Teaching The Whole Child:
Fostering Spiritual Development In Public Education

By

Sarah Amelia Marie Walsh

A research paper submitted in conformity with the requirements
For the degree of Master of Teaching
Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

Copyright by Sarah Amelia Marie Walsh, April 2016
ABSTRACT

This study focused on teacher’s perspectives and experiences of fostering spiritual development in school-aged children. The primary research aim was to investigate the strategies used by holistic educators to support their students’ spiritual development. Moreover, this study aimed to understand how spiritual development may respectfully be fostered in public and/or secular institutions. This study was conducted using a qualitative research approach, grounded in existing literature pertinent to spiritual development in education. Three semi-structured interviews were conducted with Ontario educators. This study’s findings posited that building connection and relationships and inspiring curiosity and wonder, are paramount to fostering spiritual development in school-aged children. Other qualities associated with spiritual development as uncovered through this study, included but were not limited to: fostering appreciation, honoring beauty, engaging in purposeful work and modeling vulnerability/spiritual growth. Additionally, it was revealed that there are a number of different strategies that can be employed to foster spiritual development within the parameters of public education, which should be considered in order to support whole-child development. Most importantly, data derived from interviews suggested that supporting whole-child development, including spiritual development, could be a catalyst for educational reform.

Key Words: Spirituality, Development, Education, Well-being, Holistic
FOSTERING SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

DEDICATION

This research paper is dedicated in loving memory, to my high school guidance councilor, Mr. David D’Almeida. Long talks in Mr. D’Almeida’s office supported my own spiritual growth and development. David D’Almeida gave me the gift of his deep presence, caring heart and supportive listening ear. David never told me what to think but rather supported me in my journey to find meaning for myself and for my life. David was a shining example of how an educator can offer non-denominational, spiritual guidance in public education. My guidance sessions with David were the highlight of my grade school education.

David continued to be a mentor to me long after high school graduation. He was a paragon of love in action. Those who were fortunate enough to encounter David knew that he lived to serve. I find that I continue to draw on the memories of my time with him as a regular source of inspiration. Thank you David, your spirit lives on in the lives of those you touched.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge all of the residents from Yasodhara Ashram for the support that I received during my participation in the Yoga Development Course. The Ashram is an exemplary model of how teachers can foster a person’s spiritual development without telling them what to think or believe. Thank you.

Next, I want to thank all of my loving family and friends of past and present; everyone on my path has contributed to my life and to my spiritual development in some shape or form. Special acknowledgment to Thomas for his steady love and repeated acts of service, David J. for thirteen years (and counting) of learning and laughing together, Lizzy for her capacity to bring sacredness into every moment, Martine for her years of kindness, listening and support, Dave W. for the space that they hold for my trials and tribulations and Shine for all of the conversations. Thank you all.

I would also like to acknowledge Andrew McMartin for welcoming me into his organization Pine Project in the summer of 2015. Working at Pine Project was unbelievably inspiring. Thank you to all of the staff and participants of Pine Project who opened my eyes and heart to the personal and/or spiritual growth and development that can be accessed through communing with nature. The mentorship that I received at Pine Project will stay with me for life. Thank you.

I would now like to express deep gratitude to all of my interview participants. It was a gift to learn from you. Thank you for doing the work that you do.

Lastly and most importantly, I would like to thank my mother; her countless acts of support, love and encouragement are the very reason that my scholastic endeavors have been made possible. Thank you mom.
FOSTERING SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION ................................................................. 1
  1.0 INTRODUCTION ........................................................................... 1
  1.1 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY ......................................................... 1
  1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS ............................................................ 2
  1.3 BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCHER ..................................... 2
  1.4 OVERVIEW .............................................................................. 5

CHAPTER 2- LITERATURE REVIEW ...................................................... 7
  2.0 INTRODUCTION ........................................................................ 7
  2.1 CONCEPTUALIZING SPIRITUALITY ........................................... 7
    2.11- Why The Gap in Research? .................................................. 7
    2.12- Eliminating Confusion Between Spirituality and Religion .......... 8
    2.13- Challenges of Reducing And Defining Spirituality ................. 10
    2.14- An Inclusive Definition of Spirituality .................................. 12
  2.2 CONCEPTUALIZING SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT ......................... 13
    2.21- Spiritual Development Within The Field Of Human Development ..13
    2.22- Defining Spiritual Development .......................................... 14
  2.3 PIONEERS IN THE FIELD OF SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION .... 16
    2.31- Alcott ............................................................................. 16
    2.32- Steiner ........................................................................... 17
    2.33- Kessler .......................................................................... 17
    2.34 Erikson ............................................................................ 18
  2.4 STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT IN SCHOOLS .... 19
    2.41- Justification For Spiritual Development Strategies Within Ontario Curriculum ........................................ 19
    2.42- Journaling ....................................................................... 20
    2.43- Mindfulness Meditation ...................................................... 21
    2.44- Rites of Passage .................................................................. 24
    2.45- Socratic Questioning .......................................................... 27
  2.5 CONCLUSION ........................................................................... 29

CHAPTER 3- RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .......................................... 31
  3.0 INTRODUCTION (CHAPTER OVERVIEW) ................................... 31
  3.1 RESEARCH APPROACH & PROCEDURES ................................... 31
  3.2 INSTRUMENTS OF DATA COLLECTION ................................... 32
  3.3 PARTICIPANTS ......................................................................... 32
    3.31- Sampling Criteria ............................................................. 33
    3.32- Sampling procedures ......................................................... 33
    3.33- Participant Bios .................................................................. 34
  3.4 DATA ANALYSIS ....................................................................... 35
  3.5 ETHICAL REVIEW PROCEDURES ......................................... 36
  3.6 METHODOLOGICAL LIMITATIONS AND STRENGTHS .............. 37
  3.7 CONCLUSION ........................................................................... 38

CHAPTER 4- RESEARCH FINDINGS ..................................................... 40
  4.0 INTRODUCTION (CHAPTER OVERVIEW) ................................... 40
  4.1 PARTICIPANT’S SPIRITUAL IDENTITIES: WORKING DEFINITIONS AND ORIENTATIONS ........................... 41
    4.11 Rationale for the Distinction Between Participant’s Definitions and Orientations ......................................... 41
    4.12 Participants’ Working Definitions of Spirituality ...................... 41
    4.13 Participants’ Spiritual Orientations ......................................... 43
  4.2 OBSTACLES TO CREATING LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT IN SCHOOLS ....... 46
    4.31 Societies Dominant Values: Capitalism and Hierarchy ............. 46
  4.4 TEACHING STRATEGIES AND LEARNING GOALS ASSOCIATED WITH SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT ........ 52
Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

The 2015 revised Ontario Health and Physical Education Curriculum Guide outlines the health and physical education curriculum that public school teachers are expected to follow. The curriculum guide states “current thinking views health as a holistic phenomenon, and students are therefore encouraged to make connections between various aspects of their well-being, including physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and social aspects” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015; p.34). Despite the ministry’s expectations and priorities, Anderson (2007) suggests that students’ health and physical education disproportionately focuses on the physical aspects of student’s well being at the expense of the development of their spiritual well being. Anderson (2007) argues, “there is a need to explore this aspect of health [spiritual], given that it is identified in all definitions of health along with physical, social, emotional and mental health, but rarely described in the curriculum documents” (p. 14). Anderson raises a valid point, one that introduces a line of inquiry regarding the discrepancy between knowledge and application. Given that the curriculum document acknowledges health as holistic phenomenon and even references student’s spiritual wellbeing; how then can we as educators ensure that the inclusion of spiritual well-being and development translates from theory into practice?

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to research how spiritual development is being fostered in a variety of educational settings and to learn how a small sample of teachers
create opportunities to develop students’ spiritual well-being in Ontario public schools and selected private schools. With this purpose in mind it is hopeful that this research may contribute to a greater understanding of what spiritual development entails, and how it may be incorporated into the classroom.

1.2 Research Questions

The primary question guiding this research study is: How is a small sample of teachers creating opportunities to foster students’ spiritual development in various educational settings? Subsidiary questions include: How do these teachers conceptualize spiritual development, and what are their perspectives on fostering spiritual development in public schools? What instructional practices do these teachers enact to support student’s spiritual development, and what resources and conditions support their practice? What are the obstacles associated with fostering students’ spiritual development in public schools? And, why is spiritual development largely absent from conversations surrounding holistic pedagogy?

1.3 Background of the Researcher

It is difficult for me to pinpoint an exact moment or experience that had me passionately wanting to pursue graduate research in spiritual development curriculum for grade school students. My quest to develop my own spiritual wellbeing did not surface as a response to an acute existential crisis, but rather as a reaction to a chronic feeling of disengagement and disempowerment in my own life. I remember feeling like my grade school education was a prison sentence instead of a learning opportunity. Most of the lessons and homework assignments felt to me like unnecessary busy work and
consequently, I spent my days waiting for the bell to ring. My life outside of the classroom was equally unfulfilling. I was a competitive gymnast growing up. I took recreational gymnastic classes as a toddler and was recruited into the competitive stream at the age of six. My life felt as though it centered around fulfilling other people’s expectations, which were based on other people’s criteria. In the height of my training (grade 6 onwards), I trained some mornings before school, was in the classroom from 9-3:30pm five days a week, and trained everyday after school (with the exception of Wednesdays) from 4-8pm, and on Saturdays from 9-2pm when I wasn’t at competitions. My gymnastic training hours, combined with my hours in the classroom made for a fifty-five hour workweek and that’s not including the hours spent on homework assignments. My childhood was extremely busy. My schedule was always full and consequently my life lacked unstructured downtime. Growing up, I knew that I didn’t particularly enjoy being a gymnast, however, the lack of unstructured downtime prevented me from pausing long enough to reflect and choose differently.

My high school years became a struggle. I felt disengaged with the curriculum and preoccupied with friendships and dating. I also felt extremely anxious about my future. Adults would often ask, “What do you want to do for a career?” I had no idea how to answer the preceding question; my entire life had been scheduled according to other people’s expectations of me. I did not have any tools or strategies to draw on in order to answer a question of such grand importance.

Graduating from high school was both liberating and intimidating. I felt like I was finally free, yet I had no idea how to design my own life. My late teen years and early twenties were comprised of some real highs and lows. I traveled and worked in different
FOSTERING SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

cities in hopes of discovering my purpose. I knew that I wanted to live a life of purpose and meaning, but I didn’t know what that looked like or meant. My search for my life’s purpose had me feeling emotionally drained, stressed and depressed.

My life shifted for the better in 2007. I was living in Montreal and working as a waitress. I felt worried that my life had little value because I was not on track towards a great career. The problem however, was that I did not know how to get on track. I could not figure out what I wanted to do with my life. One evening, while feeling hopeless, I Google searched “what is the purpose of my life?” and stumbled upon a young adult program at Yasodhara Ashram in Nelson, British Columbia. The program was called the Yoga Development Course (YDC). The ashram website described the YDC as “a course that offers powerful tools for transformation [whereby] self-inquiry is the foundation, and questions are explored, such as: Who am I? Who do I want to be? What is life all about? What makes my life worthwhile? How do I prepare for the rest of my life?” (http://www.yasodhara.org/study/yoga-development-course/). Seeing these questions on their website resonated with me and motivated me to save money, pack up and move to the ashram nestled in the Kootenays for the winter.

My time at the ashram was the most stimulating educational experience that I had ever had. We ate our meals in silence, practiced seated meditation, did daily Hatha yoga, wrote in our journals and reflected on our lives. We were never told what to think, nor were we encouraged to adopt any particular beliefs or doctrines. The ashram was a spiritual place, but it was not religious; this is an important distinction to make (this will be explored in greater depth in Chapter 2).

When I reflect back on my life, I see a remarkable change between the person
who I was when I went to the ashram, and the person that I’ve become after having taken
their program. Yasodhara ashram’s three-month course provided me with tools that have been essential in helping me to become an empowered agent in my own life. Since my time at Yasodhara ashram I have participated in several other spiritual and personal development workshops. I have benefited from Vipassana Meditation, Non-Violent Communication (NVC) workshops, Authentic Relating Toronto (ART) events, Unitarian Universalism gatherings and many others.

My engagement with various spiritual methods and philosophies has gifted me with a plethora of skills and tools that I can and do draw upon in my daily life. My own journey to ascribe meaning to my life and to the world has provided me with a greater sense passion and purpose. I feel blessed to have discovered so many accessible tools for self-discovery; I only wish I had been introduced to them as a child. It is this latter wish that has become the driving force behind my graduate research. It is my hope that researching various teaching strategies that foster student spiritual development will support me in making suggestions for getting these important and life changing tools into public school classrooms.

1.4 Overview

Chapter 1 of this paper introduces the topic, as well as highlights the purpose of this study, my research questions and my background as it pertains to my research interest. Chapter 2 offers a literature review whereby prominent voices in the field of spiritual development and spirituality in education are explored. Topics headings include: Holistic Education In Public Schools, Conceptualizing Spirituality, Conceptualizing Spiritual Development, Exemplary Educators in the Field of Spiritual Development
FOSTERING SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

Within Education and Strategies To Support Spiritual Development In Schools. Chapter 3 provides the research methodology and procedure(s) for this study. I also include information about the sample participants and data collection instruments, as well as provide brief biographies for each of the participants. Chapter 4 summarizes key findings and compares the data as derived through interviews with participants. In Chapter 5, implications, recommendations and areas for further research are discussed. References and appendices follow at the end.
Chapter 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter is organized into four sections under the following headings:
Conceptualizing Spirituality, Conceptualizing Spiritual Development, Pioneers in the
Field of Spiritual Developmental Education and Strategies To Support Spiritual
Development In Schools.

2.1 Conceptualizing Spirituality

2.11- Why The Gap in Research?

While pioneers in the field of psychology such as William James, G. Stanley Hall,
J.H. Leuba and Edwin Starbuck considered spirituality to be an integral component to the
field, the study was predominantly marginalized until the late 20th century (Benson,
Roehlkepartain & Rude, 2003). The gap in early research can be attributed to a variety of
factors, though Benson et al. (2003) argue that, “a fundamental challenge in making a
case for spiritual development as a core human developmental process is definitional”.
How then can we advocate for supporting students’ spiritual development without first
agreeing upon what the term spiritual development means? This question invites a deeper
investigation of the word spirituality in order to build a working definition from which to
ground this research. Furthermore, the process of locating a working definition of
spirituality may be supported through clarifying how spirituality differs from religiosity.
2.12- Eliminating Confusion Between Spirituality and Religion

Philosophy teacher Joseph Dunne (2003) argues that spirituality is not a character trait found in some, while missing in others. Instead, Dunne states, “everyone, inescapably, is spiritual, in the sense that there is some overall orientation to their lives, some assumption of what most matters” (p. 99). Dunne’s claim that everyone is inescapably spiritual is of particular interest where conversations surrounding the rejection of spiritual content in public education is concerned. Anderson (2007) speaks to this rejection of spiritual content in public school curriculum and postulates that the resistance from educators may in part be due to a common confusion surrounding the distinction between religion and spirituality. A societal failure to distinguish one from the other might explain why curriculum writers have steered away from promoting any activities that would address spiritual health as a fundamental part of education. In response to the confusion surrounding religion and spirituality, Dunne (2003) and Malviya (2011) argue that spirituality does not require an individual to follow any religious doctrines or beliefs. Malviya contends that an individual can be spiritual without attending services or belonging to a particular religion, similarly, one can be religious without having a well-established spiritual identity (2011). Malviya describes religion as being “a group activity that involves specific behaviour, social, doctrinal and denominational characteristics” (Malviya, 2011, p. 53). In contrast, spirituality points to the realm of our private subjective awareness (Malviya, 2011). Thus, the goal of spiritual educators, unlike the goal of religious educators, is to help the individual come to his/her own subjective and personal understanding of their relationship to the world and their beliefs about its meaning (or lack there of).
Scott Webster (2013) expands on this idea,

“If we are to understand spirituality as primarily a searching (Ofsted 1994, 2004) and an endeavor to make meaning and give sense to each encounter we have (Hyde 2008; Moriarty 2011; Webster 2009), then this makes it different to traditional and formalized religion characterized by a set of possible answers and sacred knowledge in the form of doctrine providing readily made interpretations, and meanings to experiences” (67).

According to Webster (2013), religious education requires the learners to acquire religious knowledge situated in external doctrines, while spiritual education requires the learners to acquire spiritual knowledge through self-inquiry and self-discovery. Spiritual education calls learners to venture on a personal search for meaning and understanding about themselves and their relationship to the world. Therefore, the role of the spiritual educator could be defined as helping students to “maximize the positive aspects of their belief systems without imposing his/her own personal moral judgments and values on the learning environment” (Arreola and Goodloe, 2013, p.225).

After exploring the defining characteristics that permit spirituality to exist independent of religiosity, it might suffice to say that Dunne’s description of spirituality (as cited at the beginning of 2.11) is a suitable entry point from which to guide the conversation surrounding spiritual development in public education. However, even with Dunne’s description of spirituality, the concept arguably remains vague and therefore requires the sourcing of a definition that offers more specificity. Unfortunately, some scholars argue that it may not be possible to confine spirituality to a single working
FOSTERING SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

definition (Benson et al., 2003). In the next section of this chapter, the challenges of reducing and defining spirituality will be discussed.

2.13- Challenges of Reducing And Defining Spirituality

Miller and Thoresen’s (2003) working definition of spirituality shares some similarities with Dunne (2003). Miller and Thoresen argue “spirituality is not dichotomous: It is not an attribute that is either present or absent in an individual […]” (2003, p. 28). Dunne, Miller and Thoresen all refute the misconception that being spiritual pertains to some [people] while not to others. Dunne, Miller and Thoresen iterate that every individual is spiritual by the very nature of being human. However, Miller and Thoresen’s explanation of spirituality goes a step further and states that, “attempts to define spirituality as a single linear dimension (e.g., something that one has more or less of) are greatly oversimplified and often misleading” (2003, p.28). Miller and Thoresen are not alone in their critique of the attempts to reduce spirituality to a concrete and simplified working definition. Benson et al., also write about this challenging dilemma. They state,

Given the formative state of the field, it would be premature to propose that a single, succinct definition could adequately capture the richness, complexity and multidimensional nature of this concept- just as it would be overly simplistic to propose a single simple definition of other complex areas of development such as cognitive development, social development or moral development (2003, p. 205).

The lack of definitional precision is why some scholars are critical and dismissive of the value of integrating spiritual development curriculum into students’ educational
experience. In his paper, Marples (2006) contends, “the term ‘spiritual education’ is completely otiose” (p. 293). Marples does not understand why educators and curriculum planners would encourage students to seek out and/or ascribe meaning and purpose to their lives without a certitude that meaning and purpose can in fact be found (2006). For Marples, the idea of dedicating a portion of class time towards a searching for something that is possibly unattainable (like finding meaning and purpose) wastes time. Marples (2006) contests that there must be a distinction made between “the search for meaning and purpose, and its discovery” (p. 295). He states,

One can search for all kinds of things without there being anything to discover. For something to count as discovery, it surely must have some basis in truth in order to distinguish it from mere illusion (Marples, 2006, p. 295).

In the latter quote, Marples states that since no empirical verification for questions and theories related to the meaning of life are available, the topic in and of itself is without value to us as a society. Head and Mertten (2000) would disagree with Marples as they argue that there are significant flaws in these materialist ways of thinking. Head and Mertten say that “materialism gets itself trapped in an ‘epistemic fallacy’ which confuses our ability to know (epistemology) with the way things actually are in reality (ontology) (2000, p. 18). Head and Merrten contend that the realm of scientific fact should not be given greater value over moral/spiritual discourse, simply because scientific knowledge offers more certainty (2000). John Miller’s thoughts should also be considered when discussing this debated topic. He holds that “this longing of the human soul for its Source- for connection and meaning and divine love- is a spiritual reality and will not
disappear simply because it is ignored by intellectuals” (1990, p. 320). Miller believes in holistic pedagogy—teaching to the whole child—meaning that it is important to make space in our curriculum for students to explore all aspects of their development; including the spiritual (1990). Marples on the other hand, passionately argues against spiritual education in schools because he does not see the value in having students search for something that cannot be proven is there. Marples sentiment on this encourages the question: could the rejection and/or absence of various spiritual beliefs not count as spiritual philosophy in and of itself? We will now examine a working definition for spirituality that sheds light on that very question.

2.14- An Inclusive Definition of Spirituality

For Myers, spirituality is “a continuous search for purpose and meaning in life; an appreciation for depth of life, the expanse of the universe, and natural forces which operate; a personal belief system” (Chandler, Holden & Kolander, 1992, p. 168). This definition is appealing in that it is notably more specific than those provided by Dunne, Miller and Thoresen. Unlike the other definitions, this one offers specific, yet inclusive criteria. For example, according to Myers, spirituality requires both a continuous search for purpose and meaning in life, in addition to an appreciation for either: the depth of life, the expanse of the universe, the natural forces which operate or a personal belief system (Chandler, Holden & Kolander, 1992, p. 168). Myers definition is unique in that it clearly welcomes room for diversity in how spirituality is practiced. Following this definition, a Christian would/could meet the criteria for spirituality by searching for meaning and purpose through biblical texts and appreciating Jesus and God as “the natural forces that operate”. Similarly, an Atheist could meet Myers’ criteria by searching for meaning and
FOSTERING SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

purpose via scientific inquiry and cultivate appreciation for the depth of life through a humanistic approach or through the expanse of the universe as seen in the Big Bang. Myers’ working definition is an ideal framework for discussing spiritual development within a public education context, due in part to its wording which is exceptionally spacious and inclusive; rendering the definition applicable to individuals of all walks of faith and orientation.

Despite the aforementioned constraints of fitting a complex concept into a single working definition, I posit that attempting to do so, offers greater benefit to the educational community than it does harm. After considerable engagement with various definitions, Myers’ definition will now serve as the primary definitional framework for the remainder of this paper. Accordingly, Myers’ notion of spirituality will be used in the subsequent section, as a directional tool to support the deeper probing of spirituality as it pertains to children’s overall wellbeing being and development.

2.2 Conceptualizing Spiritual Development

2.21- Spiritual Development Within The Field Of Human Development

Until recently, the field of spiritual development was a largely under researched domain (Benson et al., 2003). In 2002, Benson et al., (2003) conducted a quantitative study to determine the extent to which spirituality was being addressed in journals pertaining to child and adolescent development, between the years of 1990- 2002. Despite their broad criteria, they discovered that less than 1% of the articles in the two databases and six journals selected addressed issues of spirituality among children and adolescents (Benson et al., 2003). Furthermore, researchers noted that they were not able to locate a single article on spiritual development within the six premier journals over a
12-year period (Benson et al., 2003). Benson et al.’s study confirmed that between the years of 1990 and 2002, spiritual development was examined with significantly less frequency than other domains of development such as cognitive, psychosocial, moral, behavioral and emotional (2003).

Comparatively, things have shifted dramatically; the last 15 years have shown a remarkable surge in research related to this field (Benson et al., 2003). The number of dissertations pertaining to children’s spirituality is on the rise, and many volumes on spiritual development have begun to emerge (Boyatzis, 2013). Additionally, in 2006, The Handbook of Child Psychology included a chapter on religious and spiritual development for the first time ever (Oser, Scarlett and Bucher (2006), cited in Boyatzis (2013). Furthermore, the Ontario Ministry of Education mentioned student’s spiritual wellbeing in the 2015 Health and Physical Education curriculum guide. The field of spiritual development is working toward the mainstream like never before” (Boyatzis, 2013, p.1).

How then can we encourage and promote spiritual development within the confines of the public school system? Understanding and defining this term may prove to be an important step.

2.22- Defining Spiritual Development

Discussing development as it relates to spirituality adds an important dimension to this exploration (Benson et al., 2003). The addition of the word development to the concept of spirituality can suggest change, growth, transformation or maturation (Benson et al., 2003). For Eaude (2004) this is problematic, as it implies that spirituality follows a linear, developmental path. Eaude contends that although children do seem to make developmental progress in some respects, they also seem to lose touch with other natural,
inherent capabilities as they age (2004). Does this mean that prior to losing these inherent capabilities, children are more spiritually developed than adults? Or are children working towards spiritual maturity, rendering adults more spiritually developed? This lens for understanding development is known as the stage theory (e.g., Fowler, 1981) (Benson et al., 2003). The stage theory “implies a certain amount of discontinuity in religious [and spiritual] development” (Hood et al. as cited in Benson et al., 2003, p.210). Benson et al. (2013) argue that researchers must move beyond an over reliance on using the stage theory as an interpretive lens through which to understand spiritual development. Instead, we should relocate the term development and distinguish it from change over time (Scarlett, 2006). Kaplan (1983) defines development as “movement towards perfection, as variously as that idea may be constructed” (Scarlett, 2006). Scarlett (2006) explains that the phrase “as variously as that idea may be constructed”, points to an obvious challenge given the multiple notions of perfection.

How then can spiritual development be described and defined? “If it seem[ed] difficult to define “spirituality” it is even more difficult to define “spiritual development” (2013, p.1). Despite the challenges, Benson et al. manage to devise the following working definition,

Spiritual development is the process of growing the intrinsic human capacity for self-transcendence, in which the self is embedded in something greater than the self, including the sacred. It is the developmental “engine” that propels the search for connectedness, meaning, purpose and contribution. It is shaped both within and outside of religious traditions, beliefs and practices (2003, p.205-206).
FOSTERING SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

This latter definition of spiritual development works cohesively with Myers’ working definition of spirituality. Taking Myers’ definition of spirituality into consideration (e.g., a personal belief system), it might for now, suffice to say that the process by which an individual forms his/her belief system is by way, spiritual development. How then can educators support “the engine that propels the search for connectedness, meaning, purpose and contribution”? (Benson et al., 2003, p.205-206). Before investigating current spiritual development practices as employed by modern educators, let us first examine a brief history of what historical holistic educators from the past have contributed to the field of spiritual development.

2.3 Pioneers in the Field of Spiritual Developmental Education

2.31- Alcott

It can be argued that the modern holistic education movement (of which includes the spiritual realm of education) owes its modern day existence to some very important holistic education pioneers of the past. Alcott, Emerson, Fuller and Thoreau were four “Transcendentalists” who had an enormous impact on the progression of the holistic/spiritual education field (Miller, 2010, p. 130). Of the latter four, Alcott was perhaps the “the most devoted to education and nourishing children’s spirituality in that [transcendental] context” (Miller, 2010, p. 130). Alcott (born 1799) and his colleague Elizabeth Peabody are perhaps most remembered for the “Temple School” that they opened together in Boston (Miller, 2010, p.132). According to Miller, Alcott’s predominate contribution to the field of education was his view of the child (Miller, 2010). Miller writes, “[Alcott] believed that all children held an inner spiritual core that
FOSTERING SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

could be drawn out through questioning” (2010, p. 134). Alcott referred to this inner spiritual core as “soul”.

2.32- Steiner

Steiner (1861-1925) also believed in the concept of the soul, and the importance of addressing it in formal education. Motivated by his commitment to teach to the whole child, Steiner developed Waldorf education, which was founded on his pedagogical philosophy, which he named Anthroposophy (Barnes, 1991). In Anthroposophy, a person “is a threefold being of spirit, soul and body whose capacities unfold in three developmental stages on the path to adulthood” (Barnes, 1991, p. 52). For Steiner, these three stages of developmental are: early childhood, middle childhood, and adolescence (Barnes, 1991, p. 52). Steiner called the early childhood stage (ages 0-7) the “awakening stage”. He referred to the middle of childhood (ages 7-14) as the “feeling and imagination stage”. And lastly, he referred to the adolescent years (ages 14-21) as the “thinking stage”. Steiner paid particular attention to implementing curriculum that fostered spiritual development during the adolescent years. Steiner observed that adolescents seemed to spend a great deal of their time thinking about their passions, and life’s meaning (Miller, 2000, p. 76).

2.33- Kessler

Like Steiner, Rachael Kessler (1943-2010) also placed particular emphasis on spiritual education during adolescent years (Miller, Karsten, Denton, Orr & Kates, 2005, p.103). Kessler (1943-2010) founded PassageWork Institute, a learning centre for both students and educators with a pedagogical philosophy that aims to “welcome and nurture
FOSTERING SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

students’ quest for meaning, connection and integrity, building character and excellence in ways that foster compassion for themselves and for the people and world around them” (passageworks.org). Kessler wrote several books and published dozens of articles on the topics of emotional literacy and “soul education” (passageworks.org). Kessler argues that students seem to wrestle with questions connected to existential themes revolving around life’s meaning and purpose during adolescent years (Miller et al., 2005). Kessler believed that spiritual pedagogy is of particular importance in adolescent classrooms because of its potential to prevent students from engaging in dangerous behaviours (Miller et al., 2005). “Drug, sex, gang violence, and even suicide may be, for some teenagers both a search for connection, mystery, and meaning and an escape from the pain of not having a genuine source of spiritual fulfillment” (Kessler as cited in Miller et al., 2005). Kessler ran classes for adolescents that focused on their spiritual development. Kessler found that spiritual development curriculum was not only important as a means to prevent teenage violence or destructive behaviours, but that it was important because of the natural yearning for answers that arises during the adolescent years. Kessler had this to say regarding the adolescent years, “The larger questions about meaning and purpose, about ultimate beginnings and endings begin to press with urgency and loneliness” (Kessler as cited in Miller et al., 2005, p.102).

2.34 Erikson

Developmental psychologist Erik Erikson is also a prominent voice in regards to the struggles and challenges that arise during adolescence (Jeannie S. Kidwell, Richard M. Dunham, Roderick A. Bacho, Ellen Pastorino, and Pedro R. Portes, 1995). “According to Erikson, exploration is at the heart of the adolescent transition” (Kidwell
et. al., 1995, p.785). Erikson believed that people go through a period of identity crisis in early adolescence (Kidwell et. al., 1995). Erikson contended, “the remaking of personal identity, which is necessary to complete the transition, was said to be dependent on exploration” (Erikson as cited in Kidwell et. al., 1995).

After researching Alcott, Steiner, Kessler and Erikson, the following questions have emerged and will guide the remainder of this literary review: How can we support the drawing out of our student’s inner spiritual core in formal education (as expressed by Alcott and Steiner)? How can we support student’s questions of identity (as expressed by Erikson)? How might we support student’s spiritual exploration (as expressed by Kessler)? What strategies can educators rely on to foster spiritual development in schools? Lastly, what is the relationship between spiritual development strategies and the Ontario curriculum?

2.4 Strategies To Support Spiritual Development In Schools

2.41- Justification For Spiritual Development Strategies Within Ontario Curriculum

One of the goals as outlined on page 6 of the Ontario Health and Physical Education Curriculum Document is that stated, “students will develop the living skills needed to develop resilience and a secure identity and sense of self […]” (Ministry of Education, 2015; p. 6). Page 4 of this curriculum guide outlines a further goal is “[to] help students develop an understanding of what they need in order to make a commitment to lifelong healthy, active living and to develop the capacity to live satisfying, productive lives” (Ministry of Education, 2015; p. 4). Page five of the curriculum document explains that the curriculum “promotes important educational values and goals that support the development of character” (Ministry of Education, 2015; p. 5). Equipping students with
the living skills that are needed to support them in developing character, in developing their secure identities and sense of self, as well as helping them to identify what it is that they need to live both satisfying and productive lives, are ambitious and important tasks. Furthermore, it can be said that the former and latter tasks are components of spiritual development. Developing a secure identity requires an individual to look deeply within in order to know him/herself (Miller et al., 2005, p.102). And understanding what one needs in order to live a satisfying and productive life, arguably requires the individual to ask some of life’s deeper philosophical questions: Who am I? Why am I here? What is my purpose? What is satisfying to me? In the following section, I will review some activities and strategies that are conducive to supporting student’s spiritual development in public education.

2.42- Journaling

Earlier in this chapter, I determined that Myers’ definition of spirituality was most suitable for the purposes of this research paper, as well as for the intent of understanding spirituality within the bounds of public education. In this definition, Myers’ spoke of spirituality as including a search for purpose and meaning, as well as referring to a personal belief system. How then can we assist students with their exploration of their personal beliefs and to search for purpose and meaning in their daily lives? Miller (2000) suggests the practice of journaling as a sound approach. Miller writes, “It is helpful to have a place where we can write down our deepest feelings and longings, […] we can record moments when we felt the ego drop away and the soul exposed (Miller, 2000, p135). Encouraging students to keep journals, as well as making time for them to journal in class could be a feasible strategy to support students’ inner spiritual development.
Educator Jessica Siegel assigned journaling to her students to foster their personal development and as a component of the literacy curriculum (Miller, 2000, p. 71). Siegel believes that having her students write an essay on the topic “who am I?” is one of the most important assignments in her curriculum (Miller, 2000, p.71). Siegel sees these journal entries as a “silent bond between teacher and student” (Miller, 2000, p.73). The challenge in-class journaling however, lies in the question of assessment (Moon, 1999). On one hand, assessment may discourage students from deeply engaging with their journals and therefore may thwart deep personal reflection. Kennison and Misselwitz (2002) have a different perspective, they argue, “When journals don’t count toward grades, students don’t put in the work” (Pavlovich, 2007, p.286). Respectively, assessing journals may in fact encourage students’ overall effort, participation and engagement with the activity (Moon, 1999). The question of whether or not teachers should assess student journals pertaining to personal explorations of meaning, purpose and beliefs remains inconclusive at present.

2.43- Mindfulness Meditation

The revised 2015 Health and Physical Education curriculum guide expects teachers to teach “Personal Skills” (PS) in all grades. The PS section of the curriculum guide states:

1.1 use self-awareness and self-monitoring skills to help them understand their strengths and needs, take responsibility for their actions, recognize sources of stress, and monitor their own progress, as they participate in various physical activities, develop movement competence, and acquire
FOSTERING SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

knowledge and skills related to healthy living (Ministry of Education, 2015).

Furthermore, the curriculum guide expects that the Healthy Living Strand will help students to “describe the importance of self-awareness in developing stress-management strategies” (Ministry of Education, 2015). How then can teachers support their students in achieving the Personal Skills requirement, as outlined in the Ontario H&PE Curriculum Guide? Engaging with research on the topics of the development of self-awareness would suggest that mindfulness meditation one effective strategy (Soloway (2011), Jennings, S. & Jennings, J. (2013), Bishop et al., (2004)).

Mindfulness meditation is a practice that originated from ancient yogic and Buddhist practices (Brown, Marquis, Andre, Douglas, 2013). While mindfulness meditation originated from Eastern spiritual teachings, the practice itself is not limited to a particular religious tradition (Brown et al., 2013). Furthermore, it can be argued that mindfulness meditation is universally accessible given that all that is required to perform it, is a willingness to silently observe one’s own thoughts, in order to cultivate a present mode of awareness (Bishop et al., 2004). A simple definition for mindfulness meditation is “nonjudgmental moment-to-moment awareness” (Miller et al., 1995, p.193). In mindfulness meditation, the practitioner simply sits still and quiet and observes his/her/their breath and thoughts (Soloway, 2011). Soloway advocates for mindfulness in classrooms and states “mindfulness based practices can be described as attention training, focusing exercises or calming practices used to reduce student stress, regulate emotions and strengthen student engagement” (Soloway, p186, 2011). Mindfulness meditation can help a student cultivate present moment
FOSTERING SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

awareness, in order to help them to separate their thoughts from their automatic reactions (Soloway, p14, 2011). Research suggests that mindfulness meditation can support students in developing self-awareness and emotional regulation by teaching them to observe their thoughts without reacting to them, during meditation (Brown et al., 2013).

Over the last 30 years, there has been ample research that has demonstrated the therapeutic benefits of mindfulness-based interventions within various populations (Soloway, 2011). Jon Kabat-Zin from the University of Massachusetts was a pioneer in modern mindfulness meditation research. In 1979, Kabat-Zin created a mindfulness-based program called “Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction” (MBSR) (Soloway, 2011). Participants in MBSR programs were encouraged to practice meditation for forty-five minutes a day in addition to completing weekly worksheets and readings (Soloway, 2011). Mindfulness meditation was proved affective in reducing participant stress because of its ability to teach individuals to remain non-reactive to potential stressors (Soloway, 2011). MBSR continues to be one of many methods that mindfulness meditation is used therapeutically today (Soloway, 2011).

In 2013, Jennings, S. and Jennings, J. conducted a pilot research study on mindfulness training with adolescents. Jennings, S. and Jennings, J. used the Beck Anxiety Inventory and the Interaction Anxiousness Scale to establish baseline anxiety levels of the adolescents at the beginning and end of the study. The results from this pilot study concluded that mindfulness training can have a positive effect of reducing cognitive, physiological and social anxiety in normal high school seniors (Jennings, S. and Jennings, J., p.24, 2013).
In 2011, a study was published that looked at the effectiveness of 8-week mindfulness training for adolescents aged 11-15 years with ADHD (Weijer-Bergsma, Formsma, Bruin and Bogels, 2012). In this study, adolescents completed measurement tests that rated their attention and behavioural problems before, immediately after the eight-week meditation program, and then again, eight weeks after the course finished (Weijer-Bergsma et al., 2012). The study concluded that the adolescent participants showed a remarkable improvement in attention span and a reduction in behavioural problems after the eight-week training (Weijer-Bergsma et al., 2012). Furthermore, the study demonstrated a reverting to original struggles after the 16 week follow up (Weijer-Bergsma et al., 2012). This research therefore suggests a need to maintain the regularity of the mindfulness meditation practice in order to maintain the results acquired from the practice.

Yet another example of the benefits of mindfulness meditation research is seen in Lau and Hue’s study on the effects of mindfulness-based programs on Hong Kong adolescents in schools (2011). In this study, researchers examined the impacts of a six-week mindfulness program for improving psychosocial conditions (stress, anxiety and depression) in adolescents. This study, much like the others mentioned above, showed a dramatic reduction in participants’ symptoms of depression and anxiety (Lau and Hue, p.324, 2011).

2.44- Rites of Passage

Rites of passage permeate many cultures. Some examples of rites of passage are: “bar and bat mitzvahs in the Jewish communities, quinceanera” ceremonies in the Mexican community and initiation journeys offered by Buddhist or
African American communities” (Aostre, Johnson, Webb Neagley, as cited in Kessler & Weaver, 2011, p. 53). There is much to be said on the topic of spiritual development, adolescent identity formation and rites of passage.

Kessler and Weaver argue that today’s North American educational model lacks curriculum that both honours and celebrates student’s transitions (2011). Some researchers postulate that the absence of rites of passage ceremonies/rituals may contribute to an increase in risky adolescent behaviour where alcohol, drug use and sex is concerned. (Kessler & Weaver, 2011). What is the rationale for this theory?

Kessler and Weaver (2011) refer to puberty as the “threshold of the unknown” when “students must say goodbye not only to relationships with others but also to a childhood self” (Aostre et al., as cited in Kessler & Weaver, 2011, p. 51). It is not uncommon for students to struggle with their new identity formation while parents and teachers simultaneously struggle to “discover new ways to be responsible, caring guides for this young person who is ready for more (but not full) responsibility and freedom” (Aostre et al., as cited in Kessler & Weaver, 2011, p. 51). In the book Educating from the Heart, Kessler and Weaver write about a 2006 American research study by the EPE Research centre that demonstrated that “29 of 51 states see their greatest ‘leakage’ in the education pipeline during the ninth grade” (Aostre et al., as cited in Kessler & Weaver, 2011, p. 51). Kessler and Weaver contend that adolescents who are not given rites of passage will find their own ways of creating their own “badges of adulthood” (2011, p. 53). Unfortunately, some of these “badges of adulthood” all too often take the form of excessive drinking (binge drinking), reckless sex, having babies and engaging in violence (Kessler & Weaver, 2011).
Kessler and Weaver (2011) argue that studies like those conducted by the EPE Research Centre are communicating a critical need for transition support through rites of passage curriculum designed for our young adolescents. How might rites of passage programs work in practice?

In 2010, Andrew Philip Smith conducted qualitative research on the impacts of the implementation of a “rites of passage” program at an all boys’ secondary school in New Zealand (2011, p. 345). The program was called The Rite Journey (TRJ) and involved the participation of all year 10 boys over the course of 1 year. The program’s goal was to foster a positive transition from boyhood to manhood and was based on the five Cs- consciousness, connection, communication, celebration and challenge (Smith, 2011, p. 347). The TRJ delivery balanced content (classroom time), ceremonies (7 woven in throughout the year), and challenge (an end of the year 24 hour solo wilderness camp trip) (Smith, 2011, p. 348). The program’s structuring of content, ceremonies and challenges reflect the phases of separation, learning and return that are associated with various aboriginal “rites of passage” traditions (Smith, 2011, p. 346). Smith interviewed eight participants at the beginning of the program, and again at the end of the program and concluded that the “rites of passage” curriculum had significant positive outcomes for the staff and students at this school (2011, p. 354-356). Teachers shared that TRJ seemed to have triggered a change in the boy’s classroom behaviour, interpersonal skills, sense of personal responsibility and conceptions about what it meant to be a man (Smith, 2011, p. 354-356).
2.45- Socratic Questioning

Socratic questioning is said to have originated by way of the Greek philosopher Socrates (Tikva, 2009). Tikva writes,

The sole documentation of Socrates’ teaching is in Plato’s dialogues where Socrates’ method of questioning, refuting (*elenchus*), leading his respondent to contradiction and thereafter to confusion (*aporia*), is considered by many contemporary philosophers as a method of teaching (2009, p. 657).

In short, the Socratic method is said to be a process whereby the teacher uses questions to examine the values, principals and beliefs of students (Reich, 2003). According to Reich (2003), there are four main components to the act of Socratic teaching. First, through questions, participants (students) strive to identify and then defend their moral beliefs and values (Reich, 2003). The second component of the method is its moral focus (Reich, 2003). Topics are generally centered on moral education and questions tend to deal with ideas of how we best ought to live our lives (Reich, 2003). The third component of this method is that it is said to require a classroom environment, which is characterized by “productive discomfort” (Reich, 2003). Tensions can run high between participants during the best Socratic dialogues (Reich, 200). The fourth component is that the Socratic method is best used for demonstrating and supporting engagement with uncertainty and complexity, rather than producing factual understandings (Reich, 2003). How then does this method relate to spiritual development in public education?

In returning to Myers’ working definition of spirituality, the link between Socratic questioning and spiritual development becomes apparent. One of the key characteristics
FOSTERING SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

of Myers’ definition of spirituality is that it “a continuous search for purpose and meaning in life” and “a personal belief system” (Myers as cited in Chandler et al., 1992, p. 168). Respectively, the Socratic method as described by Reich (2003), arguably supports and deals with these specific issues.

Kessler and Steiner’s pedagogical approach with adolescents is one that arguably employs Socratic questioning. Kessler and Steiner’s approach is one that encourages self-inquiry and values exploration (Miller et al., 2005). Questions such as: “Why am I here?” “Does my life have a purpose?” “Is there meaning to life?” “How do I find out what it is?” “Is there life after death?” “Is there a God?” are questions that Kessler was asked time and time again by her students (Miller et al., 2005, p. 103). Kessler advocates for pedagogical approaches that provide youth with the experiences that help honour the asking and exploration of these questions (Miller et al., 2005, p. 103).

Making space for adolescents to contemplate existential questions is undoubtedly important, but not without its challenges. What might happen if students hold rigid beliefs (learned at home, or developed independently), which prevent them from engaging with the existential questions in a curious, contemplative and open-minded fashion? In this case, Noddings believes that educators can encourage flexible and open-minded question-asking and exploration through employing critical thinking strategies that can help to foster what she calls “intelligent belief” (Noddings as cited in Conti, 2002). She argues that we should teach children about different religions and spiritual belief systems so that “students can make informed decisions in their own life” (Noddings as cited in Conti, 2002).
2.5 Conclusion

In this literature review, the works of several prominent voices in the field of spiritual education were examined. I first began this chapter by conceptualizing spirituality. I investigated the works of Webster (2013) and Arreola and Goodloe (2013) in order to distinguish religiosity from spirituality. Next I explored the challenges of defining spirituality through investigating Benson et. al., (2003) and Marples (2006). After exploring various definitions for spirituality, I argued that Myers’ definition was most ideal for the purposes of discussing spirituality in the context of public education. In the next section, spiritual development was discussed and defined. I examined the works of Eaude (2004) who presented the challenges of the word development and engaged with Scarlett (2006) who suggested a conceptual reframing of our linear understanding of the term. I touched briefly on the historical educators who are considered to be pioneers in the field, before moving on to examine spiritual development’s relationship and place in the Ontario public education curriculum. Lastly, I explored strategies to foster spiritual development in students within public school settings. I explored the practices of journaling, mindfulness meditation, rites of passage exercises and Socratic questioning methods.

Through this preliminary research process, I have gathered that spiritual development is an incredibly vast and complicated topic. Furthermore, through the process of sourcing research, I have noted that topics related to spirituality within public education are either difficult to locate, or continue to be a largely under researched field (despite the increase in literature related to spiritual development as cited by Benson et. al., 2003). Moving forward, I hope to understand how educators grapple with the definitional challenges
FOSTERING SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

associated with spirituality, as well as to learn how they conceptualize and foster spiritual
development in their own classroom spaces.
Chapter 3- RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction (Chapter Overview)

In this chapter, I describe the research methodology, identifying the various methodological decisions that I have made, and my rational for these choices. I begin by reviewing the research approach and procedures before describing data collection. Next I elaborate more specifically on my participant sampling and recruitment process. I explain the data analysis procedure, review the ethical considerations that are pertinent to my research study and provide some information on the participants. I conclude this chapter with a summary of the methodological strengths and limitations of the study.

3.1 Research Approach & Procedures

A qualitative approach was selected for this research given that the central research theme “fostering spiritual development” is arguably abstruse and complex in nature, lending itself to various subjective definitions and understandings that are best explored through the flexibility that qualitative research offers. Unlike quantitative research, which “limits itself to what can be measured or quantified” (Winters, 2000,p.8), qualitative research “attempts to 'pick up the pieces’ of the unquantifiable, personal, in depth, descriptive and social aspects of the world” (Winters, 2000 p. 8). Consequently, this study employed a qualitative approach for the reason that spirituality as a concept is an unquantifiable, personal and in depth, descriptive and social aspect of this world.
3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

Data collection was engaged through individual, in-person semi-structured interviews. Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. Notes were also taken during the interviews to supplement the recorded data. Collected data was analyzed through observing the themes that were explored in the literature review, as well as with any additional themes that emerged during the interviews.

A Semi-structured interview protocol was chosen for the reason that they have been credited by qualitative researchers as being an ideal method for facilitating detailed descriptions and rich accounts of a participant’s experiences and perspectives on the chosen topic (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Lambert & Loiselle, 2008). According to DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006), interviewing in a semi-structured format is ideal in that it offers sufficient structure through planned open-ended question asking, while simultaneously leaving room for the emergence of natural dialogue between the interviewer and the interviewee (Lambert & Loiselle, 2008). Furthermore, semi-structured interviews were most fitted to this study in that they provided opportunities for participants to freely share thoughts, experiences and opinions on the given research topic which allowed for the collection of deeply personal accounts.

3.3 Participants

In this section I review the sampling criteria as was established for the purposes recruiting participants. Next I highlight my sampling procedures and explain my protocol for locating participants. This section concludes with four short biographies of each participant.
3.31- Sampling Criteria

Three Ontario educators were chosen to participate in this study. In order to be selected for this project, participants needed to meet the following criteria:

- Participants needed to be working in the field of education.
- Participants needed to self identify as being “spiritual” (in their own subjective understanding of the term).
- Participants needed to demonstrate enthusiasm and commitment to fostering spiritual (distinct from religious) well-being and development in the students and/or youth that they worked with.

3.32- Sampling procedures

The sampling procedure chosen for this study’s participant selection is referred to as “purposeful sampling”. In purposeful sampling the inquirer selects individuals and/or sites or locations for the study for the reason that it is assumed that they can purposefully inform greater understanding in the overall research problem (Creswell, 2013). Accordingly, purposeful sampling procedures were employed in support of this study’s overall research question “How is a small sample of teachers creating opportunities to foster students’ spiritual development in Ontario public schools? Answering the primary research question required that selected participants were already engaged in creating opportunities for their students to develop spiritually, thus, it was imperative that the appropriate participants were sought out and hand selected.

Study participants were recruited through a three-part process. The first step in participant recruitment involved taking note of holistic schools or organizations with education models that were championed by researchers for fostering youth’s spiritual
FOSTERING SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

development. This step took place during the preliminary research and literature review stage. The second participant recruitment step involved networking with the holistic education community and requesting assistance in locating appropriate educators who worked in various schools and organizations. Social media (Facebook) was used as a strategy to find possible candidates, as was conversing with colleagues and fellow educators. The third step was to send out participant recruitment emails with descriptions of the study and lists of the criteria to possible candidates. Only candidates who met the participant criteria were invited to participate in the interview process.

3.33-Participant Bios

*Participant 1- Riley*

Riley came to teaching later in life. Prior to teaching, she worked as a professional actor throughout the city. In her mid forties, Riley attended university for her Bachelor of Education (BEd) and has been teaching for the last seven years. Riley started her teaching degree by teaching in various inner city schools, here in Toronto. Riley was always passionate about holistic education, and eventually accepted an opportunity to help start the Toronto alternative school- Equinox. Riley worked there for three years before making the decision to accept a position at the local Waldorf School.

*Participant 2- Pat*

Pat has been in the teaching profession for the last 17 years. She initially entered the profession because she wanted to work in a First Nations community, and she felt that this profession would allow her to do that. Pat currently teaches at the Toronto alternative school- Equinox, where she has been teaching for the last seven years. Pat the junior
FOSTERING SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

grades (four-six) for the first six years, and recently started teaching a grade two/three split. Pat is one of the founding teachers at Equinox. She is passionate about the holistic work that takes place in the school.

Participant 3- Morgan

Morgan completed an undergraduate degree in film and philosophy, as well as a masters degree in adult education. Morgan works as a youth councilor at Pine River Institute- a treatment center for at risk youth. Morgan also worked and continues to supply for Pine Project- an outdoor wilderness program for youth. Morgan is currently enrolled in a Masters of Social Work at The University of Laurier, in Aboriginal Studies.

3.4 Data Analysis

After the interview transcription process, pseudonyms were assigned in place of participant’s names to protect their identities and ensure anonymity. Additionally, any identifying information was removed. Interviews were then read through multiple times in both a vertical and horizontal manner in order to support the process of identifying codes and locating themes that appeared in the data. Creswell (2013) describes the process of forming codes as the “heart of qualitative data analysis” whereby “researchers build detailed descriptions, develop themes or dimensions, and provide an interpretation in light of their own views or views of perspectives in the literature” (p184). This point is reinforced by Blazeley (2009) who states that building and deriving a coherent argument from the research requires the diligent practice of contextualizing data and making connections between the various themes (Blazeley, 2009). In accordance with the literature on qualitative data analysis, coding techniques were employed and resulted in
the emergence of six distinct themes. Themes were first colour coded (different highlighters were used for each individual theme) and were then cross analyzed, both vertically (within the same interview) and horizontally (in relation to the other interviews). The following six themes emerged as a result of the coding process:

1. Participant’s Spiritual Identities
2. Spirituality as a Component of Holistic Education
3. Obstacles to Creating Learning Opportunities for Spiritual Development in Schools
4. Teaching Strategies and Learning Goals Associated with Spiritual Development
5. Factors that Support Teachers and

In Chapter four and Chapter 5, primary themes were analyzed and discussed through Bazely’s (2009) “Describe-Compare-Relate” model. Null data was also identified and touched upon in the final chapter, under the section 5.5- Areas For Further Research.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

Interview participants were given letters of informed consent prior to engaging in the interview process (see Appendix A). Participants were required to read and sign two copies of the consent letter before engaging in the interviews. After signing both copies participants were given one copy of the consent letter for safekeeping and the other copy was retained for the records of this study. Prior to the interview, participants were emailed copies of the interview questions, as well as were reminded that they were free to refrain from answering any of the questions asked, as well as were free to withdraw from the interview and study at any point. These efforts were made to ensure participants comfort and willingness.
The identity of each participant was protected by way of pseudonym. After interviews were transcribed, each participant’s name was replaced with a pseudonym to ensure anonymity. Furthermore, any information that could lead to the participant being located or identified was removed.

The audio transcripts from the interviews and the written transcription documents were saved on password-protected computer. Access to the raw data is limited to my research supervisor and myself. The audio recordings of interviews will be deleted after the paper has been presented and/or published which may take up to five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks involved with the participation of this study.

3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

The timing of this study was fortuitous in that the research took place shortly after the release of the 2015 Ontario Health and Physical Education Curriculum Guide, which has placed emphasis on holistic concepts of health, including the spiritual dimension (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). This study is taking place at a time when there is an important need for conversations around incorporating spirituality into health education given that Ontario curriculum guide is using this terminology in its description of what teachers are expected to foster and support in their classrooms. Conducting a qualitative research study on a relatively new topic that is relevant to current issues encourages the potential for this research to become applied- supporting teachers to fulfill the curriculum goals as outlined in the HPE curriculum documents.

In terms of limitations, this study was narrow in its breadth and scope by timeline constraints enforced by the Master of Teaching Faculty at the University of Toronto.
FOSTERING SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

Participant recruitment, data collection and analysis were sanctioned to take place over approximately a five-month period. This short timeline may have inhibited some important networking and participant recruitment opportunities. Furthermore, the timeline constraint also encroached on the size of the participant pool. Five months would not allow for a larger participant sample size due to the hours required for transcription, coding and analysis; consequently only three participants were interviewed. This limited sample size of three participants inhibited any possibilities for generalizing research findings. It should be noted however, that the goals of this research had little emphasis on deriving a generalized perception of spiritual education, and rather focused on understanding some of the methods that a few select educators use to foster spiritual well-being and development in youth. Thus, common limitations associated with small sample sizes are made redundant by the nature of this research study’s central focus: to learn from the lived experiences of specific individuals. Another limitation of this study was that interviews were the sole method of data collection. Without classroom observations it is difficult to verify whether the educators testimonies regarding their pedagogy actually translated into practice.

3.7 Conclusion

This study addressed the topic of educational practices used by educators to foster spiritual development in youth. Exploring this topic was accomplished by first reviewing appropriate literature found in online academic research article databases, journals and relevant books. Next, three educators who met the criteria (as defined in 3.31) were interviewed. Interviews were then transcribed and coded. In chapter four, I report on the
FOSTERING SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

research findings and in chapter five I discuss the implications of these findings in the context of public education.
Chapter 4- RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction (Chapter Overview)

The following research findings, as presented in this chapter, were derived through an in-depth qualitative analysis of three semi-structured interviews with Ontario educators Riley, Morgan and Pat who met this study’s participant criteria requirements as highlighted in Chapter 3. The central question guiding this research was: How is a small sample of teachers creating opportunities to foster students’ spiritual development in Ontario public schools? Subsidiary questions included: How do these teachers conceptualize spiritual development? What are their perspectives on fostering spiritual development in public education? What instructional practices do these teachers enact to support students’ spiritual development? What resources and conditions support their practice? What are the obstacles associated with fostering students’ spiritual development in public schools? And, why is spiritual development largely absent from conversations surrounding holistic pedagogy? Interviews with participants were transcribed and analyzed both vertically and horizontally. Coding techniques were employed and resulted in the emergence of the following six distinct themes: 1. Participant’s Spiritual Identities 2. Spirituality as a Component of Holistic Education 3. Obstacles to Creating Learning Opportunities for Spiritual Development in Schools 4. Teaching Strategies and Learning Goals Associated with Spiritual Development 5. Factors that Support Teachers and 6. Benefits of Fostering Student’s Spiritual Development. In this chapter these six themes are presented as major headings. Subheadings, located under major headings, offer a more detailed account of data as offered by research participants.
4.1 Participant’s Spiritual Identities: Working Definitions and Orientations

4.11 Rationale for the Distinction Between Participant’s Definitions and Orientations

Prior to the interview process, participants were selected based on participant criteria as listed in Chapter 3, which included the requirement that participants self identify as being spiritual, distinct from religious (in their own subjective understanding of the term). During interviews, participants were asked to talk about their own working definitions of the word spirituality, as well as to describe their own personal spiritual identities. During the interview coding and analysis process, I noticed that participants’ definitions of spirituality were somewhat vague, rendering them challenging to grasp. The definitional ambiguity as presented by Riley, Pat and Morgan is representative of the conversation on definitional challenges as presented by Miller and Thoresen’s (2003), Marples (2006) and Benson et al., (2003) in this paper’s literature review. Upon further engagement with the data, I noticed a distinction between participants’ explanation of what spirituality is as a concept when compared with their explanation of their own personal relationship to spirituality as practice or experience. The discrepancy between participants’ explanation of spirituality as an external concept (definitional) versus their explanations of spirituality as a personal experience warranted the use of two separate themed categories.

4.12 Participants’ Working Definitions of Spirituality

Riley, a retired public education teacher and practicing Waldorf teacher, defined spirituality as being a practice of opening to the wonder, beauty and mystery of the universe. Riley’s definition shares commonalities with Myers’ definition who lists an
“appreciation for depth of life, the expanse of the universe, and natural forces which operate” as an important component of spirituality (Chandler et al. 1996, p. 168).

Riley also spoke of spirituality as being a process of becoming aware of personal behavioural patterns (often learned from family dynamics) in order to return to one’s original core essence, as was present at birth. Riley’s inclusion of the phrase “returning to an original core” in her description of spirituality mirrors the thoughts of historical educator Alcott (see literature review) who also spoke about supporting students’ connection with their original core through the art and practice of questioning (Miller, 2010, p. 134).

Comparatively, Pat spoke about there being many ways to define spirituality. At first, Pat defined being spiritual as the experience of feeling in connection to all other species. On further reflection, Pat also stressed that for her, spirituality also involved being willing to confront and face personal edges and/or fears, to embody acceptance, to “see our world as more than just, um, like physical things […] and to possess] a willingness to engage in a relationship that you don’t necessarily have concrete proof of”. Pat’s latter statement with regards to what constitutes spirituality opposes Marples’(2006) thoughts on the matter who argues that spirituality should be left out of public education since there is no empirical evidence to support its value or existence. Contrastingly, Pat’s definition of spirituality seems to suggest that she feels that spirituality must move beyond the confines of secular materialism and logical positivism.

Morgan’s definition of spirituality was most aligned with the descriptions provided by Myers (as cited in Chandler et al., 1996) and Dunne (2003) as cited in the
literature review. Morgan described spirituality as being about making meaning out of life and a process of discovering one’s own life purpose. Morgan also talked about the notion that spirituality exists in every individual. The latter sentiment mirrors the sentiments of Dunne (2003) who said “everyone, inescapably, is spiritual, in the sense that there is some overall orientation to their lives, some assumption of what most matters” (p.28).

Riley, Pat and Morgan’s explanations of spirituality highlighted and aligned with the literature which suggested that understanding and defining spirituality is of great challenge (Benson et al., 2003). All three participants shared somewhat different understandings of what it means to be spiritual however none of the participants’ understanding of the word spiritual directly opposed one another’s definitions. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that all three of the participants’ definitions for spirituality can arguably be reduced to fit within the boundaries of Myers’ definition.

4.13 Participants’ Spiritual Orientations

Riley described her spiritual identity as being in alignment with Steiner’s philosophy (see Barnes, 1991). Riley orients her spiritual identity around “the beautiful mystery”. Riley’s spiritual identity is connected to “the art of asking questions” (see Socratic questioning in the literature review) and to the appreciation for wonder, mystery, beauty, truth and imagination.

Pat on the other hand describes her spiritual orientation as being earth based. Pat defines an earth based spiritual orientation as one that revolves around a feeling of deep connection, respect and reverence for all living things. Her spiritual orientation is largely built on relationships. Pat explained that her earth-based orientation was
largely influenced by a friendship with a Mi’Kmaq indigenous man on Prince Edward Island and with an Anishinabe community while studying at Lake Head University.

Morgan, like Pat, also described his orientation as being founded on and strengthened by relationships. Morgan explained that his spiritual identity took root when he had an encounter in nature and realized that all of the plants around him were also alive. Morgan emphasized that his spiritual orientation is kinetic rather than static. Morgan shared that his spiritual wellbeing is fed to the extent that he is willing to feed his relationship with other things and other creatures. Morgan’s appreciation for relationships is foundational to the teachings of the Anishinabe people. Morgan feels deeply connected to First Nation teachings and grounds his spiritual orientation in indigenous ways of knowing.

Despite having different spiritual orientations, Riley, Pat and Morgan’s orientations share a common thread in that none are rooted in religious beliefs/doctrines. Unfortunately this study’s participant pool size is far too small to determine whether or not there is a trend towards spiritual educators being simultaneously non-religious. However, this small trend among these three participants does raise a very important question: would religious public educators be willing to support students in discovering spiritual beliefs that could potentially conflict with their own beliefs? I cannot answer this question based on the interview data or literature for this research paper alone, though this concern most certainly provides inspiration for a future topic of research.
4.2 Spirituality as a Component of Holistic Education

During interviews, participants each enthusiastically emphasized the need to cultivate a holistic model of education. A common theme that emerged among all three participants within the conversation surrounding holistic education was the notion that spirituality cannot be dissected, nor taught as an isolated subject (like math or Language Arts). In her interview, Riley expressed frustration with what she described as “the public board’s reductionist approach” to teaching and learning. Riley explained,

Spiritual development is not a unit that you can bring to children. It's not something you can slap onto what else is going on already, but it is something that needs to be given space, and time, where it is part of a whole philosophy, rather than something that you can slap on.

Riley shared that she does not feel optimistic about the ministry’s efforts to include words like “spiritual” or “holistic” in curriculum guides. Riley believes that the public education system would need a complete overhaul in order to make space for meaningful changes that foster whole-child development.

Like Riley, Morgan also expressed frustration and disappointment with the ways in which public education tends to disproportionately focus on developing students’ mental faculties at the expense of whole child development. Morgan has observed that education generally tends to include some focus on nature connection and the cultivation of reverence, awe and wonder about life in the early primary years. Morgan however, expresses concern with how dominant education models tend to replace the holistic learning opportunities as presented in primary education with mechanistic and positivist
approaches in the junior/intermediate and senior grades where there is a stronger focus on the mental/cognitive development. Furthermore, Morgan iterates that an education model that includes spiritual development in youth must be supported within a holistic education framework that focuses on the concept of wholeness and whole-child development.

Pat seemed to share a similar perspective with Morgan and Riley. Pat expressed a need for a holistic model of education in which all parts of development become integrated throughout various teaching and learning opportunities. Pat believes that spiritual development would naturally emerge as a result of a systemic pedagogical shift towards a holistic model of public education.

Riley, Morgan and Pat all share the opinion that student’s spiritual development would best be fostered within a holistic model of education. Furthermore, all three participants expressed an aversion to the idea of treating spiritual development as a specific, separate and isolated subject. They believe that spiritual learning opportunities can be embedded across the subjects through various holistic educational strategies. Furthermore, two of three participants (Riley and Morgan) were critical of the Ontario public model of education. Riley even noted that the ministry’s curriculum documents make mention of holistic education (as seen in the health and physical education guide), though Riley cautions that this is most likely a “band-aid” fix to a flawed educational system.

4.3 Obstacles to Creating Learning Opportunities for Spiritual Development in Schools

4.31 Societies Dominant Values: Capitalism and Hierarchy

During interviews, all three participants were asked to share their insights on the barriers to fostering spiritual development in public schools. Across the board, all three
participants asserted that dominant societal values (capitalism/hierarchy) present challenges to holistic educators and more specifically, to those who want to support spiritual development in schools. Riley adamantly asserted that public education places heavy emphasis on success and achievement at the cost of holistic child development. Riley stated,

It’s right on the TDSB (Toronto District School Board) website. It says, “every child can be successful” and there’s this dominant value that you have to get ahead in the world. You have to work the system. It’s all in the language of the school’s method of moving children from grade to grade, of making every child strive, and score high on those EQAO tests and achieving, and it’s not even possible for everybody to achieve because everybody’s got their different roles in life. There’s a lot of pressure.

Riley also brought up our society’s inclination to use reductionist approaches for solving complex problems. Riley acknowledges that public education is taking steps to shift to a more holistically based curriculum, however, Riley argues that these shifts will be without lasting change. Riley argued, “Things are shifting, but it feels a little Band-Aid-ish”.

Pat similarly acknowledged the tension that lies between society’s capitalist values and the grassroots push for a more holistic, and spiritually inclusive educational model. She feels that capitalist ideologies encroach on every moment of daily life. In her interview, Pat talked about how these capitalist values show up in our culture and schools as a “glorification of busy” mind-set. Pat explained “Productive, productive! And the parents are into it! And the whole culture is into it”. However, Pat unlike Riley, is less
critical of the Ministry of Education. Instead, Pat believes that it is up to the teachers to enliven and enrich various areas of the curriculum to make them more spiritual/holistically grounded. Pat said, “The curriculum is expansive, if you see it that way”.

Morgan did not specifically discuss capitalism as being a dominant obstacle for spiritual development and holistic education in schools. Morgan did however speak to our culture’s tendency to compete with, rank and divide each other. Accordingly, Morgan encourages educators to be critical of the type of spiritual development that they are advocating. He shared,

There are still spiritualities that are based on separate and hierarchical frames of being, which I don’t think are helpful. I’m referring to spiritualities that are based on models of dominant hierarchy. And I believe that these models are not just dangerous but responsible for a lot of the environmental degradation and a lot of violence in the world, because as long as there is a hierarchy and someone being on top of another, being more pure, or closer to “god”, more worthy of connection then another, then, I believe, morally speaking that that person is justified in a perpetuation violence against that “lesser person” or “lesser being”. So as long as “man” or “human” is seen as being greater than all the rest of creation, than humans are going to be justified in doing whatever they want to the rest of creation.

Morgan stresses that spiritual education must actively serve to promote respect for different views in order to dismantle hierarchy. He feels that spiritual development
curriculum should serve to promote connection (rather than separation) and equality (rather than ranking). Morgan’s concern with hierarchical models of spirituality encourages the question: Can we promote non-hierarchical forms of spirituality in a patriarchal society that is entrenched with practices of ranking, competition and separation? Noddings’ (cited in Conti, 2002) approach of cultivating “intelligent belief” (through encouraging critical thinking and open-minded question asking) may be a valuable strategy to dismantle the hierarchical spiritual frameworks discussed by Morgan.

4.32- Parents, Classroom Schedules, Curriculum Expectations and Pre-Service Teacher Training as Obstacles to Fostering Spiritual Development in Public Education

Each of the participants offered various answers to questions regarding the obstacles that they have encountered when trying to incorporate learning opportunities that foster spiritual development for their students. In addition to capitalism and/or hierarchy, participants mentioned the following as other obstacles that strain spiritual development/holistic pedagogy in schools: parents, daily public school classroom schedules, annual curriculum expectations and a lack of holistic training in pre-service teacher colleges. The aforementioned list of obstacles as provided by participants will now be discussed.

In answering the question “what are some of the obstacles to fostering spiritual development in public education?” Pat replied, “parents that are going to make a fuss and then the board will say this or that or the other thing”. Pat was the only participant who spoke directly of concern over parental backlash- this may be due in part to the fact that Pat was the only participant currently teaching in a traditional public school setting. In
FOSTERING SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

talking about mitigating the challenges of facing the possibility of parental backlash, Pat explained that it’s important to remember that you are not teaching children to follow your spiritual ideologies, but rather supporting students to make meaning of their world and develop their own connection to themselves, their communities, the planet and the cosmos. Pat insisted that so long as we are supporting students to ponder and come to their own conclusions, there should be no challenges/conflict with parents.

As for other barriers to foster students’ spiritual development in schools, Pat said “teachers having nothing or little to offer in that department as a person” is most certainly an obstacle. Pat stresses that we cannot expect teachers to teach to the whole child (mind, body, emotions and spirit) if they themselves are not working to strike balance with all parts of themselves. Pat is pessimistic about teachers’ abilities to live and teach holistically after having graduated from an educational system that is anything but holistic. Pat’s observation regarding the challenges of teachers having “nothing to offer” in the department of holistic curriculum, highlights the need for holistic educational strategies to be discussed and integrated into pre-service teacher college training programs.

Another barrier to fostering spiritual development in public education as presented by Riley is what she believes to be a lack of deep consideration about the overall daily, weekly, monthly and yearly experience for the students. Riley believes that the public board’s curriculum expectations result in jam-packed classroom schedules, which work against holistic approaches to education. Riley also feels that much of the curriculum expectations are chosen without deep consideration and reflection on the whole student experience. Riley says that in public education “so much is random, so
much is just put there, because some parts of the curriculum seem haphazardly placed, just because they need to be covered”.

Riley stresses that ministry’s heavy curriculum expectations generate hectic daily schedules for students and consequently prevent learning opportunities that would support the development of student’s emotional and spiritual faculties.

Morgan, like Riley, also believes that emotional and spiritual learning opportunities are largely being left out of classroom curriculum. Morgan said, To me, one of the dominant values of the school system is our preference for mental and physical dominance, which reveals itself in that we do not really teach children about emotional regulation or spiritual truths/spiritual connection. This goes to show right now we are imprisoning more people than ever before! And yet, it’s as if we hope that they will somehow pick up how to say, regulate themselves emotionally, like as if they are just supposed to learn this, while we spend more time on calculus and learning language than we do on actually learning about our emotional lives and how to take care of our emotional lives.

Morgan and Riley both agree that public education mandates that teachers cover a large sum of curriculum expectations without critically engaging in the question: How does teaching all of this material support the development of a well-rounded, healthy and balanced individual? Riley and Morgan call for educational reform; a system that intentionally designs curriculum content with whole child development in mind.
4.4 Teaching Strategies and Learning Goals Associated with Spiritual Development

One of the more surprising findings from analyzing interview data was that across the board, participants seemed to share the same (or very similar) perspectives on the learning goals/conditions that are imperative to producing spiritual growth/wellbeing/development. For example, all three educators independently shared that they feel that it is important to run classroom activities that build relationship and connection, inspire curiosity and wonder and generate gratitude and appreciation and/or tolerance in order to support spiritual development in their students. Two out of three participants also discussed the importance of beauty in the classroom as well as the importance of purposeful planning. The difference between participants perspectives however, is that there seems to be variation between the strategies that they use to accomplish these respective learning goals. Accordingly, this section will be organized into five subheadings with a title that is reflective of the learning goals required for spiritual development as mentioned by a minimum of two out of three participants. Under each heading individual strategies will be discussed and explored.

4.41 Building Connection and Relationship(s)

Building connection and relationship(s) is a recurring theme that was highlighted by all three interview candidates. For Pat and Morgan, teaching and building connection and relationship was at the top of their list of recommended strategies for fostering student spiritual development. For Morgan, connection is at the heart of spirituality. Morgan explained,

So to me, spirituality in education has a role in anchoring the mental, emotional and physical development of a child in a greater vision. And
that greater vision is one of connection. Connection to self, connection to others, to family, community and all of creation.

Morgan discussed the practice of “sit spots” as being one of his most prized strategy for fostering connection. Morgan explained that a sit spot is a practice whereby each student finds his/her own personal spot outdoors where they sit or lie down. The teacher/educator then sets a timer for anywhere between a few minutes and 30 minutes, depending on age. Students are expected to remain in their chosen spot until the time is up. Morgan explains,

For some students, they might just go out and have a nap, and lie down under a tree, and be quiet and be away from other students, that might be just what they need. I’ve seen other students go out and come up with songs. They’ll come back after the sit spot is over and be singing. And they are so proud of themselves and so happy that the song came from nowhere to them. And that creative impulse to me is a kind of spiritual and emotional wellness. Other student’s might have an experience with a bird or a squirrel because they are out there and they are sitting still and this animal comes close to them and they get to interact.

Morgan advocates for the practice of “sit spots” to be taught in a somewhat flexible and relaxed manner with a pedagogical approach that is rooted in a sense of trust that each student will get exactly what he/she/they need from the experience. Morgan recommends this activity as a strategy to foster connection; be it connection to self, to nature, to the greater community, to the environment, or to the cosmos.
Pat also centers her spiritual development teaching strategies on foundational practices that support connections and relationships. When asked “where in the curriculum do you fit this in?” Pat replied, “everywhere”. Pat then gave the following example of a place that she fits “relationship” into her lessons,

So science and art today, we are doing these lovely drawings and taking our time to look at the seeds and be fascinated and curious. You know it’s just a simple drawing of the seeds, but you know, seeds are worth it, kind of thing! Like, it’s all beautiful! It’s like they are apart of our world and we are in relationship with them.

Pat and Morgan both emphasized that teaching relationship and connection are an important aspect of fostering student’s spiritual development. Morgan relies on techniques such as: conversing with students around supporting the “self”, providing reflection time and encouraging nature connection through “sit spots”. Pat’s strategies are less about what she teaches, and more about how she teaches it. Pat works to model our connection and relationship to the world around reverence, appreciation, awe, wonder and respect for life when teaching a lesson. Pat does this through body language and directing student’s attention to the wonderment of the surroundings.

4.42 Inspiring Curiosity/Wonder

Riley brought up the importance of being in connection with students’ curiosity and wonder as a method to foster spiritual development in the classroom. Riley spoke of the important distinction between asking questions as opposed to giving answers when supporting student’s spiritual development. Riley said,
You're not bringing in a lot of cold, hard facts to little children, they'll shut down. They'll harden. They're new to this world. Let them be flexible and live in it, and experience it. If you walk through the woods going, "That's this. That's that. That's that. That's that." It's done. Rather, try "Wow, what's that?"

In this example, Riley advocates for connection building through the art of asking questions. Riley feels that it’s important to invite and allow students to discover their world(s) rather than solely depositing information into student’s brains.

Morgan also uses questioning techniques as a method to foster student spiritual development. Morgan uses Socratic questioning strategies for supporting existential exploration. One of the central questions that Morgan asks students is “Why are you here?” Morgan explained,

Why am I here? Ultimately that became a question that I had to ask myself on a daily basis, and to me that question is a spiritual experience. Why am I here? And, so I would ask them why they think they are here? […] And I use that approach, and that invites them to consider their place in the world, their connection to other things, and to search for their own personal meaning. Which to me at the heart of spirituality.

Morgan’s use of Socratic questioning mirrors the approaches discussed by Kessler (1999) in the literature review. As previously discussed, Kessler suggests that teenagers embark on a period of identity construction which is best supported by deep investigation of philosophical and existential concepts (1999). When asked how atheists (students and parents) might respond to the practice of asking students deeply existential questions,
Morgan replied “the thing with Atheism is, it still doesn’t negate them from asking the questions: why are you here? Or how are you connected to other people? I think there is still room for that”.

4.43- Fostering Appreciation, Attunement and Sharing

When asked, “how can we bring spiritual development practices into the classroom?” Riley responded,

I feel like through a daily appreciation practice. We frame it, we say, “do you have an appreciation for something that somebody did?” What was something that you have learned, some proof?” Daily practices are great.

Pat also inserts a daily practice into her classroom routine. Pat thinks of daily morning practice as an opportunity to get attuned (calming the mind and connecting to the present moment) for the day. Pat’s morning practices look different from day to day. Some days Pat leads a spiral circle. A spiral circle involves a long line of students. Students at one end of the line stay standing still, while the other end of the line walks and passes in front of the static end of the line, pausing briefly to make eye contact with each student. Pat leads a sharing circle after the activity to ask questions that promote self-awareness and self- discovery. Following the spiral circle, Pat asks the questions, “was it more comfortable for you to approach another student or to be approached?” and, “what, if anything, did you learn about yourself from this activity?” Pat then creates space for a sharing, acknowledgement and/or a chance for students to share something they are grateful for.
Morgan, like Pat, suggests that classes start with a coming together. Morgan explains that the group circle could be used as an opportunity to learn from each other and to hear about each other’s religious traditions and or even to learn a practice or prayer from each other. When asked how to do this in a secular context, Morgan seemed stumped at first and replied, “well, I don’t know”. On further reflection Morgan shared that he has a qualm with the word secular. “What do you mean by spiritual development in secular education, anyways?” he asked. Morgan explained that regardless of whether we call education secular or non-secular, the people who arrive at the institution come with values and beliefs that support how they ascribe meaning to their lives. Morgan went on to explain that in order to support the development of the whole child, we need to create space for the child to bring all of him/herself and all of his/her questions. Morgan emphasized that it was time for us to unpack and reconsider the word spiritual. Unlike the goals of many religious paths, inclusive and non-hierarchical spirituality is not about proselytizing or convincing anyone to believe anything. Morgan believes that students should be able to have open discussions on the topics of their religious or non-religious spiritual beliefs. He believes that students should be able to share their spiritual practices within the classroom rather than being forced to leave this part of them at home.

Riley, Pat and Morgan all use the practice of coming together daily (usually in a circle formation) as a tool to run activities that center around connection, attunement, reflection, appreciation/gratitude and sharing. Interview data suggests that educators feel strongly about the daily act of pausing to come together, though none of the participants felt strongly that a particular practice was better at fostering spiritual development and wellness over another. Pat echoed the sentiments of all three participants when in
FOSTERING SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

response to the question: what strategies do you use to foster spiritual development in your students? She replied, “it’s all like layered in there, so to give somebody a prescription of how to do that, um, it’s difficult”

4.44- Honoring Beauty

Riley mentioned the importance of creating a beautiful classroom environment as a support to whole child development. Riley said,

Yeah. There’s a real attention to beauty and care of our space. The walls are beautifully painted. There’s not a lot of jarring, in your face images. A lot of focus put to what is coming at you in your senses. That fosters spirituality.

Pat also mentioned the importance of a beautiful classroom environment. Pat explained that it is easiest to support whole child development when the students are in a room that feels and seems beautiful. Pat describes a beautiful room as being low on clutter with plenty of natural light and an abundance of hand made things (instead of plastic things) from natural materials. When asked, “how does creating a space, and bringing beauty and bringing natural materials in create learning opportunities for spiritual development? What is it about creating a space that does that?” Pat explained that, the environment makes the students feel calmer, while provoking curiosity for learning, as well as cultivating pride and reverence for the space that they frequent.

4.45-Purposeful Work

Another strategy to foster spiritual and whole child development in students is the concept of planning purposeful work as addressed by Riley and Pat. In her interview, Riley highlighted that there are plenty of curriculum opportunities for teachers to support
FOSTERING SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

student spiritual development. In response to the question “where in the curriculum can you insert spiritual developmental learning opportunities?” Riley said, “I think everywhere, and in everything. It's like art. It's more of an approach to life and approach to the world. It's not something that's separate really”

Pat echoes Riley’s sentiments that spiritual development can be integrated throughout the curriculum. Pat said,

Purposeful reading, purposeful writing; so that there’s something to do with our values and our connectedness and sustainability being my ulterior motive to get them minded that way. And thinking of how we are part of this eco system. We want to learn how to coexist and that may not sound spiritual but I think it’s a very different outlook from thinking we are the top of the heap, right? It’s spiritual because we are changing our position!

Riley and Pat both spoke of the opportunity to infuse spiritual development opportunities throughout the grade school curriculum. Riley however, seemed to suggest that spiritual development will likely occur, so long as the teacher models amazement and points out curiosity and wonder for the subject matter. Contrarily, Pat feels that what “purposeful planning” in a spiritual development context is enacted when the lesson is infused with opportunities for students to engage in critical pedagogy.

4.46- Modeling Vulnerability and Mentoring Spiritual Development

Pat spoke a great deal about the importance of sharing appropriate personal stories (that demonstrate personal growth and learning) with students. Pat suggests that these
stories can serve to let students know that their teacher is also committed to the path of learning and developing as a person. Pat also encourages teachers to share doubts as well (challenges). bell hooks (who doesn’t capitalize her name), calls this style of classroom sharing “confessional narratives” (hooks as cited in Miller & Athan, 2007). hooks asserts that this personal sharing, though often risky, is a major contributing factor to the creation of a “community of learning” (hooks as cited in Miller & Athan, 2007). Like hooks, Pat also finds that the benefits of sharing vulnerabilities through personal stories are instrumental to creating a holistic and spiritually rich classroom environment.

Riley also spoke to the importance of sharing vulnerability, though for Riley, this is modeled through her transparency with students about teaching subjects that she finds personally challenging. Riley said,

Part of the system is that if you're struggling with something and it's difficult to you then you're probably going to be able to teach it really well to the children. You'll have this extra bit of compassion and they will see an adult striving so not having it all together and that you are learning as well. That's healthy for them to see that you're struggling too.

For both Pat and Riley, sharing struggle, challenge and vulnerability are important components of supporting spiritual development. The teaching strategy of sharing personal vulnerabilities, challenges (and victories) is arguably one of the more important teaching strategies mentioned in this paper when speaking of foster student’s spiritual (and holistic) development. Challenge, doubt, struggle and vulnerability are common feelings that are experienced by almost every person. Thus, if educators are aiming to
FOSTERING SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

support the growth and development of the whole child, it would only make sense for them to model “wholeness” and share glimpses into these human traits that are commonly hidden.

4.5 Factors that Support Teachers

4.51- Teacher’s Commitment to Their Own Spiritual Development

When asked, “what factors support teachers in fostering spiritual development in students?” all three participants offered slightly different answers. Morgan said, “it’s important for me to live my own model, holistically, and that means to attend to my spiritual, mental, physical and emotional needs equally. Morgan’s prioritization of his own holistic (of which includes spiritual) development echoes the sentiments of educator and researcher Parker Palmer who said that a teacher’s own spiritual development must be the foundation for educating their students’ spiritual development, “in that teachers cannot take their students where they have not been themselves” (as cited in Conti, 2002, p59).

Riley also feels that teachers’ continued development outside of the classroom is imperative to their overall support. Riley however did not specifically affirm or negate the need to cultivate one’s own spiritual development outside of the classroom, but instead encouraged teacher’s to continue to cultivate “openness” and to continue learning about various holistic education models.

4.52- Reform vs. Revolution

Pat stated that “using discretion” could be understood as an effective strategy that teachers could employ in order to support themselves in their mission to foster spiritual development in classroom settings. Pat explains,
“…And maybe not explain explicitly everything that you are doing. Or expect people to be happy about it. You just do it! (laughs)”. Nevertheless, while Pat advocates for discretion in what is shared with parents and community, she also advocates for discretion in what teachers choose to teach. Pat explained, “Let’s be on the edge. We are on the edge. So let’s make sure we have a solid foot in the mainstream of the public board”. Here Pat is speaking to the importance of finding the balance between reform vs. revolution. Pat is encouraging educators to work on reforming education within the system. Pat emphasizes that educators can support themselves by using discretion regarding how far and how fast to push for the systemic adoption of a holistic education model, one that includes an acknowledgment of the need for spiritual development.

4.53- Medicine Wheel As A Lesson Planning Tool

Morgan suggests that teachers use the Indigenous medicine wheel as a supportive strategy when developing lesson plans. Morgan suggests thinking about each of the four quadrants of the Indigenous medicine wheel (mental, emotional, physical and spiritual) prior to teaching a lesson, and then pausing to ask: which of the four quadrants will this activity support? Morgan suggests being aware of the disproportionate number of lesson plans that are centered on fostering the mental and physical faculties of a child, and instead encourages educators to design and include lessons that will support the emotional and spiritual quadrants of the students as well.

4.6 Benefits of Fostering Students’ Spiritual Development

Morgan’s answer to the question “what are the benefits to fostering student’s spiritual development?” aptly echoed and summarized the sentiments of the other two participants. Morgan said,
Yes, well the benefits, and again, always holistic, the benefits are for the child, but also the family, the community and the world. I would say the child feels a greater sense of belonging and not just to a peer group, but belonging to the earth, to this great ecology of the earth. Furthermore, I also see other practical benefits in the support of a world-view that is required to reverse the devastation that is brought about by climate change and environmental devastation. I think it’s important not just to focus on the mental quadrant of asking: how are we going to get out of this state? We are not going to be saved by greater technologies and by consuming different things! I think we are going to get out of this by remembering that we are connected, fundamentally, in a very deep way: to ourselves, to other people, to everyone around the earth. And I feel like, if we can foster this connection in children, this will have a great impact on how conflict will be negotiated. How can there be violence if we understand that we are connected to each other at a deep level? How can we devastate our environment, our lakes and our rivers if we understand that we are deeply connected to them and that we need them, and that all the animals need them? I think the benefits are actually quite large.

4.7 Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, themes (derived from interview data) pertaining to the primary research question: “How is a small sample of teachers creating opportunities to foster students’ spiritual development in various educational settings?” were discussed and compared. In the first section of the chapter, the theme Spiritual Identity and Orientation was explored. Interview data suggests that supporting student spiritual development does
FOSTERING SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

not require educators to hold a common definition for the word “spiritual” so long as
their understanding and definition are both open and flexible- leaving room for the
inclusion of all persons and spiritual orientations.

In the next section of the chapter, the theme Spirituality as a Component of
Holistic Education was discussed. Data suggests that educators have a difficult time
reducing or isolating spiritual development from holistic education. The discussion on
spiritual development as a component of holistic education begs the question: is it
possible to foster spiritual development in public education models without first
reforming the entire system to a more holistically based model of education?

In the third section of this chapter, various obstacles and challenges to fostering
students’ spiritual development were presented and explored. Dominant societal values:
capitalism and hierarchy were discussed as problematic obstacles. Interview data put
forward the notion that spiritual development (which respectively works alongside
holistic education) can be framed as a form of activism and social justice. It was argued
that fostering spiritual development in youth could have far reaching positive
consequences for the planet. Resistance from parents, daily public school classroom
schedules, annual curriculum expectations and a lack of holistic training in pre-service
teacher colleges were also discussed.

The fourth section of this chapter was dedicated to discussing teaching strategies
that foster student spiritual development. Participants seemed to share similar ideas
regarding the important learning goals required to foster spiritual development in their
students. Each of the participants mentioned fostering connection as a primary method to
achieve spiritual development in their students. Participants also unanimously stated that
inspiring curiosity and/or wonder in students was also of utmost importance. Other learning goals mentioned included: nurturing appreciation, supporting attunement and sharing, honoring beauty in the classroom, assigning purposeful work, and modeling vulnerability through the practice of “confessional narratives”. The plethora of strategies presented in this section shone light on the fact that it seems that there are no correct strategies or “one size fits all” models to foster spiritual development in the classroom. The common thread identified in many of the learning goals offered, was that activities that generate curiosity, reverence, connection, gratitude and wonder all seem to support and nourish spiritual development.

The fifth section of this chapter touched on Factors that Support Teachers. Participants’ recommendations and answers varied slightly. Two of three participants highlighted the importance of continuing to work on oneself outside (and inside) of the classroom. Another participant suggested that using “discretion” when designing lessons and choosing how fast and how far too push the holistic education agenda was important tool of support. The latter participant reminded teachers to walk the edge without falling over. The preceding sentiments suggest that spiritual development is a component of a larger educational reform project: a project that requires both time and patience.

Finally, in the last section of this chapter the theme Benefits of Fostering Student Spiritual Development was briefly encapsulated through the use of a direct quote from Morgan, an interview participant. Morgan insists that the benefits of fostering spiritual development are both grand and far reaching. All participants feel that spiritual development supports students in fostering connection- connection to themselves, to each other, to the environment, to the world and to the cosmos- and that this sense of
FOSTERING SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

connection will translate into a deeper sense of empathy and care for the planet and all of its inhabitants.
CHAPTER 5- IMPLICATIONS

5.0 Chapter Overview

This chapter begins with a brief overview of the research project as a whole. Next, a summary of key research findings, as listed in chapter four, will be reviewed and briefly discussed. Furthermore, this chapter builds on the findings as presented in the previous chapter. A discussion around research implications, recommendations and areas for further research will follow and will constitute the bulk of this concluding chapter.

5.1 Study Overview

The primary aim of my research was to interview three Ontario educators who self-defined as holistic and spiritual (distinct from religious- see Chapter 2.) in order to answer the following research question: How do a small sample of Ontario educators create learning opportunities that foster students’ spiritual development in various school settings? Motivation to answer the aforementioned research question was driven by an over-arching desire to use my interview data in order to compile a “how to” resource guide for educators who find themselves theoretically aligned with the principals of holistic education, yet perplexed when it comes to implementation. I chose to narrow my research focus to the topic of spiritual development as a component of holistic education, after observing what I perceived to be a notable gap in research within holistic education discourse. Holistic education, according to Miller (2005), attempts to nurture the development of the whole person, which includes the development of: the intellectual, emotional, physical, social and spiritual. However, despite the fact that spiritual development is often a defining characteristic of holistic education, rarely was I able to
find academic literature that focused on spiritual development within holistic education frameworks in public school settings. The Ontario Ministry of Education even makes mention of holistic education and spirituality in the 2015 Ontario Health and Physical Education Curriculum Guide. The document states, “Current thinking views health as a holistic phenomenon and students are therefore encouraged to make connections between various aspects of their well-being, including physical, cognitive, emotional, spiritual and social aspects” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015; p.34). The inclusion of the word spiritual where descriptions of holistic education are present, led me in developing my secondary research question: What are the obstacles associated with fostering students’ spiritual development in public schools? And, why is spiritual development largely absent from conversations surrounding holistic pedagogy?

I will now dedicate the next section of this chapter (5.2) to reviewing the themes that emerged from the interview coding and analysis process, as well as list crucial research findings.

5.2 Overview of Key Findings

This qualitative research project relied on the data that was derived from conducting semi-structured interviews with three Ontario educators as a strategy to answer the following research question: How do a small sample of Ontario educators create learning opportunities that foster students’ spiritual development in various educational settings? And the subsequent research questions: 1) What challenges and/or obstacles do educators face when trying to implement these strategies? 2) What are the benefits to fostering spiritual development in schools? And, 3) Why is curriculum for
FOSTERING SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

spiritual development largely absent from conversations surrounding pedagogy within public education?

After completing interviews with educators Riley, Pat and Morgan, audio recordings were transcribed and analyzed both horizontally and vertically in order to locate common recurring themes. In Chapter 4, the following six themes were identified and discussed in great length: 1. Participant’s Spiritual Identities, 2. Spirituality as a Component of Holistic Education, 3. Obstacles to Creating Learning Opportunities for Spiritual Development in Schools, 4. Teaching Strategies and Learning Goals Associated with Spiritual Development, 5. Factors that Support Teachers, and 6. Benefits of Fostering Student’s Spiritual Development. Through comparing, relating and contrasting common themes as identified in chapter 4, a number of key findings became known. The bulk of this final chapter will focus on discussing the implications of these research findings, along with recommendations and suggestions for further research. These key findings include both broad and narrow implications for both the macro and micro educational community.

5.3 Implications

Several key findings were discovered through the process of analyzing the six themes as derived from the interview data. These findings are discussed under one of two distinct categories: Broad Implications and Narrow Implications. Under the heading Broad Implications, research findings that are relevant to either the greater education community and/or society as a whole, will be discussed. In the subsequent heading titled Narrow Implications, findings as relevant to teaching practice and future research will be examined.
FOSTERING SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

5.3.1 Broad Implications

Through the process of interviewing holistic and spiritual educators, I was able to answer my primary research question regarding how a small sample of Ontario educators create learning opportunities that foster students’ spiritual development. Each of the educators interviewed (Riley, Morgan and Pat), provided detailed descriptions of numerous spiritual development activities that they regularly employ in their classroom settings. The most interesting finding related to my primary research question however, was that most of the interview participants shared different methods to foster the very same learning goal. For example, Riley, Pat and Morgan all believed that teaching students to foster a deep connection to self, to others, to community, to nature and to the environment, was one of the most important learning goals associated with spiritual development classroom activities, yet they predominantly used different methods to achieve these same learning goals. Riley facilitated appreciation circles, Pat modeled reverence and respect for seedpods and other natural materials during science lessons and Morgan engaged students in the practice of sitting alone in nature. All three educators felt confidently that their lessons were supporting students to foster deeper connection, yet all three methods looked very different from one another’s method. The latter example was not an isolated incident. Participants repeatedly shared similar learning goals (i.e.-fostering connection, inspiring reverence and wonder for life, encouraging self-reflection etc.) yet employed different strategies to achieve these goals. The variation between each educators methods brings to mind the words of Zen philosopher Ikkyu who said, “Many paths lead up the mountain, but at the top we all look at the same bright moon” (http://mountainwayzen.net). Like Ikkyu’s poem, the broad implications of this finding
suggestions that student’s spiritual development in classrooms can be nurtured in a variety of ways, so long as educators share understanding about what the common overarching learning goals are. Unfortunately, my findings also revealed that there is no precise or specific definition among educators about what spiritual development is. Nonetheless, these three educators somehow seemed to agree that teaching students to foster connection and to cultivate reverence and respect for themselves, for others and for the environment, were all important components of spiritual development. It is however, important to recognize that these interview participants could arguably be referred to as pioneers in the field of bringing non-religious spiritual development activities to youth in classroom settings. It is therefore important to acknowledge that not all educators will have clear understandings of what spiritual development means, let alone how to practice it. Without a common understanding of spiritual development and/or the qualities that a spiritually developed person embodies, how can we expect educators to foster spiritual development in their students? Once again, in reference to Ikkyu’s poem, it is important to recognize that there are different paths up the same mountain; though I would add, that it is also of utmost importance to ensure that the educational community is in fact talking about the same mountain.

Another, and arguably my most valuable research finding was that integrating spiritual development learning opportunities for our students in public school settings, is an act of social activism. All three educators expressed frustration with how dominant societal values (as espoused by capitalism and patriarchy) stand in the way of educational reform; from our current model, to a more holistic approach. The broad implication of this finding is that public educators are engaging in grassroots change when they
implement learning opportunities for students to foster their spiritual development. Spiritual development strategies, as suggested by participants, focused on fostering respect for and connection with self, others and the environment; thus, I posit that students who develop reverence, appreciation, gratitude and respect for themselves and the world around them as students will grow up to be empathetic, compassionate, caring and community centered citizens. I postulate that spiritually developed students will lead to deeper levels of conscientious citizenship; citizenship that understands and respects the inherent value of all living things.

5.32 Narrow Implications

One of the most relevant research findings as it pertains to my personal teaching practice was the importance that participants placed on the need for teachers to continue to foster their own spiritual development outside of the classroom. Riley, Pat and Morgan all iterated that teachers should prioritize time for their own spiritual practices (journal reflection, mindfulness meditation, “sit spots” in nature, gratitude practices etc.) in order to support their teaching practice in the classroom. Morgan emphasized that teachers who believe in fostering “whole child development” must also prioritize the continued development of their whole personhood. This study has inspired me to look more deeply at my own life, in order to discern whether all four quadrants (mind, body, emotion, spirit) of my personhood are being regularly nourished.

In terms of the implications of this research on me as a beginning researcher, this study has impressed upon me the complications of qualitative research when dealing with topics that are conceptually nebulous and challenging to both reduce and define. In
retrospect, a theoretical framework may have proved useful as a method of supporting, strengthening and grounding this research.

5.4 Recommendations

As a result of conducting this study, my primary recommendation is that holistic educators set regular intentions to organize and discuss spirituality in education. It seems that the secularization of our society has pushed this very important topic to the side. Based on preliminary research, discussions with colleagues and interviews with participants, it would seem that there is an enormous amount of confusion and fear around the word ‘spiritual.’ During my initial research for this study, I observed that voices of those who opposed spirituality in education generally seemed to confuse spirituality with religion. I believe it is of utmost importance bring clarity to this confusion surrounding this word by reminding our community members that spirituality is both for, and a part of everyone. Philosophy teacher Joseph Dunne (2003) said it best when he said “everyone, inescapably, is spiritual, in the sense that there is some overall orientation to their lives, some assumption of what most matters” (p. 99). I suggest a societal reclamation of the word spiritual. However, I argue that this reclamation cannot happen without bringing this conversation into the spotlight. In order to do this, educators have to proudly and unabashedly refer to various commonly appropriated practices as spiritual practices rather than pretending that such practices (e.g. mindfulness meditation and yoga in schools) are secular. Furthermore, my findings suggest that the spirituality that holistic education embraces is one that includes space for both theists and atheists to comfortably reside.
My second recommendation, though somewhat idealistic, is for the holistic community at large to adopt a shared working definition for spirituality and spiritual development. At the very least, I recommend that at a micro level holistic educators, within their own schools, collaborate with fellow staff members in order to clarify and refine their understanding of the term. During my preliminary research, I noticed that holistic educators and researchers had a tendency to avoid clarifying what precisely was meant by spirituality being a core component of holistic education. While I understand that spirituality can and should mean something different to everyone, I nevertheless encourage the adoption of a flexible and spacious working definition by the larger holistic community. Based on my research, I encourage the adoption of Myers definition of spirituality, which is as “a continuous search for purpose and meaning in life; an appreciation for depth of life, the expanse of the universe, and natural forces which operate; a personal belief system” (Chandler et al., p. 168). Ultimately, I encourage the ministry of education to include an inclusive working definition of spiritual in future prints of the Ontario Health and Physical Education Curriculum Guide.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, I strongly suggest that practicing holistic educators identify the various characteristics and qualities that make up a spiritually developed person. Research participants, as cited in Chapter 4, seemed to suggest that being spiritually developed meant having a strong sense respect and connection for oneself, as well as with the greater community. Findings also suggested that spiritual development is likely related to having a sense of awe, wonder, curiosity and appreciation for life. Accordingly, creating realistic learning goals for spiritual development will become easier only after educators decipher which characteristics
makes an individual spiritually developed. Once again, my recommendation is that educators far and wide begin to discuss this highly meaningful topic.

**5.5 Areas For Further Research**

An important and worthy direction for future research would be to examine the links between commonly adopted spiritual practices and cultural appropriation. I hold that it is important and necessary for educators to have a relationship to the origins of every spiritual practice that they teach. For myself, having a relationship to the origin means only teaching spiritual practices that are a part of my lineage and/or only teaching spiritual practices that have been shared with me by a mentor who is of the lineage where the respective spiritual practice originated. I am of the opinion that this conversation is relevant within the context of all cultures, however, I believe that this is of particular importance with regards to cultural/spiritual practices belonging to the First Nations, Inuit and Métis people at this time. After all, it was not too long ago when the Indian Act forbade Indigenous Canadians from practicing their own spiritual/cultural traditions (Manzano-Munguía, 2011). Accordingly, I feel that it is deeply inappropriate to adopt, teach and/or be in a position of leadership with regards to First Nation, Inuit, Métis practices given my non-aboriginal status. With this in mind, my recommendation is that educators and researchers seek out meaningful collaboration with underrepresented populations to ensure that their voices, histories and perspectives are included in the planning and practice of implementing spiritual development strategies into public education.
5.6 Concluding Remarks

In review, findings from this research study indicated that spiritual development is by and large conceptualized as a process through which an individual ascribes meaning to his/her life, as well as the process that an individual goes through in order to discover their life’s purpose. The findings as derived from interview data also revealed that there seems to be some agreement regarding the qualities and/or learning goals that nourish the development of students’ spirituality despite the fact that there are multiple ways to achieve these specific learning goals. The examination of relevant literature and interview data both implied that building connection and relationships (to self, each other, the community, the cosmos) and inspiring curiosity and wonder are paramount to spiritual development. Other learning goals and/or qualities associated with spiritual development revealed through research included but were not limited to: fostering appreciation, honoring beauty, engaging in purposeful work and modeling vulnerability/spiritual growth.

Furthermore, research also indicated that implementing and/or advocating for spiritual development and holistic curriculum practices within public educational settings can be understood as a form of social activism. Interview data revealed that a tension exists between our dominant societal values and the values embraced by holistic educators. Research suggests that implementing spiritually developmentally minded learning goals into classroom practices may begin the process of a grassroots educational reform.

As a holistically grounded teacher candidate, I had invested interest in the topic and purpose for this study. Reflecting on my grade school education fills my heart with
FOSTERING SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

sadness and disappointment. I was disengaged in the majority of my grade school studies and felt spiritually famished and unsupported by the school system as a whole. My adolescent years were especially challenging as the pressures to choose a post-secondary path and/or career began to ensue. Given my recent positional shift from student to teacher, I felt that it was my duty to reflect on the pitfalls of my educational experience so that I may offer to my students that which I felt was largely absent and/or lacking in my education.

It is my hopes that this research may serve to contribute to a greater understanding of what spiritual development entails. Moreover, it is my deepest wish that spiritual development may become more widely understood and appreciated as a necessary component of child and adolescent development.
FOSTERING SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

References


FOSTERING SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT IN PUBLIC EDUCATION


Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Interview

Date: ___________________

Dear ___________________,

I am a graduate student at OISE, University of Toronto, and am currently enrolled as a Master of Teaching candidate. A component of this degree program involves conducting a small-scale qualitative research study. I am studying how educators create opportunities to support students’ spiritual development in secular educational contexts for the purposes of investigating an educational topic as a major assignment for our program. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

I am writing a report on this study as a requirement of the Master of Teaching Program. My course instructor who is providing support for the process this year is Dr. Angela Macdonald-Vernic. The purpose of this requirement is to allow us to become familiar with a variety of ways to do research. My data collection consists of a 45-60 minute interview that will be audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient to you.

The contents of this interview will be used for my assignment, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a conference or publication. I will not use your name or anything else that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information remains confidential. The only people who will have access to my assignment work will be my research supervisor and my course instructor. You are free to change your mind at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may decline to answer any specific questions. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published which may take up to five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks or benefits to you for assisting in the project, and I will share with you a copy of my notes to ensure accuracy.

Please sign the attached form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. Thank you very much for your help.

Sincerely,

Sarah Walsh
FOSTERING SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

Researcher name: Sarah Walsh

Phone number (647) ***-****
Email: *****@*******

Instructor’s Name: Dr. Angela Macdonald-Vermic
Phone number: ___________________ Email: ____________________

Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Sarah Walsh and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: ________________________________

Name (printed): ____________________________

Date: ____________________________
Appendix B: Interview Questions

Hello, thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview for my Master of Teaching Research Paper (MTRP) at the University of Toronto. This interview will take approximately one hour. The aim of the research is to learn how educators create opportunities to support students’ spiritual development in secular educational contexts. I will ask you questions concerning your understanding of the word “spiritual” as well as questions regarding your methods for fostering spiritual development for your students. I want to remind you that you may refrain from answering any question. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Background:

- How long have you been an educator? Can you tell me more about what experiences you have had as an educator?
- Can you tell me about your current position?
- For the teachers only: What grades and subjects do you teach?
- For the educators outside of the school system: What ages are the children that you work with?
- Do you fulfill any other role(s) in the school/organization?
- Can you tell me a little bit about the school/organization where you currently work? (e.g. size, student demographics, program priorities)?
- What experiences (personal, professional, and educational) have contributed to developing your interest in spirituality and your commitment to fostering spiritual development for youth?
FOSTERING SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

- When did you begin integrating spiritual development opportunities into your lessons with students/youth and why?

Beliefs / Values

- What does spirituality mean to you?
- What does spiritual development mean to you?
- How would you describe your own spiritual identity?
- What do you believe is the role of spirituality in children’s education?
- How do you believe schools fulfill that role?
- What do you believe are some of the benefits to assisting youth, specifically, in fostering their spiritual identities?
- In your view, what are some of the barriers to fostering the spiritual development of youth as a component of their educational experience? What range of factors and dominant values do you think limits these opportunities for learning?

Teaching Practices (Questions For Teachers Only)

- How do you foster spiritual development for your students? What does this look like in your own teaching/mentoring practice?
- What kinds of opportunities for learning do you create?
- Where in the curriculum do you fit this in?
- Can you give me an example of curriculum that you find relevant?
- What are your learning goals when you create these opportunities for learning?
- What outcomes do you observe from students?
- Do you assess this kind of learning? If yes, how?
FOSTERING SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

- What resources support you in this work? What are some of your favourite resources and why?

- Can you give me an example of a lesson/activity that you have conducted that was aimed at fostering students’ spiritual development?
  a. What were you teaching? Where did this lesson fit within the curriculum?
  b. What were your learning goals?
  c. What opportunities for learning did you create and why?
  d. How did your students respond? What outcomes did you observe from then?
  e. What resources did you rely on for this lesson?

Educating Practices for those who work with youth outside of schools (Non-school teachers only):

- How do you foster spiritual development in the youth you work with? What does this look like in your own mentoring practice?

- What kinds of opportunities for spiritual learning do you create?

- Where in your organization’s curriculum do you fit this in?

- What are your learning goals when you create these opportunities for learning?

- What outcomes do you observe from the youth?

- Do you assess this kind of learning? If yes, how?

- What resources support you in this work? What are some of your favourite resources and why?
• Can you give me an example of a lesson/activity that you have conducted that was aimed at fostering youths’ spiritual development?
  a. What were you teaching? How did you fit this lesson into your organization’s curriculum?
  b. What were your learning goals?
  c. What opportunities for learning did you create and why?
  d. How did the students/campers/youth respond? What outcomes did you observe from then?
  e. What resources did you rely on for this lesson?

Supports, Challenges, Next Steps:

• What factors support you in your commitment to fostering spiritual development in youth?

• What challenges have you encountered in creating these kinds of opportunities for students?

• How do you respond to these challenges?

• How could the education system help you respond to these challenges?

• What advice, if any, do you have for beginning teachers who are committed to fostering spiritual development for youth, but who understand they may face resistance?

Thank you for your time and participation.