

## Chapter 4

# Spirituality and Religion as Cultural Influences in Andragogy

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Spirituality and religion are important considerations for the adult learner, because with adulthood comes an increased identification with spirituality. In this chapter, the authors outline key theories and concepts related to spirituality and religion in adult learning, or andragogy. Transformative learning, reflective learning, and whole-person or experiential learning are described within the context of their relatedness to spirituality/religion in andragogy. A separate section on lifelong learning, an extension of adult learning, and multiculturalism, a social reality, are explored. Moving from the theoretical to the practical application of spirituality/religion in andragogy, several examples and worldviews of spirituality/religion outside of the Western, Judeo-Christian perspective are included, as well. Practical considerations are given for learners, instructors, and researchers on secular approaches to cultivating traits and qualities that correspond to an individual's spiritual dimension, feeling of connectedness, and overall wellbeing.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

In the PK-16 arena, particularly within the Western, industrialized context, the discourse on effective learning occurs rarely within the broader context of the role of religion or spirituality upon the learner's experience. For the adult learner, spirituality and religion are recognized increasingly as important considerations that facilitate the learning. Most theorists within the adult learning framework take it as a given that spirituality and/or religion are integral to- and enhance- the learning.

In this chapter, the authors present several key theories and concepts related to spirituality and religion in adult learning, or andragogy, as a foundation for understanding both the importance and influence of spirituality/religion for the adult learner. Although there are overlaps with lifelong learning, the chapter includes a separate section on the concept of lifelong learning as an extension of andragogy. The authors enhanced the discussions with non-Western perspectives and influences as they relate to spirituality/religion and adult learning. This is in line with Saudelli (2015), who explained the bias of Western orientations:

*In years past, many of the long-standing theories of adult learning, sociology of education and change theories have privileged Western orientations. While these theories provide a framework for thinking about higher education, with the advent of the 21st century, globalization and cross-national migration, we need to explore theories from an international lens inclusive the voices of international educators in international contexts. (p. 27)*

The turn of the 21st century marks a time of reflection on the social and technological progress experienced globally, and also by concerns about the threats to that progress as the awareness of political and religious conflict remain very palpable for the global citizen. Understanding the role of spirituality/religion as a cultural influence for the adult learner becomes even more of an imperative.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Defining the Contexts of Spirituality, Religion, and Religiosity**

The concepts of spirituality and religion/religiosity can be considered as distinct or as the same. Certain researchers within the field of adult learning, such as Woodburn and Burge (2011), took spirituality and religion as unique concepts. In this chapter, the authors take a different approach, which is to consider the terms as similar concepts. The terms *spiritual*, *spirituality* and *religion*, *religiosity* are used interchangeably within their appropriate context. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to provide an in-depth analysis comparing and contrasting religion, religious, religiosity, with spirituality, and spiritual. Herein, this chapter adopts Merriam and Bierema (2013), who explained it very concisely: spirituality in learning enables “meaning-making or knowledge construction” (p. 153).

### **Research Methods**

The majority of the writings summarized in this chapter are concentrated in the English language literature, published 2012 onward, archived within both the ProQuest and EBSCOHost databases. In

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