Spiritual Development of College Students:

To What End?

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Overview

1. Opening Reflection

2. Overview of Context

3. Quick review of existing spiritual development models and theories

4. Questions and comments for clarification

5. Our questions as “reflective practitioners” about existing models, from a theological perspective

6. Practical Considerations and Strategies

7. Open Conversation and Questions
Why are you here?
Why are you here?

With a million other things you could have been doing or thinking about....

Why did you come here...

... to this conference?

... to this workshop?
Why are you here?

What are you searching for …? … longing for? … hoping to discover or learn?
WHY ARE YOU HERE?

How does being here now connect to your deeper sense of life purpose...

and to that which you feel inspired to do and be about in your life?
Please share some of your reflections about WHY you are here.
Our Starting Point . . .
DEFINING SPIRITUALITY

In its most basic or anthropological sense, spirituality, like personality, is a characteristic of the human being as such. It is the capacity of persons to transcend themselves through knowledge and love, that is, to reach beyond themselves in relationship to others and thus become more than self-enclosed material monads. In this sense, even the newborn child is spiritual while the most ancient rock is not. But we usually reserve the term spirituality for a relatively developed relationality to self, others, world, and the Transcendent, whether the last is called God or designated by some other term.

Schneider’s Three Models for the relationship between religion and spirituality:

1. Strangers
2. Rivals, if not enemies
3. Partners

Why are we here presenting on and engaging this topic?

- We believe that what happens with college students around this issue of spiritual development is **critical** to them and to our society.

- We believe it is an essential part of our work to mentor students into a deeper experience, understanding, and integration of their spiritual lives.

- We encounter often students who are exploring questions of meaning and purpose in a way common and consistent with much of the theory and literature on college student spiritual development.

- Yet, as “reflective practitioners,” we are left with some questions and concerns emerging from our work with students over the past decade and in relation to existing literature and practice.

- We want to raise these questions and learn / dialogue about them with other professionals like you, who come from different settings.
CONTEXT:

U.S. and Global Culture
Context:
Higher Education in the United States


- 2/3 of college students expect that their colleges or universities will support and contribute to their spiritual growth
- 80% express an interest in spirituality, and 8 in 10 have attended a religious service in the past year.
Eg. ) AACU’s Core Commitments: Educating Students for Personal and Social Responsibility

While the commitment to educate students to be ethical and moral leaders, workers, and citizens is grounded in the history of American higher education and is today centrally acknowledged in college and university mission statements, it has faltered in practice. In the face of widespread uncertainty about the academy’s appropriate role in examining values and beliefs, issues of personal and social responsibility have been pushed to the edges of the college curriculum and addressed in only limited ways in the co-curriculum.

As a result, many students:
- Experience a disconnect between their academic studies and the personal exploration that inevitably occurs in college;
- Are left to their own devices to address personal and interpersonal concerns as well as moral and ethical challenges;
- Receive few opportunities to place those experiences in a larger context of history, culture, and society.
Learning Reconsidered:
A Campus-Wide Focus on the Student Experience

• Redefined learning as the integration of academic learning and student development

• Emphasized the broad scope in which learning occurs both inside and outside the classroom,

• Learning is a multi-centric, holistic process, rooted in meaning-making, that integrates academic learning and student development.
“… in recent years, at colleges and universities around the country, an expanding and increasingly vigorous dialogue has begun, centered on examining personal values, meaning and purpose-including religious and spiritual values - as part of the educational experience. Individually and collectively, the voices of campus leaders, of faculty, of student affairs personnel, and of students themselves have begun calling for an exploration of ways to better integrate students’ search for meaning and their spiritual quests with their academic preparation in the classroom and through campus activities.

Encouraging Authenticity and Spirituality in Education (2005)
Arthur W. Chickering, Jon C. Dalton, Liesa Stamm
“By failing to address students’ spiritual development in practice and research we are ignoring an important aspect of their development.”

Patrick Love and Donna Talbot
“Defining Spiritual Development: A Missing Consideration for Student Affairs”
NASPA Journal. Vol. 37, no. 1, Fall 1999. P. 362
Existing Models:
Spiritual Development of College Students
**Most Existing Models Build on a Similar Framework/Concept:**

*Spiritual development is one dimension of holistic development; it parallels cognitive and psychosocial development*

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<th>Infancy</th>
<th>Childhood (Early, Play age, School age)</th>
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<td>Form of Dependence</td>
<td>Dependent</td>
<td>Dependent / Counter-dependent</td>
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<td>Form of Community /</td>
<td>Parental figures</td>
<td>Conventional (Those like us”) or diffuse</td>
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<td>Psychosocial /</td>
<td>Basic Trust vs. Mistrust</td>
<td>Autonomy vs. Shame ; Initiative vs. Guilt ; Industry vs. Inferiority</td>
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Love and Talbot’s Framework of Spiritual Development (1999)

- Internal process of seeking personal authenticity, genuineness, and wholeness as an aspect of identity development
- Process of continually transcending one’s current locus of centricity
- Developing a greater connectedness to self and others through relationships and union with community
- Deriving meaning, purpose and direction in one’s life
- Increasing openness to exploring relationship with an intangible and pervasive power or essence that exists beyond human existence and rational human knowing.

CAUTION on Use of Developmental Models:
A person is a person, not a “widget” or a “product”

How do we honor the uniqueness and sacredness of an individual human being, and her/his story and journey?
How do we see this working with our students at DePaul?
DISCUSSION:

Are there any important elements or milestones for college student spiritual development that you would add?
As “reflective practitioners,” we are left with some of the following questions:
TO WHAT END?

Where is (spiritual) development going?

What is its direction?
Is what’s “good for the individual” also what’s good for the broader human community?

(Do we really believe in an “invisible hand theory” of spiritual development?)
Where is the community?
To whom is the individual accountable? How do you know when you’ve gone astray?
What happens when life gets tough?
How is the journey sustained?
How does a person avoid becoming merely a by-product of the dominant culture?

(Doesn’t the dominant culture become the “default faith” for most?)

Eg.) Presentism Individualism Privatism Materialism Consumerism Therapeutic Moralism Instant Gratification
Around what does the human community organize?

What do we pass on to our children?
How do ideals, hopes, & visions become habits or lead to behavioral changes?

(How is character or “virtue” developed and sustained over time?)
Doesn’t religion enter the picture with or without our permission or desire?
PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS and STRATEGIES
Mentoring Relationships
Community
Mentoring Environment / Culture
Displacement

EXPERIENCES OF SELF – TRANSCENDENCE

Direct Encounters with those who are materially poor

Reading and writing the “Book of Life”: Reflection and Reflective Writing

Nature
Self-Transcendence: SILENCE
(Meditation, prayer, reflection, solitude)
Ritual
Intentional inclusion of religious and wisdom traditions in dialogues with/about spirituality
Your Thoughts: To What End?