

FOCUS SECTION

INTRODUCTION

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Today, leaders in our Catholic schools face tremendous pulls in several different directions. Their responsibilities have escalated over time, and their emotional and spiritual health is often challenged by daily struggles. Some will argue that spiritual well-being was implied when a vowed religious person filled the position. For the last 25 years, however, lay women and men have held positions of leadership in our schools, and they have functioned as their predecessors modeled for them.

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the release of Parker Palmer's (1998) book, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*. This book has impacted the way teachers and administrators view their ministry in Catholic education. Palmer shares his life journey, the struggles and success he has encountered, with the overarching theme of returning to a spiritual journey and an emphasis on being a whole person.

For centuries, mystics and saints have referred to their journey in the same way. In finding a place for God in their lives, they seemed to find peace in what they were doing and this allowed them to minister to others. Today, Catholic school educators have similar experiences. Although, educators may be a bit more modest and may not equate what they do to the work of mystics or saints of the past, over time we know the work they do with young children on behalf of our Church is just as important.

There is an instructive and amusing Indian fable, *The Blind Men and the Elephant* (Saxe, 1963). Four blind men had a deep desire to learn about an elephant and each wanted to better understand what this animal of God's creation was like. So the four set out to investigate this matter further and as it happened they came across an elephant. The first blind man fell into the side of the elephant and declared with great glee that an elephant was a wall. The second man, likewise fell into the elephant but this time on the tusk, and quickly declared that an elephant was a spear. The third blind man too fell into the elephant this time feeling the squirming trunk, and was convinced that an elephant was a snake. Still another blind man fell onto the elephant and this time he landed at the knee of the elephant and was sure that an elephant was a tree.

The fable illustrates the different perspectives that individuals have had about the topic of spirituality. Walking into any popular bookstore will demonstrate that the topic has grown in popularity over the years as individuals strive to give meaning to their life and work. Spirituality for those working in Catholic education, one might guess would be an easy task to define and understand, but that has proven not to be the case. Spirituality is the ability to hear and respond to the movement of God in our lives. In the series of articles in this focus section, each author approaches the topic or theme of spirituality from a different perspective.

Dr. Gini Shimabukuro, from the Institute for Catholic Educational Leadership at the University of San Francisco, teaches a course in the program entitled, "Spirituality of the Educator." Shimabukuro has developed over time a deeper sense of spirituality and its role in the life of the Catholic educator. She has written and lectured extensively on the topic of curriculum and this article blends the two together masterfully.

Dr. Judy Goodell and Fr. David Robinson, S.J., both of the University of San Francisco, expand the role of the school counselor from a medial model framework to one in which counselors could view their students as spiritual beings. Both authors have worked at blending Palmer's work with the underlying principles of the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises. The model they propose would allow the psychospiritual development of the counselor and student to emerge to a new wholeness. Thus, a sense of spirituality and personal formation could co-exist with the Catholic school community.

Dr. Deborah Bloch, a professor in the Department of Leadership Studies at the University of San Francisco, has spent recent years working with the theory of complexity science and its relationship with developing one's spirituality. This article sets the stage for understanding complexity theory and the "God Particle" in the context of soul-work.

These articles are an attempt to stretch the reader in regard to spirituality. They offer support and encouragement to continue to work at developing a personal sense of spirituality as a minister in Catholic education.

REFERENCES

- Palmer, P. (1998). *The courage to teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's life*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Saxe, J. G. (1963). *The blind men and the elephant*. New York: Whittlesey House.