

Spirituality in Education: Professorial Viewpoints

by

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## Abstract

There has been a dramatic rise in interest in spirituality over the last decade. Historically, universities began with a spiritual base. Today, superficially, education generally appears to have lost its spiritual emphasis. The purpose of this study is to describe spirituality in Canadian post-secondary education by investigating the work experiences of 6 professors across 5 different faculties at one university in Ontario. The intent is to determine the extent of spirituality in these professors' teaching and to find out how the professors defined spirituality, and what their viewpoints were with regard to the barriers and supports to spirituality in education.

This study utilized a mainly phenomenological approach to investigate spirituality in education. Six participants were chosen and interviewed through a snowball sampling technique. All of them are male university professors between the ages of 31 and 60 who come from three religious backgrounds.

Generally following guidelines from Bogdan and Biklen (2003), four themes emerged from the analysis of the interview data: (a) subjects' definitions of spirituality, (b) their perceptions of barriers and supports, (c) benefits, and (d) application. Through an exploration of the work experience of spirituality in education, the lived experiences of the researcher and her participants were described in order to answer the research questions.

The findings from this study could provide educators with first hand accounts of how spirituality has been incorporated into the classroom environment within one Canadian university which could be used as an example to gauge the current situation of spirituality education in post-secondary institutions. This study also has the potential to raise awareness regarding the lack of spirituality in education, and will

add to the body of knowledge on spirituality in education, which in turn could motivate others to investigate the topic further.

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## CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

### Introduction

There has been a dramatic rise in interest in spirituality over the last decade (Briskin, 1996; *Spirituality in America, 2005*). Particularly, this interest has gained a high profile (Astin, 2004; Capper, Keyes, & Theoharis, 2000; Deck, 2005; Dei et al., 2000a; Dei et al., 2000b; Doetzel, 2001; Fullan, 2003; Hang, 2003; Keen, 2002; Laurence, 1999; Lusted, 1986; Marshall, 1998; Miller, 2003; Palmer, 1999; Purpel, 1988; Tacey, Thom, Ma, & Ho, 2005; 2000; Wolf, 1996). Many of these researchers argue that the resurgent interest in spirituality is a call and an effort to “return to our roots” or our “inner selves”; a response to “the age of materialism”, where people are engaged in a pursuit of material pleasures” (Doetzel, 2001; Hang, 2003; Marshall, 1998; Miller, 2003; Palmer, 1999; Tacey, 2000). According to Miller (2000), “a mechanized approach to living has contributed to the loss of soul. We have adopted a machine-like approach to living, and the ‘bottom line’ dominates our lives” (p. 1).

In this study, I focus on spirituality in post-secondary education. Historically, universities began with a spiritual base (Corry, 1969; Harris, 1962; Pulliam, 1987, Thom, 1993). The original statement given by the trustees of Harvard College, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA shortly after its founding in 1636 is as follows:

Let every student be plainly instructed, and earnestly pressed to consider well [that the] main end of his life and studies is to know God and Jesus Christ...and therefore to lay Christ in the bottom, as the only foundation of all sound knowledge and learning. (Boice, 1978, p. 9)

Four hundred years later, to many spirituality in post-secondary education generally appears to have largely disappeared. Yet, significant studies (Bloom, 1987;

Wilshire, 1990) have been supported that it is the traditional values of religion/spirituality that indeed make a university recognizable. These studies have been undertaken in an attempt to understand the decline of these values, and to argue for a continuing need for spirituality in higher education. McCabe and Martin (2005) and Giguère (2003) stated that spiritual development is a life-long journey which usually begins within one's family, and perhaps this spirituality begins to wane through elementary and secondary school experience (e.g., through peer pressure and the influence of society in general).

In exploring the connection between spirituality and higher education, Astin (2004) suggests the importance of the development of the interior lives of the students. "If we look at how our students' values have been changing during recent decades... the bad news is that they are much more focused on making a lot of money, and much less likely to concern themselves with 'developing a meaningful philosophy of life' (p. 2). Astin (2004) further argues:

Today 'being very well off financially' is the top value of students, while developing a meaningful philosophy of life has dropped way down on the list. In short, a focus on the spiritual interior has been replaced by a focus on the material exterior. (p. 2)

Similarly, Garber (1996) claims that "the years between adolescence and adulthood are crucial, moral meaning is being formed and central to the formation is a vision of integrity which coherently connects belief to behaviour personally as well as publicly." Indeed, "true education is always about learning to connect knowing with doing, belief with behaviour (Garber, 1996, p. 43)." Garber further states that "college is a critical time when students search for meaning in life and examine their spiritual

beliefs and values. During this time, students are asking questions about meaning and morality, belief and behaviour (p. 43).” Thus, researching spiritual development of students at the post-secondary level is appropriate for understanding spirituality because it is a time when many people, including professors and students search for the meaning of life.

We constantly hear the mantra of how education must make a nation, any nation, globally competitive. But in most institutions today the primary focus is on what students do, such as whether they follow the rules and regulations, what scores they can get on their examinations, how well they perform on classroom exercises, and so on. Palmer (1999) asserts that “too often, we go to schools where learning is made so dull that, once we get out, we don’t want to learn again.” (in Doetzel, 2005, pp. 16-17) It seems as if spirituality is often viewed by the modern education system as unnecessary, irrelevant, and outside academic focus. As Miller (2000) concludes, “the schools’ main role is to produce consumers and producers. We rarely hear from a government official that education might help in the development of human beings and the human spirit” (p. 1).

Similarly, as Sardello (1992) writes:

Education instead has become an institution whose purpose in the modern world is not to make culture, not to serve the living cosmos, but to harness humankind to the dead forces of materialism. Education as we know it, from preschool through graduate school, damages the soul. (p. 50)

In addition, Astin (2004) points out that “it is possible to say that this shift in values is a reflection of apparent changes not just in the academy, but also in the larger society” (p. 2). Miller (2000) agrees that “the twentieth century has not been

good for the soul. Through horrendous wars, holocaust, violence, and environmental degradation, life itself seems to have lost its vital essence” (p. 1). Many other authors (Fullan, 1993; Postman, 1992; Ghosh & Ray, 1995) have expressed a dismay with the effects of the 20<sup>th</sup> century on spirituality. Regardless, it is not the purpose of this thesis to debate whether 17<sup>th</sup> century religio/spirituality was better for the soul than is religion’s spirituality today.

Many myths surround spirituality with respect to Aboriginal peoples. Yet, the consensus from the significant literature (Agbo, 2005) is that based on Aboriginal traditional belief, human beings comprise physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual elements. In an aboriginal educational tradition, the individual is viewed as a whole person with intellectual, spiritual, emotional and physical dimensions (Agbo, 2005), and each of these aspects must be addressed in the learning process. Researchers (Agbo, 2005; Laurence, 1999; Miller, 2003) have asserted that these elements are out of balance in a western, Eurocentric education system because it has only focused on the development of mental knowledge itself, while ignored the spiritual component.

In western countries, learning models similar to aboriginal’s have evolved, but they have been eclipsed by models of education that place primary emphasis on intellectual development, with this focus intensifying as the individual moves into higher levels of education. As Miller (2000) agrees, the system and the curriculum have failed educators and their students because they have failed to recognize or encourage spirituality in education. He notes, “It is possible to view outcomes-based education as another machine-like approach to education where the emphasis is on production and results rather than the process of learning” (p. 45).

Hang (2003) states:

Education has lost its way and function; as we pass down the knowledge to the students, we neglected their mental and psychological needs and aspirations.

The original intent of education is to teach students how to be a better human being. So spirituality is called for in education. (p. 45)

This study examines spirituality in Canadian post-secondary education by investigating the work experiences of six professors at one university in Ontario. This study attempts to determine the extent to which spirituality in education was evident in their teaching. The study unpacks notions of spirituality, offers alternative ways of introducing them into education, addresses the barriers and supports of spirituality-teaching presented by participants, and tackles the implications of spirituality education for a diverse and ever changing society.

Also in this study, “spiritual” is not directly equated with “religious” (or “theological”). Beck (2005) and Haynes (1999) claims that spirituality is different from religion. Marshall (1998) states that “today, it is almost ‘fashionable’ to say that one is spiritual but not religious” (p. 59). Hague (1995) argues, “Spirituality may find expression in religion; religion at its best will be deeply spiritual, but spirituality is quite distinct from organizational religion” (p. 13). Clearly, the two concepts, spirituality and religion, should not be confused. To clarify this distinction, Chapter 2 includes a more detailed discussion of the difference between spirituality and religion. Another point is that one does not need to be religious to have morals and ethics (Beck, 1986). One of this study’s participants comments “What makes spirituality appealing to many is that it appears to have no firm definition.” These definitions of spirituality reveal its complexity as well as its importance to the human spirit or soul.

In this study, I argue that to introduce spirituality into the multicultural environment of post-secondary education, the university instructor must be very conscious of their conceptualization of spirituality while being aware of its contrast to other university members' own interpretations or even disregard of spirituality and its dis/place in the university. Some notable education scholars (Bereiter, 1972; Britzman, 1998; Dewey, 1997; Dupuis, 1985; Eisner, 1994; Etzioni, 1996; Evans, 1998; Greene, 1995; Hodgkinson, 1991; Noddings, 2002; Sergiovanni, 1992; Villa & Thousand, 2000) have expressed very established, respected views and arguments concerning the moral and philosophical purposes of education, but in this study, "moral" and "spiritual" are not directly equated.

This study describes the application of spirituality in post-secondary educational contexts. As I have been a student for more than 20 years and have been a teacher for 5 years, I have experienced various education systems, curricula, and educators. I have witnessed a lack of spirituality in my education, and I believe that this lack is strongly connected to the dark part of today's world. Spirituality and education both have the power to genuinely transform a person by dramatically altering his or her life. I also believe that there are benefits in incorporating spirituality within the classroom environment which may reduce negative social influences (Dei et al., 2000b; Thoresen, 1999). I assume that a significant reason for ongoing social problems is a lack of spirituality in education and, by extension, in society as a whole.

Langehough (1997) concurs that "A religious and spiritual orientation has been said to act as a control against 'deviant' behaviour on adolescents and to increase one's ability to resist negative social influences. It has also been correlated with

recovery from alcohol and drug addiction and child sexual abuse” (p. 67-68). This is not to suggest that a lack of spirituality is the only reason that these problems exist, but only to argue that it could be a factor (Prentice, 1997). However, studies have shown that spirituality can influence a greater sense of community and connection to the world. I hope that the discussion in this study would encourage the post-secondary education system to consider incorporating the concept of spirituality in education.

#### Statement of the Problem

“Over the past few years, interest in spirituality has grown considerably” (Dei et al., 2000b, p. 67).” Certain literature has focused on a discussion of the need for spirituality in education to deal with society’s educational and social ills. Kowalski (2003) pointed out that there are factors creating needs and wants in mainstream education, such as individualism, materialism, drug abuse, crime and violence, global economy and so on. Perhaps spirituality in schools could have a positive effect on these educational and social ills. Dei et al. (2000) states that “studies have shown that spirituality can influence a greater sense of community and connection to the world” (p. 69).

The purpose of this study is to describe spirituality in Canadian post-secondary education by investigating the work experiences of 6 professors across 5 different faculties at one university in Ontario. The intent was to determine the extent of spirituality in these professors’ teaching, to find out how the professors defined their spirituality, and what their viewpoints were with regard to the barriers and supports to integrating spirituality in education.

As a result of increased public attention on spirituality education, a great deal of work has been done in this field (Deck, 2005; Dei et al., 2000a; Dei et al., 2000b;

Doetzel, 2001; Fullan, 2003; Hang, 2003; Keen, 2002; Laurence, 1999; Lusted, 1986; Marshall, 1998; Miller, 2003; Palmer, 1999). “The very purpose of education is surely to ‘mould’ growing minds into a maturity of thinking that complements the preservation and evolution of society” (Martin, 2006, April 4). Capeheart-Mentingall (2005) states that “the challenge for colleges and universities is thus to educate students holistically. This requires providing programs and activities that emphasize social, physical, intellectual, career, psychological, cultural, and spiritual development. One of the most sensitive and potentially controversial of this is spiritual development,” (p. 31). However, “the application of science outside of the mould of spiritual direction and social conscience has the oft-cited potential to undermine the quality of human life (Martin, 2006, April 4).”

Laurence (1999) appeals that “the world presents us now: challenges to our teaching, to our learning, to our leading, to our lives” (p. 13). However, most studies have only addressed the importance of spirituality, the importance of spirituality in education, and the lack of spirituality in both society and education. There is an apparent lack of studies which focus on the application of spirituality in education or asked the question whether there is a place for spiritual perspectives within post-secondary education.

To rectify this gap in the literature, I interviewed a sample of six university professors to determine if, and to what practical extent, they have implemented or applied spirituality in their teaching, or if it remains merely an abstract notion to them in the content of their university work. This study was not an investigation into these professors’ individual teaching approaches. Rather, it was a phenomenological



investigation of their personal definitions of spirituality and their experiences of attempting to incorporate spirituality into their classroom teaching.

#### Significance of the Study

Even though there is an increased interest in spirituality in education, many studies assert that there is not enough attention given to it in post-secondary education (Astin, 2004; Beck, 2005; Bloom, 1987; Fullan, 2002; Palmer, 2000; Tarcher, 1999). All of these studies emphasize the fact that there is a lack of spirituality in post-secondary education, and also suggest that it is time to start changing that inaction. The researchers also state that their renewed interest in the topic may have been sparked by the abundance of informal opinions expressed in the media and in general social conversation such as the following: (a) Spirituality, which is difficult to define, has sometimes been confused with religion; (b) it is often prohibited as a topic of discussion in many of the public education systems in North America, although it can be found as a component within the Catholic school system in Ontario; and (c) many individuals in consumer-oriented societies perceive spirituality as the purview of eccentrics and fanatics.

This study raises awareness regarding the lack of spirituality in education. The study adds to the body of knowledge on spirituality in education, which in turn could motivate others to investigate the topic further. The findings from this study might be instructive to higher education policy makers if they decide to formalize educational policy in curriculum concerning spirituality (Kerr, 1984). It could provide post-secondary educators with a first hand account of how spirituality is incorporated into the classroom environment within one Canadian university and it could be used as an

example to gauge the current situation of spirituality education in post-secondary institutions.

### Definition of Spirituality

For the purpose of this study, the researcher used the definition of spirituality offered by the Members of the Summit on Spirituality (1995):

[Spirituality is] what moves us in our everyday lives. That it is the engine that fires our search for knowledge, love, meaning, hope and transcendence. That it is the wellspring of human emotion. It is the cradle of compassion, wellness, wholeness and our sense of connection to the world around us. Also, that it is our creative centre, the basis for morality, and ultimately, that which allows us to grow as human beings. (p. 30)

Given that the definition of spirituality varies individually in light of culture, religion, beliefs, and ethnic background, the above definition was chosen arbitrarily. Further, before the study is complete, “soul” emerges as an equivalent term to spirituality (see p. 16).

### Research Questions

Although extensive research has addressed the importance of spirituality in post-secondary education (Astin, 2004; Capper, Keyes, & Theoharis, 2000; Deck, 2005; Dei et al., 2000a; Dei et al., 2000b; Doetzel, 2001; Fullan, 2003; Hang, 2003; Keen, 2002; Laurence, 1999; Lusted, 1986; Marshall, 1998; Miller, 2003; Palmer, 1999; Purpel, 1988; Tacey, Thom, Ma, & Ho, 2005; 2000; Wolf, 1996), particularly as it pertains to Canadian universities, few studies have discussed spirituality’s practical application in university teaching. Is there spirituality in contemporary post-secondary education? This is the main research question which guides this study. The

following questions concerning spirituality in education (adapted from Doetzel, 2004)

framed this research:

1. According to your lived experience in your university teaching, what do you think spirituality means?
2. Is there spirituality in your experience of working in contemporary post-secondary education? If so, to what degree is it present? Would you describe its presence in your work (teaching, researches and community service)?
3. What are the barriers and supports that you have experienced in manifesting your spirituality in your educational work at this university?

#### Limitations of the Study

I investigate spirituality in post-secondary education using a phenomenological methodology. “The fundamental model of this approach is textual reflection in the lived experiences and practical actions of everyday life with the intent to increase one’s thoughtfulness and practical resourcefulness or tact” (Van Manen, 1990). A phenomenological study would allow me to probe into the meaning of perceptions of the participants of spirituality education. Following are what I perceive as the limitations of this study due to phenomenology:

1. The participants are professors from one Canadian university, therefore, their responses have limited inference to Canadian universities in general. The responses may not reflect viewpoints of those of a larger regional target population or a more urban/metropolitan university in Canada.
2. All of the participants are male, since no female candidates’ names were suggested by other sample members who were asked to provide additional potential participants.

3. It was beyond the scope of this study to investigate this topic from any historical perspective. The focus was a phenomenological investigation into the lived experiences of 6 university professors, not a comparison or critique of eras, global conflicts, or education systems.

4. In this study, spirituality encompasses, rather than differentiates, several concepts such as morality, values, ethics, spirit, soul, emotion, passion, love, and positive social behaviour.

### Summary

The first chapter introduces the purpose and background of the study, explains the significance of the problem, and presents the research questions and limitations of the study. Extant literature is reviewed in chapter 2. The methodology is described in chapter 3, and the findings are described in chapter 4. A discussion of the findings, implications for change, recommendations for practice and research, and the concluding remarks are presented in chapter 5.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

To provide a context and background for this study of spirituality in post-secondary education, it is important to situate the study concisely within scholarly research on the topic. The researcher included diverse definitions of spirituality in Chapter 1. The literature review in Chapter 2 discusses academic perspectives of spirituality, describes spirituality in post-secondary education, and explains the necessity of spirituality in post-secondary education.

### Definitions of Spirituality

As defined in the *Penguin Concise English Dictionary* (2002), spirituality is “1) sensitivity or attachment to religious values, 2) a practice of personal devotion and prayer” (p. 860). The dictionary also includes many definitions in different perspectives:

- 1) the immaterial and spiritual part of a human being, believed by many to be immortal, 2) the essential or animating principle of a person, group, or thing,
- 3) a person’s emotional or moral nature; b, emotional sensitivity or depth. 4) a person: a dear old soul, 5) exemplification or personification. (p. 851)

The dictionary definition includes many of the conceptualizations of spirituality which are found in the academic studies presented in this review. In the larger literature search, I identified many differing definitions of spirituality based on the perspectives of different researchers from diverse backgrounds. However, three main definition groupings did emerge in the literature review. The first is one which defines spirituality as non-religious.

For example, Houston (2002) states that spirituality is not religion. He comments, “Religion is specific, and spirituality is generic” (p. 7). Tacey (2000) coins the term *generic spirituality* to describe modern, nonreligious spirituality. Tacey describes it as “part of a genre of talking about meaning, and talking about what’s sacred in life but not necessarily being part of a specific religious tradition” (p. 73). In another example, Palmer (1983) states that “spirituality should not be confused with religion. If religion is viewed as an organized community of faith that has written codes of regulatory behaviour, spirituality should be thought of as more about one’s personal belief and experience of a higher power or higher purpose and one’s connection to one’s inner self, to others, and the universe” (p.168).

Conversely, the second grouping of definitions allude to spirituality as clearly a part of organized religion. Thoresen (1999) states “religion as with spirituality is multidimensional. Most agreed that it involves a social institution with an organized system of beliefs, practices, rituals, and symbols designed to facilitate a relationship to and understanding of a deity (or deities)” (p. 293). Tisdell (2001) mentions that “for many of us, our spirituality is clearly informed by how we were socialized both religiously and culturally” (p.1). The literature indicates a number of authors who relate religion and spirituality closely together. When discussing the importance of spirituality as part of a school administrator’s obligation, Houston (2002), for example, connects religion and spirituality together. He states:

All leaders must be attuned to the third dimension beyond thinking and doing- to what it is to ‘be’ a human in touch with the divine. But education leaders, because of their responsibility for the future through touching the lives of children, have an even greater obligation. (p.1)

The third grouping of definitions states spirituality as the interconnectivity of everything in the world, the connection with a greater community, the connection with nature and the search for the meaning of love, passion, and life. Wolf (1996) states that “spirituality is the essence of life. It is what makes a tree grow, a bird sing, and a human being smile. Spirituality has its own force and being. We cannot see spirituality. It is the power of the universe” (p. 66). Fox (1991) offers another definition of spirituality as “a higher state of consciousness that promotes a feeling of being fully alive and elicits an awakening of awe, resulting in creativity, acts of passion, a connection with others and a celebration of the meaningfulness of one’s life” (p. 71). Similarly, Doetzel (2004) viewed spirituality as:

Associated with renewed sensitivity to life, inner peace, connection, enlightenment, enthusiasm, patience and awe; further, the term characterizes an abiding human search for a connection with something greater and more trustworthy than our egos, and is viewed as a transformed state of consciousness towards connection, compassion, kindness, passion, and love. (p. 8)

Rinpoche (1992) states spirituality from the perspective of Tibetan Buddhism:

True spirituality is to be aware that if we are inter-dependent with everything and everyone else, even our smallest, least significant thought, word, and action have real consequences throughout the universe. Throw a pebble into a pond. It sends a shiver across the surface of the water. Ripples merge into one another and create new ones. Everything is inextricably interrelated. We come to realize we are responsible for everything we do, say, or think, responsible in

fact for ourselves, everyone, and everything else, and the entire universe. (p. 39)

And a final example comes from Palmer (1999) who gives an example of what spirituality in education means, “namely, a search for the deep and meaningful connectedness with ourselves, others, the web of life, and the universe.” (p.5)

Additionally, among the third grouping, the term “soul” emerges as an equivalent term to spirituality. Shlain (1991) explains the term soul as:

An empty one to which nobody attaches any conception, and which an enlightened man should employ solely to refer to those parts of our bodies which do the thinking. Given only a source of motion, animated bodies will possess all they require in order to move, feel, think, repent in brief, in order to behave, alike in the physical realm and in the moral realm which depends on it. (p. 84f)

Thus, the literature shows that there is no standard definition of spirituality and individuals use the term in accordance with their own beliefs, religions, and cultural background. For example, Lantieri (2001) states that “all individuals have spirituality, whether they are religious or not” (p. 17). These diverse definitions provide a glimpse of the complexity of the concept of spirituality and its importance to the human spirit or soul. For this study, it is important to recognize the complexity in the definitions of spirituality due to a variety of factors such as culture and religion. The complexity of the different understandings of spirituality in the Canadian post-secondary education system can also be presumed for this study.

For the purposes of this study, my assumption is that a definition of spirituality can be distinct from religion. However, this distinction was not explained to the



participants because one of the intents of the study was to garner *their* interpretations of this distinction.

#### Definitions of Spirituality in Education

Based on some of the literature reviewed, the concept of spirituality in education should not be confused with organized religious instruction. Palmer (1999) states:

We need to shake off the narrow notion that “spiritual” questions are always about angels or elders or must include the word God. Spiritual questions are the kind that we, and our students, ask every day of our lives as we yearn to connect with the largeness of life. (p. 8)

Palmer further states (1999):

I reject the imposition of any form of religion in public education, including so-called “school prayer.” But I advocate any way we can find to explore the spiritual dimension of teaching, learning, and living. By “spiritual,” I do not mean the credal formulations of any faith tradition, as much as I respect those traditions and as helpful as their insights can be. I mean the ancient and abiding human quest for connectedness with something larger and more trustworthy than our egos--with our own souls, with one another, with the worlds of history and nature, with the invisible winds of the spirit, with the mystery of being alive. (p. 6)

Other researchers such as Dei et al., (2000) advise, “We must be careful not to confuse the two concepts. In considering the pragmatics of incorporating spirituality within mainstream contexts, we must ensure that religiosity and spirituality are not seen as interchangeable ways of knowing” (p. 72). Additionally, Dickman (1980)

advises prudence on incorporating spirituality with the cautionary words, “We must be marked on this point: curricula designed to highlight spiritual perspectives and understandings need not touch on religious concerns” (p. 8).

In this study, in agreement with Palmer (1999), I separate the notion of spirituality in education with organized instruction, such as that practised in private religious schools or Catholic schools. I follow Lusted’s (1986) definition of spirituality in education as “the transformation of consciousness that takes place in the intersection of three agencies, the teacher, the learner, and the knowledge they produce together” (p. 3).

A common definition of spirituality in education can suffer in a similar way to a common definition of spirituality, in that it is different to different people, which makes it difficult to apply. Tisdell (1999) writes that “when people apply concepts of spirituality to education, academics often see a problem in the term’s lack of a common definition.” (p. 3) And Gorsuch & Miller (in press) agree that “we need to realize that a comprehensive assessment of spirituality requires multifaceted approaches, making it difficult to capture spirituality, for example, in a simple, brief questionnaire.”

Along with the problems associated with a lack of common definition, spirituality in education was a concept often not applied in the classroom. Tisdell (1999) states that “some feel that spirituality is too subjective to be of value in the objective, empirical world of academia. Others are afraid that it is associated with an attempt to influence curriculum to match religious views” (p. 3). Kolander and Chandler (1990) emphasize this point, when they report that “in discussing spirituality in education, religion is often portrayed as something to be avoided, and has been

described as ‘a political organization of like-mindedness and values that separates one group from another’ ” (p. 4). Even though there is much discussion on the definition of spirituality and the need for it, there are not many studies on the application of spirituality in education, in part, because of the lack of a common definition and the hesitancy of educators to use spirituality.

#### Importance of Spirituality in Education

The literature I reviewed on spirituality in education shows evidence for the lack of it in the classroom. This situation concerns Butler (1989) who writes “education provided must be holistic. Education processes and institutions must address the intellectual, spiritual, emotional and physical development of participants. And Palmer (1998) also claims that the spiritual component is important for teachers to consider. He writes “teaching as a vocation charts the inner landscape of the teacher on three important paths: intellectual, emotional, and spiritual” (p. 5).

The lack of a spiritual component in post-secondary education was part of a common theme in the reviewed educational research which argues that the mechanization of society and the education system has come at the expense of spirituality, creativity, and understanding. Miller (2000) notes that reforms in education still have not eliminated students’ requirement of filling out worksheets and memorizing textbooks which leaves little room for spiritual development:

This general emptiness results from a lack of spirituality and today’s mainstream educational systems can be seen as spiritually poor and do not address the needs of making students truly well rounded and connected individuals nor do the educational systems address the students’ search for meaning or wholeness.... A curriculum of meaningless tests is another

example of education without soul... It is possible to view outcomes-based education as another machine-like approach to education where the emphasis is on production and results rather than the process of learning. (p. 9)

Palmer (1998) elaborates on the mechanization, departmentalization, and bureaucracy of the education system:

We are distanced by a grading system that separates teachers from students, by departments that fragment fields of knowledge, by competition that makes students and teachers alike wary of their peers and by a bureaucracy that puts faculty and administration at odds. (pp. 35-36)

Palmer (as cited in Dei et al., 2000) further states:

In schools, some knowledge is more privileged than others, and while some are considered to be subjective, mythical or lore, others are viewed as objective, true and scientific. This is evident in the curriculum, the types of teachers that are hired, and the administrative practices of schools. (p. 83)

Sardello (1992) said that “education as we know it, from preschool through graduate school, damages the soul” (p. 50). This is reflective of the influence of early educators like Bobbitt (1912), who comments, “Education must focus on creating a product—the student’s mind” (p. 11). And Palmer (1999) adds “when we bring forth the spirituality of teaching and learning, we help students honour life’s most meaningful questions” (p. 6).

The literature above reinforces the statement by Dei et al. (2000) that “there was a general agreement that schools were not doing enough to address and nurture the spiritual lives of students” (p. 83). Miller (2000) further suggested that “the time has come for soulful learning. We have had enough of machine-like approaches to

education which deaden the human spirit. The present trends of outcomes based education and accountability drain the vitality from our classrooms.” (p. 6)

This importance of recognizing the need for spirituality in post-secondary education in North America has been validated by a leading American university, the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) (Astin et. al., 2004). Since 2003, UCLA, through its Higher Education Research Institute (HERI), has been examining the spiritual development of undergraduate students at the university through a series of annual surveys.

One of the findings from the surveys by Astin et. al. (2004) was that “college students place a premium on their spiritual development and many of them hope—indeed, expect—that the college experience will support them in their spiritual quest” (p.1). Moreover the survey by Astin et. al. (2004) shows that:

About two-thirds consider it “essential” or “very important” that their undergraduate experience enhances their self-understanding (69%), prepares them for responsible citizenship (67%), develops their personal values (67%), and provides for their emotional development (63%). Moreover, nearly half (48%) say that it is “essential” or “very important” that college encourages their personal expression of spirituality. (p. 1)

In addition, found in this survey, HERI has surveyed 40,670 faculty at 421 post-secondary institutions across the United States to gauge their attitudes and experiences on spirituality:

When it comes to the place of spirituality in higher education, we find a considerable division of opinion within the faculty. For example, when asked whether “colleges should be concerned with facilitating students’ spiritual

development,” only a minority of faculty (30%) agree. This is consistent with the finding... that most college juniors report that their professors have never encouraged discussion of spiritual or religious matters, and never provide opportunities for discussing the meaning or purpose of life. However, many faculty also believe that the following educational goals for undergraduate students are “essential” or “very important”: enhancing self-understanding (60%), developing moral character (59%), and helping students develop personal value (53%).

The data from the survey of faculty show that there was a separation of the development of student’s self understanding, moral character and personal value with definitions of spirituality. According to the definition of spirituality offered by the Members of the Summit, 1995 (see p. 10), students’ self understanding, moral character and personal value all relate to spirituality. Thus, even though a minority of faculty in the US thought colleges should be concerned with facilitating students’ spiritual development, a majority were interested in spiritual development according to the definition used in this study. Hence it is possible that the faculty in the HERI survey could connect self-understanding, moral character and personal values as relating to spirituality.

A search of the literature shows that it is likely that there were no equivalent studies of this scale undertaken in Canada. Thus the HERI surveys were the most significant and current studies available in the US, and by inference to North American post-secondary institutions. It seems that an interest in spirituality in North America is strong. Evidence for this comes from Thorsen (1999) who writes that a spiritual hunger or search for the sacred (e.g. Roof, Carroll, & Roozen, 1995) is often

cited to explain why books on spiritual topics become best sellers, such as Peck's still popular classic, *The Road Less Traveled* (1978), Albom's *Tuesdays with Morrie* (1997), Armstrong's *A History of God* (1993), and, Peck's *Further Along the Road Less Traveled* (2005).

A trend found within some of the literature show that there may be many challenges to resolving the pressing social, environmental, and political problems in the North America today, such as drug abuse, domestic violence, and mental well being. Thoresen (1999) makes the argument that spirituality could help alleviate some of these problems. He describes as follows:

For those persons who were more spiritually or religiously involved: higher rates of overall well being and life satisfaction; lower rates of depressive symptoms and suicide; lower rates of divorce and higher rates of marital satisfaction; lower rates of alcohol abuse and other drug abuse, including cigarette smoking and recreational drug use. (p. 294)

Others researchers like Kowalski (2003), and Dei et al. (2000) agree that spirituality could make a positive difference. Langehough, Walters, Knox, and Rowley (1997) argue:

A religious and spiritual orientation has been said to act as a control against 'deviant' behaviour in adolescents and to increase one's ability to resist negative social influences. It has also been correlated with recovery from alcohol and drug addiction and child sexual abuse. (p. 63)

In Steward and Jo's (1998) study of 121 African-American adolescents, spiritual support was found to be significantly related to the adolescents' ability to cope and adjust to the developmental changes and environmental circumstances in

their lives. The researchers report, “Those who reported themselves to be the most spiritual were the most well adjusted, had the highest academic performance, and were [the] most likely to use family and social support networks” (as cited in Dei et al., 2000, p. 85). As well, Walker & Dixon (2002) agreed that “African American students who reported higher levels of spiritual beliefs and behaviours received higher GPAs during one academic semester and also received more academic honors” (p. 117).

Spirituality has had an impact on some students’ lives as shown by the previous examples. According to Astin (2004), it appears as though, higher education “may be ready to pay more attention to our inner lives and those of our students” (p. 10). Similarly, Miller (2000) stated:

Holistic education must be understood in the broad context of spiritual growth and social reformation... Holistic education should allow for the development of the student’s inner life. This cannot be programmed and cannot even be taught in the conventional sense. It can only arise in a trusting climate and through certain activities that allow for reflection and contemplation. (p. 29)

Again, these findings within the literature recognize the need of spirituality in the classroom for students. And one next step is to explore how spirituality is been applied in the classroom, which is what this thesis tries to accomplish.

#### Summary of the Literature Review

The educational literature just reviewed generally emphasizes the importance of spirituality in education and identifies the lack of it in the entire education system. The intent of this study was to determine if the responses of six university instructors would reflect the beliefs, motivations, and perspectives of the reviewed literature and



if there was spirituality in post-secondary education. The reader should keep this in mind as the six sample professors are listened to.

Chapter 3 includes the researcher's personal cultural narrative in order to indicate how results may have been interpreted. As well Chapter 3 describes the study sample; and presents the research methodology, including the data collection and analysis strategies.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to describe spirituality in Canadian post-secondary education by investigating the work experiences of 6 professors across 5 different faculties at one university in Ontario. The intent was to determine the extent of spirituality in these professors' teaching, to find out how the professors defined spirituality, and what their viewpoints were with regard to the barriers and supports to spirituality in education. This study utilizes a phenomenological approach to investigate spirituality in education. Phenomenology is "the first method of knowledge [as] it involves a return to experience in order to obtain comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for reflective structural analysis that portrays the essence of the experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13).

In this chapter, I include a personal perspective on spirituality in education; the research design; and the procedures to collect and analyze the data. The personal narrative is relevant to this study because it explains my search for self-meaning and a deeper sense of spirituality in education against the backdrop of my early upbringing, educational experiences, and life in China.

### Personal Cultural Narrative

I am a 30-year-old Chinese landed immigrant now living and studying in Canada. My family are from Sichuan, a province in southwest China. My religious roots lie in Islam and Buddhism. Ethnically, my family members are not Han Chinese; rather, they originate from the Hui of Ningxia province.

During the Cultural Revolution, my parents were sent to the countryside to work as labourers. My grandparents raised me under very poor living conditions: We

often had little food and no luxuries. This difficult time instilled in me a strong desire to achieve and be successful. I excelled as a student in primary and secondary school in Chengdu City, the capital of Sichuan. I then enrolled in Beijing Broadcasting University and went on to obtain two bachelor's degrees. I also taught children's courses in art, calligraphy, and dance.

I worked at Sichuan State Television as a student and then joined CCTV, China's national broadcaster, while still a student. I travelled throughout China as a national correspondent. This job affected me deeply because it showed me not only the immensity and beauty of China and its people but also the corruption, pollution, and crime. I was then given the task of producing and directing a daily program on economics, a responsibility that allowed me to travel around the world to interview Chinese and other political and business leaders. I was able to meet powerful people and gain an understanding of how they worked and thought. At the same time, I ran two successful businesses in Beijing.

During all of this activity, I began to question my own educational qualifications for my job. Were they good enough for me to do my job adequately? Would they always be good enough? I decided that in my pursuit of more education and more challenges, I needed a change. I also wondered if I could do more than merely report on the social, political, and economic problems that I saw in my country. I began to think about the term "spirituality" when I realized that there was a paucity of spirituality (i.e., a lack of moral awareness, selfless self-satisfaction, and ethical behaviour) in Chinese society in general. I chose to leave my job at CCTV, close my businesses, and emigrate to Canada to see what new challenges life would pose, what I could learn to become more spiritual myself, and how my own renewed

spirituality might influence the behaviour of other people. In other words, I felt that by leaving China, I would gain a better understanding of the cosmopolitan world and my own country. Over all, my goal was to learn about how an educational future could bring world peace (Swee-Hin & Floresca-Cawagas, 2000; Kidder, 1994; Kùng, 1996; Kùng & Karl-Josef, 1993). I thought spirituality would be the best answer to what I had been searching for, and I always believed that spirituality as a very broad concept, includes morality, values, ethics, spirit, soul, emotion, passion, love, proper social behaviour etc. Spirituality could therefore change people in a positive way from the inside. I also believed that education itself is the foundation of a country, any country to become a better and peaceful one by genuinely transforming a person by dramatically altering his or her life. But I found there was no development of spirituality in education in China, especially in post-secondary education, and, therefore, education was lacking in its power to effect positive change and growth in society.

Since moving to Canada, I have learned much about the challenges that face new immigrants in a multicultural country: language barriers, racism, bigotry unfamiliar customs and foods, and a different climate. I studied English as a second language diligently upon arrival in Toronto, but I decided to move to a smaller city in Ontario to be in a less Chinese-intensive environment, a situation that would facilitate my desire to become fluent in English. I then realized that I wished to pursue my education, so I enrolled at the local university.

I am a product of the Chinese education system, which is the perfect example of a results-oriented model. This system has had a significant effect on my life, and it may also be the reason for ongoing problems and challenges in my life. One example

that resonates within me is the yearly ritual of writing national university entrance exams. Each July, thousands upon thousands of students write these exams and then eagerly await the results to be broadcast by various media. Each year, students who do not pass these very intense examinations commit suicide. The competition is fierce, and the disgrace of not passing is unacceptable. The only way for these students to save face and no longer “embarrass” their families is to commit suicide. Is there spirituality recognized in this outcome?

The topic of spirituality in education resonates deeply within me. I believe that this may have been one of the reasons I left China: I was eager to search for self-meaning and a deeper sense of spirituality. I want to investigate and write about a topic that will elucidate the meaning of spirituality in education to myself and others, as well as focus on its local aspects and existence at the university of my Masters studies.

#### Data Collection

Data were collected from the 6 participants via in-depth interviews. A phenomenological approach was the most suitable methodology for this study because Manen (1990) states that “phenomenological research is the study of lived experience” (p. 9). The purpose of the study was to find out if there is spirituality in education via the lived experiences of 6 university professors. Parse, Coyne, and Smith (1985) comment that “The phenomenological method seeks to uncover the meaning of human experienced phenomena through the analysis of subjects’ descriptions” (p. 81). Moustakas (1994) asserts, “With its emphasis on experience, phenomenology welcomes an empirical exploration into the construct of spirituality.

Evidence for the existence of spirituality is derived from first-person reports of life experiences by both the researcher and the students” (p. 15).

Through an exploration of the work experience of spirituality in post-secondary education, the lived experiences of myself and my participants are described by representing their accounts with thoughtfulness. I asked the participants to answer the research questions:

1. According to your lived experience in your university teaching, what do you think spirituality means?
2. Is there spirituality in your experience of working in contemporary post-secondary education? If so, to what degree is it present? Would you describe its presence in your work (teaching, researches and community service)?
3. What are the barriers and supports that you have experienced in manifesting your spirituality in your educational work at this university?

The phenomenological method allows the study participants to describe their own experiences and provide a detailed account of their perspectives and understandings of spirituality in education. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) present ways of preserving validity and reliability for a study such as this one.

#### *Researcher's Role*

I was responsible for collecting all of the required approvals prior to commencing interviews, collecting and analyzing interview data, reviewing and analyzing the papers and writings of the participants, and ensuring that all ethical considerations were followed. Prior to conducting the interviews, I acknowledged that problems might arise during the interviews because of possible language-based miscommunication. In an effort to completely understand the participants' responses,

I decided to ask for clarification whenever necessary. I was amenable to the participants' diverse opinions and understandings of spirituality in university education. I was also prepared that the participants' professorial viewpoints might reflect no practical usage of spirituality in their classrooms. After having read numerous studies about spirituality, I was informed that there are countless definitions of spirituality, as divergent as there are cultures on earth. Therefore, I was committed to approaching the interviews with an open mind and writing as clearly, and transparently as possible about the findings.

#### *Interview Schedule*

Appendix A outlines the interview schedule that I followed to collect the data. Permission was obtained from the university's research ethics board to conduct and record the interviews with the participants. During the first interview, the participants were asked questions intended to guide their reflections of their work experiences as well as their observations that these experiences were or were not indicative of spirituality in education. All of the interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. The typed interviews were reviewed with the participants at scheduled, private postinterview meetings. During the second interview, the participants were asked to clarify areas that were not clear from the first interview and to expand upon other information.

#### *Study Sample*

##### *Participants*

Six participants from five different academic disciplines were identified through a directed study course and interviewed for this study. I previously met all of the participants whom I interviewed for my final course paper while taking a directed

study course. They appreciated the intent of this study and were amenable to participating. The participants were chosen through a snowball sampling technique.

All of them are male university professors between the ages of 31 and 60 who come from three religious backgrounds: One is Muslim, one is Jewish, and four are Christians. These six middle-aged, male professors were invited to participate in the study because they are recognized educators of integrity who can make a difference (see Appendix B). Their teaching careers span 5 years to 31 years. The participants signed a release form prior to being interviewed. Informed consent was obtained when the participants agreed to be part of the study (see Appendix C). All of the pseudonyms were self-selected by the participants.

The selection of the participants was based on snowball sampling technique. Criterion sampling, one of the qualitative research sampling strategies was also adapted for this study. This strategy requires the participants to have the experiences of the phenomenon of spirituality because that may provide the fuller description of the experienced phenomenon. For example, from the directed study course, it was determined that the participants have experienced the phenomenon of spirituality (Creswell, 1998).

#### *University and Community Profiles*

This study took place in a midsized city of close to 100,000 inhabitants located in Ontario. The largest educational institution of the city is the university of this study. It was established in the mid-1960s. Approximately 80% of the students come from outside the commuting area of the city. This university has degree-granting programs at the diploma, undergraduate, and graduate levels. It has 16 research centres, some of



which also have subresearch centres. More than 35,000 alumni have graduated since the university opened.

### Data Analysis

The interview data were analyzed from the verbatim transcriptions of the 6 participants where they discussed their teaching experience as it relates to spirituality in post-secondary education. The names of the participants were changed to ensure confidentiality. To promote trust, the researcher gave each participant a copy of the interview for member checking. Before the data were analyzed, the participants were asked to review the transcriptions and make any changes that they considered important to increase the understanding of their responses.

The researcher utilized Richards and Richards's (1998) data reduction technique of code and retrieve to explore the participants' teaching experiences in relation to spirituality in post-secondary education. This procedure, which required labelling the data based upon content and developing a method for gathering other analogously labelled passages, was utilized to identify and code data commonalities to generate themes. Quotes that reflect various themes or contain codes were taken from the transcripts and grouped based upon common themes that were identified by my reading and rereading of the transcripts. All of the while, these common themes tied to the research question, the thesis problem statement, and to the literature review.

To analyze the data properly, the researcher had to suspend and stand apart from my own and external commonly held beliefs on spirituality in education to be able to find the essence of the phenomenon under investigation. For example, by being objective and impartial, I was able to have the universal essences of the phenomenon emerge from the participants' descriptions. Use of this

phenomenological method resulted in a rich description of the participants' teaching experience and their thoughts about spirituality in education.

#### *Trustworthiness of the Findings*

Because a key goal of qualitative research is to establish trustworthiness, I employed three techniques to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings:

1. Peer debriefing: An expert colleague assisted me by helping me reflect upon my own biases in the interpretation of the data and by providing an objective view of the feasibility of the methodology, including triangulation.

2. Member checking: The participants were asked to review the collected data. They were given transcripts of the interviews, and they were allowed to clarify or expand upon information revealed during the interviews.

#### *Ethical Issues*

As mentioned previously, ethical approval from the university was required before commencing this study. Once this approval was granted, the researcher handed out cover letters to all of the participants and had them sign the consent forms. The letters and forms explained the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of the participants' involvement, and the issue of confidentiality. The participants' identities remained confidential: As mentioned previously, they were allowed to choose their own pseudonyms.

Because this was a relatively small sample of only 6 professors from one small university, I took extra care to ensure the participants' privacy and confidentiality by editing out specific personal references in the interviews that could have identified the participants by name, department, or position. Respect and courtesy to religion, culture and values were demonstrated toward the participants at

all times during the study. In addition, the participants were informed that their involvement in the study would not pose a threat to their health or well-being.

Maintaining the integrity of the data was the researcher's highest priority during the study. The transcriptions were completed by the researcher alone, and total care was taken to ensure that the interviews were recorded accurately. To ensure the accuracy of the collected data, all of the participants were asked to review their transcribed interviews. Data collected from this study will be stored securely for 7 years at the university and then destroyed.

This chapter describes the design of the study, the data collection strategy, and the data analysis. The next chapter presents the themes derived from the findings and supports the findings with examples of the verbatim transcriptions derived from the interviews with the 6 participants.

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

### Introduction

This chapter records the interview data collected from the six participants in the study's sample following a particular thematic structure. Then, the chapter discusses the findings of the study of the teaching experiences of 6 participants from 5 different faculties at a local university in regards to spirituality in post-secondary education. The interviews were developed from three research questions:

1. According to your lived experience in your university teaching, what do you think spirituality means?
2. Is there spirituality in your experience of working in contemporary post-secondary education? If so, to what degree is it present? Would you describe its presence in your work (teaching, researches and community service)?
3. What are the barriers and supports that you have experienced in manifesting your spirituality in your educational work at this university?

### Themes Derived from the Findings

Generally following guidelines from Bogdan and Biklen (2003), from a broad examination of the interview data, four themes emerged: (a) subjects' definitions of spirituality, (b) their perceptions of barriers and supports, (c) benefits, and (d) application. A discussion of each theme follows. The interview number indicates the order in which each participant was interviewed by the researcher. For example, "E (Interview 4)" means that participant E was the fourth respondent interviewed by the researcher. The 6 professors offer diverse and personal perspectives and explanations of spirituality in general as well as spirituality in post-secondary education.

### Perceptions of Definition

Data analysis reveals that the majority of participants defined spirituality from two perspectives: spirituality in general and spirituality in post-secondary education. In light of their responses, they maintain that spirituality differed on educational context from the general social environment. Furthermore, their definitions differed from each other on the basis of their own understanding of spirituality.

#### *Spirituality in General*

The participants express the value of spirituality in general. They think their own cultural background and education shapes their definition of spirituality. Their comments regarding a definition of spirituality related to four common themes: relationship to religion, metaphor, unification, and taciturn/nonverbal concepts.

#### *Relationship to Religion*

The majority of the participants emphasized the existence of a certain relationship between spirituality and religion, because they understood most people would assume spirituality as equivalent to religion, or vice versa. They said that it is extremely important to make clear the relationship between spirituality and religion. However, participants' responses indicated that they differed in their point of views towards the relationship of these two terms. A dichotomy became apparent as some participants defined spirituality as *nonreligious* while others closely related it to *religion and fundamental beliefs*.

*Nonreligious.* Two participants indicated that spirituality is nonreligious although they thought people would misunderstand spirituality as religion. Participant E (Interview 4) considered religion a modern definition of spirituality. Participant E (Interview 4) believed that, for the last decade, people have begun to speak a great

deal about postmodernist spirituality, which has led to new thoughts around a new-age phenomenon of spirituality. As Participant E comments:

I think the modern spirit tends to be antireligious, emphasizing the tangible, emphasizing the secular views, preoccupation with the world rather than with religion, God, the spirit, whatever.

Participant B (Interview 3) expressed a similar view that spirituality is different from religion. As he observed:

Spirituality is considered primary, more pure, more directly related to the soul in its relation to the divine while religion is secondary, dogmatic, and stifling, often distorted by oppressive sociopolitical and socioeconomic forces.

*Religion and fundamental beliefs.* One participant argued that spirituality is integrated part of religion and fundamental beliefs, or spirituality IS religion. As Participant Q remarked that spirituality is something beyond logic, which means that you have to just believe in something in a religious way and follow those fundamental principles and live by them. He commented:

Spirituality, I think, is related to religion. It is related to fundamental concepts that you follow, which don't have any logical meaning as such, but which comes from your heart and which you know are right and you abide by them and you live by them and you exercise those, you know, fundamental beliefs.

#### *Metaphor*

When discussing a definition of spirituality, one participant mentioned that spirituality is the metaphysical part of us. He believed that people of all nations and all kinds, all language groups, all religious groups, and so on, have some commonalities. One of those commonalities is they seem to have a need to believe

and think about and articulate something that is greater than themselves. In addition, he thought that the greatness, the majesty, the wonder, the energy, or the force that is out there somewhere represents everything that is nonmaterial. As participant K (Interview 1) stated:

Spirituality, I believe, is the part of us that is metaphysical, the part of us that is nonmaterial.

#### *Unification*

Spirituality is unification, because spirituality is something which has the power to permeate into the soul of the people. Spirituality plays an important role in the integration of the individual into a coherent body. As participant N (Interview 2) maintained:

I think spirituality certainly is something that looks to things that unifies people and builds a sense of community.

#### *Taciturn/Nonverbal Concepts*

Participant P (Interview 6) recalled an example of Ghandi to explain spirituality. He mentioned that when Ghandi “would stand up in front of an audience and say not a word, the Indian people would respond to him.” Participant P defined spirituality as “something akin to understanding somebody without having to speak a word.” In this sense, participant P regarded spirituality as something intangible but powerful and nonverbal.

#### *Spirituality in Post-secondary Education*

The 6 participants also defined spirituality in post-secondary education to mean the same as spirituality “anywhere.” However, their definition of spirituality waxes quite concrete and pragmatic. They referred to five aspects: education,

meaning of life and sense of community, development of spiritual understanding, interpersonal connection by recognizing spirituality in education, and introduction of thoughts/notions.

#### *Education*

Some aspects of human beings are tangible, but the mental and spiritual parts are more difficult to care for because they are indiscernible. A doctor may help if one has a physical problem, or a person can release his or her emotions by crying or speaking with a counsellor. Two of the participants felt that the mental or spiritual part can be addressed by spirituality in education. Participant B (Interview 3) remarked, "As far as it concerns your mind, all education is spiritual in that very broad sense." Participant Q (Interview 5) explained it as "whatever you teach."

#### *Meaning of Life and Sense of Community*

Participant N (Interview 2) felt the definition of spirituality in education is in some way incorporated into his teaching, which, in turn, will inspire and guide students to reflect and ponder about the meaning of their lives. He commented, "If we define spirituality to include certain things which relate to the search for meaning in life and also the search for building a greater sense of community, lo and behold, that is in my course."

#### *Develop Spiritual Understanding*

One participant maintained that nowadays spirituality is relatively a new phenomena to students. So it is significant to introduce it to students so as to foster their cognitive ability in understanding the larger world. He suggested the point to spirituality in education is to nurture students in the classroom. As participant E (Interview 4) remarked:



I'm sure it is to cultivate all the faculties of the student to develop intellect, the ability to understand things. I suppose it is also to develop culturally, and I suppose it should be to encourage students in spiritual understanding as well.

*Interpersonal Connection by Recognizing Spirituality in Education*

Participant P (Interview 6) wanted a definition of spirituality to mention that every person is spiritual and acknowledge the interpersonal connections between people. He believed that, in terms of spirituality, people are individually different, however, coordination among people would spiritually sublime themselves. As he stated, "I suppose in a classroom, I think spirituality is dealing one spirit to another, and I am a spirit, they are a spirit, and nobody is perfect, and we try to do our best."

*Introduction of Thoughts and Notions*

Participant K (Interview 1) thought that spirituality in education means actively introducing the topic into the classroom, and entertaining the thoughts and notions while in a process of interaction between the teacher and students. As he commented, "It means inviting and entertaining thoughts and notions between a teacher and a student about this energy, force, being, person that is out there and the student's relationship with this whole notion."

**Barriers and Supports**

Data analysis indicated that all participants maintained that the application of spirituality in post-secondary education encountered a great deal of barriers while receiving less supports in reality. Five participants are not optimistic about any real supports, and they think that the barriers would affect applying spirituality in the classroom. One participant believes that there are some supports, and even there were none, any individual could apply spirituality in classrooms without being distracted by

any barrier. The study groups participants' observations into two categories: barriers and supports.

### *Barriers*

In light of their teaching experience, participants stated that the barriers stem from five aspects: global view, prejudice, curriculum, age suitability, and beliefs.

#### *Global View*

Many of the participants believed that moral and spiritual values have depreciated while materialism continues to prevail in the past five or six years. Two participants were of the opinion that materialism and performance devalue spiritual human beings, make the world less spiritual, foment societal disrespect, and, from a global view, increase confusion between religion and spirituality, on one hand, and logic and lack of respect, on the other.

As participant K (Interview 1) comments:

The barriers are the values that our culture holds dear today, and one is the barrier of science, where it is placed as superior to that which can be seen, that which can be touched, that which only can be believed. I think that our culture values materialism and also our culture values performance and that is what people do about what they are. When performance is rated higher than being, when material is rated as more significant than the metaphysical, when science and logic and reason are raised above people's beliefs, I think those are the lesser sides of being human, of human experience, and that's when people follow and devalue the meaning, purpose and mission, and what it means to be a spiritual human being.

Participant Q (Interview 5) shared a similar opinion with participant K, however based on his point of view that spirituality is religion, he further pointed out that he might be challenged by students in his class, because there are a variety of religions in this world, and various spiritualities have to be introduced into the class, which might perplex students. As he states:

And I think the barrier is for the world in general, because it is not just that they have taken it out from the school, the world in general is moving away from spirituality. The kind of society that we have made has made it very difficult to talk to students in a spiritual way. It has made it a laughingstock [political] kind of thing, so the moment you mention God in class, everybody looks around as though, you know, which God are we talking about? Are we talking about the Muslim God, or are we talking about the Christian God, or are we talking about some other God?

He reckoned that men [sic] intentionally created a logical world, in which they only saw the substantial benefits, but neglected respect to spirituality and the pursuit of spiritual perfection. As he adds:

It is very hard to talk about spirituality within the class without some students laughing at you because you have made it something which is for the people which are below average intelligence, people who believe in God or who talk about that because we have made this world into a purely logical world, and it is very difficult unless you change the fundamental outlook, unless you change the way that people look at spirituality and respect spirituality, you notice what I'm saying. We don't respect spirituality any more [especially in Ivy League institutions].

*Prejudice*

Three of the participants saw academic bias and resistance to spirituality as barriers. They found that there is a general consensus in academia that spirituality is too sensitive to be touched upon in education, since spirituality is *not* independent of the issues of race, religion, culture, family background. For example, participant N (Interview 2) expresses his concerns about spirituality in education. In his point of view, spirituality is more of a burden than people can bear, which becomes a significant contributing factor as to why people are biased and resistant to spirituality. As he comments:

There is a traditional bias against anything that smacks of religion in several parts of the academic world. There is a kind of tradition in the academic world that you have to be...very hard headed [and] very empirical, and you have to sort of...stick to a very positivist kind of model of knowledge, and there is a fear that anything to do with religion or spirituality might get you into the realm of sort of the irrational or things which aren't seen. So I think there is a resistance, sort of the idea that if you allow in spirituality, it is going to be opening the back door to any kind of metaphysical, supernatural, religious kind of belief. So I think there is that fear because there is this underlying fear in a lot of academic disciplines to, you know, hold sort of supernatural, religious kind of set of concerns and it's there, it's been talked about by a variety of academics, sociologists, probably professors of education, and so on, that there is this concern, and it developed its own resistance among a whole group of academics.

Participant E (Interview 4) indicates that the degree of spirituality acceptance poses another barrier. In other words, people can be antagonistic to any religion, which would affect the recognition of spirituality. As he states:

The spiritual understandings we had were so largely Christian, a sort of nondenominational Christianity, which was supposed to be acceptable to all people in Ontario, but it was still Christian. The spirituality of others is not particularly welcome in the schools, although you would have to talk to teachers and principals and professors of education who are more involved with that than I am to determine whether I'm completely right about it being the case. In the university, over the past generation or two, there have been many people who have been not just skeptical of religion. Of course, that is one of the traditions developed in the European and North American context over the last 2 or 300 years. They're not just skeptical, but they can be quite avowedly hostile to any kind of religion, and that could mean that they would then be opposed to recognition of spirituality, of the spirit in themselves or others or in the education, in the teaching, in the research that they do. So, that would be another of the barriers, I think, to recognizing, to the acceptance of spirituality.

Participant P (Interview 6) notes that barriers to spirituality also derive from rooted prejudices, however, surprisingly, he indicates that in a sense, the barrier may play a positive role in a certain situation. As he comments:

I think a lot of barriers to spirituality are ingrained prejudices that we all have because of our background. Most people are afraid of something new. They are afraid of difference. Sometimes, the fears are well founded, but most often,

they're not. So, I see part of my job is destroying the myths of prejudice. I know it's true. I think there are some boundaries. I believe that so often, there is so much overlap between people's religion and their spirituality, I think the barrier is probably a good one in a sense because I don't know if I would want my children to have their spirituality necessarily addressed by someone else, and so I can understand a lot of resistance by parents that they would want to guard, to put some boundary between the education that they receive and maybe matters more private.

### *Curriculum*

Three of the participants stated that curriculum construction can become one of the barriers to spirituality in post-education. This barrier is represented in four dimensions of the participants' responses: knowledge, class size, government curriculum, and lack of freedom.

Participant B (Interview 3) indicates that no particular time and space are left for spirituality teaching in the class because great emphasis is laid on the teaching of specific knowledge. As he states:

The barrier to recognizing the spiritual dimension is the very body of knowledge that you are trying to teach. There can be barriers to educational process, that is, in the case of philosophy, learning to think for yourself and sharing the experience with other people. These are the two elements I refer to as the spiritual dimension, while I would look upon the body of knowledge as a barrier that can stand in the way of people. And you can say similar things about other disciplines, like, as I mentioned, engineering, if you focus exclusively on a technical aspect and then you just offer a small part of a half

of a course just before the engineers graduate, as we do at this university, there is a technical aspect of engineering that is actually a barrier to the spiritual aspects of engineering.

On the other hand, Participant B maintains that spirituality needs close personal interaction, however, large class sizes in the university makes it impossible to carry out the plan. As he comments:

I think that class size also has a lot to do with it. If you are teaching 100 students, it is pretty difficult. If you have a very small group of 4<sup>th</sup>-yr honours' students and then you have much more, so I think class size has a great deal to do with it. You can limit your possibilities, or you can open your possibilities.

Participant E (Interview 4) expresses a similar opinion as participant B, that curriculum construction can become a barrier to spirituality in post-secondary education. He states:

I think that the barriers are based in this modern, scientific, secular culture that reached its heights perhaps in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which was developing for quite a long time. I don't know whether there is much room for spirituality in it or in the schools in what is laid down by the ministry of education. I suspect there isn't, although I express my own skepticism about the fact that I don't. What makes for, what kind of person is the well-educated, the well-cultured being, what does it require to achieve peace of mind and serenity? We tend to leave that to the churches, to religious organizations, to the preachers, and so on. We think that's not the task of education and that would be one of the barriers to, you know, we constrain the work of education.

Participant P (Interview) believed that given the curriculum construction, there is not much flexibility allowed in the classroom to teach anything related to spirituality. He remarks:

There is a lack of freedom in the classroom, so one of the barriers would be that the classroom is not open to such topics, and I don't know with the content that we have in our courses that there would be much opportunity for that in a normal course of events.

#### *Age Suitability*

Two of the participants approached the issue of barriers from the perspectives of acceptability and age as well as ability. Participant Q (Interview 5) took the notion of social acceptability into account when he responded. According to his description, spirituality acceptance is positively related to age. People are inclined to accept it as they are aging. As he comments:

The way we see spirituality is not held in very high esteem. Number one, we have taken it out from our curriculum in schools, we don't talk about spirituality anymore. So for me the greatest barrier is getting spirituality acceptability. Number two, the thing is people, students, I think the young age has got a problem as well. I've heard this thing said that in old age you believe everything; in middle age, you doubt everything; and in young age, you know everything. So students think they know everything, and the things that they know because they are not exposed to the spiritual side of it, but actually, they don't know.



Echoing participant Q, participant P (Interview 6) maintains that spirituality is not something which everyone could easily understand, however, as people age, people would become more open-minded to spirituality. As he puts it:

The level is too high, maybe that's a matter of spirituality, you'd really have to wonder why and you have to be open to understand that. I'm open enough to appreciate it. I don't know if I'm open enough to understand it.

Participant B (Interview 3) also mentions that age makes a difference for professors in regards to being spiritual in their teaching. Specifically, the aging of professors might be a barrier as well. As he puts it:

I would say that when I was younger, I focused more on the technical aspects of philosophy, still trying to master that body of knowledge. It is more difficult to focus on other aspects. You have to get mastery. That's difficult to assess this myself. I tend to think that I guess I am getting better at it as I get older.

### *Beliefs*

Participant Q (Interview 5) states the issue of barriers stems from the thread of personal beliefs and cultural differences, and fundamental beliefs and logic. The difference in beliefs, values, culture, and attitude among students can lead to different understandings of spirituality, because there exists no common definition of spirituality which could be applicable to all kinds of contexts. He points out:

If I do talk about ethics, I am, I will be introducing my personal beliefs to you and the thing is, I might be accused of preaching or something or saying something which doesn't have any logical basis, and the way I am supposed to teach my students is very matter of fact, very logical. I feel strange when I talk

to students, and the thing is especially when you talk about ethics, ethics is different in different countries. Their ethical standards and our ethical standards are altogether different.

He further states:

The problem would be, as the way I see it, I don't know maybe many people see it differently, that students are going to ask these questions. Say, yes, you bring spirituality in education, but the thing would be where do those fundamental beliefs come from, what are the rules of those fundamental beliefs? Shouldn't we be more interested in our own survival as a logical person? Shouldn't we be interested in giving ourselves everything to make our life more comfortable?

#### *Supports*

The majority of the participants concluded that there are various institutional supports concerning the integration of spirituality in post-secondary education. They also believed that the awareness of the significance of spirituality education is increasing among both students and teachers. However, one participant rendered a consistently opposite answer, that is, he could not see any supports anywhere.

#### *Institutional Supports*

One participant indicated that spirituality education lies entirely on teachers and professors as a responsibility because they have, to some degree, the freedom to design and manage their spiritual teaching in the classroom, no matter if the spirituality is incorporated officially in the curriculum. Participant K (Interview 1) believes that "as educators, you teach who you are", and he claims:

Public education gives us the freedom to do that. It's not in the curriculum, and it doesn't have to be, but the freedom, of course, that the teachers have and that the professors have in being rather than doing is limitless.

Participant B (Interview 3) took Engineering as an example, indicating that there exists some spirituality in post-secondary education, because it is represented in the professional or ethics course. He comments:

Well, there can be institutional support like, as I mentioned, the requirements that professional engineers pass examinations in ethics, that's an institutional support. Or if engineers are required to take Engineering 5539 Professional Practice and the law, and there is ethics on it, that's institutional support. But on the whole, I think the support is rather subjective if you have an instructor who wants to.

*Increased Awareness.*

Generally, the interviewees said that in comparison with the past, currently both students and teachers increasingly pay more attention to spirituality in post-secondary education. As participant N (Interview 2) states:

Well, I mean, I presume there is some interest on the part of faculty, some faculty, and there is some interest on the part of some students, and as I say, I imagine that Bibby the sociologist would tell us that there is more interest in spirituality, even by people who are not religiously involved, that there probably is a kind of constituency there as long as it's kept relatively nondogmatic in a religious sense.

He also states that:

It is a kind of ongoing, developing kind of idea, and certainly, when I was starting my career 30 years ago, I don't think you would have found much literature on spirituality apart from the more traditional forms of spirituality that were directly related to a traditional religion.

Participant E (Interview 4) expresses a similar idea that there is a growing appreciation among people, who are becoming more conscious of spirituality in education. He mentions:

I don't know whether there are very many especially in these days. Probably for some people that one or more of those movements is the way in which they become conscious of the spiritual and perhaps our growing appreciation.

Participant K (Interview 1) believed that spirituality is a newly-born product, and it is gaining visibility to more people. As he declares:

So many people are talking about spirituality. It hasn't been defined, it hasn't been articulated, but it's coming around. I think that's the nature of any movement when it gets started. That's very encouraging that it is being entertained as a plausible notion.

In comparison with other participants, participant Q (Interview 5) maintained a negative view regarding supports for spirituality in education. He addresses the issue of no supports by commenting, "No, I don't see any support. I don't see any incentive for the teacher or the professors, and I see only hurdles at the moment, which has made me very cautious when I talk to my students."

### *Benefits*

While stressing the significance of spirituality in post-secondary education, participants unanimously indicated that spirituality education would greatly benefit

both students and teachers in various approaches. Two participants addressed the answer by suggesting that the benefits of spirituality in education open students' minds.

For example, participant E (Interview 4) points out:

I suppose I am not content with a very material view of life, and so if what my students hear encourages them to challenge their professors who may have such a view to a broader understanding, I'd be all in favour of that.

Similarly, participant Q (Interview 5) suggests the opening of the students' minds. By ...opening them up to the possibilities, and all the benefits that you can have from open thinking, you know, thinking beyond what you see. Is that a benefit of teaching spirituality?

One participant made an analogy: spirituality education is the same as long-term investment. No immediate reward will be obtained in a short period of time, because spirituality is something reached deep into the inner soul of people, which requires a long process to see its effect and benefits. As participant K (Interview 1) comments:

It is difficult to assess, and specifically, it is difficult to assess in the short term because spiritual values are not something that I pick today and use tomorrow. It is something that is over time will be demonstrated if they are there as a person or they are not there. Therefore, I suppose the benefits that I have seen, that I say, in fact, are some evidence that this is what I have been doing, is that there have been times that 5 years after having had a student in class, 10 years, as much as 30 years after having a student in class, I get an e-mail or I get a card or a letter from a student that I haven't seen for years, and this student is telling me that I turned his life around and it was not because of the course that

I was teaching, it was not because I was that student's counsellor, it was because of the relationship that was established between that student and myself at that time.

Participant B (Interview 3) comments on the benefits of spirituality education on the basis of his definition of spirituality that it needs to be more pure, more directly related to the soul. It is as much a question of personal development than any visible external changes. As he declares:

If you take spirituality in the sense of realizing our common humanity or your own personal development, and then that in itself is a benefit. It is not as though such things should be beneficial in the sense of being used for some further end, like a better-paying job or career. Such things can't be described as beneficial as means, they can only be beneficial in themselves. So if that is what we mean by spirituality, it is its own reward, it can't be beneficial in other ways, or we are not really talking about spirituality. The thing about it is that it can't be used for something else if it is really spiritual.

Participant P (Interview 6) was unsure of his response to the question about benefits. He said his lack of confidence in spirituality education ascribed to his many failures in teaching spirituality. He stated that "everything that I have tried, directly or indirectly, has failed, in my estimation, partly because I don't, and I haven't tried very much, just on occasion. I haven't seen results in that yet."

#### *Application*

In response to the interview question: "Is there spirituality in contemporary post-secondary education?" All of the participants indicated that there are substantial applications and efforts that they have undertaken in their teaching in support of

students' spiritual development. They presented the spirituality application with respect to the following aspects: personal spiritual growth; student focus; coursework; religion; nonapplicability; and pass, no answer.

### *Personal Spiritual Growth*

As the participants emphasized, one application of spirituality in education is to integrate spirituality into teaching, so as to spiritually assist students' personal development. Participant K (Interview 1) passionately expresses his idea of how to support students' personal spiritual growth by helping them to increase their self-understanding and their understanding of the meaning of life. He states:

Being spiritual is my only reason for being a human being. It is my only reason for being, is my only mission in life, it's my only purpose. It is the only thing that gives meaning to me as a human being. But I'm more interested in their [students'] mission in life than mission in education because I believe that they take themselves and their meaning and purpose and beliefs into the classroom and they will do that regardless of what their beliefs are, regardless of what their mission is. I want them to know themselves, I want them to know that part of themselves, that is the spiritual dimension of themselves and these are some of the assignments that I ask them to do in order to gain that kind of understanding of themselves.

Participant N (Interview 2) illustrates his own special approach in helping students to develop spiritually. He mentions that he asks his students specific questions about life and selectively chooses books to guide students to think of the meaning of life. He stated:

I'm interested in the idea, in the search for meaning which is the idea of meaning and sort of the meaning of life or the search for meaning and explanations of certain problems in life. I ask them questions, such as how did the world come into being? What is the purpose of life? How can I find real happiness? Why is there suffering in the world? What happens after death? Are people bothered by the question of life's purpose? I chose good books for my students, the best known, best seller, the authors as being formally qualified, the kind of books which point out to some of the problems with individualism and which sort of point to some of the advantages to some of the more communal or collective ways of life that are not as individualistic and competitive. I try to put things in people's minds and get them thinking about it because if you come across as too preachy, it might turn them off. I don't care when I say preachy. I'm not talking about just religious issues or topics, but if you preach too much about anything, even if it is a secular topic, you are going to turn people off.

#### *Student Focus*

Two participants indicated that their work should be geared to students' needs and interests, and should put students in the centre of their teaching. Their priority as professors is to take care of students' needs and interests, which in turn would exert a subtle influence on students' spiritually. Participant K (Interview 1) mentions that being available to students is his way of putting his students first:

I listen to them. I also listen when they are writing, and I give them my home phone number, I give them my office phone number. I try to make myself as



available as I can to them. And if they like, I make appointments, and we spend time together sitting and talking.

He also said that he understands students' thoughts and feelings, and he recognized that one of the really important issues is to make sure that students are the centre of his teaching. He explained, "I want to know what they are thinking. I want to know what they're feeling. I want to know what their hopes are. I want to know what they are all about." Participant K thought that being a student-focused instructor is his way of addressing spirituality in education.

Participant B (Interview 3) certainly agreed with the idea of a student focus in regards to applying spirituality in education, but his view of helping students was different from that of Participant K. He separated the students into two groups. He declared:

Certainly, I've had students come into my office in what you might call a spiritual crisis. It may be the result of how poorly they are doing in my course or it may be something totally unrelated, but on the whole, it is a rare experience. On the other hand, when you've certain students in your discipline, you can see that they are going to go on to graduate school and perhaps a PhD in philosophy, [and] that opens up a whole other dimension as well. So you tend to be open with students like that. The students in crisis, that's another matter. So I would say these are the two occasions when you are confronted with that and the two types of stuff encountered are really quite different from one another as well.

*Religious Emphasis*

Two participants combined religion with spirituality in their teaching. They maintained that to teach religion is to teach spirituality to some degree. In a sense, how spirituality could be introduced to students in a religious way appears to be remarkably important. Participant B (Interview 3) said:

Again, that's difficult. It is not as though it is something separate that could be distinct from my discipline. I would like to think that you could separate spiritual issues from other disciplines in quite that way. I think religious studies itself can be taught in an objective way, I suppose, as to teaching it in a spiritual way.

Participant E (Interview 4), whose own education obviously included experiences with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship and a religious discussion group, mentioned that his understanding of the world is being nurtured in terms of a larger view. It is not simply materialistic or material. It is not enough to be secular. He noted, "As a spiritual being, I think I can always address spirituality to students in a religious way." Additionally, by citing the greatest historical events concerning spirituality, participant E endeavoured to make students understand the significance of spirituality at present. He asserts:

What I do in my lecturing is I say at specific points to speak about the way Canadian history particularly, or with this week's topic, the environmental history, the ways in which the spiritual, religion has been important in the study, in the past and if we want to understand it, we have to understand those spiritual movements and take them seriously, not to be joking about them, or sceptical, or what have you. There have been remarkable movements, and I

want the students to understand that, even though I spend only a small part of a lecture, a small part of the year on that.

### *Coursework*

Five participants addressed that spirituality should be mentioned and introduced into coursework whenever it is deemed necessary. They detailed their approaches of introducing spirituality into coursework from two major aspects: classroom work and liberty.

*Classroom work.* Five of the participants discussed classroom work by addressing how they have been trying to include spirituality in lectures, group discussions, homework, school activities, reflections, readings, guided imagery, conversations, and a connection to others. Participant K (Interview 1) reported that he addresses spirituality in the classroom by giving reflection towards a mission in life; stressing belonging and boundaries; and relating coursework to spirituality. He claimed:

I give them assignments on reflection, of course reading and reflection or interview and reflection and so on, assignments on belief systems, what do you believe in, assignments on mission statements, what is their mission in life, what is the purpose of life, what are they there for, right, rather than their mission in education.

Then when asked about how classroom assignments relate to spirituality, participant K explained the following:

A sense of belonging is necessary and the other foundational stone of all human understanding is the need for boundaries, belonging in boundaries is what is what I've been stressing. And so that has been the foundation and both

of these boundaries are both values, and belonging is about interpersonal connection, and both of them have a spiritual premise which is not really all that amenable to scientific inquiry, so I would say that that would be my application in the classroom.

When asked to clarify how exactly he brings spirituality into the classroom by assigning students work, participant K further explained the following:

They do group work every day we meet, and the group work is in discussion of a guided exercise that would be their homework, of course, is their assignment. So their assignments are based on, for instance, belief systems, and mission statements, and their reflections on the readings, the assigned readings they are to do. The readings are in that dimension and guided imagery.

Participant N's (Interview 2) applications of spirituality in coursework consisted of connecting students to greater society, making academic work less abstract, and giving specific assignments. By assigning students to collect current events and happenings from diverse sources, he intended to connect students with the real society other than to overwhelm students with abstract academic teachings. As he stated:

I get the students to collect newspaper or news magazine clippings which I want them to relate to the themes of the course. I suppose the assignments, which by their very nature, try to make them socially connected, they get them in a sense socially connected to the greater society and make the academic work less abstract.

Participant B (Interview 3) stressed that requiring students to write reflective essays and spirituality is one of his favourite ways to introduce spirituality to them:

Yeah, sure. You can see this in class. You can see it in their essays. It is probably the best opportunity for me to applying spirituality in the classroom when I ask people to write essays. Yes, I can see that and that is one of the more satisfying aspects of my profession.

Participant E (Interview 4) also spoke about the applications of spirituality in course work, he explained that lecturing is his way of applying spirituality in the classroom. To incorporate spirituality, if necessary, throughout his lectures, he successfully introduced and conveyed spirituality to students without giving particular teachings in it. He mentioned that “the extent to which this is conveyed to students is in moments in lecture and for the rest it is up to them and they can come and ask me, I’d be happy to talk about it.” He further stressed that he would be happy to see some students’ self-exploration as he always left the door open to them, apart from giving lectures. He further commented:

They certainly are, they are free to, and so I think that means able. If they chose to read in these areas, to do assignments, to write term papers, for example, or research papers that dealt with spirituality, spiritual movements in Canadian history, they certainly can. I would be very interested to see those because they are curious, powerful phenomena that we’ve had in the past.

Listening to students’ spiritual expressions is another approach that Participant E employs. He deemed spirituality education a mutual process: besides unilateral introduction by the teacher, students’ interests in and capability of accepting spiritual

teachings would in turn encourage him to make further efforts in conveying more to the students. As he reported:

I certainly listen to any expression of that sort that the students bring forward. I listen to them whatever they bring to me and try to respond compassionately. I don't know that I see pain or despair, not despair I hope, pain of course, illness or whatever and if someone is in the hospital obviously I'm sorry that has happened and try to work around it in terms of their assignments and so on. I don't know that I have heard beliefs or faith very much.

Participant P (Interview 6) believed that teaching students to be accountable and develop good habits are the ways to apply spirituality in teaching. What he reckoned matters most is to help students to form good habits or compliance to authority, which is the final destination of spirituality education. He mentioned:

The classroom setting I haven't felt called upon, maybe in the examples that I use in the classroom, like cleaning up, making sure things are picked up. Habits are slow to develop, then once you get into the habit it becomes a habit and you don't even think about it to do the right thing. It might resonate with some people. That's about it. I don't see doing anything more formally than that.

Even though he did not feel required by an external authority, he was positive about the issue of introducing spirituality in the classroom. He said, "I think there will be opportunities for everybody and I'll try to take them as I can."

#### *Nonapplicability*

Data analysis also revealed contradictions in the participants' own opinions on the issue of spirituality application. Surprisingly, although the majority of participants

laid great emphasis on the importance of spirituality in education, they also considered spirituality in education as nonapplicable. The majority of the participants believed it is not appropriate to be applied in education.

The reason why their points of view appeared contradictory differs among participants. As participant P (Interview 6) comments that students prefer practical knowledge over spiritual enlightenment. He notes:

I think if you had two professors, one on one side that wanted balance in life and another one who just wanted to focus on the classroom experience, and maybe job prospects, I would guess that 99% would go for the second professor and forget the first altogether and write him off as a crackpot, quite frankly.

In addition, he claims that one of the reasons for the nonapplicability of spirituality in post-secondary education is simply that it is not needed. He mentions:

I just don't address that at all. I would have to be asked a direct question, and I haven't been asked for years, and I would not volunteer that. It's been 5 years since I've given any book out directly or anybody has asked for on any matters of faith or spirituality. I just don't get into it. Nobody calls for it; there is no call.

Participant P was disheartened by the fact that most of his students appear to not care as much about spirituality in their education as he does, even though he kept stressing the importance of spirituality. As he remarked that "so, again, I think it is extremely important to be spiritually attuned, but I don't know how much that I would go to try to. I think there are opportunities, and you don't even have to make it explicit."

Participant E (Interview 4) expresses a similar commitment to using spirituality in the classroom. He said that “it would be only occasionally and only rarely would a student have come forward with, and I don’t know if it has arisen very often.” So the negligence or indifference of students to spirituality in education discouraged him to make further effort in teaching spirituality. As he states:

Well, I don’t know, there are many opportunities for spiritual growth actually found in my class so that’s the difficulty, whether there is very much of that happening.

Participant Q (Interview 5) expressed an even stronger opinion about the nonapplicability of spirituality in post-secondary education. The way people define happiness and success in terms of economic returns in a larger social context greatly influenced students’ point of view means his attempts to teach spirituality would be in vain. As he states:

We don’t discuss this. We say, okay, this is what you think success is, and this is how you become successful. These are the tools that you use, [and] if you use them correctly you are going to earn a lot of money, then you might be famous, and you’ll be successful because that is how success is defined. About satisfaction, about contentment, about happiness, we don’t talk about that because I don’t know, they’ve been taught not to worry about those things, because it is what we count success as.

Aside from defining success, he was concerned about the different levels of students as well. He stated, “I’m very wary about talking about spirituality, especially at the undergraduate level.”



Participant B (Interview 3) found it difficult to give any responses to the theme of application because he believed that spirituality is closely related to religion. He felt uncomfortable to lecture about spirituality because students tend to take spirituality as religion, which is too sensitive to be touched upon, since there might be diverse religious beliefs among students in the same class. So, he maintains that spirituality is non-applicable in the university classroom:

I don't think there are any. If you are talking about spirituality as distinct from religion then I would say yes, that's the case. I mean, if this were a denominational school, if we were talking about religion or theology in the context of a concessional setting in an educational institute committed to the truth of one religion or another, then you would have such a thing, but we don't have that.

He also emphasized that spirituality should be religious schools' obligation, not that of public universities. He pointed out:

I have to reiterate this point, theology itself or teaching religion itself can become an objective study rather than something that has a spiritual dimension to it. You were asking in particular about things that have or to be done, and I say that in a secular institution, [it's] likely we have no such thing. In a religious educational institution, we have such things but quite often, they fail exactly because they focus on theology or religion as an object of study rather spiritual.

In terms of applying spirituality in this reaching application, participant N (Interview 2) gave a short but determined answer. He succinctly commented, "No I haven't in

recent years. I don't think that, you know, I haven't really had that experience very much, you know. So I guess I would just have to pass on that question.”

#### Summary

This chapter presented the themes derived from the interviews: (a) subjects' definitions of spirituality, (b) their perceptions of barriers and supports, (c) benefits, and (d) application. These themes were supported with verbatim transcriptions expressing the participants' perceptions. Chapter 5 interprets and discusses the findings, presents the implications for change, and offers recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH, AND CONCLUSION

Chapter 5 presents the summary of this study, engages in a discussion of the findings with implications, offers recommendations for future research, and states a conclusion. This chapter is the final chapter for the study.

From the original review of the literature, it became evident that there was literature that supported there being more spirituality in post-secondary education as well as literature that did not support this idea. Further, the review revealed that there is controversy surrounding the difference between spirituality and religion.

Considering the findings from interviewing the six professor participants in this study, several serendipities, issues, and facts emerged. Among these were points of academic freedom and power, and illusions related to history and the more recent postmodern/new age world. What follows in this chapter addresses not only the expected themes of this study but also the unexpected findings. In this chapter, the many important concepts of this thesis are interconnected.

### Summary

The purpose of this study was to describe spirituality in Canadian post-secondary education by investigating the work experiences of 6 professors across 5 different faculties at one university in Ontario. The intents were to determine the extent of spirituality in these professors' teaching, to find out how the professors defined spirituality, and, what their viewpoints were with regard to the barriers and supports to integrating spirituality in education. The study was phenomenological in its approach as data were collected through guided interviews (Patton, 2002). Based on data analysis, four themes emerged: (a) subjects' definitions of spirituality, (b)

their perceptions of barriers and supports, (c) benefits to post-secondary education, and (d) application of spirituality in classroom setting. The purpose of this study was accomplished by providing insight into 6 professors' personal and professional perceptions of the barriers and supports of spirituality in their educational work in Canadian universities, their understanding of spirituality, and the application of spirituality in education in their classroom teaching.

The participants articulated diverse understandings of spirituality. Each of them gave two definitions: one of spirituality in general and one of spirituality in post-secondary education. In the study, findings revealed that there is variation in the definitions of spirituality. Consequently, this implies that there is variation in the definitions of spirituality in post-secondary education. This supports the findings of previous studies which separated definitions into two groupings. One group said spirituality is religion or closely related to religion. The other group said it is separate from religion. It is important for educators when discussing spirituality in education to be clear of the meaning. It is difficult for professors to expect consistency of incorporating spirituality into teaching because it is interpreted differently by different professors. If spirituality is to be incorporated into curriculum it is important for professors to have a clear understanding of which definition should be used given differences in religion, culture, beliefs, and values of their students.

As for supports for spirituality in post-secondary education, the participants expressed the view that generally there is an increased awareness and appreciation of spirituality, as well as increasing academic attention to spirituality. Findings indicated that professors found that there are more barriers than supports when applying spirituality in education. While there is agreement that spirituality in education is

valid and important, it is difficult to see in university classrooms because the barriers to integrate spirituality in education outweigh the supports from the educational institutes in the application of spirituality in education.

The data analysis revealed three main views about the benefits of spirituality in education for these participants: awareness, incentives, and uncertainty. Spirituality is an entity that we cannot see, touch, or smell; therefore, the benefit of spirituality in education is not easily measurable. However, according to the professor participants, once the importance of spirituality in education is conveyed to students, it opens their minds to deeper consciousness and makes them more receptive to the benefits.

All participants described themselves as very spiritual individuals. However, they indicated that spirituality in education is difficult to achieve at the post-secondary institution. Through inference to some degree, these findings give general insight into the smaller comprehensive Canadian universities. The subjects were receptive to the notion of using spirituality in education. However, they indicated that it was difficult to achieve in the classroom due to such specific reasons as institutional barriers--- curriculum construction, communication among professors--- and the stage of maturity of students. They all indicated that there is room for spirituality in post-secondary education and this underscores the need by the administration to encourage incorporating it into classroom pedagogy that is consistent with earlier literature (Fullan, 2003).

Each professor has his own way to teach spirituality in education even if it is not explicitly stated in their course outline. An apparent problem is that students do not appear to be receptive to the use of spirituality in education because they perceive it as religion, something that is controversial and, to many, not easy to measure

scientifically. Undoubtedly, future research on many of the questions raised by this phenomenological study (e.g., questions concerning barriers, their history/origins, their purpose or systemic/structural conditions, and what role the university plays in policies that influence these conditions) is required before spirituality in education will be clearly witnessed in post-secondary settings.

## Discussion

### *Perceptions of Spirituality*

The findings support literature (Dei et al., 2000; Doetzel, 2004; Fox, 1991; Gorsuch & Miller, 1999; Houston, 2002; Kolander & Chandler, 1990; Lantieri, 2001; Lusted, 1986; Palmer, 1983; Rinpoche, 1992; Shlain, 1991; Tacey, 2000; Thoresen, 1999; Tisdell, 2001; Wolf, 1996;) that indicates that individuals have their own unique definitions of spirituality. Although two of the participants defined spirituality in terms of religion, the others had definitions which were not directly related to religion. This is consistent with literature reviewed (Houston, 2002; Thoresen, 1999).

One of these two participants viewed spirituality as primary and religion as secondary; the other participant suggested that a definition of spirituality varies according to “the time of the day.” Overall, there were commonalities among the definitions of spirituality given by the participants. These commonalities are reflected in the definitions of Mitroff and Denton (1999) who state that spirituality is highly individual and intensely personal, that one need not be religious to be spiritual, that in a spiritual definition the entire universe has a purpose and interconnectedness with respect to everything and everyone, that one should have faith, that the highest good is to serve humankind, and that spirituality encompasses the same kind of concepts as

has been defined in this study by the participants. In summary, the fact that participants' perceptions of spirituality varied is not unexpected.

When the participants defined spirituality in post-secondary education, one common characteristic appeared: Education in and of itself is spiritual. This finding supported Miller's (2000) contention:

I believe that any subject can be taught soulfully. If the teacher brings his or her own soul to the classroom then the subject being taught takes on a vital energy. In the soulful teacher's class, the students can sense the teacher's commitment to learning. (p. 13)

#### *Barriers and Supports*

When asked about the barriers to spirituality in contemporary education, the participants' responses suggested five sub themes: global view, prejudice, curriculum, age suitability, and beliefs.

The respondents perceived that, to a larger extent, the western world is consumed by its preoccupation with money. Because people are so caught up in the material world, they have lost their fundamental values. Some of the participants suggested that Western/North Americans are beginning to lose sight of the purpose of their existence in this world. They are moving away from spirituality and moving into a material world, where materialism and performance are more important than anything else, thus devaluing spiritual human beings. The respondents' answers are consistent with findings in the literature (Miller, 2000; Palmer, 1999) that show a departure from spirituality due to materialism. Indeed, today in North America, there are particular educational institutions that have a spiritual base, yet, generally, society appears to embrace an educational system which has expelled spirituality from the

classroom (Bloom, 1987; Bork, 1997; Wilshire, 1990). These observations confirm the conclusion of Martin Luther King, Jr. as cited in *The Worlds of Martin Luther King* (1983):

One of the great problems of humankind is that we suffer from a poverty of the spirit, which stands in glaring contrast to our scientific and technological abundance. The richer we have become materially, the poorer we have become morally and spiritually. (p. 38)

The findings from the study mirror Miller's (1993) assertion that there exists a social normative view of post-secondary education that must make a nation, any nation, globally competitive. Thus, the schools' main role is to produce consumers and producers" (p. 20).

In regards to spirituality in education, prejudice poses a barrier. Most of the participants stated that, in Canadian post-secondary education, spirituality is a forbidden topic of discussion that one rarely takes the initiative to confront because it involves different interests of diverse groups of people. The Canadian university system is secular. So it may be unpopular to incorporate spirituality in the secular classroom because it is controversial to separate spirituality in post-secondary education from religion. These findings are supported in the literature (Beck, 1986). Additionally, Miller and Ryan (2001) are consistent through their statement that "[o]ne of the students I interviewed said that he believed many of his peers did not engage in religious conversation on campus because it was as if 'religion had become a bad word' " (p. 15).

The participants pointed out that there is no institutional room specifically for spirituality in post-secondary education. The participants emphasized that the



university system focuses first on the development of knowledge, not spirituality. For instance, engineering focuses exclusively on the technical aspects of the field. This is supported by Miller (1993; 2000). Class sizes and students' ages were also identified as barriers to introducing spirituality into the classroom setting.

Aside from barriers, there were also supports for spirituality in education. One participant indicated that although spirituality is not included in curriculum, professors still have the choice to include it in their course content. This academic freedom provides an opening to introduce spirituality in post-secondary education. In a sense, professional ethics can be interpreted as a spiritual role in education. Overall, it is curious that many of the professor participants emphasized barriers to discussing spiritual things in their classes considering that the job of professors by its very nature comprises academic freedom.

Recent discussions (Houston, 2002; Keen, 2002; Laurence, 1999; and Nash, 2001) on spirituality's role in education within the academic milieu have attracted attention, an interesting phenomenon that supports Raper's (2001) example from Middlebury College:

A course entitled "The Search for Meaning" is designed to "facilitate the search for meaning" and "attempts to integrate the spiritual, intellectual, emotional and physiological dimensions of life."(p. 27)

Despite the fact that the university, in which the participants are professors, has some similar courses with respect to "the search for meaning" theme [involving links to wellness, balance, social justice, women's issues etc..], these courses were not mentioned in the participants' interviews. Thus, it seems that the participants do not really sense a strong spiritual climate on their campus.

In sum, based on the responses of the participants, there are more barriers to spirituality in university education than there are supports for it which is consistent with the literature (Briskin, 1996; Britzman, 1998; Capper et al., 2000; Corry, 1969; Cooper, 2005; Cunningham & Cordeiro, 2000; Dei et al., 2000; Fox 1991; Fullan, 2002; Harris, 1962). A possible explanation for this is that perhaps professors and the educational institutions within which they work are conditioned by the larger society that is experiencing a decline with respect to support for spirituality and a disillusionment about goodness in people.

#### *Benefits*

An analysis of the data revealed three perspectives about the benefits of spirituality in education: awareness, incentives, and uncertainty. The fact that two participants thought that spirituality in education would hopefully broaden students' views and guide them in pursuit of possible truth and meaning of their lives and deemed it as a process of opening students' minds and expanding their awareness is consistent with arguments from the literature (Miller, 2000; Palmer, 1983).

The fact that two participants commented that spirituality in education is a long-term investment, that takes time for students to absorb and digest and it is more of an incentive than didactic teaching suggests that spirituality in education has an intrinsic value that is intangible and powerful, and it can offer students the opportunity to ponder their own ethics, morality, and self-development. The statement by two other participants that the process of teaching spirituality is valuable in and of itself finds support in the literature (Tacey, 2000; Thom, 1993; Wolf, 1996). Also, there is consistency with McGreevy and Copley's (1998) assertion:

We also believe that the depth of one's spirituality—a reflective life, attention to balance, an authentic self, optimism and hopefulness—is enhanced by the experiences described here, and that school leaders have the opportunity to affirm and value these experiences. Indeed, the future may reveal that attention to the spirit of education in the training of teachers and in schools and classrooms may be a significant factor in students' and teachers' growth and well-being. (p.1)

The fact that a few participants were uncertain if spirituality in post-secondary education is beneficial, and had other reservation about trying to teaching it is inconsistent with a recent survey (Astin, 2004) that found undergraduate students seek spirituality in the classroom. One might say that these students when made open to spirituality by those who educated them begin to think at a higher level of consciousness that is less based on illusions of people being bad by nature.

#### *Application*

The participants provided their responses to the application of spirituality in education from six perspectives: (a) personal spiritual growth; (b) student focus; (c) school work; (d) nonapplicability; (e) diminished use, and (f) religious emphasis.<sup>1</sup> Three of the participants concluded that they ask their students some very specific questions: How did the world come into being? What is the purpose of their lives? How can I find real happiness? What is your mission in life? and What happens after

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<sup>1</sup> [Note: in the following presentation of findings, it is not the purpose to engage in intellectual debate on such issues as “what is truth?”, “who is privy to the correct concept of spirituality and how to ask questions concerning it?”, or “indoctrinating versus teaching”. Rather the main purpose is to shed increased light on the viewpoints of the professorial participants regarding spirituality in education.]

death? They would use these questions to guide students to think about their spirituality. This finding is consistent with Palmer's (1998) recommendation:

A spiritual education should encourage students to go deep into themselves, into nature, and into human affairs and teach the value of service to others, to life, and to our planet. A more 'spiritual' education should open the mind, the heart, and the spirit of the student.

The participants indicated that professors' concept of spirituality might easily become imposed upon the students when there is possible power imbalance, which may explain the reason why spirituality is systematically encouraged to remain outside the classroom. This finding is supported by the literature (Beck, 1996) that outlines a caution to allowing spiritual teaching in the classroom. In addition, participants also noted that by establishing a concept or philosophy of spirituality, they might be able to help the students enhance their own spiritual growth. The findings reflected Raper's (2001) observation:

Topics for class discussion include literature, psychotherapy, personal philosophy, being, separation, the longing for community, death, and gender. As I read through this class syllabus, I could not help but think how revolutionary it would be if every new student had the opportunity for this kind of critical dialogue with peers and professors. (p. 27)

Participants K and B identified student-focused teaching as one way to introduce spirituality in education. They maintained that regardless of the subject or the setting, students should be the center of instruction. Students' feelings, thoughts, and needs should come first. This finding was consistent with Raper's (2001) recommendation that "I hope that we can learn to see the divine in our students and

honor them for their sanctity...find the courage to break down the barriers...to creating meaningful relationships with students” (p. 30). This finding is reflected in the assertion that living is an art (Blanchard, 1999), and everyone is searching (Burns, 1999) including students, even if they appear to initially be shy about sharing their inner spirit.

This finding also agrees with Miller (2000) who concludes that when teachers demonstrate a caring attitude, community develops in the classroom. Noddings (1984) suggests that when authentic community happens, the student “may respond by free, vigorous, and happy immersion in his own projects” (p. 181). Participant K’s statement that “we are educators, and we are what we teach” supported Palmer’s (1999) assertion that “spiritual questions are embedded not only in the disciplines we teach--they are embedded in our own lives” (p. 3). Participant B shared the same view, but he held that only students with great ambition or ideals in their lives should learn about spirituality in education.

Most participants indicated that the application of spirituality in education is related to schoolwork. They maintained that spirituality in education should be applied in the form of assignments, essays, lectures, group discussions, readings, reflections, and so on. They commented that students would benefit from looking at spirituality from different perspectives. Most of the literature reviewed did not mention the specific applications to address spirituality in education within the classroom. Only Astin (2004) touches upon some of the components the participants mentioned in this study that are used for their classroom teaching.

Participant N paid great attention to the teaching methods at the university. He stated that teaching in most Canadian universities is not innovative. Its main function

is to prepare students for the job market. Thus, he designed his teaching so that it is more closely related spiritually to social reality, thus making academic work less abstract. He reflected Palmer's (1999) notion that "learning does not happen when the subject is disconnected from the learner's life" (p. 8). The implication is that people are spiritual beings having a human experience rather than vice versa.

The majority of participants mentioned that they would allow their students to develop their own spirituality through self-exploration. What they did was listen to the students' spiritual expressions, with the agreement of students. They held that it is not appropriate to push students too hard, since students would be defiant, thus destroying their attempt to introduce spirituality in education. Half the participants stated that spirituality in education is non-applicable to their university work. It was interesting to note that some participants themselves were unsure about their previous responses. Sometimes, they had completely different views when the same question was asked twice. This apparent contradiction might be explained by the very essence of human nature and the mystery of one's understanding and consistency with respect to spirit and soul (de Waal, 1989) and post-secondary teaching (Sheffield, 1974).

In terms of what they claimed was non-applicable, participants expressed their concerns from different perspectives. Most of them said that they would keep spirituality out of the classroom because spirituality does not apply to a post-secondary setting. Some participants revealed that they never use materials or books related to spirituality because they do not want to confront students. This finding reinforces the idea that a number of articles detailing the need for spirituality in education may indicate a lack of spirituality provided in classroom teaching at the post-secondary level.

Others mentioned that they manage not to bring up the topic of spirituality education because they are afraid that students may laugh at them. Five participants also spoke of less opportunity for spirituality to grow, and they mentioned that its importance is diminishing. They would never like to address spirituality unless the students asked directly because they thought that the students prefer practical knowledge to spiritual enlightenment. This finding is in contrast with Astin (2005-06) who found in a recent survey that a majority of undergraduate students think their schools have a role to play in their emotional and spiritual development.

Two of the participants said that they employ religion as a media to teach spirituality, but not to proselytize. This finding is agreeable with Laurence (1999) who found that religion can be used as a tool to teach spirituality. They would like to choose topics from important historical events related to ethics or morality to teach students. Specifically, they would require students to do relevant readings and engage in group discussions so that the teaching of spirituality would become part of their everyday classroom activities. The literature reviewed did not address the application of spirituality in the classroom setting at the post-secondary level in Canada.

In sum, the findings supported and challenged previous research conducted on spirituality in education. An analysis of the data generated a greater understanding of what spirituality is, explored the barriers and supports for spirituality in education, and presented the applications for spirituality in post-secondary education. And also the findings from this study suggests recommendations for future areas of research.

People believe that by giving spirituality a more appropriate place in our institutions, the sense of connectedness among students, faculty and the institution

itself will be strengthened (Astin, 2004), then studies such as this one exploring the application of spirituality in post-secondary education in Canada are significant. In this study, participants provided their point of view of the application of spirituality in education from the following perspectives: (a) personal spiritual growth, (b) student focus, (c) schoolwork, (d) non-applicability, (e) diminished use, and (f) religious emphasis. The different perspectives of the participants could be instructive to other educators as to applying spirituality into their university classroom teaching.

An example of this observation is that findings suggest that paying more attention to students' internal needs rather than their external academic performance is one way to introduce spirituality in education. Using the data from this study with other similar studies could help educators understand the most effective way of implementing spirituality in education within the classroom. For example, participants K and B emphasized that one of the most important times to introduce spirituality to students is when they are facing a crucial moment in their lives or suffering a trauma. They believed that they could convey spirituality to students in this way.

Additionally, the data from this study and other similar studies elaborate some of the barriers and supports to using spirituality in education within the post-secondary teaching environment. The participants shared their thoughts on barriers such as global view, prejudice, curriculum, age suitability, and beliefs. The participants also outlined supports such as institutional academic freedom and increased awareness. These data could be used to encourage and instruct educators as to what to look out for if they want to incorporate spirituality in education within their classrooms. As well, administrators and policy makers may find the information



useful if they want to consider incorporating spirituality in education in their institutions and curricula.

Exploring spirituality in post-secondary education in a study such as this one reveals the belief that the benefits of using spirituality in education at the post-secondary level are similar to any long term investment. The participants understood that it may be difficult to see immediate results and the eventual benefits to society could be seen in the future. An example of this came from participant K who said spirituality in education would influence students' understanding of morality, social behaviour, ethics, and beliefs. He believes those traits could be incorporated into the students' character and may have influence in their future decision making.

This study is another study that shows there is diversity in the definitions of spirituality and spirituality in education. Yet, there were a few common themes within all the definitions that could be grouped together such as love, passion, a greater sense of connection, and the search for the meaning of life. This could provide educators and students a better understanding of what spirituality and spirituality in education are. This study and others like it could also help educators better realise that they should be sensitive to the variety of understandings of spirituality and spirituality in education from their students.

A lack of spirituality may lead to compulsive or reckless behaviours, substance abuse, and empty and dangerous sexuality in an effort to escape the pain of an inner emptiness (Garber, 1996; Dei et al., 2000). Therefore, by examining the importance of spirituality in education; determining its applicability to the educational process; and investigating why the educational journey should be a spiritual journey,

not just an empirical one, this process may offer insight into how spirituality in education may resolve many social problems (Thoresen, 1999).

#### Recommendations for Future Research

The following statements are suggestions for future research to expand upon and confirm the findings and discussion from this study:

1. Conduct a study that involves a larger sample and a wider geographical area of investigation.
2. Conduct a longitudinal study on the relationship between spirituality and ethical and moral behaviour.
3. Research the following questions, many of which arose from this thesis:
  - Is there an acceptable common definition of spirituality?
  - What is the relationship between spirituality and religion in Canadian education?
  - How do educators, administrators/policy makers perceive their role in attending to the spiritual needs of students? Should there be special counsellor training for these student superordinates?
  - Under what conditions and for what ends do universities, public and non-public focus on courses on spirituality?
4. Investigate the similarities and differences historically with respect to how Canadian and American universities recognize/encourage spirituality in their academic work and teaching.
5. Investigate how university professors perceive the relationship between institutionalized academic freedom and limitations on their spiritual freedom. How real and active are barriers and supports? Is responsibility institutional or

individual?

6. Interview students as to their views about spirituality on campus, particularly with respect to the teaching by their professors.
7. Investigate how students' families influence the students' spirituality.  
Were there events that caused these students to steer away from being spiritual before they became post-secondary students?
8. A survey similar to HERI (see p. 20).

### Conclusion

Historically, the first post-secondary educational institutions had religious and church affiliation. For instance, monks started universities in Europe and various religious communities initiated post-secondary education worldwide (Pulliam, 1987). Today, it is controversial as to how much education has lost its spiritual emphasis. Some writers believe that spirituality in society may address some important social issues (Dei et al., 2000b; Thoresen, 1999). The intention in this study was to investigate whether professors in post-secondary education are acting on a level of spiritual consciousness.

The results of the study have implications for a better understanding of spirituality in Canadian post-secondary education with respect to students, educators, and administrators. The findings show that there is diversity in understanding of what spirituality and spirituality in post-secondary education means. Today's Canadian society is a multicultural one. The rich cultural diversity and inclusiveness in Canadian government policies means Canadian society can move beyond what was and have the post-secondary education opportunity to celebrate its differences within. Spirituality has different meanings to different people in post-secondary settings.

Outcomes from this study are an encouragement towards fostering more open dialogue and teaching methods on spirituality and education in today's post-secondary educational system in Canada. This study provides many practical examples from current professors with methods on how to implement spirituality into the classroom; especially in an era where spirituality is not part of the set curriculum. The study also suggested that spirituality in education can always be applied in the classroom to different degrees without the need to have it explicitly stated in the curriculum. For example, participant K believed "you teach who you are" (Interview 1). What he meant was, the educator's own spiritual beliefs and personal approaches to spirituality would be reflected in their teaching. So, regardless of the subject or curriculum focus, spirituality in education would infiltrate the classroom.

There are many anecdotal and casual references to thoughts on spirituality in education within the post-secondary system. But few of the studies explore the application of spirituality in classrooms. This study makes a contribution to the systematization and growth of the body of knowledge regarding this spirituality.

The participants in the study were asked for their ideas and opinions on the benefits of spirituality in post-secondary education. They stated that the benefits of spirituality would not be seen in the short term, but would more clearly be seen in the long term growth and development of their students as human beings which would also enrich our society as a whole. This finding suggests that spirituality is indeed necessary as part of curriculum and may awaken educators, administrators/policy makers, and students who do not consider that spirituality is an important part of modern education.

This study revealed barriers and supports to spirituality in post-secondary education with barriers being greater than supports. This finding reflects the fact that although there are many studies on the importance of spirituality in education, there seems to be little practical support and usage. The numerous papers describing the need for an Utopian ideal of a spiritual classroom are well intentioned, but practical application is needed in order to make any Utopia plausible. This suggests that Canadian educators may want to start to consider applying spirituality in their classrooms.

Through both formal and informal education, society is maturing to be genuinely interested in other human beings' worlds. Leadership, equity, commitment to social justice, and excellence in teaching and learning are coming to the fore (Gatehouse, 2003; Iseke-Barnes & Wane, 2000). There is a growing desire to bring persons of different religious persuasions together with a new understanding, cooperation, and tolerance. These developments represent a wonderful freedom that should never be forgotten (Cooper, 2005; Kagan, 2003).

What is happening is of a very spiritual (not just interpersonal) nature, and in all of this, post-secondary educational institutions play a significant role as they shape the minds of young, intelligent students. This study has made a modest contribution to the literature and was conducted with full cognizance of the changing world as just described and with the knowledge that more clarity as to the concept of spirituality in education must be forthcoming.

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## APPENDIX A

### Interview Schedule

1. What do you think spirituality in education means?
2. What do you see as the role of spirituality in education?
3. Why do you think spirituality is important for students today? (How can educators use this knowledge to help university students?)
4. What do you think of as the barriers to spirituality in education?
5. What do you think of as the supports for spirituality in education?
6. As a university professor, how do you perceive your role in attending to the spiritual needs of students? And how do you perceive your role in encouraging faculty and the institution to attend to the spiritual needs of students? Have you been able to do so at your classroom/faculty?
7. Can you describe for me in some detail the kinds of efforts/initiatives that have been designed in your working experience to assist students in their spiritual development?
8. Can you describe some of the applications for your classroom teaching that you've been involved with in this area?
9. Can you talk about some of the benefits for students, faculty, and the institution as a whole as it relates to the opportunities for spiritual growth found in your class?
10. What is the level and intensity of spiritual experiences in your daily teaching life?
11. If you want to assess how well the students' spiritual needs are being met:
  - a. Do you listen to their beliefs, faith, pain, hope or despair?



- b. Are they able to express or develop their spirituality through any of lecture, group discussion, homework, school activities, reflections, readings, guided imagery, conversation, or connection to the others?

12. If you had chance to direct research in this area, or the ability to direct people to write more about spirituality in education, what would you want them to focus on?

## APPENDIX B

### Cover Letter

Dear Potential Participants

I would like to invite you to participate in a study I am conducting, entitled of Spirituality in Education: Professorial Viewpoints.

The purpose of this study is to address the questions if there is spirituality in education and to what degree, how the spiritual experiences of educators are understood and articulated by professors and students, how it has been implemented in contemporary higher education, and in what ways does this articulation of spirituality best contribute to the development of students. Through your participation in this research, you will help to answer these questions.

To accomplish my research, I will be conducting in-depth interviews with professors from the local university. The interviews will be 60 minutes broken into two in durations for each professor, and they will be recorded and transcribed. To ensure confidentiality, participants' names will not be identified, and pseudonyms will be assigned. Participation is strictly voluntary, and participants reserve the right to withdraw from the project at any time.

All of the data will remain confidential. The findings from this research project shall be summarized and submitted to the university's faculty of education as my completed thesis. The data will be stored in a secure area for 7 years, after such time

the data will be destroyed. The copy of the thesis will be submitted to both the Paterson Library and Faculty of Education Library once the thesis is completed. If you have any questions or concerns, or if you need clarification regarding this research project, please do not hesitate to contact me at (807) 627-5834, or at e-mail [qma@lakeheadu.ca](mailto:qma@lakeheadu.ca) or contact my supervisor at (807) 343-8708. Thank you for your consideration in this matter. You may also contact the university's research ethics board at 343-8110. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Qi Ma

APPENDIX C

Consent Form

174 Winnipeg Avenue

Thunder Bay, P7B, 3R4

E-mail: qma@lakeheadu.ca

Supervisor: Dr. D. Thom

E-mail: dthom@lakeheadu.ca

November 7, 2005

My signature on this form indicates that I have agreed to participate in this study by  
Qi Ma on Spirituality in Education: Professorial Viewpoints.

I have read and understand the research study and its purpose. I also understand that:

1. I am a volunteer and can withdraw from the study at any time.
2. The information I provide will remain confidential.
3. There is no danger of physical or psychological harm.
4. I will receive a copy of the results upon the research.
5. The data will be securely stored at the university for 7 years and then destroyed.
6. A copy of the completed thesis will be available for consultation in the university's libraries.

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Signature of Participant

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Date