

Elizabeth J. Tisdell, *Exploring Spirituality and Culture in Adult and Higher Education*, San Francisco 2003.

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SUMMARY

Preface (ix-xviii)

The processes of teaching and learning knowledge take place in many contexts. “If education is going to be culturally relevant and transformative on the individual or social level, it must engage learners on a variety of levels: the cognitive or rational, the affective, the sociocultural, and the symbolic or spiritual level” (xiii). This book is “especially intended for those attempting to teach for cultural relevance grounded in a sense of spirituality, and attempts to develop a theory-in-progress of a spiritually grounded and culturally relevant pedagogy for transformation” (xiv).

Part I * Breaking the Silence: Spirituality and Culture in Adult Meaning-Making and Education

Chapter 1: Introduction: Culture, Spirituality, and Adult Learning (3-23)

Four educators are introduced. They all are teaching adults in higher education or community-based settings, and come from different backgrounds. A Mexican-American woman (48), raised Catholic and in the Spanish language, working with teachers; an African American education professor (ca. 50), who grew up in the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church; a white woman (42) who was raised in Alaska and has become a singer-songwriter and community-educator; a Muslim woman (35) of East Indian descent, born in Africa, who immigrated to North America from Africa and England as an adolescent, and is a professor of education. Tisdell brings also in her own background, being a white woman rooted in an American Irish-Catholic family, who worked as a campus ministry for the Catholic Church (though having an ambivalent relationship with that Church), did a training program in massage therapy, completed a doctorate in adult education (1992), emphasizing multicultural and women’s educational issues, and has been teaching in higher education ever since.

Though the four interviewed (and many other) people hardly explicitly refer to their spirituality, they acknowledge the importance of the spiritual dimension in their own lives and in the lives of those they teach. More and more “educators and cultural workers are beginning to break the silence about the connection between spirituality and education” (20).

Chapter 2: Breaking the Silence. Defining Spirituality in a Culturally Relevant Educational Context (25-43)

Many academics and educators are breaking the silence about the role of spirituality in their areas of study and professional practice, especially in relation to health care and to adult and higher education (issues like the constructing of knowledge, the education for social justice, or emancipation). However, little attention has been given to “the explicit connection of spirituality and culture or to its connection to culturally relevant education” (27).

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Tisdell presents seven assumptions about the nature of spirituality in relation to education, based on 31 interviews with adult educators (see her earlier studies of 2001), and deepened out with other studies (29-35 and in the following chapters).

1. Spirituality and religion are not the same, but for many people they are interrelated.
2. Spirituality is about an awareness and honoring of wholeness and the interconnectedness of all things through the mystery of what many I interviewed referred to as the Life-force, God, higher power, higher self, cosmic energy, Buddha nature, or Great Spirit.
3. Spirituality is fundamentally about meaning-making.
4. Spirituality is always present (though often unacknowledged) in the learning environment.
5. Spiritual development constitutes moving toward greater authenticity or to a more authentic self.
6. Spirituality is about how people construct knowledge through largely unconscious and symbolic processes, often made more concrete in art forms such as music, art, image, symbol, and ritual which are manifested culturally.
7. Spiritual experiences most often happen by surprise.

[These seven points are unchanged taken over from 28-29.]

Like the term spirituality, the term culture is also defined differently. Based on literature, Tisdell uses the following meanings.

- *Culture* refers to a specific social group with a shared set of values, beliefs, behaviors, and language, such as African American culture or Puerto Rican culture.
- *Dominant culture* refers to those in North America, who are white, of European ancestry, moneyed, of Christian background, heterosexual, able-bodied, and often male as well.
- *Larger culture* refers to the plurality of cultures that make up all of North America. [Unchanged taken over from 37-38.]

In order to connect culture and education, *multicultural education* took on different forms and was much discussed, especially because of the diverse relations of power, of privilege and oppression, and so on. Some educators prefer the term *culturally relevant education*. Tisdell expects that spirituality can have some relevance to these critical multicultural and culturally relevant approaches, especially when its emancipatory quality (rabbi M. Lerner, 2000) is acknowledged. This “highlights a sense of awe and wonder, the cultivation of mindfulness, and a love and care for the universe”, “is manifested in actively working for the environmental sustainability and a focus on the transformation of the world” (41), “and recognizes the value of pluralism and the many manifestations of spirit within different cultures and traditions” (42).

Chapter 3: Spirituality, Religion, and Culture in Lived Experience. Overlaps and Separations (45-66)

“Organized religions have institutionalized components to them – written doctrine, codes of regulatory behavior, and organized communities of faith”, while “spirituality is more about how people make meaning through experience with wholeness, a perceived higher power, or higher purpose” (47). However, most religions “also provide their members with important aspects that do connect with spirituality” (48), especially by rituals, stories, images, symbols, prayers, songs and music. They “provide a gateway to the sacred” (50), unite information and feeling, full of affective and spiritual power and meaning for the

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different levels of consciousness. Many people don't make these distinctions and lack the knowledge of other religions as well, and many leave the religion of their childhood. In order to make a meaningful connection between spirituality and culture education, one should take more seriously the role of imagination in the constructing of knowledge (Sharon Daloz Parks 2000, and compare Fowler 1981). This is not about fantasy, but about the task to compose the real. This counts for the knowledge construction process in general and particularly for the more religious and spiritual knowledge. The resolving and restructuring power of the image and the symbol (an object, a person, concept, movement etcetera) are very important in this process, partly going beyond the borders of language, speech and cognition. A new wholeness (spiritually, intellectually, emotionally, socially) can be the result of 5 steps, initiated by a conscious or unconscious conflict, or a spiritual experience. As will be worked out in Part III, this has implications for a culturally relevant approach to adult and higher education.

Chapter 4: Between the Cultural and the Universal. Themes and Variations of Spiritual Experience (67-87)

A spiritual experience can be of importance in the identity development. Based on her own interviews, her own experience and some literature, Tisdell focuses on those types of experience that are "potentially common to all human beings in all cultures" (69). Dreams are the first type: especially when someone is in conflict or in the midst of a transition of some kind, dreams can be very powerful. They provide direction, bring love and healing, can help to solve a mystery (an academic problem), help to find order in chaos by meaningful coincidences (synchronicity, in a short time period or over a period of years). A second type of spiritual experience are those that are related to birth, death, near-death experiences and severe illness. They can cause an incredible sense of wonder and awe, but also the experiences of comfort and of reorienting presence, or the confronting and changing power of long buried memories (for instance, interrogation in the Philippines). A third type is "the sense of wonder and oneness of the universe" (83) that can be mediated by the contact with nature and in the meditation practice. They can affect the way one lives and thinks, and stimulate a sense of mindfulness. These types of experiences, that seem to happen "when the energy of the Life-force is most obvious", and that "seem to get at the interconnectedness of all things", "are common to all cultures and part of all human experience" (86). However, in the different cultural (and sometimes religious) communities this results in a variety of meaning and symbolical expression (in art, music or ritual).

Part II * Claiming a Sacred Face. Identity and Spiritual Development

Claiming a sacred face must be understood as "the ongoing development of identity related to spiritual development in a culture and gendered context" (89-91).

Chapter 5: Spiritual Development as a Process of Moving Forward and Spiraling Back (93-116)

"A basic premise of this chapter is that spiritual development is a process of standing in the present moment and spiraling back to explore significant events and spiritual experiences that shaped both one's spiritual journey and life journey and identity thus far in order to move forward to the future" (94). As far as the ongoing development of identity is concerned, the need for more integrative perspectives is seen. The different aspects or lines should be more integrated, like the cognitive development, moral development, the cultural identity development, the influence of the sociocultural context (Caffarella et al., 1999).

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Many adult development authors and theorists “have suggested, either overtly or implicitly, that the process of development is probably more spiral-shaped than a sequence of linear and clearly defined stages or phases” (95-96). See Robert Kegan’s discussion of the evolving self (1982, 1994) and Mary Bateson’s discussion of adult development and learning (1995). How one views spiritual development, depends in part on how one defines spirituality. Ken Wilber (2000) presents five different opinions, and although he himself argues that there are “eight general stages to our development that include the spiritual” (97), he actually discusses these “developmental lines” as a spiral process and from a more integrative perspective. Other developmental theorists connect the spiritual development with specific aspects, like adulthood (Parks 2000), theology and life stages (Loder 1998), women’s spirituality (Borysenko 1999).

In the framework of spiritual development, often there is referred to the six-stage theory of faith development of James Fowler (1981, 2000; 359 white people were interviewed, who were deeply informed by the Judeo-Christian traditions). He uses Kohlberg’s theory of moral development and Piaget’s theory of cognitive development, but criticizes their overreliance on rationality. His six faith development stages are: 1) intuitive projective faith; 2) mythic-literal faith (1 and 2 relate to childhood); 3) synthetic-conventional faith (emerging in early adolescence; more conventional, influence of authorities); 4) individuative-reflective faith (early adulthood; more critical, choices are made); 5) conjunctive faith (often emerges at midlife, being able to hold “the tension of opposites”, respecting other traditions); 6) universalizing faith (exceptional: “move beyond the self to a universalizing concern for all of humanity and a realization that all are one in God or a higher power”). (See 98-99.)

Despite the limitations of this linear approach, Fowler’s study “contributes to our understanding of how people construct knowledge through image and symbol, an area that has been ignored by most development and learning theorists” (99). The educators Tisdell interviewed, can be placed in the conjunctive faith stage, however, also “moving forward and spiraling back at different times in their adult life” (99). “Late adolescence and early adulthood are periods of experimentation, questioning, and for some a period of outright rebellion” (100; Erikson et al.), and young adults start to develop “worthy dreams” (100). “This process of questioning the way one was socialized around religious, cultural, or spiritual issues can take different forms” (100), also for many adults. Tisdell gives examples from people who are questioning their religious upbringing and move away from their childhood religious tradition, either temporarily or permanently. However, they who believe spirituality is important to them, do “spiral back to ‘re-member’ the life-enhancing elements of their religious tradition and their culture of origin while developing a more meaningful adult spirituality” (108). Elements and images of the past and of childhood keep their spiritual meaning, even if one didn’t grow up in a specific religious tradition. This moving back can become meaningful for the future, when one is able to do some “inner work” (Matthew Fox, 1996). Inner reflective meditative work can help to connect with the inner center (“the Life-force, God, the Realm of Mystery, or the divine spirit”), and makes them to connect with others as well, working and helping from a more centered perspective. However, “trying to live this way in practice is always a struggle” (110). Therefore, we need ways of celebrating and creating ritual (Fox), of meditative space and time. In her own (renewed) regular daily practice of meditation, Tisdell has the paradoxical experience “that in the solitary is the communal” (115), differently from attending a communal worship service.

Chapter 6: Gender, Culture, and Spiritual Identity in Midlife Integration (117-138)

“Given that spiritual development is about the ongoing development of identity, it is intimately connected to how we understand all aspects of identity, including our gender, ethnicity, culture, and class background” (117). In the last decade, several theorists call attention to this cultural complexity of development. Pamela Hays (2001) created the ADDRESSING framework. This acronym offers a system for organizing and addressing in a group “Age and generational influences, **D**evelopmental and acquired **D**isabilities, **R**eligion and spiritual orientation, **E**thnicity, **S**ocioeconomic status, **S**exual orientation, **I**ndigenous heritage, **N**ational origin, and **G**ender” (118, is Hays 2001, 5). Other authors (Rossiter, Clark, Brooks) stress the importance of narrative perspectives on development. Tisdell confirms this, by presenting a woman’s narrative of spiritual development (an African American woman, 50, religious background is the black Baptist Church, teaching reading and writing to a multicultural group of students). This narrative shows clearly how the several contextual elements (cultural background, gender, historical era, education, religious upbringing) are interrelated and how they influenced the development of her identity and spirituality. Many of the interviewed people did tell or do show how their spiritual journey does make them to live more authentically, this in relation to the different roles one has and more specifically to the issue of gender. The literature on women’s spirituality and identity development is voluminous, in particular dealing with the notions of image and symbol, especially inspired by feminist theology, and showing the importance of language and role models. Most of the interviewed people were in their midlife, and showed the ability to deal with the paradox and the integration of the tension of opposites, moving beyond their selves toward community.

Chapter 7: The Role of Spiritual Experience in Developing a Positive Cultural Identity (139-162)

Each of us has several faces (personal, political, historical, sacred), formed by and responding to the messages of our culture, religious institutions, our family etcetera. The process of ongoing identity development can be seen as a transformational process of unmasking (Abalos 1998, with regard to the Latino community in the USA), to “become the person one has always been”, searching for our “authentic vocation” (141; Palmer 2000). Spirituality can play an important role in developing a positive cultural identity, more specifically, is dealing with the mechanisms of internalized oppression (Abalos). Some life stories are presented. Richard Navarro, 38, singer-songwriter and poet, with Native American parents (Indians from Alaska and Colorado), though raised in “the Western way of doing things”, Christian religion included. Through the influence of study, meetings and spiritual practices and spiritual experiences, he starts to reclaim his own identity as a Native American. His process of unlearning what was unconsciously internalized and of reframing in a positive way of what was been seen as negative, is acknowledged in the models of cultural identity development (what once started with the work of William Cross, 1971). However, it is only in the publication of Myers et al. (1991) that the fundamental importance of spirituality has been acknowledged. The idea that the development of a positive cultural identity is also a spiritual process, holds also for people of color or ethnic minorities. Some examples (Derise Tolliver, an African American psychologist and professor, also a close colleague of Tisdell; and Tito Rodriguez, a Puerto Rican) make clear that the reconnection with the history, culture, and spirituality of their ancestors do not only transform themselves, but also those with whom they work. The story of a female activist and adult educator shows how it was only in her midlife period that she came to deal with

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her internalized oppression against herself as a Jewish woman. Stimulated by women's stories, mentoring friendship and special moments of insight, she starts to embrace her Jewishness in a deep emotional way. Finally, the story of Harriet Smith makes clear "how sexual orientation, culture, and class intersect with spirituality in dealing both with internalized oppression and with forming a positive view of self, grounded in spirituality and in aspects of her culture of origin" (155). This comes close to the conceptualization of Myers et al., wherein spirituality plays a fundamental role in the complexity of identity development, whereas Hays (2001) sees the spiritual and religious orientation as one component of this process. Finally, Tisdell shows how she makes her students aware of their cultural and spiritual history. She also points out that "dealing with issues based on culture, race, class, and gender can be controversial"; "as an instructor, I believe that adult learners need to share only what they are willing or want to share relative to these subjects" (162).

Chapter 8: Searching for Wholeness. Crossing Culture, White Identity, and Spiritual Development (163-182)

As a consequence of several developments, nowadays we are more in contact with and under the influence of different cultural, religious and spiritual differences than we were before. "This chapter focuses on the connection of spirituality to crossing culture, as related to the spiritual search toward greater wholeness and toward claiming our more sacred face" (164). The story of a Muslim woman who immigrated to the US after living in three countries shows how learning opportunities, formal education and spirituality can fruitfully interact in this process. Other life stories tell how people (for instance, a white woman with a Christian background) can choose for crossing culture experiences, by personal and more official relationships, or by interreligious dialogue groups, or by developing a more individualistic and eclectic spirituality (incorporating Eastern ideas and meditation practices). One can even (over years) become extremely committed to another tradition, because the own tradition had nothing to offer for one's spirituality. "It seems that a part of spiritual development for many people is to explore spiritualities rooted in cultural traditions other than their own" (179), in order to "nurture what has been missing in one's own tradition" (181). "These cross-cultural experiences are a part of a search for wholeness that seems to call people to move toward being more authentically themselves, spiritually and culturally" (181).

Part III * Spirituality in a Culturally Relevant and Transformative Teaching Practice

The purpose of this chapter is "to develop a more spiritually grounded and culturally relevant pedagogy" (184), and to determine some consequences for the practice.

Chapter 9: Approaching Transformative Teaching Grounded in Spirituality and Cultural Relevance (187-202)

Most educators hope that their work has a positive and even transforming effect on their learners' lives. Edmund O'Sullivan even writes (1999, 259): "I believe that any in-depth treatment of 'transformative education' must address the topic of spirituality and that educators must take on the concerns of the development of the spirit at a most fundamental level. Contemporary education suffers deeply by its eclipse of the spiritual dimension of our world and universe" (187). Knowledge construction "is not only about critical reflection or 'rational discourse', it is also about engaging people's hearts and souls, as well as their minds" (188; compare the four faces of Abalos). Palmer (1980) states: "We don't think our way into a new kind of living; we live our way into a new kind of thinking" (188; on several

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levels Tisdell experienced this, and the importance of dialogue, in her cooperation with the two scholars and educator-activists, whom have a different cultural background, Derise Tolliver and Silvia Villa, 2000, 2001). So, “If we want to draw on the transformative power of participants’ spirituality that connects with their cultural backgrounds”, educators (who are more than facilitators, Paulo Freire) need to create a specific, emancipatory learning environment. In Chapter 1 seven assumptions about the nature of spirituality were summed up. In order to develop a spiritually grounded approach to culturally relevant education, it is important to realize oneself that spirituality has a lot to do with moving toward greater authenticity. As a consequence, “it is absolutely central for educators to try to be as grounded in their own spiritual and cultural authenticity as possible”. Other important aspects are the respect for cultural traditions and their different ways and forms of making-meaning, and the willingness to take some risks in the adult learning environment as well. One must create a space wherein students can discover and share their authenticity, and even sometimes can undergo a spiritual experience. “Attending to the spiritual does mean honoring the various dimensions of how people learn and construct knowledge by facilitating activities that include attention to the affective, the somatic, the spiritual, or symbolic, as well as the cognitive, and encouraging learners to do the same in their presentations. By doing so we set up environments that sometimes result in transformative learning experiences that are also experienced as spiritual by some people on occasion” (194). Further, not only the educator and the participants determine how one attends to spirituality in the learning environment for culture relevance. The particular context of the learning activity must be taken into account. Working with adults in a community setting is often less rationalistic, leaving more space to traditional symbols, rituals, music etcetera. This also counts for those who work in student affairs and student services in higher education. However, attend to spirituality in higher education classes is somewhat different and more difficult. Among the interviewed teachers, none “wanted to be seen as doing anything coercive, or as pushing a spiritual or religious agenda, or as otherwise being ‘unacademic’. Yet many also talked about the importance of setting a tone” (198-199). Often they referred more implicitly to spirituality, trying “to create a space for ways of knowing beyond the strictly rational”. In summary, in order to create an appropriate learning environment, it is important for the teacher to develop personal relationships with people of different backgrounds, to stimulate the authenticity of himself and of the learners as well, and to create an atmosphere wherein the cultural and spiritual variety of all participants is respected.

Chapter 10: A Theory-in-Progress of a Spiritually Grounded, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. Philosophical Underpinnings and New Directions (203-217)

“Educational theory must always be related to the world of practice; otherwise the theory is not very useful” (203). As far as the theory of transformative learning in adult and higher education is concerned, most often cited is the work of Jack Mezirow (1985, 1995), followed by Mezirow and Associates (2000), and other authors. All kind of influences are active in this learning as transformation, and besides the transformation of the individual there is attention to the social transformation, leading to pedagogies (like critical pedagogy, feminist pedagogy) that want to challenge discriminating power relations. Teaching for cultural relevance is also connected to the issue of multicultural education. In the wide body of literature five approaches can be distinguished (Sleeter 1996, Grant & Sleeter 1999). Also the issues of critical multiculturalism and of resistance postmodernist approaches to education are involved.

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However, it is time now to highlight the importance of spirituality in teaching for social relevance and cultural transformation. Important are the insights of Abalos (1998), Tolliver (2000 etc), Dillard, Abdur-Rashid & Tyson (2000), (and see for instance Hart 2000, Palmer 1998, 2000, Kazanjian & Lawrence 2000, Sullivan 1999; see page 205-206). Seven principles or “elements of a Spiritually Grounded and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy” for higher education classrooms have the required transformative potential (quoted from 216-217, compare 212-216):

- 1 an emphasis on authenticity;
- 2 an environment that allows for the explorations of the cognitive, affective, and symbolic dimensions of learning;
- 3 culturally relevant readings;
- 4 exploration of cultural identity;
- 5 collaborative work and presentations that deal with strategies of change and multiple dimensions of learning;
- 6 celebration;
- 7 a recognition of the possibilities and limitations of emancipator learning potential in higher education environments.

Some examples are given of how the theoretical and cognitive aspects can be related to and completed with the affective, the relational, and the symbolic dimensions of the learning process. However, one should taken into account that higher education limits the possibilities of education as a transformational space (the different roles of the teacher who also has to give grades; limited time), and also that much education for social transformation happens on the outside of the building.

11: Stories from the Field. Spirituality and Culture in Adult Higher Education Classrooms (219-233)

Some stories and examples show how educators have drawn on spirituality in their practices. However, take notice of the fact that emotional and spiritual experiences can be closely connected, but are not the same. And also, “whether something is experienced as ‘spiritual’ is entirely determined by the one experiencing it and may not be attached to strong emotion” (220). One example shows how a carefully prepared lesson about an Islamic chant provided a good discussion in class and a powerful support to the two Muslim women students, on the day after September 11, 2001. Another example shows how a critical incident in the classroom can be caused by passing through a “talking stick” and can have a transforming spiritual quality, towards the individual and the group as well (Susan, a white high school teacher, tells – in this multicultural class – about her father being murdered by two African American). Tisdell responds: “The experience resulted in healing, new insight, greater understanding, and a shared sense of community that made it feel spiritual to me”, especially because of “this open exchange of vulnerability” and “the participants in the class being as real as they could be in that moment” (226). Also the writing of small poems about “I am” in a class full of Latino students can be very spiritual and transformative, relating on a deep level to identity and authenticity. These interesting moments make also very clear how powerful the community of learners can be, being simultaneously teachers and learners together.

12: The Possibilities and Challenges of Spiritually Grounded, Culturally Relevant Teaching (235-258)

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Tisdell starts with the experience of the educator, activist, and musician-dancer Tito Rodriguez, who tried to memorize a poem in a college Spanish class, and suddenly found himself reciting the first childhood poem he had learned, like falling into a trance. This revelation forced him to reflect on his life and to reclaim, over the years, his cultural identity. Several issues of the earlier chapters can be recognized in this story. Tisdell concludes with some reflections about the interrelationship of adult development and adult learning. It is clear now that the cultural dimension must be taken into account in the practice and theory of the adult development, the spiritual development included. It is also clear that the educator's cultural and spiritual development needs special attention. Though most of the interviewed educators were socialized in a particular religious tradition, only four of the more than thirty people stayed committed to their childhood religion. The others became ambivalent about organized religion. However, a certain sense of "in-between-ness" (244) of wholeness might characterize these educators. They considered themselves spiritual but not religious, only occasionally attending religious rituals and activities, though attached to certain symbols (especially the women mentioned feminine symbols), rituals, music and conceptual meanings, also often strongly connected to their cultural identity (the Mexican Virgin, the music of Aretha Franklin, the wilderness of Alaska, female ancestors and so on). These stories also showed that "the spiritual was found in creating a balance between inner reflection and outer action", "an integrated way of life that included a way of thinking about and being in the world" (246).

This kind of education is not easy. "Attending to the spirit is part of the work of transformation. Since attending to the spirit often takes us to the heart of our cultural selves, it is connected to culturally relevant education. Teaching in such a way offers many possibilities, but elements of it make some parts of us nervous" (248). Teaching is an art, full of surprises. Apart from that, "dealing with cultural issues always has the potential to be uncomfortable" (249), because of the history of racism, colonization, discrimination etcetera until today. But it is also very important and rewarding work, and a variety of approaches and practices can be used, not at least the support of the team and a form of community. One of the concerns in higher education is the connection and confusion of spirituality with religion. On the one hand, we don't need to use the 's'-word directly, on the other hand we don't need to avoid it. Essential is that we create a 'safe' learning environment (bell hooks 1994 [no capitals]), safe for all our students and their different cultural and religious backgrounds. However, "transformation is always uncomfortable", and should one have to deal with different forms of fundamentalism, staying respectful is important criteria for all the participants. Also the knowledge of Fowler's stages of faith can be helpful. "Probably the biggest fear about drawing on spirituality in the classroom in doing culturally relevant education is the fear of the vulnerability of both ourselves and our students. To draw on spirituality is to be authentic in the classroom. (..) But being authentic does not necessarily mean being more self-disclosing than seems 'appropriate' in the situation"(253). How far one can or should go depends on the fact and the interaction of a lot of factors, though it should be clear that "learning in the classroom needs to be primarily about the learners and not about the teacher" (254). Another concern is the vulnerability of the students. Generally students "feel more comfortable when they have an option of not participating in a particular activity and of substituting something else" (255). The teacher himself should try to find or create mentoring communities, in order to support each other in this work.

Epilogue * Final Reflections. Moving Forward to the Future (259-261)

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“If one wants to teach for cultural relevance, one needs to provide an experience not only in which individuals can explore the connection between their own identities and the sociocultural forces that shape them. They also need to make meaning and draw on the knowledge base and ways of expressing it that inspire their passion, that honor who they are, and that continue to be a source of hope, agency, and celebration of the way they make meaning and work for social transformation in the application of what they are learning” (260). The metaphor of ‘in-between-ness’ is meaningful on a number of levels, also spiritually. The reported spiritual experiences not only provided a glimpse of the wholeness and interconnectedness of all things, but also a moment of being in the ‘in-between’. This seems “to pull us open to the spirit” (261) that is manifested through all kinds of cultural expression. These experiences happen by surprise, though “they are a part of a culturally relevant education” (261).

Appendix * Research Methodology: Constructing Knowledge on Spirituality and Culture in Adult and Higher Education (263-269)

Information about interviews and the qualitative research from where the stories and ideas in this book were taken.

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REVIEW

The study *Exploring Spirituality and Culture in Adult and Higher Education* is well written and pleasant to read. It seems to me that until now – however, the climate is changing – the topics of adult education and especially of cultural education are more integrated topics at our universities than in the United States. Nevertheless, for the theme ‘spirituality & education’, that has my specific concern, the study of Tisdell is very interesting. Let me share with you some ideas, in order to stimulate our thinking and acting in this.

1. The definition of spirituality

With her seven assumptions about the nature of spirituality Tisdell opens up the field wherein we can place spirituality in relation to education. She doesn’t restrict it to a specific definition, what seems to be appropriate, because that should not do justice to the complex process of knowledge construction, meaning-making and authenticity development.

Therefore it is also important that she bases the assumptions on both life-experiences of people (most of them she interviewed herself) and on literature as well.

However, something should be noticed. The used literature is mainly about spirituality in relation to another topic, like multicultural education, adult education, knowledge construction, human development and so on. The studies about spirituality itself seem to focus on lived spirituality, with themes like pilgrimage, life circle, soul. It is not always clear if they are to be categorized as academic studies, as solid studies for the professional practice, or as New Age publications for a broad audience. Despite the often very interesting literature, academic studies that focus on the phenomenon of spirituality are not to be found in the literature. That is probably the reason why she states: “Spirituality is an elusive topic. Different people define it in different ways, but all definitions somehow seem to be incomplete” (28).

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However, there are academic studies on the phenomenon of spirituality. For example, take a look in the journal *Studies of Spirituality* (publisher is Peeters in Leuven). For our purpose we need the impressive study of the Dutch professor Kees Waaijman, *Spirituality. Forms, Foundations, Methods*, Leuven-Paris-Dudley MA 2002 (trans. J. Vriend; since its first publication in 2000 in Dutch, it has been translated in several languages). Waaijman presents (Part 1) 54 forms of spirituality, paradigms of spiritual life as it can unfold itself in relation to the institutional world religions, in close connection with the daily life, and in counter movements. The main questions of the foundational research in Part 2 are: “What are the fundamental characteristics of the area of spirituality? Which methodology best fits this area?” (Waaijman 305). Part 3 presents four methods of research strategies. Based on years of research (in which the study of spirituality and lived spirituality are connected to each other), in this study spirituality is discovered as the core of our human existence: our relation to the Absolute, that sometimes forces its way into our consciousness, a living Presence “which demands shaping and thorough reflection” (Waaijman 1), and that can be academically studied from the perspective of the transformation. “Materially, spirituality is the jointed process of the divine-human relation which is, formally, a layered process of transformation” (Waaijman vii). The work of Tisdell can benefit from these insights, as will be shown in the next remarks.

2. Transformation

By referring to other studies and using autobiographical elements from individuals, Tisdell brings under the attention, on one hand, how complex the ongoing development of identity is and, on the other hand, how knowledge construction is determined by various dimensions of experience and learning. I do underscore her plea for a more interdisciplinary and integrating approach, especially with regard to a broader acknowledgement of the role of spirituality in this. To stress the spiral shape of the identity development instead of the general linear approach, seems to be very valuable. We only need, for instance, to realize the importance, with regard to the different fields of our development and our being, of memory, memorization, memorial, celebration, ritual, learning, coping etcetera. Also Tisdell gives some nice autobiographical examples. We are constantly in a dynamic that makes us to learn new things, to recapture what we knew, thought and experienced, and that makes us to go forward and to improve our abilities and ideas on all levels of daily life and of our existence.

However, I would like to deepen out the idea of spiritual development (of course, as inseparable connected with the different aspects of learning, acting and being). What exactly is the core of this development? Towards Tisdell, it has to do with an increasing awareness of the dynamic Life-force in its many manifestations, and a growing consciousness and deepening of our authenticity and our authentic vocation, especially with regard to our cultural identity. “Although we never can really grasp its multiple manifestations, in our own development, as we move forward and spiral back, we ‘remember’ the grounding of our own spiritual and cultural traditions (...). But perhaps by standing in the great spiral of our own present moment, discovering our connectedness with others as well as our own grounding places, we discover new ways ‘the present moment is pregnant with God’. In so doing, we move forward to the future” (116). Now, with full acknowledgement of these insights, I would like to stress that in the core spirituality concerns a divine-human transformation process. The study of Waaijman makes that very clear. Spirituality is not just one of the ways people construct knowledge and meaning (20), but is fundamental to these processes. Spirituality is not just an aspect of the wide range of

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domains of learning and meaning-making (the affective, the rational or cognitive, the unconscious and symbolic domains; 20), but the central dynamic. From the perspective of spirituality, the human being stands in relation to the divine source of life. This divinity is calling out to us, and we can become sensitive to this call and learn to respond to it in a way that suits our vocation, that is, 'God's will'. The core of this process, the growth of this bond in reciprocity, is that slowly God's loving presence becomes the source of our life. That is where the thousands of mystical testimonies come in and can guide us further.

3. Mystagogy

Stressing the fact that spirituality in the core is a divine-human process of transformation, two things become clearer. Firstly, this transformation process will without doubt influence the ideas, the will and the acts of a person. This influence will consist of a growing awareness of the preciousness of oneself, of the other person, and of nature. Love and care for life will increase and lead to more responsibility and courage in order to do justice. Exactly because of this transformational quality the spiritual way isn't easy. And also, because of the connection with other sorts and aspects of development and knowledge construction, carefulness is needed. What we need is the critical reflection of 'discernment', and with that the tender though professional guidance of mystagogy (see Waaijman). When we will give the spiritual process a chance, we need to distinguish whether God's call is working or whether my own childish needs are raising the devil. We need spiritual accompaniment, people who can help us to distinguish the divine guidance in our daily life, past and future included. We need loving, though professional ears and hands, that help us to listen and to respond to the divine signs and interruptions. Sure, as Tisdell states, spiritual experiences are very important to make contact with these dimensions of life. However, they are just an aspect of the spiritual path in total. Not the experience, but its fruits are crucial; not the ideas and intentions, but the actual life should be regarded. "In mystagogy an attempt is made to clarify the journey of the spiritual way: how people relate personally to the way they are going in the divine-human relational process" (Waaijman 869).

4. To concentrate on spirituality in education

More than once Tisdell tells about the hesitation of the interviewed educators to bring the subject of spirituality up in the classroom. Not only causes the topic of spirituality a kind of vulnerability amongst the teachers and the students, the teachers also "don't want to be seen as pushing a religious or even a spiritual agenda", and "they are nervous about unintentionally setting up a situation that could provide a forum for a religious fundamentalist agenda by one of more members of the class" (205). Well, in my opinion it is not the issue of spirituality that asks for consideration, but the way we present it. First of all we should take notice of the fact that although education and spirituality are indissoluble tied, the classroom is not meant to become the space with the meditative atmosphere as in a centre of spiritual formation. Secondly, we should focus more on the education in spirituality as a discipline. Being educated about the phenomenon of spirituality is suitable for the classroom, clears up the connections and boundaries regarding religion, fundamentalism and so on, and will not only inspire the thoughts but the sensitivity as well. Of course you need good material, like the study of Waaijman and other authors, suitable spiritual and mystical texts, exercises with rituals, symbols and the telling of life stories. In my Dutch teaching practice this works very well. This brings me to a third topic, the teacher and director (and in line with that, we as researchers and teachers in spirituality). In the framework of education, teachers are crucial, the key factors in the process of growing

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knowledge and awareness of the spiritual dynamics of life. An important question is, how can these teachers, in primary and secondary education and at teaching institutes as well, be trained and spiritual nourished? This is the topic I'm dealing with in my Dutch activities. Until now this has got only slightly attention in the international scholarship about 'spirituality and education'.

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