a concept which can be used to engage in a discussion of such spiritual and moral leadership with practitioners of whatever faith perspective. It has indicated the perceived potential value of guided reflection in capturing from such discussions the detail of leadership story, and in particular the potential power of the metaphor ‘reservoirs of hope’ in facilitating such reflection by offering a ready visualisation of leadership

behaviours and motivations. It has set out a conceptual framework based on the ‘why’, ‘how’ and ‘what’ aspects of leadership, which will be applied throughout the remainder of the book.

Chapter Two: Leadership and spirituality

This chapter reviews the literature in order to locate the research within the present canon of writings on school leadership and spirituality. It considers first various types of leadership in order to locate spiritual and moral leadership within a typography of leadership styles. It then explores definitions of spirituality in order to reach a generic concept of spirituality as “a lived faith” (Wakefield 2000, 686) from which can be developed the operational definition of spiritual and moral leadership as ‘a lived faith in action’ used throughout this book. Applying the overarching conceptual framework, it can be shown that this definition can be broken down into three components: faith as meaning which informs values (the ‘why’); living as relationships informed by language (the ‘how’); and the actions and experiences which inform the leadership story (the ‘what’) and how this can be related to leadership identity and personal authenticity. The concepts of leadership and spirituality are then brought together in a consideration of the spiritual and moral leadership of headteachers and the value of practitioner reflection on experience, facilitated through the medium of metaphor and story.

Chapter Three: Reservoirs of hope

In this chapter, the first of the three data chapters drawing on practitioner interviews that capture the leadership stories of headteachers, the focus is on the metaphor ‘reservoirs of hope’, arguing that spiritual and moral leadership is motivated by a spirituality of hope which results in an espoused value system which is sustained by reflection opportunities and underpinned by networks of belief and support, and which emanates in strategies to cope with critical incidents, day-to-day pressures and the vulnerabilities of school leadership over time. It contrasts virtues, the eternal verities that underpin existence, with contextual values and pragmatic vision. It considers how these are laid down in upbringing, formed by experience and influenced by habitus, habitat and hinterland, and how they are tested by critical incidents encompassing community tragedies, personnel problems and organisational crises. It identifies three categories of headteachers who have left headship early either as ‘striders’, ‘strollers’ or ‘stumblers’, and postulates a new category of ‘sprinter’ post-