

ROLE OF SPIRITUALITY IN ADULT LEARNING CONTEXTS

by

LAURA C. BROWN

(Under the Direction of Bradley C. Courtenay)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how adult learners perceive the influence of spirituality in their learning. To address this purpose, this study examined how adult learners defined spirituality, how adults perceived the role of spirituality in their learning, and the factors that influenced spirituality in the learning of adults. Data from semi-structured interviews and artifacts were collected and analyzed using the constant comparative method.

The nine female participants represented five adult learning contexts: Adult Literacy, University/Four-Year Degree Programs, Continuing Professional Education, Technical College, and Religious Education. An underlying rationale for this study was to explore if spiritual experiences had commonalities or differences across different adult education contexts. The data revealed that even in religious settings where it would be expected that a spiritual lens would frame the learning, there was no difference from those experiences that occurred in other adult education contexts.

The findings of this study indicate that these adult learners perceive the self as spiritual, and they hold strong beliefs in a transcendent Other. These perceptions and beliefs impact the connections they have with others. When these spiritual perceptions, beliefs, and connections are complemented by reverent instructors, hospitable spaces, dependence on a transcendent Other,

and when the adult learners use their spiritual lens to interpret the content, they perceive that spirituality has contributed to their learning. These adults describe the role of spirituality as enhancing the learning of the content, facilitating transformational learning, and revealing meaning and purpose for their lives.

Three conclusions were derived from this study. First, spiritual experiences are likely to occur for adult learners who view spirituality as the essence of self. Second, spirituality is linked to learning. Third, the nature of the instructor, the nature of the classroom environment and the spiritual world view of the learner can influence spirituality in adult learning.

INDEX WORDS: Spirituality, Adult Learning, Adult Education, Transformational Learning, Holistic Learning, Meaning and Purpose for Life

ROLE OF SPIRITUALITY IN ADULT LEARNING CONTEXTS

by

LAURA C. BROWN

B.S. Ed., Augusta College, 1980

M.Ed., Augusta College, 1984

Ed. S., Augusta College, 1989

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2008

© 2008

Laura C. Brown

All Rights Reserved

ROLE OF SPIRITUALITY IN ADULT LEARNING CONTEXTS

by

LAURA C. BROWN

Major Professor: Bradley C. Courtenay

Committee: Robert J. Hill
Sharan B. Merriam
Wendy E. A. Ruona

Electronic Version Approved:

Maureen Grasso
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
December 2008

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work has been a professional, educational, and spiritual journey for me. It is a privilege to thank family, friends, and colleagues who have offered their support throughout this process, and I am thankful for the outstanding educators who have supported and guided me along the way. I am especially appreciative of the educators who served on my dissertation committee: Dr. Bradley Courtenay, Dr. Bob Hill, Dr. Sharan Merriam, and Dr. Wendy Ruona. Each member provided help and insight as I explored spirituality and adult learning.

Dr. Brad Courtenay has been a special inspiration to me. As my committee chair, he believed in me when I no longer believed in myself. He devoted many months of his time over the years helping to formulate the concepts in an articulate form. His encouragement and wise critiques generated discussions that took me deeper into the content and helped to motivate me during difficult times. I acknowledge that these hours of stimulating discussion and exploration profoundly influenced my work.

I am also grateful to the participants in my study who offered so much of themselves about spirituality and learning. They shared their experiences in rich detail without hesitation. I am honored to have known them, and I learned so much from each of these women.

My family has also supported me through multiple challenges in this work. My husband, Paul Brown, has made many sacrifices that enabled me to be productive. He accepted with unwavering grace the times that I was preoccupied with an idea or working

late into the night. Both my sons, Justin Annis and Daniel Brown, offered their own personal observations and affirmed my work as important. My father, Dr. Jere Chambers, impressed upon me the importance of adding this research to the literature. He believed in spiritual health as a source of strength and balance in life. In addition, many other family members checked on my progress and provided encouragement throughout my entire journey. These supportive voices did much to keep me moving forward.

I am grateful to all of these expressions of encouragement, support, and approval. I value this work as a genuine collaboration.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
LIST OF TABLES	viii
LIST OF FIGURES	ix
 CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of the Problem	11
Purpose of the Study.....	13
Significance Statement	14
2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	15
Definitions of Spirituality.....	15
Holistic Learning and Spirituality	24
Heron’s Theory of the Person	27
Miller’s Transformation Learning.....	30
Mezirow’s Transformation Theory	33
Spirituality and Transformative Learning	36
Integrating Spirituality in the Curriculum	40
Summary	47
3 METHODOLOGY	51
Design of the Study	52

Sample Selection	56
Data Collection	58
Data Analysis	61
Reliability and Validity	65
Bias Statement and Assumptions	68
Summary	70
4 FINDINGS	72
Participants	72
Overview of Findings	82
Definitions of Spirituality	83
Role of Spirituality in Adult Learning	92
Factors that Influence Spirituality in Adult Learning	109
Additional Observations	121
Summary: Adults' Perceptions of Spirituality in their Learning	123
5 CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS	127
Summary of Findings	128
Conclusions and Discussion	130
Implications for Practice	140
Recommendations for Further Research	144
REFERENCES	147
APPENDIX	161
A Interview Guide	161

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1: Participant Biographical Information	74
Table 2: How Adults Perceive Spirituality in their Learning	84

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1: Perceptions of Spirituality in Adult Learning	126

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In the early 21st century, spirituality has become a prominent subject in the media and the popular press. Books, magazines, and websites have been dedicated to both secular and religious treatments of this subject. Most recently in August 2005, spirituality in America was explored by *Newsweek* and the organization, Belief.net, in conjunction with Princeton Survey Research Associates (Adler, 2005). More than 1000 Americans responded to the survey, and the results provide some insight into how these Americans think about their faith and their spiritual practices. For example, for 84% of the respondents, spirituality is important in their daily lives. Adler suggests that spirituality in America is about a longing for transcendence that often cannot be met by only one religion, and so Americans are combining spiritual and religious practices from many different faith traditions. Some Americans may combine yoga, meditation, and traditional religious services to meet varying individual needs. The results of this survey suggest that spirituality is not about politics or global issues, but about forging a personal relationship with God.

Another scholar who writes about syncretism or the blending of different beliefs or religious practices is Roof (1999). In a forum about American spirituality, he examines the movement from traditional religious experiences to the personal spirituality described by Adler (2005). Changes in American immigration laws in 1965 gave rise to an increase in immigrants from Asia and other non-European countries as quotas were

shifted from favoring Europeans (Forman, 2004). Roof (1999) argues that in the 1960s Americans rediscovered spiritual teachings from the east, the Romantic tradition, and the Transcendentalists. Authors writing about the impact of the 1960s on current notions about spirituality include discussions of sex, drugs, and rock'n'roll (Lattin, 2004) as well as rebellion against the military, political, and religious establishments (Roof, 1999) which encouraged Americans to look inward (Roof, 1999) and look East (Lattin, 2004; Roof, 1999). These interests in combination with the changes in immigration laws as well as the disenchantment with mainline churches gave rise to personal focus on the inner lives of individuals (Roof, 1999). In addition, policy changes that allowed evangelicals access to the airways expanded the spiritual marketplace and lay the foundation for much of what we now describe as spiritual in American culture (Roof, 1999). Environmental concerns, honoring of the feminine, understanding the holistic, the emphasis on the inner life, the body as spiritual, the union of body, mind, and spirit, and highlighting quality of life issues were all themes of the 1960s and are reoccurring as spiritual themes today (Roof, 1999).

In addition, Forman (2004) suggests other factors that have contributed to the growing interest in spirituality. In his book about grassroots spirituality, he argues that the American fast-paced, technological focused life style in combination with demographic shifts away from rural life have contributed to our sense of worry about alienation and aloneness as well as our concern about superficial relationships and lives that lack significance. Communities no longer revolve around strong nuclear or extended families, and people no longer share life-histories with neighbors or people from work which contributes to these feelings of alienation and feeling alone. Forman also cites the

disillusionment with science and rationality to provide meaning and fulfillment as another reason for this growth in spiritual interests. Forman recognizes that there are probably many reasons for the rise of spirituality in the past three decades, but he argues that there is considerable force behind this movement.

Forman (2004) suggests that thousands of Americans are leading others in this large scale movement. They lead yoga kirtans, Bible studies, and Sufi dances (Forman, 2004). Spiritual marriage counselors, transpersonal therapists, rabbis, priests, and chaplains are engaging in a multitude of spiritual pursuits both inside and outside of traditional religion (Forman, 2004). They are bringing spirituality into untraditional settings such as the workplace, the hospital, and the classroom. For example, Greenleaf, (2004) coined the notion of servant leadership which has been embraced by several popular writers. Many of these leaders strive for leading individuals to humility and compassion, but Forman (2004) acknowledges that some of these spiritual leaders are engaging in these pursuits to expand their own egos. Whether influenced by the media, spiritual entrepreneurs, the hundreds of books in large scale book chains, mega-churches or small groups (Roof, 1999), spirituality is gaining currency in American culture. Spirituality has become big business, and Americans are engaging in spiritual retreats and workshops in increasing numbers (Forman, 2004), while websites and printed materials about this subject are also gaining popularity. For example, the magazine, *Spirituality and Health*, has a readership of over 200,000 with 500,000 website page views per month (Peter Wild, personal communication, October 10, 2005).

While the subject of spirituality in American life has become of interest in the popular press and media, this topic is becoming more evident in scholarly literature as

well. These discussions have moved out of the departments of religion and are becoming part of the broader landscape of the academy. Researchers in the fields of health and social science are exploring the intersections of spirituality with their own fields of study. For example, the field of psychology has contributed to the discussion with journal articles, textbooks, and books related to the study of religion and spirituality. Respected and refereed journals such as the *American Psychologist*, *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, *Journal of Personality*, and *Rehabilitation Psychology*, are including the work of researchers who are seriously exploring religious and spiritual dimensions in their work. Research and clinical practice have explored trends such as spiritual strategies for counseling and psychotherapy, religion as a meaning system, and spirituality and treatment (Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003).

Another area of scholarly literature where spirituality is being investigated is the field of health. In recent decades, the health sciences have begun to contribute to this body of research (Chiu, Emblen, Hofwegen, Sawatzky, & Meyerhoff, 2004). Studies indicate a correlation between better physical and mental health and religious or spiritual faith (Kennedy, Abbott, & Rosenberg, 2002). These correlational reports have included better coping with illness, less depression, less cardiovascular disease, lower rates of substance abuse, and lower rates of mortality (Kennedy, et al, 2002). Despite the fact that studying spirituality related to health outcomes has remained controversial, some medical schools have elective courses dedicated to this subject (Musick, Nichols, Woods, Tipton, & Nora, 2002). Furthermore, some hospitals have opened research centers focused on the study of spirituality and the healing arts. For example Harvard professor, Dr. Herbert Benson at the Benson-Henry Institute for Mind/Body Medicine in Boston

was one of the first medical researchers to study the long-term health benefits of prayer and meditation (Moore, 1996), and Dr. Harold Koenig at Duke University founded the Center for the Study of Religion/Spirituality and Health which is conducting interdisciplinary research, scholarship and education on spirituality, theology, and health.

Another area with an accumulation of literature about spirituality is the workplace. Employees and managers are questioning the meaning of work in relation to the meaning of their lives (Howard, 2002). Mitroff and Denton (1998) suggest that organizations should find ways to integrate spirituality and management. Values and ethics are being related to spiritual issues and the term “spiritual leadership” has been coined to include helping people explore their capabilities, develop a personal destiny, and align to a higher vision (Howard, 2002). Fenwick and Lange (1998) explored spirituality and human resource development (HRD) more critically. Among other concerns, they argue that HRD and spirituality have fundamentally different purposes and pursuits and caution against the religious fundamentalism and possible invasion of individual privacy while acknowledging the risk of manipulation when dealing with people’s spiritual impulses (Fenwick & Lange, 1998).

In the area of education, a recent body of literature has begun to emerge. Scholars have approached spirituality and education in higher education (Astin & Astin, 1999; Zajonc, 2003), K-12 education (Palmer, 1999), and adult education (Dirkx, 1997; English, Fenwick, & Parsons, 2003; English & Gillen, 2000; Fleming, 2005; Tisdell, 2003). These scholars have examined spirituality in a variety of educational contexts and have published articles and books on the topic. Topics have included issues related to culture, curriculum, leadership, and teaching.

For example in higher education, Astin and Astin (1999) studied meaning and spirituality in the lives of college faculty using a broad interpretation of spirituality which encompassed the individual's sense of self, mission and purpose in life, and the personal meaning in one's work. They believe that academic life has fostered an atmosphere where wholeness is not valued, and individuals are leading fragmented and inauthentic lives. Furthermore, Astin and Astin (1999) argue that students in higher education are discouraged from engaging in issues of meaning, purpose, authenticity, wholeness, and fragmentation among themselves or with their professors.

Faculty, staff, and academic administrators in higher education are speaking more openly about contemplative and spiritual dimensions in higher education, and with increasing frequency, they are exploring ways to integrate these dimensions into their work (Zajonc, 2003). According to Zajonc, professional conferences are being dedicated to the subject of spirituality, fellowships and grants for contemplative practices have been established, and the relationship between science, values, and spirituality has begun to be explored by several organizations and institutes such as the Mind and Life Institute and the Kira Institute.

By examining spirituality in education from the perspective of teachers, Palmer (1999) gained popularity with his book, *The Courage to Teach*, which explores the inner journeys of teachers and the value of reconnecting with teaching as a vocation. He argues for cultivating a sense of the sacred in teaching and learning. His definition of sacred involves both an "ineffable immensity beyond concept and definition.... [and] continuous respect for the great things of the world" (Palmer, 1999, p. 111). He advocates for a wholeness of learning that involves intellectual, emotional, and spiritual aspects.

Spiritual, in this context, refers to the need to be connected with the largeness of life. To clarify this concept of the largeness of life, Palmer (1998) provides examples such as understanding the meaning and purpose of life, exploring the personal gifts that contribute to the world, maintaining hope, and dealing with suffering. Palmer (1998) believes that spiritual questions are embedded in every discipline and whether we acknowledge it or not, the spiritual is always present in teaching and learning.

While educators have traditionally been cautious about addressing spirituality in education, some educators are calling for a more inclusive view about the topic. *Academics of the Heart* (Rendon, 2000), *Education and the Soul* (Miller, 1999), *Schools with Spirit* (Lantieri, 2001), and *The Heart of Learning* (Glazer, 1999) are all examples of titles which express different ways authors have engaged in this discussion of spirituality in education. For example, Glazer's (1999) collection of essays, *The Heart of Learning: Spirituality in Education*, explores spirituality in education in terms of sacredness, spiritual identity, as well as relationships and community. Other authors have included spirituality in their discussions of the wholeness of learning (Miller, 2005; Palmer, 1999), transformative learning (Dei, 2001; O'Sullivan, 1999; Tisdell & Tolliver, 2001) and workplace learning (English, Fenwick, and Parsons, 2003; Groen, 2002; Howard, 2002). These discussions are permeating every level of education including K-12 education, higher education, education in the workplace as well as adult education.

Adult educators have offered a variety of definitions about spirituality making this construct difficult to understand. For example, English and Gillen (2000) state that spirituality is "an awareness of something greater than ourselves...[that] moves one outward to others as an expression of one's spiritual experiences" (p. 1). Other authors

writing about spirituality have drawn from Western and Eastern religious doctrines and theology, healing literature, or New Age literature to make assumptions about what spirituality means (Fenwick & English, 2004). Courtenay and Milton (2004) interviewed adult learners and adult educators about their definitions of spirituality and offer these components of spirituality: a sense of connectedness, a search for meaning in life, and a transcendent energy or force.

Even without a common definition or common characteristics of this construct, scholars in adult education have continued to examine spirituality in teaching and learning (Dirkx, 1997; English, Fenwick, & Parsons, 2003; English & Gillen, 2000; Tisdell, 2003). They offer suggestions, assumptions, key ideas, and strategies for fostering spirituality in adult education, but they provide little empirical evidence about the impact, value, or benefit for the learner from spirituality being included or acknowledged in the learning environment. These adult educators have taken up the call for valuing spiritual dimensions of learning and are making recommendations for adult educators to change teaching practices based on the conceptual frameworks proposed.

Accepting spirituality as a dimension of learning has some adult educators suggesting that the spiritual aspect of the learner should also be considered (Dirkx, 1997; English, Fenwick, & Parsons, 2003; English & Gillen, 2000; Tisdell, 2003). However, there has not been much empirical research and the literature base around this topic is just emerging. In adult education, there are learning formulations, theories, and models that have been around a while and have been verified by some research and the practical experience of adult practitioners. As editor of *The New Update on Adult Learning Theory*, Merriam (2001) explores a variety of adult education learning formulations,

theories, and models ranging from andragogy to transformational learning as well as issues such as women as learners. Each of these is supported by a literature base, and adult educators have explored approaches to teaching related to these learning formulations, theories, and models. For example, andragogy emphasizes self-directed learning and the experiences of the learner (Merriam, 2001); transformational learning stresses reflection (Baumgartner, 2001); and valuing women as learners encourage adult educators to promote relationships in the learning experience (Hayes, 2001). If the spiritual dimension of learning is to be generally accepted by adult educators, more literature and research are needed.

Courtenay and Milton (2004) note that much of the adult education literature about spirituality suggests practical guidelines for incorporating it without being based on empirical evidence. Even without this empirical evidence, many adult educators argue for honoring the spiritual in adult learning. For example, Tisdell (2003) suggests that spirituality as part of the human experience is important. She examines spirituality, learning, and culture, and she argues that spirituality has an important role in the construction of meaning-making. In another example, English, Fenwick, and Parsons (2003) echo Palmer's (1999) views that spirituality has an integral part in education, and they claim spiritual practices can be fostered in adult education through activities such as purposeful reflection, journal writing, or music. English, Fenwick and Parsons (2003) believe that spirituality has value for workplace learning in terms of the well-being of workers while bridging the gap between the personal and the professional. They argue that spirituality as part of adult development learning supports the need for holistic approaches to learning.

This topic has garnered so much interest that *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* devoted an entire issue to the topic of spirituality and adult learning in 2000. Within this issue, some writers suggest there is clearly a spiritual dimension to learning. While English (2000) acknowledges the complexities of understanding spirituality in adult learning, she argues that there are spiritual aspects to all human beings, but not everyone is aware of this dimension in their lives. In this issue, Vella (2000) is very direct about the relationship of the spiritual as an element of the human dimensions of adult education, and how through attention to these dimensions, effective and excellent adult learning can be facilitated. Vogel (2000) suggests that “our spirits - our inner lives, our hearts - affect who we are and how we engage others and the world” (p. 17), and she states that it is vital for adult learners to explore connections between integrity and their own spiritual lives. Furthermore, Gillen and English (2000) assert that there is a general consensus about humans as spiritual beings seeking to make meaning out of life, and it is “imperative that adult educators embrace the spiritual and assist learners in making meaning and in answering their deepest questions” (p. 88). They argue that in order to address the spiritual dimension, adult educators should listen carefully in order to respond to the spiritual needs of learners.

Other articles have been written about this topic, and Tisdell is one scholar who has written about spirituality in several contexts. She suggests that learners already bring the spiritual into the learning environment, and adults are searching for meaning that brings coherence to their lives, which is connected to our relationships with others and the meaning created by these relationships (Tisdell, 2003). According to Tisdell, people use image and symbol to construct knowledge, and this knowledge often springs from the

core of our being. In addition, Tisdell asserts that this construction of knowledge and meaning-making is attached to the sociocultural context of the learner; therefore, spirituality and culture are tightly integrated.

Spirituality is also being linked to transformative and holistic learning. Tisdell and Tolliver (2001) make the assumption that transformational experiences are more likely for learners if they are engaged on cognitive, affective, and symbolic or spiritual levels. Furthermore, they argue that transformative learning is “better anchored if we engage on the spiritual level as well, and draw on how people construct knowledge through unconscious processes” (Tisdell & Tolliver, 2001, p. 14). Dirkx (2001b) contends that imagination allows adults to seek a “deep understanding of the emotional, affective, and spiritual dimensions that are often associated with profoundly meaningful experiences in adult learning” (p. 70). He also believes that much of the practice in adult education has marginalized emotions and elevated rationality to the point that reason and rationality are viewed as foundational to learning. He believes that our inner lives and our outer experiences have deep emotional and spiritual connections (Dirkx, 2001b). This concept of learning holistically is another area where spirituality has been a focus of the literature. Understanding the whole learner includes understanding not only the mind-body connection, but also the spirit (English, Fenwick, & Parsons, 2003).

Statement of the Problem

Many adult educators are suggesting that spirituality has significant implications for the learning of adults (English, Fenwick, & Parsons, 2003; Tisdell, 2003; Vella, 2000; Vogel, 2000). These adult education scholars are voicing strong opinions about the value of spirituality in adult education and adult learning. However, in my review of the

literature, they do not provide extensive empirical evidence to support these claims.

Anecdotal accounts and descriptions about spiritual experiences of learners permeate the literature in adult education, but there continues to be a paucity of empirical evidence to support the position that integrating spirituality benefits the learner. Fenwick and English (2004) propose that if spirituality continues to attract significant interest from adult educators, “robust analytical frames would be helpful to sort through” (p. 50) the various expressions of spirituality and spiritual literature that are proliferating the field. They argue that “educators need to move beyond shallow notions and romantic rhetoric to more rigorous conceptions of what spirituality means, and how different conceptions and responses might be enacted in adult learning and education” (Fenwick & English, 2004, p. 50).

There has been some empirical research conducted in adult education which is informing this field of study. Tisdell (2003) examined spirituality and culture in adult education. Courtenay and Milton (2004) studied the experiences of both adult learners and adult educators and Fleming (2005) focused on spirituality and leadership in adult education. In addition, Groen (2002) studied adult educators in the workplace who were incorporating spirituality. These studies are beginning to offer adult educators some insight into the relationship between spirituality and learning.

However, these studies did not address the claims of some scholars that spirituality is always present even when it is unacknowledged (Hart & Holton, 1993; Palmer, 1998; Tisdell, 2003). Statements about spirituality always being present in learning experiences imply that every learner has a spiritual component. In fact, the way these scholars present the integration of spirituality in adult education is not qualified. It

is implied that spirituality is everywhere – in every being and every setting, but I have discovered no empirical evidence to support this claim in my review of the literature, and I have discovered no studies that have examined spirituality from learners’ perspectives in multiple adult education settings.

In summary, this review of the literature leaves this question unanswered: *How is spirituality important to adult learners?* First, there is much discussion in the literature about the importance of acknowledging the spiritual in learning, fostering spirituality in adult education, and the spiritual nature of human beings searching for meaning and purpose in their lives. Furthermore, authors suggest that holistic education and the needs of learners can offer insight into the value of integrating spirituality into adult education. Authors also suggest that integrating spirituality into the curriculum has added benefit for the learner in such areas as promoting transformative learning. However, there have been only a handful of studies that probe how adult learners understand the relationship of spirituality in their learning. Some adult educators are claiming that spirituality is present in all adult learning settings even if it is unacknowledged, and there have been no studies that explore if spiritual experiences of adult learners had commonalities or differences across different adult education contexts.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand how adults perceive spirituality in their learning. These research questions guided the study:

1. How do adults define spirituality?
2. What is the role of spirituality in adult learning?
3. What factors influence spirituality in adult learning?

Significance Statement

This study contributes both theoretically and practically to the understanding of the learning of adults. Theoretically, it contributes to how adult learners define spirituality and how they perceive spirituality in their learning. The literature describes definitions of spirituality developed by adult educators, but little has been known about how adult learners define spirituality and how they articulate the influence of spirituality in their learning. This study also helps to explain the role spirituality plays in learning and, therefore, help clarify its importance in theories of adult learning.

This study contributes to practice by examining spirituality in the learning experiences of adults and probing how spirituality influences learning. Since many adult educators are suggesting changes in teaching practices to foster spirituality, this study examined how adult learners understand the influence of spirituality in their own learning. This empirical evidence is needed in the field to inform the practice of educators if they are planning to integrate spirituality into their practice. Implications for practice are revealed, and strategies helping adult educators become spiritually responsive will be identified.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to understand how adults perceive spirituality in their learning. For this study, the following three research questions were examined:

1. How do adults define spirituality?
2. What is the role of spirituality in adult learning?
3. What factors influence spirituality in adult learning?

With regards to this purpose, this review of the literature is focused on articulating the following areas. First, definitions and dimensions of spirituality are addressed. Second, spirituality is discussed in terms of its intersection with holistic learning and transformation theory. Third, spirituality and its relationship to learning are summarized, and finally, integrating spirituality in the curriculum is explored. Searches to find sources for these areas of literature were conducted in the following databases: ERIC, EBSCOhost, Academic Premier, ProQuest, PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, Health Source (Nursing/Academic), Religion and Philosophy Collection, electronic journals and texts, and dissertation abstracts. Key words of spirituality, spiritual, faith, and religion linked with adult education, teaching, and learning including transformative and holistic learning led to various authors and avenues of information.

Definitions of Spirituality

Conceptualizing spirituality and religion has been the topic of many articles and differentiating between the spiritual and the religious has become fashionable both

culturally and in scholarly literature (Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003). Definitions of spirituality are often elusive and vague (Albanese, 2001), and theorists in the academy have not generally acknowledged spirituality in learning (Foehr & Schiller, 1997). Hill et al. (2000) caution against the use of restrictive and narrow definitions which will have limited value in research, but they also note that it is important to avoid overly broad definitions that strip spirituality and religion of their distinctive characteristics. There are clearly inconsistencies in definitions about both religion and spirituality making it difficult to draw conclusions. The literature remains unclear in this area and empirical grounding is needed (Hill et al., 2000).

Hill et al. (2000) argue that both spirituality and religion have a sense of the sacred which is central to the experience. They offer this definition of the term sacred: “a divine being, divine object, Ultimate Reality, or Ultimate Truth as perceived by the individual” (Hill et al., 2000, p. 66). These authors report that modern discourse often includes the term “spiritual” as an alternative for words such as “important,” “fulfilling,” and “moving.” They argue for distinguishing between what is important in our lives and what is sacred. Things that are important or precious in our lives (gardening, music, or the pursuit for social justice) should not be confused with things that are sacred unless they take on lasting sacred attributes (Hill et al., 2000). For example a person might comment, “gardening is my spirituality,” and this statement suggests that this person is serious about gardening and finds great satisfaction and well-being in gardening, perhaps to the point of organizing her life around gardening activities. However, Hill et al. (2000) would argue that it is inappropriate to refer to gardening as spiritual unless these

responses include a perception of the sacred (such as gardening as a way to care for nature and to connect with the universe).

Numinous has also been used to describe what is sacred or what is concerned with the spirit (Elkins, 1998; Teasdale, 1999). Rudolf Otto (1923) first coined this word in his book, *The Idea of the Holy*. According to Teasdale, numinous in this sense is referring to a pre-ethical understanding of the nature of the sacred, a view that emphasizes the divine's ineffability, mystery, awesomeness, and mystical qualities. The numinous expresses the divine or sacred reality as it affects the human realm, but with none of the moral connotations that have been added by organized religion. The numinous is the divine in its utter wildness, free of any human attributions. (p. 195)

While including the sacred, religion may also comprise the search for the nonsacred (belongingness, meaning, or wellness) as well as validation and support from within an identifiable group of people (Hill et al., 2000). This distinction is but one definition offered in the literature. As will be discussed, many other scholars embrace an expanded view of spirituality.

In one of the few empirical studies comparing religiousness and spirituality, Zinnbauer, Pargament, Rye, Butler, and Belavich (1997) found evidence to suggest that these terms were comparing different concepts. This study surveyed 346 predominantly white participants, ages 15 to 85, and found that religiousness was associated with church attendance, authoritarianism, orthodoxy, and religious attendance of parents. Spirituality was described in personal or experiential terms including a belief in or relationship with a higher power or God and 93% of the participants identified themselves as spiritual. While

the term religiousness contained similar personal beliefs, there was also an emphasis on institutional and organizational beliefs and practices. There were 78% of the participants who identified themselves as religious. However, even though these terms describe different concepts, they were not considered to be independent. Most participants in this study integrated spirituality with traditional organizational practices and beliefs. There was still a small group of individuals who identified themselves as solely spiritual. This study confirms that multiple perspectives of spirituality and religiousness exist in the United States today.

For Teasdale (1999) being religious involves practicing religious traditions while spirituality involves transcendence that requires spiritual practices (such as meditation, prayer, contemplation, or liturgical devotion) to serve as a catalyst for inner change and growth. “Spirituality is a way of life that affects and includes every moment of existence. It is at once a contemplative attitude, a disposition to a life of depth, and the search for ultimate meaning, direction, and belonging” (Teasdale, 1999, p. 17). Teasdale argues that spiritual practices are profoundly transformative and may be the core means of inner change. Spirituality is essentially personal, but there can be associated social dimensions. Rather than looking for inner direction, religious people depend on the institutions of their religion to shape and guide their spiritual lives. He also believes that both spirituality and religion are derived from mysticism (Teasdale, 1999). According to Teasdale, there is a psychologically integrative dimension to this mystical way of knowing. It unites the unconscious and the conscious while integrating the memory, will, intellect, emotions, and imagination. The mystical permits us a glimpse of “the transcendent mystery beyond this universe” (Teasdale, 1999, p. 24).

Frankl (2000) discusses spirituality in terms of human existence. He suggests that humans have an “existential, personal, spiritual core....which constitutes oneness and wholeness in man [*sic*]” (p. 34). He points to “man’s [*sic*] desire to find and fulfill a meaning in his life” (p. 139) as the important component of the spiritual height of human nature. He discusses spirituality in terms of a person’s search for ultimate meaning, and suggests that this search has two dimensions. He states that this desire for meaning has both aspects of being “down to earth” (p. 142) and “up to heaven” (p. 143). He suggests that the search for ultimate meaning relates to a meaning of the universe and to the long-range meaning of one’s life as a whole. In fact according to Frankl (1949), the primary motivational force in human beings is the desire to find meaning in one’s life.

Maslow (1970) believes in the naturalistic nature of spiritual values and claims that his theoretical investigations went far in demonstrating their reality. Maslow investigated individuals who had mystical or transcendent experiences. He argues that religions originate with the insights of mystical or peak experiences of individuals. He suggests twenty-five (25) features of peak (transcendent or mystical) experiences. Some of these features include the perception of the universe as integrated and whole where judgments and evaluations are suspended. Individuals lose connection to time and space, and the world is accepted as beautiful, worthwhile, and desirable. Feelings of wonder, awe, reverence, and humility are common; the conflicts of life are transcended, and there is a diminished sense of self. Life is often considered to be worthwhile or meaningful, and a “unitive consciousness” or a sense of the sacred is glimpsed during peak experiences (Maslow, 1970). Maslow, though, criticizes scientists, philosophers, and

other intellectuals for excluding transcendent experiences and focusing exclusively on rationality.

There has been a dichotomous separation between cognition and spirituality resulting in a resistance to embrace the metaphorical and paradoxical nature of spirituality (Foehr & Schiller, 1997). Foehr and Schiller (1997) describe spirituality as “paradoxical - noncognitive but deeply known, inexplicable yet deeply felt, inexpressible in language yet familiar and trusted” (p. ix). Connectedness, meaning, purpose, transcendence, insight, intuition, imagination, passion, and awareness are all examples of words used to describe spirituality. However, understanding how these words relate to a spiritual dimension of learning has remained ambiguous. Similarly, Albanese (2001) explores these paradoxical and noncognitive dimensions:

[spirituality] has been linked to artistic creativity and to feelings of beyondness and separation from society or, by contrast, to feelings of close communion with others. It has been associated with stillness, silence, and peace, and alternately, with ecstatic surges of feeling and exuberant shouts. (p. 2)

Albanese notes that there are individual interpretations of how these qualities relate to spirituality and, these individual interpretations make spirituality even more difficult to define. With such a broad range of definitions in the literature, it is not surprising that a consensual definition of spirituality has not been offered.

However, spirituality continues to capture the interest of scholars from a variety of professional fields of study. Health is one area where spirituality has become a more prominent topic in the literature. In an attempt to clarify the meaning of spirituality in health and nursing, Tanyi (2002) examined the use of the term over the past 30 years.

Using concept analysis, she studied the concept of spirituality in 76 articles and 19 books and proposed this definition of spirituality: “Spirituality is a personal search for meaning and purpose in life....It entails connection to self-chosen and or religious beliefs, values, and practices that give meaning to life, thereby inspiring and motivating individuals to achieve their optimal being” (Tanyi, 2002, p. 506). She adds to this definition by stating that the connection fostered by spirituality brings not only faith, hope, and peace, but also empowerment. Furthermore, the results of spirituality are “joy, forgiveness of oneself and others, awareness and acceptance of hardship and mortality, a heightened sense of physical and emotional well-being, and the ability to transcend beyond the infirmities of existence” (Tanyi, 2002, p. 506).

Health care providers are increasingly considering the importance of a spiritual dimension to their practice, and recently there has been an accumulation of rapidly evolving findings related to this topic in the health care literature (Chiu et al., 2004). Chiu, Emblen, Hofwegen, Sarwatzky, & Meyerhoff surveyed the health literature from 1990 – 2000 about spirituality. By using thematic analysis of current definitions of spirituality, four themes emerged: existential reality, transcendence, connectedness, and power/force/energy. According to Chiu et al., existential reality encompasses spirituality through subjective experiences, meaning and purpose, and hope. The notions of connectedness and relationship included the connections with Self, Other, Nature, and Higher Being. Transcendence was considered by many researchers to be an essential element of spirituality or an indicator of spirituality, and researchers believed that “spirituality transcends the present context of reality and exists throughout and beyond time and space” (Chiu et al, 2004, p. 413). In addition, creative energy, guidance,

motivation, and a striving for inspiration were concepts that emerged in the power/force/energy category.

Management education is another area where spirituality has become an area of interest. Harlos (2000) examined definitions of spirituality in relation to teaching and learning. She suggests that despite the ambiguity and paradoxical nature of the various definitions of spirituality, the concept of values exists as a common element. Recognizing that spirituality can have both secular and sacred values, she suggests that spirituality can be conceived as “secular or sacred values aimed at transcendence toward our ultimate value” (Harlos, 2000, p. 615). She argues that peak experiences are examples of transcendent experiences where focus, creativity, joy, and detachment all collide. Harlos suggests that the values of humility, compassion, and simplicity should be considered to further the discussion of how spirituality and values can guide teaching.

Adult education scholars are also examining spirituality. One of these scholars is Tisdell (2003). She puts forth seven assumptions about spirituality from a study with multicultural women teaching for social change:

- (1) Spirituality and religion are not the same, but for many people they are interrelated.
- (2) Spirituality is an awareness and honoring of wholeness and the interconnectedness of all things through the mystery of what many...referred to as the life-force, God, higher power, higher self, cosmic energy, Buddha nature, or Great Spirit.
- (3) Spirituality is fundamentally about meaning-making.
- (4) Spirituality is always present (though often unacknowledged) in the learning environment.
- (5) Spiritual development constitutes moving toward greater authenticity or to a more authentic self.
- (6) Spirituality is about how people

construct knowledge through largely unconscious and symbolic processes, often made concrete in art forms such as music, art, image, symbol, and ritual which are manifested culturally. (7) Spiritual experiences most often happen by surprise. (pp. 28-29)

Other adult education scholars, Courtenay and Milton (2004), examined how adult educators and learners define spirituality. Themes of connectedness, meaning in life and a transcendent energy or force emerged in the definitions of four adult educators and seven adult learners. Interestingly, for both the adult educators and the learners in this study, spirituality was felt to reside in “the individual and that a personal grounding in this dimension affects the experience in the classroom” (Courtenay & Milton, 2004, p. 103).

In summary, Fenwick and English (2004) suggest that in adult education little theory exists to critically examine the various forms and ranges of spirituality. Scholars are still struggling to define spirituality, and there are multiple definitions of spirituality offered in the literature. Themes range from a belief in an integrated universe (Maslow, 1970) to the need for meaning, purpose (Courtenay & Milton, 2004; Fenwick & English, 2004; Tanyi, 1999; Teasdale, 1999; Tisdell, 2004), and belonging (Albanese, 2001; Chiu et al., 2004; Fenwick & English, 2004; Teasdale, 1999) in our everyday lives. Spirituality has been closely tied to themes of wholeness (English, Fenwick, & Parsons, 2003; Tisdell, 2003) and mysticism (Maslow, 1970; Teasdale, 1999). In addition, themes of transcendence and the sacred are evident in the literature (Albanese, 2001; Chiu et al., 2004; Courtenay & Milton, 2004; Fenwick & English, 2004; Harlos, 2000; Hill et al., 2000; Maslow, 1970; Tisdell, 2003), and some authors argue that the characteristics of

transcendence and sacredness are fundamental to spirituality (Chiu et al., 2004; Hill et al., 2000; Teasdale, 1999). However, it is important to note that these are definitions offered by scholars. The only definition offered from a handful of adult learners is from Courtenay and Milton (2004), and beyond this study, the literature does not offer clear direction on what adult learners consider to be important about spirituality and their learning experiences.

Holistic Learning and Spirituality

Some education scholars who are examining spirituality have included holistic learning in their discussions. There are several possibilities as to why these education scholars are drawn to the notion of holistic learning. Holistic learning values the layers of meaning that create the complexities of human beings (Miller, 1999). This concept challenges the scientific world view of a highly rational reality with fragmented building blocks verified by empirical description and precise definitions, and instead, promotes an integrative perspective about ourselves and our relationships to the world (Clark, 1990). According to holistic educator, Ron Miller, human beings are biological and ecological creatures with psychological and emotional dimensions living in ideological, social, and cultural environments (Miller, 1999). In addition, human beings possess a spiritual core (Miller, 1999). There are interactions with all of these different meanings making it impossible to point to any one and say, “This is what is important to being human” (Miller, 1999). Given this supposition, it is also impossible to single out any one of these and say “This is what is important to human learning.” However, much of the discussions about learning in adult education have ignored the spiritual. Fenwick, English, and Parsons (2003) suggest that there is a need to reclaim this important aspect of our lives by

valuing learners as more than just the sum of their cognitive, physical, emotional, and social parts.

Holistic is based on the Greek word *holos* which means whole or entirely. Holistic learning acknowledges that learners may bring their spirituality to the learning process. English, Fenwick, and Parsons (2003) propose that adult education should reconnect the spiritual and educational. They argue that adult educators “can no longer ignore the spiritual basis of our practice. The desire for holistic education may be a longing for spiritual solace, energy, and connection emanating from contemporary cultures” (English, Fenwick, & Parsons, 2003, p. 19). In holistic education, everything is connected in a fundamental way (Clark, 1990), and holistic educators believe that this view holds to “the ancient perspective of educating the whole person not just training learners” (Miller, 2005, p. 1). Palmer (1998) examines this notion of wholeness and suggests that there must be a balance between the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual.

Reduce teaching to intellect, and it becomes a cold abstraction; reduce it to emotions, and it becomes narcissistic; reduce it to the spiritual, and it loses its anchor to the world. Intellect, emotion, and spirit depend on one another for wholeness. They are interwoven in the human self and in education at its best. (Palmer, 1998, p. 4)

This concept of wholeness invites us to contemplate the integrity of the learning process (Lemkow, 2005). According to Lemkow, wholeness values the different dimensions of human experience and recognizes that life, experience, and learning are coextensive. Within this concept, she argues that wholeness points beyond itself to the

transcendent realm deepening our understanding and suggesting that we can become more than we presently are (Lemkow, 2005).

Lemkow (2005) insists that holistic learning emerged as a reaction to reductionism, rationalism, and relativism. Cynicism and shallowness have surfaced out of the belief in a “separative mind” (Lemkow, 2005, p. 21). She argues that learning can not be reduced to biochemistry and while reason is often the mode for discourse in rationalism, reason alone can not make truth, goodness, beauty, love, and compassion realities in our lives. For example, inspiration for a great work of art is not generated only by reason. According to Lemkow (2005) intuitive, aesthetic, unitive, and spiritual faculties are needed for self-transformation. Lemkow (2005) states that “the reasoning mind includes but transcends the physical senses. The intuition includes but transcends the mind. Spirit includes but transcends the intuition” (p. 21). While reason and physical senses are included, these higher faculties transcend them.

According to Miller and Koegel (2003), holistic education explores different levels of wholeness. There is respect for wholeness in the individual as well as the community. Within the community, relating to one another openly fosters an ethic of care and is highly valued. Relationships become increasingly important as the connections between the wholeness of society, the planet, and the cosmos are encountered. They believe that traditional educational practices do not recognize this concept of wholeness, and the spiritual dimensions of everyday life are not acknowledged. “This spiritual sensibility leads us to approach our students, teaching, lives, and all other forms of life with reverence” (Miller & Koegel, 2003, p. 15). This spiritual dimension captures the

notion of our highest values – values such as love, compassion, humility, peace, and justice (Miller & Koegel, 2003).

Heron's Theory of the Person

While educators in various settings have discussed holistic learning, some adult educators resonate with Heron's (1992) ideas about wholeness and its relation to spirituality (English, Fenwick, & Parson, 2003; Tisdell, 2003; Yorks & Kasl, 2003). Heron's (1992, 2004) spiritual philosophy is complex and only the salient points related to this study will be summarized. He offers a theory about feeling and personhood which includes holistic learning. In this transpersonal theory, the person is fundamentally spiritual. As the person progresses in development, there is an expression of spiritual needs which includes a need for a relationship with the divine. Heron believes in two manifest realms which include the human and physical sciences as well as a subtle realm of "energies, presence, and powers to which extrasensory capacities in humans bear witness" (Heron, 2004, ¶12).

Heron (1992) asserts that feeling is the foundation which allows us access to these realms, and feeling, not reason, is the hallmark of personhood. "The notion of a person as a distinct entity capable of continuous development...presupposes feeling as the capacity which makes such growth and learning possible" (Heron, 1992, p. 94). He argues that feeling is a word that explains both the concrete such as sensations of hot and cold as well as subtle sensations of "rapport, grace, and the presence of God" (Heron, 1992, p. 103). His model of the psyche includes four modes of the person. This theory suggests that all four of the modes are functioning at all times and are woven together to create a seamless whole. Heron describes the four modes of the psyche as the (1) affective mode

which includes feeling and emotion; (2) imaginal mode which involves intuition and imagery; (3) conceptual mode which comprises reflection and discrimination; and (4) practical mode which contains intention and action. These modes are organized into an up-hierarchy where “each mode emerges out of another below it, so the low modes nourish and support the higher” (Heron, 1992, p. 21).

In addition, Heron (1992) uses the up-hierarchy to describe his theory of knowing. Experiential knowing is embedded in the affective and imaginal modes. Presentational knowing links the imaginal and conceptual modes while propositional knowledge applies to the conceptual and practical modes. Practical knowing consummates the up-hierarchy and includes skills and competence. This theory does not privilege one way of knowing over the others, and these ways of knowing are interdependent (Yorks & Kasl, 2003). Furthermore, Heron’s up-hierarchy does integrate multiple ways of knowing and offers an explanation of how to engage the whole learner in the learning process (Yorks & Kasl, 2003).

Extending the ways of knowing, Heron (1992) describes the stages of the learning cycle. The elements in this hierarchy are referred to as the classes (methods) for learning. Music and celebration form the base of this hierarchy. Music resonates with the affective mode and generates a sense of presence. Celebration elicits a positive emotional state and helps to ensure that learners are attuned to their feelings. By celebration, Heron means that there is an awareness of the person’s capacity for empathic resonance and that the person is in “a positive, buoyant, enjoyable, and self-affirmative state” (Heron, 1992, p. 234). He describes entry to this state through relaxation, guided imagery and visualization, and meditative practices. Music can assist learners moving into this state.

Heron (1992) also describes a continuum in the affective mode that involves individuating and participatory practices. The examples he uses in the celebratory way of knowing fall on the individuating side of this continuum. There could also be participatory celebrations which could involve more unitive interactions. Examples could include group affirmations made by the learners, the sharing of poetry or creative writing, and classroom rituals such as sharing circles. These approaches help to foster a sense of belonging and union within a group (Kessler, 2005).

Next, presentations embrace mobile or dramatic visuals and graphic designs which could also include dance, movement, and theater. Presentations involve the intuition and imagery as well as the aesthetics of the learner. Words and numbers are included in the proposition mode of knowing. This class uses the mastery of language and numeracy to explore the intellectual content and to analyze the conceptual and organizing principles. Facts, rules, laws, and logic are integral here. Finally, activities comprise the practice and rehearsal of learning which helps learners make the material their own. Activities might include games, projects, fieldwork, simulations, or experiments. In this class, Heron (1992) supports interactions with other learners who can provide feedback or enhance the learning process.

For some adult educators, Heron's theory about personhood, spirituality, and learning is important since it is inclusive of multiple ways of knowing. Tisdell (2003) uses Heron's (1992) theory to support her assumption that spirituality is "about constructing knowledge through unconscious and symbolic process" (p. 34). Heron and Tisdell concur about constructing knowledge through symbolic processes, and both scholars agree that these imaginal or presentational processes include art, music, symbol,

ritual, metaphor, image, and intuition. English, Fenwick, and Parsons (2003) argue that intuition is often overlooked in learning, but it is a part of the spiritual that involves all of the senses. They believe that intuition honors a way of being beyond the cognitive or physical.

In summary, Heron proposes a theory which relies on a transpersonal model where spirituality is the essence or core of the person. He strongly advocates for holistic learning with the affective and then the imaginal modes forming the foundation for understanding more practical and cognitive aspects in the learning process. Some adult educators resonate with Heron's theory of the person because of his fundamental beliefs that all of life is spiritual and spirituality is inherent in the learning process, and they use this theory to explain the importance of the nonrational dimensions of learning when addressing spirituality.

Miller's Transformation Learning

Heron (1992) and other advocates of holistic learning contend that learning should be balanced between different types of learning that include the cognitive, affective, and spiritual (English, Fenwick, & Parsons, 2003; Yorks & Kasl, 2003). Miller (1999) is another scholar who is advocating for holistic learning, and the spiritual is clearly a feature in his notion of transformation learning. In building his argument for holistic learning, Miller posits that there are three types of learning. He describes these three types of learning as transmission, transaction, and transformation. Hutchison and Bosacki (2000) expand on Miller's (1999) work and provide a conceptual outline of these three types of learning in terms of their (1) educational traditions, (2) basic world view, (3) consciousness, (4) instructional approaches, and (5) subject integration.

Transmission learning is associated with one-way flow of information and can be described as teacher-directed instruction derived from the cognitive. This world view is mechanistic and reductionistic in nature. Within transmission learning, Hutchison and Bosacki (2000) describe information as discrete parts and curriculum as designed into organized and efficient instructional units. Disciplines are considered to be distinct and segregated, and a back to basics curriculum is emphasized.

In contrast, they describe transaction learning as being associated with constructivism as well as progressive and experiential education. Experience and context pervade this view of learning, and the cognitive and affective dimensions are emphasized. The scientific method and reflective inquiry form many of the cognitive processes. The teacher, the learner, and the subject matter form a three-way interaction which is based on the learner's interests and experiences. This orientation is dominated by theme based and experiential learning activities.

Finally, Miller (1999) and Hutchison and Bosacki (2000) associate transformation learning with holistic education. In this world view for transformation, learning is organic; systems are interconnected. Connections are facilitated at every level of learning, and relationships are important. Transformation learning in this viewpoint focuses on a spiritual approach based on the search for meaning. Meaning within this type of learning may be personal, situational, cultural, anthropological, and cosmological. Traditional or transmission approaches to education privilege analytical forms of knowing, but there are a wide variety of forms of "knowing" which can complement analytical aspects of knowledge and meaning (Hutchison & Bosacki, 2000). Reflections about human experiences are important, but reflection in transformation learning is

largely non-analytical. Instructional practices allied with transformation learning often include narrative, metaphor, fantasy, or other nonlinear forms of expression.

Within holistic learning, Miller (2005) argues that balance, connection, and inclusion are three essential factors. According to Miller, holistic educators should seek an inclusive framework that allows for a variety of approaches in order to accommodate the diversity of learners. Balance, for Miller, refers to the complementary forces and energies (e. g. rational and intuitive) that need to be acknowledged.

Elaborating on this concept of balance, Yorks and Kasl (2002) propose that holistic learning depends upon the balance and congruence of different ways of knowing and that “each way of knowing provides a validity check on the other” (p. 187).

Educators have an intuitive notion that these multiple ways of knowing are useful, but do not have conceptual maps for linking them to the learning (Yorks & Kasl, 2002). In discussing holistic learning, Hutchison and Bosacki (2000) offer this observation:

...a balanced curriculum, just as a balanced life, alternates between action and reflection, communal and personal, social and solitary....Reflection for holistic educators is not merely a bridge between experiences, nor a tool for solving personal or social problems. Rather, reflection is a state of being unto itself, a vehicle for encountering the richness and depth of the universe of which we are perhaps but an expression. (p. 181)

As described above, transformation learning supports the notion of spirituality in learning. The spiritual is acknowledged in the learning process in terms of how it facilitates meaning-making and how it encourages connections that go beyond the superficial.

In summary, holistic learning means educators address all aspects of the learner. Spirituality is one aspect not generally considered by adult education. The models offered by Heron (1992) and Miller (1999) provide entry points into understanding why spirituality is associated with holistic learning. However, these models are theoretical in nature and are not based on empirical research. Adult educators have included holistic learning in their discussions about spirituality, and while these models offer a rationale for incorporating spirituality in adult education settings, they do not offer rich information about the experiences of adult learners when spirituality has been integrated into the curriculum.

Mezirow's Transformation Theory

In addition to holistic learning, some adult education scholars claim spirituality is important for effecting transformative learning. Transformation theory as defined by Mezirow (1991, 2000) has become a major area of study and examination in adult education. In fact, by the mid-1990s, some scholars considered it the primary theory of adult learning replacing andragogy (Schugurensky, 2001). Scholars, researchers, and practitioners have been intrigued by the notion of transforming perspectives and learning and are re-examining the theory Mezirow (1991) introduced. Some common agreements exist, but many areas are becoming increasingly contested; no longer is this a field of homogeneous study (Schugurenksy, 2001). Alternative ways of interpreting transformation theory are being discussed in the literature, and the intersection of spirituality and transformation theory is one area being explored.

Mezirow's (1991, 2000) core concepts of the transformation theory he introduced in the 1970s include frames of reference, points of view, and habits of mind. Frames of

reference are the structures for assumptions and expectations that we use to filter our impressions. Frames of reference have affective, cognitive, and conative dimensions and also are composed of habits of mind and the resulting points of view. Habits of mind are predispositions that are generalized and broadly conceived, and points of view are made up of meaning schemes. Meaning schemes are usually outside of awareness and deal with the specific judgments, beliefs, feelings, or attitudes that suggest the action we tend to follow. Within this theory, Mezirow proposes four ways for learning to occur. The first way is by elaborating existing frames of reference. The second way is by learning new frames of reference. Transforming points of view and transforming habits of mind are the third and fourth ways for learning to occur. Transformations of habits of mind may be the result of sudden and dramatic insight (epochal) or may be the culmination of a series of transformations of related points of view (incremental). Inherent in this process of transformation is critical reflection on assumptions, contextual understanding, and meaning (Mezirow, 2000).

Mezirow (2000) argues that transformations occur when meaning has been clarified as specified in the following phases:

- (1) a disorienting dilemma, (2) self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame, (3) a critical assessment of assumptions, (4) recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared, (5) exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions, (6) planning a course of action, (7) acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans, (8) provisional trying of new roles, (9) building competence and self-confidence in new roles and

relationships, [and] (10) a reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective. (Mezirow, 2000, p. 22)

Given these phases for meaning making, Mezirow's (2000) theory of transformation continues to be highly rational and dependent on the cognitive dimension of learning. It is important to note that he does discuss art, dance, and music as well as intuition and imagination as ways of making meaning, and he acknowledges the influence of culture and relationships. He also states that "what we all have in common are human connectedness, the desire to understand, and spiritual incompleteness" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 7). However, while Mezirow's discussion includes these alternative ways of knowing and understanding, he maintains that the ten phases (or some variation) identified above define the process for transformative learning. In fact, Mezirow (2004) states clearly that "transformative learning is an adult form of rationality delineating generic processes involved in profound adult learning" (p. 70). Mezirow's position has generated critiques of his interpretation of transformative learning.

Perhaps the most comprehensive review of the literature of transformation theory was conducted by Taylor (1997, 2000). Taylor (1997, 2000) reviewed forty-six (46) research studies related to Mezirow's theory of transformation. Based on this research, Taylor suggests that perspective transformation is much more complex and less linear than originally thought. The research Taylor reviewed pointed to a recursive process which is fluid and more individualistic than the theory presented by Mezirow. Some phases are more significant to change than others such as working through feelings, and Taylor argues that more research is needed.

Taylor (2000) found that most studies concurred with Mezirow's definition of a perspective transformation, but others found this definition too narrow and rationally based. These studies argued that perspective transformations discounted other ways of knowing and implied that individuals were predominantly engaging logic-rational ways of knowing (Clark, 1991; Van Nostrand, 1992). Several studies indicated that too much importance was given to critical reflection and not enough importance was given to the significance of affective dimensions of learning (Brooks, 1989; Coffman, 1989; Morgan, 1987). Empathy needed for viewing the perspectives of others and trusting intuition are examples of how transformative learning relies on affective learning. In addition, relational ways of knowing influenced rational discourse making transformative learning dependent on relationships built on trust. Both critical reflection and affective learning are needed in the transformative process. Furthermore, affective learning has a principle role in promoting critical reflection. Also, Taylor reveals that transformation deals most often with subjective reframing instead of objective reframing. In other words, transformations usually occur from critical reflection about one's own assumptions rather than critical reflection about the assumptions of others. He broadens the understanding of perspective transformation by including the transpersonal realm and spirituality in his discussion (Taylor, 2000).

Spirituality and Transformative Learning

Overall, there continues to be a lack of research in the area of transformative learning and spirituality, but new ideas about transformation theory have been proposed as the literature in this area has grown. For example, Merriam (2004), in discussing adult development, has argued for the inclusion of affective and intuitive dimensions which are

on equal footing with the cognitive and rational dimensions in transformative learning. Scholars have considered ways to expand transformational learning to accommodate ideas of the common good (Daloz, 2000), cultural identity (Tisdell & Tolliver, 2001), social transformation (Dei, 2001; Tisdell & Tolliver, 2003; Schugurensky, 2001), and spirituality (Brooks, 2000; Capeheart-Meninghall, 2005; Dirkx, 2001; Hunter, 1980; McDonald, 1998; Tisdell, 2003; Tisdell & Tolliver, 2001; Vogel, 2003). These authors contend that there are spiritual dimensions in transformative learning.

Daloz (2000) explores transformative learning that supports the development of a sense of social responsibility. Daloz describes a study involving 100 socially responsible people who had been committed to the common good rather than to their own welfare. This study supports Mezirow's (2000) notion of incremental transformation where the shift in the frame of reference was a happening over a long time in many different ways. One common characteristic in Daloz's study was a constructive engagement with someone different than themselves. This sense of "otherness" forged a deep bond and provided the context for a connection across difference. Having a positive vision was not enough according to Daloz. Long-term commitments to the common good were supported by a mentoring community and the belief that "deep change takes time, strategic care, patience, the conviction that we are not working alone, and the faith that there is something in the universe" (Daloz, 2000, p. 121).

Dirkx (1997, 2001a) links transformative learning and spirituality in another way by exploring the imaginative and personal ways of knowing in what he calls "soul work" (Dirkx, 1997). He believes that the subject matter can evoke emotional reactions in adult learners, and these reactions may be products of the imagination. Dirkx describes the

process of meaning-making as helping learners connect the knowable world to their unconscious. He refers to this process as “soul work.” In soul work, the relationship of the learner and the text is used to help identify images and emotional reactions which reside in the unconscious. According to Dirkx, learners do not need dramatic events in their lives to experience transformative learning. Instead, he argues that imaginative engagement with everyday lives presents opportunities for transformative learning.

Brooks (2000) discusses transformative learning for women as part of a narrative process. Within narrative reasoning, diverse parts of a specific action are worked into a coherent whole. Several distinct characteristics are evident in transformation through this process of narrative reasoning. These include interaction on personal and social levels with the learner thinking both critically as well as generatively. Transformation is a by-product of the story sharing which includes the sharing of particular experiences and requires collaborating on the development of abstract concepts. Moreover, transformation as a narrative process engages us mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually. While weaving these stories, women develop their relational skills and frequently become aware of not just cognition and emotion, but also spirituality (Brooks, 2000).

McDonald (1998) calls for a more holistic understanding of transformational learning. In her study, she did not find that rational discourse and critical reflection held central roles in the transformative process. She was not looking for spiritual connections in her study of the transformation of ethical vegans, but elements of spirituality emerged from the data. She identified the recognition of a moral code and a universal force as important factors in the transformational learning process. Hunter (1980) also identified

spirituality as a theoretical construct in the perspective transformation of adults as they moved toward a new theory of health.

Vogel (2000) suggests that by inviting learners to reckon with their spiritual lives has potential for transformative learning. Tisdell and Tolliver (2001) are even more direct in their ideas about spirituality and transformative adult education. They make the assumption that “people are more likely to have transformational experiences if they are engaged on three levels of their individual being: the cognitive, the affective, and the symbolic or spiritual” (p. 14). They propose that engaging learners on the spiritual level helps to anchor transformative learning. Like Dirkx (1997), Tisdell and Tolliver (2001) suggest helping learners connect to the unconscious to construct knowledge.

In another context, Tisdell and Tolliver (2003) studied spirituality, cultural identity, and transformative adult education. This study involved a multi-cultural group of thirty-one (31) adult educators and explored social and personal transformations of these adult educators. Spirituality was important in mediating multiple identities and in dealing with internalized oppression. Participants also recognized the spiritual and cultural significance of music, art, ritual, and gesture. While acknowledging the limitations of education experiences to be transformative individually and societally, Tisdell and Tolliver continue to assert that by engaging learners on multiple levels of knowledge construction (personal, cultural, structural, political, and artistic/spiritual levels) transformative learning is more likely to occur.

Transformative learning was introduced by Mezirow as a rational process for adult learning. This theory has captured the attention of adult educators from many different areas of study. Spirituality and transformative learning have been linked by

some adult educators, and avenues for convergence in both spirituality and transformative learning literature have included mentoring, narrative discourse, cultural identity, social transformations, and personal transformations related to the everyday life. Within these areas, scholars emphasize the affective, imaginal, relational, and spiritual influences of transformative learning as they continue to broadly conceptualize Mezirow's theory of transformation.

Integrating Spirituality into Learning

As adult educators are considering alternative approaches to facilitate learning, new themes and issues are emerging in the adult learning literature. Spirituality and its role in adult learning is one of these themes. In their examination of the importance of spirituality in adult learning, some scholars have also considered the question of integrating spirituality in the curriculum (Courtenay & Milton, 2004; Dirkx, 1997, 2001a; English, 2000; English, Fenwick, & Parsons, 2003; Tisdell, 2003; Tisdell & Tolliver, 2001; Vella, 2000; Vogel, 2000). Some adult educators suggest that spirituality is always present in the learning environment (Tisdell, 2003) or that teaching is fundamentally a spiritual relationship as Courtenay & Milton (2004) report from their data. Whether learning is experienced as spiritual or not, though, is determined by the personal grounding of the individual and is based in the learner's experience (Courtenay & Milton, 2004; Tisdell, 2003). No matter the rationale for integrating spirituality, adult educators need to give careful consideration to what about spirituality should be integrated and how spirituality should be integrated into the learning.

Understanding what about spirituality needs to be integrated is one important consideration. Fenwick and English (2004) and English, Fenwick, and Parsons (2003)

propose an analytic framework that may be helpful in the analysis of expressions of spirituality represented in the literature. While this rational, structural analytic approach may not be congruent with some approaches toward spirituality, the exercise is important in order to attend to the explosion of spiritualities encountered in the literature (Fenwick & English, 2004). This framework offers some insight into what adult educators may include when integrating spirituality into the curriculum.

The eight dimensions in this framework are derived from adult education literature and non-theological theories addressing spirituality as well as theological literature from different traditions. The resulting dimensions are identified as (1) life and death (the meaning of life on earth or beyond); (2) soul and self (the nature of spirit); (3) cosmology (the nature of the spiritual universe, including higher powers); (4) knowledge (the nature of truth); (5) the “way” (the nature of the spiritual journey or search); (6) focus (the purposes of spiritual seeking); (7) practices of spirituality and the role of others; and (8) responses (action and application arising from spiritual pursuits).

Some examples offered by Fenwick and English (2004) for the dimensions of life and death, knowledge, and the “way” are included below to provide clarification. First, in the dimension of life and death, they note that life’s complexities can not be explained by only idealism and beliefs that exemplify feeling good. Suffering (darkness, evil, misfortune, and doubt) is an essential component of some traditions. Self-sacrifice may be expressed as leading to grace as in Christianity, for taming desire as in Buddhism, or the path to enlightenment. Secondly, in the dimension of knowledge, there are three distinguishing points which include: “...(a) the possibility of absolute truth or multiple truths; (b) the presence of divine authorit(ies); (c) the role of human intellect in seeking

spiritual knowledge/s” (p. 55). For some there is a belief in an absolute truth with varying degrees of tolerance for contradicting beliefs. Multiple truths are accepted by others, and for other learners there can be an acceptance of different beliefs or the evolution of beliefs. Furthermore, rationality can be respected as an obstacle or the gateway to inspiration, and knowledge may lead to spiritual growth or the loss of innocence.

Finally, for the nature of the spiritual journey or search, Fenwick and English (2004) suggest that this dimension appreciates the learner’s struggles in life and the role of the educator in these struggles. This dimension explores the nature of time (lifetime, time beyond life, or across several lives) and the concept of personal freedom to make decisions or choices during the journey. The spiritual journey can include all of life, or it may be but one dimension of life which supports careers, creativity, martial and intellectual life. In addition, the journey can be solitary or communal or defined as action—oriented or meditative.

These dimensions are not intended to be a definitive or exhaustive list but, instead, the dimensions are presented as an entry point to illustrate how differently spiritual beliefs and practices are situated. Within these dimensions, practices may center on the individual or the community. Spirituality may be expressed as inner seeking or focused on action, and emotional content during the journey may take on many roles. For example, understanding negativity, doubting, and questioning may be contrasted with positive emotions of happiness, peace, and joy. Motives can be discussed in terms of self or others such as redemption (self-focused), creativity or health (self-serving), or to develop connections with others or the community (other-focused). Responses can take the form of action for social justice or developing creative potential, or they may be

transcendent in nature such as prayer, retreats, and grace. Seeking joy, building communities, fostering compassionate relationships, and cultivating sacred environments can all be considered as responses to spiritual pursuits within this framework (Fenwick & English, 2004).

How spirituality should be integrated into the curriculum is another important consideration. Dirkx (2001b) believes that Heron's (1992) theory of a person reveals how spirituality can be integrated into the curriculum. Dirkx (2001b) asserts that the imaginal mode as described by Heron allows learners to seek a "deep understanding of the emotional, affective, and spiritual dimensions that are often associated with profoundly meaningful experiences in adult learning" (p. 70). He suggests that much of the practice in adult education has marginalized emotions and elevated rationality to the point that reason and rationality are viewed as foundational to learning. In the space between our inner lives and outer experiences lies a rich emotional and spiritual connection (Dirkx, 2001b). Journal writing, literature, poetry, art, movies, storytelling, dance, and ritual are possible methods for accessing this spiritual dimension of learning (Dirkx, 2001a). In addition, this work can emerge out of the relationship the learner develops with the subject matter (Dirkx, 1997).

Tisdell and Tolliver (2001) suggest that humans construct knowledge and make meaning from their experiences including spiritual experiences. Furthermore, Tisdell (2003) believes that people construct knowledge through unconscious and symbolic processes, and spiritual knowing is often expressed through these processes (Tisdell & Tolliver, 2001). Tisdell (2003) does suggest that this knowledge and meaning can be expressed in unconscious and powerful ways through metaphor, art, music, ritual,

symbol, and image. Dirkx (1997) suggests that the “unconscious is the primary source of creativity, vitality, and wisdom.... [and] we encourage engagement with the unconscious through imagination, creativity, and intuition” (p. 83-84). Furthermore, Dirkx believes that deep meaning and value can be constructed between the text and learners’ own experiences when learners approach experiences imaginally rather than just conceptually.

Mackeracher (2004) reviews much of the literature about spirituality and adult learning and draws on the work of other scholars to define spiritual learning. According to Mackeracher, spiritual learning connects us to a higher consciousness, facilitates transformative learning, connects us to others in meaningful ways, and is associated with a holistic sensation of personal transcendence. She proposes that there are seven conditions associated with spiritual learning, and adult learners are more likely to be involved in spiritual learning if they (1) have a higher state of consciousness, (2) are being open to new experiences and ideas, (3) have an awareness of their own state of consciousness, (4) are able to avoid judging their experiences or thoughts, (5) reflect on their thoughts and experiences, (6) participate in interactive dialogues to share their experiences, and (7) look for connections in unlikely places.

Other scholars suggest that exploring meaning, purpose, and significance is how spirituality can be integrated into the curriculum (Courtenay & Milton, 2004; English, 2000; Gillen & English, 2000). “The opportunity to find relevance and meaning, to be part of something beyond ourselves, is profoundly spiritual” (English, 2000, p. 31). Gillen and English (2000) suggest that humans are spiritual beings who are seeking to make meaning out of their experiences. Therefore, adult educators can integrate spirituality into their teaching by assisting learners in constructing meaning (Gillen &

English, 2000), challenging learners to ask questions of ultimate meaning (English, Fenwick, & Parsons, 2003), and addressing their deepest questions (Gillen & English, 2000). In addition, adult educators can address spirituality by providing periods of reflection and inner exploration (English, Fenwick, & Parsons, 2003).

Building relationships with learners and connections for learners is another way to integrate spirituality into the curriculum. Spirituality can help adult educators avoid hierarchical relationships with learners while assisting in building relationships with learners on a lateral level (Courtenay & Milton, 2004). English (2000) recommends the use of dialogue to promote the spiritual dimension of learning. She suggests that dialogue can encourage interpersonal connections among people that support their spiritual development. Helping learners explore the connections between their spiritual lives and their integrity is also important (Vogel, 2000). According to Vogel, teaching holistically embodies exploring integrity in committed relationships, business and social relationships, faith communities, and government.

Beyond the importance of exploring meaning and purpose, building connections, and valuing the imaginal mode of learning, the literature offers limited direction about the approaches for integrating spirituality. However, there is much commentary about the outcomes of integrating spirituality. These outcomes include helping learners acquire new insights about themselves, develop a stronger sense of self, and promote care and outreach for others (English, 2000). Developing relationships that promote a commitment to the common good has also been discussed in the literature (Daloz, 2000; Vogel, 2000). In addition, integrating spirituality may promote a greater sense of authenticity (Capeheart-Meningall, 2005; Chickering, 2006; Tisdell, 2003), community (Capeheart-

Meningall, 2005; Diamond, 2005; English, 2000; Wickett, 2000), and the sacred (English, Fenwick, & Parsons, 2003; Orr, 2000; Vogel, 2000).

Some adult educators argue that integrating spirituality into the curriculum can animate social action. Spiritual commitment is often the underpinning for emancipatory adult education (Tisdell, 2000, 2003). English (2005) suggests that spiritual and social change not only have deep roots in adult education, but also are purposes of contemporary adult education. She advocates for accepting spirituality and social change as one way of reconciling the divide between the personal and collective that presently exists in adult education. Bean (2000) believes that adult education, spirituality, and development are inseparable, and he suggests principles for adult educators that foster a contemporary and relevant spirituality. His spiritual principles address ecology, community, social justice, the dignity of the human person, action for liberation, allied with combined action and reflection.

Interestingly, other adult educators suggest that spirituality has always existed at the very root of adult education, and many adult educators are already fostering spirituality in their practice (Zinn, 1997). Helping adults find meaning and purpose in their lives, gain self-confidence and responsibility, and stressing the need for responsible social action have been deeply embedded into the essence of adult education for some time (Zinn, 1997). Adult educators are encouraged to seriously consider what they are already including in their practice (Gillen & English, 2000).

In some respects, then, responding to learners' spiritual needs does not demand any additional preparation or require any supernatural gift or teaching ability.

Basically, spirituality requires adult educators to challenge themselves

continuously to engage in a critically reflective practice that encourages the questioning of assumptions and beliefs, and to listen carefully to the needs of the learners. (Gillen & English, 2000, p. 88)

In conclusion, integrating spirituality into the learning of adults begs the questions of what should be integrated and how should spirituality be integrated. Fenwick and English (2004) and English, Fenwick, and Parsons (2003) provide a framework for understanding dimensions of spirituality that can be integrated in the curriculum. Heron's theory of the person provides one way of understanding how spirituality can be integrated through imaginal processes. Adult educators have also suggested helping learners develop meaning and purpose in their lives and a sense of connectedness with self and others are ways to integrate spirituality. Additionally, many practices of adult educators such as reflective practice, questioning of assumptions and beliefs, and listening to students may already address the spiritual dimension of learning.

Summary

The literature reviewed revealed that spirituality in adult learning as an area of study is just emerging. Clearly, consensual definitions have not been offered, and the parameters for this topic have not been established. Based on the literature reviewed, there was no single compelling theory about spirituality and adult learning revealed. However, as is often the case in emerging topics of study, the literature points to areas that may have significance for understanding spirituality in adult learning. This chapter reviewed literature about spirituality from four areas: (a) definitions, (b) holistic learning, (c) transformation and transformative learning, and (d) the integration of spirituality into the curriculum.

Based on the literature reviewed, there are still multiple definitions and discourses about spirituality in the literature, and no clear and concise definition has emerged. While scholars have attempted to uncouple the concepts of religion and spirituality, there are inconsistencies in their definitions making it difficult to draw conclusions. Some scholars discuss spirituality in terms of its paradoxical qualities and the individual interpretations associated with this concept. Since this is a relatively new area of study for adult education, literature was also reviewed from other fields including health and business. Themes about spirituality included a belief in an integrated universe and a need for meaning, purpose, and belonging in our everyday lives. Wholeness, mysticism, transcendence and the sacred have all been associated with spirituality. Furthermore, some scholars have argued that the characteristics of transcendence and sacredness are essential to spirituality. The definitions provided in the literature were all proposed by adult educators and only one study (Courtenay & Milton, 2004) revealed a definition from adult learners. Fenwick and English (2004) urge adult educators to put forward rigorous conceptions of spirituality and to propose how spirituality can be enacted in adult education practice.

Secondly, holistic learning is an area that has garnered the interest of adult education scholars who are discussing spirituality. Holistic learning promotes an integrative perspective about learners and encourages educators to address all aspects of the learner. Recognizing that learning involves the cognitive, physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects is a central tenant to holistic education. Miller (1999) and Heron (1992) both describe adults as having a spiritual core. Heron offers one holistic theory of learning which proposes that feeling, not reason is the hallmark of the person. His theory

integrates multiple ways of knowing and proposes that the affective and then the imaginal modes form the foundation for understanding more practical and cognitive aspects in the learning process. Some adult educators (English, Fenwick, & Parsons, 2003; Tisdell, 2003; Yorks & Kasl, 2003) resonate with Heron's theory of the person because of his fundamental beliefs that all of life is spiritual and spirituality is inherent in the learning process, and they use this theory to explain the importance of the nonrational dimensions of learning when addressing spirituality.

Thirdly, learning should be balanced between different types of learning that include the physical, cognitive, affective, and spiritual (Heron, 1992; Mackeracher, 2004; Yorks & Kasl, 2003). Miller (1999) suggests that there are three types of learning: transmission, transaction, and transformation. In transmission learning, information and curriculum are organized into discrete and segregated instructional units. Transaction learning requires a three-way interaction between the teacher, the learner, and the subject based on the interests and experiences of the learner. Relying on multiple ways of knowing, transformation learning facilitates connections and relationships and focuses on a spiritual approach based on the search for meaning.

Next, adult education scholars discussing spirituality have also suggested that spirituality is important for effecting transformative learning. Mezirow's transformative learning is a rational process for describing perspective transformations in adult learning. Mentoring, narrative discourse, cultural identity, social transformations, and personal transformations related to everyday life are all areas discussed in the literature about transformation learning and spirituality.

Finally, literature related to integrating spirituality into the learning of adults was examined. Fenwick and English (2004) and English, Fenwick, and Parsons (2003) provide a framework for understanding dimensions of spirituality that can be integrated in the curriculum. Their eight dimensions offer insight into what about spirituality might be integrated into the curriculum. Heron's (1992) theory of the person provides one way of understanding how spirituality can be integrated through imaginal and symbolic processes. Helping adult learners explore meaning and purpose in their lives and develop a sense of connectedness with self and others are offered as approaches to integrate spirituality. Mackeracher (2004) proposes seven conditions that may facilitate spiritual learning. Additionally, many practices of adult educators such as reflective practice, questioning of assumptions and beliefs, and listening to students may already address the spiritual dimension of learning.

Gaps in the literature are evident in the paucity of research about this topic. The literature consists largely of descriptions and anecdotal accounts about spiritual experiences of adult learners and educators. Furthermore, there is little information from adult learners about how they define and perceive spirituality in their learning. Yet, some adult educators have proposed that integrating spirituality into the curriculum is important and has benefit for the learner.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to understand how adults perceive spirituality in their learning. These research questions guided the study:

1. How do adults define spirituality?
2. What is the role of spirituality in adult learning?
3. What factors influence spirituality in adult learning?

Spirituality has been intriguing scholars for centuries, but there has been a resurgence of interest in the past quarter century (Emmons, 2003). Adult education scholars have only recently identified spirituality as a topic of discussion and study. Very little empirical evidence is available from adult learners regarding the role of spirituality and the learning of adults. Therefore, the inductive and exploratory process of qualitative inquiry is best suited for this study.

A qualitative research design was chosen for this study because the characteristics are well suited to exploring the influence of spirituality in adult learning. Its aim is to contribute to our present knowledge base about how adult learners define spirituality and perceive spirituality in their learning. In addition, this study helps us understand the role spirituality plays in adult learning and, therefore, helps to clarify its importance in theories of adult learning. In this chapter, I outline the design of this study, the criterion of sample selection, data collection and analysis, the importance of validity and reliability, and my assumptions and biases as a researcher.

Design of the Study

According to Creswell (1994), there are three primary reasons for conducting a qualitative study: (1) the study is exploratory, (2) there has not been much written about the targeted population or topic, and (3) by listening carefully to the informants, the researcher seeks to build a picture based on their ideas. This study was designed to be exploratory, and as previously stated, there has been little research about the role of spirituality and adult learning. In addition, since there is little theory about spirituality and learning available in the literature, this study sought to understand the role of spirituality by listening to adult learners.

A basic interpretive qualitative design was used in this study as the emphasis was focused on the perspectives and world views of the people involved, and the variables were largely unknown. Qualitative research values representing the subjective experience and theoretically interpreting what is observed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2001) making this methodology appropriate for this study. Since spirituality is considered to be an elusive concept (Tisdell, 2000) and there has been no general agreement about its meaning in the literature (Emmons, 2003), studying this topic was at times difficult. There is also a naturalistic paradigm associated with qualitative inquiry (Patton, 2002, Punch, 2005) making it appropriate for this study. Naturalism accepts that there is “no underlying premise that there is a ‘way things really are’ or a ‘way things really work’” (Lincoln & Guba, 2001, p. 98). Instead, the naturalist is intrigued with uncovering the different constructions and the attached meanings held by individuals and recognizes that these constructions are intensely personal and may be very diverse (Lincoln & Guba, 2001).

Merriam (1998) suggests that qualitative research is unique in its ability to help researchers “discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives and world views of the people involved” (p. 11) especially where the variables are largely unknown. Qualitative inquiry is based on the notion that meaning is socially constructed, and this meaning is not static (Merriam, 2002). Meaning can change over time, and its interpretations are what intrigue qualitative researchers (Merriam, 2002). Merriam identifies four key characteristics of interpretive qualitative research designs. These characteristics involve (1) understanding how meaning is constructed, (2) the researcher as the primary instrument, (3) the inductive process of qualitative research, and (4) the rich and descriptive nature of the data (Merriam, 2002).

Merriam’s (2002) first characteristic was consistent with this study as I was endeavoring to understand meaning through the perceptions and interpretations that adults make about spirituality in their learning experiences. This study was not trying to predict what will happen next or in the future, but was dedicated to understanding the complexities of spirituality in the learning experience. Qualitative researchers accept that there are multiple interpretations of experience or reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2001; Merriam, 2002), and these interpretations are dependent on the context and can shift or change over time (Merriam, 2002). The qualitative researcher is not concerned so much with outcomes or products (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 2002), but instead it is the process which becomes paramount to the study as the researcher seeks to understand how these individuals construct reality in interaction with their social worlds (Merriam, 1998).

Secondly, the qualitative “researcher is the primary instrument” (Merriam, 2002, p 5). In qualitative research, the skill, competence, and rigor of the researcher are

important (Patton, 2002), especially since there is no instrument with predetermined categories between the researcher and the experience or phenomenon being studied (Merriam, 2002). Some quantitative instruments have been constructed to understand the spiritual lives of adults. The *Spirituality Assessment Scale*, *Spiritual Orientation Inventory*, *Index of Core Spiritual Experience*, and *Mystical Experiences Scale* (MacDonald, 2000) are all examples of quantitative scales that measure varying constructs of spirituality, but my research uncovered no scales that measure spirituality in relation to the learning experiences of adults. These and other spirituality scales reflect “only limited aspects of a highly complex, multidimensional, and largely non-material ontological reality” (Moberg, 2002, p. 47). Furthermore, these quantitative constructs do not yield answers to the research questions. They do not answer the question about the role of spirituality in adult learning or what factors influence spirituality in adult learning.

Since the concept of spirituality is deeply personal and often difficult to articulate, it was important that I, as the researcher, had strong communication skills, sensitivity, and the ability to build trust and rapport in a relatively short time as suggested by Lincoln & Guba (2001). I was prepared to explore the unexpected and ambiguous. Participants sometimes had difficulty clearly articulating their experiences and revealed aspects of spirituality that I had not considered. This qualitative inquiry was designed to be flexible and allowed me to probe for discovery by making adjustments during the process. The structure of the design developed as the empirical work proceeded as suggested by Punch (2005); therefore this qualitative research relied on my skills as the researcher to make critical decisions in the field. Furthermore, since I was the instrument for data collection,

I had to carefully reflect on and report potential sources of bias or error since I could not escape the personal interpretation inherent in qualitative data analysis (Punch, 2005).

The inductive process is the third characteristic of qualitative research.

Qualitative research was used since there is no compelling theory which explains spirituality in adult learning. Therefore, the process was one of discovery where I was gathering data to build possible theories, concepts, or hypotheses (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 2002). As previously stated, scholars have presented various frameworks and discussions about this topic, but there is a conspicuous lack of theory about spirituality and learning in the literature. The inductive nature of qualitative research in this study allowed for the emergence of important themes, interrelationships, and patterns about spirituality from the data and was guided by analytical principles rather than rules (Patton, 2002). The data analyzed in this study helps clarify the importance of spirituality in theories of adult learning.

The fourth characteristic is the rich and descriptive nature of qualitative research. Instead of numbers or concise responses found in quantitative research, qualitative researchers depend on words and pictures to describe the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 1994). The descriptions of the participants and the context were used in conjunction with the raw data. The raw data in this study are direct quotes, and these quotes came from field notes, interviews, observations, and the artifacts reviewed. This qualitative study produced rich detail from a small number of participants which allowed for an increase in understanding of this topic. Since this study relied heavily on interviews, having information-rich participants who provided their personal definition of

spirituality and described the influence of spirituality in their learning experiences was important.

In summary, this study sought to gain a deeper understanding about spirituality and adult learning, a concept about which little is known. I wanted to know how adult learners define spirituality, the role of spirituality in adult learning, and what factors influence spirituality in adult learning. This inductive, naturalistic, and holistic form of inquiry holds that human beings construct meaning from their experiences and that there are multiple realities and interpretations of these experiences. The influence of spirituality in the learning of adults was best understood through this basic interpretive qualitative study.

Sample Selection

Participants in this study were selected purposefully. Purposeful sampling provides information rich cases and yields in-depth understanding and insight (Patton, 2002). Participants are considered to be “information-rich” when the researcher “can learn a great deal about the issues of central importance to the purpose of the study” (Patton, 2002, p. 46). The researcher judges these individuals to hold specific knowledge about the topic of the study (David & Sutton, 2004). Patton identifies fifteen different strategies for selecting a purposeful sample. The three strategies for selecting a purposeful sample employed for this study were criterion, maximum variation, and snowball sampling. Criterion sampling provides that all participants meet “some predetermined criterion of importance” (Patton, 2002, p. 238). The purposeful sample selected was based on the following two criteria:

1. Participants have been learners within an adult learning setting.
2. Participants acknowledge that they had a spiritual experience in the adult learning setting.

Snowballing sampling was helpful for this study. Snowball sampling is particularly useful when a “population is hidden and thus difficult to identify” (David & Sutton, 2004, p. 152). In snowball sampling, the researcher “makes contact with one appropriate case from the population who, in turn, is able to put the researcher in contact with other ‘like’ cases” (David & Sutton, 2004, p. 152). Snowball sampling helped identify information-rich participants who might otherwise not be identified. I asked an adult who had already expressed having such a spiritual experience in her learning to be my first participant. Then by asking participants that I interviewed to make recommendations for other possible participants, I was able to broaden my potential pool of participants. In addition, I also sought participants by contacting organizations that provide adult learning across adult learning contexts.

Participants were selected based on meeting the two criteria and their willingness to participate in the study. All of the participants were contacted by phone or in person. In these initial conversations after sharing the purpose of my study, I ascertained that the participants met the two criteria for the study by asking them about their spiritual experience in an adult learning setting. All participants are women and range in age from 30 to 80 years of age. Men were not intentionally excluded from the study, but the men identified through the snowballing technique and who acknowledged they had spiritual experiences in an adult learning context were working as church pastors or their experiences occurred in focused religious study such as seminary. Men did identify

spiritual experiences, but I was not able to identify men who acknowledged spiritual experiences in an adult learning context and who were willing to be interviewed. After much reflection, I decided not to include learners who were practicing religious leaders or whose spiritual experiences occurred in seminary classes because I wanted learners whose careers and education had not been built around spirituality from a religious perspective.

Since the field of adult education includes a broad spectrum of education contexts, it was important to use a maximum variation in the purposeful sample. This type of sampling captures and describes themes that cut across much variation (Patton, 2002). In small non-randomized samples, this strategy increases heterogeneity by identifying common patterns that occur across cases (Patton, 2002). By identifying diverse characteristics for constructing the sample, I increased the heterogeneity and captured the core experiences and shared dimensions about spirituality and learning. For this reason, I interviewed one or more participants from multiple adult education contexts. These various adult education contexts allowed me to compare and contrast learners' perceptions from a variety of learning experiences. These adult education settings represent five adult learning contexts: Adult Literacy, University/Four-Year Degree Programs, Continuing Professional Education, Technical College, and Religious Education.

Data Collection

In qualitative research, the three primary types of data collection are interviews, observations, and documents (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 2002; Patton, 2002). Qualitative researchers may identify one primary information source and use another method of data

collection as support for the primary source (Merriam, 2002). Whenever possible, researchers are encouraged to use multiple data collection methods to enhance the study's validity (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 2002; Patton, 2002).

Patton suggests that the researcher can not observe everything including thoughts, feelings, and intentions. He adds that "we cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask questions about those things" (Patton, 2002, p. 341).

The primary data source for this study was person-to-person interviews. Merriam (1998) states that "interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them" (p. 72). Interviews allowed me to understand the participants' perspectives. According to Merriam, there are three types of interviews available to the qualitative researcher: highly structured, questionnaire driven interviews; semi-structured interviews, flexibly worded interviews; and unstructured with no predetermined questions. Highly structured interview questions are useful when gathering sociodemographic information, and I used this type of interview question to gather some standardized information about sociodemographic information including age, ethnicity, occupation, and religious background.

Data were predominantly collected through the use of interviews that were informal, conversational, and semi-structured in nature. I used a general interview guide (see Appendix A) for these interviews that contained elements of both structured questions and topics to be explored. This interview guide helped to ensure that "basic lines of inquiry" (Patton, 2002, p. 343) were included in each interview. These semi-structured interviews ensured that some topics or subject areas would be addressed by all

of the participants. These semi-structured interviews involved open-ended questions which were limited in number and intended to elicit the views and perceptions of the adult learners. However, flexibility was accepted in the exploration of information shared by participants. There was an overall purpose and guide for these interviews, but I was able to probe the lead of both the participants and the data (Patton, 2002), and was able to seek clarification of participants.

Each participant was asked to select an interview site that was suitable for audio-taping. The interviews were generally 1 ½ hours in length. Participants selected a pseudonym or one was assigned to them to protect the privacy of the participants. All interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim for analysis. The lines of the transcription were numbered sequentially.

Spirituality can be hard to discern or observe, and the interviews were the primary source of data in this study. However, I was careful to observe each participant and the setting they selected during the interview. I made field notes about the setting and the participants' demeanor and emotion expressed during the interview. My field notes and research notes were important as data sources as they helped to outline the details of my observations and provided a record of my research decisions.

I asked participants to share any documents or audio/visual materials they felt might contribute to this study. These personal documents could have been an important data source, but the participants did not share any documents for me to consider. However, while in their offices and homes, I did review artifacts that contributed to my understanding of these learners' experiences including books, music, and décor that had

spiritual references. For example, Desiree had book shelves lined with hymnals, religious music, and inspirational texts.

As I collected data, I made notes and maintained a wall board at my home that documented my thoughts and impressions over time. At first this wall board was organized linearly and detailed my progress with interviews, transcription, and some of my first impressions. As I moved deeper into the process of data analysis, the wall board process became organic and reflected my ideas about the development of categories and themes. Having captured many of these thoughts and impressions on Post-It notes made it easier to reorganize as categories became more defined. Many of my notes were integrated into the notes section of my data analysis tool.

Data Analysis

Conducting qualitative research is not an easy task. The collection of data is complex and can yield large amounts of information which must be analyzed for common themes, categories, or patterns. Patton (2002) states that while there is no precise formula for conducting data analysis, it requires “reducing the volume of raw information, shifting trivia from significance, identifying significant patterns, and constructing a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal” (p. 432). For Merriam (1998), data analysis begins immediately and intensifies with the data collection process. “Hunches, working hypotheses, and educated guesses direct the investigator’s attention to certain data and then to refining or verifying hunches. The process of data collection and analysis is recursive and dynamic” (Merriam, 1998, p. 155).

After transcribing each interview, I read each transcript carefully making notes in the margins. I read transcripts again to see if themes had emerged and if some themes were similar and could be collapsed. I reread transcripts to see the extent to which I could find connections between interviews and if tentative categories emerged. Reading and rereading the transcripts was a process that was repeated often throughout the data analysis. Each interview was analyzed separately using my notes and artifacts to add veracity and depth to the findings.

Constant comparative analysis was used in this study to analyze the data. By moving back and forth comparing incidents and developing categories of information or themes as suggested by Creswell (1998), I was able to gain insight into the adult learners' perceptions of spirituality. As new data bits were collected and analyzed I continued to compare them with the existing categories.

Using a process developed by Ruona (2005) which details procedures for analyzing qualitative data using Microsoft Word, I was able to compare data bits with other incidents from another data set. Each participant was given a specific code number, and data was placed in a table with columns for the code numbers, the participant identification numbers, the data, and research notes. The data column contained the actual text from each interview which was divided into meaningful segments. Using a particular episode or data bit from the interviews or field notes, I compared it with another incident from another data set or the same data set leading to tentative categories that could be compared to each other as suggested by Merriam (1998). I used this information to compile a preliminary list of themes and began to develop tentative categories. This process continued until the data were assigned to various categories. By

comparing initial categories to each other, I was able to determine possible relationships. In the notes column I recorded my insights, ideas, and hunches as I coded the data segments.

For example, Alexi shared a story about a class where she experienced a connection with another participant. I initially thought that this experience only illustrated Alex's definition of spirituality that dealt with connections with other people. However, as I collected more data and reviewed data across cases, I found that I kept coming back to Alex's story and her perceptions of how she had changed based on her new understanding of others. It was Alexi's description of her experience and my observations of her working with other people that had me more closely examine the role of spirituality. She said

So now I strive more to embrace that connectedness... it [has] become more safe to connect with people and not be afraid.... I am really trying to [be] open and be more loving and caring and.... [be] receptive to people no matter who they are, what class of people or where they are from. It is just an amazing experience to go through.

As I collected more data and reflected on the experiences from other participants, I realized that Alexi's experience provided evidence for the role of spirituality in transformational learning as well as supporting her definition of spirituality. I was able to code this data bit in multiple ways so that I could expand and collapse categories throughout the process.

To help with this process, I developed a coding system to capture quotes that underpinned each category. These written codes were used to identify similarities and

differences appearing in the narratives. I assigned each category a coding number which I used as a resource for sorting the data. After I had followed this process for each interview, I merged the data from multiple interviews into one master document which allowed me to focus on cross-case analysis. By grouping the data thematically using the code numbers, I was able to reflect on the emerging themes across all the participants. The process of sorting and resorting the data segments allowed me to query the data and organize my findings. In this stage of the process, I was able to interpret and generate meaning from the data by exploring how the categories related to each other, the literature, and the research questions. Continuing to refine and integrate the themes and name categories was labor intensive work. However, this detailed process allowed for final categories supported by rich data that address the research questions.

In addition, there was a need to recognize “sensitizing concepts” in this qualitative research study. Sensitizing concepts were the notions and ideas that I brought to the study and served as a guide to the initial research. These concepts provided me a way to organize the complexity of the experience. It was important to be open to the experience in this study, but I needed some way of breaking the experience into manageable elements. These sensitizing concepts can be formally identified or they can be implicitly recognized by the researcher (Patton, 2002). In this study, the literature review helped to identify sensitizing concepts that guided the data collection and analysis. These included notions about definitions of spirituality, holistic learning, transformational learning, and ways that the learners described their instructors and the classroom environment.

Reliability and Validity

Qualitative methods are designed to allow the researcher to study a phenomenon in depth and detail (Patton, 2002). Much more information is generated about a smaller number of people or cases in qualitative research (Patton, 2002). This characteristic of qualitative studies contrasts sharply with reliability in quantitative studies which seeks the consistency of measurement (Punch, 2005). While this characteristic may be considered a limitation in terms of generalizability (Patton, 2002) and reliability as understood in quantitative studies, Merriam (2002) argues that the more important question for qualitative researchers is “whether the results are consistent with the data collected” (p. 27). In other words, do others concur that the results are dependable and consistent given the data collected (Merriam, 2002)?

As suggested by Merriam (1998), to help strengthen the reliability of my study, I have identified my assumptions and position related to the topic of spirituality and adult education. Secondly, I have provided an explanation of my audit trail. Thirdly, I have also provided an example that illustrates how I analyzed the data and derived categories supported by the data.

In addition, Merriam (2002) indicates that external validity or generalizability is left to the reader or user to determine how the findings might be applicable in their context. It is important for the researcher to capture and provide enough detail so that this type of comparison can be made by the reader (Merriam, 2002). Therefore, qualitative findings are more detailed, longer, and often variable in content (Patton, 2002) than the data from quantitative research. The researcher is fully present in observations or interviews and gets close to the situation, people, or phenomenon being studied (Patton,

2002). This context must be thoroughly explained by the researcher. By thoroughly describing the context of my study, other readers will be able to determine if the findings can be applied to their situation (Merriam, 1998).

Internal validity or credibility is often considered a strength of qualitative research because there is no instrument with predefined limits between the researcher and reality (Merriam, 2002). The researcher is closer to the reality in qualitative research, and reality is constructed by individuals (Merriam, 2002). It is important that the findings are congruent with reality (Merriam, 2002) and that we “understand the perspectives of those involved, uncover the complexity of human behavior in context, and present a holistic interpretation of what is happening” (Merriam, 2002, p. 25). According to Creswell and Miller (2000), qualitative researchers can strengthen the validity of a study by employing one or more of the following processes: “member checking, triangulation, thick description, peer reviews and external audits” (p. 124). In this study, I used member checks, triangulation, peer review, and the establishment of an audit trail.

The first strategy I used for increasing internal validity was member checks. Member checks allowed me to view data not only from the lens of the researcher, but also from the lens of the participant (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Taking the data and findings back to the participants of the study to confirm the credibility of the information is an important technique for establishing validity (Creswell & Miller). Member checking was accomplished by asking participants to review my description of them as a participant. In addition, I had the participants comment on the tentative findings to determine if they concurred that I had captured their meaning as they discussed their

spiritual experiences. I had them review these findings and provide me with feedback by a designated date.

As part of the member checking process, I met personally or had a phone conference with eight of the participants. One participant emailed her affirmative response. All of the participants generally concurred with the findings. They especially supported the categories regarding the factors that influence spirituality. Two participants said that they supported the category of connections with others even though their experiences shared during the interview did not necessarily provide evidence for this category.

Triangulation was another strategy used for increasing the veracity of the study (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Triangulation of data sources is a “validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 126). Qualitative researchers not only look for common themes from different participants, but they also provide evidence from multiple data collection methods to corroborate these themes.

Merriam (2002) suggests that the graduate school committee oversight is one type of peer review that can increase validation for qualitative studies. Having members of the committee review some of the raw data and determine if the findings were credible based on the data helped increase the internal validity for this study. This process was accomplished with the guidance of my major professor and dissertation committee.

Finally, as the third process to increase internal validity, an audit trail was established. An audit trail is a detailed account of the steps and actions taken in the research study (Merriam, 2002). As the study progressed, I kept notes about various

aspects of the research process including the rationale for decisions made. The audit trail was used to document my research process through journaling and memoing. Memos were recorded immediately after the interviews. I developed a biographical sketch of each participant as well. I kept research notes documenting my activities and data collection chronology as well as the data analysis procedures used. This audit trail illustrates how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were reached.

Bias Statement and Assumptions

The role of the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis is critical in qualitative research (Merriam, 1998). It can not be overemphasized because the data must be interpreted by the researcher. When the data must first go through the mind of the researcher before being interpreted or put to paper, concern about subjectivity must be addressed (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). The interview is a social interaction, and the situation is filled with many potential meanings (David & Sutton, 2004). As such, the researcher has an obligation to reflect on, deal with, and report sources of potential personal bias (Patton, 2002).

A basic presupposition of this study was that some adult learners have had a spiritual experience that influenced their learning. This assumption guided the study in terms of the sample selection and interview questions. I was not trying to guard against this assumption, but, instead, I embraced it and made it central to the study.

Personal subjectivity can be understood in biographical information. I am a white, married, middle-aged, and middle-class female. I grew up in both suburban and rural communities and now reside in a rural town in the South. I have been employed with

state, regional and local K-12 educational agencies. I have advocated for social and educational access for individuals from poverty and individuals with disabilities for most of my adult life. Also, as an educational leader and professional staff developer, I have observed that some adult learners approach learning from a spiritual lens.

Spirituality and religion have had significant influence in my personal life. I was raised in Presbyterian and Methodist churches. As an adult, I have attended Presbyterian and Methodist churches as well as nondenominational evangelical churches. There have also been extended periods of time when I have not attended religious services. I have studied other religions since my early teens and have found myself incorporating some practices from these religions in my daily life. In my twenties, I began to practice yoga and meditation and I continue to include these practices today. While Christian values shape who I am and what I do in the world, this life-time exploration of religious and spiritual traditions has reminded me to accept wisdom from a variety of sources and to acknowledge the diversity of spiritualities and religions that could have been presented from participants.

Spirituality re-emerged as a topic of interest when I was diagnosed with cancer. Chaplains and my medical service providers began to share information about the health benefits of spirituality, and as an educator, I became curious about spirituality and learning. Considering my involvement with the disability community and attention to health related issues, I recognized the need to monitor myself and stay focused on the purpose of the study since I tend to become intrigued by responses related to health, spirituality, and well-being.

Furthermore, my training in K-12 education has made me guarded about asking specific questions about spirituality and religion in school environments to avoid conflicts with First Amendment rights about separation of church and state. I needed to overcome this hesitation and became more at ease with this line of inquiry.

Part of my responsibility as the researcher was to be aware of my biases and assumptions and to recognize them when they were encountered during the research process. The relationship between spirituality and health is one of my biases and sometimes, I needed to check myself when participants would go down this path during interviews. My interview with Nina serves as one example of how I became intrigued with the role of spiritual and health, and I had to redirect the interview back to the topic of spirituality and learning. Since there is much about spirituality that interests me, I needed to keep the purpose and research questions in mind so that I stayed focused during the interviews.

I also needed to be sensitive to my subjectivity and recognize that I could over interpret the data. For example, I needed to be careful that I did not overstate the conclusions drawn about spirituality benefiting learning in relation to the adult learners in this study. Systematically recording these biases in my research notes and establishing regular debriefing sessions with members of my committee helped me to understand my biases and assumptions and to use them productively in the process.

Summary

This chapter explains the methodological approaches and specific details of this qualitative research process. This study was a descriptive study utilizing basic interpretive qualitative methodology with semi-structured interviews as the primary

method for data collection. Secondary data sources included documents, artifacts and observations of the study participants. This secondary data was used to triangulate the data so that the validity of the study could be strengthened. In addition, member checking, peer reviews, and the establishment of the audit trail were also used to increase the internal validity. The constant comparative method of data analysis was the means of examining the data. In addition to member checking and peer reviews, reliability and validity were assured by the use of rich, descriptive interviews and by clarifying researcher biases. Throughout the process my purpose was to discover thematic categories about the importance of spirituality in the learning experiences of the participants.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to understand how adults perceive spirituality in their learning. The research questions guiding the study were:

1. How do adults define spirituality?
2. What is the role of spirituality in adult learning?
3. What factors influence spirituality in adult learning?

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section describes the participants in the study. These brief profiles of the nine participants are organized alphabetically by pseudonym with the field of adult education they represent. Participants had the opportunity to choose their own pseudonym. The second part of the chapter reports the findings and the supporting data from the interviews. The third section describes a model for how adults perceive spirituality in their learning.

Participants

Nine adult learners who acknowledged that spirituality played a role in their learning were interviewed for this study. Exploring spirituality across multiple adult education settings was important for this study so participants selected were learners in a variety of adult education contexts. Snowballing was the technique employed to select participants. In this technique, participants were asked to make recommendations of other adult learners who could possibly contribute rich data for the study. I asked participants to assist me in identifying individuals who fit the following criteria for this study:

1. Participants who have been learners within an adult learning setting.
2. Participants who acknowledge that spirituality has played a role in their learning.

In addition to snowballing, I also sought participants by contacting organizations that provide adult learning across adult learning contexts. The nine participants represent five adult learning contexts: Adult Literacy, University/Four-Year Degree Programs, Continuing Professional Education, Technical College, and Religious Education. The spiritual experiences of these adult learners occurred in single learning experiences as well as in multiple learning experiences in the same adult education context. As seen in Table 1 and the participant descriptions, the participants have various religious affiliations, occupations, and adult learning contexts. All participants are women and range in age from 30 to 80 years of age. Two women are African American and seven are Caucasian. The women worked in different occupational fields including catering, behavioral health, quality control, music, consulting, communications, landscaping, and education. All of the participants identified themselves as Christian (2 Pentecostal, 1 Presbyterian, 3 Christian unspecified, 3 Baptist). Two participants indicated that they were raised Catholic, and one participant indicated that she practiced Judaism for 15 years. While these participants identified themselves as Christian, several of the participants described practices that are associated with many different faith traditions as described by Roof (1999) and Forman (2004). For example, Alexi and Susie embrace mind, body, and spirit connections. Alexi also practices forms of yoga and believes in the power of healing touch. Nina believes in the sacredness of nature as a way to connect with the universe and with God.

Table 1

Participant Biographical Information

Name	Type of Adult Ed	Gender	Age	Religious Affiliation	Ethnicity	Occupation
Alexi	Continuing Professional Education	F	39	Presbyterian	W	Business Quality Control
Desiree	Degree Program	F	40	Baptist	W	Musician
Maria	Technical College	F	34	Pentecostal	W	Caterer
Nancy	Degree Program	F	44	Christian	W	Consultant
Nina	Continuing Professional Education	F	80	Baptist	W	Landscape Designer
Paige	Adult Literacy	F	34	Christian	AA	Paraprofessional
Pam	Religious Education	F	48	Christian	W	Communications
Shandi	Degree Program	F	30	Baptist	AA	Behavioral Health
Susie	Degree Program	F	42	Pentecostal	W	Educator

Alexi

Alexi is a 39 year old white female. She works in the poultry industry in quality control for feed. She also has a studio that is part of a wellness center where she works part-time. The wellness center offers yoga, stretching, and strength training classes along with the services of a chiropractor, reflexologist, and massage therapists. Her spiritual experiences were part of a continuing professional education conference she attended for her work at the wellness center. She shared a conference flyer that indicated that the conference was for individuals with a commitment to life, and to a greater degree of

wholeness and healing for themselves and the global community. The conference hosted a variety of participants including massage therapists, chiropractors, and yoga instructors who attended to extend their skills.

Alexi believes in the power of a healing touch, and I observed her as she received a chiropractic treatment. I also observed her as she taught classes at the wellness center. She incorporates touching as she works with her clients. In addition to her work in the poultry industry and at her studio, Alexi is active in her Presbyterian church where she sings in the church choir. She also leads a laughing yoga group and volunteers at community events.

Desiree

Desiree is a musician who has a variety of positions in her community. She is the director of chorales and church choirs. She also teaches piano and voice lessons in her home to children and adults. In addition, she works at a small college as an accompanist for musical performances. She is a 40 year old white female. She is married and is the mother to three children. Her family is actively involved in youth activities within her community. She said she was from a Southern Baptist background, but is now serving in a Presbyterian church. Desiree writes in her journal often, and she reviewed her journal notes about her experience before coming to the interview. Desiree's home library includes many religious and spiritual texts as well as Christian music and hymns.

She was working on her Master's degree when her spiritual experience occurred. The professor of her conducting class was also a mentor, and he was often willing to counsel her on various subjects as she progressed through her degree. While the class listened to the Johannes Brahms' mass, *A German Requiem*, Desiree said she became

upset and had to leave the class. She said that what made the experience spiritual was the connection to the music and the text, “How lovely is thy dwelling place, O, Lord of hosts.” This event made her deal with the death of her grandmother from 15 years earlier, and she became focused with what her legacy would be for her children.

Desiree presents herself as articulate and confident. I have observed Desiree as she has worked with children and adults. She spends much time connecting with individuals and intentionally listening. She is considered by many to be a close friend, and she invests of herself in these friendships.

Maria

Maria is a 34 year old white female who describes herself as born Catholic, but raised Pentecostal. She attended a technical college in culinary arts and is now the director of catering at a conference center. Maria is a quiet modest woman who was uncomfortable at first talking about her spirituality. She is divorced and living alone in the small town where she works.

I met Maria while she was the caterer at a training I was attending. I observed Maria working as the caterer at this event. She seemed to be intensely focused on her work. I saw her holding her hands over the food and speaking softly with her eyes closed. She was moving her hands above all of the food on the table. Maria opened her eyes and saw me staring. She smiled and nodded. She said, “This is an important meeting for the teachers, isn’t it?” I replied that it was. “Well,” she said, “praying helps. This food will help them learn more.”

Maria feels that she was spiritually led to the technical college for culinary arts. She believes that her education was a spiritual journey. She believes that God has guided

her throughout her education and this has given her confidence. For her, hospitality is more than a job; it is an opportunity to serve God and other people.

Nancy

Nancy has a private consulting business, and she provides professional learning for public and private organizations. Nancy is a 44 year old white female who is married and has three children. Nancy has a long history of being involving in social action for a variety of issues. She has taken in foster children, worked with families in crisis and poverty, and she volunteers at her children's school. She encourages her children to join her in working in soup kitchens and homeless shelters. She is very active in her church activities and she describes herself as Christian.

Nancy was working on her advanced degree at a research university where she reports that she had several spiritual experiences in her classes. Most of her narrative revolved around classes dealing with multiple truths and theories. Nancy was concerned with how to reconcile what she learned in her classes with her own personal faith.

Nancy has taught courses on how to change organizations for the positive benefit for all the stakeholders. She also has expertise in cultural diversity. I have observed Nancy teaching, and she does connect well with her participants even when they are uncomfortable dealing with issues. She is frank and direct in her interactions, but considerate. She wonders about what should be done to help organizations sustain social and organizational change.

Nina

Nina is 80 years old and full of energy. She is a white female who lives with her daughter and son-in-law. She works for a landscaping business, and she does small

landscaping designs for customers in her community. She believes in the spiritual dimensions of nature. She believes that her landscape designs are gifts from God. She has been known to sit on her little stool in a yard for several days waiting and meditating before she begins the design for a space. I visited her home and her own yard is beautifully landscaped and full of texture, flowers, and color. She believes that nature is a testament to God's beauty. She uses flowers from her yard to share with her pastor, church members, and friends. Nina believes that through her flowers and plants, she is able to offer others a "smile from God." In fact, in her home garden she has a decorative garden stepping stone that refers to heaven's gate and gardens.

Nina is very demonstrative and she uses her hands to gesture as she speaks. She often held her hands as if in prayer and pointed upward as if to signal a "sign from above." Nina was raised in the Southern Baptist tradition, and she continues to attend church. She talked about her close relationship with her pastor.

Nina spoke about numerous spiritual experiences, but she discussed a learning experience that happened in 1945. She remembered it vividly. She believes that she received divine intervention while in business school.

Paige

Paige is a 34 year old African American female who worked hard to put herself through a GED program and college. She was an unwed teenage mother while she was going through the GED program. Currently, she is married and is raising her two children. She works as a paraprofessional and hopes to obtain her teaching certificate.

Paige is actively involved in her Christian church where she sings in the church choir and volunteers with programs for drug and alcohol abuse. She is proud of her work

with teenage mothers and feels the young girls relate to her frank conversations about how to she was able to change her life. She is also proud of her accomplishments, but recognizes that she has needed to rely on her family and friends for support.

Paige has been selected several times to serve on state panels dealing with educational issues, and she has been interviewed on television. I observed Paige speaking to educational leaders. Paige's spirituality was evident in much of what she said and did. She prayed before going on stage, and during her speech, Paige credited the Lord for guidance and spiritual support. She also said that she could not have accomplished so much if the Lord had not been with her. When I visited Paige's house, she had a Christian prayer from a church bulletin posted on her refrigerator and her Bible was on her kitchen table. She laid her hand on her Bible several times during the interview.

Paige recounted numerous spiritual experiences throughout her life, but she spoke in detail about the connections she made with her teachers while working on her GED. These connections have continued beyond the time in the classroom. Paige believes that her life has improved since she has accepted God's path for her.

Pam

Pam is a white female who is 49 years old. She is a journalist and currently works in communications for several organizations. She was raised Catholic, and she married a Jewish man. Together they attended Temple for over 15 years, but she usually also attended Mass on Sunday. She became very close to their rabbi and became active in the Temple activities. When her family relocated to Georgia, she did not feel comfortable in either the Catholic Church or the Temple nearby. Her family is now part of the congregation of a large non-denominational Christian church.

Pam is proud of her three daughters. One of her daughters has a significant disability. Pam is very active in raising awareness for autism and for families with children with disabilities. She is on the board of several organizations and wants to make significant changes for families. She says that her spirituality has influenced many of the decisions she has made. Pam described an experience that happened during a lesson at a church where she is an active member.

Observing Pam's home, revealed several Christian symbols including decorative crosses. She is an avid reader, and she had several inspirational books on her book shelf. I have observed Pam working with educators and families with children with disabilities. She is intense and energetic. Pam is willing to help families in many different ways. She gives much of herself and expects little in return. Pam invests in relationships. She believes that many of her relationships are spiritual.

Shandi

Shandi is a 30 year old African American female who is working on her Ph.D. She has worked in behavioral health working with individuals who have HIV/AIDS. She is currently teaching health to undergraduate students and working with grants for behavioral health research. Shandi is single and living alone. She has made numerous life changes following her spiritual experiences. Church is an important part of her life. She says that she feels comforted by prayer, and she has prayed in classes asking for God's assistance. I observed Shandi in a graduate class where she appeared to be praying before a presentation. She also talked about a book of spiritual quotes she carried in her notebook for inspiration. She has a document posted on her website about her teaching philosophy that states "health is a state of total mental, physical, spiritual, environmental

and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity.” In this document she also discusses helping others explore what they are passionate about, so they can in turn be passionate about the promotion of good health for others.

Shandi described four different types of spiritual experiences that impacted her learning. The first is about a dream that deeply impacted her life. Next, she described her general learning experiences and how she perceived spirituality in these experiences. The third is about her experiences as an adult educator. Finally, she shared experiences in a college class about African-American women. She drew upon this class to describe specifically how the class environment and the teacher helped to make the experience spiritual for her.

Susie

Susie is an educational leader who is providing professional learning for teachers. She is a 42 year old white female who is married with three children. She described a difficult childhood, and she has dedicated much of her career to supporting children who are marginalized, disenfranchised, and abused. Susie attends a Pentecostal church with her family. She has recently moved to a new community in order to be closer to her family.

Susie is very concerned about making a difference with youth, and she feels that she was called to teach. She values the strengths and weaknesses of the individual while maintaining high standards. She has mentored other teachers who wanted to be able to connect with students like she does. She called this work “discipling.”

Susie has a strong sense of a transcendent Other and of her self, and she believes in a triune sense of self. Susie uses a metaphor of a diamond to describe how her

experiences interact with this triune sense of self to shape the cut of the diamond. She believes she has a physical dimension, a cognitive dimension, and a spiritual dimension. She refers to the spiritual dimension as her “spirit man.” She said that through her learning experiences, her spirit-man has grown. She states that the physical self is secondary to the spirit-man and the flesh is the vehicle for getting to the spiritual experiences. For Susie, meaning-making is spiritual because she uses all three dimensions (physical, cognitive, and spiritual) to make meaning of each experience.

While she was in graduate school, Susie had several spiritual experiences associated with classes in organization change, ways of knowing, and multiple intelligences. She said that she has a strong sense of intuitive knowing and can feel spirit-to-spirit connections. Susie approaches her work with adults hoping for these spiritual connections because she believes that they contribute to transformational experiences.

Overview of Findings

The purpose of this study was to understand how adults perceive spirituality in their learning. Associated with this purpose, was a focus on the theme in existing adult literature which points to spirituality as being inherent universally in all types of adult education; therefore, this study examined spirituality across several types of adult education. After analyzing the transcripts, no distinct patterns of difference emerged in the findings. The data revealed that even in religious settings where it would be expected that a spiritual lens would frame the learning, there was no difference from those experiences that occurred in other adult education contexts. In other words, the spiritual experiences of participants in a religious adult education class could not be differentiated from those described by participants in nonreligious classes.

As can be seen in Table 2, findings from this study are organized according to the guiding research questions dealing with adult learners' definitions of spirituality, the role of spirituality, and the factors that influence spirituality in adult learning. Ten categories emerged from the data.

The first set of findings relate to the question of how adult learners define spirituality. These findings address the adult learners' perceptions of spirituality and include categories about essence of self, beliefs in a transcendent Other, and connections to others.

The second set of findings gives us an understanding of the role spirituality plays in adult learning. These findings encompass enhancing the learning of the content, facilitating transformational learning, and revealing meaning and purpose for life.

The third set of findings includes the factors that influence spirituality in adult learning. These findings indicate the importance of the role of instructors, classroom environments, depending on a transcendent Other, and the interpretation of content for adult learners who acknowledge spirituality in their learning.

Definitions of Spirituality

The findings of the study which relate to the definition of spirituality can be collapsed into four main categories. The first category deals with the essence of identity. This category pervades all other categories and indicates how these participants define themselves as having a spiritual core. The second category relates to a belief in a transcendent Other. All participants claimed to have a belief in something bigger than themselves. Some of the participants referred to this belief of object as God and others to a Higher Being. The third category incorporates spiritual connections with others. The

Table 2

Role of Spirituality in Adult Learning Contexts

I.	Definitions of Spirituality
	A. Essence of self
	B. Belief in a transcendent Other
	C. Connections with others
II.	Role of Spirituality in Adult Learning
	A. Enhances the learning of the content
	B. Facilitates transformational learning
	C. Reveals meaning and purpose for life
III.	Factors that Influence Spirituality in Adult Learning
	A. Having a reverent instructor
	B. Creating a hospitable classroom
	C. Depending on a transcendent Other
	D. Interpreting content through a spiritual lens

evidence here points to deeply felt connections with other people including classmates, friends, and colleagues.

Essence of Self

Defining spirituality is not an easy task, and it has layers of meanings for different individuals. Alexi expressed her difficulty in defining spirituality by saying she did not know how to clearly define spirituality because it meant different things to her, but that “spirituality is a powerful thing” even if it is hard to describe. However, as these adult

learners shared their experiences, it became clear that spirituality is how they see themselves. All nine participants voiced comments related to spirituality as the essence of their identity.

Shandi said, “[Spirituality] is at the core of my being.” According to Paige, “spirituality is all a part of who I am and my connection with God in everything that I do.” Susie believed in a triune self comprised of her mind, body, and spirit. She called her spiritual self the “spirit-man,” and she believed that she connected with God and the spiritual world through her “spirit-man.” Desiree said that “Everything I do is related to who I am as God’s child.” Maria described an inner spirituality which comes from God, and Pam said spirituality matters because “it is who I am, what makes me.” She emphasized that “spirituality is a connection to your inner self which is God.”

This idea of spirituality being related to their inner self was expressed by Nina and Alexi. They discussed spirituality as part of themselves, a looking inward. Alexi explained this notion as, “the inner self that we have that is not really tangible....You can feel it.” Nina described a spiritual energy inside herself. She said this “spiritual drive gives you the energy to keep going...Your spirit is inside of you.” Pointing to her heart, she added, “My spirit is here.”

Belief in a Transcendent Other

A belief in a transcendent Other was another prevailing theme throughout the experiences shared. All of the participants included this belief in a transcendent Other in their definitions. Participants expressed their beliefs in God, the Lord, Jesus Christ, a Holy Spirit, the Spirit, and a Greater Being.

For example, Shandi said, “when I think about spirituality I think about my relationship with God, but also how I live my life according to how I view my relationship with God.” She described how her relationship with God connects her with her inner self and her passions. She remembered a dream where she believed God called her to graduate school. She described this experience in much detail and included these comments in her definition of spirituality: “I felt like God knows me and my heart and [knows] what I want to do and what I am capable of. . . . Only God knows me intimately to lead me like that.”

Paige believed in the “Lord” and this belief was underscored by the prayer posted on her refrigerator in her kitchen. She referred to this belief many times during her interview. Desiree’s beliefs about spirituality were also associated with Jesus Christ. She said that spirituality was being “as close to whom Jesus Christ was as is humanly possible.”

For several of the adult learners, decisions that they made or felt they were guided to make had to do with their deeply personal beliefs in the transcendent Other. Maria explained her view of spirituality as a belief in a transcendent Other by describing how God has been her spiritual guide most of her life. She believed that God led her to enroll in the culinary arts program. She said, “[In] everything that I do, I let God and my spirituality lead me. . . . I don’t just do it because I decided to. I really use my inner spirituality to make my decisions through God.” Nancy described spirituality this way, “My definition of spirituality would be walking on faith and knowing there is a Greater Being that is in control of my life.”

Alexi summarized her beliefs in a transcendent Other by saying “that we are all one in the Spirit,” while Nina felt a connection to God through her work with the natural environment. In addition, Nancy expressed her connection to the Other as a journey.

A transcendent Other was noted by Nancy as she described the dynamics and unique aspects of her beliefs. Nancy said that “spirituality is a key in every experience” including those she has with other people, but much depends upon where she is in her commitment and faith. She said that this commitment shapes how she relates with “the Holy Spirit or the spiritual realm.”

At times Nancy’s beliefs in a transcendent Other are very strong, and she is very “in tune” and can feel and hear a spiritual presence. She says that she knows God is real because she can feel it. She explained this statement by saying “I have lived that feeling knowing that there are paths and journeys I have taken where God has been with me....And times when I have not let Him go on that journey...It is a journey; it is ever changing.”

Maria also shared her belief in a transcendent Other. She claimed to have an ancestral spiritual presence guiding her and watching over her. She said, “I have felt that there is someone there watching over me and guiding me. I don't always tell people that because they will think I am nuts.” She laughed nervously as she said, “I always feel that we have guidance that other people maybe don't acknowledge.”

Nina’s beliefs with a transcendent Other were expressed through her gardening and landscaping and her beliefs are supported by the inspirational stepping stone in her garden. She said that this work makes her feel like she is communicating with God. She said, “I get my little stool when I’m working and digging....I just go down and sit down

and look at the beautiful sky and meditate and say the sky is beautiful, I've got to make this beautiful." She believed that if she is patient and waits that God will give her guidance for her landscaping designs.

Several of the participants described not only their belief in a transcendent Other, but offered their perspective of the nature of the transcendent Other. It was evident from their quotes that strong feelings are associated with a belief in a transcendent Other. These feelings seem to be manifestations of something holy and divine. For these adult learners, the feelings they describe seem to have a quality that is spiritually pure. Alexi states that spirituality is something "I feel [and] that you can't touch....The feeling that the spirit of God [is] there with us." Feelings of grace, peace, forgiveness, joy, and love were attributed to spirituality as these adult learners shared details of their experiences. Shandi said spirituality "helps you feel more centered or more at peace," and Desiree said that part of being a child of God included feeling God's grace and forgiveness. Nina discussed spirituality as beautiful and that it made her "feel good." Alexi, on the other hand, described spirituality as making her feel special. She remarked that "'special' might seem like a little quaint word," but this was the word that described how she felt. She added that she also felt "gratefulness, ...love and peacefulness," while for Pam, spirituality was feeling a sense of "blind faith." Desiree made this comment about her feelings of peace and joy:

I don't think [peace] is the essence of [spirituality]. Because there have been many times when it's not peaceful, it's joyful. You know, in my temperament it's not easy for me to do peace, but I can do joy. And I can do a heart overflowing. To me, that is more the essence of spirituality. Sometimes I need the peace.

When my heart is torn or I am struggling so deeply with something, I need to go find the peace. But the peace that I hit is almost instantaneously replaced with not a calm lake in the late afternoon kind of peace at all, but more of a rippling brook joyfulness that this is passed on, so I don't have to carry this. It is a peace that I go looking for, but at the end it's almost instantaneously replaced with the joy. The laughter or the giggles of God is a good way to say it...So I would not say that peace is the essence, but it is joy.

Connections with Others

Not only did the participants define spirituality as the essence of self and a belief in a transcendent Other, but they acknowledged that spirituality is a connection with others. The adult learners talked about the connections made while sharing spiritual practices and how these spiritual connections with others were mutually enriching. Participants perceived spiritual connections with colleagues, classmates, and strangers. For example, these connections occurred during prayer before a test, in a breakout session of a conference, and in study groups. Two of the participants commented on how these spiritual connections moved them to physically reach out to others. In addition, the member checking process generated much discussion about how these connections with others are spiritual.

For example, Pam's definition of spirituality included a personal relationship with God, but also "learning, talking to people...and learning from people that live [their spirituality] through example." Nina said she had a spiritual connection to other people, and that she often demonstrated this by reaching out to others and hugging them. Shandi said it is very powerful for her when she spiritually connects with classmates. She talked

about her experiences praying with classmates before a test or a final. She said that she feels different when she expresses herself this way with classmates. "I think it helps motivate me and keeps me going." She says that she appreciates it when another classmate says, "Girl, don't worry about it. Just pray on it. God's going to work it out."

Susie described relationships with others that she felt contributed to her spiritual experiences. She called these relationships "spirit-to-spirit connections." She said these relationships not only enriched others, but they were enriching to her as well. When pressed to explain what she meant, Susie said the more she spiritually connected with others, the more of herself she could "give away" and she felt that she became a "light source," thus strengthening her spirit-man.

Alexi's experience exemplifies this spiritual connection with others, and she described this experience in relation to God's gifts. She said she believes "everyone has their individual gifts, and we all work together for whatever the good is that we are trying to achieve." She described a spiritual experience while at a conference learning about a type of chiropractic therapy. She wanted me to understand that this experience was something very different and rare. She said "that it's not anything like what happens at church. It is just a totally different awareness." This retreat made it clear to her that not only are the gifts important, but that "we are also connected in that spirit, in that bond of unity and that you don't have so much of a choice...[about] who you are going to resonate with and not resonate with."

She talked about waiting her turn for a chiropractic demonstration in a chair near a man on the chiropractic table when her body began to move on its own volition. She said, "I am just sitting there and I start having all this weird movements and feelings in

my body..... Finally I looked over at this guy, and every time he would move a certain way, I was moving the same way.” She said that she did not know this man, but their bodies were moving in tandem. “We are both doing the same [thing]... It was something in his neck, I remember that, and in his shoulders. And whatever he would do, I would move.” Alexi goes on to explain why this experience was significant and spiritual for her by saying it made her realize “that everybody was connected and all part of that spirit and that everybody was part of that family of God.” She went on to elaborate about this bond of unity and how this experience was spiritual:

It is kind of like picking your friends. You don't pick who you are connected to. You are connected to everybody. Your same spirit is in me and... Everybody's got energy and vibrational frequencies. Everybody's got that stuff in them and you're not only connected as a unit to use your gifts in life, but you are also connected physically.

At one of the breakout sessions at the conference, Alexi was involved in a yoga session and she felt a connection with a man in the class as they went through the exercises together. They did not speak in this session, but they maintained close eye contact throughout the activities. After this breakout session, she did not see him again until the culminating conference activity several days later. She called this activity, the *Angel Wash*, with two rows of people, and participants coming one at a time through the middle of these rows. The people in the rows put out their hands to bless the person in the middle with love while music was playing in the background. Alexi said quietly to herself, “Here comes this big guy that I connected with on the first day...and he is crying....How can I reach this guy and show him how much I love him?” So, she reached

up and gently wiped the tears from his face. He was supposed to keep his eyes closed, but he had to see who it was. Alexi explained that this man gave her a huge hug, and she knew that they had made an important connection even though no words had been spoken. Alexi said this was an amazing experience and she was beginning to understand the value of connecting with classmates.

Role of Spirituality in Adult Learning

Understanding how the adult learners defined spirituality became very important as I tried to determine the role of spirituality in their learning. Without this understanding of the participants' notion of spirituality, many of the insights and nuances of the learning experiences would have been missed. For example, understanding how Shandi sees her self as a spiritual being becomes important when she discussed how praying facilitated her learning of the content. When participants responded to the questions about what they had learned from their spiritual experiences in an adult learning opportunity, three categories emerged. Participants described how their spiritual experiences enhanced the learning of the content, facilitated transformational learning, and revealed meaning and purpose for life.

Facilitates the Learning of the Content

Seven of the nine adult learners in this study discussed how spirituality enhanced the learning of the content in their education experiences. They believed strongly that in these educational experiences a transcendent Other gave them understanding, knowledge, and skills related to the content. In all cases, strong emotions were evident as the adult learners described these experiences. Some of the learners became very animated, other learners cried, and some of the narratives were punctuated by long pauses or nervous

laughter. The adult learners realized that these experiences were special and unique, and some of the learners were surprised or awed as they described their experiences to me. Comments such as Paige's "God, you are blowing my mind!" and Pam's "It amazed me," illustrate this feeling of being surprised by the experience.

Nina shared an experience that occurred over 50 years ago, and she remembered it in vivid detail. The experience was that she believed that an angel from God gave her answers to a test when she was unable to study because her mother had been ill. Nina discussed how she felt when the teacher handed her the tests. "She pulled out all these tests, and my mind was just whirling....My angel came and said, 'You can do it! Put your mind to it. You can do it!'" Nina said that she heard and felt the presence just above her head. She added this comment, "I swear *something* [emphasis added by participant] answered the questions. I didn't....You know what? I made a B+ on my exams." Nina went on to tell how that experience prepared her for an experience she would have a short time later in business school during her shorthand class. When I asked her what was spiritual about shorthand, she made this observation:

I had a terrible time in shorthand....All of a sudden it all came to me. Just as clear and plain as daylight, and I said, "Yeah!" I got that help I needed [pointing up]. Oh, the spirit above. The spirit came and took over... my shorthand... The spirit got in my brain and said, "You can do this. You can do this." What was spiritual about shorthand! The Spirit! I just could not get [shorthand], and I prayed.... "Come on, Lord. Help me do this!" [hands folded as if in prayer] So He did and I passed that booger and got a good job. It came all of the sudden. It [shorthand system] got clear to me and then of course, I had to work at understanding some

of it, but the system came to me....He opened my eyes....Sometimes it's little pieces and sometimes it goes [hands flowing over her body, hands getting faster & faster, making a swishing sound, whistle] like that...I have to be sure to remember when it does that... It just came all of the sudden.

One day something very different happened to Maria in her culinary arts program. She described an experience about making ice and food sculptures in one of her culinary classes. In the following spiritual experience, she described how she realized that God has given her a gift. Maria had not received training or worked on her knife skills, but suddenly one day in class, she was able to carve a block of ice into a sculpture. Maria believed that God gave this gift to her. Here is how she described it.

I know that people were taught...and were trained to do the things that came to me natural. I mean, different knife skills, different artistic skills that I was never trained on, came natural. Like carving fruit, carving, making displays out of stuff with the knife [or] making a block of ice into a fish. No one taught me that, I just did it. I feel that was something spiritually I was led by....It was a gift to me.

Shandi seemed uncomfortable at first identifying the source of her knowledge. She said, "I won't call it divine intervention [laughing] because I don't know if that is quite what I want to call it." But as she continued sharing her experiences she became more confident that God was giving her not only guidance but knowledge. "When I am studying hard and...it is not connecting with me I feel like there is something going on that I can only attribute, for me, to God...giving me this knowledge." Shandi explained the benefit of this spiritual connection. "I feel like somehow that is some kind of spiritual connection. I am...trying, but I feel like I am getting this extra boost or kick."

Shandi described experiences that are educationally related, but move beyond the classroom setting. She recognized that she must study and be engaged with the learning in the classroom and in doing class homework, but she believed that there were moments when something special had happened in her learning. She said that she did not know these things at a conscious level. "I have these things in my head that I am not even consciously aware of, but once I start to do the task or start to write, it just comes out...I feel like it is just God bringing this stuff out."

During other moments there was a flash of understanding and the learning was connected. She attributed these learning experiences to her own studying and preparation, but also to God's intervention in her learning. She believed that through prayer and preparation, God had given her these gifts. She talked about reading material and not really "getting it," but then all of a sudden, the learning "just connects and flows together." Shandi elaborated how being focused in prayer had helped her. She talked about reading material over and over and not understanding it, but somehow this information was available to her when she was taking her test. Talking about this experience, she said, "It is just flowing from my brain, and I did not understand it." She believed that her focused prayer to ask for guidance with the class materials helped her. She believes that she was given "this new knowledge and understanding" and God was saying "no, this is in you. Let me help jog your mind or give you that boost."

Paige shared a similar experience when she was working toward obtaining her GED after having dropped out of high school many years prior. She knew she did not know the content that was to be tested, but she passed the tests after praying for God's help. She believed that God was with her through it all.

I can't describe it, but I just felt like I was on this mission there. I started in February, and in May, I had obtained my GED...I was like okay; I have been out of school umpteen years. I haven't studied for nothing, no subject.... And I was so nervous [to take the tests]. I was like, Lord, I don't know this. I don't know it. I am guessing. I'm trying to do process of elimination. I am thinking like, and I was so nervous, I didn't finish all of [the questions]... And I'm like okay, I am just bubbling in. And when I got my test results, I passed most of those tests. And I'm thinking like, "Oh my God!"...One test at a time, I passed.

Paige obtained her GED, and she believed that God was with her through her entire college career especially since she had been a high school dropout. She believed that God gave her the strength to write a research paper and get through her internship.

Pam talked about how her learning was enhanced when she realized that she was trying too hard to control her learning. Through prayer, meditation, and conversations with God, she had been able to be more open to new experiences. One of the learning experiences that Pam shared happened in church during a lesson about a short passage of scripture that focused on having faith in God. This was scripture taken from the New Testament of the Christian Bible dealing with the apostles walking away from their nets and then coming back to find them full. As Pam discussed the pressures and struggles in her life, she said she realized in that moment that she needed to have "blind faith" and "trust God" like the apostles. She summarized by saying that it all came together the day when she heard the story at church. She said, "It just struck me that I was trying too hard."

Nancy clarified the connection between her spiritual experience and how her learning was enhanced. She shared a spiritual experience in graduate school that forced her to examine her own faith and beliefs. Her class was about the notion of multiple truths. She said, “I had to step back and look back at the bigger picture than that class and the bigger picture than my own personal faith. So I began to look in other people’s direction. And, how they explained truth...It was just a growing time.” Nancy felt that she had to balance what she believed and what was being taught.

What is it I believe? And what is it that I will take from what she is teaching me that I felt had some validity? But then, what I believe from scriptures and from personal background experiences has validity, [so] how do I mesh the two?...

When I was able to ask questions and hold on to my faith...my spiritual growth increased and enhanced.

Nancy said that she had to examine what she was reading and learning in the light of her own faith. When she realized that they clashed, she had to reflect deeply. She said that she “came out with even a deeper faith.”

Facilitates Transformational Learning

Facilitating transformational learning was another role of spirituality in the learning of these adults. Six of the nine participants described learning characterized by transformations of thought which resulted in changes in their world view. These participants related spiritual experiences that seem to be aligned with transformational learning, and these spiritual experiences indicate that emotions and feelings have significance in the process of transformation. For example, Susie’s spiritual experience while learning about multiple intelligences was associated with a recursive transformative

journey based on intuition. Some of the experiences, such as Desiree's spiritual experience in her music class, reflect how engaging learners through cognitive, affective, and spiritual or symbolic dimensions may increase the likelihood of transformation learning. In addition, Nancy's spiritual experience reflects transformational learning and social responsibility. The evidence indicates that these spiritual experiences reflect transformational learning because the participants changed their world views and perspectives.

The narratives of Paige, Pam, Desiree, Alexi, Susie, and Nancy illuminate the role spirituality played in transformational learning as a consequence of a spiritual experience in an adult learning opportunity. Using a broad definition of transformational learning that includes the transforming of world views, the spiritual experiences of Paige, Pam, Susie, and Alexi did stimulate transformational learning as they did change their world views or perspectives.

Narratives, such as Paige's story, reflect the role of spirituality as the adult learners changed their world views and became more open minded and tolerant of others. Paige, who early in the interview, identified that her sense of self was framed by spirituality, described an experience in her classes in philosophy and intercultural communications. Throughout these classes, she was thinking critically about what she was learning and contrasting this new knowledge with her own spiritual beliefs. In this part of the interview, Paige described how her spiritual experience contributed to her transformational learning.

I think my spirituality has given me the basis or the permission to have an open mind, to be able to hear why people do what they do. [To] not label them as being

deviant, being defiant, but understanding this is their cultural background. I might not agree with you, and you might not agree with me, but [I] have an open mind...enough to want to create a sharing so...I can understand you better. You can understand me better, and there can be some peace between us....I am secure in my spirituality to be able to open up my mind to receive that....Sitting in that philosophy class, learning about Socrates and Plato and reading about this one particular culture where they practice feticide, I am thinking Oh my, God.

Because it went against my norm and what I know, but to try to have an open mind to understand their culture and what they believe and how they believe, and [they] felt like there was no other choice but to do that, it gave me a totally different perspective that took me out of the judgment seat. I am thinking like, wow, this is amazing!

Paige's comments reflect how she was reconstructing new frames of reference, and through her spiritual experience, Paige learned that by being open to new experiences, she could understand more about the intercultural world. Paige indicated she now believed a more harmonious world was possible, and she said we have to embrace this world and try to create a world "where we are going to live in harmony together."

Nancy had many of the same sentiments, but she expressed them differently. In summarizing what she learned from her multiple truths class in her graduate program and working on her dissertation, she said, "It contributed to my desire to read more and to learn more things. It opened me up to more possibilities in different ways." She talked about how she lived in various compartments of her life, and the spirituality in her learning opened some of these doors to "just to peep into a place. To look at it for a

while.” Nancy’s reported that she was more willing to see another person’s perspective and validate other individuals’ ways of thinking and living. She said that it was not until then that she was able to learn from those other ways of thinking. She said that this “reinforced Jesus’ teaching of how we are supposed to treat our fellow man.”

Nancy’s transformational learning continued through her awareness of social responsibility. She became more involved in social justice work through several organizations and with her family. Through this work and her experiences dealing with multiple truths in the classroom, Nancy’s world views became challenged on cognitive, affective, and spiritual levels. She said that she thought about these issues and how they conflicted with her faith and her beliefs about spirituality. She even discussed how she did not feel comfortable discussing these issues with members of her church congregation. After much reflection, Nancy professed that she had become more tolerant and open minded, and her commitment to the common good became more pronounced and explicit. Her comments were associated with her work with families in poverty including work with food banks, soup kitchens, and homeless shelters. Based on her experiences, she now believed that spirituality without social justice action could not make change happen, but social justice work without spirituality was not enough to sustain change either. This was a significant shift in her frame of reference. Because of her spiritual experiences and this transformational learning, Nancy felt like she had changed her worldview. “This is something just recently that I have finally admitted out loud.....Now I’m at a place where I can be the hands and feet of God and do something.”

This notion of the spiritual experience facilitating transformational learning as evidenced by changing world views or perspectives continued with Pam. Pam described

how her perspective changed when she became more open-minded and tolerant. Earlier in the interview, Pam had described her associations with various religions, but over the past few years, she had been cultivating a personal relationship with God as she understood Him. She described being in a class at church and being able to understand someone else's point of view. It was this spiritual experience that helped her to develop a more expansive view of God. With critical reflection about her experience, Pam acknowledged a shift in her frame of reference. She reported that she was more tolerant of others including others from different religions. Pam explained how her thinking had changed by saying, "I think it is very narrow-minded of us to think there is only one way to describe God. I think God is spiritual...is a spirit and different cultures and different religions have made their connections."

The importance of transformational learning was highlighted in Desiree's experience. Her emotions, the music, and associated text of the music all converged in that moment to change Desiree's world view. She was able to conceptualize a spiritual legacy that she could pass on to her children and other people that she encounters. This legacy was not comprised of material items, but instead it would be filled with examples of character and the values. She used the metaphor of a river to describe this process, "Life flows on and we are here for just a little stretch of the river. I want to make sure that what I pass on is real and true...without false pretenses or arrogance."

Desiree reported that she reflected critically over several days about this spiritual experience. She said she even wrote about it in her journal. After this reflection, Desiree realized that her world view had become "far less egocentric than it was" before the experience. She explained, "It's less about who [Desiree] is and how she gets through the

day, [and more about] what I have done to influence the people around me as well as influence my children.” She described this change in her thinking as understanding more about the “the passing of the torch” from generation to generation. In talking about what she learned from her spiritual experience, she said,

I saw that what I am doing now at this moment with these kids is not making a difference just at this moment. But I saw the history or the future of the moment. The decisions I make now with even my own children at home impact them in how they respond to something tomorrow or next week. If I respond consistently, it impacts how they will respond as an adult. That was the first time I thought “forward-thinking” thoughts.

A class on multiple intelligences was one event that initiated transformational learning for Susie. While in this class learning about interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences, Susie recognized that she had a gift for intuitive knowing about her self and others. Susie explained that this was a spiritual experience because she realized that she had a gift from God. In the class, she tried to explain this notion as part of a presentation. As her teacher explored this idea with her and as she reflected on this sense of intuitive knowing over time, Susie realized how important this understanding would become to her teaching. Not only did Susie feel that her teaching practices were validated, but she now valued the strengths and weaknesses of her learners at a much deeper level. Susie reported that other teachers at her school began to observe this subtle but profound difference in how she approached her learners. She mentored these teachers at her school. It was a process she called “disciplining.”

After Alexi attended the conference on holistic healing, she thought a lot about what had happened to her. She reflected deeply on this experience and her beliefs about accepting others. She believed that what she learned from her experience was that she needed to embrace others even when their beliefs or interests might not be the same as hers. She believed this was important because they were all part of the same spirit. Alexi felt she had been too guarded in her life, and she now felt safer to connect with other people who might have different ideas or beliefs. Alexi seemed to believe in a sacred sense of connecting. This sense of connectedness went beyond ordinary empathy and was about honoring and revering individuals. This concept was difficult for Alexi to explain, but she did offer these observations:

So now I strive more to embrace that connectedness... it [has] become more safe to connect with people and not be afraid.... I am really trying to [be] open and be more loving and caring and.... [be] receptive to people no matter who they are, what class of people or where they are from. It is just an amazing experience to go through.

Her new understanding and acceptance of others was transformational for Alexi. She expanded her work teaching adults about wellness, and she was able to let down her guard and embrace others. After this spiritual experience, Alexi seemed to have a heightened sensitivity to the importance of physical touch especially when working with the elderly in her stretching classes. Alexi also seemed to have a deeper appreciation for the kinesthetic feel of others and using a sense of touch to heal.

The spiritual experiences as described by these participants transformed how they interacted with other people at a fundamental level. Following her spiritual experience,

Paige was able to accept others in a way that she never been able to do before. She said their “beliefs and norms might not be the same as mine. But we can create some common ground to communicate with each other.”

Reveals Meaning and Purpose for Life

Understanding the meaning and purpose for life was another strong category that emerged as the adult learners described the role of spirituality in their learning. Their spiritual experiences helped these adult learners understand and affirm the meaning and purpose for their lives. In trying to explain this concept, the participants used many different words to describe the process of discovering their meaning or purpose for life including a search, a journey, a path, a mountain climb, a sign, opening of doors, and a calling. Dreams, reflection, prayer, and sudden understanding were some of the various ways that this meaning and purpose for life were revealed. Their voices on the tapes revealed a strength and conviction as they described what they had discovered, and for all but one of the participants, this sense of meaning and purpose brought a sense of acceptance, comfort, and even courage.

Maria described finding a purpose in hospitality and culinary arts as her “calling in life” that gave her “confidence in [her]self as a person.” She said that this purpose gave her the strength, courage, and ability “to move forward with [her] talents.” Nancy described finding her purpose as a journey that she takes with God. She said in this journey there was “acceptance and understanding” as well as “comfort.”

Paige related a story about struggling about what to do with her life after she got her GED. She shared this narrative about telling her story to a group of teenage mothers who had dropped out of school.

That morning, before I left, the Lord had me get my mother's obituary, my grandmother's obituary, a picture of myself and my ex-husband, this is my third husband, a picture of me and my second husband, a picture of my two kids. I had the picture framed with my GED certificate in it and another picture framed with my acceptance letter from [college]. It was about being real with those girls. And letting them know that this is the path that I have walked down, this is who I am now and this is where I am going. My phrase for them was "Love is a verb; it is something that you do." I was letting them know I have been there....And to let them know, it is hard work, you better believe it. Hard work. I have cried plenty of nights. But when I look at the faces of my two children, they are worth every sweat, every tear that I have to put in it.

It was shortly after that event that Paige realized that God had revealed her calling for her own life. She said God had people there when she needed them to add to her life. She discussed this idea at length during the member checking process. In the interview, Paige said that this event changed her life, and this new direction was "divinely chosen." She continued the story this way:

I am in prayer, Lord, which way do you want me to go? What do you want me to do? Wherever you send me, I will go. But after I did that workshop with those teenage mothers, I was so confident in my skin. It was like putting on your favorite pair of pajamas, and I knew this is my calling. This is what I am supposed to be doing...But I know that with the experiences that I have had, I have to share those experiences. I have to be somebody's cheerleader. I have to be in their ear

and encouraging them and letting them know I stand here before you as a living witness. It can be done.

While discussing the dream that led her to graduate school, Shandi indicated that she did not believe that the dream was a random occurrence. She felt that God was guiding her even when she did not think she was capable of obtaining her advanced degree. Shandi wanted me to know that this type of experience had not happened to her before or since. She said that “everything just felt really right” and “this did not seem like an accident.” Shandi said, “I felt like God was telling me this is a direction I want you to go in, and this is a direction you are capable of going in.” She describes this moment as a “sign from God” because she had never had a conscious thought about getting her Ph.D. and she felt she was being led in this direction. She added, “So I was just feeling this was the Lord...I believe that God has ordained my steps and is all powerful.”

Shandi’s experiences revealed a spiritual journey on different planes but all leading to what she felt as a single destination. Shandi felt that she was on a spiritual journey leading inward, helping her understand herself and her relationship to God, but she also felt that she was on a spiritual journey where her steps were taking her outward to bridge research with community action for HIV/AIDS. Even though she had not had conscious knowledge of that before, she said she felt like she was where she needed to be. That is why she is attributing all of this to her dream alone and following a spiritual path. She said since she has stayed on God’s path, “Things are working themselves out.”

Another adult learner who discussed education as a spiritual journey was Nancy. Nancy talked about her life in graduate school as being a spiritual journey. She described this gradual journey as painful early on, but that she had learned a lot about herself in the

process. Nancy said that because of her spiritual journey, she understood her life's purpose from a broader perspective. She made this observation:

I don't think it was just one thing...For me personally, in my Christian faith, it has been this journey....God taught me something and then I was ready to learn something else....It still isn't that I have learned it and I am done. So it was gradual and some of the first, early times were painful.

Desiree's experience in her music conducting class was emotional and was associated with the death of her grandmother. She had a deep connection to a passage of music. After much reflection, Desiree said that she understood that the meaning and purpose for her life was the spiritual legacy she would leave to her children just like her grandmother had left for her. She said she had a "heart connect" with this understanding of the value of life on earth and beyond. She wanted her children to understand why deep connections with people are important, and she wanted them to recognize the essence of a person. She said that she had conversations with her children about this and she had said to them, "I want you to connect with the spirit that is inside the shell which is all that is left."

So many times, we only see what is on the outside, and I was really intent on making my children slow down enough to connect with somebody's eyes and see who they are. I would not have thought through those things, but I do all the time now....because, children, you have this gift, this way of connecting to them.

Desiree went on to say that now she can see that her grandmother's legacy was present in her, and she could hand down those things to her children. Her children can see that it is important to share the burdens of others because "when there is love and the

burden is shared, the weight is divided between two.” She said that this knowledge was very comforting to her because she knew that she was on the same path as her grandmother and her mother. Desiree said that for the first time, she understood that the path did not stop and that this passing down to the next generation had new meaning. She believed that this was just like the music. She understood that “the music is continued; so that the song does not end...my mother [and I] are in the business of transferring those things to my children so they can transfer them to their grandchildren.”

During her member check, Desiree shared the ways that this experience had transformed how she interacts with her family. She said that she has created time to be with the family as a whole and time to be with each of her children so that she can intentionally share her values. She discussed further her ideas about her spiritual legacy how she understands the larger implications for herself, her family, and the world.

Maria felt that God opened doors for her and helped her align her talents in the culinary field. She said that she felt that she was spiritually led and that God opened the door to culinary arts for a reason. She said, “I don't believe in coincidences. I think things happen for a reason. Sometimes they might seem like a coincidence but they're not.” She said that this knowledge gave her confidence and courage. She believed that her purpose in her industry was to be a server of hospitality. Because of the gifts that she had received, Maria also believed she had a responsibility to give back to others. She volunteers to cook at camps for critically ill children and had plans to go back to her technical college and teach.

In fact, the idea of giving back or teaching resonated with these adult learners. As these participants discovered their meaning and purpose for their lives, they seemed to

feel a responsibility to share what they had learned with others. Nancy, Susie, and Shandi were already teaching adults in formal learning settings, but others expressed their desire to do so in the future. Susie wanted to teach and make a difference in the lives of children. Paige wanted to teach teenage mothers. Maria wanted to teach at the technical college. Desiree wanted to do more when teaching her children about what she had learned. Susie believed that understanding her meaning and purpose gave her a sense of resiliency.

Factors that Influence Spirituality in Adult Learning

When asked what factors brought about these spiritual experiences in the classroom, the participants identified four categories. The first category involved relationships with the instructor. These relationships with the instructor were characterized by intimacy, caring, and honoring the learner, and this relationship was reverent in nature. The second category was related to the classroom environment. In the spiritual experience, a hospitable environment was important. Adult learners described these environments as safe, open, and warm. Within this hospitable classroom, some adult learners felt that symbolic processing such as music and writing contributed to the spiritual experience. The third category illustrates how adult learners depend on a transcendent Other. For these adult learners, a transcendent Other is present and an important component in their learning. Another category depicted adult learners' interpretation of content through a spiritual lens. Adult learners reporting spiritual interpretations of the content acknowledged that other students were not making the same connections.

Having a Reverent Instructor

For eight of the nine adult learners, the instructor played an important role in their spiritual experiences. Most of these adult learners have had many adult learning experiences and have interacted with many adult educators. However, they know that there was something different and special about the relationships they described to me. The adult learners conveyed characteristics of the instructor that they had never experienced before, and the participants felt that the instructor offered something unique to the experience.

These descriptions of the instructor go beyond the language used in adult education about the role of adult educators. These instructors demonstrated a profound honoring and respecting of the learner, and the adult learners described the instructor as being deeply connected, emotionally present in the moment, and caring for them as individuals in a reverent manner. In addition, the adult learners perceived that they were valued as a whole person. The term reverent was chosen to express the depth of honor and respect these instructors had for the learner as a whole person.

These interactions with their instructor were not contrived or artificial. Clearly, the adult learners perceived these interactions and connections with their instructor as natural and genuine. This sense of connection contributed to the learning experience being spiritual. In some cases like Desiree's experience, this sense of a reverent instructor was essential to the spiritual experience in the classroom.

Desiree's detailed description of her relationship with her professor in the music conducting class illustrates this concept of a reverent teacher. Desiree already had a strong relationship with this professor, but she explained how this experience was

different. She described how the professor spent hours talking with her and helping her process what had upset her and caused her to run out of class as described earlier.

[The professor] had dealt with grief through music before. And so he was not at all shaken or disturbed.....So it was not just me talking about my instance, but he also gave examples from his world of losing people and dealing with their losses with grief through music....He said, "I can see why that piece would get you, too," but he understood completely once he got out there and started talking to me about what had happened. He had "been there and done that." And so he was wonderful....He saw the validity of it and affirmed that for me. Although I don't remember any specific things that he said that helped me process it. But he had "worn those shoes." He did not negate the experience. He amplified it by saying that "it happened to me, too." That allowed me to express myself more openly. If he had not spoken to me, probably no one else would have responded to me the way he did....In that moment, we established a lot of camaraderie....I was more emotionally there than any other conversations that we had had before.

Desiree talked about other conversations with this teacher, and she said that even when anger, frustration, or other raw emotions were involved, her previous conversations did not compare to the intensity of this experience. She said that she was surprised by how much time he had spent with her: "He had skipped a class to stay and talk to me. Yes, he had sent somebody else to teach the class, so that we could finish the conversation." She said that this was an "overwhelming and spiritual moment of realizing that time passes and life goes on and the music connects us." Desiree noted that this spiritual experience was a beautiful time, a healing time, and a time of closure.

Pam, Paige, and Maria described characteristics of a reverent instructor. They said the instructors had the ability to open up themselves and to listen. Pam said that it was important that her teacher suspended his judgments. Susie said her teacher listened to her and understood and affirmed what was in her heart. She said it was as if the teacher was saying, “I can read you....I can see who you are inside and it makes sense.” Susie went on to add that while she felt a spiritual connection with her teacher, the bond was strengthened as they worked together over time. She said her teacher revealed an openness and vulnerability that made this possible, because he was able to “make his physical self transparent so that his spirit could be seen.” She said that at one point her teacher allowed himself to be moved to tears, and this moment strengthened their spiritual connection. In addition, Susie remarked that her teacher “fed her spirit” in such a way that they became permanently connected. This professor became a spiritual mentor as well as her major professor.

Shandi felt that having instructors acknowledge a transcendent Other as they discussed the content was important. She said that there had been situations with instructors where the “use of the word God [was] an automatic connection.” Shandi talked about an instructor in a class about African American women, and she said that this instructor “would bring in God a little bit or talk about certain perceptions... [the] acknowledgement of God...makes the connection.” She reflected on this idea and said:

I never thought about it at the time, but thinking about it now, yes. I think it changes the dynamic of the class. I think sometimes as an instructor myself, you can not always annihilate your beliefs on religion and spirituality, but you can not always express completely what you feel. And I felt like [the instructor] left an

openness and vulnerability for us, and I think that made it easier for other people to speak up or contribute...because she was letting us into her space a little. She said, the teacher “was sharing a connection for us...she was sharing her own connection and beliefs and perceptions....So, that made it easier to connect with her as well.”

Maria used the words compassion and passion as she tried to explain the importance of the instructors in her spiritual experiences. As she described the teachers who embraced teaching in this manner, she said she could feel the compassion they had for their students. Maria believed that these instructors also had a passion for their content as well as for their students. She added that she could feel “their passion for what they are teaching, [but] not only for what they are teaching but for us as well.” Maria felt that she had not experienced this type of teaching before, and it gave her confidence. She said, “I felt stronger than I've ever felt in my life, and I felt like I could do anything.” Maria also felt that her instructors saw something different in her, and they responded to it. Maria perceived that her instructors recognized that she had found a sense of meaning and purpose in her studies, and she believed that contributed to making their relationships special. “I have passion for food and for service. I know they took a different interest in me than they did some of the other students because they know I had passion ...a will...and spirituality about me.”

Nina also felt that her instructors saw something different in her. “The teacher maybe understood how badly I wanted to learn. How badly I wanted this. I always think they gave me a little special attention to help me fulfill my desire....They gave me some special attention.”

Paige also acknowledged many of these traits in her description of her teacher. She believed that the teacher offered herself, and as a student, Paige was ready to receive what the teacher was offering. I asked Paige to try to explain in what ways was this spiritual. Paige said, “She opened up herself. She just [had] this genuineness.” Paige added, “She opened up the door, and I walked through it to receive what she had for me. I definitely see that as a spiritual experience.” Paige said that she called this teacher many times, and they developed a long relationship that went far beyond the classroom walls.

Paige talked about the intense support she received from her teacher as being a blessing. Paige said her teacher knew about her struggles and was “there” for her. She reiterated this idea that her teacher was emotionally available. This concept of being “there” was significant, but difficult to convey. For many moments as Paige tried to explain this concept to me, the right words did not seem to come. Then she tried again.

My teacher, she was there. She knew...what was going on with me...And the support [she] gave...it is so amazing.... and it followed me. It has followed me all these years... Remember, I said just the blessing of receiving people, and being there to meet people [was] a blessing as well. That is the spiritual experience. It is like the kindred spirit. You know, it has a language all of its own.

Creating a Hospitable Classroom

The classroom environment was also credited as a factor in making the learning experience spiritual. The classroom space felt safe, secure, and hospitable. This hospitable classroom environment not only related to making learners feel welcome, but

it also dealt with the techniques that were used. These adult learners described classrooms where music, writing, and modes of expression were allowed and valued.

Using this notion of a “hospitable” classroom in a biblical sense expresses how these adult learners described their classrooms. These classrooms were characterized by a fundamental attitude toward the learners as human beings and allowed for a sense of brotherhood and sisterhood. The adult learners described a sense of welcoming, openness, and belonging in classrooms where spiritual experiences occurred.

The participants generally accepted that the instructor established this hospitable space. Shandi felt having the teacher create openness made it easier for students to contribute. In describing the classroom environment, Desiree talked about dialogue. She said “It was the back and forth talking...safe, hospitable, and secure” that also contributed to the spiritual experience. And for Shandi, the classroom environment seemed family-oriented. She said, “No one protested when she told us to say grace like a family...like we were a family.” She said that the instructor structured the class to “let her own beliefs come through as well as her interpretation of what she was teaching us.”

Within this hospitable space, unconscious and symbolic processes were accepted. Writing, reflection, prayer, meditation, and music were highlighted. Susie, Pam, Nancy, Desiree, and Shandi discussed how these affective modes of communication supported their experiences. As previously discussed, Shandi and Paige valued prayer as part of their learning experiences. Desiree described how music can “transcend class, barrier, and religion” to access something deep within ourselves. Susie felt that music was a vehicle for sharing spiritual connection. Pam also expressed why the music was essential for her experience. “[The] music...it really opens you up to listen. It just goes directly to

your emotions. Music opens your mind to listen or to feel. So I think that is also essential.”

As a musician, Desiree shared Pam’s sentiments about having an emotional and spiritual connection to the music, and as she described how she finds spiritual solace through music, she cried openly. She said, “many times when I can’t pray, I can play. There are some times when words are too heavy or the concept is too deep that I can’t wrap language around it.” She said when she can not describe what she is feeling, especially when the emotions are “too raw or too deep,” she can go to the piano and play. She felt that “God does not need words to understand the agony of our heart or the cry of our heart.” Desiree observed that at these times she is listening to the music, but not controlling her hands. She described it as an “out-of-body or in-the-zone experience.” Desiree said that in these moments

there was not a conscious word [or] thought, [but] when I would get up from the piano, it was resolved or at least taken care of....I had passed the burden on, and I did not have to worry about it anymore.

So, upon reflection, Desiree did not think it was surprising that she would have a spiritual connection to a piece of music in the classroom; still her reaction did catch her off guard.

Nancy’s professor created a hospitable classroom environment where she felt comfortable talking and writing about her faith. She claimed she was able to communicate what she was thinking and feeling better through writing. She felt the professor responded differently than he would have if her comments had been made during a class discussion. She said, “Sometimes when we wrote things about faith, you could tell he respected our faith.” This hospitable space allowed Nancy to critically

reflect on her beliefs, and the professor furthered this process of reflection with his comments and queries about what she wrote.

Depending on a Transcendent Other

In addition to having a reverent instructor and a hospitable classroom, the participants also realized that a transcendent Other is present and is a vital component in their learning. These adult learners described a dependence on a transcendent Other that contributes to their learning. Within this category are descriptions of: God caring and intervening in their learning, God influencing their lives, and God being in control of their lives. All nine adult learners described spiritual learning experiences that fall in this category.

In Paige's example, she contended that having God intervene in her learning while getting her GED caused her to exclaim, "God, you are blowing my mind! You care about the smallest little things. And it has made such a difference in my life and so I try to pray about everything." Because of what happened in her learning experience, Paige said she realized that her life is a tapestry and that even though she has struggled, she has accepted that God does intervene and her life will work out. She said, "I feel like my relationship with the Lord is a 'fixed fight' for me....my faith allows me to believe, that God is going to somehow work all of this out," therefore, she had to resist having a "microwave mentality" and be patient waiting for God's plan to be revealed. Paige said that what she learned from this spiritual experience was that "everything was in God's hand," and this knowledge helped to keep her calm and focused.

Like Paige, Pam had also encountered challenging times in her life, and she described the difficulties she had finding supports for her daughter with autism.

However, when she heard the lesson in church that day about the faith of the apostles as they left their nets, she realized she needed to “just totally give it up to God,” and that she needed to quit trying to be her own god. She reiterated this idea of giving her life to God several times, and how when she did, her life moved in a more positive direction. She said, “I’ve gotten great comfort by letting God...lead me.”

Nancy explained that she transitioned to another place in her understanding of a transcendent God and that it was not her responsibility to judge how other people found God or got to Heaven.

I can’t judge how other people get to that place...Before, I would have said there is one way. Period, and that’s it. I am willing to think that there might be another way. And there is a God that is bigger than me that can figure that out.

Understanding God’s influence in her life was fundamental to Shandi’s experience. She attributed her spiritual experiences for learning that a transcendent Other was involved in all aspects of her life including her education. She also said that realizing God’s presence in her learning allowed her to learn “in the middle of her learning.” In an effort to summarize her narrative, she said, “I think it helped reaffirm my beliefs, my belief that God is over everything. And it helped reaffirm my faith.”

Nancy described her spiritual experiences in graduate school, and she affirmed that she realized God’s presence in her learning and educational accomplishments. She talked about her struggles with scholarly writing and how one professor suggested that she would not make it through her program of study. She cried out to God, “OK, God, I can not do this. This is something that I don’t have any ability or gifts or strength to do....If I will ever finish this [dissertation], this is going to have to be completely You.”

She prayed for God's support, and in those moments when she was writing, she realized that God was writing with her page by page. This dependence on God's guidance during her writing was significant because she felt that she could complete her program of study and her dissertation. She made these comments as she summarized her narrative, "It was painful and a struggle sometimes. I became a better writer, but that dissertation was truly a miracle, I believe [it] was truly from God!"

Interpreting the Content through a Spiritual Lens

A fourth factor that appears to influence spirituality in the learning of adults is the use of their spiritual lens as they approach the content of their education experience. In essence, these participants viewed their content through the lens of a spiritual world view. All of the adult learners described experiences that provide evidence for this finding. These adult learners named the experience as spiritual because they looked at it through a spiritual lens. They recognized that the spiritual experience was based on their personal interpretation of the content, and they acknowledged that other students in the classroom did not seem to be having similar experiences. Throughout the member checking process, this area generated much discussion. The participants concurred with this category as a factor that influenced spirituality, and they were intrigued with the experiences of the other participants in the study.

Nancy described a class where she studied theories and qualitative research. She said that she was fascinated with how she had begun to see spirituality in so many of her classes.

It was kind of funny because it was spiritual....I saw God in all of those

[theories], and I saw how God reveals himself to people in different ways. He is

not in just one way of thinking. He is not in just one box. He could be present in all of those things. And that is like an Ah-ha moment...the fact that He is omnipresent. He is able to relate to people wherever they are, in different ways and make sense of their life.

Susie talked about transformational spiritual experiences in her learning as being “seismic events” in her life. In these experiences, her intellectual growth was secondary to her spiritual growth. As she reflected on a graduate class about multiple intelligences, she realized she had a spiritual connection to the content. By incorporating what she understood about her own spiritual gift of intuition and this new knowledge of multiple intelligences, Susie believed she could strengthen how she interacted with others. It is Susie’s interpretation of this class content that enlightened her to the ways that she could nurture people and have “spirit-to-spirit” connections.

Pam said she was amazed to learn that the passage of scripture that was so important to her spiritual experience was only four lines long. She said that she was struck by the “unbelievable act of faith” it took for the four men to walk away from their nets. These men walked away from their livelihood in an act of faith. As her teacher expanded on these lines, she began to look inward toward her own life. What she interpreted from the content was that she did not need to be thinking about only the day-to-day issues, but she needed to have faith in a Higher Being for her spiritual growth and the rest of her life would fall into place.

For Desiree, music was at the core of the content of her class. The class was studying Brahms, *A German Requiem*, and the piece, “How Lovely is Thy Dwelling Place,” is what moved her to tears. This was a piece she had sung before during a time

when her grandmother was dying. She said as they were listening to the piece that day in class, she felt “the weight of the piece” and became emotional because of the angst she had been feeling about the death of her grandmother 15 years earlier. She reminded me that this was a music conducting class, and the other students were focused on their conducting skills. She said that she was the only person in the class who made this connection to the music, and she had to leave class because she was an “absolute mess” and “completely torn up.” Desiree said after she got past the “heaviness of the connection” to the music, she was able to realize this was the releasing of grief.

The text for the class was the music, and her interpretation of the music was the catalyst for making a spiritual connection about the importance of life and beyond. In her member check, Desiree shared the text of this requiem and the specific point in the music that affected her so strongly. In this part of her interview, Desiree, demonstrates how she was interpreting the content with these comments.

It is a beautiful moving piece anyway, but to have had that connection to it.

Higher connection...It was just a connecting moment of death. While it is a Requiem Mass for the dead, it is not a morbid piece. It is a very anticipatory, anxious piece, waiting, getting to the How Lovely Are Thy Dwelling Places Oh Lord of Hosts.

Additional Observations

In examining the narratives of these adult learners collectively, it becomes apparent that “having the time to engage” may influence spirituality in adult learning. Some of the adult learners noted the time to engage with a reverent instructor. Others noted time to engage in the environment, and other participants recognized the need to

engage with their interpretation of the content over time as being relevant to the spiritual experience.

The examples from the narratives of Desiree, Susie, Paige, Nancy, Shandi, and Maria help clarify this notion dealing with “having time to engage.” Desiree talked about the extra time her teacher gave her. She said she and the instructor talked for over two hours, and she reported that he even missed his next class to help her resolve her feelings. She described looking back in her journals about the experience and offered this observation, “I had forgotten how much time that professor had spent with me that day....He had skipped a class to stay and talk with me.” Susie described the intense nature of her class that met five consecutive days for eight hours each day, and this time helped foster the spiritual connection she established with her teacher. The spiritual connection they established has lasted for years. Paige described how her teacher allowed for connections inside and outside of class and how this teacher supported her for the next several years and then reconnected with her again years later. Nancy’s classes dealing with multiple truths and theories lasted for a semester, and she needed that time during class and after class to critically reflect on her beliefs. Having more time with the content and the professors allowed Nancy “to be more transparent.” She said, “I could take more risks....I could bring up things that matter to me, and it was OK.”

Maria and Shandi shared spiritual experiences that went beyond the confines of any one class and often reflected their time in the entire program of study (culinary arts and graduate school). Maria felt that her entire course of study was spiritual for her and she said that she spiritually connected in all of her classes. Shandi said that the entire process of “being in [graduate] school became more of a spiritual path.” These spiritual

experiences occurred in learning environments that were constructed around courses of study such as in four year degree programs, graduate school, technical college, and adult literacy.

Information received during the member checks affirmed this notion of having time to engage. Most of the participants resonated with how the time to engage was important to their spiritual experience even though it was not explicitly addressed during their interviews. In fact, two participants asked why it was not included in the factors section. Paige and Desiree recounted their spiritual experiences and pointed out that having the time with the instructor was critical to their spiritual experience.

Summary: Adults' Perceptions of Spirituality in their Learning

The categories previously described can be portrayed as a model of how adult learners in this study perceive spirituality in their learning. Figure 1 depicts this model and the interaction among the categories. The figure suggests that adult learners who have a spiritual world view bring this world view to the educational experience. The perception of spirituality for these adult learners begins with how they define themselves. They see the self as spiritual and this perception permeates all aspects of their lives including their learning. This sense of self is closely identified with a transcendent Other. In fact, in many cases that transcendent Other is a part of them. Their spiritual identity and belief in a transcendent Other also affects how these adult learners view others because they view other people as spiritual beings. Therefore, these adult learners perceive spiritual connections with others. For these adult learners, spirituality not only defines who they are, the major source of their beliefs, but also how they interact with

other people. These definitions are interrelated, and the boundaries between each definition are difficult to discern as evidenced by the first oval in the model.

These definitions of spirituality are important in understanding the experiences that the adult learners claimed and described as being spiritual. Four factors influence spirituality in the learning of these adults: (1) having an instructor who has a spiritual orientation toward relationships with learners; (2) creating learning environments that are welcoming and hospitable; (3) depending on a transcendent Other; and (4) interpreting the content through their spiritual lens. The arrow on the model represents these factors that influence spirituality in adult learning. These factors can work together or only one factor may be present for the educational experience to be identified as spiritual. However, these adult learners all reported interpreting the content through a spiritual lens as an important factor that influenced their learning.

As these factors complement the adult learners' definitions of spirituality, they perceive spirituality as contributing to their learning in three ways. They affirm that spirituality facilitates the learning of the content, facilitates transformational learning, and reveals their meaning and purpose for life. These roles may be present alone or in combination, but the adult learners perceive each role as separate and distinct. On the model, the rectangles on the right represent these distinct roles of spirituality in adult learning.

In conclusion, these adult learners perceive the self as spiritual, and they hold strong beliefs in a transcendent Other. These perceptions and beliefs impact the connections they have with others. When these spiritual perceptions, beliefs, and connections, are complemented by reverent instructors, hospitable spaces, dependence on

a transcendent Other, and when the adult learners use their spiritual lens to interpret the content, they perceive that spirituality contributes to their learning. These adults describe the role of spirituality as enhancing the learning of the content, facilitating transformational learning, and revealing the meaning and purpose for life.

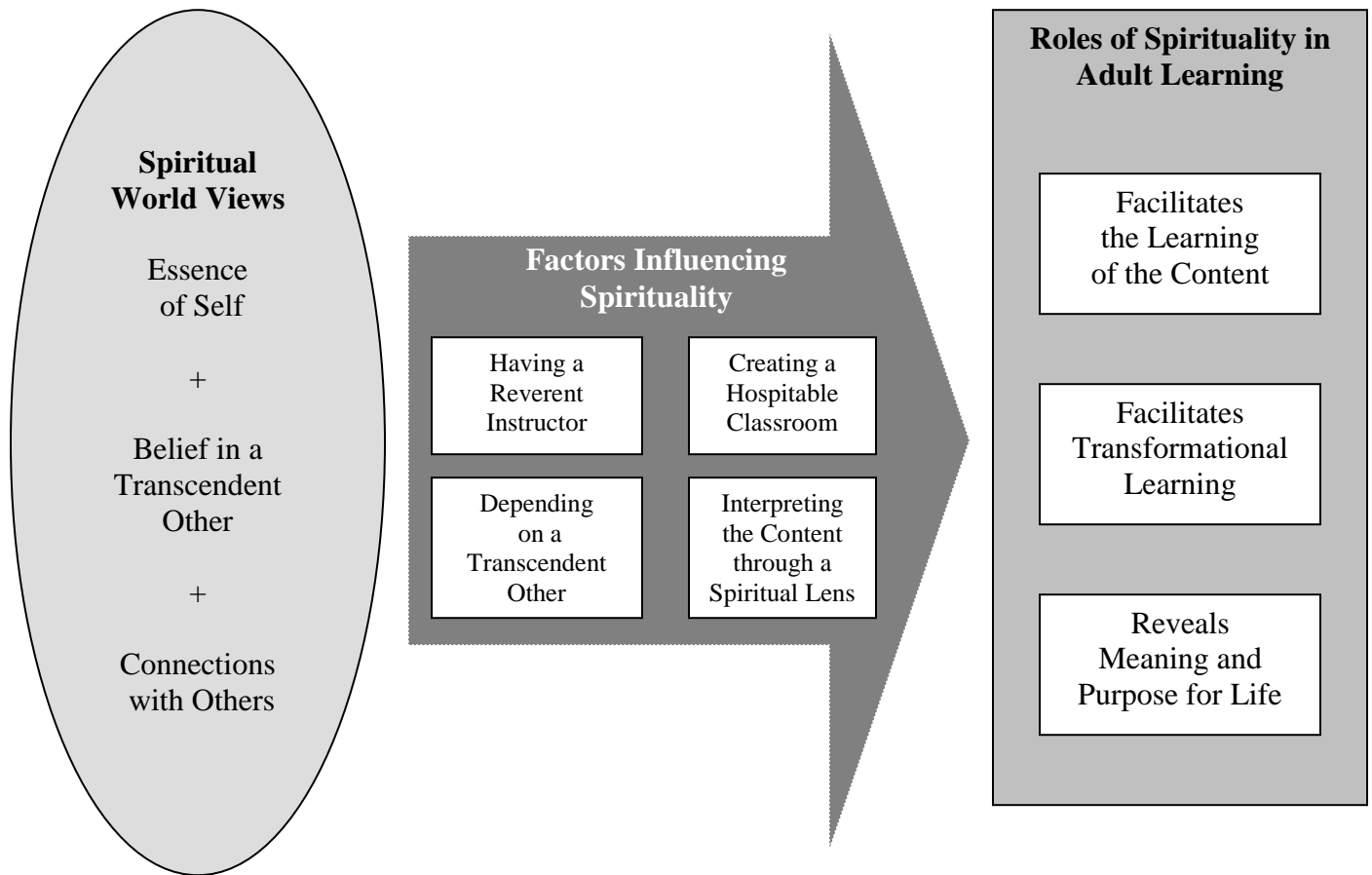


Figure 1

Perceptions of Spirituality in Adult Learning

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter summarizes, presents the conclusions, and addresses the implications for research and practice derived from the study. The purpose of this study was to understand how adults perceive spirituality in their learning. The following research questions that guided the study were:

1. How do adults define spirituality?
2. What is the role of spirituality in adult learning?
3. What factors influence spirituality in adult learning?

Exploring spirituality across multiple adult education settings was important for this study so participants selected were learners in a variety of adult education contexts. Snowballing was the technique employed to select the nine participants. In this technique, participants were asked to make recommendations of other adult learners who could possibly contribute rich data for the study. The criteria for sample selection consisted of the following:

1. Participants who have been learners within an adult learning setting.
2. Participants who acknowledge that spirituality has played a role in their learning.

In addition to snowballing, I also sought participants by contacting organizations that provide adult education across various adult learning contexts. The nine participants represent five adult learning contexts: Adult Literacy, University/Four-Year Degree Programs, Continuing Professional Education, Technical College, and Religious

Education. As seen in Table 1 and the participant descriptions, the participants have various religious affiliations, occupations, and adult learning contexts. All participants are women and range from 30 to 80 years of age.

Potential participants were contacted by phone and the purpose of the study, criteria for selection, and the research questions were identified. After answering questions and clarifying concerns, the interview procedures and expectations were explained. A follow-up phone call was made or an email was sent to each participant confirming the time and location of the interview as well as information providing them with the three broad research areas of the study. Semi-structured participant interviews were conducted lasting on average about 1 ½ hours in length. Observations of their homes and workplaces which reflected the participants' spiritual beliefs were observed and recorded. Documents provided were also reviewed. The observations and the review of artifacts and documents served to provide a form of triangulation of data.

All participants were emailed or mailed a draft of the findings and asked to respond to the accuracy of my interpretation of their experiences. Eight participants responded with comments, possible additions, corrections, and interpretations.

Summary of Findings

Existing literature has been based primarily on the experiences of adult educators and the notions of scholars and has not been based on the experiences of adult learners. This study makes an important contribution because it provides evidence from the spiritual experiences of adult learners.

An underlying rationale for this study was to explore if spiritual experiences had commonalities or differences across different adult education contexts. After analyzing

the transcripts, no distinct patterns of difference emerged in the findings. The data revealed that even in religious settings where it would be expected that a spiritual lens would frame the learning, there was no difference from those experiences that occurred in other adult education contexts. In other words, the spiritual experiences of participants in a religious adult education class could not be differentiated from those described by participants in nonreligious classes. These participants all professed Christian beliefs, and this fact may account for the cohesive set of findings associated with this study. In addition, there appears to be an association between the participants' educational level and their ability to articulate their spiritual experiences. The higher the educational level of the participants, the easier it seemed for them to articulate the influence of spirituality in their learning. For example, Shandi, Desiree, and Susie were all graduate students, and these participants were able to easily describe why their educational experiences were spiritual.

Data from this study were collected and analyzed using constant comparative analysis in order to discover how adults perceive spirituality in their learning. The findings of the study are organized around the three research questions: adult learners' definitions of spirituality, the role of spirituality in adult learning, and the factors that influence spirituality in adult learning.

The findings of this study indicate that these adult learners perceive the self as spiritual, and they hold strong beliefs in a transcendent Other. These perceptions and beliefs impact the connections they have with others. When these spiritual perceptions, beliefs, and connections are complemented by reverent instructors and hospitable spaces and dependence on a transcendent Other, and when the adult learners use their spiritual

lens to interpret the content, they perceive that spirituality has contributed to their learning. These adults describe the role of spirituality as enhancing the learning of the content, facilitating transformational learning, and revealing meaning and purpose for their lives.

Conclusions and Discussion

The purpose of this study was to understand how adults perceive spirituality in their learning. I examined how adult learners defined spirituality, how they perceived the role of spirituality in their learning, and the factors that influenced spirituality in the learning of adults. After review of the findings, I arrived at the following conclusions: (1) spiritual experiences are likely to occur for adult learners who view spirituality as the essence of self, (2) spirituality is linked to learning; and (3) the nature of instructor and the classroom can influence spirituality in adult learning.

Conclusion 1: Spiritual Experiences are Likely to Occur for Adult Learners who View Spirituality as the Essence of Self

Given the experiences described by participants in this study, spiritual experiences are likely to occur for adult learners who view spirituality as the essence of self. Understanding these spiritual experiences requires an understanding of how these adults define spirituality. The findings in this study are congruent with much of the literature about definitions of spirituality. For these adults, definitions of spirituality do include the sacred as defined by Hill et al. (2000), the numinous as explained by Teasdale (1999), and a transcendent Other as suggested by many scholars (Courtenay & Milton, 2004; English, Fenwick, & Parsons, 2003; Tisdell, 2003). These adults perceive

themselves to be spiritual beings that have a belief in transcendent Other, and these perceptions and beliefs impact how they connect with other people.

The literature does offer some insight into these dimensions of spirituality. Several scholars have proposed that adults are spiritual beings or have a spiritual dimension. Heron (1992) asserts that the person is fundamentally spiritual, and spirituality is inherent in the learning process. In discussing ethical choices in learning, English, Fenwick, and Parsons (2003) note that these choices include a basic acceptance of the person as spiritual, and Miller (1999) notes that human beings possess a spiritual core. Other scholars have stated that spirituality is always present even when it is unacknowledged (Hart & Holton, 1993, Palmer, 1998, Tisdell, 2003). These scholars have claimed that all learners are spiritual beings and that there is a spiritual nature we all bring to a learning experience.

Courtenay and Milton (2004) discuss spirituality as being grounded in the individual, and this spiritual dimension of the learner affects the perception of the experience in the classroom. This study found that individuals who describe their spiritual world views had spiritual experiences in their learning. This is a distinction from what has been discussed in the literature about all learners being spiritual beings. Some adult learners do hold spiritual world views and have a spiritual identity. This spiritual world view is associated with a belief in a transcendent Other and impacts many of the activities in the classroom. These adult learners have a perception of the self as a spiritual being, and this perception is interwoven with how they connect with other people, including their classmates and instructors, as well as how they interact with the content. This conclusion makes an important contribution to the literature by establishing that

some adult learners do have spiritual world views that influence their learning in several ways. This study not only provides data that supports this conclusion, but also offers one explanation for how these definitional concepts interact with one another to impact learning.

Transcendence was another component of the definition of spirituality offered by the adult learners, and it is a prominent theme discussed in the literature. Adult education scholars have pointed to transcendence as a major component of spirituality (Courtenay & Milton, 2004; English, Fenwick, & Parsons, 2003; Fenwick & English, 2004; Tisdell, 2003). In fact, some scholars have proposed that transcendence is an essential element of spirituality (Chi, et al., 2004). English and Gillen (2000) define spirituality as “awareness of something greater than ourselves” (p. 1), and Mackeracher (2004) includes the connection to the greater cosmic world in her definition of spirituality.

Connecting with others is another aspect of spirituality discussed in the literature (Courtenay & Milton, 2004; English, 2000). English, Fenwick, and Parsons (2003) discuss spiritual friendships, and they suggest that “a relationship with a person with whom we have an affinity is in and of itself a spiritual connection” (p. 74).

This study affirms much of the discussion in the literature about these two areas dealing with a belief in a transcendent Other and connections with others for those adult learners who hold spiritual world views. However, it is important to note that all adult learners may not hold spiritual world views and may not view themselves as spiritual beings. Newman (2008) acknowledges the work of adult educators writing about spirituality (English & Gillen, 2000; English, Fenwick, & Parsons, 2003; Tisdell, 2003), but he characterizes himself as a rationalist who has a “secular soul” (p. 295). In the

discussion of his experiences in a meditation class, Newman notes he has been criticized by his colleagues for ignoring the “spiritual element of the self and therefore, the potential spiritual element within education for self development” (p. 295). He argues that some adult learners envision an Other with them, but he does not share their beliefs. He concludes with this statement, “There are only ‘two’ of us; me and you, my worldly companions. My learning, my living will be done in your company” (p. 295).

Conclusion 2: Spirituality is Linked to Learning

The second conclusion of this study confirms that, for these learners, spirituality is linked to learning. Analysis of the data reveals that spirituality is linked to learning in three ways: (1) spirituality facilitates the learning of the content, (2) spirituality facilitates transformational learning, and (3) spirituality reveals meaning and purpose for life.

Facilitating the learning of the content is the first way that spirituality is linked to the learning of adults. The adult learners in this study claim that a transcendent Other intervenes in their learning and provides them with knowledge, skills, and abilities that they did not have prior to their spiritual experience. Some of the adult learners acknowledge that they study and are well prepared for the educational tasks, but other adult learners claim that they did not study. These adult learners claim that they had no knowledge about the subject and then they have knowledge given to them by God. The literature is silent on this aspect of spirituality and learning, but these adults offer experiences from their learning as evidence for viewing spirituality in this way.

Facilitating transformational learning is another way spirituality is linked to learning. The adult learners describe spiritual experiences that involve perspective transformations. Not only do the adult learners identify cognitive, affective, and spiritual

dimensions of transformational learning, they also identify spiritual experiences that highlight transformational learning related to social responsibility and intuition.

For at least two of the participants, this conclusion affirms Mezirow's (1991, 2000) phases of transformational learning. For all of the participants who described a transformational experience there was an affective dimension (Merriam, 2004; Taylor, 2000). Desiree's spiritual experience in her music conducting class was very emotional and reflects the affective dimension of her transformational experience. Some of the experiences, such as Desiree's experience, reflect how engaging learners through cognitive, affective, and spiritual or symbolic dimensions may increase the likelihood of transformation learning as suggested by Tisdell and Tolliver (2001). In addition, Nancy's spiritual experience reflects Daloz's (2000) discussion of transformative learning and social responsibility. While this notion of spirituality and transformational learning has been discussed in the literature, there has been little data from adult learners to support this discussion. This study provides evidence from the learner that spirituality does influence transformational learning.

Finally, spirituality helps adult learners perceive meaning and purpose for their lives. From their spiritual experiences in adult education environments, adult learners feel spirituality contributes to finding their life's calling or vocation. In many cases, spirituality serves as the catalyst for their actions as adult learners discover their meaning and purpose for life.

Frankl (1949) proposes that the primary motivational force in humans is the desire to find meaning in life and that this desire provides us with hope. According to Frankl, man is driven by a desire to "find and fulfill meaning in his life" (2000, p. 139), and he

associates this desire with the spiritual aspect of human nature. Baumeister (1991) provides some guidance on understanding this human desire for meaning. He associates the search for meaning in life with four needs and by satisfying all four needs he believes that people will probably feel that their lives do have meaning. He states that “if one can invoke a context that will outlast one’s life, then one’s accomplishments will have meaning even despite one’s death, they will not be futile” (p. 275). First is the need for purpose. Purpose is comprised of goals and fulfillment, and people have a need for both. Second, people have a need for value in their lives. They are strongly motivated to find sources of value and want to see that their life has positive value. Next, people have a need for efficacy. Baumeister states that “in daily life, the need for efficacy often takes the form of needing to feel that one is making a difference” (p. 41). Finally, people have a need for self-worth. People need reasons for believing that one is a good and worthy person.

Maria’s spiritual experience demonstrates how Baumeister’s view of meaning for life is realized in the adult learner. Maria described how she had goals and felt fulfilled being in her culinary arts program. She felt a sense of value for the first time in her life and believed that she was making a difference for others. As she described the difference she was making in the lives of others, Maria provided examples of preparing and serving the meals for not only conference sessions and weddings, but also activities associated with the American Heart Association, and the American Cancer Society as well as a camp for children. She reported that her sense of self worth, inner strength, and confidence had grown as she had continued with her program of study and as she began working in her field. She said that she felt stronger than she had ever felt in her life and

that she had the courage and ability to move forward with her talents and gifts. Maria's spiritual experience provides an illustration of how satisfying all four needs described by Baumeister help people feel that their lives do have meaning.

English (2000) notes that it is spiritual to find relevance and meaning in our lives. This sense of meaning and purpose for life has been identified in the literature. Courtenay and Milton (2004) report that adult learners included meaning for life as a component of their definitions of spirituality, and Tanyi (2002) highlights this personal search for life's meaning and purpose in her definition for spirituality. In discussing vocation related to adult education, English, Fenwick, and Parson (2003) state, it "entails a total spiritual commitment to the common good and constant self-examination of our spiritual purpose or our reason for being" (p. 52). They also add that vocation can be seen as a spiritual journey that adds meaning, purpose, and direction for our lives and "influences how we live in the world" (p. 52).

For these adult learners, their spiritual experiences revealed the meaning and purpose for their lives. Many of these adult learners describe a need to give back to the community or describe being called to teach adults about what they had learned. This notion of having a responsibility to give back or teach was strongly associated with discovery of the adult learners' meaning and purpose for life.

Conclusion 3: Spirituality in Adult Learning is Influenced by the Nature of the Instructor and Classroom, and the Spiritual World View of the Learner

The third conclusion involves how the nature of the instructor and the classroom can influence spirituality. In this conclusion, the instructor is described as reverent and the classroom space is described as hospitable. The data in this study reveal that having a

reverent instructor and creating a hospitable classroom can influence spirituality for adult learners. These relationships with the instructors are described as unique and special, and they are characterized by compassion, intimacy, and caring. These reverent instructors demonstrate a profound honoring and respecting of the learner, and the adult learners describe the instructor as being deeply connected, emotionally present in the moment, and caring for them as individuals in a reverent manner. In addition, the adult learners perceive that they are valued as a whole person.

These descriptions of the instructor go beyond the language typically used in adult education about the role of adult educators. These adult learners portray relationships that are richer and deeper than relationships described by Knowles (1984) and Mackeracher (2004) which are characterized by acceptance, respect, helpfulness, and care. Apps (1996) approaches this notion of a reverent instructor as he describes teaching with heart. He explains that rather than replacing teaching approaches, teaching with heart adds to well known teaching approaches. “It builds on them and takes them deeper....to help people get in touch with additional components of their lives” (p. 17). According to Miller and Koegel (2003), this dimension of teaching is spiritual and captures our highest values such as love, humility, peace, justice, and compassion. They suggest that this spiritual dimension of teaching “leads us to approach our students, teaching, lives, and all other forms of life with reverence” (p. 15). English, Fenwick, and Parsons (2003) also discuss a spiritual aspect of teaching and state that this approach is unique because the starting place is not just a tolerance for others, but it begins with a source of reverence for other people. They assert that this spiritual approach to teaching is “grounded on a profound understanding that the other person is to be honored and respected – that he or

she is on holy ground” (p. 83). It is this profound honoring and respecting of the learner and the active love demonstrated for the learner that English, Fenwick, and Parsons point to as they describe how to bring spirituality into the teaching of adults.

Creating a hospitable classroom is another factor that influences spirituality in the learning of these adults. Using this notion of a hospitable classroom in a biblical sense as defined by Nouwen (1975), expresses how adult learners describe their hospitable classrooms. He concludes that hospitality “is one of the richest biblical terms that can deepen and broaden our insight in our relationships to our fellow human beings” (p. 44). These classrooms are characterized by a fundamental attitude toward the learners as human beings and allow for a sense of brotherhood and sisterhood. Nouwen applies his descriptions of hospitable space to teachers and students in classrooms and asserts that this space is not created as a “method of making our God and our way, but the opening of the opportunity to find their God and their way” (1975, p. 49). Nancy described how her instructor not only allowed her to discuss how she was making spiritual connections with the content, but she felt as if this discussion was encouraged, even though her instructor did not share her beliefs. Shandi described how she felt comfortable and safe praying publicly in her class. These adult learners describe a sense of welcoming, openness, and belonging in classrooms where spiritual experiences occurred.

In these hospitable spaces, the instructor and the adults are learning together, and there is a respect for the learner as a whole person. These adult learners feel safe, nurtured, supported, and welcomed in these classrooms. English, Fenwick, and Parsons (2003) describe these classrooms as sacred spaces where the classroom is treated as holy ground. Hill et al. (2000) defines sacred as related to a divine being or divine object or an

Ultimate Truth or Reality as perceived by the individual. In order to be perceived as spiritual, objects and actions must include a perception of the sacred (Hill et al., 2000). These sacred classroom spaces have elements of the divine as perceived by the adult learners, and according to English, Fenwick, and Parsons (2003), these sacred classrooms include an attitude that signifies how the spiritual aspects of our being can be reclaimed. This notion of cultivating sacred spaces is discussed in the literature (English, Fenwick, & Parsons, 2003; Orr, 2003; Palmer, 1998; Vella, 2000; Vogel, 2000).

The importance of sacred spaces is evident in the discussion of holistic teaching. Holistic educators have discussed hospitable and sacred spaces as they approach spirituality in learning. These educators argue that there is a connection between educational and spiritual in adult learning (English, Fenwick, & Parsons, 2003). For holistic educators, the classroom environment is created to welcome all dimensions of the learner. In these classrooms multiple ways of knowing are respected and symbolic processes, including literature, music, symbol, and art, are valued (Dirkx, 1997, 2001a; Heron, 1992, Tisdell, 2003; Tisdell & Tolliver, 2001). These holistic classrooms have spiritual dimensions where learning is organic, relationships are important, connections are facilitated, and transformation learning is based on the search for meaning (Hutchison & Bosacki, 2000; Miller, 1999).

However, this study also finds that the spiritual world views of the adult learners influence these spiritual experiences. The adult learners in this study depended on a transcendent Other in their learning and they felt that spirituality facilitated the learning of the content. The literature does not offer much about these two factors that are inherent in the learner. Courtenay & Milton (2004) and Tisdell (2003) both discuss how

spirituality is personal grounded in the learner. However, beyond these two references, the literature does not explore how this personal grounding might impact spirituality in adult learning.

This study does provide insight to ways spirituality might be integrated into the adult education classroom. Adult educators who are reverent and create hospitable spaces allow adult learners the opportunity to connect with the spiritual dimensions they encounter in their learning. This study confirms much of this discussion in the literature about the nature of the instructor and the classroom by providing data from adult learners who believe that spirituality can influence learning. However, this study does help to further define the nature of a reverent instructor and a hospitable classroom and how these factors contribute to the learning of these adults. In

Implications for Practice

Some scholars are calling for adult educators to make changes to their practices to foster spirituality (Bean, 2000; English & Gillen, 2000; Tisdell & Tolliver, 2003, Tolliver & Tisdell, 2006, Vogel, 2000; Wickett, 2000). Practitioners in adult education interested in spirituality in learning may have searched the literature for answers. This study is one of the first studies to examine how adult learners with a diversity of adult education experiences perceive spirituality in their learning. This study adds evidence to support much of the discussion about spirituality and adult learning, but it goes beyond the current discussion to provide a framework for understanding the interplay among adult learners' definitions of spirituality, the roles of spirituality, and the factors influencing spirituality in adult learning.

In their examination of the importance of spirituality in adult learning, some scholars have considered the question of integrating spirituality in the curriculum (Courtenay & Milton, 2004; Dirkx, 1997, 2001a; English, 2000, English, Fenwick, & Parsons, 2003; Tisdell, 2003; Tisdell & Tolliver, 2001; Vella, 2000; Vogel, 2000). Much of the literature has implied that spirituality is everywhere – in every being and every setting. Whether learning is experienced as spiritual or not, though, may be determined by the personal grounding of the individual and is based in the learner's experience (Courtenay & Milton, 2004; Tisdell, 2003). The findings of this study indicate that it is the adult learner's spiritual world view that shapes the learning and contributes to a learning experience being labeled as spiritual. Given these findings, I suggest four actions for adult educators that can contribute to fostering a spiritually responsive atmosphere in their classrooms. These actions are not oriented toward methods, artifacts, or rituals being introduced into the classroom. Instead, these actions revolve around understanding the spiritual world views of adult learners; interacting with learners in a reverent manner; creating hospitable classrooms; and supporting adults as they develop meaning and purpose for their lives.

Adult educators interested in spiritual aspects of learning could approach the topic in this way. They should be primarily concerned with determining if their learners have spiritual world views and try to understand what these world views encompass as opposed to focusing on methods for integrating spirituality. In addition, the adult educators could assess if these learners rely on these world views in their learning. Adult educators could survey the learners to determine the spiritual world views of students or they could have learners write a brief essay that expresses what is at the core of their life

as a learner. This personal essay could be focused around questions such as: (1) What is important to me as a person? (2) How do I define myself? (3) What world views do I bring to the learning? (4) In what ways do I rely on these world views in my learning? In addition, adult educators can listen intently for indications that learners hold spiritual world views during conversations, discussions or in other encounters with learners. They can also look for spiritual references in writing assignments or journal entries.

The second action for fostering a spiritually responsive atmosphere is approaching learners with reverence. Interacting with learners in a reverent manner may be a new concept to some adult educators, but other adult educators have always approached their work in this manner. Listening deeply to students, developing the ability to remain fully engaged, and profoundly honoring the learner are ways that adult educators can demonstrate this sense of reverence. For example, Desiree described how she felt supported as her instructor stayed with her for hours as she worked through the issues associated with the death of her grandmother.

The third action adult educators can take to foster a spiritually responsive atmosphere is to create a hospitable classroom. This action may sound easy, but it is not. Creating a classroom that is safe and open requires a conscious effort on the part of the adult educator. Creating an atmosphere that is not only safe and open but characterized by belonging and welcoming requires even more effort. Creating an atmosphere that is sacred and encompasses all of these characteristics and also develops connections of sisterhood and brotherhood requires more effort than many adults educators may realize or be willing to expend. These classrooms honor the whole learner, respect multiple ways of knowing, and value symbolic processes such as music, literature, and art.

The essence of this action of a spiritually responsive classroom is how the space is perceived by the learner. In these sacred spaces, there is a feeling of connection and caring between the instructor and the learner, and possibly with the universe. In addition, in these classrooms, spirituality is not ignored, and adult learners feel comfortable sharing their spiritual beliefs. They also feel comfortable sharing the spiritual connections they are discovering in their learning. Their beliefs are respected, and there is no effort to convert their beliefs. For example, Nancy related her experience about sharing her spiritual connections to the content in her class papers and class discussions. She felt that her beliefs were valued and the feedback she received from her instructor and her classmates demonstrated respect for her beliefs even though they were not shared by her instructor or all of her classmates.

Supporting adult learners as they find meaning and purpose for their lives is the fourth action adult educators can take to foster a spiritually responsive atmosphere. Adult educators can encourage reflective learning as learners make meaning from their spiritual experiences. Fostering dialogue and encouraging learners to be open to new experiences are some of the ways that reflective learning can be encouraged. Adult educators can help learners build connections and by providing opportunities for learning to reflect about the meaning they are creating in the classroom. Adult educators can foster this type of atmosphere by asking and answering questions such as *How do you perceive the meaning and purpose for your life?* Adults may be searching for their meaning and purpose or they may have discovered this purpose through their spiritual experiences. In addition, adult educators may encounter learners involved in transformational learning as they interact with learners in this manner. Transformational learning grounded on

spiritual experiences in the context of adult education may take many different forms including animating social action or helping learners develop a stronger sense of self.

In conclusion, I suggest four actions for fostering a spiritually responsive atmosphere for adult learning. Inherent in these actions is a belief that some learners hold spiritual world views, and they bring this world view with them into the learning environment. These actions are comprised of understanding the spiritual world views of adult learners, interacting with adult learners with reverence, creating hospitable classrooms, and supporting adult learners as they develop meaning and purpose for their lives.

Recommendations for Further Research

The literature reviewed about spirituality and adult learning consists largely of descriptive studies and anecdotal accounts about spiritual experiences of adult learners and educators. Little research exists about adult learning and spirituality from the learner's perspective. This study focused on the three areas of definitions of spirituality, roles of spirituality in adult learning, and factors influencing spirituality. While this study explored these areas, more research is needed to help adult educators as they approach this spiritual dimension to learning.

- Future studies about spirituality and adult learning could be focused on increasing the size and diversity of the sample. This study involves a small sample of white and African-American women who profess a Christian religious orientation. Future studies about spirituality and adult learning should focus on a larger sample and involve both men and women. Participants from other religious

affiliations and individuals who profess to be atheists should be included in the sample.

- This study used selection criteria to determine if participants acknowledged having a spiritual experience in their learning. Other studies could examine all the learners in particular classes to determine the frequency of spirituality for the entire class. These studies would help us know if spiritual experiences in adult learning are rare or if they are a more common experience.
- This study revealed four factors that influence spirituality in adult learning. Researchers could conduct studies to confirm or refute these findings, and future studies could examine if there are other factors that influence spirituality and determine what these additional factors might be. An interesting question could be posed about the role of symbolic processes including art and music in relationship to this topic. Researchers could further query issues related to the factors and ask if there are relationships among the factors or do some factors contribute more or less to influencing the spirituality in the learning of adults.
- The roles about spirituality and adult learning associated with this study included enhancing the learning of the content, facilitating transformational learning, and revealing meaning and purpose for life. Other studies could be designed that probed more deeply into these roles. A study might examine the spiritual experiences of adult learners who claim that spirituality enhanced the learning of the content and query how this phenomenon occurs. Another study could focus on individuals who had experienced transformational learning to uncover the presence of spirituality and how it influenced transformational learning. In

addition, a study could be designed to understand the spiritual nature of meaning and purpose for life and what ways this influences the adult learning.

- An interesting question could be asked about the content of the adult learning experiences. Do some types of content tend to be more likely to spiritually engage adults? This study did not deal with specific content, but other studies could focus on specific content areas. For example, would the findings be different for students whose spiritual experiences occurred in a philosophy class as opposed to the spiritual experiences in accounting? Researchers could explore the spiritual experiences of adult learners in response to this question.

REFERENCES

- Adler, J. (2005, September 5). Spirituality 2005: In search of the spiritual [Special report]. *Newsweek*, 48-64.
- Albanese, C. L. (2001). Introduction. In C. L. Albanese (Ed.), *American spiritualities: A reader* (pp. 1-15). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Apps, J. W. (1996). *Teaching from the heart*. Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing.
- Astin, A. W., & Astin, H. S. (1999). *Meaning and spirituality in the lives of college faculty: A study of values, authenticity, and stress*. Los Angeles, CA: University of California, Higher Education Research Institute.
- Baumeister, R. F. (1991). *Meanings of life*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Baumgartner, L. M. (2001). An update on transformational learning. In S. B Merriam (Ed.), *The new update on adult learning theory* (pp. 15-24). New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, No. 89. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Bean, W. E. (2000). Community development and adult education: Locating practice in its roots. In L. M. English & M. A. Gillen (Eds.), *Addressing the spiritual dimensions of adult learning: What educators can do* (pp. 67-76). New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, No. 85. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (1992). *Qualitative research for educators: An introduction to theory and methods*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Brooks, A. K. (1989). Critically reflective learning within a corporate context (Doctoral dissertation, Columbia University Teachers College, 1989). *Dissertation*

Abstracts International, 50, 2348.

- Brooks, A. K. (2000). Transformation. In E. Hayes & D. D. Flannery (Eds.), *Women as learners: The significance of gender in adult learning* (pp. 139-153). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Capeheart-Meningall, J. (2005). Role of spirituality and spiritual development in student life outside the classroom. In S. L. Hoppe & B.W. Speck (Eds.), *Spirituality in higher education* (pp. 31-36). New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, No. 104. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Chickering, A. W. (2006). Curricular content and powerful pedagogy. In A. W. Chickering, J. C. Dalton & L. Stamm (Eds.), *Encouraging authenticity and spirituality in higher education* (pp. 113-144). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Chiu, L., Emblen, J. D., Hofwegen, L. V., Sawatzky, R., & Meyerhoff, H. (2004). An integrative review of the concept of spirituality in the health sciences [Electronic version]. *Western Journal of Nursing Research*, 25(4), 405-428.
- Clark, M. C. (1991). The restructuring of meaning: An analysis of the impact of context on transformational learning (Doctoral dissertation, University of Georgia, 1991). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 52/06, 1981.
- Clark, M. C. (2001). Off the beaten path: Some creative approaches to adult learning. In S. B. Merriam (Ed.), *The new update on adult learning theory* (pp. 83-92). New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, No. 89. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Clark, E. T. (1990). A search for wholeness in education [Electronic version]. *The Education Review*, 56(4), 47-50.

- Coffman, P. M. (1989). Inclusive language as a means of resisting hegemony in theological education: A phenomenology of transformation and empowerment of person in adult higher education (Doctoral dissertation, Northern Illinois University, 1990). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 50, 2348.
- Courtenay, B. C., Merriam, S. A., & Reeves, P. M. (1998). The centrality of meaning-making in transformational learning: How HIV-positive adults make sense of their lives. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 48(2), 65-84.
- Courtenay, B. C., & Milton, J. (2004). Spirituality in adult education: From the voices of educators and learners. In D. Clover (Ed.), *Adult education for democracy, social justice, and a culture of peace: Proceedings of the Joint International Conference of the Adult Education Research Conference and the Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education* (pp. 101-106). Victoria, Canada: University of Victoria.
- Creswell, J. W. (1994). *Research design: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. W., & Miller, D. L. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory into Practice*, 39(3), 124-130.
- Daloz, L. A. (2000). Transformative learning for the common good. In J. Mezirow &

- Associates (Eds.), *Learning as transformation* (pp. 103-123). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- David, M., & Sutton, C. D. (2004). *Social research: The basics*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2001). Editors' introduction. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The American tradition in qualitative research: Volume I* (pp. xi-l). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Dei, G. J. (2001). Spiritual knowing and transformative learning. In E. V. O'Sullivan, A. Morrell, & M. A. O'Connor (Eds.), *Expanding the boundaries of transformative learning: Essays on theory and praxis* (pp. 121-133). New York: Palgrave.
- Diamond, M. R. (2005). Faculty perspective on spirituality, teaching, and learning on a nonsectarian campus: Gleanings from a book group. In S. L. Hoppe & B.W. Speck (Eds.), *Spirituality in higher education*. (pp. 31-36). New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, No. 104. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Dirkx, J. M. (1997). Nurturing soul in adult learning. In P. Cranton (Ed.), *Transformative learning in action: Insights from practice* (pp. 79-88). New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, No. 74. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Dirkx, J. M. (2001a). Images, transformative learning and the work of soul [Electronic version]. *Adult Learning*, 12(3), 15-16.
- Dirkx, J. M. (2001b). The power of feelings: Emotion, imagination, and the construction of meaning in adult learning. In S. B. Merriam (Ed.), *The new update on adult learning theory* (pp. 63-72). New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, No. 89. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

- Elkins, D. (1998). *Beyond religion*. Wheaton, IL: Quest Books.
- Emmons, R. A., & Paloutzian, R. F. (2003). The psychology of religion. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 54, 377-402.
- English, L. M. (2000). Spiritual dimensions of informal learning. In L. M. English & M. A. Gillen (Eds.), *Addressing the spiritual dimensions of adult learning: What educators can do* (pp. 29-37). New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, No. 85. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- English, L. M. (2005). Historical and contemporary explorations of the social change and spiritual directions of adult education. *Teachers College Record*, 107(6), 1169-1192.
- English, L. M., Fenwick, T. J., & Parsons, J. (2003). *Spirituality of adult education and training*. Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing.
- English, L. M., & Gillen, M. A. (2000). Editors' notes. In L. M. English & M. A. Gillen (Eds.), *Addressing the spiritual dimensions of adult learning: What educators can do* (pp.1-6). New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, No. 85. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Fenwick, T. J., & English, L. M. (2004). Dimensions of spirituality: A framework for adult educators [Electronic version]. *The Journal of Adult Theological Education*, 1(1), 49-64.
- Fenwick, T. J., & Lange, E. (1998). Spirituality in the workplace: The new frontier of HRD. *Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education*, 12(1), 63-87.
- Fleming, J. (2005). *The role of spirituality in the practice of adult education leaders*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Georgia.

- Foehr, R. P., & Schiller, S. A. (1997). Introduction. In R. P. Foehr & S. A. Schiller (Eds.), *The spiritual side of writing: Releasing the learner's whole potential* (pp. ix-x). Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Publishers.
- Forman, R. (2004). *Grassroots spirituality: What it is, why it is here, where it is going*. Charlottesville, VA: Imprint Academic.
- Frankl, V. E. (1984). *Man's search for meaning*. New York: Washington Square Press Publications.
- Frankl, V. E. (2000). *Man's search for ultimate meaning*. New York: Barnes and Noble Books.
- Gillen, M. A., & English, L. M. (2000). Controversy, questions, and suggestions. In L. M. English & M. A. Gillen (Eds.), *Addressing the spiritual dimensions of adult learning: What educators can do* (pp. 85-92). New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, No. 85. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Glazer, S. (Ed.) (1999). *The heart of learning: Spirituality in education*. New York: Penguin Group.
- Groen, J. (2002). The experiences and practice of adult educators in addressing spirituality within the workplace: An empirical study. In J. M. Pettitt & R. P. Francis (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 43rd Annual Adult Education Research Conference* (pp. 134-140). North Carolina State University.
- Harlos, K. P. (2000). Toward a spiritual pedagogy: Meaning, practice, and applications in management education. *Journal of Management Education*, 24(5), 612-627.
- Hart, M., & Holton, D. (1993). Beyond God the father and the mother: Adult education and spirituality. In P. Jarvis & N. Walters (Eds.), *Adult education and theological*

- interpretations* (pp. 237-258). Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing.
- Hayes, E. R. (2001). A new look at women's learning. In S. B Merriam (Ed.), *The new update on adult learning theory* (pp. 35-42). New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, No. 89. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Heron, J. (1992). *Feeling and personhood: Psychology in another key*. New Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Heron, J. (1998). *Sacred science: Person centered inquiry into the spiritual and the subtle*. Rosson-Wye, UK: PCCS Books.
- Heron, J. (2004). *A revisionary perspective on human spirituality*. Retrieved February 15, 2006, from www.human-inquiry.com.thoughts.htm.
- Hill, P. C., Pargament, K. J., Hood, R. W., McCullough, M. E., Swyers, J. P., Larson, D. B., & Zinnbauer, B. J. (2000). Conceptualizing religion and spirituality: Points of commonality, points of departure. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 30(1), 51-77.
- Howard, S. (2002). A spiritual perspective on learning in the workplace [Electronic version]. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 17(3), 230-242.
- Hunter, E. K. (1980). Perspective transformation in health practices: A study in adult learning and fundamental life change (Doctoral dissertation, University of California, 1980). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 41, 62.
- Hutchison, D., & Bosacki, S. (2000). Over the edge: Can holistic education contribute to experiential education? [Electronic version]. *The Journal of Experiential Education*, 23(3), 177.
- Kennedy, J. E., Abbot, A., & Rosenberg, B. (2002). Changes in spirituality and well-

- being in a retreat program for cardiac patients. *Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine*, 8(4), 64-73.
- Kessler, R. (2005). Nourishing adolescent spirituality. In J. P. Miller, S. Karsten, D. Denton, D. Orr, & I. C. Kates (Eds.), *Holistic learning and spirituality in education* (pp. 100-107). Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Kovel, J. (1991). *History and spirit*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Knowles, M. S. (1984). Introduction: The art and science of helping adults learn. In M. S. Knowles & Associates (Eds.), *Andragogy in action: Applying modern principles of adult learning* (pp. 1-21). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Lantieri, L. (Ed.). (2001). *Schools with spirit: Nurturing the inner lives of children and teachers*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Lattin, D. (2004). *Following our bliss: How the spiritual ideals of the sixties shape our lives today*. San Francisco: Harper Collins.
- Lemkow, A. F. (2005). Reflections on our common lifelong journey. In J. P. Miller, S. Karsten, D. Denton, D. Orr, & I. C. Kates (Eds.), *Holistic learning and spirituality in education* (pp. 17-26). Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (2001). Ethics: The failure of positivist science. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The American tradition in qualitative research: Volume I* (pp. 92-107). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. (Original work published 1989).
- Maslow, A. H. (1970). *Religions, values, and peak-experiences*. New York: Penguin Books.
- MacKeracher, D. (2004). *Making sense of adult learning* (2nd ed.). Toronto: University of

Toronto Press, Inc.

MacDonald, D. A. (2000). Spirituality: Description, measurement, and relation to the five factor model of personality. *Journal of Personality*, 68(1), 153-197.

McDonald, B. L. (1998). A comparison of Mezirow's transformation theory with the process of learning to become an ethical vegan (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Georgia, 1998). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 59, 692.

Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Merriam, S. B. (Ed.) (2001). *The new update on adult learning theory*. New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, No. 89. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Merriam, S. B. (2002). Introduction to qualitative research. In S. B. Merriam & Associates (Eds.), *Qualitative research in practice: Examples for discussions and analysis* (pp. 3-17). San Francisco: CA: Jossey-Bass.

Merriam, S. B. (2004). The role of cognitive development in Mezirow's transformational learning theory. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 55(1), 60-68.

Merriam, S. B., & Caffarella, R. S. (1999). *Learning in adulthood: A comprehensive guide* (2nd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative dimensions of adult learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Mezirow, J. (2000). Learning to think like an adult: Core concepts of transformation theory. In J. Mezirow & Associates (Eds.), *Learning as transformational: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress* (pp. 3-34). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Mezirow, J. (2004). Forum comment on Sharan Merriam's "The role of cognitive

- development in Mezirow's transformational learning theory," *Adult Education Quarterly*, 55(1), 69-70.
- Miller, J. P. (1999). Making connections. *Educational Leadership* [Electronic version]. 56(4), 46-48.
- Miller, J. P. (2005). Introduction: Holistic learning. In J. P. Miller, S. Karsten, D. Denton, D. Orr, & I. C. Kates (Eds.), *Holistic learning and spirituality in education* (pp. 1-6). Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Miller, R. (1999). Holistic education for an emerging culture. In S. Glazer (Ed.), *The heart of learning: Spirituality in education* (pp. 189-202). New York: Penguin Group.
- Miller, R., & Koegel, R. (2003). The heart of holistic education: A reconstructed dialogue between Ron Miller and Rob Koegel. *Encounter*, 16(2), 11-18.
- Mitroff, I. I., & Denton, E. A. (1999). A study of spirituality in the workplace. *Sloan Management Review*, 40(4), 83-92.
- Moberg, D. O. (2002). Assessing and measuring spirituality: Confronting dilemmas of universal and particular evaluative criteria [Electronic version]. *Journal of Adult Development*, 9(1), 47-60.
- Moore, N. (1996). Spirituality in medicine [Electronic version]. *Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine*, 2(6), 24-30.
- Morgan, J. H. (1987). Displaced homemaker programs and the transition for displaced homemakers from homemaker to independent person (Doctoral dissertation, Columbia University Teachers College, 1987). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 49, 28.

- Musick, D. W., Nichols, M., Woods, S., Tipton, S., & Nora, L. M. (2002). Toward a more spiritual approach to medical education. *Annals of Behavioral Science and Medical Education*, 8(2), 101-104.
- Newman, M. (2008). The “self” in self-development. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 58(4), 284-298.
- Nouwen, H. J. (1975). *Reaching out: The three movements of spiritual life*. New York: Doubleday Publishing.
- Orr, J. A. (2000). Learning from native adult education. In L. M. English & M. A. Gillen (Eds.), *Addressing the spiritual dimensions of adult learning: What educators can do* (pp. 59-66). *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, No. 85. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- O’Sullivan, E. V. (2001). The project and vision of transformative education: Integral transformative learning. In E. V. O’Sullivan, A. Morrell, & M. A. O’Connor (Eds.), *Expanding the boundaries of transformative learning* (pp. 1-12). New York: Palgrave.
- Otto, R. (1923). *The idea of the holy*. New York: Oxford Press.
- Palmer, P. J. (1998). Evoking the spirit [Electronic version]. *Educational Leadership*, 56(4), 6-11.
- Palmer, P. J. (1999). *The courage to teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a teacher’s life*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Persut, B. (2002). The development of nursing students’ spirituality and spiritual care-

- giving. *Nurse Education Today*, 22, 128-135.
- Punch, K. F. (2005). *Introduction to social research: Quantitative and qualitative approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Roof, W. C. (1999). Forum: American spirituality. *Religion and American Culture*, 9(2), 131-139.
- Ruona, W. E. A. (2005). Analyzing qualitative data. In R. A. Swanson & E. F. Holton (Eds.), *Research in organizations: Foundations and methods of inquiry* (pp. 223-263). San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler.
- Schugurensky, D. (2001). Transformative learning and transformative politics: The pedagogical dimension of participatory democracy and social action. In E. V. O'Sullivan, A. Morrell, & M. A. O'Connor (Eds.), *Expanding the boundaries of transformative learning: Essays on theory and praxis* (pp. 59-76). New York: Palgrave.
- Tanyi, R. A. (2002). Towards clarification of the meaning of spirituality. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 39(5), 500-509.
- Taylor, E. W. (1997). Building upon the theoretical debate: A critical review of the Empirical studies of Mezirow's transformative learning theory. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 48(1), 34-60.
- Taylor, E. W. (2000). Analyzing research on transformative learning theory. In J. Mezirow & Associates (Eds.), *Learning as transformational: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress* (pp. 285-328). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Teasdale, W. (1999). *The mystic heart*. Novato, CA: New World Library.
- Tisdell, E. J. (2000). Spirituality and emancipatory adult education women adult

- educators for social change. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 50(4), 308-335.
- Tisdell, E. J. (2003). *Exploring spirituality and culture in adult and higher education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Tisdell, E. J., & Tolliver, D. E. (2001). The role of spirituality in culturally relevant and transformative adult education. *Adult Learning*, 12(3), 13-14.
- Tisdell, E. J., & Tolliver, D. E. (2003). Claiming a sacred face: The role of spirituality and cultural identity in transformative adult higher education. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 1(4), 368-392.
- Van Nostrand, J. A. (1992). The process of perspective transformation: Instrument development and testing in smokers and ex-smokers (Doctoral dissertation, Texas Woman's University, 1993). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 53, 5649.
- Vella, J. (2000). A spirited epistemology: Honoring the adult learner as subject. In L. M. English & M. A. Gillen (Eds.), *Addressing the spiritual dimensions of adult learning: What educators can do* (pp. 1-6). New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, No. 85. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Vogel, L. J. (2000). Reckoning with the spiritual lives of adult educators. In L. M. English & M. A. Gillen (Eds.), *Addressing the spiritual dimensions of adult learning: What educators can do* (pp. 17-28). New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, No. 85. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Wickett, R. E. Y. (2000). The learning covenant. In L. M. English & M. A. Gillen (Eds.), *Addressing the spiritual dimensions of adult learning: What educators can do* (pp. 39-48). New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, No. 85. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- Yorks, L., & Kasl, E. (2002). Toward a theory and practice for whole person learning: Reconceptualizing experience and the role of affect. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 52(3), 176-192.
- Yorks, L., & Kasl, E. (2003). Through the looking glass: A taxonomy for presentational knowing. In D. Flowers, M. Lee, A. Jalipa, E. Lopez, A. Schelstrate, & V. Sheared (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 44th Annual Adult Education Research Conference* (pp. 453-458). San Francisco: San Francisco State University.
- Zajonc, A. (2003). Spirituality in higher education: Overcoming the divide. *Liberal Education*, 89(1), 50-58.
- Zinn, L. M. (1997). Spirituality in adult education. *Adult Learning*, 8(5/6), 26-30.
- Zinnbauer, B. J., Pargament, K. I., Cole, B., Rye, M. S., Butler, E. M., Belavich, T. G., et al. (1997). Religion and spirituality: Unfuzzifying the fuzzy. *Journal of the Scientific Study of Religion*, 36(4), 549-564.

APPENDIX A

Role of Spirituality in Adult Learning Contexts

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Participant_____

Date_____ Start Time_____

Place_____ End Time_____

Demographic Questions:

Age_____ Ethnicity_____

Occupation_____

Religious Background_____

1. How do adult learners define spirituality?

Tell me about a spiritual experience you have had while in an adult learning environment.

Probe:

What about this experience was spiritual for you?

Where did it occur?

When did it occur?

I have heard you say.....

Probe key words from the descriptions provided.

Would you say that this is your definition of spirituality?

2. What is the role of spirituality in their learning?

Thinking back on this learning experience can you name key things that you learned?

In what ways did your spiritual experience contribute to your learning?

2.3 In what ways are you a different person or do you think differently because of this spiritual experience?

3. What factors influence spirituality in adult learning?

3.1 What do you think brought about these spiritual experiences in this class or learning situation?

Probe....

What occurred?

What did this person [teacher, class members] do that you felt added to the spiritual experience in this learning situation?

Was this experience associated with the content, group work, another classmate, class environment? How?

If any of the following themes are not evident from the participant's reply, then I will probe further to determine if they are reflected in the participant's experience:
Did this spiritual experience have anything to do with...?

- (a) life and death (the meaning of life and beyond)
- (b) soul and self (the nature of spirit)
- (c) cosmology (the nature of the spiritual universe, including higher powers)
- (d) knowledge (the nature of truth)
- (e) the "way" (the nature of the spiritual journey or search)
- (f) focus (the purposes of spiritual seeking)
- (g) practices of spirituality and the role of others
- (h) responses (action and application arising from spiritual pursuits)