

## ***BOOK REVIEW***

### ***Spirituality in Social Work and Education: Theory, Practice, and Pedagogies***

Editors: Janet Groen, Diana Coholic, John R. Graham (2013). Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 250 pages.

“Spirituality within Social Work and Education” appears to have emerged towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and is currently continuing to evolve as an acceptable part of university curriculum. The editors of this book have selected a number of refreshing accounts of the scholarly application of spirituality. The content makes up a collaborative project by a group of academics working within the fields of social work and education. Referred to as “the first of its kind”, this book introduces an interdisciplinary interchange between education and Social Work. After having reviewed the chapters, educators may feel more confident about incorporating “spirituality” into their courses.

When introducing their topic, the editors clarify the difference of what is meant by two terms, often mistaken for one another. They suggest that “spirituality” indicates a person’s search for life purpose, and connection with self, others, the universe, and a higher power; whereas, “religion” is a unified set of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things. Within the following chapters, the authors give examples of ways that scholars have grappled with how to: define spirituality, integrate it into the classroom and be persuasive about spirituality being a meaningful concept for practitioners.

Divided into three sections, the chapter topics present a dialogue between the authors. The first section explores the historical and theoretical underpinnings of spirituality within social work and education; the second section focuses on the pedagogical implications of incorporating spirituality into teaching; the third part of the book addresses issues related to practicing spirituality, while teaching.

In the 2nd chapter, the Antigonish social justice movement is given as an example of an intersection between spirituality and adult education. To help contextualize the multi-definitions of spirituality, the author introduces some examples how gender, culture, race, ethnicity, and geography can all affect a person’s understanding of spirituality. And, she shares a personal experience of attending a “wake” where she had observed how the traditions of celebrating a deceased person’s life were very cultural. Her perspective, about spirituality within education, supports Parker Palmer’s argument

that effective teaching results from the cultivation of the inner landscape of an educator's life.

Chapter 3 provides a short overview of the concepts of religion and spirituality in social work research, practice and education. The literature selected suggests that although there has been a lack of curriculum content in the area of spirituality and religion, many instructors have been incorporating these values into their teaching. Furthermore, the author indicates despite there being an expanding research agenda, focusing on "spirituality", researchers have experienced challenges on how to adequately measure the influences of spirituality on individuals.

Through an introductory quote, the author of chapter 4 brings attention to the importance of a rise of new consciousness and experiencing of a change of the human heart. He supports the position taken earlier in the book that spirituality can result in more social justice and aiming to make the world a better place. When proposing developing an alternative narrative, the author stresses the value of adopting discourse that addresses the universal human need for meaning. Such a "whole system consciousness" would support a belief that people are interdependent and there is the potential of living beings to contribute to the well-being as a whole. He further argues that this new consciousness would knock down the walls of dualism and challenge an individual's "mistaken identity" of being separate from others; it would eliminate distorted thinking and overcome old habits of mind.

Continuing with an argument in support of ridding dualism, the author of chapter 5 discusses seeking an "undivided life" where there is unity of meaning and purpose connected with intellect and action; and, where compassion and care reflect insight and knowledge. She also carries on a supportive dialogue about working towards social justice. To enhance her discussion, she brings in the voices of six professors from the faculties of social work and education, who contributed to this book. One contributor stated that his wish to pursue spirituality in teaching practice and research demonstrates an understanding that focuses on inter-connectedness with others.

In "Section Two" the authors examine some of the stressors of introducing more pedagogical approaches to spirituality within adult education. One author argues that it is important to infuse spirituality into education and social work in order to cultivate caring and just professionals. A third author suggests applying post-structural and critical approaches to pedagogy, which could assist in the celebration of diversity and creation of peaceful societies. Another

author contributing to the discussion encourages a holistic approach to teaching and insists that students want to be taught as "spiritual beings" aspiring to find meaning and purpose within their education.

The third section addresses the importance of mindfulness-based practices as a means of self-care and approach to therapy and educator presence. Mindfulness is explained as an activity that encourages awareness within the present without passing judgment on the future. The authors suggest that a school culture can be altered by students being more mindful. They acknowledge some challenges faced when working with and teaching individuals from multicultural backgrounds who endorse a variety of spiritual beliefs and practices. However, they suggest that "mindfulness" can be taught to individuals with diverse spiritual beliefs.

Endorsing "mindfulness", the author of chapter 10 stresses the importance of an educator's presence in the classroom, and of them applying "contemplative practices" to teaching. The author of chapter 9 states that she applies "holistic arts-based groups" and experiential methods which teach mindfulness based practices. Comparable to the argument presented by the authors of chapter 11, this author is convinced that spirituality is a bio-psychosocial dimension of one's humanness that can involve transpersonal experiences.

Chapter 10 and 11 addresses a holistic and "spiritually sensitive" approach to health care in social work and medicine. The authors of chapter 11 suggest that applying holistic healing that involves a spiritual component could assist to improve medical education. They discuss their research which involved interviewing thirty spiritual healers. They note that each healer had entered into the cultural world of their patients with great care and compassion before offering any recommendations for healing. Also, there was a meditative component in many of the interventions of the healers. The invocation of prayer, breathing exercises, relaxation and possibly hypnosis and entering a dream realm were some of the claims made by the healers in their research.

The authors of chapter 13 and 14 support the belief that Social Workers and other professionals should be able to freely dialogue about their faith, beliefs, and practices. Using case studies of grief and trauma experiences, they attempt to demonstrate that spirituality is central to the process of healing from grief and other traumas. They indicate that neglecting the spiritual dimension of healing ignores a commitment to holistic practice. The author of chapter 14 argues that within the helping profession, spirituality can

be an energizing and empowering principle within problem solving, policy development and health.

In sum, I believe that this book truly does demonstrate the amount of progression that has taken place the past decade in the area of spirituality in social work and education. And, the content does give strong evidence of the benefits of moving in the direction of further interdisciplinary collaboration. Because this book has been referred to as "the first of its kind" I really do not have "another one of its type" to compare it to. However, the one element of spirituality that I noted was lacking within the content, is: "heart wisdom "which has been connected with spirituality, care and compassion throughout history, within the various religions.

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