Exploring spirituality in the teacher-leadership role of mentoring through collaborative action research

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Abstract

This paper reports on a collaborative action research project exploring spirituality in teacher-leadership through the life-world of a New Zealand Christian school principal. The participant focused on the teacher-leadership role of mentoring colleagues towards more effective teaching practices and improvement in the Christian culture of the school community. The findings show that mentoring is a long term relational commitment that remains faithful to the Christian vision and values of the school. By modelling humility, compassion and a godly resolve to encourage quality Christian education, the principal witnessed transformation in teachers' practice and the culture of the learning community.

Introduction

Spirituality in educational leadership has received renewed interest in New Zealand and internationally in the past decade (Wellman, Perkins & Wellman, 2009; Gibson, 2014b; Ramirez, 2009). Tisdell (2001), an American professor of education and an educational researcher says,

> *Spirituality is one of the ways people construct knowledge and meaning. It works in consort with the affective, the rational or cognitive, and the unconscious and symbolic domains. To ignore it, particularly in how it relates to teaching for personal and social transformation, is to ignore an important aspect of human experience and avenue of learning and meaning-making.*
>
> (p. 2)

The current New Zealand Curriculum document (Ministry of Education, 2007), continues this tradition by acknowledging the importance of spiritual well-being within the Health and Physical Education learning area. Specifically, it refers to a Maori term,

'taha wairua', literally meaning '*the spirit*', within the concept of 'hauora' or holistic well-being, which is said to lie "at the heart of this learning area" (p. 22). This curriculum document also emphasises values that are to be "encouraged, modelled and explored" (MOE, 2007, p. 10). The document states, "students will learn about different kinds of values, such as moral, social, cultural, aesthetic and economic values" (MOE, 2007, p. 10). Values are also widely acknowledged in literature as an integral aspect of people's meaning making of spirituality (Conrad & Brown, 2006; Gibson, 2011a).

It is also noteworthy that the Education Council New Zealand, Code of Ethics for Certificated Teachers (2015, p. 1), states that teachers will among other things, "promote the physical, emotional, social, intellectual and *spiritual* well-being of learners." These examples of state education literature take an inclusive view of what spirituality means, reflecting the pluralistic, religious and secular nature of New Zealand society. These background considerations support the pre-supposition that spirituality in teacher-leadership remains a meaningful and relevant topic for today's schools.

Spirituality in teacher leadership

Following research into spirituality in principal leadership (Gibson, 2011c), spirituality in *teacher-leadership* within *Christian schools* has emerged as an under-researched topic within our national education system. Spirituality is a complex and controversial human phenomenon with widely differing philosophical, sacred and secular arguments being presented in the literature (Waaijman, 2002). From a theoretical perspective the author does not conflate religion with spirituality. However, for many people spirituality is juxtaposed with religious, ontological and epistemological meanings and in part, defined by their socialisation within religious organisations (Gibson, 2011c). This article takes an inclusive stance that spirituality can include theistic, supernatural and transcendent

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understandings linked to religious beliefs and sacred text. This pre-supposition is in contrast to a humanistic world-view, which excludes the existence of theistic and supernatural reality (American Humanist Association, 2003).

There is a growing body of literature which explores theoretical and experiential dimensions to spiritual leadership (Flintham, 2003; Fry, 2005; Woods, 2007; Walker & McPhail, 2009). This paper asserts an important distinction between spirituality *in* leadership, and spiritual leadership. As such, spirituality in leadership invites teacher-leaders to "integrate personal meanings of spirituality into their preferred leadership practice in appropriate ways for their own well-being and the well-being of everyone in their school community" (Gibson, 2011c, p. 39). This does not imply perfection and acknowledges that mistakes can be valuable contexts for spirituality in leadership to be developed and expressed (Gibson, 2014a).

> *This paper asserts an important distinction between spirituality **in** leadership and spiritual leadership.*

In terms of leadership, there are numerous types and styles that might characterise a teacher-leader and these have been well documented in the literature for several decades. For example: servant-leadership, moral and authentic leadership, relational and transformational leadership (Beattie, 2002; Branson, 2007; Burch, Swails & Mills, 2015; Dyer, 2001; Quin, Deris, Bischoff & Johnson, 2015). It is important to note that such leadership styles are not completely distinct, for they share common characteristics. They also inter-connect with discourse on spirituality in leadership in their beliefs, values and intentions. Dent, Higgins and Wharff, (2005, p. 628) claim there are "many similarities between workplace spirituality theory and leadership theory" based on the fact that there are many "dynamic dimensions or contexts for describing and measuring the phenomenon that closely resemble one another."

Furthermore, teacher-leadership may be engaged through a number of strands. For example, through modelling the way in a curriculum area, managing student behaviour and restorative justice processes, mapping out the curriculum for a team, moulding the climate and culture of the school community, mediating between disaffected people, mentoring colleagues and students, building a sense of membership among teams and syndicates, and ministering to pastoral needs of people within the organisation (Gibson, 2011a). Through such strands teacher-leadership contributes towards shaping and influencing teaching colleagues, school policies and programmes, student participation and performance, and the organisational culture and climate of the school community.

Principals also engage in teacher-leadership roles directly through mentoring and indirectly by providing effective leadership in administrative and management practices, provision of timely and appropriate professional development for teachers, and in building a cohesive successful school learning community (Gibson, 2011a). Spirituality in teacher-leadership therefore, can have multiple, situated meanings interwoven through the personal and professional beliefs, values, attitudes and actions of participants as they enact and embody their praxis in the life of the school (Ramirez, 2009).

Within Christian school contexts, spirituality in teacher-leadership implies living the virtues and dispositions of a disciple of the Lord Jesus (Matthew 16:24; Acts 11:26). It also implies that Christian teacher-leaders will authentically integrate into their practice biblical Christian teachings (Van Brummelen, 2009). These assumptions are supported within the biblical story. For example, Galatians 5:22-25 refers to walking in and bearing the fruit of the Holy Spirit, and 2 Peter 1:5-8 emphasises seven characteristics followers of Christ are enjoined to diligently add to their faith. Furthermore, the desire to integrate Christian spirituality into teacher-leadership would ideally be motivated by love and service to God (Matthew 22:37), to walk worthy of the Lord Jesus (Colossians 1:10), and to encourage others to be Christ-minded (Philippians 2:1-16).

Mentoring teachers

Mentoring of teachers is understood in the research literature as a reciprocal, relational and reflective process which may be formal or informal, one-on-one, collaborative and even a community endeavour (Bynum, 2015; Newby & Heide, 2013). Shillingstad, McGlamery, Davis and Gilles (2015, p. 2) write, "Teacher leaders who step into the role of mentor face significant responsibilities. Within these multifaceted roles, mentors encounter triumphs and challenges." Mentoring teachers is complex, as each teacher is unique with unique contextual variables in terms of their professional experiences, current teaching responsibilities, knowledge, skills and dispositions. The levels of support, guidance, and direction, as well as the ways in which mentoring might occur, will therefore need to be differentiated. Yet there will be times when mentors can model pedagogy or inquiry processes within a group setting.

Mentoring teachers is different to teaching children and requires an awareness of the adult learning approaches. The value of mentoring of teachers on student learning outcomes is supported in the literature (e.g. Newby & Heide, 2013). Power

relationships, motivational factors, and the mentor approach (whether authoritarian or democratic), will also impact on the engagement of the mentee (Wolfensperger, 2010).

Research methodology and design

Methodologically, this research project is understood within an interpretive, constructivist paradigm of how knowledge is derived. It includes aspects of phenomenology, in which Laverty (2003, p. 8) observes, "the biases and assumptions of the researcher are *not* bracketed or set aside, but rather are embedded as essential in the interpretive process." Interpretivism links well with the systematic, cyclical, dialogical and reflective process embedded within action research. It recognises the subjective, co-constructed meanings developed between the researcher and practitioner. This research is also a qualitative inquiry. Denzin and Lincoln (2006, p. 3) say, "qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them."

As a method of inquiry, the development of action research (AR) as a theory is attributed to Kurt Lewin in the 1940s (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010). Action research is best understood as a flexible, recursive, iterative and spiralling inquiry process (Bognar, 2009; Pine, 2009). It is designed to engage participants with their own needs, leading to valued insights and improved professional practice. It asks participants to be intentional, systematic, ethical, vulnerable, and have a psychological and spiritual readiness for transformation (Stringer, 2007). According to Kinsler (2010, p. 173), *educational* action research, "has multiple forms and levels that permit a range of possible design capabilities."

The particular collaborative action research (CAR) model presented to the principal participant was informed by a range of literature (Shula & Wilson, 2003), and is best described as flexible, first-person, technical and practical action research. Kinsler (2010) says,

> Technical AR is orientated toward functional improvement measured in terms of success in changing particular outcomes of practice... Practical AR seeks to improve practice through the development of personal wisdom derived from true and reasoned deliberation.
>
> (p. 174)

The researcher also added the concept of the participant engaging in discussion with a trusted critical friend or colleague to assist in interpreting and evaluating ideas and issues. Referring to critical collegiality Pine (2009) asserts:

> It is important to engage colleagues in a process of collaborative inquiry to advance the developing research effort. Particular colleagues may be enlisted at the beginning of the research for a variety of reasons—because they are especially sensitive to emerging problems, or are creative and have ideas about how educational issues might be addressed, or are skilled in problem definition, or are greatly interested in a particular issue.
>
> (p. 235)

The author's role was to facilitate participant engagement in the action research process, inviting the principal to choose an area of teacher-leadership too that was relevant and appropriate. The collaborative role extended into explaining the action research intentions, conducting semi-structured interviews, assisting in the refinement of the action plan, providing feedback on the participant's reflective journaling, collating and co-constructing the meaning of the data, and reporting on the outcomes. In these ways CAR is characterised as dialogical and reflexive, focused on understanding and reframing praxis—the intersection of beliefs and professional practice (Pellerin & Nogués, 2015). This approach links with Whitehead's (2008) living theory methodology which emphasises the importance of each individual's experience in improving practice and generating knowledge.

Data was gathered from the participant in two 60 minute semi-structured interviews. One interview took place at the beginning of the project to understand the participant's personal and contextual meanings of spirituality in their diverse teacher-leadership roles. A second interview was undertaken at the end of the project to understand the participant's experiences and to obtain critical incidents that illustrated engagement with spirituality in teacher-leadership. Reflective e-journaling was encouraged throughout the research period. Emailed communication kept the relationship connected, enabling updates on the participant's progress and thinking. The researcher also provided feedback on ideas and where appropriate, forwarded articles on the topics the participant was interested in.

The field-work took place over three school terms. The credibility of this qualitative inquiry is supported through the triangulation of the research design and the participant selection process. Visiting the participant twice for interviews enriched my appreciation of the school community context. The online reflective journaling and email communication enlarged and enriched the data set available for interpretation. The participant was able to check the interview transcripts and the veracity of the

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research report. Furthermore, the participant followed the action research process in a thorough and systematic way, involving critical reflective thinking, data gathering and analysis, consultation with a critical friend, action planning and evaluation. Cognisance of clarified theoretical perspectives about spirituality in teacher leadership situated within Christian school contexts, shaped the participant's responses.

Due to the busyness of teachers' and principals' work-lives, the time committed to the project was strategically positioned as professional development in the participant's work plan for the year. In support of this approach Pine (2009) considers,

> Enacting change is not easy. It requires time, patience, sound planning, communication, and implementation skills. So, in establishing a foundation for action research, I believe that modest beginnings are no disgrace and in most respects, preferable to ambitious ones. The visibility and impact of early efforts may be small, but it is advisable to consider carefully the relative merits of simple versus more intricate research plans and data analysis procedures.
>
> (p. 235)

Participant recruitment and demographics

The researcher received ethical approval from Bethlehem Tertiary Institute to conduct the research in 2012. Recruitment letters of invitation were sent to a sample of 17 Christian schools in New Zealand, chosen for their size and practical accessibility to the researcher. Four people within three non-denominational Christian school contexts in New Zealand accepted and were recruited to participate. Due to the unique personal and in situ variables, this report focuses on one of the participants, an experienced principal (referred to as Participant 1) serving in an established Christian school community.

Findings and discussion

Participant 1 is an experienced school principal and a mature Christian, who described spirituality in teacher-leadership as:

> Jesus' command to love God and to love your neighbour as you love yourself... In teacher leadership our goal is to be able to support each other in community to be doing that more effectively and to be modelling... being an example of us seeking to do that well and building that in our student body and in the wider community... you can't measure what's happening in the heart and soul, you can just observe the fruit of it.
>
> (P1, interview 1)

The principal chose to explore spirituality in teacher-leadership through the complex and

> *... to enquire about my effectiveness in developing and embedding these values [referring to the school's values] in myself, in our teachers and in our students*

challenging process of *mentoring* teachers, a role that relates to the Christian concept of discipleship (Matthew 28:19). Believing mentoring was a priority, this principal positioned the role and process as a relational and reciprocal form of professional development within the school. The over-arching focus of the action research according to the principal was

> … to enquire about my effectiveness in developing and embedding these values [referring to the school's values] in myself, in our teachers and in our students, as I feel this is something I want to improve on in my own practice.
>
> (P1, personal communication)

This over-arching focus was integrated into the action research process by gathering data from the staff including through a questionnaire. Staff responded to several questions, the first being, "How can I [as principal] best support you as a teacher to live and teach in a way that inspires our students to personally own our school values?" The remaining questions invited the teachers to give feedback on the things they would like to see the principal continue doing, start doing, or stop doing, in terms of supporting them to embody the school's values.

The principal demonstrated to staff through the use of the questionnaire, a willingness to be vulnerable and open to learning. Modelling life-long learning was an intentional authentic strategy to build credibility and a trusted learning-focused relationship with teachers. The principal explained,

> I have asked them to do a reflection on my leadership and sent it to them...
> and I have been deliberately open and vulnerable because I want to model that
>
> (P1, personal communication)

The principal's spirituality was again highlighted at the end of this questionnaire by linking the purpose of the inquiry to Jesus' teaching in Matthew 7:3-14 about self-evaluation preceding the fixing of problems in other people's lives—an important attribute of a mentor. The principal wrote, "*am committed to growing, and can't do that without understanding the logs in my own eye, and I appreciate your honesty about both the good and the bad*" (P1, personal communication). This approach models humility, communicating to colleagues that Christian teaching is not about perfection but more about a growth mind-set, and a desire to improve through collegial fellowship.

The questionnaire was a helpful data gathering instrument at the commencement of the action research process. However, there are ethical

issues about teacher-leaders conducting their *own* evaluative questionnaires due to the power relationships between the mentor and those being mentored. Notwithstanding, in this case the principal believed that by modelling openness and vulnerability, it helped to nurture collegial trust in the process ahead. Paul wrote to the Ephesians linking this virtue with corporate growth: "But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ" (Ephesians 4:15).

The principal's action plan following on from this questionnaire was complex as the mentoring role involved working relationally and responsively one-on-one, with each of the teacher's diverse needs. One of the important ingredients for successful mentoring is confidentiality. For that reason many personal and professional details of the mentoring experience are not available for inclusion in this publication. Notwithstanding, the principal in the role of mentoring needed to work through quite diverse scenarios in a professional manner. The principal described how these scenarios afforded opportunities to critically reflect, to walk carefully through each problem, to seek counsel from others, to pray, to process a range of personal feelings and to be resilient.

The findings showed that the principal's spirituality in teacher leadership was woven through a range of mentoring strategies. These included clarifying expectations with teachers, providing teachers with the tools to support their management responsibilities, and encouraging open and honest professional reflective writing. The idea behind reflective journaling was to encourage teachers to self-critique their praxis—the intersection between beliefs and professional practice.

The principal's spirituality in mentoring was further illustrated through modelling restorative justice processes to the teachers as a way of compassionately and holistically working with student behaviour issues. The focus being not on revenge and punishment, but, "how we can bring change in the offender and some of that is loving themselves and some of that is loving others in terms of our school values" (P1, interview 2). Compassion is a characteristic of God (Psalm 145:8), being exemplified through the life of the Son of God (Matthew 9:36; 14:14). Christians are enjoined to be compassionate towards one another (1 Peter 3:8) and compassion can be instrumental in "making a difference" in people's lives (Jude 1:22).

The principal described a critical incident in which compassionate mentoring was shown towards a staff member who was suffering deterioration in health. The principal helped the teacher understand and process the situation by being caring, patient and consulting with others. The principal described the need to respect the person's 'dignity' and explained how the mentoring process was undertaken with integrity.

> *I have sought quite a lot of advice from different people about how to process things with _____and I have really tried to be gentle with _____ , to be honest.*
>
> (P1, interview 2)

Another practical example of spirituality in the teacher-leadership was the principal encouraging teachers to explore using a more student-led approach to devotion times. The principal said the aim was, "*not to be talking at kids all the time about God but to try to engage the kids and get the kids asking questions ...a more inquiry approach*" (P1, interview 2). The principal believed these mentoring strategies and practical examples contributed towards improving the teaching and learning across the school. This was supported in the data by several incidents in which the principal's mentoring was affirmed by staff members.

Undertaking action research on the topic of mentoring teachers, even in a Christian school context, was not easy for the principal. Pine (2009, p. 236) maintains, "It is good to remember that action research can be messy." Significant professional issues arose during the journey that needed to be carefully considered. Reflecting on these issues the principal demonstrated the integral nature of spirituality in teacher-leadership.

> *We live in a fallen world... it's not about what's happened, it's about how we respond to it and stuff happens unfortunately. That's why we need God and why we need forgiveness and why we need grace... and why we need help.*
>
> (P1, interview 2)

The findings showed that mentoring teachers was a holistic and transcendent endeavour requiring a sense of drawing on God's help, drawing on personal resilience and crafted wisdom from previous experience. At the end of the year, the journey was described with mixed emotions. On the one hand, it was an "*extremely difficult year*" and on the other, "*Term 4 has been the best—and there has been an absence of stress within the staff*" (P1, personal communication). Reflecting on the experiences, the principal expressed a sense of optimism and peace in being called to the role, and a confidence in God's sovereign work in the bigger picture—the life of the school community.

We live in a fallen world... it's not about what's happened, it's about how we respond to it and stuff happens unfortunately.

I do enjoy it... I actually hate broken relationships. That's what it's all about at the moment, trying to bring the community back. I believe I'm called here and I think God knows what he's doing... .

(P1, interview 2)

This case study of a principal exploring spirituality in the role of mentoring teachers is a 'work in progress'. The complexities of the individual circumstances and needs of the teachers meant the principal didn't feel a sense of closure or fulfillment of the goals that were hoped for at the beginning. At the conclusion of the action research process the principal said,

I feel as though I'm not the best case-study for the action research because you've got what my hope is and you've got what happened, but there's not necessarily been that clear link between them in some scenarios.

(P1, interview 2)

> **Exercising spirituality in professional practice doesn't guarantee fair weather and plain sailing.**

This evaluative feedback affirms that the outcomes of action research can be incomplete when the end of the collaborative research period arrives. It certainly supports the idea that action-research includes successive on-going cycles.

Synthesis of the findings

Spirituality **in** leadership, invites leaders to integrate personal meanings of spirituality into their preferred leadership practice in appropriate ways for their own well-being and the well-being of everyone in their school community. This does not imply perfection and acknowledges that challenging and difficult circumstances can be valuable contexts for spirituality to be developed and expressed. Mentoring implies a relational, reciprocal and reflective process; one that is respectful and responsive to the individual needs of the mentee. The findings of this qualitative research provide descriptive insight into a principal's spirituality in mentoring teachers towards more effective pedagogy and a stronger Christian culture in the life of the school. In Figure 1 the textural data is synthesised into five key areas. They affirm the literature discussed pertaining to relational, authentic and transformational leadership (Beattie, 2002; Burch, Swails, & Mills, 2015; Quin, Deris, Bischoff & Johnson, 2015) and relational, responsive and reflective, differentiated mentoring (Bynum, 2015; Newby & Heide, 2013; Wolfensperger, 2010).

Firstly, spirituality in teacher-leadership for this participant did not emerge from a vacuum. Rather it was believed to derive from considerable personal and professional experience or crafted wisdom, and in response to significant needs within the school community. Jesus as a teacher was responsive to the needs of people within the contexts in which he lived. He taught people to be responsive to their neighbours through the story of the Samaritan who, as he journeyed came across the man half dead beside the road and "when he saw him, he had compassion on him" (Luke 10:33).

Secondly, the participant's spirituality was described as interwoven within a revised strategic vision for the school, which included strengthening pedagogical effectiveness and fostering a greater consistency in living out Christian values within the life of the school. Christian schools are vulnerable to losing their special character over time. Christian spirituality is vulnerable, something that needs to be protected and encouraged (Ephesians 6: 10-18).

Thirdly, the participant described the mentoring process as modelling and guiding the way for colleagues. This concept links with the spirituality of Jesus of whom Acts 1:1 says, of all that he began to "both do and teach." Paul the apostle of the Lord Jesus expressed it this way, "Those things which you have both learned and received, heard and seen in me, do..." (Philippians 4:9). Of particular note was the participant's spirituality expressed through a growth mind-set. Various writers of the epistles in the New Testament exhort readers to grow. For example, 1 Thessalonians 4:1, "Furthermore then we beseech you, brothers, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as you have received of us how you ought to walk and to please God, so you would *abound more and more*."

Fourthly, the participant's spirituality in mentoring was characterised by relational, supportive and ethical practices. These practices included clarification on expectations, provision of tools to help teachers engage with change, discreet consultation, care towards staff who might find the process challenging or be facing personal difficulties, and self-control in the face of criticism or resistance. These characteristics of the participant's mentoring echo expectations of spiritual life recorded in the scriptures. For example, Galatians 5:22-23 says, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance... ." Jesus also promised relational support for the disciples via the Holy Spirit to enable them to be equipped to be agents of transformation (John 14:26).

Fifthly, the participant's self-evaluation of the outcomes of the teaching mentoring process was mixed; some success and cause for joy, some on-going areas for growth, with the entire process being messy and challenging. Exercising spirituality in professional practice doesn't guarantee fair weather and plain sailing. Jesus experienced

difficulties teaching people in the early part of his public ministry where it is recorded in John 6:66, "From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him." The ability to remain resilient is an important feature of Christian spirituality. In 1 Corinthians 15:58 Paul concludes his extensive mentoring of the believers at Corinth with the admonition to be "steadfast unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain."

Nuanced insights

There were unique critical incidences that arose in the mentoring process during the year. Due to ethical considerations around the sensitivity of these specific mentor/mentee stories, details cannot be described. Suffice to say that they were believed to have been worked through with professional wisdom, care and patience. The concept of having a 'critical friend' to support the principal through the action research process was also believed to be helpful in critically reflecting on decisions. To assist with specific needs, the principal did draw upon professional resources.

1. Spirituality in teacher-leadership *informed by*	personal spiritual life in Christ, crafted wisdom derived from leadership experience within Christian schools, teacher and student needs within the current school community.
2. Spirituality in teacher-leadership *interwoven through*	strategic vision to build a more cohesive learning community around core Christian values and effective pedagogical practices.
3. Spirituality in teacher-leadership *modelled through*	personal integrity, a growth mind-set, vulnerability to critical feedback, and encouraging colleagues to undergo a similar process.
4. Spirituality in teacher-leadership *characterised by*	relationality, provision of supportive tools, clarification of goals, ethical practice, care, compassion, humility, consultation, godly resolve, and self-control.
5. Spirituality in teacher-leadership *experienced as*	complex, individualised, messy at times, incomplete, on-going challenge, including prayer and faith, resilience, and perseverance.

Figure 1. Key themes identified from the action research inquiring into spirituality in teacher leadership

Prayer and faith were also described as important throughout the mentoring process. A further nuanced insight from the data was that the mentoring relationships drew upon the participant's emotional management skills and social-emotional intelligence in working collaboratively with others.

Limitations, implications and recommendations

Spirituality is a complex and contested phenomenon in the literature, with many diverse secular and sacred views reflecting our pluralistic societies. Spirituality in teacher-leadership can also have many situated meanings as teachers enact and embody their praxis in the life of a particular school (Ramirez, 2009). The qualitative findings described in this article, acknowledge the subjective and interpretive reality of the participant's experiences, and of the researcher's own knowledge and dispositions towards Christian biblical perspectives. These findings are tentative, not being generalisable to statistical populations (Check & Schutt, 2011). However, they are presented as credible and trustworthy, having been triangulated from interviews, reflective journaling and personal communications across a three term period. Together the findings show a range of practical ways that spirituality was believed by the participant to be an integral part of mentoring teachers. Further cycles of action research would be ideal to enrich the findings and to better understand the long term commitment and dynamics required to effectively mentor teachers within the life-world of a Christian school community.

Conclusion

The findings of this collaborative action research project have described how personal spirituality was intentionally integrated into the principal's teacher-leadership role of mentoring teachers. Through modelling humility and compassion combined with a godly resolve to encourage quality Christian education, the principal participant was able to see progress towards transformation in pedagogical practices and the culture of the school community. Readers will take into account that the findings are tentative and limited to a particular context. Notwithstanding, it is hoped that this study of spirituality integrated into an action research process will be useful to readers encouraging self-reflection on the degree to which their own spirituality is authentically and relationally modelled in professional practice. Overall, the findings of this project showed that mentoring is a long-term collegial commitment that remains faithful to the vision and values of the school community.

> " *the findings show a range of practical ways that spirituality was believed … to be an integral part of mentoring teachers.* "

The final word from the principal, received at the commencement of the following year, affirms the fruitfulness of this commitment.

> *This year the school is a completely different place... I can now feel creative.* (P1, personal communication). TEACH

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