

# EDUCATIONAL IMPACT ON SPIRITUAL GROWTH: A CASE STUDY

by

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(Under the Direction of Bonnie Cramond)

## ABSTRACT

The concept of spiritual giftedness in the classroom has gained increasing attention over the course of the past decade and is evolving in the field of gifted education. Many influential people have called for action to educate children in real-world ways by promoting social capital, ethics, and wisdom (Ambrose & Cross, 2009; Gardner, 2011; Renzulli, 2011; Sternberg, 2011). Although these different topics do not encompass the totality of spirituality, they do address a similar educational philosophy of promoting the well-being of individuals and improving the overall well-being of mankind. Through the use of a case study method of a recent high school graduate, this investigation offers an overview of spiritual giftedness and how spirituality can be nurtured in the classroom.

Olivia's identification as a spiritually gifted student was based upon self-reports, teachers' observations, and anecdotal accounts that align with Torrance and Sisk's (2001) description of likely traits found in gifted individuals. In order to understand the current state of addressing the spiritual needs of children, this study also examined teacher-based philosophies that nurture spirituality, curriculum designed to enhance spiritual development, specific programs to implement, and techniques educators can employ in the classroom. The findings may be useful for practitioners in understanding techniques

to nurture the spirituality of students and in understanding spiritually gifted students.

Policymakers may find this study useful when examining school philosophies. On the college level, professors may find this study beneficial when focusing on the spiritual dimensions of educators in the classroom.

This study is presented in the form of three manuscripts to be submitted to professional journals. The first article describes characteristics, anecdotal accounts, and personal philosophies of Olivia as a spiritually gifted individual. The second article describes how teachers impacted the spiritual growth of Olivia through teaching philosophy, attitudes, and interests. The third article describes instructional techniques and extracurricular activities teachers can utilize to nurture the spiritual development of students.

**INDEX WORDS:** spiritual giftedness, teacher philosophies, writing workshop, Odyssey of the Mind, theatre and art, concept-based education, Socratic seminars, classroom meetings

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## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my twin sister, my mother, and my father. You provide such valuable love and support to all the lives you touch. You have been my inspiration in all that I do. My appreciation grows for you more and more with every moment I am on this earth.

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I would like to thank the many women who have served as valuable role models in my life: Sharon Dole, Bonnie Cramond, Julia Howard, and Connie Kowalske. Your inspiration, kindness, and encouragement have helped me to achieve so much in life. I admire your tenacity, courage, and insight. Women all over the world have benefitted from your support.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this research is to examine spirituality and its role in education. Over the course of the last decade, education has been impacted by the mandates of No Child Left Behind (Scot, Callahan, & Urquhart, 2009). These mandates were developed in a manner where a great deal of emphasis is placed on standardized test scores because the outcome can be viewed in a concrete manner (Miller, 2005). Assessment of student growth is necessary, but in the attempt to reach the demands of documenting student growth, many schools across the nation have created learning environments where the focus is solely on the attainment of achieving these scores, where the students have become empty vessels to be filled with test-taking strategies (Scot et al., 2009). The essence of connecting with individuals in a human way has become devalued (Miller, 2005).

Prior research in this field of study has focused on defining spiritual intelligence, measuring the growth of spiritual intelligence, creating instruments to identify spiritually gifted students, and in understanding how teachers evoke a sense of spirituality in their classrooms. Further research in gifted education in this vein can be seen through *The GoodWork Project* (Gardner, 2011), *WICS* (Sternberg, 2011) and *Operation Houndstooth* (Renzulli, 2011). This investigation used a case study approach to explore spiritually nurturing influences as interpreted by a recent high school graduate who has been recognized as spiritually gifted.

## **The Problem**

### **Demands of Standardized-Testing**

The demands teachers face are high, with their performance evaluated according to student results on end-of-the-year standardized tests (Scot et. al, 2009). Throughout the school year, teachers utilize benchmark assessments, various evaluation programs, and highly structured instructional techniques to focus on growth in the areas of reading and math (Scot et al., 2009). With such an emphasis on standardized test scores, where do teachers find the time to nurture the spiritual development of children?

### **Prescribed Curriculum**

In reaction to the pressures and demands to achieve desired test scores, many school systems have implemented prescribed curriculum, mandatory instructional methods, or rigorous pacing guides (Miller, 2010). Many of these offer only a surface-level opportunity for students to delve into the concepts or ideas beneath the facts on the page (Scot et al., 2009). According to Miller (2010) students suffer from a lack of time for discussing ideas and making connections to self, others, and the world. Teachers suffer because they may no longer have a sense of ownership in the classroom. Their classroom procedures and direction of study may no longer be ones they develop or implement. Creativity diminishes, passions fade, and the desires that drew teachers into the classroom are no longer nurtured (Miller, 2010).

### **Spiritual Awareness and Gifted Education**

Roeper (2008), who initiated the Global Awareness Network of the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC), explained that as global awareness continues to evolve, it will focus on universal awareness. As Roeper described her past seventy years

serving gifted children, she recounted the details that led her to this conclusion, which included compelling experiences with her students who had pressing questions and curiosity about existence, birth, death, and the meaning of life. They had an awareness of their intellectual, emotional, and spiritual reality.

Roeper explained that although our world is limited by our senses, her students understood the realities beyond their own. Roeper's students questioned the mysteries that surrounded them and their relationships and places in the world. Roeper proposed that we should envision spirituality as a part of our reality and learn to trust the unknown. If it is seen as an essential part of our world, viewpoints would change remarkably. Roeper offered that a strong sense of self can help children as they struggle with the complexities of life and enable them with the power to make positive choices as they deal with difficult issues and ideas.

### **Leaders in Gifted Education**

The concept of spiritual awareness in the classroom is evolving in the field of gifted education. Wisdom, ethics, and social capital are important topics to consider as schools work to develop curriculum that addresses the whole child (Ambrose & Cross, 2009; Gardner, 2011; Renzulli, 2011; Sternberg, 2011). By utilizing tenets from these practices, schools can implement programs or philosophies that emphasize the importance of respect, understanding, self-reflection, compassion, and concern for issues that impact the world.

## **Review of the Literature**

### **International Association of Children's Spirituality**

A growing interest in spirituality is evident through the International Association of Children's Spirituality, which was launched at the 7<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Children's Spirituality in 2006. The association's goals are to promote research and practice in relation to children's spirituality and raise awareness of children's spirituality as an important educational focus within wider contexts. The association publishes *The International Journal of Children's Spirituality*. The journal, launched in 1996, provides an international and multicultural forum for researchers interested in what is meant by spirituality, the development of children's spirituality, and its significance to schooling and society.

### **Advanced Development Journal**

In 2009, the *Advanced Development Journal*, designed to address adult giftedness, devoted an entire issue to spirituality and giftedness. The articles delved into the definition of spiritual intelligence as awareness of expanded realities, research into beliefs and consciousness, spirituality in young children and remembered childhood spiritual experiences. Other pieces included spiritual intelligence and dreamwork, Shamanic and kundalini experiences, and existentially based therapy for gifted clients.

### **Leaders in the Field of Gifted Education**

**Operation Houndstooth.** Joseph Renzulli's (2011) work in Operation Houndstooth reflects his evolving theories on social capital. Operation Houndstooth explores the co-cognitive factors of optimism, courage, romance with a topic, sensitivity to human concerns, physical/mental energy, and vision/sense of destiny. These co-

cognitive factors interact with cognitive traits and development. Overarching themes or outcomes include wisdom, a satisfying lifestyle, and the pursuit of happiness in regard to diversity, balance, harmony, and proportion. The backdrop for the model was based on the question of why some people utilize their interpersonal, political, ethical and moral realms of being in such a way as to better humanity as opposed to seeking power or feeding the ego in a quest for material gain or self-indulgence. As schools help to nurture and develop society's future leaders, the co-cognitive components must be incorporated into the process and help in the same regard as cognitive development. Renzulli described the importance for students to examine their individual abilities, interests and learning styles and to explore areas of potential involvement based on their interests.

**The GoodWork Project.** Gardner (2011) described how his evolving interest in morality, wisdom, goodness and ever-growing concern for ethics in the marketplace spurred his contributions to the GoodWork Project where students investigate ethical issues they may encounter in their future careers or in their roles as citizens. His work in this area has evolved over the past fifteen years and is based on what he calls the 3 E's: technical Excellence, being Engaged in the world, and working in a way that is Ethical. He attributed a focus on standardized testing and promoting the pursuit of material wealth as factors that undermine the outcomes of a strong society. He suggested that the definition of school success must be redefined in order to promote the well-being of individuals and encourage their contributions to creating a compassionate society.

**WICS (Wisdom, Intelligence, Creativity, Synthesized).**

Over the past decade, Sternberg (2011) has developed his theory on wisdom, whereby an individual uses both skills and knowledge to benefit the common good. The

group's larger interests are considered through ethical values. Sternberg (2012) analyzed the process of acting in an ethical manner as an eight-step process:

1. Recognize there is an event to which to react.
2. Define the event as having an ethical dimension.
3. Decide that the ethical dimension is significant.
4. Take personal responsibility for generating an ethical solution to the problem.
5. Figure out what abstract ethical rule(s) might apply to the problem.
6. Decide how these abstract ethical rules actually apply to the problem so as to suggest a concrete solution.
7. Prepare to counteract contextual forces that might lead one not to act in an ethical manner.
8. Act.

To further his research findings, Sternberg created a series of tests to measure his theory, which he calls *Wisdom, Intelligence, Creativity, Synthesized* (WICS). He has developed educational strategies by combining creative, analytical, practical, and wise thinking strategies. He has also created assessments to gauge the effectiveness of these strategies (Sternberg, 2008). Tests at Yale and Tufts have found that supplementing the college-admissions assessments with these tools increases prediction of successful academic performance and participation in extracurricular activities among students, while at the same time, reducing or eliminating ethnic differences in test scores.

**Connecting ethics with high ability.** Ambrose & Cross (2009) described the importance of creating an interdisciplinary connection between ethics and high ability. Through the study of ethics, conceptions of right conduct, and the nuances of moral behavior were analyzed. These findings were investigated in the study of high ability

individuals through the nature and dynamics of giftedness, talent development, creativity, and intelligence. Researchers contributing work to this edited volume were from diverse fields: gifted education, creative studies, social sciences, humanities, and natural sciences. Their findings offered practical ideas and research-based insights into how positive ethical dispositions can be nurtured in high ability individuals. Table 1.1 outlines possible applications in schools for promoting Social Capital, ethics, and wisdom.

### **School-based Philosophies**

Several school environments have been developed with an emphasis on promoting the spiritual growth of students. In 2009, Toronto's Whole Child School was founded. Whole Child Education (Miller, 2005) incorporates spirituality into the curriculum in order to awaken students to a sense of wonder and awe, while deepening a sense of connection with the cosmos. The wholeness of the child is acknowledged with the aim of understanding wisdom, nurturing compassion, and helping students develop a sense of purpose in their lives. The material is investigated in a holistic fashion where the teacher utilizes numerous strategies to make learning personally and socially meaningful. Table 1.2 outlines the connections encouraged in the school.

In a similar fashion, Reggio Emilia Schools emphasizes a holistic approach where children have control over their own learning. Allowing students to learn through experiences is an essential component with emphasis placed on open-ended discovery, problem-solving, play, self-expression, guided exploration, and the use of long-term projects. Developing relationships between students is heavily emphasized as is allowing for a multitude of ways for children to express themselves.



Montessori Schools utilize *cosmic education* where students are introduced to the context of ideas situated within the whole where students connect to nature and find their own purpose on earth (Miller, 2010, p. 48). Emphasis is placed on independence, freedom within limits, and a respect for a child's psychological development. Students are encouraged to have a sense of reverence for life and care for the earth through the development of gratitude. Discovery learning and hands-on activities are utilized during uninterrupted blocks of time.

The Waldorf Schools use a humanistic approach where learning is interdisciplinary. It incorporates elements that are practical, artistic, and conceptual. Creativity and imagination are highly valued, and an overall goal is to help develop moral responsibility. The schools aim to help students fulfill their unique destinies. Teachers are responsible for defining the curriculum, and they loop with the students. The development of abstract thought is utilized to encourage social responsibility, and there is a heavy emphasis on spirituality. The Waldorf School curriculum is now offered in over 70 countries (Kates & Harvey, 2010, xii).

### **Curriculum and Programs**

Other work in this field can be seen through the development of curricular units of study to nurture spirituality (Cottingham, 2005; de Souza, 2006), techniques to nurture spiritual development such as global learning, the Future Problem Solving Program, and community service programs (Terry, Bohneberger, Renzulli, Cramond, & Sisk, 2008; Terry, 2008), and professional development opportunities for educators (Kessler, 2000; Miller, 2005). In 1998/1999, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) devoted an entire issue of *Educational Leadership* to the topic of

the spirit in education, winning a Bronze Excel Award from the Society for National Association Publications (Kessler, 2000).

**Education for hope, compassion and meaning.** de Souza (2006) explored in detail the need for students to be able to access and nurture their inner lives in order to develop their sense of self and to promote connectedness to others in the community, world, and beyond. Goals of her model were to reduce the number of students who become isolated in traditional classrooms, to promote resilience, and to encourage a sense of compassion.

She proposed a learning model that recognized the need for intellectual/rational, emotional and spiritual quotients. Five elements were integrated in the learning process: perceiving or sensing, thinking, feeling, intuiting, and enabling individuals to become familiar with both their inner and outer worlds. She emphasized that the process must be transformational in order for learning to move beyond the superficial level.

As an example, she described introducing the topic of justice in the classroom. An immediate response would be influenced by experiences, knowledge, and perceptions which exist from a personal or impersonal level prompting different thoughts and feelings about the concept. When students share their perceptions, the students are able to access deeper levels of unconscious and previously gained knowledge. The merging of new knowledge and previous knowledge allows the students to recognize the power of injustices and be sensitive to or empathize with those who have been victims. This, in turn, may lead to a call of action in the future, or a transformation, providing a pathway for spirituality to develop and allowing for connections to be made.

**Spirituality in the history classroom.** Mark Cottingham (2005) investigated the development of spirituality through the incorporation of literature in the history classroom. He devised four case studies to analyze the process. His goal was to provide a context that allowed for students to delve into the core of the human condition in order to understand the complexity of human experiences. The units of study he created were designed for students aged twelve, thirteen, and fourteen. The backdrop of a historical event allowed the students to work as an inquiring community where individuals were able to explore their own ideas and beliefs while learning from others. The engagement of emotion as well as intellect allowed for reflective empathy through questioning on a deep and philosophical level. Students explored conflicts to elicit spiritual development.

Continued research in building curriculum is needed in this field. Focusing on the spiritual dimensions of teachers would provide a foundation for the nourishment of spirituality of students in the classroom. In addition, educational leaders in school and university systems can help design and guide school philosophies and designs.

### **Research Question**

The research questions guiding this study were:

- What traits does a spiritually gifted student possess?
- What influence do family and life events have on spiritual development?
- How do personality traits impact spiritual development?
- How does a spiritually gifted student describe educators who are spiritually nurturing?
- What attitudes or philosophies of teachers are spiritually nurturing in the classroom?
- What educational techniques are spiritually nurturing?
- How can teachers identify spiritually gifted students?

### **Significance of the Study**

The concept of spiritual giftedness in the classroom has gained increasing attention over the course of the past decade and is evolving in the field of gifted education. Through the use of a case study method of a recent high school graduate, this investigation offers an overview of spiritual giftedness and how spirituality can be nurtured in the classroom. Olivia's identification as a spiritually gifted student was based upon self-reports, teachers' observations, and anecdotal accounts which align with Torrance and Sisk's (2001) description of likely traits found in gifted individuals.

In order to understand the current state of addressing the spiritual needs of children, this study also examined teacher-based philosophies which nurture spirituality, curriculum designed to enhance spiritual development, specific programs to implement, and techniques educators can employ in the classroom. The findings may be useful for practitioners in understanding techniques to nurture the spirituality of students and in understanding spiritually gifted students. Policymakers may find this study useful when examining school philosophies. On the college level, professors may find this study beneficial when focusing on the spiritual dimensions of educators in the classroom.

### **Summary**

This study is presented in the form of three manuscripts to be submitted to professional journals. The first article describes characteristics, anecdotal accounts, and the personal philosophy of Olivia as a spiritually gifted individual. The second article describes how teachers impacted the spiritual growth of Olivia through teaching philosophy, attitudes, and interests. The third article addresses instructional techniques and extracurricular activities teachers can utilize to nurture spiritual development.

**Table 1.1 Addressing Spiritual Development through Social Capital, Ethics, and Wisdom**

<b>Theory or Framework</b>	<b>Main Tenets or Process</b>	<b>Applications in Schools and/or with Students</b>
Operation Houndstooth (Renzulli, 2011)	Optimism Courage Romance with a Topic Sensitivity to Human Concerns Physical/Mental Energy Vision/Sense of Destiny	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Future Problem Solving Program (Volk, 2008)</li> <li>• Triad Enrichment Model Level III Activities</li> <li>• Independent, self-selected projects</li> </ul>
3 E's (Gardner, 2011)	Technical Excellence Being Engaged in the World Working in an Ethical Way	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Global Learning (Gibson, Rimmington &amp; Landwehr-Brown, 2008)</li> <li>• Debate unit focused on ethical issues</li> <li>• Study of ethical dilemmas</li> </ul>
WICS (Sternberg, 2011)	Wisdom Intelligence Creativity  Synthesized	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assessment strategies that gauge analytical, creative, practical, and wisdom</li> <li>• Curricular unit of study based on responsibility</li> <li>• Study of influential leaders</li> </ul>
Connecting Ethics and High Ability (Ambrose & Cross, 2009)	Ethical Leadership Interdisciplinary Perspectives Emotion, Affect, & The Inner Journey Recognizing & Guiding High Ethical Ability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching for Intellectual and Emotional Learning (TIEL Model)</li> <li>• Study the steps in ethical decision-making</li> <li>• Global Learning</li> </ul>

**Table 1.2. Miller’s Six Connections within Whole Curriculum**

<b>Connection</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Application</b>
Subject Connections	Integrated Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multidisciplinary approach where instructor references other curriculum.</li> <li>• Interdisciplinary approach where several instructors utilize a theme or problem.</li> <li>• Transdisciplinary approach where a broad concept is utilized.</li> </ul>
Community Connections	Tone and Activities Enhance Learning Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher must be “present” in the classroom.</li> <li>• Cooperative learning.</li> <li>• Positive interdependence between all school community members.</li> <li>• Collaboration of neighborhood community.</li> </ul>
Earth Connections	Encouraging Awe and Wonder in the World	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gardening</li> <li>• Caring for Animals</li> <li>• Outdoor Education</li> </ul>
Body-Mind Connections	Establish a Connection Between the Body & Mind	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yoga</li> <li>• Eurythmy (A Dance and Song Process that Expresses Feelings and Emotions)</li> </ul>
Thinking Connections	Links Analytic and Intuitive Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Modeling the Creative Process</li> </ul>
Soul Connections	Help Students Find Their Center, To Be More Creative, and Feel Relaxed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meditation</li> <li>• Visualization</li> </ul>

**CHAPTER 2**

**MANUSCRIPT ONE:**

**PORTRAIT OF OLIVIA:**

**A CASE STUDY OF A SPIRITUALLY GIFTED STUDENT<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Kowalske, K. L. To be submitted to *Roeper Review*..

### **Abstract**

The concept of spiritual giftedness has gained increasing attention over the past decade and is evolving in the field of gifted education. Through the use of a case study method, this investigation offers an overview of spiritual giftedness of a recent high school graduate. Olivia's identification as a spiritually gifted student was based upon self-reports, teachers' observations, and anecdotal accounts that align with Torrance and Sisk's (2001) description of likely traits found in gifted individuals. Based on initial interviews with Olivia, four interviews were conducted with former educators identified as being spiritually nurturing in an educational context. Through analysis of these interviews and documents collected to support Olivia's recognition as spiritually gifted, the following traits were uncovered: creativity, compassion, concern for others, perseverance, concern with worldly issues, integrity, humility, gratitude, visionary, making others shine, inclusiveness of others, awareness of self, resilience, concern with equity and justice, desire to make a difference, and impact on group dynamics. These findings may be useful for practitioners in understanding spiritually gifted students and for professors as they prepare instructors to serve the needs of the whole child.

**Keywords** spiritual giftedness, spiritual intelligence, case study, personality traits

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this article is to examine spiritual giftedness and spiritual development in a recent high school graduate. Researchers have described the idea of spiritual giftedness using numerous terms such as spiritual intelligence, spiritual awareness, spiritual sensitivity, and spiritual capacity (Amram, 2007; Emmons, 2000; Sisk & Torrance, 2001; Vaughan, 2002; Zohar and Marshal, 2000). Because there is



limited consensus, this article will use spiritual giftedness to represent these ideas. This article provides definitions of spiritual giftedness and intricate details about the personality traits of an individual recognized as spiritually gifted.

For purposes in this article, spirituality and religion are not equated. A person can practice Buddhism, Catholicism, Judaism, or any other religion; he or she can also be agnostic or atheist (Pargament, 1999; Tirri, Nokelainen & Ubani, 2006). Certain religious routines or practices may foster the spirituality one finds in the world, but spirituality is also found through a connection with nature, communication or love expressed to others, by understanding the world in a new way, or through meditation and yoga (Boone, Fite, & Reardon, 2010). When people question their role in the world, they are reaching out in a spiritual way. They want to uncover how their daily actions connect to a larger universe (Love, 2002; Mayhew, 2004; Palmer, 1986; Zinnbauer, Pargament & Cole, 1997). The individual experience of spirituality is a journey taken alone within the community of humanity.

### **Review of the Literature**

In this review of the literature, a connection between spirituality and gifted students is explored. This is followed by a description of the varying definitions for spiritual giftedness from researchers within and outside of the field of gifted education. Finally, a description of traits found in gifted students is discussed.

### **A Call for Exploring Spirituality in Gifted Students**

Roeper (2008), who initiated the Global Awareness Network of the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC), explained that as global awareness continues to evolve, it will focus on universal awareness. As Roeper described her past seventy years

serving gifted children, she recounted the details that led her to this conclusion, which included compelling experiences with her students who had pressing questions and curiosity about existence, birth, death, and the meaning of life. They had an awareness of their intellectual, emotional, and spiritual reality.

Roeper explained that although our world is limited by our senses, her students understood the realities beyond their own. Roeper's students questioned the mysteries that surrounded them and their relationships and places in the world. Roeper proposed that we should envision spirituality as a part of our reality and learn to trust the unknown. If it is seen as an essential part of our world, viewpoints would change remarkably. Roeper offered that a strong sense of self can help children as they struggle with the complexities of life and enable them with the power to make positive choices as they deal with difficult issues and ideas. Researchers have mirrored these sentiments and expressed the need for nurturing the spiritual development of gifted children (Coles, 1990; Lovecky, 1998; Navan, 2012; Tolan, 2000).

### **Defining Spiritual Giftedness**

There is no agreed upon definition of spiritual giftedness (Vaughan, 2002). Although by no means conclusive of all definitions of spiritual giftedness (see Table 1.2), several definitions have emerged over the past decade (Amram, 2007; Emmons, 2000; King, 2008; Sisk & Torrance, 2001; Vaughan, 2002; Zohar & Marshall, 2000). Sisk and Torrance (2001) provided a theory of the concept of spiritual intelligence with its foundations in psychology, science, and in ancient traditions. In addition, they described eminent individuals or spiritual pathfinders and offered techniques in developing and nurturing the spiritual intelligence in oneself, in young students, and throughout the

education system. They defined spiritual intelligence as the capacity to use a multisensory approach including intuition, meditation and visualization to access one's inner knowledge to solve problems of a global nature. Their definition is product-oriented and delves into cosmic and existential issues with awareness of ultimate values and their meanings (see Table 2.2).

### **Traits of Spiritually Gifted Individuals**

Zohar and Marshall (2000) described characteristics of spiritually intelligent individuals as having the capacity to be flexible, to be self-aware, to use and face suffering, to transcend pain, to be inspired by value and vision, to inspire others, a reluctance to cause harm, a tendency to see connections in diverse aspects of life (being holistic), a tendency to ask questions about and investigate existential ideas, and possessing a facility for working against convention.

Through a thematic analysis of 71 interviews, Amram (2007) defined spiritual intelligence as the ability to apply and embody spiritual resources and qualities to enhance daily functioning and wellbeing. The participants in his study were recommended by peers as individuals who embody spirituality in daily life. Some were business leaders or therapists, but the majority consisted of spiritual teachers such as priests, rabbis, swamis, or sheiks. They identified themselves as among the major spiritual traditions including Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Non-Dualism, Shamanism, Taoism, and Yogism. Across traditions and participants, 7 themes emerged: refined awareness and self-knowledge, grace, meaning, transcendence, truth, peaceful surrender to self, and inner-directedness (see Table 2.3).

Sisk and Torrance (2001) noted a multitude of likely characteristic traits: uses inner knowing, seeks to understand self, uses metaphors and parables to communicate, uses intuition, sensitive to social problems, sensitivity to purpose in life, concerned about equity and injustice, enjoys big questions, senses gestalt (big picture), wants to make a difference, capacity to care, curious about how the world works, values love, compassion and concern for others, close to nature, uses visualization and mental imaging, reflective, self-observing and self-aware, seeks balance, peacemaker, concerned with human suffering, seeks to understand self, and feels connected with others, earth and universe.

Research in this field has focused primarily on defining spiritual giftedness and designing spiritual intelligence self-assessments. Several research studies have investigated spirituality in adults. This investigation serves to fill the gap in literature by fleshing out the traits of a spiritually gifted student as described by teachers in the classroom.

### **Research Questions**

The overarching research question guiding this study was “What traits does a spiritually gifted student possess?” The following research questions guided this investigation: How does a spiritually gifted student describe herself and her experiences? How do teachers describe a spiritually gifted student? What behaviors does a spiritually gifted student display in class? How can teachers identify spiritually gifted students?

### **Method**

#### **Research Design**

A holistic, single-case study approach was used in this investigation. Using a global approach, holistic designs examine a single unit such as an individual, in this case,

a gifted individual. Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, (2006) described the key characteristics of a case study as being anchored in real life, focusing on a single unit. Multiple data collection techniques are utilized in this research. At its core, the basic question to be addressed in case studies is: *What are the characteristics of this particular entity, phenomenon, person, or setting?*

Case studies have proven beneficial for evaluating educational programs and informing policy (Merriam, 2009). At the foundation of this approach is the search for meaning and understanding. With an end product of a richly descriptive analysis of a bounded system, the researcher serves as the primary instrument of investigation using an inductive investigative strategy (Merriam, 2009). A case study explores a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin, 2008). It can be especially effective when the context and phenomenon's boundaries are not completely understood or defined (Yin, 2008). For this study, the spiritually nurturing educational influences of one individual were investigated. By interviewing a fixed number of people, the boundedness of the investigation was defined (Merriam, 2009).

As a cornerstone for research in gifted education (Buchanan & Feldhusen, 1991), case studies allow the reader to clearly envision the student. The physical characteristics, unique talents, talent development, school progress, and understanding of the nature and nurture of gifted youth can be explored through this qualitative method (Buchanan & Feldhusen, 1991). Case studies allow the teacher, an everyday observer and an invested partner in the success of students, to have a more comprehensive understanding of the unique characteristics of gifted learners in the classroom.

## **Data Collection**

Several components comprised this investigation. Initially, Olivia was contacted through email with the request to participate in the study. Then, three, hour-long interviews were conducted with Olivia. Questions centered on Olivia's spirituality (see Table 2.4).

In addition to the interviews, Olivia took a spiritual intelligence self-assessment, the SISRI-24 (Spiritual Intelligence Self-Report Instrument) designed by King (2008) which assesses spirituality in critical existential thinking, personal meaning production, transcendental awareness, and conscious state expansion. This assessment was given in order to corroborate the identification of Olivia as being spiritually gifted.

Based on data gathered from interviews with Olivia, teachers recognized as being spiritually nurturing within an educational context were contacted through email. Interviews, lasting an hour in length, were conducted with four former teachers from the schools she attended. Two interviews were conducted in the teachers' classrooms and two were conducted at the teachers' homes. Questions focused on two main categories: describing Olivia and describing their classroom climate, curriculum, and personal beliefs.

## **Data Analysis**

All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Interviews were reviewed several times by the researcher, and participants were asked to review their interview transcripts upon request. Based on transcriptions, information was coded. Observed codes were synthesized into relevant themes (Patton, 2002). Relevant quotes were grouped under themes to provide support and elaboration. In several cases, quotes from participants and

writing samples supported more than one theme. This resulted in the development of subthemes. These subthemes were then analyzed to determine which main theme they most strongly supported.

Buchanan and Feldhusen (1991) recommended the importance of keeping a case study data base to store all raw data gathered during the case study process. This included the archival records, documents, and physical artifacts being indexed for easy access. Olivia emailed writing samples which were coded and stored under relevant themes. Pictures were taken in classrooms and also stored under relevant themes. Hard copies of writing were typed and saved under relevant themes. Through this data collection, a detailed description of the case, as well as themes or issues emerged (Stake, 1995).

Throughout this investigation, a chain of evidence and careful records of interview responses and data were gathered. All participants were given pseudonyms. Data were gathered from several sources including documents written by Olivia. Two items were especially beneficial in the context of this research. The first was Olivia's manifesto, a paper she wrote for a college Humanities class. In this assignment, she described her philosophy about life. The second document was a letter Olivia wrote thanking her scholarship program for sending her on an outdoor leadership experience. These items were significant because they provided details about Olivia's personal philosophy and reflections on life.

### **Participants**

This study used purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002). The topic of spirituality can be challenging to explore. Preliminary discussions with Olivia ensured that the

participant could offer in-depth, rich material pertaining to the subject. Olivia was selected because of her recognition as a spiritually gifted student, based on teacher anecdotes and observations. These recommendations stemmed from Sisk and Torrance's (2001) description of likely traits of spiritually gifted students. To further corroborate this selection, Olivia completed the SISRI-24 (King, 2008). In critical existential thinking, she scored 26 out of 28 points. In personal meaning production, she scored 20 out of 20 possible points. In transcendental awareness, she scored 28 out of 28 possible points. In conscious state expansion, she scored 10 out of 20 possible points. These findings show strong evidence of Olivia's spirituality based on a self-report.

Based on data gathered from interviews with Olivia, teachers recognized as being spiritually nurturing within an educational context were interviewed. One individual was her fifth grade elementary school teacher. The second was her eighth grade honors language arts teacher. The third was her high school drama teacher, and the fourth was her high school AP United States history teacher. All teachers have been given pseudonyms (see Table 2.5).

### **Researcher as Instrument**

As the gifted specialist at the middle school Olivia attended, I was her primary instructor for sixth grade language arts and a co-teacher for her seventh and eighth grade language arts classes. I identified her for the school's gifted program when she was in sixth grade. Over the course of her middle school experience, I marveled at her writing talent, graciousness, self-expression, gracefulness, creativity, and courage. As I began studying spiritual giftedness and discussing the topic with colleagues, Olivia was often mentioned as an example. This case study allowed me the opportunity to better



understand why Olivia made such an impact on me and the teachers who have had the opportunity to have her in class.

### **Description of Research Context and Participant**

Olivia attended a charter school for elementary school and public school for middle and high school. The charter school was founded in 2000 and now serves 180 students. The philosophy centers on low student class size, an integrated curriculum, community support with retiree volunteers, and community service. The middle school serves 850-900 students and the high school serves over 1,000 students. The town is nestled in the mountains of western North Carolina. Predominant employers are the school system and service industry. Over fifty percent of the population is affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention, followed by United Methodist and Catholic churches. The town is a popular retirement community and recreational destination with a national forest and numerous waterfalls located nearby.

Olivia is slender and carries herself with grace. She has medium-length brown hair and inquiring blue eyes. Her older sister is part of the Teach for America program. Her mother is a hospice nurse. Her father passed away last year after a long struggle with ALS – Lou Gehrig’s disease. Olivia was a leader in her class, serving as student council president in middle and high school. She excelled in her classes and also participated in the theater program, performing yearly in the school musicals.

When Olivia was in sixth grade, she made a tremendous impact on my teaching philosophy. I vividly remember a conversation with her early in the school year when we were studying the Holocaust. I had assigned the students different novels to read in literature circle with assignments to complete along with daily discussions. She came to

me exasperated because the pace was too fast, not allowing the students to be thorough with the assignments, the discussions too shallow because of the roles I had assigned. She taught me that students did not always need such rigid structure, that students could have authentic discussions out of pure desire to explore the literature. She taught me to slow down and allow students to have time to invest all of their energy into assignments. The quality of final products improved and the discussions in the literature circles were insightful, inspiring.

Over the past ten years I have worked with gifted classes that have had different characteristics. Some have been highly competitive or creative, some critical, others underachieving. Olivia's class was unique in that they were extremely caring. They were inclusive and kind, pushing each other to take risks and reach their highest potential.

Olivia received a prestigious scholarship and is a sophomore at a state university. Although Olivia has not narrowed her focus on one specific major, she is interested in environmental studies, religious studies, and medical anthropology. She is trying to decide which avenue to follow or how to find a career that involves all of her interests. Currently, she attends an Anglican church located near the campus of her university.

Olivia views spirituality in terms of her relationship with the universe and her connections to other people, the environment, and a greater being. Although she does not equate religion to spirituality, she acknowledges that her religion feeds her spirituality. She sees the two as different entities, where they work in tandem to shape each other. Olivia has grappled with her religious beliefs over the years. Her current religious affiliation did not come without careful thought. In eighth grade, she became very frustrated with what she described as hypocrisy and judgment in the church. She

grappled with her Christian faith and began to look into other religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism. This period in her life left her uncertain with how her parents would respond to her and how she would negotiate her personal identity.

Olivia's parents encouraged her to work through the process of questioning her religion. Her mother, a Methodist, grew up the son of a preacher, and her father, an Episcopalian, dropped out of college to study in the seminary. Together, they provided a setting where Olivia had ownership over her religious decisions. They encouraged her to question and develop her own beliefs about the world in general and in the nature of God. Through this, Olivia developed her own understanding, independent of what she was taught, although it did incorporate certain family beliefs. Her father described faith as only being real and flourishing when it is questioned and tested. Maintaining traditions proved to be important to Olivia's decision to remain a Christian. Her family attended church services on Sundays, but when on vacation or during snow storms, her family would have a service at home where the family sang hymns and selected passages from the Bible for discussion. Olivia's current religious philosophy is that faith is not a static thing that you achieve, but instead, that it is malleable, capable of being molded by her beliefs over and over again throughout the course of her life. She compared these beliefs with that of her spirituality where it is a continual process of ups and downs and growing and changing.

Olivia's parents both worked in careers that focused on taking care of others. Olivia's father worked at several nondenominational churches, as a missionary, as a counselor, a substitute teacher and a hospice chaplain. Her mother served as a hospice nurse in several communities over the past 16 years before becoming director of her

current facility. Her mother's career as a hospice nurse also served as a model of the importance of nurturing others and in understanding death as a natural part of being human. Death and dying had been common household topics of discussion. Through these conversations, Olivia realized that death was a part of life. This knowledge was very important to her spirituality because the knowledge made her less afraid of death in the sense that she was not paralyzed by it. Because she was aware of the process, she felt could live life more fully with the knowledge that it will not last forever.

Olivia explained two important components that worked in tandem with her beliefs. The first was the role of creativity due to its capacity to allow a person to express oneself. This, in turn, allows the individual to understand herself and to better understand the world around her. The second was leadership. Spirituality helps guide Olivia's interaction with others and her desire to take action in order to nurture her values. She believes that spirituality allows people to understand their role in the world and the possibility of impacting and connecting with others in a meaningful way, which moves individuals out of an isolationist mentality.

## **Results**

The results have been organized into three main sections about Olivia: relationship with self, relationship with others, and relationship with world. The first section offers information about how spirituality guides Olivia's personality and experiences. The second section provides details about how spirituality influences Olivia's interactions with other individuals. The third section provides details about how spirituality influences Olivia's perceptions of and interactions with the world.

## Relationship with Self

Olivia has a clear understanding about her purpose in life as being a caretaker and serving others. Olivia found that her sense of purpose stemmed directly from her spiritual beliefs. She stated, “I feel that most simply, my purpose in life is to love God and to love others, and particularly to love God by loving others.” The following excerpt from *Olivia’s Manifesto: Leave No Trace for the “Other World”* demonstrates this passion for taking care of others:

Be Considerate of Other Visitors – Whether we’re taking a short backpacking trip or building a career and family in our ancestors’ home, we’re all just visiting. During your time here, work hard, carry your weight, take pictures, cook good food with your friends, and sleep soundly under the stars. But most importantly, take good care of your expedition mates; tend their wounds, share their load when they’re struggling, and respect the way they celebrate and enjoy the wonders of your journey. And when you leave, be sure to leave this land and its inhabitants in good condition for the adventurers that will follow in your footsteps.

Olivia described that finding out how to fulfill this purpose continues to evolve and develop over time, but at its core is how she finds it personally rewarding and enjoyable to serve others.

Olivia was described as having a deep sense of compassion, self-awareness, wisdom, and insight. When asked to describe Olivia, Lane, her high school history teacher, explained how she had a beautiful heart and was full of compassion, but beyond that, she was also highly aware of the environment around her, who she was as an

individual, and how she fit into that environment. He further elaborated on how extraordinary it was to find this type of awareness in adults, let alone in students. She also demonstrated this through her writing. From *Olivia's Manifesto: Leave No Trace for the "Other World"*:

Plan Ahead and Prepare – In the wilderness, everyone must know at all times where their rain gear is and what to do if someone doesn't make it back to camp at night. The dangers of our everyday lives are far more numerous and stealthy. Know what to do when you come across the obstacles you expect, and learn to recognize telltale signs of the ones you might not see coming. Stress, hate, and dishonesty will hurt you just as badly as ice, hot sun, and strong wind. Prepare to find shelter from the elements in the form of loved ones and quiet moments with a hot drink.

Lane attributed this awareness to Olivia having dealt with her father's illness and eventual death from Lou Gehrig's Disease (ALS), but her elementary school and middle school teachers, Karen and Leslie, saw this unique awareness before the illness surfaced in her family.

Olivia demonstrated a great deal of resilience. At the time of the interviews, Olivia's father had only recently passed away. Olivia delved into the lessons that she had learned from dealing with his ailment and consequent death. The grieving process was lengthy, beginning with his initial diagnosis six years prior to his passing. As her parents were divorced, she and her sister played pivotal roles in being caretakers as the disease slowly robbed him of his abilities. She described that after his death, life became a bit easier to handle because she could take moments to grieve and then move on with her day

and then grieve again when necessary. She felt that she was moving through the mourning process rather than pushing the pain away. Olivia was able to endure her father's illness without it causing her to become angry with the world. She shared,

I think most of my anger happened a long time ago. I think most of it was directed partially at God, but mostly toward the disease. I think I have always, for the most part, accepted that bad things happen. And I think I have never believed that God chooses these things to happen to us.

Olivia described her desire to remain optimistic in troubling times. She was able to recognize what would be the healthiest thing for her to do. She shared,

It feels so much better to find meaning rather than lose meaning and to walk away... So naturally I've followed that course. And, I do think it's helped me develop a more rounded sense of meaning.

Although Olivia's strengths in resilience were strong, her ability to understand inner personal needs sometimes trumped her physical needs. She explained how she was more in-tune with her inner needs, such as needing to be alone or focusing on God, as compared to her physical needs such as eating and sleeping.

Olivia was described as being determined and showing perseverance by all of the teachers in the study. Jamie described Olivia as being,

Very ambitious, very courageous, very outgoing, a bit headstrong, I'd say.

Determined, dedicated. She's pretty. She's attractive. She is one of the most dedicated students I have had in a long time. Natural leader since her freshman year... She has a force. She's full of passion. I guess that's what it is, she has a forceful being. There is a big presence with her.

As a freshman, Olivia and several other students decided they wanted their drama class to perform Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* because they were in love with the time period. The play was immense in length and well beyond the typical freshman class project in both length (at 2 ½ hours) and in reading level. Jamie explained that the play was longer and more complicated than the yearly musical they produced with more lines to memorize and more set changes. Jamie summarized her experience with Olivia over the course of teaching her for 4 years:

She chose the quirky. She would not settle for anything easy; she wanted the most challenging projects. She wanted to be challenged continuously all the way through. She will be one of those people who keeps going even after she's accomplished her goal; she will keep going. She will encourage others to do the same. You just don't find many people like that, but it was very natural in her.

Olivia's perseverance and commitment to excellence was noted by all instructors.

Olivia spoke of her ability to visualize events in her life. This form of mental imaging has allowed her to work through difficult issues, particularly with her father's death from ALS. She described her experience during the final stages of his life where he was struggling with the decision of going on a ventilator or going through a natural death. She credited her visual images of the scenarios as being very powerful in understanding his struggles during the process they went through. Olivia also spoke about the process of visualization during the writing process and as she listened to music.

When writing, Olivia described how she enjoyed using metaphors and stories. She also described how she used these in daily communication because they helped to communicate her thoughts. She contributed this skill to her love of language arts. Olivia



used extended metaphors and parables throughout the manifesto she wrote in response to the outdoor education experience.

### **Relationship with Others.**

Olivia has a strong sense of compassion and capacity to care. Karen, Olivia's elementary teacher, described her caring nature as starting from a young age. As part of Karen's classroom philosophy, she felt it was important to promote a warm and inviting learning environment by having students participate in a variety of cooperative learning activities. She described how she could pair Olivia with the most challenging students, and Olivia would treat him or her with care and compassion and bring out the best. Her desire to care for others can be seen through her writing. From Olivia's Manifesto: *Leave No Trace for the "Other World"*:

Minimize Campfire Impacts – Fire provides necessities like heat and good food.

Don't be afraid to take what you need, but never walk away from a helping hand without saying thank you and giving a little back in return. And always remember, heat and good food are always best when shared. Sometimes the stories and songs we share when we gather around a campfire are more essential to our wellbeing than anything else.

When asked about her philosophy of caring, Olivia described the difference in helping others to do what you think is best versus helping others in a way that they truly need. She stated,

To be caring, you have to have a lot of compassion, and I think that varies in people, and I think experience is one of the best things that can influence someone's level of compassion, but also I think you need to have an ability to

listen and watch what other people need instead of just giving them what you think they need.

Olivia described that her capacity to listen and care grew through her father's illness as she learned to understand his true needs and not only what she wished for him.

Olivia was known for being gracious and expressing her thankfulness. Jamie, the high school drama teacher, described how thoughtful Olivia was after having worked together in the theater program for four years:

She has just set the caliber very high for all of my students. You know, she thanked me. That's big. She thanked me for what she got, and what she did. She had the empathy and the maturity to thank me and not to just leave. The best thing was that I was able to give her a reference for the scholarship she got. That was amazing, and she was so thankful.

The middle school teacher, Leslie, also described Olivia's thankfulness by referring to a thank-you card she received from Olivia at the end of the year which was filled with appreciation for Leslie's engaging personality and approach to teaching.

Along with demonstrating kindness and graciousness towards others, Olivia also dealt with others with a great sense of integrity in her life. She described her awareness of how her decisions impacted her interactions with others. She stated,

As much as it is disappointing to not be able to connect with people because they are discussing something I don't feel is right or talking about something in a way I don't feel is right, instead of feeling less valuable because I don't fit in, I find more value because I had the integrity to know that I am doing what I believe in.

She spoke at length about how she struggled when peers talked about each other in negative ways or discussed serious topics using frivolous terms. When this occurred, she felt compelled to either voice her opinion or to try and avoid the situations. She does not enjoy the awkwardness this brings forth, but her pride in her beliefs makes it easier to manage.

Although Olivia took pride in acting with integrity, she also recognized that a dark side can accompany this through self-righteousness behavior. Olivia demonstrated humility in the classroom and through her writing. Leslie, her middle school teacher, described her ability to be humble in Socratic seminars where students can often get into serious debates while supporting their opinions about controversial issues. Leslie stated,

She was able to ask other students why they felt a certain way. So, instead of just saying, “Your reasoning is illogical or you are prejudiced...” She would ask, “Why do you feel this way?”

Leslie described how Olivia had a tremendous sense of presence during these types of discussions where the teacher serves only as a moderator, allowing the students to guide the discussion.

In addition to acting with humility with other students, Olivia also demonstrated this character trait when facing other obstacles at school. Jamie described conversations with Olivia where Olivia expressed her desire to avoid being self-righteous with other students in class and with teachers at the high school where her expectations were not being met. Olivia was cognizant of not wanting to appear to be someone who thinks she knows everything. As she grew older in middle school and high school, she did not rebel against her teachers or her schools. She remained invested throughout the process.

Olivia was described as a leader by all of the educators in the study. Karen described Olivia's leadership while participating in *Odyssey of the Mind*. Leslie spoke of Olivia's leadership in classroom discussions and projects. Jamie described her leadership in the student government, in classes, and in the school musicals. In response to a backpacking expedition offered through Olivia's college scholarship program, Olivia wrote a final report. The program defined and taught about four leadership roles (self, peer, and designated leadership, as well as active followership) and seven leadership skills, enabling Olivia to understand that leadership was both natural and teachable. Understanding her personal leadership style and the other group members' leadership styles made interactions smoother and conflicts easier to resolve. Her insight into leadership can be seen in the following excerpt from the final report:

Before long, I found my stride. As my body strengthened, so did my leadership ability and my ability to live comfortably and efficiently in the wild. I was proud of the progress I'd made, but still had a long way to go before I was as competent as some of my fellow travelers. I was therefore completely floored when I was nominated and chosen as one of the two Independent Student Group Expedition leaders. I lead a group of six for the final four days of the course, miles away from instructors and all other humans and through a path we'd chosen ourselves.

For the theater department, Olivia started a masquerade ball. She asked the teacher permission to organize the event and take charge of all of the preparations. Jamie described the ball:

Olivia was one of the best leaders I have taught by far, probably the best leader I have taught. She led in a way that was very truthful, by the book, with a natural-

born talent to attract others and make them go along with her in a very mature, very positive for everyone, not just for herself. Each semester they have a fantastical masquerade ball at the end of the semester where they get to celebrate their uniqueness and their beauty and their love for one another.

Since establishing this event, subsequent students have continued on with that tradition.

Olivia's desire to be a leader was not based on pleasing her peers or adults. She explained how her values guide her:

And, I think as far as resisting peer pressure or marching to my own drum, having my own spirituality has helped me find my own value and worth in something other than what other people think of me. I find my value in knowing that I am part of this greater being, that I was created by this all-powerful being. Following the values I associate with my own faith and spirituality is what defines me and gives me value rather than what other people think of me.

Olivia linked her spirituality directly to her value and worth.

As part of Olivia's leadership skills, she had the capacity to promote others' accomplishments and successes. As student council president, Olivia was described as being different from other presidents because her intention involved helping other students. Jamie stated,

She really stood out from other student council presidents because she really tried to make her class shine. They were the smallest class to come through in a long time. And, they were an outstanding class, and I think that was because they had a lot of really great leaders. Other groups have fallen short on that. She is going

to give 100%. She's going to shine, and she's going to make everyone else around her shine. I guess that's what you mean by spirituality.

Along with wanting to make other students shine, Olivia and her class were noted as being compassionate and inclusive of all group members by displaying a high capacity to care for one another. The group dynamics resonated with the instructors as having been unique and exceptionally impressive. In reference to the musical Olivia's class produced her senior year, her instructor stated,

Yes, that musical was over the top, but that was because there were several girls that Olivia was best friends with and they made it amazing. They were very dearly missed this past year because you only get them once in a while.

The group was described as being able to maintain a high level of competence without using harsh words. They worked to make sure that everyone was performing to her or his potential. When individuals struggled, the group found ways to encourage them without isolating or belittling them.

When addressing intuition, Olivia described her ability to see beyond the surface of daily interactions. She described having a good sense of understanding how people are thinking and feeling in tense or stressful situations even when people are not expressing their emotions. She explained how these experiences occur when it is not obvious to others.

### **Relationship with World.**

Olivia's concern with world issues and human suffering began at an early age and continues today. She explained how her friends describe her as having a bleeding heart. She is affected by events that may not have a strong personal connection because of her

belief that all individuals are impacted by pain and suffering. Her concern with suffering started as a child, affected by the treatment of insects by her peers. She described:

Before I had much exposure to world events, it started with animals and even insects. Like I used to get really upset and have serious, serious discussions with kids in on the playground in preschool when they would be stomping on anthills because I would be like, “This is not okay. How would you feel if someone was doing this to you?” So, I think it started there, and as I had more exposure to things happening in the world, I became more aware of these things, they became very important to me.

Devastating events in the news affect Olivia in a very intense way. She described crying uncontrollably when learning of the tragedies that occurred in Haiti. Along with dealing with this pain, she went on to describe how she wished she was able to impact problems others around the world faced.

I wish I had a bigger capacity to feel all of those things and to sympathize or empathize with everyone. I especially wish I had a bigger capacity to do something about all of it, but I think that’s where I plan to go with my life, that in some way to respond.

Olivia’s further described her desire to take action by studying environmental issues, world religions, and medical anthropology in her college classes in order to understand how she can impact the world around her.

Olivia’s concern has a great concern for equity and justice. She described her concerns with justice and the power of words to define experiences. Of major concern to her now is the use of derogatory words and phrases concerning sexuality. During her

senior year of high school, she wrote a speech about the impact language has on perception. Olivia went on to elaborate upon the idea of words affecting more than an individual's perception of an issue:

I think a lot of people do a good job in being aware of these injustices when they are being serious, but in day-to-day language, they still perpetuate these sorts of ideas. Maybe that's not so dangerous for them. Maybe that's not going to shape the way that they think about it, but I definitely think that it shapes the way other people think about it, maybe other people who don't take these things seriously. And I think that perpetuates the idea that it's okay to talk about things like this, and it's okay to have these imbalances.

Olivia described her attempt to initiate change by having people think about the importance of words

Olivia described both large and small moments of being in nature as being rewarding. She described how it makes her cry to think about how small she is and how big God is. She shared grand moments where she was overwhelmed by God's presence such as standing on the North Rim of the Grand Canyon, but she also connected in smaller ways such as walking to class, seeing a tree blooming, visiting the Arboretum on campus, or taking a breath of fresh air. Olivia described her ability to connect with God through interactions in nature. She stated,

If I am already happy and I go outside, it reminds me of what God has created, and it makes me so much more grateful for everything he has given me. If I am sad and I am outside, I feel surrounded by God's presence and I feel small, and I



love going to church, and I think it is very important to me, but the most intense moments I've had, and the most spiritual moments I've had, have been outdoors. The importance of connecting to nature was sprinkled throughout the manifesto she wrote and throughout the interviews. She explained,

Being around people is very important to me, especially when I am needing something, but being in nature is probably the most essential thing to my wellbeing, and I find that both, when I am both sad or upset or angry and when I am happy, it allows me to somehow to feel what I need to feel. It heightens those emotions, the good emotions and sometimes sadness.

She further described how nature helped her work through the process of grieving over her father.

### **Discussion and Implications**

This article adds to the research about spiritual giftedness and gives details and anecdotes about what a spiritually gifted student might look like in the classroom. In correlating Olivia's characteristics in alignment with Sisk and Torrance's (2001) traits of spiritually gifted individuals, Olivia showed strengths in a majority of the categories. These traits also align with several of Amram's (2007) dimensions of spiritual intelligence.

Olivia values love. She has a deep sense of compassion and a strong concern for others. All of her teachers described Olivia as being able to understand complex issues or seeing the "big" picture, demonstrating Sisk and Torrance's (2001) sense of gestalt. She was referred to as a visionary who wants to make a difference in the world around her.

Her passion and presence work together to create a forceful being. These traits allowed Olivia to demonstrate her leadership skills.

Olivia feels a strong connection with others, the earth, and the universe. She is known for “making others shine.” This selflessness results from her desire to be inclusive. Above all other qualities, the teachers strongly emphasized how Olivia was reflective, self-observing, and self-aware. Along with aligning with Sisk and Torrance’s (2001) description of self-awareness, this trait is also found in Amram’s (2007) description of likely traits by demonstrating knowing as a developed, refined awareness and self-knowledge. She understands her role in situations and has a desire to delve into history in order to comprehend how humanity has evolved. With the death of her father, Olivia showed resilience and the ability to grow without becoming angry or jaded with life.

Perhaps due to her love of language, Olivia finds herself using metaphors and parable to communicate. Olivia discussed the role of visualization and mental imaging in her life. When discussing intuition, Olivia described her ability to understand the emotions of others in awkward situations. This may stem from her own self-awareness and concern for those around her. She is very concerned with the suffering of others. Olivia also has a strong sense of equity and justice and strives for fairness in life for all people.

In the future, Olivia plans to explore religion, medical anthropology, and environmental studies. These fields bring together her capacity to care and her desire to make a difference. Amram (2007) noted that spiritually intelligent individuals have a powerful sense of meaning in life where they experience significance in daily activities

through a sense of purpose and a call for purpose. By pursuing these fields of study, this will allow her to continue to explore her love of nature, where she finds her strongest connection to a power higher than herself.

### **Directions for Future Study**

Future studies in this field should include researching students with certain cultural or religious backgrounds. In studying spiritually gifted students, it is also interesting to consider the leadership component of their personalities. It would be an advantageous goal to make sure that schools are providing our future leaders with as much wisdom, ethics, and morality as possible throughout their years in elementary, middle, and high school.

One of the most endearing quality traits in Olivia was that she wanted other people to receive recognition for what they did and for everyone to reach their fullest potential. This is an important trait for a student to possess and it would be advantageous for researchers to delve into how this manifests in an individual. Olivia's recognition as a spiritually gifted individual began at a young age where her teacher was able to see her compassion for others, her insight into worldly issues, and her need to explore these ideas in writing. Future research could further uncover characteristics of spiritual giftedness in young children.

Finally, it is important to evaluate what actually compels an individual to take action. Students may learn about ethics and wisdom, but may not apply these to their personal and professional lives. Providing authentic learning opportunities that require action to be taken would enable them to understand the importance of more than thinking

about critical issues. Research studies focused on why and how individuals pursue real-world actions in order to address society's problems would be advantageous.

### **Limitations**

With case studies, this investigation is limited in that it may not represent the larger population. Additional research is necessary to understand the characteristics of spiritually gifted children. In addition, Olivia's leadership traits may have influenced her identification as a spiritually gifted student. Certainly other students demonstrate these skills but are not recognized because their influence is so predominant on those around him or her. Finally, this study utilized the characteristic traits of spiritual giftedness outlined by Sisk and Torrance (2001) as the basis for interview questions. Questions aligning with other researchers' traits might result in a different vision of a spiritually gifted student.

### **Conclusions**

Based on this study, a list of characteristics of spiritually gifted students with leadership potential can be surmised. These traits could be used to develop a teacher checklist of characteristics of spiritually gifted students with leadership potential. The following traits would be on the list: creativity, compassion, concern for others, perseverance, concern with worldly issues, integrity, humility, gratitude, visionary, making others shine, inclusiveness of others, awareness of self, resilience, concern with equity and justice, desire to make a difference, and impact on group dynamics

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**Table 2.1. Spiritual Intelligence as a Capacity**

<b>Theory or Framework</b>	<b>Main Tenets or Process</b>
Ultimate Intelligence (Zohar & Marshal Five, 2000)	Intelligence in coping with/handling, and answering, problems of meaning and value.
Five Facets of SI (Emmons, 2000)	Capacity in employing spiritual resources in resolving problems.
Higher Consciousness (Sisk & Torrance, 2001)	The capacity to use a multisensory approach—intuition, meditation, and visualization—to access one's inner knowledge to solve problems of a global nature.
Cultivation of Spirituality (Vaughan, 2002)	A capacity for a deep understanding of existential questions and insight into multiple levels of consciousness.
Seven Dimensions of SI (Amram, 2007)	The ability to apply and embody spiritual resources and qualities to enhance daily functioning and wellbeing.
Spiritual Intelligence (King, 2008)	A set of mental abilities which contribute to the awareness, integration, and adaptive application of the nonmaterial and transcendent aspects of one's existence.

**Table 2.2. Spiritual Intelligence Components**

<b>Component</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>
Core Capacities	Concern with cosmic/existential issues and the skills of meditating, intuition, and visualization
Core Values	Connectedness, unity of all, compassion, a sense of balance, responsibility, and service
Core Experiences	Awareness of ultimate values and their meaning, peak experiences, feelings of transcendence, and heightened awareness
Key Virtues	Truth, justice, compassion, and caring
Symbolic system	Poetry, music, dance, metaphor, and stories
Brain States	Rapture as described by Persinger (1996) and Ramachandran and Blakeslee (1998)

**Table 2.3. Amram's Seven Dimensions of Spiritual Intelligence**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>
Knowing: developed refined awareness and self-knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>mindfulness (knowing self and living consciously with clear intention and mindful, embodied awareness and presence)</li> <li>trans-rational knowing (transcending rationality through synthesis of paradoxes and using various states/modes of consciousness such as meditation, prayer, silence, intuition, or dreams)</li> <li>practice (using a variety of practices to develop and refine consciousness or spiritual qualities)</li> </ul>
Grace: living in alignment with the sacred, manifesting love for and trust in life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>sacred (living in alignment with the divine, a universal life force, nature, or one's true essential nature)</li> <li>love (reverence and cherishing of life based on gratitude, beauty, vitality, and joy)</li> <li>trust (hopeful outlook based on faith or trust)</li> </ul>
Meaning: experiencing significance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>in daily activities through a sense of purpose and a call for service, including in the face of pain and suffering</li> </ul>
Transcendence: going beyond the separate egoic self into an interconnected wholeness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>relational I-Thou (nurturing relationships and community with acceptance, respect, empathy, compassion, loving-kindness, generosity, and I-Thou orientation)</li> <li>holism (utilizing a systems perspective seeing the wholeness, unity, and interconnection among the diversity and differentiation)</li> </ul>
Truth: living in open acceptance, curiosity, and love for all creation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>acceptance (to forgive, embrace, and love what is, including the "negative" and shadow)</li> <li>openness (open heart and mind, open curiosity, including open respect for the wisdom of multiple traditions)</li> </ul>
Surrender: peaceful surrender to self	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>peacefulness (centered, equanimity, self-acceptance, self-compassion, and inner-wholeness)</li> <li>egolessness (letting go of persona to maintain humble receptivity, surrendering, and allowing what wants and needs to happen)</li> </ul>
Inner-directedness: inner-freedom aligned in responsible wise action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>freedom (liberation from conditioning, attachment and fears, manifesting courage, creativity, and playfulness)</li> <li>discernment (wisdom to know truth using an inner-compass / conscience)</li> <li>integrity (being/acting authentically, responsibly, and with alignment to one's values)</li> </ul>

**Table 2.4 Main Participant Interview Guide****Interview Questions:**

How would you define spirituality for yourself and others?

How do you nurture your spirituality?

- Can you take me back into an experience and describe the circumstances?
- Were there certain activities associated with this experience?

How do others you know nurture their spirituality?

Do you feel like you were in touch with your spiritual side from a young age?

Do you seek to understand self?

Do you use metaphors and parables to communicate?

Do you use intuition?

Are you sensitive to social problems?

Do you feel like you have a purpose in life?

Are you concerned about equity and injustice?

Do you enjoy big questions about the universe?

Do you want to make a difference?

Do you feel like you have a high level of capacity to care?

Are you curious about how the world works?

Do you value love?

Do you have compassion and concern for others?

Are you close to nature?

Do you use visualization and mental imaging?

Are you reflective?

Are you self-observing and self-aware?

Do you seek balance?

Do you feel connected with others, the earth and universe?

Do you feel like you are a peacemaker?

Are you concerned with human suffering?

**Table 2.5 Teachers Identified as Spiritually Nurturing**

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Grade Level</b>	<b>Subject Area</b>
<b>Karen</b>	<b>5<sup>th</sup> Grade</b>	<b>General Education</b>
<b>Leslie</b>	<b>8<sup>th</sup> Grade</b>	<b>Language Arts</b>
<b>Jamie</b>	<b>9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> Grades</b>	<b>Theater</b>
<b>Lane</b>	<b>11<sup>th</sup> Grade</b>	<b>AP United States History</b>

**CHAPTER 3**  
**MANUSCRIPT TWO:**  
**TEACHER PHILOSOPHY AND THE SPIRITUALLY GIFTED STUDENT<sup>2</sup>**

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<sup>2</sup> Kowalske, K. L. To be submitted to *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*.



### **Abstract**

Educators have the capacity to nourish more than just the academic needs of students in the classroom. Through their philosophies and attitudes, they are able to develop an atmosphere that can nurture the spiritual development of students. This study utilized a case study approach with a recent high school graduate who was recognized as being spiritually gifted. Based on interviews with her, four former teachers were interviewed to gather information about the techniques they utilized in the classroom. Findings indicated that these teachers made concerted efforts to create a warm classroom climate and build a strong rapport with students. They also encouraged empathy, creativity and self-expression. In addition, understanding multiple perspectives and focusing on the thinking process were evident. Several teachers created an atmosphere of intense interaction and choice in assignments. Information from this study may be beneficial for teachers as they reflect upon the climate they create in the classroom, for professors as they design teacher education programs, and for administrators as they outline philosophies for their schools.

**Keywords** spiritual giftedness, teacher philosophies, classroom climate, nature, teacher empathy

### **Introduction**

Two years ago I sat down with my principal to review my students' growth on the standardized test scores from the prior year. As I had been teaching for sixteen years, I anticipated a discussion about teaching strategies I assessed to be effective and materials that could help develop my gifted program. Instead, he pulled out a spreadsheet and started calling out names. "Why had Sean not shown projected growth?" he asked. Sean

had scored in the 99<sup>th</sup> percentile for the past three years. He was still at the 99<sup>th</sup> percentile, but he could have earned more points within that percentile. I sat dismayed. I had an incredible year working with Sean. He was thoughtful and a voracious reader. He participated in numerous extracurricular activities and completed all projects thoroughly, often adding a new dimension to consider for upcoming units. Throughout the year, we had investigated the Holocaust, world cultures, and Utopian societies through literature circles, Socratic seminars, and problem-based learning. Our discussions were deep and rich. I thought of Sean as one of the wisest students I have ever taught. I explained this to my principal, but he returned to the topic of growth within the 99<sup>th</sup> percentile. I was devastated.

What had felt like an incredible school year, now felt like a failure. For a while, I lingered in this sadness, but increasingly I became outraged. Our school year had been a success! We had worked to delve into incredible topics impacting our world. We both grew as individuals based on what we had read, researched, and written in class. There was so much more than the test score showed. From this, I became passionate about the importance of serving all of the dimensions of students I taught as individuals, as human beings. A school year cannot and should not be quantified by a number on a test.

### **Background**

The purpose of this article is to examine spiritually nurturing characteristics of educators. This article provides a background for why spirituality should be addressed in schools. In this study, spirituality and religion are not equated, although they may work in tandem for certain individuals (Noddings, 2008). For others, spirituality is found in their connection to nature, to others, to the world around them, or to a higher being

(Pargament, 1999; Tirri, Nokelainen & Ubani, 2006). A spiritual person may be agnostic or atheist. Certain practices can be seen as spiritual such as prayer, meditation, or yoga (Love, 2002; Mayhew, 2004; Palmer, 1986; Zinnbauer, Pargament & Cole, 1997). The desire to take care of others and the world is rooted in a person's spiritual beliefs. The spiritual journey is different for every individual (Boone, Fite, & Reardon, 2010).

It is important to focus on the spirituality of teachers and how this influences students for several reasons (Palmer, 1998). Teachers bring with them more than a toolbox of instructional techniques into the classroom. They also provide the climate that students will be immersed in throughout the year or course. This climate can be one of joy and enthusiasm or one that is cruel and demoralizing. The educator has the power to pass on the passion for questioning ideas or embracing one another or caring for the world (London, Johnson, Arguelles, Brown, Crowell, & Donnelly, 2004). Teachers impact students' lives on a daily basis, and they can become heroes in the students' eyes, individuals who taught them to view the universe in a different way.

Opposition to focusing on spirituality may stem from a heightened focus on test preparation and fear of addressing spirituality in school. Pressure to perform well on standardized tests leaves little room for nurturing the whole child, but one does not necessarily have to detract time and attention away from the other (Noddings, 2008). Spirituality can be emphasized through classroom protocols, everyday interactions, small gestures, or curriculum threaded with existential ideas, wisdom, or ethics (London et al., 2004). Others may perceive that spirituality belongs only to religious pursuits, but this should be negated by the tenet that all individuals have a spiritual journey, unique to him or herself (Boone et al., 2010; Johnson, 2005; Noddings, 2008). Religious practices may

nurture this development or may not. Finally, some may feel that spirituality should be addressed through the family, but are our schools serve as metaphorical extended families. Students often spend more time within school buildings than they do at home. If our schools are not seen as families, then it is a great disservice for our children (Noddings, 2008).

### **Review of the Literature**

In this literature review, a need to explore teacher dispositions is outlined. This is followed by a description of attitudes and philosophies of educators that nurture the spiritual growth of students. Finally, suggested techniques to nurture spirituality in the classroom are described. These areas are addressed in order to provide a foundation for how spirituality is nurtured in an educational context.

#### **Teacher Dispositions**

Teacher preparation programs and assessments in the classroom focus on teachers' knowledge, skills, and dispositions. An increasing emphasis on the first two categories has occurred, perhaps as a result of the pressure of high-stakes testing and No Child Left Behind as well as the ease of assessing teachers' knowledge and skills through tests and observations (Boone et al., 2010). Dispositions are critical to address because they create a foundation for the teacher to be self-reflective, form connections with students, and honor diversity in individuals (Boone et al., 2010).

#### **Spiritual Dimensions of Educators**

Identifying the spiritual dimensions of teachers is limited. One researcher has made a notable contribution to this research based on extensive interviews of educators. Johnson (Johnson & Neagley, 2010) defined themes based on her work in exploring ways

the spirit dimension is addressed in the educational environment. Through literature reviews and extensive interviews with educators, the following themes emerged that teachers used: *contemplative*, *meaning-making*, *self-reflective*, *emotional*, *ethical*, *ecological*, and *creative*. Johnson suggested that each theme contained a number of interrelated human capacities such as behaviors, abilities, aptitudes, skills, faculties, potentials, roles, capabilities, and powers. The following provides a description of each of Johnson's themes:

The *contemplative* realm consists of awareness, mindfulness, and intuitive knowing. *Contemplative* educators relate to students through intuition, awareness, and presence. They include moments of silence in the day or teach contemplative methods directly to the students through relaxation techniques and sensory awareness.

*Meaning-making* refers to seeking the purpose of life, thinking about life and death, and understanding the roles of religion and philosophy. Teachers include existential issues in their curriculum and create classrooms that stimulate curiosity and allow for in-depth analysis of themes.

*Self-reflective* describes the ability to examine oneself and analyze personal motives, emotions, actions, strengths, and weaknesses. This strengthens identity, builds integrity and honesty as individuals realize their purpose in life. Students may be able to reflect in a mature way, assess strengths and weakness, and understand inner conflict as they work toward a resolution. Teachers allow for reflection in the classroom and create a safe environment where students can learn from their mistakes. Providing choice and addressing learning styles and multiple intelligences help students to assess their unique abilities.

The *emotional* theme explains the desire to experience the nature of being, the connection between all life-forms, and developing satisfying relationships. Capabilities include emotional openness, emotional engagement with ideas, a sense of awe or wonder toward varying forms of life, empathy, emotional resilience, and faith in self, others and the world. Educators create a nurturing environment by modeling hope and faith in the world, building a healthy emotional climate in the classroom, encouraging curiosity, and allowing for choice in topics of investigation.

*Ethical understanding* and action describes the principles and values related to how humans should interact with the world around them. Morality and questioning of how people should behave in order to create a better society are at the foundation. Educators provide specific lesson plans and curriculum that showcase ethics in history or in current events. Creating a democratic classroom atmosphere and working for social change through service projects can also provide the opportunity for students to engage in ethical thinking.

The *ecological* category encompasses an interdisciplinary, holistic way of thinking about life between the physical nature of being and the connected relationship of all life forms and the universe. This emphasizes the importance of sustainability practices and recognizing the effects of human actions. Educators focus on the analysis of causes and effects, provide opportunities for students to understand ecological issues, and allow for nature-based experiences.

Johnson (Johnson & Neagley, 2010) described *Creativity* as the ultimate capability because it allows humans to use imaginative thinking to explore ideas. Characteristics include playfulness, humor, and imagination to understand self, world,

and others, acting innovatively, and using a variety of forms to express ideas. Educators encourage the use of creativity throughout curricular lessons, teach creative processes, study creative works and individuals, and allow for self-expression in assignments.

### **Accessing One's Inner Knowledge**

Teachers' attitudes and philosophies help to guide their decisions about instructional techniques to utilize in the classroom. Sisk and Torrance (2001) described numerous techniques to employ in the classroom in order to promote spiritual growth. By studying spiritual pathfinders and the lives of eminent people, teachers can encourage the capacity to care and concern for human suffering. Journal writing and time for reflective thinking aid the development of inner-knowing and understanding of self. Problem solving and problem-based learning promote the use of intuition and concern with inequity and injustice. Open-ended discussions, unity in studies, mapping to integrate studies, and integration of science/social studies allow students to discuss universal issues, experience a sense of gestalt, develop curiosity about how the world functions, and feel connected with others, the earth, and the universe.

Personal growth activities and process discussions encourage sensitivity to the purpose of life, the desire to make a difference, and concern for ethical conduct. Utilizing service learning projects, an eco-environmental approach, and the what/so-what/now-what model promote sensitivity to social problems and a connection to nature. Goal-setting activities, affirmations, and *thinking-about-thinking* encourage a sense of balance and values of love, compassion, and concern for others. Role playing, socio-drama, and conflict resolution promote reflection, self-awareness, and peacemaking.

There is a need to explore teacher dispositions in order to provide the most beneficial classroom environment for students. This can be established by researching attitudes and philosophies of educators that nurture the spiritual growth of students. Research in understanding why teachers select certain techniques to implement in the classroom and how this is tied to dispositions would also be beneficial. These areas need to be researched in order to understand how spirituality can be nurtured in an educational context.

### **Research Questions**

The overarching question this study addresses is “How can teachers provide a spiritually-nurturing environment for students?” The following questions guided this investigation: How does a spiritually gifted student describe educators who are spiritually nurturing? What attitudes or philosophies of teachers are spiritually nurturing in the classroom? What educational techniques are spiritually nurturing?

### **Method**

#### **Research Design**

Merriam (2009) described the appropriateness of utilizing a case study framework when the researcher is intrinsically interested in the case and hopes to acquire a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. The purpose of the investigation was to gain insight and uncover the interaction of various educational factors and influences, as opposed to hypothesis testing (Merriam, 2009). From the research, a holistic description and explanation (Merriam, 2009) of the spiritual influences found within the educational context was crafted. Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, and Sorensen (2006) described the greatest advantage of conducting a case study as the potential for depth, where an



individual can be defined within the context of his or her environment. The present actions, past actions, emotions, and thoughts of the participants were investigated. Multiple data collection techniques were utilized. At its core, the basic question to be addressed was: *How do teachers promote a spiritually-nurturing educational environment?*

### **Data Collection**

Several components comprised this investigation. Initially, three, hour-long interviews were conducted with Olivia. Based on data gathered from these interviews, subsequent hour-long interviews were conducted with former elementary, middle, and high school teachers who were recognized as being spiritually nurturing within an educational context. Questions focused on the educators' personal beliefs, classroom climate, and curriculum (see Table 3.2).

The participants also submitted writing samples, letters, and photographs. Throughout this investigation, a chain of evidence and careful records of interview responses and data were gathered. Participants were given the opportunity to review transcriptions upon request.

### **Data Analysis**

All interviews were recorded, transcribed and reviewed several times. Based on these transcriptions, information was coded and then synthesized into relevant themes (Patton, 2002). Analysis occurred over time as each transcription was reviewed. Relevant quotes were grouped under themes to provide support and elaboration. No preconceived themes were anticipated. As recommended by Buchanan and Feldhusen (1991), a data base was utilized to organize all raw data gathered during the case study

process. This included the archival records, documents, and physical artifacts. Information was indexed so that it was easily accessed. Pictures were taken in classrooms and also stored under relevant themes. Hard copies of writing were typed and saved under relevant themes. Through this data collection, a detailed description of the case, as well as themes or issues emerged (Stake, 1995).

### **Participants**

This study is situated within the context of a larger study. In the first investigation, Olivia's spiritual giftedness was explored through interviews with Olivia and anecdotes provided by the teachers she recognized as being spiritually nurturing to her. In this study, the attitudes and philosophies of the teachers are elucidated. Purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) was used in this study because the topic of spirituality is difficult to explore. It was essential that the main participant feel competent discussing her personal spirituality and how her spirituality was nurtured in educational contexts. Olivia was initially selected based on her recognition as a spiritually gifted student from teacher anecdotes and observations. These recommendations stemmed from Sisk and Torrance's (2001) description of likely traits of spiritually gifted students. Based on initial interviews with Olivia, interviews were conducted with four former teachers from the schools she attended. Specifically, one individual was her fifth grade elementary school teacher. The second was her eighth grade honors language arts teacher. The third was her high school drama teacher, and the fourth was her high school Advanced Placement (AP) United States history teacher.

### **Researcher as Instrument**

As the gifted specialist at the middle school Olivia attended, I was her primary instructor for sixth grade language arts and a co-teacher for her seventh and eighth grade language arts classes. As my interest in spiritual giftedness developed, I began to discuss how schools and teachers could provide a spiritually-nurturing environment with colleagues. This case study allowed me the opportunity to delve into how teachers' philosophies and attitudes can impact the spiritual growth of students in unique ways.

### **Description of Research Context and Participants**

Karen works at a local charter school that was founded in 2000 and now serves 180 students. The school emphasizes the importance of low student class size, an integrated curriculum, community support with retiree volunteers, and community service. She initially began working in art therapy and ran a group home before entering the teaching profession when she decided to start a family.

Leslie works at a public middle school serving 850-900 students. She has worked in public and private schools. Currently she serves students as the gifted specialist at a neighboring middle school to the one where she taught Olivia. She was recognized as their teacher-of-the-year in 2012.

Lane and Jamie work at a public high school serving over 1,000 students. Lane has recently decided to leave the teaching field in order to attend the seminary. Although he comes from a family with numerous public school teachers, he has made the decision to homeschool his two, young daughters. Jamie has been teaching drama and the arts for 16 years. She has worked with both elementary and high school students.

The town is located in western North Carolina where the predominant employers are the school system and service industry. The population of the town predominantly identifies itself as Southern Baptist, followed by United Methodist and Catholic. The town is a popular retirement community. The local national forest and numerous waterfalls located nearby also make it a recreational destination.

### **Results**

The results section is divided into themes that outline the teachers' goals as educators. Dominate themes emerged in six categories. Teachers showed strong evidence for creating a warm classroom climate and building a strong rapport with students. They also sought to evoke empathy in their students. Through classroom design and choice of activity, they provided opportunities for self-expression, creativity and choice. Several promoted critical thinking and exploring multiple perspectives. Encouraging intense interactions in the classroom was also a goal.

#### **Creating a Warm Classroom Climate**

Lane described his classroom environment as intentionally comfortable and warm. He has lamps, although his school does not allow them, and plants, rugs, artwork and "random things" his students would find interesting such as Legos, a doll from the show *Family Guy*, and a picture of Dwight from *The Office* peering out of the window on his door. There is a student-created mural on the wall, and he insists upon keeping the blinds open so that natural light floods the room. Student-produced artwork fills the bulletin boards, and his guitar sits in the front of the room. He enjoys playing music for the students and attributes his cozy atmosphere to a high school teacher who had a similar

environment when he was in school. He described his purpose for creating this atmosphere:

You know, walking into a cold, sterile environment and then trying to reach them in an emotional way or spiritual way, if you want to say it, I just can't do it. They have to feel safe.

Jamie described her environment as being lively, a time in the day where students could cut loose and grow and mature. She explained how students had a choice and a voice in her classroom. Karen teacher filled her class with animals such as rabbits, ducks, and chickens in order to encourage a warm atmosphere. She also relied heavily upon group work to build collaborative skills. Leslie utilizes project-based and problem-based projects in order to establish an environment where all individuals were on a quest to acquire information together.

### **Building Rapport**

Olivia particularly appreciated when teachers shared their insights about her personality or her strengths and weaknesses. She shared how she enjoyed when teachers recognized her talents in language arts and social studies due to her interest in humanity. Having teachers voice their insights, allowed Olivia to understand herself in a greater capacity. Olivia described how appreciative she was when teachers treated her as an adult or if they designed activities that required that they behave in an adult-like manner. She shared her appreciation for activities that allowed students to voice their opinions:

With Socratic seminars, we were treated like adults. We were expected to have an opinion and be mature. To have someone expect this from you, makes you

develop these things, and I think that doesn't happen enough. Kids aren't viewed as having an opinion or aren't held responsible for what they say.

Lane explained how important it was that students were perceived as human beings. He described a particular scenario in his class:

It happened first period, in my government and civics class, and this kid calls me over to ask for legal advice. You would be amazed at how often that happens, as if I am qualified to give legal advice. And, he's so angry with his parents because of what they want to do to help him, but the kid doesn't see it like that... I was on my knee by his desk, and he suffers from severe anxiety and he takes all of these medications to deal with it, and I was looking down these rows of desks, and I was watching my students writing. I was looking at their hands, and there were two girls in particular, and I know about their lives. I was just amazed that they are just sitting there diligently doing the assignment I gave them. It just struck me; they have all of this crap they're dealing with and what could this kid do legally against his parents because of what they are doing, but these kids are doing what I ask them to do, and I was just awestruck. That's the sort of stuff that I try to...just being aware...just that they are people, little people.

He summarized his feelings by discussing how wrong it is for teachers to not view kids as people in the classroom. He elaborated upon this issue by discussing the "factory-like" system that is in place to educate children and how that needs to change.

Leslie enjoys being honest and truthful with her students. She lets them "inside her head" by steering the classroom through humor and wit. When forced to complete school-required activities or assessments, she lets them know that she doesn't find these

activities to be stimulating, but they must go through the process, just as she is required to go through the process. She shared,

Anything that pushes them to be in charge of their own learning is important.

This year has been interesting as we say that we are pushing them to a higher level, but we are putting them into these A, B, C, D situations where they have to assessed and pre-assessed and post-assessed in order to prove that learning is going on. And anytime we break away from that type of thing, I see tremendous growth. Like my six graders who hosted the poetry slam. They want to be so much more than that. When they do Socratic seminar or deep research, they are so happier. They don't have enough opportunities to do it.

For the yearly middle school poetry slam, a group of poets from her sixth grade class performed a poem about the drawbacks of relentless testing. The poem won second place.

Karen establishes rapport by honoring all of the students in her classroom. She works diligently to ensure that everyone feels safe and loved. With a background in art therapy, she understands the importance of helping each student grow and learn through trial and error. Karen spoke of the importance of instilling values in her students by providing a caring environment. As part of this vision she believes in conducting classroom meetings where the students discuss problems or issues, celebrate successes, or apologize for transgressions. The students utilize *I statements* to voice their concerns. She described how challenging this can be at times because students must face issues where they have done something wrong and discuss it with the other individuals involved. She emphasized that she was not test-driven. Being helpful and respectful are

goals she would like all of her students to learn. She is hopeful that her charter school will adopt character education as a focus for the entire school.

Many of the teachers spoke of counseling their students or having a background in counseling or possible future in some type of counseling field. Karen discussed her background in art therapy and counseling at a group home. She shared details about the challenges she faced in the group home setting and her decision to enter the classroom due to her desire to raise a family. Her initial desire was to work with individuals struggling with suicide, abuse, or schizophrenia. She shared,

My undergraduate degree was in art therapy. My teaching degree was my masters. I took all the art classes, but with budget cuts, jobs were being cut. I really liked the psychology of it all and then got my teaching credential... I wanted to work and did for three years. I worked with really, really difficult kids. I worked in group homes. As a house parent in a group home and that was incredibly hard.

Lane spoke of counseling students who came in before school. In the classroom he described,

I have a pretty rough first period class. And there's this one kid, he's in court this morning, and he comes to me often to talk about his uncle or something that has happened or something he's seen on the news. And it's a big deal for this kid to come in and talk about a current event. So, he comes in to talk about a bombing suspect, and I think what has happened in the past to make this happen is that I've just shown an interest in him. I tap him on the shoulder and ask him how he's doing. And, showing that I see him as a person and not a troublemaker or a kid to



get in the way and mess up the class, he's become my shadow. Yesterday I had to go make some copies, and I'm like, *walk with me, let's go, let's go...*

Providing guidance to students was very important to Lane. He also spoke of working with adults in this capacity.

### **Evoking Empathy**

When asked to share his teaching philosophy, Lane shared his passion for helping students develop empathy towards others through careful inspection of past events. One activity he utilizes is an analysis of photographs where students view an image and then try to add color, motion, sounds, smells, and a future to what they view. He emphasized the importance of providing the human side to history. He elaborated upon the reason for wanting to instill empathy as being a result of his family's heritage of being educators.

He shared,

I attribute that to my mom. She was always pushing education, but she was also pushing empathy. Now, keep in mind that I have 15 teachers in my family, like 15 current members in my extended family. My running joke is that when we have a family reunion, it is really like we are having a faculty meeting. So, I've always been around it, but I never wanted to do it, but my Mom sent me to Europe when I was 16, and I was like whoa, so this stuff really happened. I saw that what I had been studying was real. Walking up the staircases where *such-and-such* happened in Germany... Yea, so bringing that to people was really important.

Jamie discussed the importance of instilling empathy and raising self-esteem. When asked what the most important component to her job was, she shared,

We are raising self-esteems. And that everyone leaves the class feeling better about being on stage and that they can speak in front of their peers confidently.

Also, that they are good theater audience members. I am all about empathy, about listening to what others need and not hurting each other and understanding why we are the way we are and understanding who we are.

During a discussion with Olivia about problems with a high school honors instructor, Jamie reiterated the importance of remembering that people have challenges in their lives and that we are here to help people, not to hurt them.

### **Providing Opportunities for Creativity, Self-expression, and Personal Choice**

Olivia spoke highly of the creative components in her classes. Jamie described her classroom as one where students are constantly creating and producing. The students engage in writing, creating characters, painting, makeup design, and blocking scenes. They also develop ideas through lighting, sound, and stage design. Olivia described the importance of creativity in education:

I associate creativity and spirituality closely together because I think creativity pulls things out of us and in how we understand ourselves and how we understand each other and in how we understand the world around us. That was a great thing about elementary school because there was so much creativity encouraged and activities to be creative and that was great in middle school, particularly in language arts. But I lost this a lot in high school, and I think one of the areas where I still had that was in theater that's why I really love drama because we had a chance to dream and come up with new things and make new things happen and live out different worlds. So that was a really great part of high school. And, not

every kid is like me. Not every kid likes to write and likes to do theater and is able to express themselves that way. But it was for me, and it helped me pull out my spirituality and my understanding of the world.

Olivia described the loss of creativity in high school as pressure and demands of testing increased.

Olivia described her appreciation for the creative components in many classroom extracurricular activities. In elementary school, she participated in *Odyssey of the Mind*. Karen was the sponsor. Olivia described Karen's ability to promote creativity. She expressed,

She was really good at encouraging people to be creative, usually by giving them freedom and responsibility and by just being there. She gives pottery lessons to students and to parents out of her garage. I think generally in life she is just good at encouraging creativity.

One of Karen's favorite classroom activities over the years has been to produce plays for the school such as *Tom Sawyer* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. When Olivia was in her class, she was very enthusiastic about producing a play and wanted to follow in the tradition of presenting a Shakespearean production. Karen went on to describe numerous instances where she encouraged her students to use creativity through artistic expression integrated in the curriculum.

Lane relies upon lecturing for daily instruction, but allows for student creativity through extra-credit assignments. He described how students have created small and large projects. He explained,

I've had some kids do some amazing things. And one kid, who I thought would never do this because he isn't really hands-on, but we were talking about the 1920s and he created an assembly line. He took a vacuum motor and created a conveyer belt.

Leslie utilizes creativity throughout the year through problem and project-based learning and where students have a variety of options to express what they have learned. She also utilizes Writing Workshop where students craft poems, essays, short stories, and memoirs.

Jamie emphasized how important it was that the students have ownership over the activities in her classroom. Students select plays that are performed and daily activities to focus on as they prepare for productions. She described, "It is all choice. It's structured, but it's all about kids creating their works of arts on stage. That's why it's called theater art in action." Leslie also described the importance of allowing for choice in all of the projects and activities she implements. She especially enjoys project-based learning where students select their own topics to explore. This year a group of her sixth grade students hosted a community poetry slam to promote awareness for Youth Outright, an organization for gay, lesbian and questioning youth. She explained how ownership over assignments promotes student commitment.

### **Promoting Critical Thinking and Exploring Multiple Perspectives**

Leslie expressed how important it was for her to design lesson plans and implement activities that forced the students to contemplate the world around them. She described the use of Writing Workshop,

They are forming their thoughts, and they feel like an adult as they form their opinions. They don't like to be told you can't do something. They want to be independent. During Writing Workshop, they are independent thinkers putting their own thoughts onto paper. They are not finding the same answer everyone else finds. They need to "free-think."

She also explained her current fascination with connecting history to the future by teaching historical fiction and fantasy/science fiction by studying the Holocaust and futuristic dystopian societies. She finds it fascinating to have the students "wrestle with meaty, futuristic stories." She summarized her overall philosophy:

I like to instigate. I think teachers should be instigators. We should not be following along like drones. I like to poke them. We are in this together. We are taking a journey to seek knowledge and information. I love it when students bring in a thought that is new and interesting. It's great to have those moments.

Leslie spoke at length about the importance of utilizing Socratic seminar in order for students to delve into multiple perspectives about topics. She described how her students are always questioning ideas and topics and reasons for completing assignments. She enjoys encouraging them to do this.

Olivia described how inspired she was by her high school history teacher's desire to ensure that all of his students were critical thinkers. She shared,

He really encouraged us to think about things and about big things and really take pride in that... there are a lot of people out there who aren't thinking. They aren't thinking about what they do or what they say, and it's really important for them to think. One activity he did with us that I thought was really cool was we did this

Thoreau project where we had to go a week without electricity. So, we didn't use cell phones or computers, and we tried not to use lights. I didn't even shower, although the teacher said we didn't have to take it that far. Doing those kind of things, that weren't going to be on a test anywhere, were designed to make us think about things and the way we work and why we do the things we do.

Lane described how important it was that his students understood that there are multiple perspectives for every issue. He described,

So, I try to present as many sides of the argument as I can, and that really frustrates them, but how many times have you been asked what you think about something? I just kind of smile at them and I just leave it there. And I know it frustrates them, but that's part of the joy, presenting as much compelling evidence as I can from as many different viewpoints as I can and then just walk away... I'm notorious for bursting bubbles. Just exploding them.

He reiterated the importance of students being able to make informed decisions and to understand their thinking process.

**Encouraging Intense Interaction.** Jamie believes in a classroom that is continuously active. In the description of her classroom environment, she said,

You are moving; you are creating. You are in action. It's not like you are painting a picture. It's art in action. You have to be up. Class participation grades mean you have to be doing something all of the time. Even if you are just sitting and waiting for your lines on stage and you aren't contributing anything else, then you aren't contributing anything to the class. You have to be

contributing. There's set design. There's makeup design. There's costume design. There are so many areas where you could be contributing

She elaborated further about the importance of allowing students time to develop their ideas:

Now, when I watch groups doing work, I realize that they need time. That's the creative process. They need time to develop ideas and let them simmer. And, it happened again today in class. A kids said, "You have to get these kids on task," but I told him, "No, no. This is the magic moment. This is when the magic happens. Even if it seems like we're not completely on task, the magic is happening." Sometimes I used to get so mad because I would think that they just weren't doing anything. But they were. You have to allow the mind to venture, to go somewhere else. You have to give them time to let the ideas simmer. I walk around checking and the go-getters really are. For the most part the entire class is participating.

Jamie explained that this understanding came as a result of being in the classroom for many years.

### **Discussion and Implications**

Each teacher falls into multiple categories when aligned with Johnson and Neagley's (2010) description of how educators can spiritually nurture students. Activities implemented by the teachers align with Sisk and Torrance's (2001) description of techniques to nurture the spiritual growth of students. Karen's strengths were guided by her love of nature and training in art therapy and counseling. She encouraged the students to share her passions by having bunnies playing in the classroom, raising

chickens and ducks, incorporating art into her lesson plans, and utilizing classroom meetings. Creativity is an important component in her own life where she makes pottery and gives pottery lessons to others. By sponsoring clubs such as *Odyssey of the Mind*, she has helped her students develop their own creative skills. Olivia's participation in this activity was her favorite spiritually-nurturing experience in elementary school. Through creative endeavors, students are encouraged to have a sense of awe and wonder with the world (Gafoor & Kottalil, 2011). Karen also enjoyed presenting plays for the school and creating opportunities for self-expression. The importance of encouraging character education was evident as the elementary school teacher described the vision for the charter school where she works and her use of classroom meetings. This encourages sensitivity to others and understanding of self (Gafoor & Kottalil, 2011). Overall, she shows strong evidence of her ability to nurture kids in the emotional, ecological, and creative realms (Johnson & Neagley, 2010).

Leslie's strengths were in promoting critical thinking and encouraging the understanding of multiple perspectives. She relies heavily on utilizing concept-based instruction where the students are "taking a journey" with her in the pursuit of knowledge. This type of learning environment promotes the spiritual development of students due to the reciprocal relationships within the learning community (Sewell, 2009). Her use of Socratic seminars and Writing Workshop allows the students to develop their opinions and express their feelings about complicated issues. In addition, she finds it essential that students have the opportunity to take action with the knowledge they are exploring. She does this through the use of problem and project-based learning experiences. By utilizing these strategies, she is encouraging the use of intuition, concern



with inequity and justice, exploring universal issues, developing curiosity, and encouraging connections between self, world, and the universe (Sisk & Torrance, 2001). These endeavors show strong evidence of her ability to nurture students in the ethical, self-reflective, and creative realms (Johnson & Neagley, 2010).

Jamie's strengths stemmed from her creative passions. Her classroom was saturated with creative endeavors where the students were in charge of the direction of their activities. She prided herself on allowing the students to grow, learn, think, and develop their ideas. To accomplish this, she has to allow students time to let their thoughts grow into meaningful actions. By providing students with these opportunities, she is arousing imagination in the students that assists in constructing meaning and building connections between inner and outer worlds (Tucker, 2010). In addition, she encourages her students to be self-reflective, to develop a strong sense of self-esteem, and to have empathy for other individuals. Allowing opportunities for self-expression is at the heart of her lesson plans and units of study. Overall, Jamie shows evidence of her ability to nurture kids in the emotional, self-reflective, and creative realms (Johnson & Neagley, 2010).

Lane's main strength was in helping students develop the skill to analyze their own thinking processes. He pokes and prods them in class to justify their beliefs. The ability to be self-reflective is crucial to help students raise and reflect on universal questions and issues (Gafoor & Kottalil, 2011). By encouraging students to explore history using a humanistic approach, he helps them learn to explore multiple perspectives. In order to be able to reach students in a personal way, he makes a concerted effort to create a comfortable classroom climate with quirky items, use of

music, and a relaxing tone where students can freely ask questions or add comments to the daily lectures. He believes that students should be treated like humans and that the factory-like process of education needs to be transformed. Finally, he is widely known as being a counselor for students when they are dealing with challenging issues. By constructing strong interpersonal relationships, educators build safe communities that nurture spiritual development (Gafoor & Kottalil, 2011, Tucker, 2010). Through these endeavors, he shows evidence of nurturing students in the emotional, self-reflective, and ethical realms (Johnson & Neagley, 2010).

### **Recommendations**

Teachers must nurture their own spirituality in order to be able to better address these needs in students (Palmer, 1998; Johnson, 2005). By focusing on this, teachers can increase the following capacities: emotional and intellectual engagement, self-awareness, character development, appreciation for diversity, conservation of the environment, and the power to transform the world (Johnson, 2005). King (2008) outlined four approaches for encouraging spiritual growth in individuals based on his work in defining spiritual intelligence which include: *critical existential thinking*, *personal meaning production*, *transcendental awareness*, and *conscious state expansion*. These techniques may be helpful as teachers work to develop their own spirituality and can be integrated created for use in a classroom.

In order to improve *critical existential thinking*, King suggested that an individual discuss existential issues, write about existential topics, or analyze an existential debate or argument. Topics to contemplate include a higher power, energy, or deity, the origins of life and the universe, the future of the human race, what happens after death or before

birth, the definition of truth and justice, if evil exists, good versus evil, whether reality exists only in our minds, the definition of reality, the nature of human consciousness, the nature of time and the relationships among past, present, and future.

To improve *personal meaning production*, King recommended making a list of all things that give your life a sense of meaning and purpose including daily activities, work, hobbies, relationships, people, pets, special events, or occasions. The list should include items that give the individual a sense of purpose when you wake up in the morning. Reflecting upon the list enhances the ability to find meaning on a daily basis. In addition, King encouraged individuals to write about meaningful experiences, describing the experience and why it gave a sense of meaning and purpose. Further, individuals should discuss emotions and physical reactions to these emotions. Along these same lines, King suggested keeping a journal in order to find the good in the bad. In order to find meaning in negative or traumatic experiences, individuals should examine experiences of friends, loved ones, or strangers in order to consider positive outcomes. After investigating how other people find hope in pain, King proposed that the individual can then reflect on small personal setbacks and move onto larger ones by making a list of positive and negative outcomes. Finally, the individual should define a purpose in life by brainstorming ideas, writing about this topic, narrowing down the ideas and applying them to see if they make sense. Through completing this process, clarity will develop.

In order to improve *transcendental awareness*, an individual should pay attention and be mindful of inner and outer worlds, the details of daily experience, and the nonphysical aspects of life. King suggested that individuals ask questions such as, *Is there more here than meets the eye?* or *Are there any perspectives other than the physical*

*and material?* or *Was the experience spiritual or related to something greater than the self?* It can be beneficial to pay attention to things like emotions, instincts, and gut reactions, and work to see the bigger picture in situations. King recommended that in order to develop a holistic perception, individuals should try to use a top-down approach by viewing situations from a broader perspective instead of a bottom-up approach where individual parts are viewed first. In addition, it is important to look for connections in how a situation connects to the individual, the world, and the universe. Meditating and experiencing spiritual states of consciousness, such as oneness, unity, or cosmic consciousness can lead to increased perception of similar transcendent qualities during normal consciousness.

King suggested that meditation can improve *conscious state expansion*. Meditation can be achieved by finding a special location, focusing on breathing, and visualizing something that makes the individual feel relaxed and peaceful. Beginners should start with ten minutes and increase length of time from there. Being mindful is also important. This includes recognizing perceptions and emotions while meditating, which makes the individual feel connected to something greater. Practicing these behaviors helps to gain control over when the individual enters and exits such states. Exploring new methods of meditation with different objects of focus can also enhance conscious state expansion.

### **Limitations**

This study is limited in that it is a case study that is restricted by location, Olivia's perspective of spiritually nurturing educators, type of school environments of the teachers, and the individual school philosophies. This study was located in part of the

Bible Belt of the south-eastern United States. Other regions in the country and around the world may encourage spiritual development in the schools in more overt manners. This study relied upon the one student's vision of spirituality and her perspective of how that was nurtured in the educational setting. Other individuals may look at spirituality through a different lens, resulting in other outcomes. There also is a difference between how charter schools and public schools choose their vision or overall philosophy.

### **Implications and Directions for Future Study**

As universities continue to update their teacher training programs by including assessments for attitudes and dispositions for teacher education candidates and public schools examine their effectiveness, it would be advantageous to include coursework or professional development opportunities about the spiritual dimensions of teachers. Providing effective instruction is important, but it is essential to recognize the overall experience students have throughout each school year. It is interesting to consider the power of a teacher in a classroom. Attitudes and philosophies of educators are conveyed both overtly and covertly through daily activities selected and the rapport established. The teachers should be cognizant of what they are conveying.

Future research would be beneficial in exploring the perspective of leaders, such as superintendents and administrators, on their role of promoting a spiritually-nurturing environment in schools. Specific components found within this study would also help to elucidate the spiritual development of students. How a teacher develops and nurtures empathy could be explored through qualitative studies. The connection between creativity and spirituality also deserves further investigation.

## **Conclusions**

In order for teachers to establish spiritually-nurturing classrooms, they must be cognizant of how they can create a warm classroom climate. This can be established through modifying the classroom setting to include plants, animals, and student-friendly items. This can also be established through establishing a friendly tone and through creating student-centered learning opportunities. Building a strong rapport is essential in order to provide a healthy community where students feel safe and secure. Utilizing empathy and encouraging students to develop empathy is important for developing self-reflection and honoring the unique nature of all individuals. Creativity, self-expression, and personal choice allow students to investigate their understanding of the world around them. By providing activities that promote critical thinking and understanding of multiple perspectives, students are allowed to delve into topics of a worldly nature. Finally, intense engagement allows for a meaningful experience for both students and educators.

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**Table 3.1. Johnson and Neagley's Spiritual Dimension of Teachers**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Classroom Application</b>
Contemplative	Awareness, Mindfulness, and Intuitive Knowing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moments of Silence</li> <li>• Relaxation Techniques</li> <li>• Sensory Awareness</li> </ul>
Meaning-Making	Purpose in Life, Life & Death, Religion & Philosophy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Existential Issues</li> <li>• Curiosity</li> <li>• In-depth Analysis of Themes</li> </ul>
Self-reflective	Analyze Personal Motives, Emotions, Actions, Strengths, & Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assess Strengths &amp; Weaknesses</li> <li>• Understand Conflict</li> <li>• Safe Learning Environment</li> <li>• Provides Choice</li> <li>• Addresses Learning Styles</li> </ul>
Emotional	Connection Between All Life-forms, Empathy, Resilience, Faith	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Modeling Hope &amp; Faith</li> <li>• Healthy Classroom Climate</li> <li>• Curiosity</li> <li>• Provides Choice</li> </ul>
Ethical	Principles & Values, Morality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moral Investigations</li> <li>• Ethics-based Problems</li> <li>• Democratic Classroom Environment</li> <li>• Service Projects</li> </ul>
Ecological	Connections Between Life & Physical Nature & the Universe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Causes &amp; Effects</li> <li>• Discussion of Ecological Issues</li> <li>• Nature-based Experiences</li> </ul>
Creative	Use of Imaginative Thinking to Explore Ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creative Lessons</li> <li>• Focus on the Creative Process</li> <li>• Self-expression</li> </ul>

Table 3.2 School Personnel Interview Guide

**Interview Questions:**

- ◎ **How would you describe your experiences with spirituality in the classroom?**

  - Probing questions: Can you take me back into an experience and describe the circumstances? Were there certain activities associated with this experience? Did the experience utilize a specific aspect of the curriculum? Would you give credit to your attitude in the classroom or the classroom climate you created?
- ◎ **Based on previous interviews, you were identified as having a positive influence on the spiritual growth of a former student. This former student identified you based on personality, attitude in the classroom, curriculum, project, or extracurricular activity. Can you describe this feature?**

  - Probing questions: Can you describe your background in regard to this feature? Can you describe your intentions?
- ◎ **In other aspects, how do you nurture the spirituality of students?**

  - Probing questions: What classroom management techniques do you employ? What instructional methods do utilize? What topics of study do you investigate?
- ◎ **How is the spirituality of students nurtured through programs or in other ways at your school?**

  - Probing questions: How do certain clubs promote spiritual development? Which activities aim to address spiritual needs? How do school-wide goals nurture spirituality?

**Table 3.3 Teachers Identified as Spiritually Nurturing**

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Grade Level</b>	<b>Subject Area</b>
<b>Karen</b>	<b>5<sup>th</sup> Grade</b>	<b>General Education</b>
<b>Leslie</b>	<b>8<sup>th</sup> Grade</b>	<b>Language Arts</b>
<b>Jamie</b>	<b>9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> Grades</b>	<b>Theater</b>
<b>Lane</b>	<b>11<sup>th</sup> Grade</b>	<b>AP United States History</b>

**Table 3.4. King's Spiritual Intelligence Components and Suggested Strategies**

<b>Component</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Suggested Strategies to Address Component</b>
Critical Existential Thinking	Frequently Contemplates Existence and Reality and Develops Original Theories and Philosophies on Life, Death, Etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss, Analyze, and Write about Existential Issues</li> </ul>
Personal Meaning Production	Capable of Creating Meaning and Inferring Purpose in All Physical and Mental Experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Journal about All Meaningful Daily Activities</li> <li>• Write Memoirs</li> <li>• Discuss Painful Experiences</li> <li>• Define a Purpose in Life</li> </ul>
Transcendental Awareness	Aware of Transcendent and Spiritual Aspects of Existence on a Regular Basis; Can See the Transcendent Anywhere	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practice Mindfulness</li> <li>• Question Daily Experiences</li> <li>• Look for Connections with Self, World, &amp; Universe</li> <li>• Meditate</li> </ul>
Conscious State Expansion	Demonstrates Complete Control Over Entering and Exiting Higher/Spiritual States of Consciousness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on Breathing, Visualizing, and Meditating</li> </ul>



**CHAPTER 4**

**MANUSCRIPT THREE:**

**NURTURING SPIRITUALITY IN STUDENTS:**

**STRATEGIES FOR TEACHERS TO IMPLEMENT IN THE CLASSROOM<sup>3</sup>**

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<sup>3</sup> Kowalske, K. L. To be submitted to *Gifted Child Today*.

## **Abstract**

Nurturing students in an academic capacity is essential in education, but it is also important that educators address components of the whole child. This includes the development of ethics, wisdom, and compassion (Ambrose & Cross, 2009; Gardner, 2011; Renzulli, 2011; Sternberg, 2011). Students need to have an understanding of their role in the world, their connection to other individuals, and the possible influence they can have on society. Spirituality involves an evolving quest to understand one's place in the universe. Certain strategies can be utilized in order to promote spiritual development including writing, competitions, drama and the arts, investigating influential individuals, Socratic seminars, Global Learning, and service learning. These techniques promote creativity, self-expression, critical thinking, and existential thinking. The decision to implement these strategies may stem from different teacher's passions or it may become the focus of a school-wide initiative.

Keywords: spiritual giftedness, Writing Workshop, Socratic seminars, competitions, service learning

## **Introduction**

### **Background**

This research stems from the investigation of a spiritually gifted student and the impact of educators on her spiritual development. In prior articles, the personality traits of this individual were researched and the philosophies of the teachers were explored. This article addresses spiritually-nurturing educational techniques that can be implemented in the classroom or through extracurricular activities.

## **Leaders in Gifted Education**

The concept of spiritual awareness in the classroom is evolving in the field of gifted education. Many influential people have called for action to educate children in real-world ways by promoting social capital, ethics, and wisdom (Ambrose & Cross, 2009; Gardner, 2011; Renzulli, 2011; Sternberg, 2011). Although these different topics do not encompass the totality of spirituality, they do address an educational philosophy to promote the well-being of individuals and to improve the overall well-being of mankind.

**Operation Houndstooth.** Joseph Renzulli's (2011) work in Operation Houndstooth reflects his evolving theories on social capital. Operation Houndstooth explores the co-cognitive factors of optimism, courage, romance with a topic, sensitivity to human concerns, physical/mental energy, and vision/sense of destiny. These co-cognitive factors interact with cognitive traits and development. Overarching themes or outcomes include wisdom, a satisfying lifestyle, and the pursuit of happiness in regard to diversity, balance, harmony, and proportion. The backdrop for the model was based on the question of why some people utilize their interpersonal, political, ethical and moral realms of being in such a way as to better humanity as opposed to seeking power or feeding the ego in a quest for material gain or self-indulgence. As schools help to nurture and develop society's future leaders, the co-cognitive components must be incorporated into the process and help in the same regard as cognitive development. Renzulli described the importance for students to examine their individual abilities, interests and learning styles and to explore areas of potential involvement based on their interests.

**The GoodWork Project.** Gardner (2011) described how his evolving interest in morality, wisdom, goodness and ever-growing concern for ethics in the marketplace

spurred his contributions to the GoodWork Project where students investigate ethical issues they may encounter in their future careers or in their roles as citizens. His work in this area has evolved over the past fifteen years and is based on what he calls the 3 E's: technical Excellence, being Engaged in the world, and working in a way that is Ethical. He attributed a focus on standardized testing and promoting the pursuit of material wealth as factors that undermine the outcomes of a strong society. He suggested that the definition of school success must be redefined in order to promote the well-being of individuals and encourage their contributions to creating a compassionate society.

**WICS (Wisdom, Intelligence, Creativity, Synthesized).**

Over the past decade, Sternberg (2011) has developed his theory on wisdom, whereby an individual uses both skills and knowledge to benefit the common good. The group's larger interests are considered through ethical values. Sternberg (2012) analyzed the process of acting in an ethical manner as an eight-step process:

1. Recognize there is an event to which to react.
2. Define the event as having an ethical dimension.
3. Decide that the ethical dimension is significant.
4. Take personal responsibility for generating an ethical solution to the problem.
5. Figure out what abstract ethical rule(s) might apply to the problem.
6. Decide how these abstract ethical rules actually apply to the problem so as to suggest a concrete solution.
7. Prepare to counteract contextual forces that might lead one not to act in an ethical manner.
8. Act.

To further his research findings, Sternberg created a series of tests to measure his theory, which he calls *Wisdom, Intelligence, Creativity, Synthesized* (WICS). He has developed educational strategies by combining creative, analytical, practical, and wise thinking strategies. He has also created assessments to gauge the effectiveness of these strategies (Sternberg, 2008). Tests at Yale and Tufts have found that supplementing the college-admissions assessments with these tools increases prediction of successful academic performance and participation in extracurricular activities among students, while at the same time, reducing or eliminating ethnic differences in test scores.

**Connecting ethics with high ability.** Ambrose & Cross (2009) described the importance of creating an interdisciplinary connection between ethics and high ability. Through the study of ethics, conceptions of right conduct, and the nuances of moral behavior were analyzed. These findings were investigated in the study of high ability individuals through the nature and dynamics of giftedness, talent development, creativity, and intelligence. Researchers contributing work to this edited volume were from diverse fields: gifted education, creative studies, social sciences, humanities, and natural sciences. Their findings offered practical ideas and research-based insights into how positive ethical dispositions can be nurtured in high ability individuals.

The following table outlines possible applications in schools for promoting Social Capital, ethics, and wisdom (see Table 4.1).

### **Characteristics of Spiritual Giftedness**

There is no agreed upon definition of spiritual giftedness and there has been an ongoing debate over the existence of spiritual intelligence, but it is important to understand traits that educators might see in students. Sisk and Torrance (2001) noted a multitude of

likely characteristic in spiritually gifted students: uses inner knowing, seeks to understand self, uses metaphors and parables to communicate, uses intuition, sensitive to social problems, sensitivity to purpose in life, concerned about equity and injustice, enjoys big questions, senses gestalt (big picture), wants to make a difference, capacity to care, curious about how the world works, values love, compassion and concern for others, close to nature, uses visualization and mental imaging, reflective, self-observing and self-aware, seeks balance, peacemaker, concerned with human suffering, and seeks to understand self, feels connected with others, earth and universe.

Educators searching for ways to nurture these characteristics can implement techniques in the classroom or as an extracurricular activity. These strategies do not have spirituality as part of their labels or descriptions, which can make their implementation easier as this topic can be controversial. As educators and administrators become aware of the importance of nurturing these traits, the following list of techniques will grow.

### **Suggested Techniques for Encouraging Spiritual Growth**

#### **Technique One: Writing Workshop**

Implementing Writing Workshop allows students to be creative and express their ideas about issues they may be struggling with in their personal lives. They are able to make connections between their experiences and the experiences of others. Writing Workshop can be arranged so that students select their own genres to pursue or they can work through the writing process in a more organized fashion. It is important that students have creative opportunities (poetry, short stories, memoirs, plays, and novels), as well as assignments in informational and argumentative writing (reports, essays, and blogs). The creative pursuits allow for self-expression, while the informational and

argumentative writing enable students to develop and support their opinions on various topics. Students should be encouraged to explore existential topics starting at a very young age. Journal writing and time for reflective thinking aid the development of inner knowing and understanding of self (Sisk & Torrance, 2001). At the conclusion of a writing unit, students should be encouraged to share their writing by reading excerpts to the class or producing a classroom magazine. Listening to others helps develop compassion.

### **Technique Two: Competitions**

Numerous competitions exist that offer opportunities for students to develop their spirituality by encouraging creativity or allowing students to make connections to the world around them. These competitions can range in topics such as mathematics, science, social studies, and reading. At the heart of spiritually-nurturing competitions is creativity.

**Odyssey of the Mind.** *Odyssey of the Mind* is an international competition focused on creative problem-solving for students in kindergarten through college. Sponsors serve as facilitators as students craft products to address a long-term challenge and prepare for a spontaneous-response competition. To encourage creativity, the group needs time to develop ideas, a safe environment where students can brainstorm without judgment, responsibility for creating a final product, and rapport with the sponsor that is rooted in trust. In addition to promoting creativity, these competitions require authentic problem-solving, an essential skill for students to understand on a personal level in order to act in an ethical and moral way. Participating in extracurricular activities also provides the opportunity for students to develop leadership skills.

**Future Problem Solving Program.** Volk (2008) described the use of *The Future Problem Solving Program* developed by Torrance as a way to address the heightened sensitivity that gifted children have toward global problems and interests in social and environmental issues. The development of moral responsibility and guidance as future leaders enables students to reach their full potential and recognize global interdependence. The program allows students to explore these issues in a structured atmosphere. The program promotes critical thinking, team work, self-efficacy, problem-solution implementation, research skills, and reasoning about future scenarios.

Across countries involved in the program, teams of four members research current problems selected by an international vote. One topic is selected for each school year. Recent topics have included terrorism, freedom of speech, healthcare, alternative energy, nanotechnology, and world population. After researching, the teams are given a scenario set 20-50 years in the future. They must then write an 11-page booklet addressing concerns. By creating an action plan, students are able to develop a sense of responsibility for the world and engage in techniques of becoming effective leaders. There is also an action branch of the program, *Community Problem Solving*, where students explore local, regional, or international topics of their own choice. Students involved in this component must carry out their action plans.

### **Technique Three: Drama and the Arts**

Creativity enables spirituality to grow because it helps students to understand themselves, each other, and the world around them. As students move through the education system, creative endeavors can become overshadowed by the stress to attain top scores on standardized tests in order to be accepted to universities. Participating in



drama and art classes can be important, but all teachers can include these techniques in their classrooms. Students can perform skits, participating in reader's theater, write plays, draw pictures, sing songs, or design sculptures.

#### **Technique Four: Investigating Influential Individuals**

Students can benefit from studying the lives of artists, social activists, and spiritual leaders. It is essential that they analyze important successes and failures, delve into his personality traits, and study pivotal moments, which defined the individual's life. Learning about the failures of influential individuals, students can better understand the problem-solving process and the role of resilience in a person's life. By studying spiritual pathfinders and the lives of eminent people, teachers can encourage the capacity to care, and promote concern for human suffering (Sisk & Torrance, 2001).

#### **Technique Five: Socratic Seminars**

Socratic seminars provide the opportunity for students to develop ideas and voice their opinions about important issues. Teachers can explore topics that are morally or ethically controversial such as cloning or global warming. During seminars the teacher serves as a facilitator, ensuring that the discussion is productive, but the ideas are developed and explored by the students. These discussions help students to understand multiple perspectives, personal beliefs, and existential ideas. In this process, the students become owners of the information. Open-ended discussions allows students to discuss universal issues, experience a sense of gestalt, develop curiosity about how the world functions, and feel connected with others, the earth and the universe (Sisk & Torrance, 2001).

**Technique Six: Global Learning**

Gibson, Rimmington & Landwehr-Brown (2008) examined *Global Learning* and its impact on gifted students. *Global Learning* is a social-constructivist learning activity that utilizes project-based and experiential learning. It provides an avenue for students to communicate with others around the world through advanced technologies through first-hand investigations. Through *Global Learning*, students develop sensitivity towards others, tolerance of others, respect for differences, respect for varying perspectives, appreciation of human dignity, belief that people can make a difference, commitment to social justice and equity, and curiosity about global issues. This contributes to the idea of promoting spirituality by providing the opportunity for students to understand their role in the world and also in creating the pathway for students to humanize those from other cultures.

**Technique Seven: Service-learning**

Terry (2008) described service-learning programs as a way to nurture the development of highly moral people. *Service-learning* is a method integrated into the curriculum where students address needs in the community. The process involves three levels: community service, community exploration, and community action. Terry explored the idea that service-learning may help students to use their intellectual, motivational and creative assets to make a positive difference in the world. As students are educated to become future leaders, idealism, compassion, and altruism are qualities that must be investigated. Opportunities must allow for high levels of responsibility and authenticity where students can practice reflective judgment and self-awareness in order to develop empathy for others and a desire for action. Utilizing service learning projects

promotes sensitivity to social problems and a connection to nature (Sisk & Torrance, 2001).

### **Conclusion**

Spiritual development is crucial for individuals and for society. People are becoming aware of the importance of nurturing more than the cognitive skills of children. There exists a need to provide students with avenues in which they can develop skills associated with their spiritual development.

Writing Workshop allows students to develop their ideas about personal and worldly issues. Extracurricular activities such as *Odyssey of the Mind* can provide an atmosphere where students can thrive and grow in a safe environment. During this creative process, students need to have a goal, encouragement, time, and ownership. Creative problem-solving is encouraged in all classes. Drama and the arts provide self-expression and the exploration of worldly ideas. Techniques from these extracurricular classes can be implemented in all classes. Socratic seminars give students the opportunity to voice their opinions and learn more about controversial topics. Global Learning and service learning projects can help students to understand their role in the universe and in promoting environmental awareness. A school utilizing a mission to serve the spiritual development of students should honor the uniqueness of each child (Van Bockern, 2006) by encouraging creativity, self-expression, critical thinking, and existential thinking.

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**Table 4.1 Addressing Spiritual Development through Social Capital, Ethics, and Wisdom**

<b>Theory or Framework</b>	<b>Main Tenets or Process</b>	<b>Applications in Schools and/or with Students</b>
Operation Houndstooth (Renzulli, 2011)	Optimism Courage Romance with a Topic Sensitivity to Human Concerns Physical/Mental Energy Vision/Sense of Destiny	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Future Problem Solving Program (Volk, 2008)</li> <li>• Triad Enrichment Model Level III Activities</li> <li>• Independent, self-selected projects</li> </ul>
3 E's (Gardner, 2011)	Technical Excellence Being Engaged in the World Working in an Ethical Way	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Global Learning (Gibson, Rimmington &amp; Landwehr-Brown, 2008)</li> <li>• Debate unit focused on ethical issues</li> <li>• Study of ethical dilemmas</li> </ul>
WICS (Sternberg, 2011)	Wisdom Intelligence Creativity  Synthesized	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assessment strategies that gauge analytical, creative, practical, and wisdom</li> <li>• Curricular unit of study based on responsibility</li> <li>• Study of influential leaders</li> </ul>
Connecting Ethics and High Ability (Ambrose & Cross, 2009)	Ethical Leadership Interdisciplinary Perspectives Emotion, Affect, & The Inner Journey Recognizing & Guiding High Ethical Ability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching for Intellectual and Emotional Learning (TIEL Model)</li> <li>• Study the steps in ethical decision-making</li> <li>• Global Learning</li> </ul>

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSION**

The participants in this study were interesting to investigate. Through the research process, the character traits of each individual emerged to showcase their spiritual dimensions. Although the topic of spiritual giftedness was new to some of the individuals, they were all enthusiastic about this line of research and their inclusion in the study.

Olivia is a talented young lady with a very promising future. She has brought a great deal of intellectual excitement and passion to the classes she attended in elementary, middle, and high school. Her teachers praised her unique abilities and her powerful presence in the classroom. She was a leader, but not in a boastful, aggressive way. She had grace and is aware of self and others.

Jamie is lively and engaging. She believes that a classroom should be constantly filled with action. Students should be writing, memorizing lines, acting out scenes, blocking stage movements and working on stage and makeup design. This has recognized that art takes time: time for the students to think, to discuss, to practice, to fail, and then finally, to produce. Empathy is extremely important to her as an individual and as a component that her students strengthen and utilize. Her students are thankful for the opportunity to be creative in her classroom.

Lane is beloved by his students. He is known for delving into topics that require the students to explore and support their opinions. He feels like his teaching style has a



bit of a “shock factor” because he speaks to the students in a way that is different from the more traditional teachers. His classroom is lively and engaging; he refers to it as controlled chaos. Although he utilizes a lecture-style approach, the students are engaged and call out questions or comments throughout the lessons. He has a passion that teachers must see students as people and that teachers must remember all of the experiences a child may be going through at home. His discouragement with the public school system is dismaying. He has decided to homeschool his children and leave the profession to return to school to receive a degree in religious studies.

Leslie is witty and engaging. She utilizes instructional techniques that require students to think critically about topics and to explore multiple perspectives about a topic. Because she teaches middle school, she feels like the way she teaches can be more playful than elementary school or high school teachers. In elementary school, students are still learning the basics, while in high school, the testing demands become extremely stressful as students prepare for college admissions. She relies upon Writing Workshop, Socratic seminars, project and problem-based units of study, and the use of concepts in all of her lessons.

Karen is full of compassion and has a great love of nature. She fills the classroom with appreciation for animals by allowing bunnies to hop around all day and raising chickens and ducks every spring. She relies upon cooperative learning and weekly classroom meetings where students can explore important topics and sensitive issues. She is known for promoting creativity in school and in the community, where she teaches pottery from her garage. With a background in art therapy and former work as a group home leader, she has a strong desire to help students emotionally. Although she is

saddened by how the new requirements of testing will impact her charter school, she is hopeful that they will seek out a new identity, possibly one in character education.

### **Future Research Agenda**

In order to promote ethics, wisdom, and morality, it is important to study spiritually gifted students, philosophies of spiritually-nurturing educators, and curriculum that impacts the spiritual growth of students. Our future spiritual leaders are sitting in classrooms across America. He may be the boy who is able to see multiple perspectives about issues or the young girl who is ferociously penning her thoughts on the page. It is our role to recognize these gifts and nurture them throughout their educational journeys. Specific research with spiritually-gifted individuals could be conducted in a variety of settings that include different cultures, different views on spirituality, and different religious beliefs.

By having future teachers investigate their own spirituality, they can better understand how this impacts the climate they create in the classroom. There are subtle undercurrents that are established through expectations and interactions. Educators may be able to understand their strengths and weaknesses, if viewed through this lens. It is important to address each individual teacher's philosophy and passions because these become the cornerstone for effective curriculum design and implementation. Specific research studies could analyze teacher empathy and the role of creativity in the classroom. Understanding how individuals establish a warm classroom climate and build a strong rapport with students would also be beneficial.

Nurturing the spirituality of students provides the foundation for importance of caring for others and the world. Teachers can address this through the establishment of a

through the techniques they choose to utilize. Allowing students to express themselves through writing, drama, and the arts is critical for encouraging creativity. Utilizing Socratic seminars gives students the opportunity to explore existential ideas and build support for their personal beliefs. Extracurricular activities should be promoted as they provide unique educational experiences allowing for leadership skills to develop and problem-solving skills to be nourished. Giving students an opportunity to participate in Global Learning or service learning experiences allows students to understand their role in the world and presents them with the understanding of the impact they can make on problems others face. Specific research using case studies would help to understand why these activities are important for schools to utilize.

### **Conclusion**

In all of these endeavors, educational researchers have explored the development of higher consciousness through moral, emotional, social, or ethical intelligences. While these models and the discussion at national conferences show promise for including spiritual intelligence, school policies and structure create barriers that inhibit educators to embrace these ideas. The demands of standardized testing and narrowly-focused goals for education keep teachers and students bound within their current confines of the system.

The overall goal of education must be reassessed. What are the essential learning outcomes? Students who score well on reading and math assessments? Do we only want to nurture students in a way so that they can contribute to our workforce? By assessing these students are we building a wider gap in those who can do and those who cannot?

Assessment of student learning is necessary, but it should not be the driving force behind our schools. We should be encouraging each student to develop skills as a whole

individual who is able to understand his or her role in the community and world. We need to enable students to be able to reflect on life's journey and others' journeys, as well. Most importantly, we need to equip students to be active leaders and citizens of the next generation (Sternberg, 2011).

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## APPENDIX A

### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL WITH MAIN PARTICIPANT

#### Introduction:

I would like to begin by thanking you for being a part of this project. As you know, I am a doctoral student in the Educational Psychology Department at the University of Georgia, and I am conducting my dissertation on the influences of spiritual development. Specifically, I would like to learn more about your perceptions of spirituality, influences on your spiritual growth, and how spirituality plays a role in an educational context.

I first became interested in this topic after learning about the Dalai Lama's work in creating a school for the spirituality gifted in India. Based on learning about this school, I researched theories about spiritual intelligence, specifically Dr. E. Paul Torrance and Dr. Dorothy Sisk's research in higher consciousness. I am also intrigued by current work being conducted in the field of giftedness by Joseph Renzulli in Social Capital, Howard Gardner in the Good Works project, and Robert Sternberg's WICS model, which utilizes wisdom as a key facet in the learning process. I appreciate you taking the time to meet with me today and discuss your insights.

Before we begin the interview, I would like to remind you that the information you share during the interview will be kept confidential as explained in the consent form. I will not use your name or any other identifying information about you. Feel free to skip any questions you do not want to answer, and at any time you may end the interview. I anticipate that the interview will take approximately an hour. I will record the interview and erase the recording at the completion of my dissertation. Feel free to ask questions during the interview. Do you have any questions before we begin?

#### Interview Questions:

◎ **How would you define spirituality for yourself and others?**

Probing questions:

How do you nurture your spirituality?

Can you take me back into an experience and describe the circumstances?

Were there certain activities associated with this experience?

How do others you know nurture their spirituality?

Do you feel like you were in touch with your spiritual side from a young age?

Do you seek to understand self?

Do you use metaphors and parables to communicate?

Do you use intuition?

Are you sensitive to social problems?

Do you feel like you have a purpose in life?

Are you concerned about equity and injustice?

Do you enjoy big questions about the universe?

Do you want to make a difference?  
 Do you feel like you have a high level of capacity to care?  
 Are you curious about how the world works?  
 Do you value love?  
 Do you have compassion and concern for others?  
 Are you close to nature?  
 Do you use visualization and mental imaging?  
 Are you reflective?  
 Are you self-observing and self-aware?  
 Do you seek balance?  
 Do you feel connected with others, the earth and universe?  
 Do you feel like you are a peacemaker?  
 Are you concerned with human suffering?

◎ **How was your spirituality nurtured through your educational experiences in elementary, middle and high school?**

Probing questions:

Which activities addressed your spiritual needs?

Can you take me into an experience and describe it to me as if in pictures?

Did the experience utilize a specific aspect of the curriculum?

Would you give credit to the teacher's attitude or the classroom climate?

How did certain clubs promote your spiritual development?

Can you take me into an experience and describe it to me as if in pictures?

Did the experience utilize a specific aspect of the curriculum?

Would you give credit to the teacher's attitude or the classroom climate?

How did school-wide goals or attitudes nurture your spirituality?

Can you take me into an experience and describe it to me as if in pictures?

Did the experience utilize a specific aspect of the curriculum?

Would you give credit to the teacher's attitude or the classroom climate?

Final Question: I would like to take this time to see if you have anything additional you would like to add to this interview. Is there anything else you would like to share? Were there any questions I should have included in this interview?

## APPENDIX B

### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR SCHOOL PERSONNEL

#### Introduction:

I would like to begin by thanking you for being a part of this project. As you know, I am a doctoral student in the Educational Psychology Department at the University of Georgia, and I am conducting a research project on the influence of spirituality in the classroom. Specifically, I would like to learn more about your perceptions of spirituality and how spirituality plays a role in your classroom or learning environment.

I first became interested in this topic after learning about the Dalai Lama's work in creating a school for the spirituality gifted in India. Based on learning about this school, I researched theories about spiritual intelligence, specifically Dr. E. Paul Torrance and Dr. Dorothy Sisk's research in higher consciousness. I am also intrigued by current work being conducted in the field of giftedness by Joseph Renzulli in Social Capital, Howard Gardner in the Good Works project, and Robert Sternberg's WICS model, which utilizes wisdom as a key facet in the learning process. Because you work with gifted students, you offer special insights into this phenomenon. I appreciate you taking the time to meet with me today and discuss your insights.

Before we begin the interview, I would like to remind you that the information you share during the interview will be kept confidential as explained in the consent form. I will not use your name or any other identifying information about you. Feel free to skip any questions you do not want to answer, and at any time you may end the interview. I anticipate that the interview will take approximately an hour. I will record the interview and erase the recording at the end of this project. Feel free to ask questions during the interview. Do you have any questions before we begin?

#### Possible Interview Questions:

- ☉ **How would you describe your experiences with spirituality in the classroom?**

  - Probing questions: Can you take me back into an experience and describe the circumstances? Were there certain activities associated with this experience? Did the experience utilize a specific aspect of the curriculum? Would you give credit to your attitude in the classroom or the classroom climate you created?
- ☉ **Based on previous interviews, you were identified as having a positive influence on the spiritual growth of a former student. This former student identified you based on personality, attitude in the classroom, curriculum, project, or extracurricular activity. Can you describe this feature?**

  - Probing questions: Can you describe your background in regard to this feature? Can you describe your intentions?

- ◎ **In other aspects, how do you nurture the spirituality of students?**
  - Probing questions: What classroom management techniques do you employ? What instructional methods do utilize? What topics of study do you investigate?
- ◎ **How is the spirituality of students nurtured through programs or in other ways at your school?**
  - Probing questions: How do certain clubs promote spiritual development? Which activities aim to address spiritual needs? How do school-wide goals nurture spirituality?

**Final Question:** I would like to take this time to see if you have anything additional you would like to add to this interview. Is there anything else you would like to share? Were there any questions I should have included in this interview?



## APPENDIX C

### REQUEST TO PARTICIPATE FOR SCHOOL PERSONNEL

Dear Participant,

This email is to invite you to participate in a research study titled “Educational Impact on the Spiritual Growth of Students,” which is being conducted by Kristy Lee Kowalske, graduate student, Educational Psychology and Instructional Technology, University of Georgia, 828-489-9904, under the direction of Dr. Bonnie Cramond, professor, Educational Psychology and Instructional Technology, University of Georgia, 706-542-4248. You have been identified as having a significant impact on the spiritual development of a former student based on your classroom instruction, instructional attitude, sponsorship of extracurricular club or activity, or educational/emotional guidance.

The purpose of the study is to gain an understanding of the educational influences on spiritual growth of students. The results of this study will add to the work conducted by Dorothy Sisk and E. Paul Torrance in spiritual intelligence through the descriptions provided by spiritually gifted students. It will also add to the work conducted by Aostre Johnson in the spiritual dimensions of teachers in the classroom. Certain instructional methods, school activities or organizations and school-wide philosophies will be uncovered. This may also add to the work being conducted by Howard Gardner, Joseph Renzulli, and Robert Sternberg.

This study will also be useful for practitioners in understanding what techniques to use to nurture the spirituality of students and in understanding spiritually gifted students. Policy makers may find the study useful when creating new schools or in reexamining current school philosophies. On the college level, implications may result in a new focus on teaching methods and personal awareness of the spiritual dimensions a teacher provides in a classroom setting. For administration preparation programs, the spiritual dimension in relationship to leadership skills would be beneficial to explore.

The only people who will know the identity of participants are members of the research team. No individually-identifiable information about the participants, or provided by them during the research, will be shared with others.

If you volunteer to take part in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

Participate in a face-to-face interview with the researcher, who will ask questions and collect documents about influences on spiritual growth. The interview is expected to take about 45 minutes-1 hour.

If you are interested in participating in or learning more about this study, please contact the researcher at 828-489-9904 or [kkwagner@uga.edu](mailto:kkwagner@uga.edu). You will receive a follow-up email with additional information about study procedures and the handling of confidential information.

Thank you,

Kristy Kowalske

## APPENDIX D

### CONSENT FORM FOR MAIN PARTICIPANT

I agree to take part in a research study titled “Educational Impact on the Spiritual Growth of Students,” which is being conducted by Kristy Lee Kowalske, Educational Psychology and Instructional Technology, University of Georgia, 828-489-9904 under the direction of Dr. Bonnie Cramond, Educational Psychology and Instructional Technology, University of Georgia, 706-542-4248. My participation is voluntary; I can refuse to participate or stop taking part at any time without giving any reason without penalty or loss of benefits which I would otherwise be entitled. If I decide to withdraw from the study, the information that can be identified as mine will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless I make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the information.

The results of this study will add to theory and practices in gifted education. The study will also be useful for practitioners in understanding what techniques to use to nurture the spirituality of students and in understanding spiritually gifted students. Policy makers may find the study useful when creating new schools or in reexamining current school philosophies. On the college level, implications may result in a new focus on teaching methods and personal awareness of the spiritual dimensions a teacher provides in a classroom setting. For administration preparation programs, the spiritual dimension in relationship to leadership skills would be beneficial to explore.

I will not benefit directly from this research.

If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be asked to do the following things:

Participate in 1-3 face-to-face interviews with the researcher, who will ask questions and collect documents about influences on spiritual growth. Each interview is expected to take about 45 minutes-1 hour. The interview will be audiotaped and notes will be made during the interview. The field notes will not contain any descriptors that could identify participants. Both the audiotape and the field notes will be destroyed after being transcribed. Items collected may include archival records, documents, or physical artifacts which could provide further details of spiritual giftedness or the spiritually nurturing environment of the educational environments. These may include diary entries, writing samples, letters, or assignments

Complete the SISRI-24 (Spiritual Intelligence Self-Report Inventory).

After the initial interview, further interviews may be conducted in order to clarify information provided. Based on this information, I will help identify 3 participants (teachers, guidance counselors, specialists or administrators) who have influenced my spiritual development. These individuals will be asked to

participate in a single interview to provide information about their influence on the spiritual development of students.

No discomforts or stresses are expected.

No risks are expected.

Interviews will be audiotaped. Documents will be photographed or copied for later analysis. Any artifacts obtained which include non-research participants that are not part of the public record should not contain any identifiable private information (e.g., names, images of faces). Any identifiable private information will be blacked out before it becomes part of the research record.

I understand that I have the right to review/edit the tapes. The researcher will have access to the tapes and documents, which will be erased after transcription of the interviews. I will have the right to review the transcription to check for errors and misinterpretation.

All individually-identifiable information will be held confidential unless required by law. The data obtained from my teachers/mentors will be linked with my own data; however neither I nor the teachers/mentors will have access to each other's interview data. If the researcher uses any direct quotes from my interviews, the researchers will delete or alter any information that could identify the quotation as mine or be affiliated with my school or place of work. The researcher will use pseudonyms to protect the identities of all participants. However, as my information will be linked with my teachers/mentors' information in a published format, it is possible that my teachers/mentors may be able to identify information as my own.

The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project, and can be reached by telephone at: 828-489-9904.

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

_____ Name of Researcher	_____ Signature	_____ Date
_____ Phone number	_____ Email	
_____ Name of Participant	_____ Signature	_____ Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

*Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 629 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address [IRB@uga.edu](mailto:IRB@uga.edu)*

## APPENDIX E

### CONSENT FORM FOR SCHOOL PERSONNEL

I agree to take part in a research study titled “Educational Impact on the Spiritual Growth of Students,” which is being conducted by Kristy Lee Kowalske, Educational Psychology and Instructional Technology, University of Georgia, 828-489-9904 under the direction of Dr. Bonnie Cramond, Educational Psychology and Instructional Technology, University of Georgia, 706-542-4248. My participation is voluntary; I can refuse to participate or stop taking part at any time without giving any reason without penalty or loss of benefits which I would otherwise be entitled. If I decide to withdraw from the study, the information that can be identified as mine will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless I make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the information.

The results of this study will add to theory and practices in gifted education. The study will also be useful for practitioners in understanding what techniques to use to nurture the spirituality of students and in understanding spiritually gifted students. Policy makers may find the study useful when creating new schools or in reexamining current school philosophies. On the college level, implications may result in a new focus on teaching methods and personal awareness of the spiritual dimensions a teacher provides in a classroom setting. For administration preparation programs, the spiritual dimension in relationship to leadership skills would be beneficial to explore.

I will not benefit directly from this research.

If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be asked to do the following things:

Participate in a face-to-face interview with the researcher, who will ask questions and collect documents about influences on spiritual growth. The interview is expected to take about 45 minutes-1 hour. The interview will be audiotaped and notes will be made during the interview. The field notes will not contain any descriptors that could identify participants. Both the audiotape and the field notes will be destroyed after being transcribed.

No discomforts or stresses are expected.

No risks are expected.

I understand that I have the right to review/edit the tapes. The researcher will have access to the tapes, which will be erased after transcription of the interviews. I will have the right to review the transcription to check for errors and misinterpretation.

All individually-identifiable information will be held confidential unless required by law. The data obtained from the primary participant will be linked with my own data; however neither I nor the primary participant will have access to each other's interview data. If the

researcher uses any direct quotes from my interviews, the researchers will delete or alter any information that could identify the quotation as mine or be affiliated with my school or place of work. The researcher will use pseudonyms to protect the identities of all participants. However, as my information will be linked with the primary participant's information in a published format, it is possible that the primary participant may be able to identify information as my own.

The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project, and can be reached by telephone at: 828-489-9904.

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

_____ Name of Researcher	_____ Signature	_____ Date
_____ Phone number	_____ Email	
_____ Name of Participant	_____ Signature	_____ Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

*Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 629 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address [IRB@uga.edu](mailto:IRB@uga.edu)*

## APPENDIX F

### SISRI-24

#### THE SPIRITUAL INTELLIGENCE SELF-REPORT INVENTORY

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Age? (in years) \_\_\_\_\_

Sex? (circle one) Male Female

The following statements are designed to measure various behaviours, thought processes, and mental characteristics. Read each statement carefully and choose which **one** of the five possible responses best reflects you by circling the corresponding number. If you are not sure, or if a statement does not seem to apply to you, choose the answer that seems the best. Please answer honestly and make responses based on how you actually are rather than how you would like to be. The five possible responses are:

**0 – Not at all true of me | 1 – Not very true of me | 2 – Somewhat true of me | 3 – Very true of me | 4 – Completely true of me**

For each item, circle the **one** response that most accurately describes **you**.

1. I have often questioned or pondered the nature of reality.  
0 1 2 3 4
2. I recognize aspects of myself that are deeper than my physical body.  
0 1 2 3 4
3. I have spent time contemplating the purpose or reason for my existence.  
0 1 2 3 4
4. I am able to enter higher states of consciousness or awareness.  
0 1 2 3 4
5. I am able to deeply contemplate what happens after death.  
0 1 2 3 4
6. It is *difficult* for me to sense anything other than the physical and material.  
0 1 2 3 4
7. My ability to find meaning and purpose in life helps me adapt to stressful situations.  
0 1 2 3 4
8. I can control when I enter higher states of consciousness or awareness.  
0 1 2 3 4
9. I have developed my own theories about such things as life, death, reality, and existence.  
0 1 2 3 4
10. I am aware of a deeper connection between myself and other people.  
0 1 2 3 4
11. I am able to define a purpose or reason for my life.

- 0 1 2 3 4
12. I am able to move freely between levels of consciousness or awareness.  
0 1 2 3 4
13. I frequently contemplate the meaning of events in my life.  
0 1 2 3 4
14. I define myself by my deeper, non-physical self.  
0 1 2 3 4
15. When I experience a failure, I am still able to find meaning in it.  
0 1 2 3 4
16. I often see issues and choices more clearly while in higher states of consciousness/awareness.  
0 1 2 3 4
17. I have often contemplated the relationship between human beings and the rest of the universe.  
0 1 2 3 4
18. I am highly aware of the nonmaterial aspects of life.  
0 1 2 3 4
19. I am able to make decisions according to my purpose in life.  
0 1 2 3 4
20. I recognize qualities in people which are more meaningful than their body, personality, or emotions.  
0 1 2 3 4
21. I have deeply contemplated whether or not there is some greater power or force (e.g., god, goddess, divine being, higher energy, etc.).  
0 1 2 3 4
22. Recognizing the nonmaterial aspects of life helps me feel centered.  
0 1 2 3 4
23. I am able to find meaning and purpose in my everyday experiences.  
0 1 2 3 4
24. I have developed my own techniques for entering higher states of consciousness or awareness.  
0 1 2 3 4

### The Spiritual Intelligence Self-Report Inventory (SISRI-24)

#### Scoring Procedures

##### Total Spiritual Intelligence Score:

Sum all item responses or subscale scores (after accounting for \*reverse-coded item).

24 items in total; Range: 0 – 96

##### 4 Factors/Subscales:

##### I. Critical Existential Thinking (CET):

Sum items 1, 3, 5, 9, 13, 17, and 21.

*7 items in total; range: 0 - 28*

II. Personal Meaning Production (PMP):

Sum items 7, 11, 15, 19, and 23.

*5 items in total; range: 0 - 20*

III. Transcendental Awareness (TA):

Sum items 2, 6\*, 10, 14, 18, 20, and 22.

*7 items in total; range: 0 - 28*

IV. Conscious State Expansion (CSE):

Sum items 4, 8, 12, 16, and 24.

*5 items in total; range: 0 - 20*

\*Reverse Coding: Item # 6 (response must be reversed prior to summing scores).

Higher scores represent higher levels of spiritual intelligence and/or each capacity.

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For additional information, please visit <http://www.dbking.net/spiritualintelligence/>  
or e-mail David King at [dbking@live.ca](mailto:dbking@live.ca)