

THEORETICAL, REVIEW & REFLECTION ARTICLES

Transformative Learning Theory and Spirituality: A Whole-Person Approach

Gary Piercy

Spirituality is gaining popularity within academics as discussions regarding the importance of spirituality within leadership and education increases. A biblical anthropology embraces human nature as physical, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual with recognition that adults are capable of learning within each of those realms. Embracing humans as spiritual beings necessitates the inclusion of spirituality in discussions related to how humans come to know. Mezirow's transformative learning theory provides an understanding the nature of adult learning and serves as the foundation upon which to build a whole-person approach to adult learning that includes spirituality. Defining spirituality as the quest for life-meaning and self-awareness for a higher purpose demonstrated through efforts to achieve the common good for all, offers a working definition by which to establish learning goals. Creating learning strategies that touch the human spirit allows educators greater opportunities for transformative learning to occur.

Mezirow's dialogue concerning adult transformative learning theory continues to spark discussion regarding how adults learn. For Mezirow, learning involves adult learners engaging in critical reflection concerning their existing frames of reference (Mezirow & Associates, 2000). This internal dialogue allows adult learners the opportunity to examine assumptions and beliefs to determine their validity in light of new information. In addition to critical reflection, transformative learning theory recognizes the importance of reflective discourse with others. Merriam (2004) observed that critical reflection requires a higher level of cognitive development than many adults ever achieve resulting in a call to "expand the theory of transformational learning to include more 'connected,' affective,

and intuitive dimensions on an equal footing with cognitive and rational components" (p. 66-67). In agreement, Mezirow (2004) acknowledged the need "to elaborate on the crucially important roles and relationships of affective, intuitive, and imaginative dimensions" of transformative learning (p. 70).

Others have joined the conversation regarding various dimensions and approaches to transformative learning theory. Baumgartner (2001) described four approaches that theorists and interpreters employ with regard to transformative learning theory including Freire's emancipatory approach, Mezirow's cognitive-rational approach, Daloz's developmental approach, and Dirkx and Healy's spiritual approach. Each of these approaches offers insight into transformative learning; however,

including spirituality as part of the learning process provides opportunities for the development of a whole-person approach to adult learning. An examination of spirituality in learning requires an understanding of the nature of adult learners and learning, the aspects and development of spirituality, and learning strategies to enhance spirituality in education moving toward a whole-person approach to the transformative learning process.

The Adult Learner and Learning

THE ADULT LEARNER AS A SPIRITUAL BEING

Schauffele and Baptiste (2000) acknowledge the Judeo-Christian Bible as a credible source and contend that learning theory should incorporate a biblical understanding of human nature. Citing Genesis 1:26-27, Schauffele and Baptiste, maintained that humans are unique from other living creatures because God created humans in his own image. Thus, the Christian view of human nature includes the idea that humans are spiritual beings (Schauffele & Baptiste, 2000). Furthermore, based on Jesus' words recorded in Mark 12.30, "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength" (NIV), Schauffele and Baptiste maintained that human nature includes a minimum of four realms including physical, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual. Such a view reflects Dewey's picture of the whole person as intellectual, social, moral, and physical (as cited by Schauffele & Baptiste).

This biblical perspective of human nature provides a framework for understanding whole-person learning. According to Schauffele and Baptiste (2000), adult learners are capable of learning or knowing by way of experience through any one or combination of these four realms. The extent of knowledge gained may vary from one realm to another; however, these realms of human nature become a means by which adult learners come to know. As adult learners come to know a thing by means of one or more of these realms, they begin to incorporate their knowledge habitually into their lives. Thus, recognizing the multiple dimensions of human nature requires the development of a learning theory that encompasses the whole person.

ADULT LEARNING

A simple definition of learning is a change in

behavior (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Thus, in a broad sense, learning involves the development of "repeatable strategies which are habitually acted upon in order to achieve what the subject perceives to be the best possible ends" (Schauffele & Baptiste, 2000, p. 451). The differences among key learning theories are identifiable when examining the determining factors for recognizing the best possible end. For example, the behaviorist recognizes the environment as the determining factor for the best possible end (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). The cognitivist recognizes the natural abilities of "organization, logic and a priori principles of truth" as the determining factor for the best possible ends (Schauffele & Baptiste, 2000, p. 451). The social constructivist maintains that people learn as they socially engage in dialogue and activities concerning common tasks or problems (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Situated learning theorists recognize communities of practice and social cognitivists recognize various personal factors such as physical, emotional, and cognitive as determining the best possible end (Schauffele & Baptiste, 2000).

Each of these learning theories seems to base assumptions on an either/or premise. That is, learning occurs either as an external process between learners and their environment or as an internal psychological process of acquiring and elaborating on information (Illeris, 2003). However, using Schauffele and Baptiste's (2000) model of human nature causes a dilemma in the light of the possibility that learning occurs in all four levels of human nature (physical, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual). Therefore, it is necessary to approach learning with a theory that includes multiple dimensions of learning.

Illeris (2003) provided a learning model that allows for external and internal learning by recognizing that external and internal interactions are active aspects of the learning process. Illeris' model begins with the process of external interaction between learners and their environment. The internal process involves the interaction between reason and emotion. Illeris depicted this model as an inverted triangle demonstrating the interaction of three dimensions of learning. Each point of the triangle represents one of the three dimensions. The lower point of the inverted triangle represents the environment while each of the other points represents cognition and emotion. The foundational claim of

the theory is that these three dimensions will always interactively process information in order to create learning.

Through the cognitive dimension, learners are able to build upon their knowledge and understanding by constructing the ability to manage the challenges of everyday life, which gives learners the capacity to function. The emotional dimension includes the “mental energy, feelings, and motivation” securing the learners ability to reason, which enables the development of sensibility (Illeris, 2003, p. 399). The environmental dimension is the external dimension involving the interaction of learners with people, places, and events. It is through this external dimension that learners integrate into their communities resulting in the learners’ ability to socialize. Thus, the three dimensions of learning create a field of learning that encompasses “the development of functionality, sensibility, and sociality” (Illeris, 2003, p. 399). Thus, Illeris’ learning model and Schaufele and Baptiste’s (2000) understanding of human nature provide a foundation for developing a strategy for whole-person learning. Building on this foundation requires understanding the aspects and development of spirituality.

Understanding Spirituality

DEFINITIONS OF SPIRITUALITY

Reaching a consensus regarding the definition of spirituality is a difficult challenge. In fact, Tisdell (2002) indicated that though many offer definitions for spirituality, they all seem to be incomplete. For example, Bean (2000) viewed spirituality as creating meaning out of life’s experiences. Vogel (2000) recognized spirituality as being “drawn to visions of justice, compassion, righteousness, and peace...embrac[ing] more than the material and mundane, or the here and now” (p. 18). According to Vella (2000), every learning event is a moment in which spiritual development occurs. Further, Tisdell (2008) described spirituality as part of the life journey that leads an individual toward wholeness. Moreover, Hill and Johnston (2003) defined spirituality within a given context by equating responsibility for stewardship of the earth as spiritual. Furthermore, as difficult as spirituality is to define, it remains an indispensable part of adult development by providing meaning and coherence to life’s journey (Mulqueen & Elias, 2000). Yet, despite the

variety of definitions for spirituality, several concepts that seem to reoccur in the literature including a consciousness of a higher power, interconnectedness with all people and all creation, and a development of self-awareness (Tisdell, 2001; Zeph, 2000). Thus, drawing from many sources, a working definition of spirituality could include the quest for life-meaning and self-awareness for a higher purpose demonstrated through efforts to achieve the common good for all.

As noted above, human nature consists of at least four realms including physical, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual. Citing Dirkx, Baumgartner (2001) noted that appealing to the spiritual dimensions of adult learners requires the use of imagination as transformative learning surpasses a rational approach to include a “soul-based learning that emphasizes feelings and images” (p. 18). Thus, a primary aspect of spirituality is the role of emotion in transformative learning.

EMOTIONS

Goleman’s (2006) work regarding emotional intelligence has brought the concepts of emotions to the forefront by recognizing that emotions are the impulses to act that are shaped by experiences and cultures. Like Goleman, Illeris’ (2003) recognized the importance of the interaction of cognition and emotion in the learning process. Dirkx (2001) also affirmed the significance of emotions noting that emotions can either help or hinder learning. Adult educators often overlook the emotional aspects of human nature viewing teaching and learning as primarily a rational and cognitive process. However, citing Damasio and LeDoux, Taylor (2001) wrote, “recent research has revealed that emotions are indispensable for rationality, such that one cannot reason without emotions or feelings” (p. 219).

The field of neurobiology traditionally regards reason as a higher order function of the brain while emotion is a lower order function of the brain (Taylor, 2001). However, it seems a more prominent relationship exists between the functions of the brain relating reason and emotions. Parrot and Schulkin noted, “emotions anticipate future needs, prepare for actions, and even prepare for thinking certain types of thoughts” (as quoted in Taylor, p. 222). These findings also coincide with Dirkx (2001) who viewed emotions as fundamental aspects of how adults make sense of their daily lives.

Within the brain, chemical transmissions continuously and simultaneously process information from both conscious and unconscious sources (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). This information within the brain travels from one neuron to the next neuron through chemical molecules known as neurotransmitters that move information throughout the brain through an intricate and multifaceted system. Consequently, human feelings, emotions, and reason continually interact within the brain as the neurotransmitters deliver information throughout the brain. For example, one might have to make a decision with regard to relocating to a new city for a new employment opportunity. As the process of evaluating the situation takes place, the individual considers the job and the location of the job, which could elicit specific feelings. If the emotional attachment to the city is positive, the individual might have euphoric feelings resulting in a smile. If the emotional attachment to the city were negative, the feelings would be the opposite. Thus, emotions are influential in the cognitive process (Taylor, 2001)

Goleman (2006) affirmed the relationship between the cognitive and the emotional noting that humans have a rational mind (thinking) and an emotional mind (feeling) which interacts to create the mental life. Citing Merriam and Caffarella and Taylor, Dirkx (2001) supported these findings by noting that,

‘Brain-based’ theories and the concept of ‘emotional intelligence’ suggest that emotion and feelings are deeply interrelated with perceiving and processing information from our external environments, storing and retrieving information in memory, reasoning, and the embodiment of learning. (p. 68)

Citing Johnson-Laird and Oatley, Taylor (2001) wrote,

Without emotions, individuals are unable to co-ordinate their behavior, respond to emergencies, prioritize goals, prepare for proper action and make progress towards goals – incapable of filling the gaps often found in the slow and error-prone process of objective rationality. (p. 223)

The emotional dimension of human nature serves as an important component of the learning process as both emotions and reason interrelate in order to promote learning. In addition, emotions often serve as the catalyst for reflection as adults begin exploring their feelings leading toward transformative learning. Barlas (2001) found that “intense emotional content of learning experiences served... to trigger reflective learning by directing focus on assumptions that underlie frames of reference” (p. 4). Barlas’ research was in the context of learning-within-relationship, which is a second aspect of spirituality.

RELATIONSHIPS

Recalling the various definitions of spirituality, one definition worth revisiting is the idea of the interconnectedness of all people as relationships among adult learners is vital to the learning process (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Adults entering into various learning environments often find camaraderie with other adult learners as helpful and stimulating. Encouraging, supportive, and trusting learning environments are indispensable for reasonable discourse. Nouwen described this as a hospitable environment in which people become friends (as cited in Wickett, 2000). As adult learners begin sharing their lives and experiences with one another, they may create a context of compassion and trust, through which they are able to discuss differing perspectives on topics of interest. This type of safe environment provides opportunities for learners to examine the strengths and weaknesses of their personal frames of reference, as well as those of others.

Another benefit of a safe and trusting learning environment is that it allows for a sense of unity in diversity. The diversity of perspectives among adult learners within a given context serves to provide differing approaches and opinions that enrich the learning experience for everyone. Though engaging in discourse with those of differing perspectives may cause some adult learners to feel uncomfortable, establishing a safe and trusting learning environment enables adults to participate in the learning experience regardless of their feelings. These safe and trusting environments offer occasions for uninhibited and genuine dialogue, enabling adults to achieve superior meaning-making opportunities, which enables spiritual development. This learn-

ing-within-relationship provides opportunities for adults to learn along with others as both the context and process of learning serve as important components of critical reflection that leads to transformative learning (Barlas, 2001).

According to Yorks and Kasl (2002), one of the primary preconditions for establishing trusting relationships through which transformative learning may occur is empathy. While empathy may be easily assumed within groups with similar interests, backgrounds, and experiences, such groups do not provide many diverse experiences and therefore may not evoke transformative learning. Yorks and Kasl referred to this as the “*paradox of diversity*” (p. 186). The paradox is that the more diverse the experiences, backgrounds, and perspectives of the members of the group, the more likely the relationships will produce transformative growth. On the other hand, such diversity may indicate the group will be unable to empathize with one another thus creating a context that may actually inhibit growth and transformation.

Nevertheless, as adult learners develop compassion and empathy for one another, the mutual and emotional support provides a safety net for critical reflection and for transformative learning as emotions are often the catalysts for promoting transformative learning. Learning-in-relationships allows empathetic adults to “discuss...and process...emotions and feelings, both as a precursor to critical reflection and as a stimulus for critical reflection and perspective transformation” (Barlas, 2001, p. 6).

Caring communities of learning are also vital in the actual process of transformative unlearning as the process of abandoning previously held frames of reference might be emotionally painful. Boyd and Myers noted that as adults unlearn previously held practices, they often feel a sense of loss, as previous ideals that provided certainty and security are no longer valid (as cited in Macdonald, 2002). Such loss requires adult learners, along with their instructors, to serve as collaborators, who share concerns regarding this loss of certainty and security within the process of transformation.

Adult educators assist learners in creating an empathetic context for learning-in-relationships by maintaining a safe and trusting environment. This allows adult learners to share their individual life experiences with confidence that mutual respect will prevail. Through this discourse, adult learn-

ers have an opportunity to share their unique and diverse life experiences while developing empathy and emotional support for one another resulting in a deepening appreciation for different perspectives (Barlas, 2001). Not only should the adult educator create this empathetic culture, it is also necessary for educators to focus on building positive relationships with their students.

Vella (2000) offered a “spirited epistemology” which recognizes adult learners as “Subjects (capitalized)...in order to emphasize the primacy of the learner) of or decision makers in their own learning” (p. 7). As such, adult learners take responsibility for their own learning and their own lives. Thus, spirited epistemology is learner-centered and as such assumes the accountability of the instructor to the student as the instructor assumes a moral obligation to facilitate the goals of the student.

Vella (2000) provided various principles and practices for instructors to implement for developing a learner-centered adult education program. The first principle is dialogue. Through dialogue, educators provide guidance to discussions through which learners are able to share their experiences and knowledge with others. As the dialogue continues, the instructors provide substantive comments and information in order to assist the learners in adding new information to their existing knowledge. Dialogue that centers on the learners’ needs also provides instructors with vital information concerning content relevance and learning processes.

The second principle is respect, which “guides not only the design of learning and the learning tasks, but also every aspect of educators’ encounters with adult learners” (Vella, 2000, p.12). As instructors come to know the life situation of adult learners, they are able to come to respect those learners’ contexts, experiences, and perspectives. One way of gaining information concerning the lives of adult learners is through a learning needs assessment before entering into the learning situation. Such an assessment provides the instructor with important information regarding the learner’s background, interests, and learning needs.

The third principle is accountability, which is the foundational value of a spirited epistemology as the teacher is accountable to the learner by way of the learning design or learning covenant (Vella, 2000). Spirited epistemology does not necessarily mean the subject matter concerns spiritual matters.

However, the nature of the relationship between the instructor and adult learners creates an opportunity for spiritual growth through the interactions between instructor and learner (Wickett, 2000). Through a learning covenant, instructors and learners establish mutually agreed upon learning objectives and the implementation of strategies useful for accomplishing those objectives. The learning covenant also includes establishing of timelines, identifying resources, and outlining principles for assessment.

Just as creating a learning environment of hospitality is essential in learning relationships among learners, the same hospitality is equally important in the relationship between instructors and learners. Quoting Nouwen, Wickett (2000) wrote, “hospitality is not an invitation to adopt the lifestyle of the host, but the gift of a chance for the guest to find his own [life]” (p. 42). Developing this type of relationship with learners requires instructors to resign control and allow learners the opportunity to learn and to make mistakes. Achieving this type of abandonment requires a trusting relationship between instructors and learners and a belief that learners want to achieve success (Wickett, 2000).

Vella’s (2000) fourth principle involves forging new relationship between instructors and learners in which both become equal partners in the learning experience. Working together as partners allows instructors and learners to advance one another’s learning. Citing Gravett, who based her comments on Bakhtin’s theory, Vella (2000) wrote this new relationship:

implies that teacher, learner, and knowledge are in a dynamic, reciprocal unity - dialogic teaching is proposed as transformative exchange, in which teachers and learners are involved in a co-learning and co-teaching process, thereby cultivating the development of an authentic community of learners, characterized by sharing and support, along with cognitive challenge. (p. 14)

Citing Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule, Vogel (2000) provided a dynamic image describing the relationship of instructor to learner as that of a midwife. The imagery comes from the biblical account of the Hebrew midwives who stood between Pharaoh’s

order to kill all infant boys without regard for their own lives and safety. Using this imagery, adult educators assist learners in creating new ways of thinking and new ways of doing (Vogel, 2000). Thus, in the role of a midwife, the instructors do not replicate themselves; rather, they nurture “knowledge, values, creativity, and growth” (Vogel, 2000, p. 24). The relationships forged within adult learning contexts enable adults to explore new ideas and reflect upon previously held assumptions within safe and trusting environments. Both emotions and relationships play a significant role in spirituality. The significance of emotions and relationships requires an understanding of how spirituality develops in adulthood.

SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

English (2000) promoted three components of authentic spiritual development relating to adult learning. The first component of spiritual development is a strong sense of self. Such spiritual self-awareness is an understanding of what one believes in, cares about, and values (Zohar, 2005). Adults engaging in continuous or lifelong learning environments often develop personal relationships with other adults within the same environment. Such rich relationships provide adult learners opportunities to develop “a stronger sense of self, which is integral to spiritual development” (English, 2000, p. 30). In addition, as adult learners develop meaningful relationships with instructors, they often feel a sense of value, which also contributes to a strong sense of self. With a strong sense of self, the student constructs a solid foundation upon which they are able to confidently take risks and grow.

Referring to Jung, Cranton and King (2003) described this strong sense of self as “the development of the whole person, indivisible and yet distinct from the general collective psychology” as a “lifelong process of *individuation*” (p. 33). Individuation, along with authenticity and transformative learning form an escalating journey. As adult learners are real, or authentic with themselves, they begin seeing their values and beliefs as being different from others. Then they begin the process of transformation leading to further authenticity leading again to further individuation and transformation (Cranton & King, 2003).

Dirkx (2001) also connected spirituality and a sense of self by arguing, “personally significant and meaningful learning is fundamentally grounded in and is derived from the adults’ emotional, imaginative connection with the self and with the broader social world”

(p. 64). Engaging in various educational contexts often evokes strong emotional expressions from adult learners. Adults returning to the classroom often describe their experiences using words depicting emotions such as fear or dread (Dirkx, 2001). This suggests that emotions and feelings significantly affect the adult's sense of self and learning processes. Thus, just as emotions and relationships serve as primary aspects of spirituality for adult learners, both also serve to aid in furthering spiritual development within adult learners.

English's (2000) second component of spiritual development involves caring, concern, and outreach to others. Spiritually developed individuals recognize that all of creation is interdependent and for this reason take responsibility to care for others as well as all of creation (Hill & Johnston, 2003). Zohar (2005) affirmed the ability to demonstrate compassion as an important principle of spiritual development. Adults' lives improve as they give of themselves to strengthen and affirm others. Encouraging one another, learning from one another, and affirming one another enhances spiritual development. Further, spiritual development creates and awareness within adults that something greater than themselves exists (Zeph, 2000). This awareness affects the choices they make and their commitment to the good of all. It creates a realization and desire within adults to reach out to others to serve their local communities, society, and the greater world for the common good of all people.

English's (2000) third component of spiritual development involves continually constructing meaning and knowledge. Through relationships and various experiences in life, adults are continually constructing meaning. As adults grow in their understanding of their lives, they become aware that "life is greater than... [their] sphere of influence and that... [their] future is bound up with that of others" (English, 2000, p. 30). The recognition that they are a part of something greater than themselves provides adult learners a tremendous opportunity for further spiritual development as they engage in meaning making. Zohar (2005) referred to this as holism, which includes the understanding that everyone is part of the world system and what one does, thinks, values, and feels affects the entire world and thus everyone bears a responsibility to fulfill his or her part.

In addition to English's (2000) components of spiritual development, Fowler's (1974) work in the area of faith development provided a connection between spiritual development and cognitive development. Fowler

described spiritual development as a journey beginning with faith that depends upon the faith of others such as parents or other authority figures. The next step in the journey depicts faith that depends upon the faith of the community, such as a church or synagogue. Finally, many adults develop a faith that is uniquely their own, capable of dealing with life issues.

Other researchers also connect spiritual development with cognitive development. Citing cognitive development theorists such as Belenky, Clinchy, Basseches, and Keegan; Mulqueen and Elias (2000) wrote, "what is striking about these theories... is that, for a person to reach the highest stage of cognitive development, a 'transformation' of sorts, represented by a commitment to values and beliefs, is required" (p. 2). Referring to Perry's study of cognitive development among Harvard and Radcliffe undergraduates during their four years of college, Mulqueen and Elias (2000) offered four stages of cognitive development. The first stage is Dualism in which adult learners divide meaning into two sets – good or bad, right or wrong. The second stage is Multiplicity during which, adult learners begin to trust their own instincts and opinions becoming less dependent upon authority figures. The third stage is Relativism in which, adult learners begin accepting the opinions of others only after researching, analyzing, and comparing for themselves the evidence supporting said opinions. The fourth stage is Commitment at which point adult learners begin engaging "in dialectical logic and paradoxical thinking by being committed deeply in values and yet open to learn" (p. 2). Adults capable of engaging in dialectical thinking are able to discuss and entertain ideas and worldviews different from their own without being threatened.

Merriam (2004) echoed the concept that dialectical thinking is a higher level of cognitive development. Though Merriam is not connecting dialectical thinking to spiritual development, she does connect dialectical thinking to the more mature adult. If higher-level cognitive development is more likely among more mature adults, then it is also possible that this higher level of cognitive thinking coincides with spiritual development in adults. Mulqueen and Elias (2000) noted that in later stages of adulthood, "psychological and cognitive development impels a person to focus on the inner/spiritual self" (p. 2). Thus, a connection exists between spiritual development and cognitive development and spiritual development and maturity. As adults mature, the possibility exists for deeper cognitive development as well as deeper spiritual development.

Incorporating human spirituality is a necessary part of a whole-person approach to adult education. Educators often overlook human spirituality even though it is ever present (Tolliver & Tisdell, 2002). Educators in the twentieth century prepared learners for blue-collar jobs. However, the current knowledge economy requires educators to prepare learners to be innovative, critical thinkers who are confident in their abilities and ideas (Vella, 2000). Further, Vella (2000) vehemently wrote, “unless we teach one another as spiritual, human beings, we will continue to feed a domination system that will be our death” (p. 15). Therefore, educators should begin viewing spiritual dimensions of human nature in the same way they view cognitive dimensions of human nature. The task thus becomes how to include not only the cognitive, but also the spiritual in learning strategies and design.

Strategies for Enhancing Spirituality in Education

ESTABLISHING A FRAMEWORK

Cranton (2002) identified seven guidelines for establishing a learning environment promoting transformative learning including:

- An activating event that typically exposes a discrepancy between what a person has always assumed to be true and what has just been experienced, heard, or read;
- Articulating assumptions, that is, recognizing underlying assumptions that have been uncritically assimilated and are largely unconscious;
- Critical self-reflection, that is, questioning and examining assumptions in terms of where they came from, the consequences of holding them, and why they are important;
- Being open to alternative viewpoints;
- Engaging in discourse, where evidence is weighed, arguments assessed, alternative perspectives explored, and knowledge constructed by consensus;
- Revising assumptions and perspectives to make them more open and better justified;
- Acting on revisions, behaving, talking, and thinking in a way that is congruent with transformed assumptions or perspectives. (p. 66)

While there are no teaching methods that guarantee transformative learning (Cranton, 2002), these methods serve as guidelines that are easily adapt-

able for developing a strategy to include spirituality in education.

Schauffele and Baptiste (2000) argued that human beings are able to learn and come to know something through any or all of the four dimensions of human nature (physical, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual). Citing Shamblin and Hess, Schauffele and Baptiste (2000) wrote:

Although students’ cognitive and spiritual dimensions are not as...accessible to teachers as students’ physical and emotional spheres, it is arguable that the effects achieved through alterations of these metaphysical domains are significantly more lasting and profound than those achieved through merely physical domains. (p. 456)

Dirkx (2001) agreed arguing, “personally significant and meaningful learning is fundamentally grounded in and derived from the adult’s emotional, imaginative connection with the self and with the broader social world” (p. 64). In light of the close connection between all realms of human nature and considering the importance of the spiritual dimensions in meaning-making, adult educators must utilize learning strategies and designs that will affect the spiritual aspects of adult learners in order to create lasting and deeper learning experiences.

WORKING WITH IMAGES

According to Dirkx (2001), “emotions are often associated with voices or images that emerge within an individual’s consciousness” (p. 65). As such, emotions and feelings become a language that bridges the gap between the soul and the outside world (Dirkx, 1997). Adults engaging in learning activities may discover emerging images from emotional connections made with the text of life. In educational circles, examples of the text of life may include various forms of communication including print, speech, and media. Consequently, as adult learners interact with the text of life, images bridge the gap between the outside world and the spiritual dimensions. These images often communicate deeper objectives, behaviors, and feelings apart from reason (Dirkx, 2001). The imagination then becomes the means of communication for an ongoing dialogue of the spiritual dimension and the outside world

and as such becomes the link that adult learners use to establish a relationship with the soul. Learning to work with emotions and to identify images that evoke emotions allows adult learners to tap into a powerful inner aspect of their being. Therefore, the work of the soul is learning that involves recognizing, elaborating, and differentiating the various emerging images as the process of increasing the ability to gain deeper understandings of experiences in adult education (Dirkx, 2001).

The imaginal method provides learners the opportunity to engage in Cranton's (2002) activating event. Exposing learners to various viewpoints, differing opinions, or new information engages the emotions of learners as they reconcile new voices, ideas, and concepts with their previously held assumptions. According to Cranton, "whenever possible, we should...present ideas from more than one point of view...[and] seek out controversial or unusual ways of understanding a topic" (p. 67).

JOURNALING AND NARRATIVE

In order to reach this deeper level within adult learners, educators may incorporate many different designs or strategies into their learning tasks. Dirkx (2001) recommended several strategies for working with images including journal writing and narrative. Journal writing provides an avenue for critical reflection allowing adults to review events and experiences in life for the purpose of meaning-making. Through journaling, adult learners record and process their experiences and the emerging emotional images resulting from reflection leading toward deeper level learning. Thus, narrative journaling enables adult learners an avenue for the development of self-awareness as well as an increased awareness of others (Smith, 2009). The connection between journaling and Cranton's (2002) guidelines is evident in that journaling offers opportunities for adult learners to articulate their assumptions, to engage in critical self-reflection, and to engage in an ongoing conversation with the self. The journal is thus a personal story leading to another strategy important in working with image, the narrative.

Narrative enables adult learners to make sense of their experiences and understanding their self. Quoting Rossiter, Clark (2001) wrote, "the self... [is] 'an unfolding story' in that 'as we understand the world and our experiences narratively, so also do we understand and construct the self as narrative'" (p. 87). Through the unfolding story, adults begin constructing coherence coming to an understanding of the constantly chang-

ing self. Using imagination, the narrative connects the experiences of the story to the learners' emotions thus creating deep and memorable learning.

Narrative works well within Cranton's (2002) guidelines regarding openness to alternative points of view. Cranton admitted that openness to the viewpoints of others could be difficult. However, the employment of role-play offers learners opportunities to begin identifying with alternative ideas in a non-threatening way. Role-play coincides well with narrative since both involve the use of real and imagined story to convey an experience. However, in order to successfully explore and be open to alternative points of view it is necessary to establish a safe learning environment.

CREATING SAFE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Adult learners learn within relationships; however, in order for such learning to take place instructors must create a learning environment in which adult learners are able to express themselves without fear. This provides for another of Cranton's (2002) guidelines, which is an opportunity for students to engage in discourse. According to Vogel (2000), a hospitable space necessitates welcoming differing opinions and ideals and the protection of the right of everyone assume responsibility for what they will share and what they will learn. Thus, the instructor is responsible to make certain that such a safe and hospitable environment not only exists, but also continues. Maintaining safety, trust, and honor within the learning context is necessary to promote a climate of mutual respect that encourages divergent dialogue.

Learning covenants offer one way for establishing a safe learning environment. Such a covenant can be between two individuals or within a group. Learning covenants establish conditions within particular contexts applying to all parties involved within the covenant. Instructors and learners alike agree on the conditions of the covenant providing a sense of community ownership important in the promotion of transformative learning (Baumgartner, 2001). Such a covenant could include commitment to and responsibility for the hospitable learning environment, respect for others, agreed upon benefits and sanctions, and an evolutionary nature of the group (Vella, 2000). These types of conditions enable both instructors and learners to understand the requirements for learning activities as well as the requirements regarding attitudes and behaviors. Establishing these types of requirements informs everyone within the learning context what constitutes

acceptable and unacceptable protocol. Though both adult educators and learners are responsible for maintaining a safe learning environment, ultimately it is the instructor that makes certain such an environment actually exists.

Learning-within-relationship also provides a context for adult learners to engage in yet another of Cranton's (2002) guidelines. That is, through safe and trusting learning environments, adult learners are able to revise their previously held assumptions while exposing themselves to the divergent perspectives of others. Barlas (2001) found adult learners from diverse cultures began realizing the importance of compassionate support and the encouragement of the instructor during the transformation process. Additionally, Macdonald (2002) noted that unlearning can cause great emotional stress and therefore necessitates the support of others. Thus, adults learning within a context of safety, trust, and honor with other adults create an environment of encouragement, strength, and support in which transformative learning may occur.

Cranton's (2002) guidelines also include acting on revisions. This is in keeping with Merriam and Caffarella's (1999) definition of learning as a change in behavior. Thus, adult learners and instructors should incorporate learning tasks designed to reflect the new learning. Instructors may also allow for individual or group projects within the classroom or offer opportunities to engage in activities within the community (Cranton, 2002).

FURTHER STRATEGIES

English (2000) provided three informal learning strategies including mentoring, self-directed learning, and dialogue. First, mentoring allows adult instructors and learners alike become partners in the learning process. Mentoring provides an opportunity for two individuals to "be and become" (English, 2000, p. 30-31). Because mentoring can take place in any context, it allows for deeper level relationships with a goal of helping learners realize their full potential (English, 2000). The relationship of the mentor and the mentee becomes a relationship of mutual respect and reciprocity as they share knowledge, understanding, and life experiences from which the other may glean resulting in the enrichment of both.

Second, self-directed learning (SDL) allows learners to gain a strong sense of self as they engage in learning activities that are meaningful to their own life experiences. SDL offers opportunities to develop self-

understanding and awareness, which reflect spiritual development (English, 2002; Zohar, 2005). SDL programs provide opportunities for adult learners to create a support network of instructors and learners in order to foster further development that could accommodate spiritual and cognitive development concurrently.

Third, engaging in dialogue as an informal strategy for spiritual development provides opportunities for meaningful exchanges between adult learners and their instructors. From time to time, learners and instructors may find that setting aside the formalities of educational protocol opens avenues leading to deeper levels of learning. This is in keeping with Brookfield's (2005) critical theory in which the dominant ideology (in this case that of the instructor) may inhibit creativity. However, as learners and instructors dissolve the barriers of formality and domination they are able to encourage the development of a collaborative partnership (English, 2002). Such a partnership also reflects the spirit of the midwife educator that Vogel (2000) envisioned. Further, informal dialogue provides opportunities for spontaneity and the freedom to ask the fundamental "why" questions, both of which enhance spiritual development (Zohar, 2005).

CONCLUSION

There is a "general consensus that humans are spiritual beings who seek to make meaning out of life and their experiences" (Gillen & English, 2000, p. 88). In light of this, adult educators must work to develop theories and strategies designed to engage the spirit of adult learners so that they might gain deeper knowledge and understanding regarding life's experiences. This requires theorists and practitioners in the field of adult education to continue working toward the development of learning theories designed to engage the whole person including the physical, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual.

Two important aspects of spirituality in adult learners are the role of emotions and the role of relationships. Emotions and relationships are important in understanding spirituality and they are important in the development of spirituality in adulthood. Further, providing safe and secure learning environments allows adult learners to explore new ideas and engage in transformative learning by learning-within-relationships with those from differing cultural and social backgrounds, which enables learners to realize both their interconnectedness and their interdependence both of which relate to spirituality and spiritual development (Love, 2001).

The importance of relationships between adult learners is second only to the relationship between the instructor and adult learners. This relationship becomes the mutual responsibility of both the instructor and the learner as it offers a context for mutual development. Through learning covenants and mentoring, adult educators and students engage in reciprocal learning allowing opportunities for further whole-person development.

Implementing theory to practice becomes the heart of assimilating spirituality and education. Individuals can actively engage spiritual dimensions in adult education contexts offers opportunity for deeper level transformative learning as educators connect reason and emotion. Cranton's (2002) transformative teaching strategies allow for such engagement within various learning tasks designed to incorporate whole-person learning. Dirkx's (2001) imaginal method offers insight concerning how adults are able to establish a "meaningful connection between the text and...life experiences" resulting in deeper level learning (p. 69). Finally, mentoring, self-directed learning, and dialogue all providing opportunity for further spiritual development (English, 2000).

Adult are learning on many levels including formal, informal, traditional, and non-traditional formats for both personal and professional development. Mezirow and Associates (2000) transformative learning theory serves as a solid foundation upon which to build a learning theory that embraces the development of the whole-person. Understanding spirituality and spiritual development provides an opportunity for adult educators to capitalize on opportunities to develop the understanding of transformative theory and to create rich learning environments in which adult learners to grow.

Author Biography

Gary W. Piercy holds a Ph.D. in Applied Management and Decision Sciences from Walden University, as well as Bachelor and Master of Arts degrees in Biblical Languages from Southwestern Assemblies of God University and Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, respectively. Currently a lead faculty member in Grand Canyon University's College of Doctoral Studies and serves as dissertation Chair for many doctoral learners, Dr. Piercy has taught at Lonestar College (TX) and Central Bible College (MO). Dr. Piercy has lectured in the U.S. and abroad on leadership and organizational topics.

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