



THE USE OF SPIRITUALITY IN TRAINING AND ADULT EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Over the past decade or more, a surge of the idea of spirituality has overcome the population. This surge is apparent in our everyday lives as we watch TV, read books, surf the Internet and even in our work as companies advertise their 'spirited workplaces.' This paper explores the definitions of contemporary spirituality as it relates to training and the adult education field. One of the main goals addressed is to show a clear distinction between the terms spirituality and religion – that spirituality is not religion and vice versa. The paper discusses the discoveries of a spiritual consciousness at work and what society thinks of it. It also give a clear understanding of why the field of training and development is moving towards spirituality, and what types of spiritually-infused training is taking place at work and in other adult education venues. Finally, the disadvantages of this emergent paradigm are discussed with cautions and suggestions on the future of spirituality in training and adult education.

Key Words: Spirituality, training, adult education, personal growth, religion, development, consciousness.

INTRODUCTION

A new age of spirituality has been brought to the awareness of individuals within the last 10 years or more, and it is not only affecting the personal growth of people, but also, it is affecting the adult learning and development environment in different corporations and firms across the nation. Many companies have sought to expand their employees' need for job satisfaction by seeking out training classes and techniques that explore spirituality, and there has been a surge of adult education and those in the higher education field to explore courses specifically addressing spirituality. This type of learning also directs employees to seek a proper work/life balance. But one of the most important goals spirituality has assisted people with is finding meaning and purpose in life. "If you look at what brings energy into a team, increasingly it's about the idea that we are people, not machines. You do that through a combination of values and high purpose - spiritual intelligence, for lack of a better term - coupled with the right sort of interactions and learning" (Rennie as cited in Kubicek, 2005, p. 1).

This paper explores the definitions of contemporary spirituality as it relates to training and the adult education field. One of the main goals addressed is to show a clear distinction between the terms spirituality and religion – that spirituality is not religion and vice versa. The paper speaks of the discoveries of a spiritual consciousness at work and what society thinks of it. It also attempts to give a clear understanding of why the

field of training and development is moving towards spirituality, and what types of spiritually-infused training is taking place at work and in other adult education realms. Finally, the disadvantages of this emergent paradigm are discussed with cautions and suggestions on the future of spirituality in training and adult education.

TODAY'S SPIRITUALITY

What is meant by the term spirituality? Is it a religion, or is it part of a religion? Not too long ago, the phrases spirituality and religion were almost synonymous – to be spiritual was to be religious and vice versa (Lauzon, 2007). Neither appeared in adult education or training curriculums or materials, and both were far from making it into business and education journals or the corporate environment. To be religious is to abide by a certain set of thoughts and principles where one is guided by a headship and established “laws” of morality, ethics, love, forgiveness, good and evil. In many cases, religion is not a choice, but a ritual, so to speak, passed on through family lineage. Religion was never spoken about in the workplace, as companies were afraid of crossing lines into discrimination. Today, religion is still not spoken of in the corporate setting and more specifically, in the field of training and development, but spirituality is. As Tisdell (2001) describes it, spirituality has become a hot topic. English (2001) reports, “After a long hibernation, spirituality is no longer a taboo word in adult education and training” (p. 2).

Definitions of Spirituality in Adult Education

There are several definitions of contemporary spirituality regarding adult education. Allan Lauzon (2007) describes spirituality as something that is not simply learned about but is something experiential, that humans make meaningful by being part of creation. Spirituality is a recognition of an individual's beliefs about who they are, what purpose they serve, what else is out there, where did they come from and where are they going. Even more, it is a feeling of oneness to the world, to all of humanity, to all that exists – that there is a supreme, higher being and that this life experience is a journey not made up of rules, but of exploration and learning. Spirituality breaks down the barriers of separateness that religion so adamantly prescribes. Its goal is to find the commonalities of every human being, to find a wholeness, so that individuals do not feel separated, but together as one. To be human is to feel the need to find a oneness, a feeling of unity with other humans and the world around us. Tisdell (2008) says that spirituality should be viewed as away to find wholeness, “because the whole is always greater than the sum of the parts, then spirituality itself is always greater than that which can be described in language” (p. 28).

For adults in the corporate environment, feelings of separateness are constant. Employees are asked to keep their personal lives separated from their professional ones. In the area of expansion, adults in higher education programs and in corporate environments are being asked daily to manage their own career needs and advancements. Literature being written on the topic of spirituality and adult learning today notes that a time of a great change in thinking is here, a transformation of evolution is upon us. Lauzon (2007) argues that the emergence of spirituality is an evolutionary transformation of consciousness – one that will challenge educators' understanding of the adult learner and how to apply such a concept to the practices of training and development.

In the training and development field, the definition of spirituality has become a focus. Tisdell (2001) recounts that within adult learning, a common theme has become a focus on making something meaningful which is specifically related to adults' search for spirituality. As adult educators, Vella claims that “attending to the spiritual dimension of adult learning is part of honoring the learner as ‘subject,’ and thus the author of her/his own life in the quest for meaning-making” (as cited in Tisdell, 2001, p. 1).

Although spirituality has become a more common-place term, and our culture is more open to its presence, trainers and adult educators have the option of not including the word in the vocabulary of their curriculums

and training materials. It does not mean that the word 'spirituality' should be discussed directly or that learning activities are to be built around it (Tisdell, 2001). It should, however, be considered that it is the adult educator's role to nurture the soul of the learner, to understand that spirituality is present in the teaching and learning environment, and that it brings with it something sacred (Dirkx cited in Tisdell, 2001, p. 1). Using the word spirituality can cause drawbacks in this emergent trend of helping people find meaning in their lives if educators are not sensitive to their students' feelings.

Spiritual Findings at Work

In order to understand what knowledge the corporate world had of the emergence of spirituality, Ian Mitroff and Elizabeth Denton completed more than 90 interviews with executives and high-level managers and reported their findings in *A Spiritual Audit of Corporate America: A Hard Look at Spirituality, Religion, and Values in the Workplace* (Salopek, 2000, p. 77). What Mitroff and Denton found were almost undisputed agreements regarding the definition of spirituality across several different industries. The overarching definition of spirituality found was that it is a search for ultimate meaning and purpose, and to live a life of wholeness and integration (Bloch, 2005, p. 196). Other findings included people not wanting to fragment their lives, but to be known as a whole person; that people have a strong sense of differentiation between religion and spirituality; and that employees who see their company as being spiritual consider them to be more profitable as they are open to creativity and emotions (Salopek, 2000, p. 77).

The question if work can be enjoyable and give meaning to peoples' lives is being asked daily. During regular check-ups, doctors and health professionals of all kinds are questioning people, 'Do you like what you do? Does your work give meaning to your life?' Human resources professionals, career counselors and mentors are on the same mission – to help promote a sense of self-fulfillment and meaning for people in their work. The fast-paced business world promotes consistent organizational change, high stress levels, competitiveness, higher productivity, unhealthy eating patterns, and a constant connection to technology. This is causing people to reevaluate the meaning of work – why are we there and what is the meaning behind it (Allerton, 1992, p. 80). Human beings are searching for "deeper meaning, for purpose, and for greater personal satisfaction" (Salopek, 2000, p. 77). J. Francis Stroud suggests that businesspeople need a new way of being, one that assists in healthier emotional, physical and spiritual lifestyles (Allerton, 1992).

Perhaps one of the best pieces of evidence that spirituality is becoming part of mainstream thought was noted by Salopek (2000) when she found that *Trend Letter* cites spirituality among its top 14 of trends shaping the 21st century. Spirituality is all around – on TV, on the Internet, in books and articles. It is helping individuals to become more relaxed and open about this part of their lives. Reality TV shows like *The Monastery* on BBC and *Spirituality Shopper* (Kubicek, 2005) and daily shows like *Oprah Winfrey* support viewers in remembering their spirit (Thompson, 2000). These people exemplify how their everyday work is essentially connected to their spirituality in all manners of life and crossing over into death. Spiritually-based best-selling books can be found in every store and have promoted an awareness of a different kind.

Authors such as Dan Brown and Neale Donald Walsch have assisted in raising the consciousness of humankind; they teach the everyday adult learner a new language, a consciousness and a connectedness that gives meaning to life in the smallest tasks or hardest life lessons. Other TV shows such as *Medium* and *Ghost Whisperer* aid in awakening human beings to the thought that life is more than what the eye can see.

Current Movement Towards Spirituality in Training and Adult Education

There is a long tradition and well-established history of the field of adult education and the practice of such. Social democracy and social gospel movements resulted in programs such as the Antigonish movement and the Farm Radio Forum, which inspired visions of democracy and social justice (Lauzon, 2007). In the 1950s and 1960s, a change began to occur in order to legitimize the field of adult education and learning. Professional existence in the field had to be practically research based. Only scientifically based educators

and practices would be accredited. The focus on separateness and individual successes were therefore engaged.

As humanity has progressed, so have the thoughts and ideals of adult education and its impact. Today, people are curious to know what divine intervention might be near and how they can tap into a greater knowledge and wholeness to make sense of their world. Trying times call for a deeper search for answers. Thoughts of the tragedy at Columbine High School and 9/11 still plague society today. A change of thought patterns might bring about a more holistic, collective consciousness – a new spirit of humanity. Thoughts of spirituality in adult education have become part of this new consciousness. As stated clearly by Lauzon (2007):

The fundamental purpose of a spiritually inspired adult education is to develop an educational process that creates opportunities for the development of autonomy and choice. It is only in having choice that individuals can name the world for themselves, and it is in naming the world for themselves that learners create the conditions and opportunities to create meaning – which is at the very heart of a spiritually inspired adult education (Lauzon, 2007, p. 42).

As described by Cooks, Hackney, Jackson, Stevens and Zumwalt (2002), the movement towards spiritual growth and development of the learner is a holistic and humanistic approach to the advancement in the field of adult education and training. A sense of spirituality comes along with being human, but not all know or feel this part of their humanity. Cooks et al. describe this aspect of knowing as an essential part of training - that there are three dimensions that assist informal learning and spiritual growth in adults. The three elements of spiritual development include: a strong sense of identity; mindfulness, concern and outreach to others; and a continuous creation of meaning and knowledge (Cooks et al, 2002, pp. 1-2). These qualities should be applied to both adult educator and adult learner alike.

Furthermore, spirituality in education simply refers to adult educators and learners reaching deep inside and finding a connection between teacher, student and subject (Jones, 2005). Making a connection, or having a 'wow' moment, is the place where the truest learning happens. There is no real time or space associated with it. Many people would argue that spirituality cannot be seen or heard and that it may not even exist. In that case, it cannot be measured, therefore, why educate on this basis. Longtime scholar of teaching and learning, Ernest Boyer, said that even if things cannot be measured, they can nevertheless be experienced. Emotions then, which also cannot be measured, are indescribably part of the human existence and cannot be refuted (Jones, 2005). Nevertheless, the definition of spirituality is not always clear and concise.

Spiritual Training at Work and in Higher Education

In a movement towards connection with others and in claiming wholeness, bringing aspects of spirituality into work is ever-present. Human resources offices hold events featuring speakers who help people connect employees with their inner-self to find what is truly important or what makes their souls move (Thompson, 2000). Forums have been created in order to spread knowledge informally to people who share similar interests and are inspired to progress in certain areas.

Trainers in the adult education field deal with spirituality on a daily basis. They are training on topics such as ethics, character and giving in order to benefit another (Thompson, 2000). Spirituality training uses several pseudonyms – ones that trainers are quite familiar with. Anytime a trainer teaches a manager supervisory skills and/or how to deal with difficult people, they are providing training in spirituality. Trainers are helping people discover who they are; they help lead them in certain directions, help them discover their purposes, values and what their relationships mean. "If senior managers understand how vital a spirited workplace is to corporate goals, then they will support efforts to develop the spiritedness of their workplace" (Thompson, 2000, p. 19). That being said, Thompson (2000) suggests that trainers be guided with certain ideals in mind.

First, they must ensure that senior management understands the value of spirit in the workplace. Second, trainers should find needs assessment tools to ensure enough attention is being given to the human spirit. Third, he suggests the training programs that are developed be looked at through spiritual eyes. Fourth, if there is ambiguity regarding ethical issues, a new targeted area of training should be developed. Finally, the trainer should get in touch with their own spirituality.

Leona English (2001) suggests examining training materials by asking some of the following questions: “Do I challenge learners to interpret meaning in their lives?; Does my teaching encourage learners to find the spiritual dimension of everyday life?; Do I spend time fostering my own spiritual life?” (English, 2001, p. 2).

Examples of Applied Spirituality in the Adult Education Classroom

Within the formalized classroom of learning and education, spirituality has begun to spring forward in order to advance different fields of knowledge, such as counseling, education for administrative leaders and phenomenological research. The American Counseling Association studied the effects of using spiritual genograms in a community counseling graduate course as a way to provide experiential learning to students with opportunities for exploration into spiritual and religious influences, the implications for counseling practices and opportunities for self-reflection (Willow, Tobin, Toner, 2009). As described by Hodge (cited in Willow et al., 2008), “a spiritual genogram is an assessment instrument specifically designed to identify and operationalize the spiritual and religious strengths that exist in clients’ family systems” (p. 2). Results of the study showed that there were clear instances of student development in three different competencies: knowledge, skills and awareness (Willow et al, 2008).

A second example of spiritual training in the classroom took place in order to assist a phenomenological researcher. Phenomenology is a study of thought, based on ordinary reality. It is also the most advanced of several different communication theories. Phenomenology, as a study of communication theory, is the true embodiment of understanding. It is the purest form of knowing regarding everyday language and interactions, for example, knowing, understanding, feeling and communicating what love is. The definition of phenomenology as described by Olga Louchakova, is similar to the definition of spirituality as described by Tisdell (2008). She describes spirituality as a journey toward wholeness, and Louchakova (2005) describes phenomenology as a “demand for self-enquiry, thus involving the ‘whole being’ of the student” (p. 89). Therefore, the description of this training is spiritually based, for not only was it spiritual training, where graduate students in a psychology class studied this method, but the basis of the training – phenomenology – is itself spiritual.

In a third example, a graduate-level seminar based on the spiritual and moral dimensions of educational leadership, sought to provide information on whether or not spiritual transformation might be possible within a worldly establishment. The seminar focused on spirituality and its relationship to transformative learning. A spiritual transformation occurs when a shift of consciousness takes place surrounding a person’s belief systems about themselves, about others, and about the world they live in (Groen & Jacob, 2006). Graduate students volunteered to be part of the classroom because they found an attraction to the thought of spirituality. Once in small groups, the facilitator would present a spiritual principle for problem solving exercises based on a case study. The most significant transformation occurred when one of the men in the class experienced a life changing event. When his fiancé decided to leave him, he did not know where else to turn. He pulled out his materials from the spirituality seminar and began to see where his missteps were and how to heal them. He learned that for most of his life, he had been self-centered and never recognized it. He was able to use his seminar experience to self-reflect and actually, start to heal his relationship with his fiancé.

DISADVANTAGES

As evidenced to the references in this paper, a clear drawback of the role of spirituality in training and development in adult education is that there is no concise definition of spirituality. Thus, empirical studies are limited. Regarding classes on spirituality, questions arise. If spiritually-based courses are moved into the public sector, should they only be reserved for those in the field of psychology and counseling? And could untrained, insensitive leaders be at risk for running a seminar if individuals with emotional conditions join the class? As suggested by Groen and Jacob (2006), more intense research and observation in these areas are required to answer the questions. Another caution to using spirituality in the classroom is that the highest ethical standards must be used.

HRFOCUS approaches the topic of spirituality in training with scrutiny. It suggests that if companies choose to offer training on spirituality and motivation, that reasonable accommodations are made so as to not offend the religious beliefs of others (2000). Attorneys suggest offering both spiritual and non-spiritual training sessions that achieve the same objectives. Employers addressing spirituality in the workplace should take caution as there is the potential for a religious-discrimination lawsuit if the sensitivity of the subject is not addressed appropriately.

CONCLUSION

Spirituality is a feeling of oneness to the world, to all of humanity, to all that exists – that there is a supreme, higher being and that this life experience is a journey not made up of rules, but of exploration and learning. It is clearly apparent that spirituality is effecting most aspects of our lives today, and specifically in the field of training. Spirituality is everywhere – on TV, on the Internet, in our books and magazines, in movies and in our corporate environments. Spirituality is intrinsically part of being human and training in this field can help people of all ages and work experience, gain a better awareness of what it means to them.

Trend Letter cites spirituality among its top 14 of trends shaping the 21st century. And a study by Ian Mitroff and Elizabeth Denton found that there were almost undisputed agreements regarding the definition of spirituality across several different industries. As companies look to expand their businesses and retain excellent staff, a focus on assisting personnel in finding meaning in their jobs and in life is being explored. Training classes and techniques exploring the topic are being used as a way to help. Soft skill training in the areas of managerial skills, learning to deal with difficult co-workers and how to be an effective team member, are all examples of spiritual training. If ethical training is taking place, spirituality presents itself.

More and more, using the basis of a spiritual practice to truly learn is becoming prevalent, as is seen in the three examples given earlier of spirituality in the training, care and advancement of knowledge in adults. In the future, spirituality could become a mainstream practice in the training departments of major corporations and in courses being taught in any field where adults crave a deep knowing of self and the world around them.

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