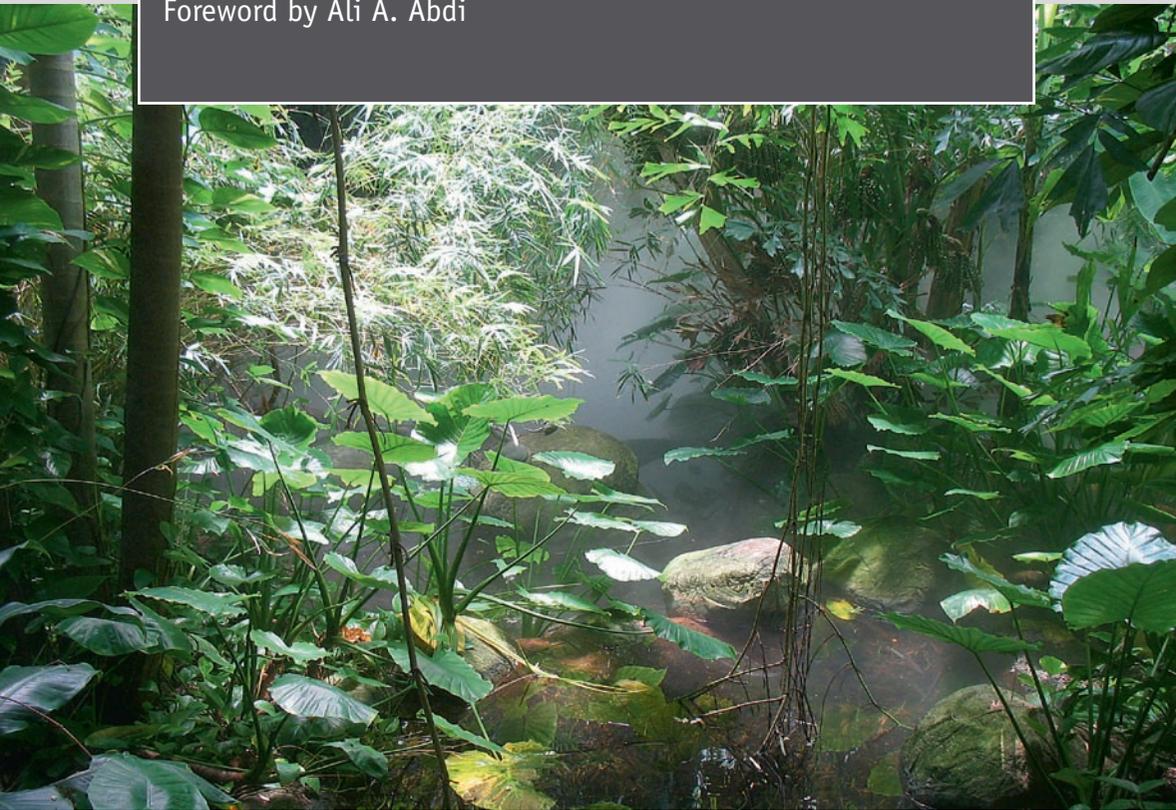


# Spirituality, Education & Society

An Integrated Approach

Njoki N. Wane, Energy L. Manyimo  
and Eric J. Ritskes (Eds.)

Foreword by Ali A. Abdi



*SensePublishers*

SPIRITUALITY, EDUCATION & SOCIETY



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## An Integrated Approach

Foreword by Ali A. Abdi

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## **DEDICATION**

This project is dedicated to the seekers; to those who are willing to move beyond the dictated realms of quantifiable knowledge and search for meaning outside of what can be physically experienced. May you find what you are looking for.

It is also dedicated to those who have gone before us – the faithful that have blazed the path and passed down their knowledge for us to follow in their footsteps. Without you, we would not be here.



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The editors would like to thank the contributors to this volume for the way in which they have opened their spirits and shared their stories; without you, this book would not exist. There is something intimate about spirituality and the stories that are shared here; we appreciate the courage it takes to reveal your soul in such a public way. In receiving your stories, hopefully we have revealed and presented them in ways that honour both the intimacy as well as the power that is inherent within the stories and the act of telling them.

Not only is this book indebted to the people who have directly contributed chapters but, much like in any project, there is a vast web of people who have contributed in less direct, but no less important, ways. Much gratitude is given to the people who have spoken spiritual words to us, both within the walls of the academy and beyond them. To those who have spoken and acted into our lives, our family, colleagues, friends and mentors, this book is a testament to how no one can live, work or study in a vacuum – we are all connected in spiritual and physical ways.

To all of you: *Asante sana.*



## FOREWORD

In *Spirituality, Education & Society: An Integrated Approach*, Njoki Wane, Energy Manyimo and Eric Ritskes have given us an important scholarly gift, that has been seemingly missed by so many of us in the burgeoning educational literature. The location of spirituality in education has been definitely, not only under researched, it has been also severely misunderstood. Indeed, when we see spirituality for what it is: an appreciation of the expansive immaterial reality that influences social relations, mental dispositions as well as the universally more inclusive explanations we attach to the metaphysical world, then we should have, long ago, incorporated this important area of educational studies into our realms of research, teaching and scholarly conclusions. Interestingly, the world of academia seems to have shied away from confronting, indeed, advancing the constructively complex terrain of spirituality. Perhaps most of us believed that we were ill-equipped to investigate a topic that is not as measurable, or minimally as observable as the conventional educational topics and/or educational phenomena we examine in our classrooms, research projects and academic conferences. Undoubtedly, that could partially explain the apparent immense shortcomings in this extremely important area of study. But there may even be a bigger reason for this intellectual vacuity. Via an expansive misunderstanding of what the conceptual and para-practical constructions of spirituality contain, many academics might construe such study and its meta-operational dimensions as attached to, or at least related to organized religions and, therefore, should only concern those who engage in such practices.

While one need not formally attempt to separate spirituality from religions, mainly because religious people would have every right to also be spiritually connected, it is the case as it is presented in this pioneering book, that spirituality is more expansive than the general domains of many religions, appeals to more inclusive aspects of people's lives, which are not, by the way, limited to linearly identifiable situations and topics, but in almost every space, context, relationships, intentions, and assumptions. As such, the limiting or the uni-dimensional understanding of spirituality deprives educational contexts and related spaces of schooling, as the editors and their contributors so cogently note, the richness of both learners and teachers relating to their world with holistic dispositions that have the volition to understand and appreciate so much that is not immediately observable, but that definitely influences, even occasionally determines, the way we relate to everything that informs our contexts including the living, the physical, the hidden, and the overall amazing wonders of the universe.

Such understanding and appreciation could assure a more harmonious existence, not only in general relational prospects, but more so, in the totality of one's own being. And wouldn't that be something that will positively impact the lives of many learners who feel socially alienated, academically detached, even mistakenly labeled for seeking out and surviving (as much as humanly possible) in de-

centering learning contours that neither enfranchise their inner existentialities, and of course, never support their yearning for less measurable understanding of their subjective locations, needs and aspirations. Needless to add that the education system, as it is structured today in Canada and elsewhere, with its basically colonialist and supposedly rationalist intentions and constructions, never aimed for a spiritually amicable learning and teaching processes that enrich more than the market needs of the schooling project. Indeed, it is these historically-located rationalist assumptions, operations and expected outcomes that would generally stifle the clearly needed spiritualizations of the pedagogical context. But to what extent is education really rationalist, objective and effectively measurable? Perhaps a more important question: whose rationalist, de-spiritualizing life systems are being advanced in current relations of the schooling project? If these enlightenment and by extension, modernist-driven ways of learning and teaching are representative of one way of seeing the world, then the epistemic enfranchisement of spirituality in educational research and schooling platforms should and will delightfully disturb such hegemonic edifice of monocultural scientism which has dominated the learning landscape for too long.

Undoubtedly, as should be clear from the many, diverse themes contained in this book, the absence of spirituality in education represents more than a purely rationalist prospect. More so, it is one hitherto functional and dangerous scheme to diminish the knowledge foundations as well as the epistemological revival of Indigenous and communal ways of knowing and social well-being. As implicated in the pages of this exceptionally timely book, therefore, it should not be uncommon to realize that in today's less organic societies in Indigenous America (North and South) and Oceania, Africa and Asia along with the huge diasporic communities from especially the latter two, which now resides in North America and Europe, and whose educational well-being has not been fully supported by the conventional structures of schooling, the introduction of the spiritual could play an important role in recasting the educational system as less alienating, more subjectively connected, and capable of seeing beyond the economic and biased exam-driven walls of all learning and teaching. Needless to add that, beyond these learners, people in all corners of the world, regardless of their social or ethnic background, will definitely benefit from a spiritually enriching educational experience.

In critically responding to these learning and human emancipation related attachments of spirituality, this book powerfully achieves, via its five sections and 16 chapters, which range from analyzing the conceptual foundations/constructions of the case, examining the methodological selves of the 'story', and critically deformatizing its practices, a potentially multi-centering analytical perspective in, not only convincingly advancing the indispensability of spirituality for our actual educational existences, but as well, in discursively illuminating the expansiveness of the meanings as well as the practices (yes, practices) of spirituality as directly affecting, and in original, lived terms, impacting the ways we create meanings, establish knowledge systems, behave or do not behave in our cultural contexts, and make use of the resources that are available and that we use to understand,

appreciate, even recreate in our lived milieus. As the authors in this important endeavor clearly expound, the noticeable absence of spirituality from the educational research and from contemporary spaces of schooling, is to say the least lamentable, and the coming of this work and other treatises that should follow it, are essentially needed, and should awaken, one must hope, in all those whose perception of public education as a primary public good is authentic and present, an urgent sense of advancing the place of spirituality in all learning situations, relationships and outcomes.

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## INTRODUCTION

For too long spirituality has been an underexplored, often misunderstood aspect in the field of education. This book is an attempt to show that exploring spirituality within the context of education will create new pathways of understanding, for educators and students. By weaving spirituality into learning and knowledge creation discourses, educators as well as learners can foster spiritual growth while strengthening the connections between the learner, knowledge and the process of schooling. The main intention of writing this book is to create an educational space that develops learners' and educators' spiritual interconnectedness in relation to learning, schooling and the community at large. Spirituality is very important to many people's lives and valuing the spirituality of students and teachers means valuing the uniqueness of individuals, regardless of race, gender, creed, sexuality or ability. Spirituality has been silenced and marginalized as a discourse or embodied knowledge in the academy. In this book we explore the questions and issues of spirituality and its intersections with schooling from a wide range of diverse perspectives. Often, the education systems like to believe that they are eminently concerned with the real problems and dilemmas facing society, culture, human suffering, and the struggle for liberation. In the business of this never-ending search for liberation, there is no time for what people consider as spiritual, which is considered to be "otherworldliness and esotericism" and of little value. In this book, we argue that the spiritual quest is inherently part and parcel of liberation and resistance as well as a vital part of society and the search for holistic living and learning; it is a search for guiding visions and values within this world and for the many people who occupy this planet. What academics perceive to be a flight from the 'real' is often a quest for the heart of the real (Tacey, 2002). Spirituality is about personal empowerment, personal and collective transformation, and relationships.

For instance, many of us do not think about breath, yet if we were to stop and to imagine that there would be no human or any living being without air, it would lead us to recognize and pay attention to that certain aspect of who we are as something that is collective and common to all of us – Breath. Thich Nhat Hanh, says in western culture we are always focused on the future and not on just "being". We are always working towards something, always blinded by the next step so that we forget many of the inner journeys we are taking. We are so goal oriented, that we forget the little changes we make. We have such high ideals of what change means that we do not pay attention to the very breath that we need

and that our next door neighbour needs to sustain us to make these anticipated huge changes. As a result, we direct our energy to those places that may not be attainable at the moment, forgetting the many inner changes that need to take place in order to create the spaces that are conducive to real spiritual change. What we are advocating in this book is that we need a different level of consciousness, a new way of seeing the world around us: A focus on the self and our spiritual selves as intricately connected and vital to the environments, goals, locations, changes and desires that we seek to attain.

Many times, when we bring spirituality in our academic discussion, it is closely followed by discomfort and there is an instant disconnect that is created; the inevitable critiques of the rigor of your academic engagement or your level of theorizing, that you are advocating soft discourses that should be left to those who are not of the academic world, spirituality as only for those who peep from a distance at academic walls. Academics who lay any claim to spiritual knowledge or experience are asked to leave it at the doors of the academy upon entry and politely (or perhaps not so politely) asked to pick it up as they leave, almost as if there is a fear that spirituality will somehow ‘taint’ the academic spaces. Spirituality in the academy is like mixing water and oil – there is inevitable and strict separation – but this should not be. We cannot divorce the intellect from our invisible being – that is, who we really are bell hooks, writing on spirituality in education, said: “We can’t begin to talk about spirituality in education until we talk about what it means to have a life in the spirit .... To live a life in the spirit, to be true to a life of the spirit, we have to be willing to be called on – often in ways that we may not like” (2003, p. 158). What this means is that, for educators who genuinely invoke the spirit and strive to connect with others at deeper levels that appeal to the emotional consciousness, to the heart, there is no place in the academy for them. As educators, we have to address both needs for intellectual as well as emotional growth. The structures that surround us have many tactics and methods of suppressing the spirit and creating oppression, depression and many times spirit injury. As academics, activists and educators we must be willing to recognize the damage that our current systems are inflicting on us, society and students and choose to bring the spirit into our work in ways that challenge existing structures and that create spaces for the ‘whole self’, spaces that embrace spiritual and emotional knowledges.

The study of spirituality is also a call to the integration of hope, love and unity into our research, our lives and our classrooms. It is about creating organic spaces of trust and respect. Even the utterance of such words as hope and love in academic spaces brings awkwardness and disjointedness – these words don’t seem to belong in such a place that values abstractness, cold truth and numbers. Bringing spirituality back into the academy is not a rejection of logic or reason but a rejection of the privileged position that it is given; it is a call for the inclusion of hope, love, respect, diversity, peace, community and humour – the things that make us whole. For too long the academy has rejected these aspects to its detriment, this

book then is also a call for the rejuvenation of the academy, the introduction of a vitality and holism that has been largely absent.

The arguments presented in this book are that, if we do not pay attention, if we separate the spirit from the self, if we allow the self to be disconnected by the current education system – how can we expect things to change? The explicit goal of this work is transformation. We cannot afford to be oblivious to the oppressive structures that are continuously reproducing themselves in society and, consequently, in education. We need to bring this level of consciousness to our work in order to bring transformation. Some readers may not see the relevance of what we are talking about and the subject at hand. The academic structure functions to appeal to meritocracy and any deviation from the norm is challenged, devalued and even ridiculed. What is not obvious to many scholars is the fact that the academic discourse deals with abstract knowledge that appeals to the cognitive faculties of the brain. Where it places value is on logic, reason and mental abstractions. There is no emphasis or recognition that, in order to function as a normal human being, you need to develop all aspects of yourself – that is the invisible you – which some people refer to as spiritual self. In most academic institutions, this is not encouraged and it becomes very difficult to talk of spirituality in the academy. bell hooks argues:

Most of my teaching experience has been in climates that are totally, utterly, and completely hostile to spirituality. Where colleagues laugh at you if they think that you have some notion of spiritual life. ... my teaching practice has been...within an environment that is utterly hostile ... Not naming that hostility but working with it in such a way that the spirit can be present in the midst of it: that the fire burns bright without any generation, anything in the environment generating it. (2003, p. 162)

bell hooks concludes her argument on spirituality in education by stating: “I can testify to the meaningfulness of spiritual practice and that such a practice sustains and nurtures progressive teaching, progressive politics, and enhances the struggle of liberation” (2003, p. 164).

There is an urgent need for educators who are willing to unsettle the status quo and critically demand that mainstream discourses stop ignoring such essential aspects of student’s growth. Many times, the message given is that learning is solely an intellectual exercise, which negates the reality that the whole person enters the classroom and that we, as educators who seek to nurture and grow, need to appeal to all of their senses and faculties. As a result of this negation, students are often unprepared to cope with topics of spirituality when they are raised in the academy or are unable to connect and grow in atmospheres that feel sterile, fragmented and devoid of aspects of themselves that they value.

In the course of writing and getting the material ready for this anthology, we found that the difficulty of talking about spirituality in general paled in comparison to when we pushed the envelope and asked how we might incorporate spirituality in our learning, teaching, and everyday interaction in the academy. Also, it is

essential that we critically examine the impact of Eurocentric education and the spiritual scars which emerge as a result of the indoctrination of learners into a Western system of thought, as this is primarily what is valued in academia. If we are to proceed in an ethical manner, we must interrogate the implications of an educational system which reifies Eurocentric systems of thought, and a particular method of generating knowledge. The insidiousness of privilege must be acknowledged and challenging this must be thought of as part of the task of introducing spirituality and holistic learning into the academy. Part of the privilege of the dominant is that such ongoing connections between Eurocentric learning, privilege, and the absence of spirituality are not remarked upon. Perpetuating dominant frameworks on already suppressed indigenous spiritual beliefs is harmful not only to the students but other educators (Potter, 1995, p. 73). As alternative epistemological frameworks are widely rejected within academia, the outcome for many students, especially those who come from a background where spiritual knowledges are valued, is disengagement from one's spiritual ways of understanding and knowing the world. This results in epistemological dissonance. Creative dissociation is a skill developed by many students to allow them to survive the academic experience. It is these issues that we are evoking in this anthology. Incorporating a spiritual paradigm would challenge us to recognize that we are all connected in diverse ways and at varying levels of being and would promote the re-valuing of diverse ways of knowing. There must be the recognition that there are very real consequences to how we operate in the academy and in society at large; in this way, we are held ethically and morally accountable for the implications of our theorizing.

How then, do we incorporate and integrate the spiritual in the academy? Spirituality has always been about inclusiveness; hence our practice needs to center this. We do not want to perpetuate a hierarchy of values. Elsewhere Wane (2007, 2009) has indicated that there is no need to name our spirituality, however, we should allow the space for it and provide space for students to define their spirituality from their roots or religious backgrounds because the definition of spirituality has to be open ended. What we are advocating is to have spirituality included in the discussion, for the inclusion of voices and knowledges that have been silenced. Some people may see this as moral or therapy work, but this is not what we are pushing to have in the academy. It is allowing people to be authentic to who they are and to their experiences. In this book then we are engaging with questions such as: What is spirituality? What are the spiritual ways of knowing? How do you situate yourself in the discourse of spirituality? What is your entry point? What do you mean if you refer yourself as spiritual person? What factors contribute to how you define your spirituality? How do you nurture the spiritual self? What does spirituality entail? Why do we need to break the silence about spirituality in education? How does being spiritually inclined help us in our work, our research, our writing, our teaching? What would be the end result if everything we did had a spiritual component in itself? What is the connection between spirituality and learning; knowledge production; health; work; social justice; culture; research; higher education? What do we mean when we talk of spiritual

tools or spirituality as a discourse or a methodology? Our suggestion is that one should define their spirituality by weaving together their understanding of what is spiritual from their own background, the readings, everyday interactions and experiences and discussion. That is, the definition that speaks to you is the correct definition of spirituality. This is not a call to some sort of vague relativism but an acceptance and valuing of personal experience and diversity as they fit into the wider scope of knowledge and society.

Spirituality has been part and parcel of indigenous peoples of the world and religious institutions and is an important part of life. Among indigenous peoples, spirituality was never separated from everyday living. Today, we have fragmented spirituality. When we examine spirituality in higher education, it is mainly in relation to how knowledge is constructed. In relation to an emerging new age spirituality, there has been great concerns because of appropriation and commodification of past traditions and knowledges; however, the response from New Age followers is that there has been a decline of traditional religion and this new form of spirituality, fills that vacuum. There is this notion that the world's various spiritual traditions are public property and no longer the private preserve of the parochial groups. Unfortunately, what happens is that the sacred becomes commodified and in the process loses its sacredness. The messy conglomerate of New Age mysticism moves away from the relational, connected and practical spirituality that this book is advocating as a form of resistance to Eurocentric, dominant discourses; instead, it all too easily falls prey to them. The diversity that is advocated in this book is one that is willing to critically interrogate issues of history, oppression, domination and the personal implications and relationships to these forces.

How do we develop a contemplative mind that explores issues of social injustice, discrimination, homophobia etc. within the contexts of history and oppression? Inviting the contemplative does not mean being silent and passive; it is the invoking of the humaneness in us that demands an action component to our work. If we know the systems, the structures, the organizations that we operate in that keep our spirit broken, create scars, fragment our humaneness, we need to think of different ways of doing things. This transformation becomes possible when we look inward, ponder deeply, and witness the contents of our consciousness. This approach will help us to cultivate an inner and outer way of learning, a pedagogy without imposition of religious doctrines. Spirituality is therefore about awareness and honouring of wholeness and the interconnectedness of all things through the mystery of what many refer to as life-force; higher power; higher self; cosmic energy. This book seeks to explore these connections between spirituality, society and schooling in new ways that illuminate how a holistic education cannot be confined to a classroom or to a curriculum; a critical education must engage with spirituality as seen in the whole self, society and learning as a never ending process.

Part one of this book focuses on two aspects of spirituality as a concept. In Chapter 1, "Situating children in the spirituality discourse", Susannah Cole explores how Western society and traditional development theory has failed to

socialize children's spiritual identity, choosing to value quantifiable elements of development at the expense of multidimensional, interconnected and spiritual aspects of childhood development. She uses her experience as an Early Childhood Educator to explore how transformational learning can be brought about through the inclusion of the whole child, through the inclusion of the spiritual alongside the cognitive, physical, social and emotional development. This inclusion would allow for each child to be centred in a nurturing environment that values their differences.

In Chapter 2, "Connected: Indigenous spirituality in the classroom", Eric Ritskes explores how Eurocentric understandings of spirituality have negatively centered the individual at the expense of the community and relationships. He argues that spirituality, as conceived through indigenous knowledges, demands the valuing of the relational as primary. This involves acknowledging connections to the whole self, the community, history and to a higher power or larger framework. It is through this recognition of the inter-connectedness of all things that inclusive, transformational education can be implemented through recognizing and affirming difference, collaborative learning, openness, and active/embodied learning.

Part two of this book looks at how spirituality can be conceived of as methodology within the academy. In Chapter 3, "Teaching with heart and soul: Nourishing the authentic self", Lisa Hart explores why it is important for educators to nurture the spirit of their students if they wish to bring transformational learning to their classrooms. Using her experience as an educator, she argues that the philosophy of 'one-size-fits-all' devalues students' spiritual experiences and that there needs to be a restructuring of the classroom to include the spiritual, which allows students to connect to their home life, communities and lived experiences outside of the classroom. Transformative learning means building trust and community within the classroom where students feel safe to bring their spirituality into their learning.

In Chapter 4, "Spirituality and its relevance for the contemplative educator: Insights into the discourse of spirituality in education and sociological implications", Jennifer Motha works to highlight what she sees as the salient conceptualizations of spirituality as a discourse and their relevance for the contemplative educator. She draws on her own personal experience as an educator as she explores the value of meditative practices and their value in life and in the classroom.

Part three explores how spirituality is closely tied to cultural practices and what this means for transformative education. In Chapter 5, "Spirituality: A philosophy and research tool", Njoki Wane explores the relational philosophy of *Maat*, an indigenous African belief, to ask the question: What would research that embraces spirituality look like? She emphasizes the need for a new framework that reconnects the intellect, one that allows a researcher to bridge their inner and outer knowing, and one that honors their humanity while incorporating high scholarly standards in their research project.

In Chapter 6, "Spirituality and indigenous knowledge: Study of kototama and decolonization in the school system", Yumiko Kawano looks at how re-envisioning

spirituality through kototama (the “spirit of words”) can lead to the regaining of a balanced mind. She examines the immense power of words and thoughts in re-valuing suppressed knowledges and in re-valuing the spiritual aspects of students which are inherently tied to language and indigenous knowledges. She warns that spirituality is much like a knife, it can be used negatively to divide or harm others or, if we use it carefully, as a useful tool.

In Chapter 7, “The role of spirituality in Maori and Tibetan villages”, Jia Luo uses his research in Tibet to examine commonalities between the Tibetan and the Maori response in indigenous communities towards the integration of indigenous, mother-tongue education. He argues that notions of ‘quality’ must be evaluated through the lenses of indigenous knowledge, spirituality and culture. He argues that top-down development approaches to education are doomed to failure while community driven responses will lead not only to maintenance of indigenous traditions and languages but also to the enrolment and achievement goals that policy-makers desire.

In Chapter 8, “The dialectics of Western Christianity and African spirituality”, Akena Adyanga explores how spirituality and the related practices of healing, sacrifices, and rituals are deeply rooted in the everyday life of the *Acholi* people of Uganda. These practices and values have been devalued through Western Christianity which has led to the destabilization of communities. Adyanga explores to what extent syncretism is possible and the importance of indigenizing local education systems as to value the community’s spiritual and indigenous practices and knowledges.

Part four focuses on spirituality as intricately tied with personal experiences as the authors explore meanings and implications of spiritual learning through the lens of their own experience. In Chapter 9, “A spiritual journey in the academy: My personal experience”, Energy Manyimo challenges himself to re-envision how he conceives of African spirituality in the context of his spiritual journey as an academic. He uses an Afrocentric and indigenous knowledges framework to answer the questions: What is spirituality? Why is it important to practice spirituality? When is it important to introduce spirituality in the education system? How should it be introduced and by whom?

In Chapter 10, “‘My name in Mohammed but you can call me John’: Canadian racism, spirit injury and the renaming of the indigenous body as a rite of passage”, Aman Sium challenges the practice of re-naming and Anglicizing the names of Indigenous people upon arrival in Canada. He shows the importance of naming in Indigenous cultures and uses his own personal experience to show how the practice of renaming is closely tied with policies of assimilation and racism and how it results in spirit injury for Indigenous bodies. The relationship between renaming and spiritual disconnection is explored in the context of Canada and the classroom and explains why Indigenous people need to reclaim the history and past that is represented in names and the process of naming.

In Chapter 11, “Holding relationships as sacred responsibilities: A journey of spiritual growth and being”, Nadia Salter discusses how relationships are a vital part of everyday life and how integrating spirituality into one’s life or educational

practices involves holding these relationships as sacred. Holding relationships as sacred involves seeing everyone as interconnected and purposeful, honour, respect, kindness and seeking harmony and balance with those around you. By honouring these relationships we can nourish our whole being and provide spaces for others to do the same.

In Chapter 12, “Spirituality: An interconnected path to healing”, Adelin Brunal explores the histories of African Canadian communities and sees the need for spirituality to act as a key component in the ‘re-education’ project of Black youth, as a way to resist complacency and discourses of materialism. He sees spirituality as a way to bring ‘oneness’ to both individuals and communities and as a positive force of interconnectedness which enables the recognition and valuing of the holistic individual.

In Chapter 13, “Spirit injury: The impact of colonialism on African spirituality”, Jennifer Jagire looks at her personal experiences to show how traditional African spirituality has been devalued by Western Christianity both in her homeland of Uganda as well as in Canada. She argues that indigenous spirituality can be used to disrupt hegemonic Western conceptions of spirituality as perpetuated in the schooling system and can be a way of re-valuing the self and the past.

In Chapter 14, “The loss of my indigenous languages, as I lose, I struggle to find”, Wariri Muhungi explores how, as an African Kenyan woman, the loss of her indigenous languages has affected her emotional and spiritual well-being. She uses critical autoethnographic and feminist lenses to explore her experiences of colonization through schooling systems in Africa, Europe and North America. Through these experiences the need for spiritually-centred education is examined as a key feature of the struggle for personal liberation and socio-cultural meaning within Eurocentric, dominant educational structures.

Part five looks at how spirituality can be mobilized and applied in various ways and locations. In Chapter 15, “Religious fundamentalism, political power and the colonization of spirituality”, Emily Antze examines the use of spirituality within religious fundamentalist movements and explores how spirituality has been co-opted for personal or group political gain. The exploration of power structures within these movements reveal that individual expressions and outlets of spirituality have been ‘colonized’ by organized religion. Antze explores possibilities of decolonization, especially through classroom pedagogy, in hopes that spirituality can be used to promote equality and harmony.

In Chapter 16, “Wisdom sharing and altered consciousness: A transformative learning project”, Jennifer Richmond-Bravo argues that for transformative learning to take place, educators must be willing to not only interrogate their own lives but willing to look openly across lines of difference without prejudice. In dominant Eurocentric society much of this difference has been appropriated, commodified and used to further oppress minoritized peoples. Informed learning and understanding can come through pedagogy that approaches learning as a relationship and knowledge as something not to be consumed but received with gratitude.

Many of the chapters in this book deal intimately with the personal and experiential nature of spirituality. While there are certainly some who will decry this approach due to a perceived lack of academic rigour or objectivity, what we seek to highlight is the rich and valuable work that is to be done in exploring how spirituality affects each of us in unique ways and in ways that allow us to approach the work of transformation, both in society and in schooling, in new and powerful ways. The goal of the book is to explore connections both to aspects of our whole selves that have been suppressed and subordinated within the academy and also to others around us.

This project, *Spirituality, Education & Society: An Integrated Approach* is a call for the creation of an academic community which sees the value of spiritual knowledges in creating communities where compassion, hope and love are valued. It is in these places that transformation becomes possible and where learning becomes a healing, sacred process rather than the dehumanizing, consumptive process that it so often is today. When spirituality is valued both as a personal pursuit as well as a form of connection and relationship, space is created for communities who value diversity and inclusivity. Educators who use spiritual knowledge value the power that is found in diversity. Hopefully, as you read and use the texts found in this book, you are taken in by both the diversity of the voices as well as the common message that they are advocating: spiritual knowledge is an irreplaceable aspect of the whole self and, if we are serious about transformative learning, we must engage with this aspect of all learners.

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SUSANNAH COLE

## 1. SITUATING CHILDREN IN THE DISCOURSE OF SPIRITUALITY

### INTRODUCTION

How is it possible that I have an undergraduate degree in Child Development and am completing my final course for a Masters in Education in Developmental Psychology and I have only just been introduced to the validity of the concept of ‘other ways of knowing’? ‘Other ways of knowing’ explore alternative, non-scientific ways of interpreting and understanding reality. Western scientific models of knowledge production rely almost exclusively on linear theories and empirical evidence that place logical reasoning as the definitive source of knowing. Spiritual ways of knowing rely on intuition and wonder, aspects that Western scientific models discount as taboo. My interest in writing about children’s spirituality has arisen from the startling realization that my current knowledge of child development is dangerously limited. Until now I have been led down a singular path in my education. Without an appreciation for other ways of knowing, my understanding of spirituality has been restricted. I believe that spirituality lies at the core of our humanity and is a gateway to knowledge, not the obstruction that I’ve been taught.

Imagine how different our lives might be if we approached each day with an appreciation of ourselves as spiritual beings. Placing spirituality at the centre of our lives opens a realm of possibility that leads to our deepest self. Everyone is spiritual; however accessing this facet of our lives can be challenging if we are taught as children to disregard our connection with spirit. Often, the innate spiritual nature of children is disregarded because children are often perceived as immature and selfish. Their ability to squeal in delight at the sight of something new or twirl around in circles just to watch the world go by is viewed as frivolous and juvenile rather than as an uninhibited expression of their innate spirituality. A child’s sense of self is the source and origin of his or her spirituality. The experiences and relationships children have in their lives will enhance and further their spiritual development. When adults make space for and honour children’s authentic expression they are accepting and nurturing children’s spirituality. Children’s spirits grow when they experience a sense of belonging in, and interact within, an environment that acknowledges and provides opportunities for diversity of expression and critical reflection.

In Western society spirituality is not supported in the curriculum and consequently our education system fails to socialize children’s spiritual identity. Providing support to parents and educators to facilitate children’s spirituality

begins with knowledge building. Our understanding and teaching of child development needs to incorporate spiritual development and adults need to apply this knowledge in their relationships with children. In Western society we rely primarily on traditional developmental theory that is purely evidence-based in exploring the lives of children. Accordingly, our work with children often focuses on the domains of development that are readily visible and externally measured. Unfortunately, highlighting only the quantifiable elements of development negates the ability to appreciate the multidimensional, interconnected, and dynamic nature of spirituality. Our knowledge of child development becomes incongruent with the lived experiences of children when we overlook the non-quantifiable spiritual domain that encompasses internal elements and permeates the whole child. I will introduce postformalism as a theory capable of expanding our understanding of development. The theory of transformational learning will be applied as the vehicle for developing greater insight into the complex nature of spiritual development and deepening our awareness of our spirituality.

This chapter originated from my desire to holistically represent child development – inclusive of spiritual development. As an Early Childhood Educator, I have observed children and witnessed their spiritual nature. However, my university texts neglected to mention spiritual development alongside physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development. Until recently, I had never been taught how to recognize or nurture a child's spirit. I am writing from the perspective of a white woman of European descent, who has benefited from all the unearned privileges associated with my position. My knowledge of child development is rooted in Western scientific thinking; thus only recently has it occurred to me that my understanding of child development is limited and exclusionary. Over the past few months, I've become aware that I've unwittingly been working within a dangerous structure that relies on exclusionary and oppressive processes that limit ways of knowing. This course has been my introduction to theories related to epistemology, power structures, and oppression. By challenging my privileged position, this course has opened my eyes to opportunities for transformation.

According to Dei (2004), transformative learning is a form of education that involves a "shift of consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters our ways of being in the world" (p. 4). For learning to become transformational, it needs to become more "inclusive, discriminating, self-reflective, and integrative of experience" (Mezirow, 1997 as cited in Robinson, 2004, p. 112). I'm now becoming increasingly conscious of privileged assumptions I've made about children and how they grow and learn, and I'm questioning the supremacy of Western scientific thinking. I am developing what Robinson (2004) refers to as 'reflexivity', or the ability to see my historical and cultural conditioning and its influence on my worldview.

Through an exploration of transformational learning, I hope to address the limitations of my knowledge by highlighting ways of knowing that transcend the essentialist and reductionist tendencies of purely evidence-based developmental theories. I am not proposing the complete discounting of Western scientific

thought, as it is one valid source of information, but it does not provide a platform to discuss the spiritual aspects of children's lives. It is essential that the whole child be valued in discussions of spiritual development.

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter I will be exploring children's spirituality through a developmental perspective. In Western society, developmental theory has predominantly focused on notions of progress and evolution highlighting predictable, sequential, and increasingly complex stages. Inherent in this perspective is the discounting of the lower (child) stages in favour of the more developed stages of adulthood (Johnson, 1999). Mainstream Western society has been remiss in presenting developmental theories that provide a holistic, fluid, and interconnected representation of development. It is my position that fostering children's spiritual development requires an understanding and integration of both traditional developmental theory as well as post-formal thinking. Specifically, children's spiritual development will be discussed using cognitive developmental theory to explore the ways in which children perceive and interpret the world in relation to their spiritual nature. Jean Piaget's model of cognitive development will be presented as representative of the traditional developmental theory, and Kincheloe and Steinberg's (1993) theory of postformalism will be used to provide a more expansive and inclusive perspective of children's cognitive development.

Jean Piaget was born in Switzerland and studied philosophy, psychology, logic, mathematics, and biology. Ultimately, he dedicated himself to finding a biological explanation of knowledge (Rathus & Rinaldi, 2009). His work has had a significant impact in education over the past 30 years. His theories help shift long-standing perceptions of children as empty vessels needing to be filled with knowledge to a view of children as active builders of knowledge – little scientists who are constantly creating and testing their own theories (Papert, 1999). At the core of Piaget's theories is a belief that looking carefully at how knowledge develops in children can provide insight into knowledge production in general. Unfortunately, Piaget's significant and detailed achievements have been simplified and applied in limited ways in education. The trend is to rely only on his four stages of cognitive development in teacher education and curriculum development (Papert, 1999). Piagetian cognitive theory highlights rational, logical ways of knowing and holds them as the most sophisticated representation of knowledge production. Cognitive developmental theory is primarily concerned with the individual and the development of self (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1993). We must ask ourselves if we are limiting our understanding and interpretation of the world by dogmatically following this model.

In contrast to Piaget's cognitive theory, Joe Kincheloe and his life partner Shirley Steinberg have developed a more contemporary theory of cognitive development called postformalism, a theory that provides a more comprehensive, inclusive, and expansive view of knowledge production (1993). Kincheloe as a leading scholar in critical pedagogy who focuses his work on exposing unexamined power relations that shape cognitive theory and educational psychology in an effort

to create a psychology of possibility. Born in Tennessee in 1950 to parents who were committed to social justice, he witnessed extreme forms of classism and racism in the Southern United States during the 1950s and 1960s. These experiences shaped his view of the world and helped to ground his theories with the perspectives of those who have suffered at the hands of dominant power blocs (Steinberg, 2009).

Postformalism posits that mainstream developmental psychology has historically dismissed the cognitive abilities of those who do not fit in the dominant white, middle and upper socio-economic and patriarchal classes. Postformal theory is ideally suited to exploring knowledge production outside the realm of scientific logical thinking because it is concerned with questions of meaning making, emancipation, and processes of self-production (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1993). Kincheloe and Steinberg (1998) point out that White culture has used Enlightenment ideologies, that place '*reason*' as the ultimate human accomplishment, to establish their superiority. '*Whiteness*', they argue, has become synonymous with rationality, which in turn has become synonymous with '*the good*'. Similarly, they suggest that non-whiteness has often been identified with irrationality and deficiency (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998). Post-formal thinking addresses the limitations of knowledge based solely on science by demoting '*reason*' to only one type of knowing. This model acknowledges various forms of knowing by focusing on cognitive processes through the union of reason and emotion. It draws from feminist theory and deconstructs the thought-feeling hierarchy used by men to oppress women (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998).

Introducing post-formal thinking into the discussion creates a space to explore intuitive ways of knowing as well as the emotional and relational elements of spirituality. The integration of Piagetian cognitive theory and postformalism represents a holistic and inclusive framework for an exploration of children's spiritual development. Once we are equipped with relevant knowledge that reflects an inclusive understanding of children's spiritual nature, it becomes imperative to effectively apply this knowledge in our relationships with children and in our educational practices.

Transformational learning theory represents a theoretical approach that provides a framework for exploring relational dynamics that deepen our understanding of our spiritual selves and its expression. This theory challenges individuals to reflect critically on the ways in which they engage with and interpret the world (Belenky & Stanton, 2000). Transformational learning is flexible and makes space for fluidity in relationships by integrating a questioning approach that acknowledges the changing nature of circumstances, people, and ultimately decisions (Belenky & Stanton, 2000). Exploration is valued and answers are not forced when we use a questioning approach in our self-discovery. Transformative learning can support individuals to move "toward a more inclusive, differentiated, permeable, and integrated perspective" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 155). When adults confront their own limiting beliefs and assumptions, they are more capable of creating a space inclusive of spiritual ways of knowing and therefore support and facilitate the spiritual development of children.

In this chapter I will incorporate both my knowledge of child development from a traditional developmental standpoint as well as apply post-formal thinking to my understanding of children's spiritual development with the goal of presenting a holistic picture of the spiritual lives of children. From this perspective, I will highlight how transformative learning can be used as a tool within the education system to create an environment that supports and nurtures children's spiritual development.

### SPIRITUALITY

The definition and interpretation of spirituality is largely dependent upon one's worldview. Adult assumptions about spirituality, which rely on rational thinking and religious concepts, often hinder the ability to understand the spiritual nature of children. Spirituality lies beyond rational conceptualizations and thoughts about God (Hart, 2003). It is important for me to compile a definition of *spirituality* that is inclusive of children. To this end, a constructive definition would provide a place for all individuals to locate themselves as spiritual beings, regardless of age, gender, race, ability, sexuality, or culture. Therefore, for the purpose of this chapter, I will use the term *spirituality* to reflect a child's development of self that includes a search for meaning, transcendence, wholeness, and purpose (Love, 2001; Tisdell, 2003). The spirit of children is captured when spirituality is understood as an "inexhaustible web of meaning interrelatedly connecting self, other, world, and cosmos" (Myers, 1997, p. 109). Furthermore, the essence of spirit is mysterious and experienced by children in moments of awe and wonder. For Tobin Hart (2003) this mysterious quality of spirituality is an unquantifiable force that animates and connects all things. He suggests that one cannot separate oneself from this force because all aspects of life contain the essence of the whole.

Applying a definition of spirituality that reflects its personal nature allows for inclusivity and helps to delineate it from religion that reflects a collective expression. It can be problematic when the terms are applied interchangeably, particularly in educational contexts. Although spirituality and religion are interrelated, they do not necessarily overlap (Love, 2001). Spirituality refers to something intimate and personal that helps children expand their understanding of themselves and their place in the universe. Alternatively, religion refers to institutional beliefs, codes, and rituals that provide structure or expression to spirituality (Forster, McColl, & Fardella, 2007). Religion can serve as a sanctuary that provides a sense of community, but it can also be experienced as oppressive when it requires strict adherence to codes of conduct and claims to hold a monopoly on the truth (Fernandes, 2003; Hart, 2003). Within education, children need to be able to locate themselves and experience a sense of belonging within the classroom. Incorporating various religious practices in the classroom becomes problematic because exclusion is inevitable. In contrast, educational environments that support spirituality reflect inclusivity and occur naturally when teachers employ an open mind and are committed to critical reflection.

Although a child's spiritual nature involves an inward experience that originates in a connection to self, excessive individualism can get in the way of further

spiritual development (Myers, 1997). To ensure that spiritual pursuits do not become narcissistic or destructive, it is necessary to introduce the concept of responsibility in the definition of spirituality. Fernandes (2003) reminds us that although spirituality connotes a personal experience, it should not be considered private because at its essence it is relational and therefore necessitates a responsibility to self, others, and the world. This responsibility can be expressed through daily activities, relationships, and actions that reflect a willingness to engage in what matters most to us. Children need to be supported to explore their spiritual identity, discover meaning for themselves and share their understanding of the world with others.

#### CHILDREN'S SPIRITUAL WAYS OF KNOWING

To ensure the recognition and nurturing of children's spirituality it is necessary to understand how they experience and express their spiritual nature. Traditionally, in Western society, child development has been conceptualized through the theories of White, male psychologists such as Jean Piaget, Erik Erikson, and Lawrence Kohlberg (Rathus & Rinaldi, 2009). These theories are characterized by individualistic, linear, product-oriented thinking and are filled with Eurocentric ideologies that espouse generalizations about the mind. They provide a structure for understanding the quantifiable domains of development, but exclude spiritual ways of knowing.

In particular, Piagetian cognitive theory is based on the notion that as children progress through the stages of their lives, they construct knowledge in an orderly fashion as their thinking becomes increasingly sophisticated. Although Piaget claims that these cognitive stages are qualitatively different from each other, they are presented as hierarchical and ultimately culminate in a mastery of formal logical thinking. According to Piaget, children three to six years old are considered to be in the preoperational stage of cognitive development. This stage is characterized by intuitive and perception bound reasoning, caused by their inability to decentre their thinking which leads to egocentrism and errors in logical thinking. This stage is often referred to as an immature form of knowing. At age seven, children enter the stage of concrete operations where Piaget argued we see the beginning of adult logic; however, children are still limited in their reasoning by their inability to deal with abstract concepts. A child's logic remains bound by reality because they rely on tangible, easily manipulated constructs. It isn't until Piaget's final cognitive stage, formal operations, when children twelve years of age and older become capable of sophisticated logical thinking characterized by hypothetical, deductive reasoning. Piagetian cognitive theory regards this form of logical reasoning as the highest level of thought, a level some individuals might never attain (Rathus & Rinaldi, 2009). This linear portrayal of children's cognitive development is exclusionary and limits our understanding of the dynamic and diverse nature of knowledge production. It is a reductionist view of childhood that incorporates principles of universality and uniformity that are intended to reflect normal childhood development. This brief overview of Piaget's cognitive

developmental theory illustrates that it does not value subjective and intuitive thinking and is grounded in a specific set of assumptions about the mind that reflect a Western, male scientific point view. Devaluing knowledge that is viewed as non-intellectual, illogical, and irrational fragments our understanding of spiritual development.

Piaget's cognitive theory has been criticized at several levels – for the purposes of this paper, I've chosen to focus on just a few. First, his theory does not acknowledge that children learn within multifaceted sociocultural environments (Rathus & Rinaldi, 2009). We cannot understand the spiritual nature of children without an appreciation of diversity and the importance of reciprocal learning between children and adults. Second, Piaget has presented his work in the form of a stage-theory, which inherently requires changes to be discontinuous (Rathus & Rinaldi, 2009). Yet, children have innate knowledge and their cognitive abilities are continuously developing and growing as they are introduced to new experiences. Finally, the theory fails to mention integrating these cognitive abilities to reflect an appreciation of both intuitive and logical thinking. In fact, Piaget believed that for children to be truly rational, their development needed to move away from emotions (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1993). This belief is irresponsible because an appreciation of children as spiritual beings is severely limited without valuing emotion.

Spiritual ways of knowing delve into non-quantifiable domains related to subjective, intuitive, and relational knowledge production (Shahjahan, 2006). These domains are rarely discussed in current developmental psychology texts. However, I have witnessed spiritual knowing in children and it is my belief that spiritual knowing is the underlying source of cognition. Infants are born with innate knowing and an ability to experience connection. Johnson (1999) suggests that the roots of intelligence can be observed in an infants drive to seek and create meaningful patterns and relationships. The connection between cognitive development and spiritual ways of knowing is not a notion found in traditional developmental theories. Through my own process of transformative learning I have discovered several alternative perspectives of child cognitive development put forward by Tobin Hart (2003), Alison Gopnik (2009), and Barbara Kimes Myers (1997) that highlight spiritual ways of knowing.

Children show us the beauty of vulnerability with their honesty and remind us of the simplicity of the moment when the mundane elicits awe (Hart, 2003). From the moment of birth, children demonstrate empathy as they identify with the people around them and literally take on the feelings of others. The roots of care and compassion are evident early in our lives. Children have an incredible ability to create and imagine long before they read and write. The touchstones for our spiritual being are found in our childhood (Hart, 2003). Alison Gopnik (2009), a psychologist and philosopher, believes that children are actually more intelligent, thoughtful and conscious than adults. Children are not primitive adults gaining perfection with age. They have different, though equally complex and powerful minds, brains, and forms of consciousness. Children's brains are wired to take in as much sensory input as possible. They are capable of paying attention to everything, which makes them successful at finding out about the world rather than just acting

on it (Gopnik, 2009). Personal knowledge, based on feelings, is developed as children explore the world through their senses. All knowledge is based on the integration of personal knowledge (Myers, 1997). This open-ended intellectual capacity should not be underestimated. I must construct my knowledge of child development with multiple perspectives and theories to fully appreciate the spiritual lives of children. Postformalism is representative of an inclusive theory that expands my current knowledge of child development to include spiritual ways of knowing.

Postformalism is informed by and extends Piagetian cognitive theory to include social, interpersonal, and ideological concepts that form the basis of spiritual ways of knowing. Unlike formal operational thinking, post-formal thinking is inherently flexible because it recognizes that all theories, including itself, are historically situated and socially constructed (Johnson, 1999). Understanding children's spirituality necessitates an appreciation of the individuality of expression and the inevitability of change. Postformalism addresses questions of purpose, meaning, human dignity, freedom, and social responsibility. It broadens our understanding of thinking to include both constructed and innate knowledge and emphasizes interconnected, dynamic, and intuitive modes of expression (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1993). For example, it draws from feminist theory to acknowledge cognitive processes that are created by the union of reason and emotion. Within this theory, emotions are viewed as essential in grounding our cognition and providing insight where logic cannot (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1993).

Creativity and spiritual knowledge are closely linked: they are intangible and expansive in nature and involve exploring possibilities and producing meaning (Villaverde, 1999). Creativity can be viewed as a core process that supports spiritual knowing. Examining how formal and postformal models view the creative process highlights an important distinction between these theories. Traditional conceptions of the creative process rely on a mechanistic model that separates the whole into pieces, whereas postformal thinking depicts creativity as an unfolding of an implicate order through an integrative process (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1993). Fluid rather than static processes facilitate spiritual development. The formal view of the creative process reinforces convergent thinking – thinking that brings together information focused on problem-solving, often with a single answer. The postformal view of the creative process supports divergent thinking – thinking that moves in many directions and involves a variety of aspects, often leading to novel ideas and solutions (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1993). The cultivation of our spiritual awareness ideally occurs within contexts that welcome the unknown and challenge individuals to reflect on their experiences with an open and questioning mind. Postformalism represents a more inclusive description of knowledge production that provides a framework for exploring children's spirituality. Postformal thought is intended to broaden our understanding of cognition, a starting point in a search for a comprehensive view of cognition rather than a definitive explanation of cognition (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2003).

In the interests of presenting a variety of perspectives related to ways of knowing, I conclude this section with a recommendation made by Mi'kmaq Elder

Albert Marshall. He proposes a blending of our ways of knowing into a new worldview called “Two Eyed Seeing”. This worldview synthesizes scientific knowledge from traditional Aboriginal concepts and orthodox Western science. He asks us to “learn to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing, and from the other eye with the strengths of Western (or Eurocentric or mainstream) knowledges and ways of knowing ... and use both these eyes together, for the benefit of all” (Marshall & Bartlett, 2009). This perspective offers insight into how our various ways of knowing can work together to strengthen our understanding of our relationship to the world and ourselves. To respect the spiritual nature of children, we need to acknowledge various worldviews and teach children to remain open to new ways of knowing. Developmental textbooks must present a more diverse representation of cognitive theory. When our understanding of how children think and learn is expanded to integrate various ways of knowing, our education system can create a place for a child that acknowledges and even rewards authentic individual expression. It is my belief that spirituality unfolds in a multitude of ways throughout our lives and requires cultivation to bring into fullness.

#### SPIRITUAL EDUCATION

The current Western education system is not formally addressing spirituality. Concerns related to the separation of church and state have led to fear around explicitly labelling spiritual development. The education system has chosen not to develop curriculum that directly speaks to spirituality (Kessler, 1999). In some cases it is being incorporated in fragmented, informal ways but this tends to only further indoctrinate students in White, Christian values rather than offer opportunities for genuine spiritual expression. As a first step, educators can begin to incorporate the word spirituality in their daily vocabulary and confront the fears that arise as a result.

Recently I came across a book, *Teacher, the Geranium on the windowsill died, and you just kept on talking* (Nieuwejaar, 2003). This title encapsulates the essence of what is lacking in the spiritual education of children. It captures the palpable nature of human experience that is felt deeply by children and reminds us of the importance of being present in our relationships. Our teaching needs to be aligned with the lived experiences of children. We have a responsibility to meet children where they are, with a willingness to share openly. This requires us to cultivate an attitude, both within ourselves and in our teaching practices, that encourages us to appreciate and capitalise on meaningful moments. We need to be able to heed the plant that died, the seed that sprouted, or the fragrance of the flower (Nieuwejaar, 2003). Adults and children are enriched when they have space to experience complexity and simplicity, laughter and grief, and giving and receiving. If the focus of our role as educators is on being in the moment with children, the relationship will present mutual opportunities for learning.

Spirituality is often connected with experiences of awe, wonder and mystery, but adults don't always acknowledge the difficult emotions that often accompany these experiences (Earl, 2001). In Western society, we ask children to deny who

they are when we don't make space for all their experiences. We teach them that there is only one right way to live. Therefore, children progressively shut down and hide parts of them that don't fit with adult expectations, creating a 'shadow' (Hart, 2003). 'Shadow' can be described as the negative or undeveloped side of the personality composed of characteristics people are denying (Earl, 2001). Hart (2003) poignantly states: "shadow is created when we stand between ourselves and our own light" (p. 179). Children don't need to be rescued from difficult experiences; they need a space that supports a range of experience. Neglecting to address all the spiritual aspects of children's lives sends them the message that the most important aspects of their lives are not okay to talk about. It reinforces the notion that life is about what we are told to know and not about what we know for ourselves. Dei (2004) reminds us that when educators deny spiritual knowing, either through a lack of awareness or an inability to engage with students on a spiritual level, their teaching practices can become destructive rather than liberating. Denial does not lead to wholeness; therefore, children who are restricted in their expression are left without the support and encouragement they need to meet their full potential (Hart, 2003). In accordance with my definition of spirituality, I assert that spiritual education involves acknowledging and teaching sacredness, respect, compassion, and connection.

I believe schools play a crucial role in shaping a child's worldview, values, and character through both visible and invisible means. Visibly, children are taught a curriculum based on Western scientific principles that value logical reasoning and emphasize individual achievement, competitiveness, materialism, and objective knowing (Lindhom, 2007). Observable and measurable knowledge is highly esteemed (Shahjahan, 2006). More dangerously, within the school system a hidden curriculum reinforces compliance, competition, a single answer, and the notion that authority and truth are found outside of oneself, in a teacher or textbook (Hart, 2003). Spiritual ways of knowing that include subjective and intuitive knowledge are not acknowledged as valid forms of representation.

Western curriculum has become consumed with external variables and objective solutions because these elements are easily quantified; whereas the internal realm is often ignored or discredited (Palmer, 2003; Hart 2004). Shahjahan (2006) points out that the view of the world as interconnected is made invisible and illegitimate in our current education system. This leaves children with a feeling of emptiness and a fragmented life that lacks purpose and meaning. In classrooms, students often find themselves disconnected from the aspects of their lives that matter most to them. What happens in relationships, the space between 'you and me', is often lost in chaotic classroom environments (Hart, 2003). Theologian Martin Buber wrote that "spirit is not in the I, but between the I and you. It is not like the blood that circulates in you, but like the air in which you breathe" (as cited in Hart, 2003, p. 67). This relational dynamic lies at the centre of our spiritual lives and forms the basis for compassion and sense of community. To make space for this in the classroom, teachers need to deepen their understanding of themselves and support their students to do the same. Thomas Merton, a poet, social activist, and writer, believed that "the purpose of education is to show a person how to define himself

authentically and spontaneously in relation to the world – not to impose a prefabricated definition of the world, still less an arbitrary definition of the individual himself” (as cited in Hart, 2003, p. 175). Our current Western school system, with its visible emphasis on scientific ways of knowing and a hidden curriculum that emphasizes conformity, ultimately serves to deconstruct children rather than support their inherent capabilities. For education to become inclusive of spirituality, educators must take responsibility and challenge both themselves and their teaching practice to confront ideologies and systems that hinder genuine, individual expression

Transformative learning is an ideal tool to examine personal beliefs, feelings, and assumptions. When these beliefs are left unexamined or when educators take the position that they are ‘all knowing’, the ability to relate honestly and empathetically with children is impeded. The transformational process occurs when educators engage in critical reflection aimed at creating a more inclusive, discriminating, and autonomous perspective (Merriam, 2004). Reflecting on experience is key to transformative learning. Experience alone does not constitute transformative learning. Rather, it is the ability to critically reflect that shifts everyday experiences into opportunities for learning (Merriam, 2004). For educators to access their own spiritual nature they must be willing to engage with experiences in their lives on a deeper level. Mezirow (1991) specifies *premise reflection*, which involves examining socially constructed beliefs and assumptions, as the only type of reflection that can truly lead to transformation. This type of reflection requires educators to develop a level of comfort with contradictions so that they no longer view inconsistencies as problems that need to be fixed. Instead, educators learn to apply dialectic thinking that allows for acceptance of alternative perspectives and different worldviews. As educators move away from unilateral, rigid thinking, they open themselves up to the possibility of creating meaningful relationships with children. Relationships rooted in honesty and compassion honour the children’s spirituality.

Ultimately, nurturing the spiritual lives of children is about drawing out as opposed to adding on (Hart, 2003). This notion reflects an underlying trust in children’s innate spiritual nature and their ability to fully express themselves. From this perspective, the adult’s role is not about filling children up from the outside by downloading information into empty receptacles. Instead, spiritual education requires an acknowledgment of children’s innate knowledge and the ability to support their process of unfolding (Hart, 2003). The role of the educator in supporting the spiritual development of children is to show children what they already know and who they are rather than teach them what they think children should know and who children should be. Educators validate self-discovery when they accept children for who they are and create a free environment to imagine, create, and experiment (Hart, 2003; Kimes Myers, 1997). As children develop an understanding of themselves, connect with others, and ask questions about the world, they are showing us their spiritual selves. Children develop as whole beings in relation to people who love, listen, respond to, and guide them (Kimes Myers, 1997).

## DISCUSSION

The education system itself needs to engage in transformative learning. It needs to reflect on what it is to see itself clearly, appreciate that other ways of knowing are valid, and abandon exclusivity in favour of inclusive practices. How can we create an education system that allows all children the opportunity to locate themselves within the classroom without resorting to extreme individualism? Having experienced transformative learning firsthand I am aware of the amount of time and energy it requires to engage in critical self-reflection and confront my cultural conditioning. Is it fair to ask educators to engage in transformative learning? Would educators be willing and able to do it? In this paper I have argued that transformative learning is an ideal tool for self-exploration and the development of dialectic thinking. What other tools are accessible to educators to support spiritual development?

The definition of spirituality and the methodologies used to study it also raise some interesting questions. How can we define spirituality without describing it as the antithesis of scientific? Michael Hogan (2009) argues in his paper, *On Spirituality and Education*, that it is a mistake to ignore the scientific study of spirituality and that we should find a way to synthesise the study of spirituality with mainstream psychological science. Is this an appropriate avenue for the exploration of spirituality, or should we concentrate on maintaining spirituality as separate from science?

## CONCLUSION

I conclude this chapter with an excerpt from a children's novel by Margery Williams, *The Velveteen Rabbit* (1922). It is a magical story that chronicles the experiences of a stuffed rabbit in his quest to become real. This excerpt captures a simple, yet profound conversation between two toys, the Rabbit and the Skin Horse, which highlights the essence of what it means to be spiritual. Children can connect with their spiritual nature when they are engaged in relationships that value their inherent worth.

The Skin Horse had lived longer in the nursery than any of the others. He was so old that his brown coat was bald in patches and showed the seams underneath, and most of the hairs in his tail had been pulled out to string bead necklaces. He was wise, for he had seen a long succession of mechanical toys arrive to boast and swagger, and by-and-by break their mainsprings and pass away, and he knew that they were only toys, and would never turn into anything else. For nursery magic is very strange and wonderful, and only those playthings that are old and wise and experienced like the Skin Horse understand all about it.

“What is REAL?” asked the Rabbit one day, when they were lying side by side near the nursery fender, before Nana came to tidy the room. “Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stick-out handle?”

“Real isn’t how you are made,” said the Skin Horse. “It’s a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become Real.”

“Does it hurt?” asked the Rabbit.

“Sometimes,” said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. “When you are Real you don’t mind being hurt.”

“Does it happen all at once, like being wound up,” he asked, “or bit by bit?”

“It doesn’t happen all at once,” said the Skin Horse. “You become. It takes a long time. That’s why it doesn’t happen often to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don’t matter at all, because once you are Real you can’t be ugly, except to people who don’t understand.”

“I suppose *you* are real?” said the Rabbit. And then he wished he had not said it, for he thought the Skin Horse might be sensitive. But the Skin Horse only smiled.

“The Boy’s Uncle made me Real,” he said. “That was a great many years ago; but once you are Real you can’t become unreal again. It lasts for always.” (Williams, 1922, p. 1)

Challenging my cultural conditioning has expanded my understanding of children’s spiritual development. Valuing other points of view has finally allowed me to create a fluid, inclusive, and reflective perspective that is capable of not labeling ‘other’ as less than. Abandoning the practice of diminishing ‘other’ has opened up the possibility of experiencing ‘all’ as valid. This allows me to experience spirituality as intrinsic to being human.

Western society needs to establish an education system that facilitates the development of the whole person. It is our responsibility to create environments that nurture children’s spirituality by engaging with them in the process of learning instead of presenting them with a packaged understanding of the world. By adopting a receptive and compassionate position, educators create opportunities for children to transform. Trusting that learning is transformative gives children the freedom to develop their spiritual lives.

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ERIC J. RITSKES

## **2. CONNECTED: INDIGENOUS SPIRITUALITY AS RESISTANCE IN THE CLASSROOM**

### INTRODUCTION

An ever increasing body of work is emerging within the pedagogical arena that explores the realm of spirituality and its implications within a classroom (Tisdell and Tolliver, 2006; Groen, 2008), in curriculum (Fraser, 2004), for student development (Love, 2001; Kessler, 1999; Hindman, 2002), or within the academy as a whole (Shahjahan, 2006; Rendon, 2000). The emergence of this body of work stems from what is perceived as an ever widening chasm that separates Western education from the “whole person”, suppressing and silencing aspects of student life that are important in the quest for a holistic education experience. This chapter examines the definitions of spirituality that are emerging out of this Western educational discourse and contends that the current definitions undermine the collective power of spirituality by centering the individual as the sole locus of spiritual determination in a sort of spiritual solipsism. The current discourse of spirituality has been born out of resistance to organized religion and its coercive, imperialistic endeavors but, in rejecting the organized structures of religion, spirituality has engaged in the other extreme, namely Western liberalism and its dogmatic emphasis on individual rights – throwing any notion of collective spirituality out with the proverbial bath water.

I will argue that any definition of spirituality needs to acknowledge the value of connection, as conceived in indigenous spirituality, as vital and inherent to its being: a connection to all aspects of the self, connection to one’s community, connection to history, and connection to a higher power or larger framework. It is through this connectivity that spiritual power is constructed and spiritual resistance is empowered and without it, spirituality falls prey to individualism and relativism. Finally, I will attempt to elucidate some of the implications that such a collaborative spirituality might have on the classroom and the academy. The impetus for spirituality to be brought into the classroom is based on a desire for change to how we educate, a desire to resist the current patterns of thinking and, according to Kessler (1999), a desire for connection.

I come to this topic from a position of spiritual and mental struggle. Not only do I struggle to locate myself within the discussion of resistance and spirituality but I also struggle with the possibility of being able to locate myself at all. I recognize and am aware of my full participation within the discourses of Western domination that I am implicated in through my skin color (white), my heritage (European), my religion (Christian), my gender (male) and my sexuality (heterosexual). I do not

posit these influences as something apart from who I am, in some sort of nebulous “out there” (Howard, 2006), but recognize that I come from a position of illegitimate privilege and who I am is embedded in domination. While not overlooking the influence that these locations have on my work, I also understand the difficulty of discovering *how* they influence my work (though undoubtedly they do) as well as the challenge in locating what I have left unsaid; what remains hidden is undoubtedly the most insidious. While I cannot escape these locations, my work hopefully resists against these discourses from within them; as Dei & Asgharzadeh (2001) clearly state: it is not possible to claim impartiality or indifference and I do not choose to do so. As Budd Hall (2000) states in his preface to *Indigenous Knowledges in Global Contexts*, “I can’t change my race or gender, but I *am* able to shape my approach to my work” (p. xiv). My move or shaping, then, is one of resistance. This resistance comes not in the form of the post-colonial which not only falsely demarcates periods of oppression, but as Dei (2000) also argues, post-colonial discourses disturbingly ignore the histories and lived realities of indigenous peoples. So instead it is an anti-colonial resistance that I choose to mobilize, one that seeks to challenge and ultimately bring down colonial relationships within society through epistemologies of the colonized.

#### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The anti-colonial framework that I apply to this chapter seeks to both affirm indigenous ways of knowing while at the same time interrogating the intersections of power and knowledge that are inherently imbedded in any type of knowledge production. This framework also recognizes that knowledge does not reside in one site or location but is produced as a result of multiple, localized lived realities and experiences. This position avoids succumbing to the post-modern tendency to oversubjectify individual voices or experiences and rather chooses to recognize the value of individual experience within the framework of collective histories, as Dei (2005) states: to see unity in diversity. Knowledge, then, is bound up not only in the individual but also in the collective and communal identities, in recognition of the multitude of flows and cycles that occur in knowledge production. Not only does this framework challenge how knowledge is created but also how totalizing theories are used to simplify complex realities, choosing instead to focus on the fluidity and flexibility of a discursive framework (Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001).

I theorize colonial here, not strictly in its historical context nor as alien and foreign, but more broadly as discourses and forces of domination, imposition and exploitation. This approach does not seek to devalue, homogenize, or misrepresent the unique qualities of the historical representations of colonialism that were imposed on indigenous groups by Western nations but rather argues for more nuanced approaches and interrogations of how different forms of colonial power have been enacted in different ways, in different locations, in different times, in different spaces, and how these might work in conversation with each other. There is a caution here in creating an ‘umbrella’ term that veils the intricacies of its many members but, in recognizing this danger, there must be the move away from

homogenizing the issues and towards giving each colonized body a voice and many allies to raise their voice in unison with. Not only this, but in eschewing false dichotomies, an anti-colonial approach does not seek to set up the colonizer as 'other', aware of the dangers in setting up such dichotomies and recognizing the spectrum and complexities inherent in domination.

In light of these complexities, resistance is viewed in localized ways and as embedded within daily actions and choices, with the understanding that "colonizing practices can be unending and deeply embedded in everyday relations" (Dei, 2005, p. 273). An anti-colonial framework seeks to explore these various manifestations of colonization to uncover similarities and differences that might be of value in the resistance of and the dismantling of colonial powers. This approach also seeks links and alliances between those who resist domination in different forms (gender, class, race, disability, etc.) in an effort to explore how lived realities are shaped by multiple forms of power relationships. It rejects any singular approach to anti-oppression and supports solidarity in the struggle against the multiplicity of dominations.

In seeking to affirm indigenous knowledges, of vital importance is to theorize a 'working definition'. In constructing a 'working definition', an anti-colonial framework recognizes the fluidity and ever-changing nature of knowledge while challenging the Western discourses that seek to fix, categorize, contain and reify; as Battiste (2000) argues, "The quest for universal definitions ignores the diversity of the people of the earth and their views of themselves" (pp. 36-37). An anti-colonial framework also recognizes that "at each arrival at a definition, we begin a new analysis, a new departure, a new interrogation of meaning, new contradictions" (Davies, 1994, p. 5). This process of arrival/departure, in relation to indigenous knowledges, resists being defined by others which has too often been the case as Western academies and discourses have tried to contain and define indigenous knowledges and bodies in order to dominate and control them; it allows indigenous people to define for themselves what 'indigenous' means.

In defining indigenous knowledges, too often the tendency has been to locate it solely in the past and to fall prey to what Macedo (1999) calls a "blind romanticism". Locating indigenous knowledges in the past only serves to reify and enclose, to position indigenous knowledges as out of sync with 'modern' times, as a relic to be discarded for something better. Instead, I seek to define indigenous knowledges along the lines of Dei, Hall and Rosenberg (2000) who not only associate indigenous knowledges with the long-term occupancy of a certain place but define it as, "The sum of the experience and knowledge of a given social group [which] forms the basis of decision making in the face of challenges both familiar and unfamiliar" (p. 6). Indigenous knowledges are dynamic rather than static, constantly being created and re-created in the face of new obstacles, experiences and locations, yet never losing what makes it 'indigenous'. Indigenous knowledges are created in relation to a specific location or place but, just as colonialism uprooted indigenous peoples it also uprooted their knowledges which are constantly adapting, creating, re-creating and persisting (Purcell, 1998). In falling prey to a blind romanticism or static definitions rooted solely in past or place, not only are indigenous knowledges reified but a false dichotomy is imposed in which

indigenous knowledges are posited in direct opposition to Western knowledge. As Dei (2000) states, indigenous knowledges do not sit in pristine fashion outside of other knowledges; an anti-colonial framework recognizes the collaborative and cumulative processes involved in knowledge production and calls for a more nuanced interrogation of how knowledges interact with each other in a constant process of creation and re-creation.

Indigenous knowledges also seek to work with the power of diversity. The term 'indigenous' encompasses a wide array of knowledges, cultures, peoples, and locations (Wane, 2008). Roberts (1998) argues that indigenous knowledges develop through an in-depth understanding of relationships to a specific place and Dei (2000) states that indigenous knowledges are operationalized differently depending on history, environment and context. It is in the fluidity and openness of indigenous knowledges where all of these localized knowledges find their meeting point. There is recognition of multiple origins of knowledge and the multiplicity of ways that knowledge is operationalized, as well as an understanding of how knowledge is much like a river with many tributaries, ever expanding and overflowing its boundaries, constantly charting new courses and paths. This is not to so easily dismiss the realization that differences are prone to be homogenized within such an overarching concept as indigenous knowledges but rather to call for close interrogations and appreciations of diversity which will recognize that, even within such a wide scope there are common threads to be found which bring diverse peoples together under the banner of 'indigenous'.

An anti-colonial framework also recognizes that schooling is not innocent and that it has historically played an important role in colonizing indigenous groups; in producing and re-producing inequality along the lines of gender, race, culture, class, religion, and language; and in "miseducation", as Renato Constantino sees it:

We see our present with as little understanding as we view our past because aspects of the past which could illuminate the present have been concealed from us. This concealment has been effected by a systematic process of miseducation characterized by a thoroughgoing inculcation of colonial values and attitudes. (qtd. in Macedo, 1999, p. xv)

Institutes of education, sanctioned by the state, serve to further the agendas of the state and social structures of exploitation (Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001). This chapter recognizes that education has been used to silence and subsume the voices and knowledges of indigenous people, divorcing them from their histories; still it chooses to view education as a key site of resistance, giving indigenous peoples agency and power to resist even within systems of domination.

Finally, anti-colonial discourse is a discursive framework, a dialogue. It is a process rather than an arrival. This is especially apparent as I struggle to attenuate my position in this chapter; I am acutely aware of how little I know about what I am doing and I echo Hanohano (1999) in stating, "[I am] begging your compassion as I stumble on – for I don't know anything" (p. 210). As Dei (2000) argues, learning is not always about acquiring new knowledge but working with the power

of not knowing, of revealing the knowledge that has always been within you but obscured; hopefully this chapter works towards bringing this type of personal and public revelation. Spirituality and the anti-colonial framework are also closely tied to humility and I approach this project with the highest level of regard for those who have ‘gone before’ and have struggled with the topic before me, as well as holding the humble hope that I can add to the discussion.

This anti-colonial framework is particularly important to this chapter, not only in its focus on epistemologies of the colonized but also in its understanding of how all aspects of knowledge, from literature to politics to spirituality, come together to create social understanding (Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001). An anti-colonial framework recognizes the power in struggle and resistance, as well as in celebrating the spiritual aspects of life through art, literature and oral traditions, as a way to move beyond a preoccupation with victimization as well as a way to incorporate the language of hope. Finally, it recognizes the power of the ‘indigenous’ in creating and sustaining resistance to dominant forms, recognizing the power of working with fluid and ever adapting definitions and realities.

#### DEFINING SPIRITUALITY

##### *Defining Spirituality through Individualism*

Equally important to this project is how we are to define spirituality. Prior to the last century, Western spirituality was not conceived of outside of religion, originating out of Christian tradition and scriptures, specifically from the idea of the Holy Spirit (Schneiders, 2003). Even today, the issue of how to conceptualize or define spirituality as a distinct concept apart from religious frameworks seems to be primarily based in ‘first-world’, Western locations. What has caused this shift towards conceiving of spirituality outside of religion? In line with Schneiders’ (2003) argument, I argue that spirituality has been separated from religion as a response to perceived problems with religion; its exclusivity, its rigid ideology, and clerical systems are all at odds with a (post)modern society’s image of self and society. Yet, despite this perceived failure of religion, within the self there is a desire to find a meaningful life path which consequently leads to a desire to continue the search for meaning outside of the frameworks of religion. This extraction of spirituality from religion has been aided by society’s move to what was considered rational, secular, and scientific thought, as well as a move towards the explicit separation of church and state – a separation of private matters from the public sphere. In rejecting everything religion had to offer, the locus of Western spirituality moved from the congregational to the individual, from the public realm to the private realm. This conceptualization of spirituality drew heavily from spiritual traditions in other parts of the world, appropriating what was useful in a sort of religious consumerism (York, 2001). What was taken was divorced from its contexts and used to confirm Western desires. These forms of spirituality were transplanted into Western society as exotic and different, being positioned as a counter-discourse to the hegemonic influence of religion, as an alternative way of

reaching personal fulfillment. Spirituality could be the positive force to counter the ills of religion.

This polarization of spirituality and religion is evident in society as a whole and, as a microcosm, in schooling and the academy. There has been an explicit dichotomization that posits spirituality as acceptable, personal, liberating, and as a mature entity while religion is demonized as institutional, constraining and childish (Johnson, Kristeller, and Sheets, 2004). Spirituality was born as a counter-discourse or resistance to the hegemonic, restrictive reigns of religion but, in the process, it created its own regimes of truth, its own definitions, and its own dominant discourse (Foucault, 1978; Estanek, 2006) which not only appropriated indigenous traditions into a 'spiritual stew' but, in defining itself through individualism, silenced the voices of communities and other collective groups. Any notion of collective spirituality was silenced through a discourse of individualism.

The emergence of spirituality as its own discourse has provoked a large body of work that has struggled to define exactly what spirituality is: as Palmer (2003) states, "Spirituality is an elusive word with a variety of definitions – some compelling, some witty, some downright dangerous" (p. 377). Most definitions are understandably broad and abstract as they try to accommodate all varieties of spirituality, attempting to negotiate the connections between religion and spirituality and yet facilitate a divergence. The common thread in these attempts is a focus on the individual as a locus for 'authentic' spirituality. By placing the locus of spirituality in the individual there is room to accommodate a multiplicity of spiritualities, little need to come up with a clear definition of what spirituality entails, and also a clear delineation from the congregationalism of religion. Bennett (2003) states that spirituality is the organizing story or force of one's life, Hindman (2002) takes the approach that spirituality is who we really are inside, which agrees with Chittister (1990) who argues that spirituality is what we are and how we act. These definitions emphasize the individual and are in line with many of the definitions emanating from recent research in spirituality (Rose, 2001; Love, Bock, Jannarone, and Richardson, 2005; Palmer, 2003). To find an 'authentic' spirituality one must be able to discover the 'authentic' self – the approach and direction is inward. Personal spirituality is independent of other people and their spiritualities; the histories, forces and discourses at work around the individual; and independent of any realm outside of the core self. The primary concern is with moving inward.

This affirmation of individualism is in line with Western society's move toward secularization and liberalism. York (2001) defines secularization as a society-wide decline of interest in organized religious traditions. As spirituality is freed from the rules of religion it becomes a fluid and disparate entity. For Western society this has led to an upswing in spirituality, as seen in the New Age movement which views the individual alone as the "locus for selectivity and determination of belief" (York, 2001, p. 366). Secularization and spirituality are in this way tied together in promoting individualism in the model of Western liberalism. York (2001) goes on to argue that this Western New Age spiritualism is an outgrowth of Western capitalism (the 'religious consumer supermarket') and falls into the same traps as Western liberalism in denying difference through individualism in effort to further

hegemonic culture. It was this culture of consumerism and individualism that has led writers to explore spirituality as a cure or alternative in the first place, but instead of escaping the Western hegemonic discourse they are merely reproducing it within this new discourse of spirituality.

This self-dependence and individualism are not completely insular in that they ignore any type of relationship but, rather, in that they place all relationships as a secondary effect. It is only *after* a discovery of the authentic self that it is possible to look outward to relationships in other realms; spirituality is “how *I* live at the center of who *I* am. *I* live at a center with an image of who *I* am, how *I* am embodied and in touch with the concrete .... My spirituality is the way *I* live at *my* center ... [italics mine]” (Johnson, 1983, p. 252). This spirituality has self at the center of the formation and not until the self is uncovered can the individual understand their relationships with the world around them. Schneiders (2003) argues that this inward-outward thrust “implicitly defines spirituality as a private pursuit for personal gain, even if that gain is socially committed” (p. 177). To put it simply – spirituality as it is conceived here is limited by self; as Rendon (2000) states, “I can make a difference for others only if I make a difference for me” (p. 11). As a private gain it is reproducing Western liberalism, secularism, and capitalism within the discourse of spirituality.

The primacy of ‘me’ is connected to the search for an ‘authentic self’ or, as Robinson (2004) calls it a “solid me” (p. 108). As alluring as it is to think that there is something pure and discoverable within all of us, this argument ignores the always ongoing construction and fluidity of self. There seem to me to be three areas that need to be troubled in this search for the ‘authentic self’. First, the search for authenticity promotes a spiritual hierarchy of “more authentic” and “less authentic” which is inherently fragmentary and marginalizing rather than unitary. Those who have ‘attained’ a certain level of authenticity can claim priority in spiritual discussion and the voices of those who are ‘not spiritual enough’ are silenced. Second, in the search for what is pure and innocent within us, the multiplicity of forces and discourses that interact with us and through us are ignored, especially in the ways that they might shape our journey or even our “authentic self”. Third, in imagining such an authentic core, the self and spirituality are seen as static, unchanging, and contained when, as I will argue later, this is exactly the opposite of how we need to view spirituality. As our life experiences, perceptions, feelings, and understandings of spirituality change, are we moving away from our authentic spiritual core or is it rather a move towards spirituality as a connected, fluid, uncontained identity?

### *Defining Spirituality through Connectedness*

My intended goal with this chapter is not to negate the self but to remove it from the center of the grid. Spirituality needs to be viewed as a connected experience where the individual is one node in the web of existence or, perhaps to use an indigenous American image, merely one point in the Circle of Life. Spirituality cannot be summed up, as Tisdell and Tolliver (2006) state, as “an individual’s journey to wholeness” (p. 38). There has to be a recognition that everything is

connected, that each individual is connected to others in their communities, connected to the past and those who have gone before, connected to frameworks or entities larger than themselves, and connected to the future through their actions and relationships in the present. These relationships do not develop out of the self but are part and parcel of a reciprocal relationship with the individual; we cannot conceive of our spirituality without looking at relationships and how they mould us. Kinchloe (2006) states, “Knowledge production and the construction of selfhood cannot take place outside of this intricate web of relationships” (p. 188). It is not an inward movement that should be primary to spirituality but an opening of the self to accept and embrace the forces and relationships at work all around us. At the same time, this chapter is not trying to set up another dichotomy in self/other but is interested in viewing both as interlocked or interwoven with each other.

This sense of connectedness is vital to ideas of indigenous knowledges and spirituality and I argue, that in promoting this connectedness, this is one way that indigenous knowledges and spirituality can be used as a methodology of resistance in the academy. Mazama (2002) argues that a central tenant of indigenous spirituality is that everything in life and death (humans, plants, objects, ancestors, events) is imbued with a common essence that binds us all together. Hanohano (1999) states that every aspect of indigenous life is saturated with the spiritual and the purpose of life is simply to *be*. Dei (2002b) understands indigenous spirituality in terms of collective empowerment, the ability to relate to others without preconceived motives, and listening to the self and world rather than the “hegemony of me”. Dei (2002b) goes on to say that, “The individual develops a spirituality through the engagement of society, culture and nature interrelations” (p. 5) and that the individual only makes sense within the context of community (Dei, 1993). Kinchloe (2006) argues that “A human being simply can’t exist outside the inscription of community with its processes of relationship, differentiation, interaction, and subjectivity” (p. 192). In this light, spirituality is not a journey into the self to find an authentic core but rather an unveiling of the self to recognize the multiplicity of relationships that we interact with and that interact through us. It is a breaking down of the ‘hegemony of me’ and the rebuilding of the self through relationships.

Again, I feel the need to reiterate that indigenous spirituality does not seek to obscure or destroy the self but rather seeks to destroy the self/other dichotomy in which it is possible to conceive of the self as autonomous and separate from the larger collective (Dei, 2002b). I do not wish to set up the binary of dependence/independence but rather to look in a more nuanced way at what might be called mutual inter-dependence; a reciprocal spiritual relationship whereby, through relations we connect and shape others and, at the same time, are re-shaped and impacted by others. This is a fluid spirituality that progresses, grows, is aware and is constantly struggling to resist and break free from the relations that seek to control or dominate it. It resists the urge to place self at the center. In a mutual inter-dependence, the self cannot be negated or expunged but only exists in the context of connections.

## HOW ARE WE CONNECTED?

The connections that I am talking about in regards to spirituality can be focused broadly around four main categories: connections to communities, connections to history and the past, connections to larger frameworks, entities or mysteries, and connections to one's whole self. I purposefully use the plural form of connection to note the multiplicity of relations that can spring out of infinite lived realities and the multiplicity of connections that we all have in varying forms. These categories, upon closer interrogation, are neither clearly delineated nor definitive, each bleeds into the others and outside of these borders. Yet, by looking at these connections separately, hopefully it is of at least some heuristic value.

*Connections to People and Communities*

To be connected to the people around you means to be connected through shared language, shared location, shared experiences, shared culture, or shared environment. The idea of a shared language is central to ideas of spirituality as language is more than simple communication and the imposition of foreign languages have been used to divorce people from communities, culture and spiritual connections. Chrisjohn, Young and Maraun (1997) argue that it is through language that peoples "come to know, represent, name, and act upon the world" (p. 338). Almeida (1998) sees language as the thread between generations through the knowledge passed down by the elders. The imposition of foreign languages has divorced people from their connections and given them a new, colonial framework to work within (Wane, 2008). In terms of spiritual connections, Simpson (2004) argues that by translating traditional narratives into colonial languages, knowledge and people are separated from the spirituality, its source and meaning. Language is the thread that connects spirituality to everyday lived realities.

The indigenous concept of embodied, active learning is critical to this connection as well, as people interact in physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual ways with one another – often all at the same time. This is evidenced in the daily interactions of people in communities through actions such as healing rituals that are themselves imbued with meaning, knowledges, and spiritual connections (Wane, 2008). These connections are not always explicit as they might be in a healing ceremony and often don't need to be as the fluidity of meaning is implicitly recognized by the community. It is the community, through its practical realities, rituals and ceremonies that direct and illuminate the pathways into the inner self and into a greater understanding of mystery and sacred knowing (Ermine, 1995). Spirituality in this sense cannot be extracted from the lived realities of the people and communities; Portman and Garret (2006) describe how in many indigenous languages there is not even a word for spirituality or religion as something separable from existence. It is these lived realities of communities that impact and shape who we are as spiritual beings.

In the spiritual connection to communities there is also a spiritual interaction and connection to place and environments. Almeida (1998) argues that it is the land that is the physical core that connects communities and if it is lost, so too are

the languages, knowledges, and spiritualities. Hanohano (1999) describes how specific locations or sites are imbued with spiritual essence and power; Dei's (1992) study views land as the bridge between the living and the dead for indigenous cultures; Dei (2002a) describes how land transcends into the metaphysical realm through the giving of life, sustenance, and spiritual strength; Holmes (2000) states that the Earth is the voice and humans the listeners, Ilmi (2010) explains how land can be sacred and spiritually cleansing; and Portman and Garret (2006) look at how a harmonious relationship with nature is essential for being a whole spiritual self. This connection to the land resists Western scientific discourses that conceptualize the land and people as separate entities, choosing instead to see humans as one link in the vast chain of nature, intimately connected to earth, sky, water, animals, and plants (Wangoola, 2000). The land is much like family and evokes a language of love that resists Western discourses that are tied to the land, discourses of economy and exploitation (McIsaac, 2000). Not only this, but it resists universalizing and reductionist Western scientific discourses that seek to divide, measure, and control the earth, in the process not only fragmenting the earth into various 'extractable resources' but also fragmenting knowledge and space (Ermine, 1995; Purcell, 1998).

The intention here is not to ignore some of the inherent problems in theorizing community as a singular, homogenous entity. Daniels (2009) argues convincingly how community has been constructed as a male dominated space through memory and 'his-story', ignoring and omitting the contributions and voices of women. This gendering of memory is a result of the colonial frameworks that created the public space and, consequently, the history created in them, as a male space (Oyewumi, 1997). Also, Gujit and Shah (1999) show how the term 'community' has been used as a 'Trojan horse' by the western development agenda to cloak and validate Western development aims, all the while ignoring the complexities and diversity that are inherent in any community. Not only this but to view community as a static, enclosed entity only enforces the insider/outsider binary, making the community a type of elitist club whose members hold the key to an essentialized 'community' knowledge. The community is fluid and often disparate as people move in and out and choose to play greater or lesser roles. To envision boundaries of a community, especially in today's globalized space where communities and connections can span the globe, is an impossible task. Fluidity and difference is often seen as disruptive and threatening, silenced in the name of cooperation but, as Dei (2005) argues, we need to recognize that there is strength in the diversity of communities. This is not to advocate for the opposite extreme of complete fragmentation and attenuation of differences but to advocate for the explicit recognition of communities as open, diverse spaces in need of meaningful ways of understanding the complex structures of relationships.

### *Connections to History and the Past*

Gearon (2001) clearly articulates that spirituality cannot be seen in ahistorical terms. Two key elements of this connection in regards to indigenous spirituality

are: connection to the elders who are the “repositories of knowledge from time immemorial” (Hanohano, 1999), as well as connection to the ancestors that have gone before. This connection to history is an important one as it actively participates in the decolonizing project. Fanon (1963) examines how colonization sought to distort and misrepresent the past, divorcing people from their histories. Linda Smith (1999) argues that a vital part of the decolonization process is “about recovering our own stories of the past” (p. 39). This spiritual connection to the past through elders and ancestors is a reconnection to, or reclamation of, hidden histories and obscured memories. I am not trying to position a sort of authentic or romanticized ‘past’ that is the basis for validity but positioning the role of history along the lines of Lattas (1993) when he states that, the past needs to be recreated and viewed “as a way of formulating an uncolonized space to inhabit” (p. 254).

Longwood, Muesse and Schipper (2004) recognize the use of older mentors in spiritual or religious development but the indigenous connection to elders is based on more than a student/mentor relationship. Holmes (2000) looks at how land was given voice through the elders, blood memory was kept alive, and heart knowledge was expressed; all of these coming together to form an *ancestry of experience*. It is this lived experience of those who have gone before which shapes our spiritual self, as Holmes (2000) explains: it is through the elders that knowledge lodges in the heart. Hanohano (1999) calls the elders repositories of knowledge from time immemorial, Kirkness (2002) speaks of giving voice to the ancestors through the knowledge of the elders, and Garrett (1996) sees elders as parent, teacher, community leader, and spiritual guide. The elders then are important mediators in spiritual connections and, subsequently, in knowledge production; as Holmes (2000) describes in regards to indigenous Hawaiian peoples, knowledge is a gift from a higher power which is then revealed and contextualized through relationships.

Not only is there a connection to the elders but to those in the community that have passed on. Dei (1993) and Mazama (2002) examine how indigenous African cultures view life and death as inherently linked and how the ancestors’ role in the community is to guide and protect the living. Mayuzumi (2006) looks at how connection to the ancestors through the Japanese tea ceremony is how Japanese women can connect with history and create and expand one’s spiritual space. Being able to connect to common ancestors is also critical in symbolizing the social unity of a community (Dei, 1993). This connection speaks to how the present cannot be theorized without another dimension; it is never as simple as what you can see. This connection is also vital in the resistance to Western ideas of time and boundaries; those who have passed on slip in and out of the present, the past experience actively informing the knowledge production of the present. Spirituality is not only mutually inter-dependent with events in the present but also with history as symbolized by the lived experiences of the elders and ancestors.

#### *Connections to Larger Frameworks, Entities or Mysteries*

Tisdell (2003), in part two of her seven part definition of spirituality, talks about connectedness to the “Life Force, God, higher power, higher self, cosmic energy,

Buddha nature, or Great Spirit” (p. 28) but, in the indigenous understanding, this connection goes deeper than simply recognizing a higher power. It is recognition that beyond the physical, knowable world is something larger than the conceptual ordering of community and individuals, a world too full to talk about. This connection highlights an awareness of an alternative framework that exists beyond the tangible and scientific. Portman and Garrett (2006) show how Native American peoples believe that all things are alive and have spiritual energy; everything has a connection to this alternative framework which exists in balance with the physical. This connection to higher mysteries speaks through silence, subverts traditional modes of verification, can be felt through intuition, dreams or visions, and is experiential. It is unquantifiable and ever-changing; the Great Mystery.

This connection is often understood and expressed through creative expression, through songs and chants, proverbs and storytelling, rituals and ceremonies, again pointing to the value of indigenous languages in these forms. Wane (2005) states that rituals take us beyond our social locations and positioning to allow us to interconnect at a higher level, as well as allowing us to move beyond the part of self that wants to restrict possibilities. Portman and Garrett (2006) explain that Native American traditional ceremonies are designed to keep the self in good relations with those around them and with a higher power. Oral forms of communication, such as singing, poetry and storytelling, communicate a connection to something higher, another dimension that is not easily explained in the words themselves and often the only way of expressing what is ‘unsayable’. The spiritual connection is emphasized through the personal connections and context of these oral events and narratives, as Lakota chief Harold Dean Salway said, “You have a tendency to lose some of the spirituality when it’s down in black and white” (qtd. in Barringer, 1991, p. 1).

This connection exists outside the realms of Western scientific discourses and resists their ordering of the world through the traditional senses, adding a spiritual sense. It also resists how history and knowledges are viewed, in that they are not embedded in the text (the story, the song, the poem) but enacted upon through the telling or the performance, they are both engaged in and derived from social activity (Cohen, 1989). In the indigenous context, knowledge of the higher realm is revealed through performance which acts as a bridge between the physical and the spiritual dimensions. Not only this but rituals and storytelling explore the intricacies of the community in ways that cannot be done otherwise, exploring the interplay between personal and collective, the intertwining of spiritual and physical, and the mixture of mythology and history. This spiritual connection to a higher realm is always an exploration, always a process rather than an arrival, and always shrouded in mystery; still, through its very denial of definable boundaries it plays a role in resistance. Ward (1990) states, oral narratives and its listeners do not “seek to construct from the text a unified meaning; rather [they are] attentive to the text’s refusal to mean” (pp. 88-89).

*Connections to One's Whole Self*

Spirituality is not a separate entity that can be extracted and examined separately from the other aspects of life, it weaves its way through every aspect, from the day-to-day physical actions (Graveline, 1998), to sexuality (Love, Bock, & Richardson, 2005), to how we think (Shahjahan, 2006). Our spirituality is shaped through the influences that are placed on our emotions, our bodies and our mind; they cannot be separated. This is the recognition that everything we do is tied to our spirituality, that every breath we take is at one moment both physical and spiritual, both mental and emotional. Spirituality cannot be cocooned away and divided from other aspects of life, it is in everything we do and everything we are. This connection is aptly conceived in the idea of the First Nations sacred circle which typically represents seven directions of which one is the center or the core (Portman & Garrett, 2004; Cajete, 1994). It is through the integration of the core with the other directions (east, south, west, north, upper/Sky, lower/Earth) that spiritual harmony and balance are achieved.

This is the place for individual agency within the community, for self-empowerment within the web of relationships. As Malidoma Somé (1994) argues, "Each one of us possesses a center ... The center is both within and without. It is everywhere" (p. 199). A communal spirituality is not the negation of the self to the capricious whims of the community or a higher power but an exploration of self through the lens of relationship and connection to communities and higher powers. These connections provide a way to place the self physically, historically and spiritually. As iterated before, these connections cannot be neatly examined or categorized as they intermingle and affect one another. The connections are not static over time or space; they are constantly changing as we live our own realities and others live their realities beside us. There is no strict delineation of self and community, they converge and diverge at specific moments, never escaping each other. This is part of the beauty of spirituality.

## DISCUSSION: SPIRITUALITY AS RESISTANCE

The previous sections have explored how ideas of a connected indigenous spirituality are in opposition to the hegemonic, individualistic discourses of spirituality. Putting this in discussion with an anti-colonial framework necessarily entails envisioning spirituality as resistance. Each previous section has briefly touched on how indigenous spirituality and its connections can be used as resistance but a concerted effort must now be made to explore exactly what this means.

Both Said (1993) and Fanon (1963) argue that colonial discourses never "give anything away out of goodwill" (Said, 1963, p. 207). Said goes on to argue that the colonial must be forced to yield its control through political, cultural and physical battle, to which I would add as an aspect of cultural struggle: the spiritual struggle. In regards to indigenous spirituality, Graveline (1998) argues that "inter-connectedness is a necessary resistance strategy" (p. 46). The power of a collective indigenous spirituality needs to be brought to bear in resistance against dominant,

imperialistic discourses which seek to posit their knowledge as the only valid form. Dei and Doyle-Wood (2006) see indigenous spirituality as an active and “revolutionary spirituality” that is vital to the anti-colonial project. Spirituality is not resistance simply as a defensive stance to hegemonic Western discourses but it is also constructive, giving ways and spaces to explore power/knowledge relationships through connections and working towards restoring the language of hope. I do not seek to put forward a romanticized notion of resistance and struggle for the sake of struggle; it is not a grand movement or popular uprising but a collection of everyday choices that cumulatively and incrementally build for social change. I also am aware of Foucault’s (1978) assertion that resistance is never external to power and that there needs to be nuanced understandings of how resistance works in relation to structures of power.

Weedon (1987) posits that everything we do is either in compliance or resistance to dominant discourses and, consequently, how we perceive spirituality is an important form of resistance. Through connectedness we resist the Western liberal discourse of individualism that posits science and Western rationality as primary. In choosing an indigenous spirituality of connectedness, we are creating space for multiple ways of knowing, for a renewed understanding of the common relationships that we share, and opportunities to interrogate why we see the world as we do. Dei (2002b) states that spiritual knowledge “simultaneously upholds ‘objectivity’ to the subjective experience and similarly some ‘subjectivity’ to the objective reality” (p. 7). It breaks down binaries and begs for more nuanced and multi-faceted approaches to reality. Gearon (2001) clearly states, “A spirituality of dissent resists easy assimilation into the systems of cultural representation ... and always presents a challenge to the systems which control such representations” (p. 296).

#### RESISTANCE WITHIN THE CLASSROOM

How can a spirituality of resistance be brought into a setting such as the academic classroom where knowledge is closely controlled and validated through dominant Western discourses? How can a spirituality that is rooted in activity and experience make the transition to the classroom where learning is normally passive? Finally, how can a spirituality that is connected to a wide range of forces move to the Academy where knowledge is divorced from its connections and where knowledge is commodified and individualized? These are the questions that arise when resistance happens both ‘within and against’ dominant discourse and institutions such as the Western academy.

Indigenous knowledges and spiritualities resist being labelled, reified and corralled into a curriculum. The goal is not to learn *about* indigenous spiritualities but to learn *through* them, to use them, and to embody them. Dei (2000) states, “indigenous knowledges do not ‘sit in pristine fashion’ outside of the effects of other knowledges” (p. 111); they are meant to be used as methodology rather than be subject-ed to a book, lesson plan or discipline. The separation of spirituality from practical application, schooling and other forms of knowledge only furthers

the problematic beliefs that spirituality can be sequestered or ignored as part of the whole person. Through methods of indigenous spirituality, community and connections can be encouraged and fostered, collaborative forms of knowledge can be affirmed, space can be created for individuals to feel connected, and a greater understanding of how spirituality can exist outside of the private sphere can be built.

By talking about integrating indigenous spirituality in the classroom there is the recognition that this resistance is still within the dominant discourses and systems of education and is, in this way, limiting (Foucault, 1978). This has been a popular topic among anti-colonial and anti-oppression scholars, can the ‘master’s tools’ dismantle the ‘master’s house’? Anti-colonial writers such as Fanon (1963) have recognized the implications of setting up colonized/colonizer binaries that ignore the complexities within them and to separate spirituality and indigenous knowledges from the academy does the same. Dei (2000) calls the academy one of the most important starting places for decolonization work, a place to lodge a sustained critique of Western domination. I agree that to create spirituality and indigenous knowledges as outside of the academy only serves to create rather than dismantle binaries, yet this does not mean accepting the system as flawless; as Dei (2000) poignantly puts it, it is not about “opening the ‘club’ to new members, but rather, examining the whole idea/structure of the club” (p. 119). It involves looking for ways to create a framework where knowledge can be created collaboratively, multiple groups and individuals centered, and mutual inter-dependence affirmed.

I will put forward three ways in which I believe indigenous spirituality can be mobilized and affirmed in a classroom setting to resist dominant classroom norms, whether it be at the primary schooling level, secondary schooling or in institutes of higher education.

### *Recognizing and Affirming Difference*

Connected spirituality is not a homogenizing, essentializing, Western liberal ‘multicultural’ project and its goal is not to integrate spiritualities or philosophies to create a “world-culture” (Nakagawa, 2000) nor to posit a sort of spiritual universalism (Beck, 1999). It resists a Eurocentric dominance that masquerades as unity or tolerance of diversity; the kind of token multiculturalism that Rushdie (1992) calls “teaching kids a few bongo rhythms” (p. 137). In a connected spirituality, instead of being ignored, hidden, essentialized, romanticised or reduced to stereotypes, difference is valued and appreciated. Dei (2002) states that it is the teacher’s role to “candidly explore all the emerging contestations, contradictions and ambiguities in peoples’ lives” (p. 7). The multiplicity of identities in a classroom cannot be ignored because the student’s lived experiences and their spiritual journey affect how they will create knowledge in the classroom. The power of difference needs to be embraced and explored.

Students can be challenged to interrogate how their identity is formed by relationships, how they are spiritually connected to a wide range of relationships, and how these concepts affect how they perceive and learn. Not only must we openly accept the interrogation of identity but, as educators, we must illuminate the

connections and relationships that ground the learner to the larger historical, political, and spiritual contexts (Dei, 2002). This interrogation needs to go beyond superficial difference, that is often currently paraded, and towards examining individual particularities. This is not to promote a fragmentation around individualism or to succumb to relativism but to understand that individualism can be explored within the context of connectedness and community. It is through relationships that individuals are shaped and formed; we need to learn how to explore these relationships in new ways that go beyond what we have done to this point.

### *Affirming Collaborative Learning*

Collaborative learning begins when the teacher/student dichotomy is broken down in a positive way that allows for everyone to contribute their lived experiences to the process of knowledge building, regardless of position or credentials. It recognizes that each student brings their unique spirituality to the classroom and recognizes the dynamic and fluid qualities of knowledge production. In recognizing student's individual spirituality, the classroom becomes a space to learn about individual stories and daily resistances, showing us the complexities of daily changing power structures (Abu-Lughod, 1990). The classroom is deconstructed as a space of abstraction, objectivity and rationality, as something removed from the messy realities of domination. This begins with self-investigation on the part of the teacher or educator. Dei (2000) calls the decolonization project one of self-implication and Howard (2006) emphasizes the importance for educators of voicing one's story of implication in colonial processes; decolonization begins with decolonization of the self, which as Wane (2006) describes, is much more of a process than an isolated event. Educators need to reflect on their own connections to colonialism and resistance and to place themselves within the webs of relationships and spirituality.

This collaborative process can even extend beyond the walls of the classroom to include the community in the process of knowledge production, demonstrating again that knowledge is not contained within the academy or controlled by a certain group; as Dei (2002) states, collaborative processes "present communities as active, spiritual subjects, resisters and creators" (p. 8). This does not imply the need for "service learning" models, as McNally (2004) suggests, that thrust students into communities without examining the power dynamics. Projects such as these only posit communities as something to observe or to use as a step on the journey to personal fulfillment instead of recognizing the value of the knowledge that they have to offer or viewing them as co-creators and an integral part of knowledge production. Indigenous learning and spiritualities are embodied and active, they do not sit pristinely in the classroom nor flow in the unidirectional teacher to student flow – they are alive and multi-directional. Collaborative learning illustrates this to students and deconstructs the power of the teacher as a holder and dispenser of knowledge.

In this process of deconstructing the learned/learner dichotomy, collaborative learning also becomes a process where questions become as important as answers. There is recognition that there can be multiple answers to a single question, multiple questions to be asked, multiple ways of asking the same question and the definitive answer to these questions does not always come from those in positions of power. Again, this is not a relativist approach but one that opens the doors for students to see possibilities and gives them a chance to find value for themselves. In affirming the connected aspect of spirituality and learning, questions can be the door to allowing students to explore how these connections affect and shape who they are as spiritual beings.

### *Creating a Space of Openness and Belonging*

Spirituality cannot simply be introduced to a classroom as a subject or something to be learned from a book. Groen (2008) notes that classes on spirituality are increasingly being offered in professional faculties such as nursing, business or education but spirituality needs space to be active beyond a specific curriculum, a space to allow for an embodied learning experience. One way to do this is to create what Kessler (1999) calls “an authentic community”, a space of openness where students feel comfortable exploring their relationships and connections. It is also a space that allows for different experiences and is open to new possibilities in exploring spirituality, such as through play, creative learning such as art or drama, story sharing, or even silence. Dei (2005) calls for schooling that allows an open space for each student to be able to connect with their past, their present environment, their history, and to which I add, their spirituality and possibilities. Spirituality cannot be forced into a curriculum or onto students, spiritual experiences cannot be manufactured through certain techniques or exercises, and awareness of connections cannot simply be shown. What educators who are interested in bringing spirituality into classroom spaces can do is provide possibilities and spaces which are safe for students to explore for themselves.

In creating such a space, spiritual characteristics such as compassion, respect, and contemplation can be encouraged and explored in the context of connection. Instead of presenting learning as a competitive, individual pursuit leading to personal gain, education needs to be viewed as an endeavor to uncover and understand our connections, to understand how they shape who we are, and how we can create resistance through connectedness. As hooks (2003) argues, “conventional education teaches us that disconnection is organic to being” (p. 180). A connected spirituality ruptures the conventional. Spirituality creates community and shared experiences through humility, empowerment and dialogue, opening up a space for learners to belong to knowledge production.

### *Creating Space for Active, Embodied Learning*

As Cajete (1994) argues, students are often ‘refitted’ to the system that caused the problem in the first place rather than looking at refitting the system to the students. In integrating spirituality into the education system, spaces need to be created for

active, embodied learning which will challenge the system in place and allow space for each student to ‘fit’ in their own way. Cajete (1994) looks at an indigenous centered curriculum “Creative Process: The Centering Place,” that takes students out of the traditional classroom and engages them with nature, history, philosophy, community, mythology, and the whole self in ways that make the knowledge active and alive. The students interact within the community and within nature in ways that allow them to explore spiritual connections. Thinking of an active, embodied spiritual learning will sometimes entail thinking outside of the box of the educational system, of the classroom, and the assigned curriculum in an effort to provide an inclusive education that centers each student and allows them to explore their spiritual and whole selves.

Within the classroom, games can bring students together and help them grow connections, art can help them encounter processes steeped in meaning and mystery, and having students bring in objects that have spiritual meaning for them to discuss with the class can be positive ways of promoting a connected spirituality through embodied learning (Kessler, 1999). Stories and songs, both the process of creating them and performing them, can help to convey the connections between the spiritual and the physical. Collaborative projects of creation can show how individuals work within the frameworks of community. These activities should not be confined to ‘fine arts’ or ‘drama’ but can inform dialogue across the disciplines; as David Hanlon (2003) argues, “History it seems to me can be sung, danced, chanted, spoken, carved, woven, painted, sculpted and rapped as well as written ...” (p. 30). Wane (2006) describes a group activity that she does with her class that involves collaboration and tangible examples of how colonial violence severed and distorted tradition knowledges and realities. Cajete (1994) describes a process where art, biology and mythology are brought together to allow students to explore their connections to Mother Earth and the interplay of the elements through painting, sculpting, journal writing, storying and other art forms. Active spiritual learning cuts across the disciplines and refuses to be subject-ed.

## CONCLUSION

The spiritual resurgence that we are seeing in the academy is important in being able to produce an education system that allows for the participation of the whole self but without the proper emphasis placed on connectedness this spirituality loses its power of resistance and reproduces dominant Western liberal discourses of individualism. Not only are we connected to individuals around us but we are connected to history through those who have gone before, connected to larger frameworks beyond what we can empirically prove, and connected to our whole self. The beauty of bringing spirituality into the classroom is that there is no formula or set method but an infinite amount of possibilities that are dependent on the connections of the individuals within the class. There is no amount of reading or learning on the topic of spirituality that can ensure students will emerge with a greater understanding of their spiritual connections; when spirituality is used as a

methodology what can be given to students is a space and the tools to use, if they so choose.

Bringing a connected spirituality into the classroom is never simple as it necessarily interacts with the messy world of reality; as Battiste (2000) states, “Indigenous knowledge is the way of living within contexts of flux, paradox, and tension, respecting the pull of dualism and reconciling opposing forces” (p. 42). Spirituality is not intended to be separated from reality or to sit in “pristine fashion” outside of other forms of knowing, it is meant to be used and to be constantly created and re-created in context of each individual’s connections with each other (Dei, 2000). ‘Working definitions’ and fluid boundaries become vital as spiritualities interact and constantly create and re-create knowledges. It is in the understanding of our mutual inter-dependence and our enactment of it that resistance gains power.

A spirituality of resistance also moves away from the language of victimization and negative criticism towards something constructive and creative; as Wane (2008) recognizes, “It is imperative that I stop spending my time critiquing the totalizing forms of western historicism and engage in the discourse of possibility, where the missing voices and knowledges can be heard and validated” (p. 194). If resistance is to be meaningful and sustainable it needs to stop constantly responding to criticisms and critiques and to engage in positive ways with other voices who seek constructive resistance, strengthening and building up alternative systems of education, ways of viewing spirituality, and ways of knowing. This involves sometime being quiet and listening to the multiplicity of voices and experiences in each classroom. This approach is not asking educators to don the proverbial rose-colored lens but to work toward empowerment through positive construction, moving towards hope, and embracing possibility.

This chapter presents no definitive answers or strategies but, hopefully, rather connections and possibilities to be explored further by teachers, administrators, and educators. A connected spirituality encourages the spirit of exploration as we seek to uncover the relationships that shape who we are and how we can positively work within these relationships, resisting those that seek to dominate and encouraging those that seek to promote peace and openness. The classroom is a vital space in working toward spiritual understanding and in giving individuals a place to safely explore the many connections that they bring to the community. We need to embrace the complexity of these connections and struggle to create safe spaces for exploring these complexities; this is the journey of a connected spirituality.

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