Chapter 4
The Mystery of Spirit:
Implications for Integrating a Spiritual Perspective in Secular Education

Robert London
California State University, San Bernardino, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter addresses how educators can integrate a spiritual perspective in secular education, describing an approach based on an integration of cognitive developmental/constructionist theory with principles of spiritual psychology consistent with a variety of spiritual traditions: an approach that provides guidelines for nurturing a healthy development in students, as well as building a strong foundation for their healthy development as an adult. However, the purpose of this chapter is not to present a comprehensive discussion of what it means to integrate a spiritual perspective in secular education, but rather to focus on concepts that are essential to integrating a spiritual perspective, but typically are not emphasized in other approaches. Specifically, the focus is on the general process implied by a transformative approach to education from a spiritual perspective, addressing three general topics: the mystery of Spirit, building a foundation for adult spiritual growth, and the need for inner work.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter addresses how educators can integrate a spiritual perspective in secular education. Specifically, this chapter describes an approach based on an integration of cognitive developmental/constructionist theory with principles of spiritual psychology consistent with a variety of spiritual traditions: an approach that provides guidelines for nurturing healthy development in children and adolescents, as well as building a strong foundation for their healthy development as an adult. The emphasis of this chapter is a spiritual perspective versus a contemplative approach. Contemplative approaches are typically based on research-based approaches linked to improvements in achievement, positive affective factors, and other improvements in student learning (e.g., Smith et al., 2018; Titone et al., 2017). The integration of these approaches in the educational process is a positive development; however, the view of this chapter

is that a significant component of a spiritual perspective, even in secular education, should focus on the transformation of *Being*. This chapter thus explores a few approaches for facilitating transformative spiritual growth appropriate for a secular setting. However, the purpose of this chapter is not to present a comprehensive discussion of what it means to integrate a spiritual perspective in secular education but rather to focus on concepts essential to integrating a spiritual perspective, but typically are not emphasized in other approaches such as contemplative approaches. Specifically, the focus is on the general process implied by a transformative approach to education from a spiritual perspective. The significance and essence of this approach is captured in a quote from the Dalai Lama concerning peace education in the forward of *Peace is every step:*

Although attempting to bring peace through the internal transformation of individuals is difficult, it is the only way . . . And I believe that love, compassion, and altruism are the fundamental basis for peace. Once these qualities are developed within an individual, he or she is then able to create an atmosphere of peace and harmony. This atmosphere can be expanded and extended from the individual . . . and eventually to the whole world (Hanh, 1991: vii).

In the following discussion, I the author will generalize from the quote that this type of transformation of *Being* is necessary to facilitate nurturing a sense of wholeness in children and adolescents. First, some terminology related to a spiritual perspective necessary to understand this chapter will be defined, then the idea of transformation understood as a spiritual process will be introduced, discussing three general topics: the mystery of Spirit, building a foundation for adult spiritual growth, and the need for inner work.

TERMINOLOGY

When discussing spirituality, we often discuss experiences that are not easily described given the subjective nature of the experiences. Even when we see commonalities in the "what and how" of our experiences, there may be fundamental differences in our explanations of the meaning of the experiences. Therefore, this chapter will limit the terminology involving spirituality to the concepts necessary to support the discussion in this chapter and omit a discussion of certain philosophical issues. Also, I the author will capitalize the defined terminology in the text to denote the usage implied by the definitions. The definitions given here are primarily influenced by the work of Bennett (e.g., London, 2016b, 2001, or Bennett, 1961, 1964) and the *Spirituality and Education Network* (e.g., London et al., 2004**).** Bennett was a spiritual teacher, a student of G. I. Gurdjieff, who furthered the work of Gurdjieff after his death and integrated the teachings of several contemporary spiritual teachers, especially from different Sufi traditions (Bennett, 1961). The definitions pertain to three distinct yet interdependent components of our experience as humans: *Spirit*, *Soul* or *Being*, and *Body* or *Function*. At some level of *Being* the three may be seen or experienced as one (Bennett, 1961). However, to understand our ordinary experiences, the division into three components is useful. The first, the world of Function, relates to the functioning of the material or conditioned world where the processes are predictable, observable, and objective. It includes the ordinary workings of thinking, feeling, and bodily movements - not what a person is, but rather what a person does.

In the second instance, we need to recognize that a component of our experience cannot be reduced to the functioning of the conditioned material world and that is a nonmaterial source of meaning and value

17 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/the-mystery-of-spirit/326683

Related Content

Exploring Bilingual Dynamics: Students' Perspectives in Islamic Studies Classrooms Across English and Arabic Medium International Schools
Syeda Rabia Tahir (2024). *International Journal of Contemporary Islamic Studies (pp. 1-12).*
www.irma-international.org/article/exploring-bilingual-dynamics/360654

Exploring Bilingual Dynamics: Students' Perspectives in Islamic Studies Classrooms Across English and Arabic Medium International Schools
Syeda Rabia Tahir (2024). *International Journal of Contemporary Islamic Studies (pp. 1-12).*
www.irma-international.org/article/exploring-bilingual-dynamics/360654

Explorations of the Links Between Multiculturalism and Religious Diversity
Surjit Singha, Ranjit Singhaand V. Muthu Ruben (2023). *The Role of Faith and Religious Diversity in Educational Practices (pp. 120-148).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/explorations-of-the-links-between-multiculturalism-and-religious-diversity/329528

FOSCE: A Scale Measuring Equanimity Defined on the Tenets of Swadharma and Its Role in Contributing to Workplace Spirituality
Banya Baruaand John Burgess (2022). *Handbook of Research on Integrating Spirituality in Modern Workplaces (pp. 186-205).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/fosce/298180

English and Arabic Language Learning Environments: Islamic Universities Undergraduates' Experiences
Noraisikin Sabani, Anita Jimmieand Hanin Naziha Hasnor (2020). *Global Perspectives on Teaching and Learning Paths in Islamic Education (pp. 178-204).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/english-and-arabic-language-learning-environments/234918