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A CASE STUDY ON SPIRITUALITY IN SENIOR CENTERED EDUCATION:
QUALITATIVE RESEARCH IN ADULT EDUCATION

by

Laura E. Demarse

A Dissertation

Submitted in Fulfillment of the

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Abstract

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The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand the deeply personal role of spirituality in adult education as seen through teaching seniors and examined the personal manifestation of spirituality through the life experiences of five adult educators. The research questions examined how the participants implement spirituality in their teaching practice, principally informed by their personal definitions of spirituality and how these personal experiences of spirituality influence and shape their work as adult educators. The case study used non-participant observation and semi-structured interviews, which provide the narratives that informs the basis of this study.

Keywords: spirituality, adult education, transformation learning, case study

Table of Contents

Chapter		Page
1	Introduction	1
	Background of Study	2
	Statement of Problem	8
	Purpose Statement	9
	Research Questions	9
	Significance of the Study	10
	Definition of Key Terms	10
	Study Overview	11
2	Review of the Literature	13
	Spirited Epistemology	15
	Meaning Making	19
	Integration of Spirituality and Adult Learning	22
	Brookfield-Reflective Practices	23
	Kolb-Experiential Learning	24
	Heron-Theory of Person	25
	Gerontology	28
	Adult Learning Theory	30
	Transformative Learning	31
	Andragogy	33
	Self-Directed Learning	34
	Gaps in Literature and Theory	36
	Chapter Summary	37
3	Methodology	38
	Pilot Test	39
	Research Methods	39
	Epistemology	40
	Theoretical Framework	41
	Methods	44
	Limitations of Study	45
	Research Setting	46
	Participants	47
	Data Collection	48

Data Analysis	51
Trustworthiness	52
Triangulation	52
Member Checking	53
Subjectivity Statement	53
Chapter Summary	54
4 Finding	56
Description of Research Participants	56
Michelle	55
Terry	56
Pauline	57
Betty	58
Research Question	59
Synthesis of Findings	60
Themes	62
Lens 1	67
Lens 2	68
Lens 3	70
Lens 4	72
Discussion	74
Chapter Summary	77
5 Discussion and Implications	78
Summary of Findings	80
Research Question 1	80
Research Question 2	80
Research Question 3	82
Research Question 4	84
Implications	85
Recommendations for Future Research	87
Conclusion	87
References	89
Appendices	
A. Recruitment letter	98
B. Interview Guide	99
C. IRB Approval	100

Chapter 1

Introduction

Spirituality is of increasing interest and focus in adult education and adult learning theory. Spirituality is an elusive term and open concept for many individuals. The idea of being motivated or personally enhanced through a connection to something larger than one's self in the universe has appeal in teaching practice (Dirkx, 2003; Palmer, 2007 Tisdell, 2003; Tisdell & Tolliver, 2003; Vella, 2000). Understanding how adult educators use spirituality to inform their practice is of interest; and has the potential to advance a stronger conceptual framework for using spirituality in adult education.

Spirituality in adult education provides context by which we can begin to understand and gather information on how and why certain learning experiences are personally transformative, and deeply meaningful (Heron 1992; Knowles 1970; Mezirow 1991; Tisdell 2003; Vella, 2000). The life experience of the adult educator and their unique lens is critical in identifying how spirituality enters the classroom and sets the tone. Spirituality has become an important component of adult education and scholarly discourse surrounding education, social justice and transformative learning. This is seen in the work of Courtenay and Milton (2004), they found that spirituality was felt to “reside in the individual and that a personal grounding in this dimension affects the experience in the classroom” (p. 103). It is from this lens, that makes it ultimately incumbent upon the educator to understand their own life experience as it will inevitably inform their teaching practice and posture. Moreover, according to the US Census (2014), the largest percentage of the population in American history, the baby boomers are moving into retirement, which accounts for more than 20% of the US population.

Therefore, lifelong learning suggest there is an interest in engaging active retired older adults in non-formal learning experiences that are personally meaningful and salient to their life experience. By way of example, lifelong learning as defined by the Lifelong learning Council of Queensland, Australia (2015), offers that it is education that contributes to a person's complete development; mind and body and intelligence, sensitivity and spirituality. Therefore, through building and expanding on the current conceptual construct of spirituality in adult education practice, where a paucity of research exists, the opportunity to enhance and foster greater clarity in practice informs the province of this study.

This chapter will provide an overview of the background of the study, the statement of the problem, the purpose statement, the research questions, the significance of the study as well as the key terms and definitions.

Background of the Study

The literature (Dirkx, 1997; English & Fenwick, 2003; Hill & Johnson, 2003; Tisdell, 2003-2009; Tisdell & Tolliver, 2001) on spirituality and adult education proffers the basic theoretical framework on transformational learning theory, and self-directed learning to establish and advance the role of spirituality in adult learning and adult education. These theoretical orientations are critical to the role of adult education insofar as it provides the basic framework from which spirituality is seen in learning. Expressly, transformational learning supports the concept of spirituality in learning as it acknowledges and facilitates meaning-making (Dirkx, 1988, 1997; Palmer, 1997; Tisdell, 2000-2009; Vella, 2000). It is through this experience that spirituality grounds to adult education and informs teaching practice.

Spirituality and adult education have started to gain traction in the field of adult education and has lent insightful theory and understanding to the experience of adult learning and adult education. The term spirituality is elusive and subjective for many individuals according to Milacci (2006), however, it captures the essence of a deeply held and personal process that brings people to adult education and greatly enriches personal experiences. Some adult educators believe that spirituality is always present in the learning environment, whether implicit or explicit or intangible in nature (Palmer, 1997; Tisdell, 2003; Vella, 2000). For instance, teaching is fundamentally a spiritual experience, in that we teach who we are, and that teaching is a deeply personal process (Brookfield 2010; Dirkx, 2000; Palmer, 2000; Tisdell, 2003; Vella, 2000).

The work of Tisdell (2003) provides a comprehensive understanding of the definitions of spirituality and its impact on practice. Tisdell (2003) provides seven basic assumptions about the nature of spirituality:

(1) Spirituality and religion are not the same, but for many people are interrelated; (2) spirituality is an awareness of honoring of wholeness and the interconnectedness of all things that many people refer to as 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 not acknowledged) in the learning environment; (5) spiritual development constitutes moving toward greater authenticity 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, image, symbol and ritual all of which is manifested culturally; (7) spiritual experiences most often happen by surprise (p. 6).

The work of Tisdell (2004) informs much of the current narrative in the field of adult education as she provides a conceptual framework from which we can begin to understand how to integrate a spiritually infused teaching practice. Tisdell (2004) additionally offers adult educators guidelines on how to engage spirituality in the classroom. First, placing an emphasis on the authenticity of teachers and students by creating an environment that allows for the exploration of the cognitive (through reading and discussion of ideas); the affective and the relational (through connection with other people and of ideas to life experience); and through the symbolic (through art, poetry, and music). Second, providing readings that reflect the cultures represented by members of

the class. Third, exploring the communal dimensions of cultural identity, by promoting collaborative work that envisions and presents manifestations of multiple dimensions of learning. Last, recognizing the limitations of the classroom experience, and acknowledging that transformation is an ongoing process that takes time. In order to understand how spirituality fits with adult education, it is imperative to explore the theoretical underpinnings of adult education.

Adult education has a long, diverse and unorganized history according to U.S. Department of Education (2013) from a historical perspective, during the formation of this country, people participated in apprenticeships as the primary form of adult education, in order to learn a trade. Benjamin Franklin formed the first public library in 1727 that served as the beginning of creating a central community space for borrowing books and engaging in independent learning. Throughout the industrial era the U.S government began to support engaging adults in various programs that supported agricultural and vocational development, i.e., the Smith Act of 1914. Following WWII veterans were supported by the newly created GI Bill to return to colleges and universities to learn a new skill and re-enter into society. Further, the Manpower Act of 1960s provided funds to retrain unemployed adults to make them marketable and employment ready again. This served as the basis for many basic adult education programs in place today (Scott, 1995). Non-formal learning courses, such as knitting, yoga and computer skills are also included in the field of adult education and readily referred to as lifelong learning. This study is focused on lifelong learning and non-formal learning as seen through adult education. The field of adult education was founded based on the concept of andragogy. The term andragogy developed by Malcom Knowles (1970,

2001) imparts that adults learn differently thus emphasizing the value in the learning process and seeking to create more equality between the teacher and learner. The concept of andragogy is believed by Merriam (1993) to best applied in a community setting that is supportive of self-directed learning. The notion of adults possessing the capacity to be self-directed as well as how they decide to learn best provides a conduit to see how spirituality and meaning-making supplement that process.

By way of example, conceptualizing how adults experience learning and adult education is reinforced by the work of Mezirow (2000) as he proposes four ways in which learning occurs, the first is through expanding existing frames of reference, the second is through acquiring new frames of reference and the third is transforming points of view and fourth is transforming habits of mind. Mezirow (2000) posits that “what we all have in common are human connectedness, the desire to understand and spiritual incompleteness” (p.12). Furthermore, it provides a deeper more contextualized understanding of the use and importance of critical reflections in adult learning, and how these can be structured into meaning and trigger learning (Mezirow, 1990). Specifically Mezirow (1990) proffers a distinction between reflective action and non-reflective action to delineate how adults participate in learning through either thoughtful action with reflection or habitual action without reflection. To further expand on reflection and adult learning, Mezirow (1990) posits that “by far the most significant learning experiences in adulthood involve critical reflection—reassessing the way we have posed problems and reassessing our own orientation to perceiving, knowing, believing, feeling and acting” (p.13).

To further understand the role of spirituality in adult learning, it is critical to include an explicit definition of the term transformational learning, which Tolliver and Tisdell (2009) describe as “ learning that creates a more expansive understanding of the world regarding how one sees and experiences both others and one’s self and is grounded in one’s entire being” (p. 37). The literature on spirituality and adult learning are guided by the role of transformational learning, as transformational learning is thought to be best facilitated through engaging multiple dimensions of being including the rational, affective, spiritual, imaginative and somatic (Tolliver & Tisdell, 2006). Tisdell and Tolliver provided additional context, by offering that spirituality in education refers to transcendence and compassion in the classroom that acknowledges the interconnectedness of students, teacher and subject. Furthermore, spirituality can raise the creativeness, imagination and facilitate a connection. This creates a mechanism in the classroom experience to harness the creativity as part of the learning process. Jones (2006) indicates that “This divine process begins with our willingness to allow the subject and the learners to engage our hearts each time we begin the mind-and-soul expanding trek of adventure” (p. 6).

Dirkx (2000) links transformational learning to spirituality through “soul work” as he imparts the importance of imaginative engagement and utilizing imagery to facilitate emotional reactions to proffer learning. Dirkx (1988) imparts that “symbols are powerful images and motifs that hold considerable significance for us because they represent, at an unconscious level, deep seated issues that may be evoked through study of content matter” (p. 6). Meaning-making, as named by Dirkx (1988) is seen through the process by which organize, rename and elaborate with awareness on these specific and personal

images. Dirkx calls for educators to help “honor and give voice” to the expressive aspects of our experiences, that manifest through art, dance, song, ritual, fantasy and dream as a way to frame transformative learning in a more spiritual perspective.

Understanding how spirituality is used to inform practice in adult learning is central to this study. Tisdell (2003) offers the following:

Whether one actually discusses spirituality directly or creates a space more implicitly depends on the content and context of the course. Since one of the fundamental aspects of spirituality is that it happens by surprise and cannot be planned might seem contradictory to providing a space for acknowledging the spiritual dimension. Nevertheless, it is possible to design a curriculum and learning environment that attends to symbolic domains of learning that are part of spirituality. (p. 212)

Spirituality in adult education can also be seen through examining the work of Palmer (2007). He describes teaching as combining the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual, in this way: “by spiritual I mean the diverse ways we answer the heart’s longing to be connected with the largeness of life—a longing that animates love and work, especially the work called teaching” (Palmer, 2007, p. 5). Furthermore, good teaching “possesses a capacity for connectedness. Teachers are able to weave a complex web of connections among themselves, their subjects, and their students so that students learn to weave a world for themselves” (Palmer, 2007, p. 11).

However certain gaps exist in operationalizing the exact “how” and “why” spirituality occurs in learning environments. Beringer, (2000) contents that spirituality is

conceptually difficult to define and lacks “a precise theoretical and conceptual definition hence is cloaked in conceptual ambiguity” (pp.157-158). Milacci (2006) further imparts that instead of “endeavoring to ground the term, the trend in spirituality literature within adult education appears to construct a vague notion of spirituality designed to be more palatable to a wider readership” (p. 213). To this end, there appears to be a need to realize a more specific understanding of how spirituality occurs in adult learning and what specific contexts best foster and cultivate this experience.

Statement of the Problem

The field of adult education is varied and dispersed in definition and practice. Adult education programs employ a variety of different teaching techniques to accommodate various populations. The opportunity to learn more about how spirituality can be used to inform teaching practice with an adult population has interest and appeal across the landscape (Dirkx, 2001; Milacci, 2006; Palmer, 2007; Tisdell & Tolliver, 2003; Vella, 2000). Utilizing and building on the existing research in the field to further ground the practice and provide a more nuanced refined understanding of “how and why” spirituality is operationalized either explicitly or implicitly serves as the basis for this research. An interest in refining and incorporating a more holistic adult teaching practice that is inclusive of all life experiences, serves as the defining piece that informs this study.

This research seeks to add to the existing body of knowledge and provide a means for understanding how spirituality impacts current teaching practice.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the case study is to understand the personal role of spirituality of the adult educators at a senior center as seen through teaching seniors and examined the personal manifestation of spirituality through the life experiences of five adult educators., I endeavor to understand how spirituality intersects with teaching practice and informs this process to make a more meaningful learning experience.

Research Questions

The research questions that will guide this qualitative case study are:

1. How do adult educators define spirituality?
2. How does their personal definition of spirituality influence their role as educators?
3. How do adult educators infuse spirituality in the classroom?
4. How does spirituality influence the career of adult educators?

Significance of the Study

I am choosing to conduct this study as I feel interested in exploring the deeply personal life experience of adult educators at a senior center in order to gain a more crystalized understanding of “how and why” spirituality is used in adult education teaching practice. Gaining a more nuanced picture of spirituality in adult education can enhance and foster a more focused narrative with direct implications for informing practice and research in the field of Adult Education.

Furthermore, it is imperative to demonstrate the myriad of social and health benefits that adult education and senior centers promote (National Council on Aging, 2015). Linking the in-class experience, connection to others and spiritual dimensions of learning may help to assuage expensive chronic health issues, such as depression and

loneliness. Disseminating the pro-social benefits of spirituality in adult education may provide greater traction for funding support in the public domain.

Definition of Key Terms

Andragogy: the art and science of helping adults learn. (Knowles, 1970)

Adult Education: “activities intentionally designed for the purpose of bringing about learning among those whose age, social roles, or self-perception define them as adults” (Merriam & Brockett, 1996, p. 8).

Adult Educator: “teacher of adults is to help them to realize that the bodies of knowledge, accepted truths, commonly held values, and customary behaviors comprising their worlds are contextually and culturally constructed” (Brookfield, 1996 p. 125).

Meaning-Making: “meaning making is knowledge construction that uses images and symbols that often emanate from the deepest core of our being and can be accessed and manifested through art, music or other creative work” (Merriam, 2004, p. 215).

Spirituality: “a connection to what is referred to by various names as the Life Force, God, a higher power or purpose, Great Spirit, or Buddha Nature” (Tisdell & Tolliver, 2003, p. 38).

Senior Center: “a place where “older adults come together for services and activities that reflect their experience and skills, respond to their diverse needs and interests, enhance their dignity, support their independence, and encourage their involvement in and with the center and the community.” (National Institute for Senior Centers, 2014)

Spirited Epistemology: A spirited epistemology is based on the belief that all education is directed toward such a transformation. (Vella, 2000)

Transformational Learning: “ learning that creates a more expansive understanding of the world regarding how one sees and experiences both others and one’s self and is grounded in one’s entire being” (Tolliver & Tisdell 2009, p. 37).

Study Overview

This chapter has provided a brief overview of the proposed research study, theoretical framework, and review of the literature and definition of terms. The following chapters will provide a more detailed explanation of all the aforementioned areas of this research endeavor. Chapter 2 will provide a more comprehensive and exhaustive review of the literature on spirituality and adult education. Chapter 3 will provide a specific account of the case study research methodology. Chapter 4 will provide data analysis and synthesis of findings. Chapter 5 will discuss the findings, implications and discuss future research endeavors.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

Introduction

Spirituality and adult education has started to gain traction in the field of adult education and has lent insightful theory and understanding to the experience of adult learning. The following chapter will provide a basis for conceptualizing how spirituality is situated within the context of adult education. The chapter is organized into three main components: (1) a detailed review of the literature on spirituality in the field of adult education; (2) congruence the theory; (3) and a review of adult learning theory.

The term spirituality is elusive and subjective for many individuals, however captures the essence of a deeply held and personal process that brings people to adult education and greatly enriches personal experience and outcomes. The most prolific researcher in the field of spirituality in adult education, Elizabeth Tisdell provides a comprehensive understanding of the definitions of spirituality and its impact on practice. Tisdell (2003) provides seven basic assumptions about spirituality:

- (1) Spirituality and Religion are not the same...
- (2) Spirituality is about awareness and honoring of wholeness and the interconnectedness of all things...
- (3) Spirituality is fundamentally about meaning-making.
- (4) Spirituality is always present (although often unacknowledged) in the learning environment.
- (5) Spiritual development constitutes moving towards greater authenticity to a more authentic self.
- (6) Spirituality is about how people construct knowledge through largely unconscious and symbolic processes, often made more concrete

through art forms, such as music, art, image, symbol and rituals that are manifested culturally. (7)Spiritual experiences often happen by surprise. (pp.28-29

Tisdell's work inserts spirituality in adult learning as a transformative experience. Spiritual transformation and learning are seen as a congruent and complimentary process. This notion is further delineated by the work of Jack Mezirow (1991) as he espoused the importance of personal transformation in learning.

Conceptualizing how adults experience learning and adult education is reinforced by the work of Mezirow (1991) promoted that adults experience a developmental incentive that impels adults to develop ways of understanding the world and ways of constructing meaning, that account for an ever widening number of experiences. To further understand the role of spirituality in adult learning, it is critical to include an explicit definition of the term transformational learning, which Tolliver and Tisdell (2009) describe as "learning that creates a more expansive understanding of the world regarding how one sees and experiences both others and one's self and is grounded in one's entire being" (p. 37). The literature on spirituality and adult learning are guided by the role of transformational learning, as transformational learning is thought to be best facilitated through engaging multiple dimensions of being including the rational, affective, spiritual, imaginative and somatic (Tolliver & Tisdell, 2006).

Spirited Epistemology

Tisdell (2003) observes that spirituality in addition to meaning making in adult education is also always present in the learning environment. Vella (2000) imparts “every education event is a movement toward a *metanoia*, the passage of spirit from alienation into deeper awareness of oneself. A spirited epistemology is based on the belief that all education is directed toward such a transformation” (p.2). Tisdell’s framework further imparts the notion of authenticity as a critical aspect of developing a spirited epistemology-“a key point is that spirituality is about moving towards a greater sense of one’s deepest spirit or more authentic identity” (Tisdell, 2003, p. 33). Tisdell (2003) offers the adult educator the following tools to incorporate spirituality into their practice:

engaging the learner in critical readings and engagement of new ideas (cognitive domain) understanding and weaving together how these experiences relate back to one’s life experience (affective domain) and creating a space for integrating learning through the use of symbols, art of metaphor (symbolic domain). (p.35)

Understanding how spirituality is used to inform practice in adult learning is central to this study. Tisdell (2003) offers the following:

Whether one actually discusses spirituality directly or creates a space more implicitly depends on the content and context of the course. Since one of the fundamental aspects of spirituality is that it happens by surprise and cannot be planned might seem contradictory to providing a space for

acknowledging the spiritual dimension. Nevertheless, it is possible to design a curriculum and learning environment that attends to symbolic domains of learning that are part of spirituality (p. 212).

Concomitantly, this can also be seen through examining the work of Palmer (1998), as he views teaching as combining the intellectual, emotional and spiritual, in this way: “by spiritual I mean the diverse ways we answer the heart’s longing to be connected with the largeness of life—a longing that animates love and work, especially the work called teaching” (5). Palmer believes: “Good teaching possesses a capacity for connectedness. Teachers are able to weave a complex web of connections among themselves, their subjects, and their students so that students learn to weave a world for themselves” (p. 11).

Additional depth and scope can be seen through the work of Dirckx (2003), as he provides an additional lens in which to distill meaning from spirituality in adult learning, as he describes nurturing the soul in adult learning.

To nurture the soul is to recognize what is already inherent within our interactions, relationships and experiences, to acknowledge its presence within the teaching and learning environment, to respect the sacred message—we encourage engagement and dialogue with the unconscious through imagination, creativity and intuition. (p. 5).

Dirkx's "soul work" creates a space for reflecting on the process of learning and calls for "greater levels of self-awareness and consciousness" the development of self-knowledge which is all rooted in the development of the soul. This notion is further grounded in practice through the following instructional techniques.

Vogel (2000) imparts that teaching adults is about offering constructive critique, urging learners to go deeper and cast their nets further-it also involves introducing a new vocabulary, a provocative metaphor. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1997) refer to the role of the adult educator as a "mid-wife". This metaphor illustrates the role of adult educators as "giving birth to new skills, new ideas, new metaphors and new ways of being and doing" (Vogel, 2000, p. 24).

Moreover, Vella (2000) proposed the assumption that each learning event is a moment of spiritual development in which people practice being what they are. Additional assumptions state that human beings are designed to be the subjects, or decision makers in their own lives and learning. Transformation is not towards the grasp of an external set of information, knowledge or skills, rather transformation into one's self, informed by new knowledge and skills.

Vella (2000) offers the adult educator several principles for practice such as dialogue, "the heart of the spirited epistemology is respect for dialogue" (p. 5). Further the author states the importance of respect as a guiding principle as it allows people space and is a fundamental concept

for all adult educators and asserts that respect is central to the spiritually based relationship. Accountability is part of a spirited epistemology in that the teacher is accountable to the student through the learning design. Lastly, Vella states, “a spirited epistemology is not only an attitude. It is a process with materials and actions. It involves a mutuality of respect and a joy of learning” (p.7).

To further situate meaning in context of a spirited epistemology, Lauzon (2007) draws the connection between spirituality and adult education through returning to the core mission of adult education to provide transformative pathways for personal development, social change and transformation, skill development and vocational advancement. It is through this mission he states, “the fundamental purpose of a spiritually inspired adult education is to develop an educational process that creates opportunities for development of autonomy and choice” (p. 42). Lauzon (2007) refers to spiritually inspired education as an “emergent education” and further delineates that it is “only in having choice that individuals can name the world for themselves, and it is in naming the world for themselves that learners create the conditions and opportunities to create meaning-which is the very heart of spiritually inspired adult education” (p. 42).

Lauzon (2007) offers the adult educator several tools to embrace spirituality in teaching practice by articulating that “we must strive to engage learners in their fullness, recognizing the importance of body,

mind, feeling and spirit as complementary ways of knowing the world and others” (p. 43). Further imparting that knowledge is not linear, rather abstract and textured; additionally, “knowledge construction in this context arises through engagement that is characterized by intimate relationship- relationship with self, others and other larger environment” (Lauzon, 2007, p. 43). Lastly Lauzon calls for adult educators to find comfort in “complexity, ambiguity and paradox” (p. 45). This section has provided a conceptual review of how a spirited epistemology is examined and anchored to practice.

Meaning Making

The use of “Learning Covenants” proposed by Wickett (2000) demonstrates the important relationship between the learner and the educator as having a “deeper meaning in the context of the relationship that this volume describes as spiritual” (p. 40). Wickett posits that these defined learning contracts or “covenants” creates the parameters for learning objectives, time lines and criteria for evaluation. Learning Contracts are thought to be beneficial in adult education as they individualize the learning process and assist adult learners with further developing and fostering self-directed learning, active engagement with the subject matter and greater autonomy. Knowles (1984) imparted that learning contracts were helpful in increasing a student’s internal locus of control. Contracts also help students achieve greater self-direction in their learning by allowing them to control their learning experiences to meet

their own needs and interests, and to develop skills to educate themselves (Dart & Clarke, 1991).

The spiritual dimensions of learning are defined by Wickett (2000) as involving the ability to move beyond ourselves in our contribution to spiritual development through our relationship with others. Growing in the relationship between the learner and educator as “finding a hospitable place where life may be lived without fear and where community can be found” (p. 42). Hospitality is identified as “a friendly emptiness where people can enter and discover themselves as created free. Finally, recognizing the limitations of the learner and the adult educator relationship; as one that is supportive and recognizes that other “human resources may be as valuable as or more valuable than their interactions with the educator” (p. 42).

By way of example, Merriam (2004) states that spirituality is related to adult learning through the construct of meaning making. Merriam proposes that adult education, meaning making, and spirituality are all linked through educators understanding that:

Involves the search for or an acknowledgment of the spiritual in the lives of adult learners is connected to the search for meaning that gives our lives coherence. Additionally, adults enter into classrooms with this agenda (meaning making) whether or not it is articulated. Lastly, meaning making is knowledge construction that uses images and symbols that often emanate from the deepest core

of our being and can be accessed and manifested through art, music or other creative work. (p. 215)

Tisdell (2003) states that understanding how “spirituality is informed by culture, and how students’ meaning-making efforts are informed by spirituality, helps educators create educational experiences that are more culturally relevant and truly transformational” (p.23).

Further, Hill and Johnson (2003) propose that educators have accountabilities for creating “broad educational belief systems that involve the cultivation of awe and wonder of the earth, assisting students in their process of meaning making, creation of metaphors and worldviews that nourish our capacity to live with and in the world”(p.23) Additionally adding that “development of attitudes that allow us to act on wrongs we see in the world, and the ability to act responsibly on issues of justice and equity, and the celebration of diversity” (p. 23).

Dirkx concludes that “education is a cultural enterprise, and as the word itself says, education concerns guidance of the soul into the world. Education in this sense concerns the drawing out of soul to conjoin with world soul” (Dirkx, 1996, p. 6). The following section will further situate spirituality and adult learning in context.

Integration of Spirituality and Adult Learning

The integration of spirituality adult learning is seen from a variety of entry points as advanced through the current narrative in the field of adult education. One of the theoretical anchors is provided by Brookfield

(1998) in his “critical reflective practice” as a means of providing the adult educator with a deeper contextual understanding of informing meaning through ones practice. Brookfield (1998) offers four Critically Reflective Lenses in which to provide opportunities for reflecting back “who we are and what we do” providing a lens in which we can further investigate our assumptions. Critically Reflective Lens 1 is writing our autobiography as a “learner of practice”. Analyzing our autobiographies as learners has important implications for how we teach and learn, often it helps explain to us those part of our practice to which we feel strongly committed. “When we try to uncover our most deeply embedded allegiances and motivations as teachers, a useful path of analysis is to study our autobiographies as learners” (Brookfield, 1998, p. 199). Autobiographical work is a meaningful way to construct a transformative discourse in the classroom as well as serving a catalyst for examining our own work as educators. “When we are trying to uncover our most deeply embedded allegiances and motivations as teachers, a useful pathway for analysis is to study our autobiographies as learners” (Brookfield, 1998, p. 198).

Reflective Lens 2 is envisioned to allow the educator to see learning through our learners eyes. In order to engage this practice effectively it is critical to build and convey trust with the learners. “Without an appreciation of how people are experiencing learning, any methodological choices we make risk being ill informed, inappropriate, or harmful” (Brookfield, 1998, p. 200). Brookfield emphasizes the

importance of making our students feel safe, and model concern consistently through the classroom experience. Brookfield advocates for “getting inside the heads” of our students-“without appreciation for how people are experiencing learning, any methodological choices we make risk being ill-informed, inappropriate or harmful” (p.199).

Reflective Lens 3 is to critically reflect on our colleagues experiences. “Our colleagues serve as critical mirrors reflecting back to us images of our actions that often take us by surprise-we need our colleagues to help us know what our assumptions are and to help us change the structures of power” (Brookfield, 1998, p. 200). This experience is critical in the growth and development of the adult educator insofar as providing emotional sustenance, in understanding that problems we may have viewed as idiosyncratic or unique are shared by others. Brookfield further imparts that while critical reflection often starts alone it is a collective shared experience and process.

Reflective Lens 4 is engaged through knowing and understanding the theoretical literature. The literature allows the adult educator to “name” the practice by illuminating the general elements of what may be perceived as idiosyncratic experiences. (Brookfield, 1989) Brookfield (1989) suggests the importance of reading theoretical analysis to produce critical reflection as it helps “switch our interpretative frames so that we can view a situation differently” (p. 201). Brookfield’s work is significant in understanding the unique and dynamic tension that is inherent in

teaching and learning. Further holistic learning can be seen through Experiential Learning Theory.

Subsequently, Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) provides important linkages to meaning making insofar as he posits that learning is a holistic process of adaptation. ELT is described by Kolb, Boyatzis, and Mainemelis (2000) as "the process by wherein knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (p. 2). Additionally, ELT "provides a holistic model of the learning process and a multilinear model of adult development, both of which are consistent with what we know about how people learn, grow and develop" (Kolb et al., 2000, p. 2). Expressly ELT posits a learning cycle that is driven by action/ reflection and experience/abstraction. Kolb (2008) states, "these two dimensions define a holistic learning space wherein learning transactions take place between individuals and the environment" (p. 1).

Additionally, Kolb's learning theory postulates that learning occurs through cycles of concrete experiences and reflective observation, which then leads to the development of new knowledge that can be applied to new experiences. "It is not just the result of cognition but involves the integrated functioning of the total person-thinking, feeling, perceiving and behaving" (Kolb & Kolb, 2008, p. 4). Spirituality sits well within this construct as emerging from reflection and operationalized in a holistic learning environment. Since spirituality is a fluid experience, that ebbs and flows throughout the lives of adult learners, partnering spirituality with

experiential learning provides another means to ground its use in theory. The congruence between the rich lived experience of adult learners, ELT and spirituality provides a useful conceptual framework for the practitioner. “In short, learning is a process of making meaning from all experiences-cognitive, emotional, physical, social and spiritual. Learners draw from all their worlds-public, professional and private” (Zepke & Leach, 2002, p.206). Meaning making can also be seen through the development of personhood as extolled by the work of psychologist John Heron.

Heron (1992) presents a compelling theory on the person and feeling; outlining a theory grounded in a phenomenological construct that provides another means to understand the use of spirituality in adult education and the importance of meaning making. Specifically, Heron outlines four primary modes of functioning: the affective, imaginal, conceptual and practical (as cited in York & Kasl, 2002). “Each mode includes two processes; the affective mode embraces feeling and emotion...the imaginal mode comprises intuition and imagery...The conceptual mode includes reflection and discrimination. And the practical mode involves intention and action” (York & Kasl, 2002, p. 182). This framework provides a construct to understand how adult learners process information and as espoused by Heron (1992) treat experience as integrated process of learning. Espousing, “The notion of a person as a

distinct entity capable of continuous development...presupposes feeling as the capacity which makes such growth and learning possible” (p. 94).

Tisdell (2003) anchors much of her work on spirituality to Heron’s theory of person as they both support multiple ways of knowing. The work of Tisdell and Heron are congruent and complimentary as seen through their shared understanding of knowledge construction and symbolic processes. Specifically, Tisdell (2003) posits, “spirituality is about constructing knowledge through unconscious and symbolic processes” (p. 34).

Heron’s theory (1992) provides additional depth and scope to Kolb’s experiential learning model insofar as Heron states:

Experiential knowing is evident when we meet and feel the presence of some energy, entity, person, place, process or thing. Presentational knowing is evident on our intuitive grasp of the significance of imaginal patterns as expressed in graphic, plastic, moving, musical and verbal art forms. (as cited in Yorks & Kasl, 2002, p. 181)

Again, this theory is congruent with the aforementioned literature, and scholarly discourse from the field.

To expand the conceptual framework of the impact of spirituality in adult education practice, it is important to return to the work of Palmer (2003) and his work on “pedagogy of the soul” that provides additional clarity to cultural diversity and personal change and transformation

through adult learning experiences. Palmer imparts that teacher training needs to attend to the “heart and soul” of the life work of a teacher and that “Consciously or unconsciously, we are wedded to the notion that, although higher education can expand people’s minds with facts and theories, and train them in skillful means, it cannot help them grow larger hearts and souls” (p. 378). Palmer imparts putting the soul into practice through the creation of his Courage to Teach (CTT) program which provides the tools and platform for educators to engage spirituality in teaching. “Central to the pedagogy of CTT is creating a space that welcomes the soul”, the program calls for open dialogue and discussion, using what Palmer describes as “third things”-poems, teaching stories, music, art, these others things allow for the “shy soul to speak” outside of academic discourse (p. 382).

The pedagogy of the soul provides the tools for an adult educator to understand how to create a space in their classroom, yoga or painting studio or wherever, that safeguards as pace where the soul feels welcome to show up (Palmer, 2003). Palmer proposes that including creative and artistic projects invite learners to begin to move from a cognitive domain to a more symbolic mode where transformative learning is more likely to occur (Lawrence & Dirkx, 2010). Furthermore, Palmer (2003) states, “we teach who we are” therefore it is incumbent upon the adult educator to check-in with themselves and make sure that attention is being paid to

creating a cultural inclusive, spiritually open and welcoming learning environment.

Lastly in order to fully engage the lifelong learners present at the senior center understanding the developmental lifecycle of an older adult needs consideration. Erickson (1963) identified the stage for older adults (65+) as ego integrity vs. despair, with the basic virtue of wisdom present. The work of this stage is to accept one's life as meaningful. This concept of finding meaning is congruent with the role of spirituality in adult education at the senior center. Erickson's theory imparts the importance of self-reflection and acceptance as developmental tasks at this stage. The role of spirituality and in adult and lifelong learning promotes both of these important tasks.

Gerontology

Gerontology is derived from two Greek words "geron" which means "old man" and "logos" which means "discourse" or "study". Gerontology is the study of the phenomenon of old age. It is the study of the social psychological and biological aspects of ageing in an adult person. Gerontology is distinguished from geriatrics which is the branch of medicine that studies the diseases and care of the elderly person (Onyenemezu & Olumati, 2013). There are three main perspectives on aging as espoused by Onyenemezu and Olumati (2013); biological aging, as seen through physical decline, sociological aging, which is typically guided by the norms of the society in which they belong, however can and

does include personal attitudes and interactions with society. The last perspective is psychological aging. This includes, memory, emotions, life experiences and self-identity. “Psychological ageing is heterogeneous and continuous as an individual passes through life” (Onyenemezu & Olumati, 2013, p.152).

Furthermore, aging can also be seen as consisting of three main categories, primary aging-the natural process of aging that is comprised of changes biologically socially and psychologically. Secondary aging is associated with various terminal and chronic illness that impedes the aging process, and prevents normal functioning. Tertiary aging is brought upon by the loss of a spouse or death of close family member or friend. This loss is seen as leading to the gradual decline of normal individual functioning. (Onyenemezu & Olumati, 2013) Connecting the health benefits of active engagement as seen through lifelong learning and non-formal learning situates the importance of spirituality in context of adult education.

Freire (1970) perceived adult education as “conscientization” which involves liberal education, extension and mass education, aesthetic, moral and cultural education programs. Older adults have varied and specific educational needs separate and apart from other age groups. In fact, their interest and enthusiasm for learning should provide motivation to enable them to adapt or adjust to their current challenges of life. Nzeneri (2000), Fasokun (2006), and Onyenemezu (2012) observed that

adult education is concerned not with preparing people for life, but rather with helping/assisting adults to live more successfully as useful and acceptable members of their societies and contribute meaningfully to the development of those societies. Adult education provides older adults to with better ways of managing the remaining years of their life endeavors more comfortably and joyfully (Onyenemezu & Olumati, 2013).

Understanding the orthogonal nature of aging from psychological, social, and biological changes is imperative in fostering sound adult educational experiences.

Adult Learning Theory

“Adult learners are those adults who engage in learning activities that may promote ‘any sustained change in thinking, values, or behavior’ (Hansman & Mott, 2010, p. 15). The adult learner is characterized in the literature as Self-Directed (Apps, 1991; Brookfield, 1995; Mezirow, 2000 & Merriam 2001). This term provides a basis for understanding adult learners as “assuming control over their own learning”, Merriam (2001) describes the goals of self-directed learning from three perspectives, humanistic, transformative, and emancipatory. A humanistic perspective posits that adult learners have the capacity to be self-directed. Transformational learning informs how adults make meaning of their lived experiences, mainly through the notion of “disorienting dilemmas” that manifest in self-reflection and introspective thought. Lastly, emancipatory

learning can be seen through political and social action, stemming from a social justice posture (Hansman & Mott, 2010, p. 17).

Adults enter into learning environments for different reason with accompanying and varying skillsets. The Adult Center on Education (2005) states that adults enter into learning to create change in their life, this change can encompass change in their skills, behaviors, knowledge level and attitudes. The adult educator needs to be keenly aware of the adult learners' motivations for learning, Zemke and Zemke (1995) state the key to using adults natural motivation to learn is tapping into their most teachable moments. Additionally building on past experiences are key to fostering meaningful learning experiences. All of these notions are expanded upon the following section.

Transformative learning. Transformational Learning Theory, developed through the work of Mezirow (1991, 2000), “focused on delineating the process of transformation and its relationship to adult development” (p.207). Essentially, Transformational Learning Theory imparts that learning is about making sense of our experiences, and in order to do this, we may need to change or alter our beliefs, attitudes or perspectives. “A change in our entire perspective-the lenses through which we make sense of the world-is key to transformational learning” (Merriam, 2004, p. 207). Mezirow’s Transformative Learning Theory (1991, 2000) which poses several considerations for filtering adult learning, principally seen through frames of reference, points of view, and

habits of mind. Mezirow (2000) posits that transformational learning occurs through the following ways:

(1) a disorienting dilemma, (2) self-examination of feelings of fear, anger, guilt or shame, (3) a critical assessment of assumptions, (4) recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformations are shared, (5) exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions, (6) planning a course of action, (7) acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans, (8) provisional trying of new roles, (9) building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships, [and] (10) a reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective. (Mezirow, 2000, p. 22)

Transformational learning is supported and proffered by many in the field of Adult Education, as seen through the comprehensive study conducted by Taylor (1997, 2000) his research suggesting that transformational learning is a complex, non-linear process, rather professing a more distinct and fluid experience, as opposed to Mezirow's theory. Others scholars like Dirkx (1997, 2001) link transformational learning to spirituality by way of exploring symbolic and imaginative domains of learning. Dirkx (1997) promotes meaning-making as a way of helping learners connect to their "soul" by drawing on dramatic of life changing events (Dirkx, 1997).

Transformational learning is connected to learning through narrative analysis by the work of Annie Brooks (2000). Brooks proposes that transformational learning happens vis-à-vis story-telling and the sharing of particular experiences helps with the individual development of abstract concepts. Furthermore, Brooks proposes that narrative processes engage both the psychological, physical and spiritual.

Andragogy. In order to fully understand the adult learner, we must turn to the concept of Andragogy as defined by Knowles (1980) as “the art and science of helping adults learn” (p. 43). Knowles proposed:

Adult learners are those that possess independent self-concepts and are capable of directing their own learning from a rich reservoir of their own life experience; having learning needs prompted by their changing life roles; and are intentionally motivated toward problem-centered learning that has immediate application in their lives. (Knowles, 1980, p.43)

Merriam (2004) submits that Knowles (1980) notion of Andragogy was comprised of five assumptions about the adult learners; as someone that is independent and can direct their own learning, has an accumulated reservoir of life experiences, has learning needs closely associated with or related to life roles, is problem centered, with interest in direct application of knowledge and is intrinsically motivated to learn (p. 203). Current thought in the field is that Andragogy is “not really a theory of adult

learning, andragogy captures general characteristics of adult learners and it offers some guidelines for practice” (Merriam 2004, p. 204)

Contrasting Andragogy is the work of Sandlin (2005) that espouses that the model presented by Knowles (1980) leaves out the critical feminist and Afrocentric perspectives, specifically outlined by the following critical paradigms.

1. Andragogy assumes wrongly the education is value neutral and a politic.
2. Andragogy promoted a generic adult learners as with White middle class values.
3. Andragogy ignores other ways of knowing and silences other voices.
4. Andragogy ignores the relationship between self and society.
5. Andragogy is reproductive of inequalities; it supports the status quo. (p. 27)

Self-directed learning. Self-directed learning (SDL) theory which is built on the theoretical underpinnings of Andragogy, as adult being self-motivated to learn as defined as learning is a “process in which individuals take the initiative without the help of others” in planning, carrying out and evaluating their own learning experience. (American Institutes for Research, 2011). Self-Directed learning was pioneered by Malcom Knowles (1960) defined this process as the developing ability to understand one’s self as a learner and foster the capacity to assume one’s

internal directedness even in other-directed environments in order to learn when one might need to be taught and, to be accountable for one's learning or non-learning-all, may help individuals of any age mature as learners. Further supported by Merriam (2004); viewing self-directed learning as linear, with the adults self-determining their learning needs, identifying resources and instructional platforms, creating a plan and finally evaluating the outcome.

Brookfield (1986) imparts that the most “fully adult form of self-directed learning is one in which critical reflection on the contingent aspects of reality, the exploration of alternative perspectives and meaning systems, and the alternation of personal and social circumstances are all present” (p.59).

Various perspectives on SDL are seen through the scholarly work of Candy (1991) through grounding and linking personal autonomy and self-directed learning as context-bound. Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) espouse a model of understanding SDL as goal or personal orientation dependent and socially contextualized. Garrison (1997) imparts that SDL is seen through self-management, motivation and is processed through self-monitoring. It is through understanding the various applications and interpretations of SDL that spirituality begins to emerge as a viable construct in adult learning theory.

Self-Directed Learning provides another means for conceptualizing how spirituality can be used to inform teaching practice in adult education.

Through understanding the connection to self, free agency and intrinsic motivation one can begin to see how spirituality is an evitable part of this personal process.

Gaps in Literature and Theory

The literature on spirituality and adult education proffers the basic theoretical framework on transformational learning theory, self-directed learning to establish and advance the understanding of the role of spirituality in adult learning and adult education. However certain gaps exist in operationalizing the exact “how” and “why” spirituality occurs in learning environments. Beringer (2000) contents that spirituality is conceptually difficult to define and lacks “a precise theoretical and conceptual definition” hence is cloaked in conceptual ambiguity. Milacci (2006) further imparts that instead of “endeavoring to ground the term, the trend in spirituality literature within adult education appears to construct a vague notion of spirituality designed to be more palatable to a wider readership” (p. 213). To this end, there appears to be a need to realize a more specific understanding of how spirituality occurs in adult learning and what specific contexts best foster and cultivate this experience.

“Within adult education, few studies exploring any aspect of the connection between spirituality and practice have been conducted” (Milacci, 2006, p. 40). The limited amount of research and available literature create the space to explore how spirituality is being used, accessed and implemented in adult education and teaching practice. One

of the difficulties in retrieving how spirituality is harnessed and utilized in adult learning is partly do the varied, dispersed and individual definition and means for operationalizing in praxis.

Summary

The aforementioned sections have shown the connection meaning-making, adult learning and spirituality. The opportunity to explore how spirituality is used to inform teaching practice is a newer concept to explore in explicit expressly stated terms, this study seeks to add to the body of literature and add another layer of insight from the field.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to understand the role spirituality plays in informing teaching practice. This will be accessed through observation and interviews in order to gain the perspective and the personal experiences of adult educators that teach at a senior center in a large suburban area in the southeast region of the US. Additionally, to identify the personal dynamics and life experiences of the adult educators as a conduit to gain a deeper understanding of the practice of spirituality in teaching adults. In this chapter I will discuss the research methodology, including the choices of epistemology and theoretical framework, and the methods will be used for data gathering, analysis and interpretation. Confidentiality, trustworthiness, and the researcher's subjectivity are also discussed.

The research questions examined how spirituality influence participants teaching practice, principally informed by their personal definitions of spirituality and how these personal experiences of spirituality influence and shape their work as adult educators. The following questions will guide this single site descriptive case study:

1. How do adult educators define spirituality?
2. How does their personal definition of spirituality influence their role as educators?
3. How do adult educators infuse spirituality in the classroom?
4. How does spirituality influence the career of adult educators?

Pilot Study

A pilot test was conducted in the spring of 2014, interviewing and observing 3 adult educators at the same senior center using the same research questions and protocol. The participants were selected in the exact same fashion and the analysis yielded the following themes that informed my interest in expanding the scope of this research. Three themes emerged from the data: (a) interconnectedness and contemplative practices, (b) strength and capacity building, and (c) social support and community building. These themes linked the personal life experience of the adult educators to unique findings which are consistent with the current scholarly discourse on spirituality in adult education; thus providing additional depth and scope to ground in practice. The three narratives provided a basis for processing the experience and framing the current discourse provided by the literature. Expressly, the themes provided insight into the role of adult educators and the personal nature of spirituality and its impact on teaching practice. The current research took a more nuanced approach to contextualizing and further exploring this phenomena in practice. Additionally, I expanded the scope and depth of this study by adding more participants to the study and building on and expanding the themes.

Research Methodology

In this chapter I discuss the qualitative research as a case study grounded in examining the phenomenon under investigation and examined participants and site selection. Data collection and analysis methods utilized in the study are described along with the ways the data was probed. Finally a review of my pilot study and role as a researcher are featured.

Epistemology. Epistemology refers to the examination of knowledge. According to Krauss (2005), epistemology usually asks questions such as, “what the relationship between the knower and what is known? How do we know what we know? What counts as knowledge?” (p. 759). Similarly, Denzin and Lincoln (1994) submit that epistemology seeks to understand what the relationship is between the inquirer and the known. The answer will depend on the theoretical framework and paradigm of the researcher. Epistemological assumptions are important to understand as they ground the research and are translated into methodological strategies (Kraus, 2005). Traditional research paradigms have been historically positivist in their approach to seeking knowledge and truth. Positivist epistemology adheres to an independent research approach, hence: knowledge is discovered and verified through direct observations and measurement of phenomena; facts are established by taking apart a phenomenon to examine its component parts. An alternative view is the constructivist view that knowledge is established through meaning attached to the phenomenon being studied. (Krauss, 2005, p.759).

Case study research as espoused by Yin (2009) and Stake (1995) is based on a constructivist paradigm. According to Baxter and Jack (2008), “Constructivists claim the truth is relative and that it is dependent on one’s perspective, it appreciates that importance of the subjective human creation of meaning” (p.545). Stake (1995) imparts the case study research employs a constructivist or existential (non –determinist) paradigm where researchers employ a holistic treatment of the study, non-interventionists, with an orientation away from cause and effect (positivist) and towards a more personal interpretation of the phenomenon. A constructivist epistemological lens

seeks a view that is built upon the assumption that reality is socially constructed. Constructivism proffers the importance of the personal meaning of events and experiences constructed by the individual, as a result individual knowledge and meaning construction becomes one's personal reality. It is from this posture that qualitative research aims to examine and understand how the research participants construct their own reality, provide either individual or shared meaning around the phenomenon of interest (Lauckner, Paterson & Krupa, 2012).

Qualitative research, according to Creswell (2007) begins with researchers' "assumptions, worldview,...theoretical lens and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 37). Furthermore, my research will rely heavily on the use of interviews, Creswell (2007) imparts that interviews in qualitative research methods explore both the participants' perspectives and elicit personal stories and reflections. Anchoring to a strong constructivist perspective and adhering to the doctrine of transformational learning theory, the proposed research will seek to operate within the aforementioned framework.

Theoretical Framework

In qualitative research all experiences are filtered through the unique lens of the researcher. Crotty (1998) felt that all "knowledge and meaningful reality is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world" (p. 42). I informed my research with this tenet in mind, with specific interest in the interaction in the classroom and the participant's experiences that informed this process. This is congruent with a constructivist paradigm. Case study methodology is derived from a constructivist paradigm that seeks to understand a specific phenomenon

within its environment. Yin (2009) imparts that case study research method is used to understand real life phenomena in-depth; understanding is encompassed in important contextual conditions-that are highly pertinent to the phenomenon being studied.

Additionally an andragogical framework provided the basis for observing the participants teaching practice to explore the salience and value previous life experiences has on teaching practice. Specifically seeking to observe facilitator engagement through the connection with students in the classroom, the shared experiences vis-à-vis personal stories and sharing, and how the adult educator fosters a sense of community in the classroom. The three areas of observation connect to spirituality through the congruence to community, togetherness, and unconditional positive regard for all experiences. The andragogical paradigm lends the prism by which I observed and the adult educator's rich reservoir of life experiences as they draw upon these past life experiences to inform teaching practice and subject matter. Analyzing how the adult educator embedded their own background and experience in their teaching method serves as the schema to capture observation linking teaching practice to spirituality. The specific actions operationalized by the adult educators will be reviewed in Chapter 4.

Furthermore, spirituality is conceptually anchored to adult education through the concept of meaning making, and meaning making stems from the human element or humanistic tradition, which advanced the concepts of andragogy, self-directed learning and transformational learning. Humanistic educational philosophy seeks to develop people through continual learning, self-actualization and personal growth and development. This framework seemed to fit well with adult educators in non-formal education courses offered at the senior center, as described in this study.

The literature on spirituality and adult education proffers the basic theoretical framework on transformational learning theory to establish and advance the understanding of the role of spirituality in adult education. Additionally, it anchors to the work of Tisdell (2003) in an effort to create a conceptual framework to understand how adult educators can use spirituality to foster a more complete learning environment and experience. The framework closely aligns with transformational learning as a conduit for integrating spirituality in teaching practice.

Case study research is differentiated from other research methods by what Merriam (1998) describes as interpretation and context. Merriam (1998) adds; “by concentrating on a single phenomenon or entity (the case), the researcher aims to uncover the interactions of significant factors characteristic of the phenomenon” (p. 29). Case study research can be delineated, according to Yin (2009), into three types of cases, explanatory, seeking to answer a question and explain presumed causal links; descriptive, used to describe a phenomenon in a real life context; and exploratory, used to explore situations where the intervention is not clear. Stake (1995) proposes three types of cases; intrinsic, defined as having a particular interest in the case; instrumental as seen through an interest in understanding something; and collective whereby a researcher may study several cases together. This case is a descriptive, insofar as the end product seeks to provide a thick and rich description of the phenomenon under study (Merriam, 1998).

The place of theory in a case study depends to a large extent upon what is known in the area of interest-thus a qualitative case study develops new theory (Merriam, 1988). A descriptive case study inquiry is used in this study as it is “useful in presenting basic information about areas of education where little research has been conducted” (Merriam,

1988 p. 27). The role of theory in guiding the case study is informed by the researcher's epistemological framework as well as how it relates to the phenomenon under investigation. Case study methodology can be used to test theory or build theory and given the elusive and flexible framework for constructing how spirituality is used in adult education teaching practice, it is helpful to rely on the role of transformational learning theory from which spirituality emerges, which rests comfortably within a constructivist paradigm.

With respect to this case, case study research design is the primary means for understanding the deeply contextualized experience of spirituality in adult education at the senior center. Case study research provides the framework to understand an experience at one specific location. The units of analysis are the five adult educators interviewed at the center. Case study research provides the framework for a "rich analysis and valuable insight" into the specific program, event or phenomenon. Anchored in real-life situation, the case study will provide a rich and holistic account of the phenomenon (Merriam, 1988, p. 32). The goal of a case study method is to provide an in-depth understanding of an event, and the how and why events relate to outcomes (Martinson & O'Brien, 2010).

Methods

Case study research was utilized for understanding the deeply contextualized experience of spirituality in adult education at the senior center in this study. The data will be collected through the interviews from the five adult educators and non-participant observation, field notes and artifacts collected at the center. According to Yin (1994, 2011), the case

study research provides the framework for a “rich analysis and valuable insight” into the specific program, event or phenomenon. Case studies investigate contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. In other words “this method is utilized to cover contextual conditions –believing that they might be highly pertinent to your phenomenon of study” (p.13).

Further adhering to the principles of outlined by Yin (2011) for a descriptive case study design, in order to present a detailed account of the role of spirituality in adult education. A descriptive case study is used to describe a phenomenon and the real life setting in which it occurs (Yin, 2011). Furthermore, case study design focuses on asking “how and “why” questions, seeks to understand behavior in its natural environment that cannot be manipulated, allows the researcher to examine contextual issues that maybe relevant to the phenomena and lastly can be used when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clear. (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Limitations of the Study

One of the main limitations of this study is case study methodology. Case study research has been critiqued for lacking rigor, generalizability and specific structure. Stake (1995) submits, Qualitative case studies are limited through the specific uniqueness and filtered through the worldview and positionality of the researcher. Furthermore

there are limited instructions for constructing final reports, therefore the investigator must utilize their own predispositions and impulses throughout most of the research effort. Further limitations of case study design are seen through issues of reliability, validity and generalizability. Stake further imparts that “the purpose of case study is not to represent the world, but to represent the case” (p. 245). Issues of internal and external validity are addressed through the research design. Since qualitative case study research operates with different assumptions about reality, and how knowledge is constructed, it is important to understand that different worldviews and different paradigms should have different conceptualizations about validity and reliability (Merriam 1988). Validity, according to Merriam (1998) must be assessed in terms of interpreting the investigators experience. Since one the main tenets of qualitative research is that reality is “holistic, multidimensional, and ever-changing; it is not a fixed single objective phenomenon waiting to be discovered, observed and measured” (p. 167). Furthermore, case study research has agility and flexibility to work in a variety of settings and investigate a range of questions, problems and phenomena. While other limitations are distinctly possible, the above provides a non-exhaustive list of limitations I considered when designing this study.

Research Setting

The senior center is a vibrant hub of lifelong learning activity and programming. Located in a large suburban town in the southeast region of

the country, it is a popular retirement destination for many. The courses are available based on first come first serve basis for enrollment. In order to register the individual must be a minimum of 55 years of age. The Center has a comprehensive list of courses, programs and events year round. The classes are affordable and often free, and taught by many retired subject matters experts and other qualified instructors. The Center is open 6 days per week and provides instructional and cultural activities year round. The center is housed in a municipal building located in a Park on a large green space in the geographic center of town. The center is accessible on a number of local bus lines and provides an open access space for town residents and the surrounding towns. The non-formal learning design of the center offers courses that range from yoga to computer literacy, oil painting as well as planned cultural trips around the region. The center can be seen as a community of practice that offers both formal and non-formal learning experiences. (Gray, 2004) Communities of Practice (CoP) view participation as learning and “learning is positioned as embedded in wider social and historical practices, which interact to generate valued practices within a given community” (O’Donnell & Tobbell, 2007, p.315).

Participants

The Senior Center caters to an active and motivated population of seniors. The center requires the seniors to be a minimum of 55 years of age and a resident of the town or surrounding area. The region has a large

number of universities and colleges, therefore the center works to promote intellectually stimulating offerings to attract the well-educated retirees in the local area. Participants will be selected based on availability.

Specifically, I worked with the center director to craft and email (Appendix A) to inform faculty that I was conducting research for my doctorate in Higher and Adult Education at the University of Memphis. I was seeking participants that were allow me to observe their class and participate in an interview immediately following the class. I did not specify that I was studying spirituality, as I didn't want to overly inform the participant pool. I simply stated I was interested in observing for my research on adult education. With that the email sent to the 50 faculty members and I selected participants based order in which I received responses indicating interest. Once I received an email indicating an interest in participating I scheduled a time to visit the class and conduct the interview. I adhered to the same process for the first 5 responses I received from adult educators at the center. I did not use faculty that I had previously observed in my pilot study.

Data Collection

The data will be collected via five individual non- participant class observations, immediately followed by an in-depth interview, using an interview guide (Appendix B) of interview questions. I observed each educators class once, immediately followed by a 45-60 minute semi-structured interview. The interview questions provided a platform from

which I engaged the participant in a topic that starts with general questions about their life and experiences, this is germane to the research agenda, as it situates the participants “reservoir of life experience” (Knowles, 1970) in context. The varied life experience of the past personal and professional experiences add to a “rich and thick” (Geertz, 1973) description. Interview transcripts were provided to participants for member checking to allow the opportunity for the participants to review their responses.

Interviewing is a qualitative research method to collect qualitative data. Structured, semi-structured, and unstructured are the three interview methods used in research. I used a semi-structured interview technique guided by a list of questions. Other interviewing techniques qualitative researchers deploy in the field are structured interviewing, whereby the researcher adheres strictly and does not deviate from the prescribed interview questions. Conversely, some qualitative researchers utilize an unstructured interview, insofar as they allow the conversation to flow organically guided by the participant and/or setting. For the purposes of this case study, a semi-structured interview allowed for some variation in questioning and provided the participant the flexibility to share freely in the interview process. The conversation was gently guided by the questions, but not strictly limited to only answering the proposed questions.

Observations are another qualitative method for collecting data. Observations can be either participant or non-participant, determined by the scope of the research project and the research. Participant observation always takes place in community settings, in locations believed to have some relevance to the research questions. The method is distinctive because the researcher approaches participants in their own environment

rather than having the participants come to the researcher. Generally speaking, the researcher engaged in participant observation tries to learn what life is like for an “insider” while remaining, inevitably, an “outsider” (Duke University, 2012).

Nonparticipant observation is a data collection method used extensively in case study research in which the researcher enters a social system to observe events, activities, and interactions with the aim of gaining a direct understanding of a phenomenon in its natural context. As a nonparticipant, the observer does not participate directly in the activities being observed (Liu & Maitlis, 2010). For the purposes of this case study, I adhered to a non-participant observation method, to unobtrusively enter the classroom and observe. Furthermore, seeking to observe 3 areas; adult educator/participant connection to their students, shared stories and life experiences, and how a sense of community was fostered. These three areas help anchor and situate teaching practice to spirituality.

Field notes are used to provide points of reference while observing class and interviewing. Ideal for capturing thoughts to revisit and clarify with participants during the interview and helpful for my own personal experience and observations. I have sketched the physical layout of the classrooms, made notes about lighting, art work displayed and music I enjoyed while being present.

Artifacts were captured through several photographs I took of the outdoor garden space used for one of the yoga classes I observed. The grounds, flowers and plantings were impeccable it added to the meaningfulness of the experience. These artifacts add texture and embedded meaning to my data analysis.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process began with my transcription of the interview recordings for the participants. Listening to my participant's recordings provided an additional sensory experience, listening to their words without them present, outside the formal interview process, created more salience and texture. This is called thematic analysis, Boyatzis (1998) imparts that process is flexible as it allows the researcher the flexibility to code information and themes once uncovered and get close to the data developing a deeper appreciation for the content. After transcribing the interviews, I made notes in the margins of each transcript as various unit of information or themes clearly emerged from the participant's interviews.

According to Baxter and Jack (2008) data collection and analysis happen concurrently. Yin (2003) offers five techniques for analysis: pattern matching, linking data to propositions, explanation building, time-series analysis, logic models and cross-case synthesis. Further, Stake provides a contrasting theory of data analysis insofar as he adheres to categorical aggregation and direct interpretation. Stake (1995) provides an approach that is intuitive, empirically-grounded, and naturalistic.

For the purposes of this research project I adhered to Stake's (1995) interpretation of data analysis. Stake's analysis provides the basic framework for constructing this case from a six step process:

1. Bounding the case, conceptualizing the object of study
2. Selecting the phenomena, themes or issues-that is, the research questions-to emphasize
3. Seeking patterns of data to develop the issues

4. Triangulating key observations and bases for interpretation
5. Selecting alternative interpretations to pursue
6. Developing assertions or generalizations about the case (p. 244).

Stake further advises the more the researcher has an intrinsic interest in the case, the more the focus on the study will be on the uniqueness, particular context, issues and story.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is a description of the validity and reliability in qualitative research (Creswell, 2007). Additionally, I utilized data triangulation and member-checks to achieve validity and reliability of data analysis and findings. Baxter and Jack (2008) recommend that researchers employ a variety of techniques to “promote data credibility or truth value” (p. 556). Lincoln and Guba (1985) impart that trustworthiness involves establishing creditability, as seen through confidence in the “truth” of the findings; transferability, demonstrating the findings have applicability to other contexts; dependability, showing the findings can be repeated and are consistent; and confirmability, which is described as the degree of neutrality and the extent to the research findings being shaped by the participants and not researcher bias.

Triangulation

Triangulation of data sources and data types is a primary strategy that can be used to view the research and case from multiple perspectives. Stake (1995) states that triangulation is a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability or interpretation. While acknowledging that no observations or interpretations are perfectly replicable, triangulation serves to clarify meaning by identifying diverse ways a phenomena can be seen and experienced. Denzin (1984)

identified four types of data triangulation: data source triangulation, where the researcher looks for data to remain the same in different contexts; Investigator triangulation, when multiple investigators examine the same phenomenon; Theory Triangulation, when investigators with different viewpoints interpret the same results; and Methodological triangulation, when one approach is replicated by another researcher to increase confidence in the interpretation. I triangulated my data with my non-participant observations, interview transcripts, member checks and through my detailed field notes.

Member Checking

This allows the participants to have time to review and clarify interpretations and contribute new or additional perspectives. An additional strategy is to use reflection and field notes to again promote the dependability of the study. (Baxter & Jack, 2008)

Lincoln and Guba (1985) posit that member checking is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility, insofar as it allows the researcher to test their conclusions and interpretations with members of the group from whom the data was originally obtained. I provided a copy of each transcript to the participant via email, so they were able to clarify and make changes.

Subjectivity Statement

I am a 39-year-old Caucasian female. I was raised Catholic, however I am currently lapsed in my faith and do not practice or espouse a specific faith. I describe myself as spiritual and believe in a higher power or life force. I live in an affluent community and have a multicultural worldview informed by my travels and experiences living overseas. I am a licensed counselor and believe in treating all people with an unconditional positive regard. Furthermore, my own experience as not only a researcher

of adult education but also as a consumer has informed my research identity and fostered my epistemological lens. I have found a natural connection to the role of spirituality in my own educational journey and believe personally and professionally that it has real salience in teaching practice, instructional formats, and learning outcomes.

In order to proceed with this qualitative case study, we must accept that spirituality exists in current practice and can be examined. Additionally, adhering to a constructivist paradigm insofar as this view imparts that knowledge is established through meaning attached to the phenomenon being studied” (Krauss, 2005, p.759).

Moreover, this specific research utilized a case study methodology, this research as espoused by Yin (2009) and Stake (1995) based on a constructivist paradigm.

“Constructivists claim the truth is relative and that it is dependent on one’s perspective, it appreciates that importance of the subjective human creation of meaning” (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p.545). Stake (1995) imparts the case study research employs a constructivist or existential (non –determinist) paradigm where researchers employ a holistic treatment of the study, non-interventionists, with an orientation away from cause and effect (positivist) and towards a more personal interpretation of the phenomenon. A constructivist epistemological lens seeks a view that is built upon the assumption that reality is socially constructed.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I discussed the research methodology, describing first the purpose of the study, the theoretical framework, the methods of data gathering, analysis and interpretation. Trustworthiness, and the researcher’s subjectivity were discussed. The

following chapters will present the findings and interpretation, and the relationship to the literature.

Chapter 4

Findings

This chapter contains the findings and data analysis from the current case study, which explores the personal experiences of 5 adult educators at the Senior Center in a suburban area. The data was collected through non-participant observation, field notes, artifacts and interviews. Through observation and interviews I gained clarity on facilitator engagement as a framework for understanding how spirituality informs teaching practice. Through observing the adult educator in three capacities; 1) the connection formed in the class to students and subject matter; 2) the use of stories, shared life experiences; and 3) fostering a sense of community.

The purpose of the description of research participants is to offer depth and scope to the participants' backgrounds and personal narratives. The participants are Michelle, Terry, Pauline, Lenore, and Betty.

Description of Research Participants

Michelle. Michelle is a quiet, distinguished, 59-year-old woman that is a very talented fiddle player. She has a strong family background in music, her mother was a classical piano teacher and Michelle studied classical piano and Violin beginning at age 3. Michelle is well educated, holding a Master's degree in English with a focus on Medieval Studies. Prior to teaching at the Senior Center, Michelle worked as a technical writer and editor for the World Health Organization, Texas Instruments, and Becton Dickinson to name a few. She is now semi-retired and does freelance editing work, but has time to pursue her real passion, playing the fiddle, teaching fiddle and performing. Raised Catholic but no longer practicing, Michelle refers to spirituality in her work as a

“divine force” and feels that her teaching allows her to channel a positive energy that is about kindness and acceptance. She says that, “Music should be about your soul, yourself, what is in your and what ties everybody together. It transcends language, religion and age-we are all musical in some way.”

Terry. Terry is a 68-year-old retired former corporate trainer originally from New Hampshire. She is well spoken, warm and friendly. Terry began offering courses at the Senior Center several years ago when she noticed the center was not providing enough intellectually stimulating courses. She currently offers a world religion class, computer course and a travel adventures class. Terry is an avid world traveler with a large international trip each spring. She informed me she has just returned from the Canary Islands and is in the process of planning a trip to Panama. Terry describes spirituality as a mindset that is an embedded feeling you have when teaching. It is a movement forward, towards something, and hopefully a sense of peacefulness. Terry describes spirituality as an enlightenment and a guide. She believes her view of spirituality is informed by her knowledge and interest in world religions and feels that it is manifested by a connection with nature and a connectedness to the physical arts, as seen through painting, sculpture. Terry describes spirituality as an energy exchange or a feeling or sign.

Lenore. Lenore is a bubbly, friendly, and very warm. She is 55-years-old and very young looking. Lenore teaches Nia dance class at the Senior Center and has been on faculty for the past 5 years. She came to Nia through an interest and background in dance, meditation and massage. Lenore holds a bachelor’s degree in Zoology and had an unfulfilled career working as a lab manager prior to connecting with her passion for Nia and massage. She reports being drawn to Nia through a connection with dance and

inspired and encourage by her mentor to pursue teaching certification and develop a career around her passion. Lenore believes that she received many signals throughout her adult life that led her to follow her passion and move away from energy draining work in the lab. Lenore refers to Nia as “a way of life, it is a dance through life”. She says that “Spirituality is something bigger than the physical realm, it is about a connection with nature, sensing a good energy from the earth, a life force”. Lenore describes the spirituality is each person’s uniqueness. When Lenore is teaching she lets the spirit of the moment guide her, connect her and call her to help people.

Pauline. Pauline is a kind spirited, soft spoken very relaxed 75-year-old Yoga and Meditation instructor. Pauline has been teaching Yoga at the Senior Center for 8 years and became a certified Yoga instructor at the age of 60 through the encouragement of her instructor. Pauline is a retired Social Worker and holds a Masters in Social Work, she worked for many years with sexual offenders in a different region of the country. She loves teaching yoga and meditation and believes the connection to one’s body and spirit is incredibly important for an aging population. Pauline’s Yoga class has become a community gathering spot for class participants to meet new people and they often go to coffee as a group after class. Pauline describes spirituality as about connecting the inside world to the outside world. She believes it is fundamentally about kindness and caring for others. She believes it is manifests in her teaching through kindness and gratitude, journey inward, and a connection to an energy force. Inspiring people to find common ground, through breathing or talking, Pauline describes spirituality as a “connection where you listen and are present for each other”.

Betty. Betty is a 75-year-old world traveler that recently returned to the U.S after living overseas for 36 years. Betty offers courses at the Senior Center in Life Coaching. She became affiliated with the center 3 years ago, first as a participant and now as an instructor. Betty most recently lived in Egypt for 20 years, but has also lived in the Sudan, Morocco and Kenya. She is a former United Nations and US Embassy employee that enjoyed exciting posts all over the globe. She has been married twice, and is currently widowed. She is friendly, encouraging and inquisitive. Betty reports having been enrolled in a doctoral program in Woman's Studies at the University of Alabama in the 1970s but finding the process to be unfulfilling and leaving after completing 40 credit hours. Betty describes spirituality as a personal relationship with a higher power, a universal consciousness. Says that "It is your mission in life, your life purpose, people go through life with music inside of them, many people die with their music still inside because they never found their life purpose". Betty reports showing this through demonstrating patience, kindness, warmth and encouragement with her students.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this qualitative case study were developed primarily to understand the individual personal definition of spirituality and how it informs the teaching practice of the 5 adult educators that participated in this study. The main question of how the participant defines spirituality is supported by three sub-questions. To collect data I utilized non-participant class observation, semi-structured interviews and collected notes from the field. The sub-questions were constructed to support and further ground how the participants' definition of spirituality informs teaching practice within the Senior Center. The sub-questions were:

1. How does their personal definition of spirituality influence their role as educators?
2. How do adult educators infuse spirituality in the classroom?
3. How does spirituality influence the career of adult educators?

Synthesis of the Findings from the Data Collection

This section is inclusive of the findings from the 5 non-participant class observations and 5 interviews conducted supplemented by my field notes and artifacts. Data collected via interviews, used a predetermined list of interview questions and the conversations were all recorded with the participant's permission. The interview questions provided a platform which engaged the participant in a topic that starts with their life story and experience. Through establishing rapport, my hope was to allow the participant to speak freely, as all the participants did, to allow the conversation to flow organically. Through utilizing what Taylor and Bogdan (1998) refer to as "descriptive questioning" I was able to learn a great deal about the lives, interests and backgrounds of my participants. Through actively listening and occasionally asking clarifying questions, I was able to glean supporting information on their prior work lives, religious beliefs and current family structure.

The data analysis process began with my transcription of the interview recordings for the participants. After listening to all interviews again several days later, than again through the transcription process, several themes began to re-emerge, I say re-emerge, because I made several mental notes of possible themes while interviewing. Listening to the recordings provided an additional sensory experience, listening to their words without them present, outside the formal interview process, gave my experience and time with

them more salience and texture. Merriam (1988) states that data collection is about “making sense of one’s data” (p. 127). After transcribing the interviews, I made notes in the margins of each transcript as various unit of information or themes clearly emerged from the participant’s interviews.

Using note cards to first categorize situational factors, (prior employment, religion, family life, interests) while also categorizing emerging theories and concepts congruent with the literature, such as spiritual moments or happenstance. I developed categories based on reoccurring themes in the transcripts with linkages back to the literature to anchor and frame the category or theme. According to Goetz and Lecompte “Devising categories is largely an intuitive process, but it is also systematic and informed by the study’s purpose, the investigator’s orientation and knowledge, and the ‘constructs made explicit by the participants in the study’” (as cited by Merriam 1988, p. 133). Through the process of categorizing data and informing the themes, it was critical to ensure opportunities for explanation building and pattern-matching from data to theory and existing research (Yin, 1994). The purpose of coding is to get items to begin to move methodically to a slightly higher conceptual level (Yin, 2011).

There were five main themes or narratives that initially emerged from the interview transcripts; prior work experience in contiguous capacities, previous religious affiliations, the role of happenstance or spirituality in life, creating space for spirituality, and outside interests with intertwinements to spiritual work. Through deeper analysis the 5 themes were merged into 4 comprehensive narratives that are congruent with literature: non-linear processes and interconnectedness (lens 1) contemplative practices (lens 2) reckoning prior life experiences (lens 3) strength and capacity building (lens 4).

The four lenses provide the context in which the individual adult educators arrive with spirituality as part of their practice. It is this personal evolution and familiarities that impacts teaching methodology and can be anchored to the literature. According to Yin (2011, p. 187), “Once the themes are sorted, the researcher can begin to examine related features of these groups and gain insight”. These research questions were developed to identify and articulate what Tisdell (2000) described as educators testifying to the significance of their own spirituality animating their practice not as explicit content, but as an internal personal catalyst and support for emancipatory, inclusive educational practice. It is through this lens that the case study provides a deeper contextualized understanding of this personal spiritual experience and how it impacts teaching practice. It is important to identify this belief or orientation in practice in hopes of developing a spiritually grounded conceptual framework for practitioners to draw from in adult education practice.

Themes

The first research question regarding how adult educators define and implement spirituality in their practice provided several points of reference with linkages to the literature. Betty’s response captures lens 1- non-linear processes and interconnectedness:

I was working for the U.S Embassy in Cairo in a job I absolutely loved, then in 2005 my husband died unexpectedly of a brain aneurism, and my mother died. I had been living overseas for 35 years, and started to feel pulled to return home. So in 2012 at the time of the revolution I felt as if I was getting a message from a higher power to return to the U.S. and see my boys and my grandchildren. So I came back and being back here was a tremendous shock to me as I never decided

that I would stop working and retire, that's for old people, I just hadn't occurred to me to not work. Thankfully I became a Certified Life Coach and discovered the Senior Center, otherwise I don't know what I would have done.

Lenore shared a congruent narrative:

After I graduated from college I worked as a Lab Manager and a Chemist analyzing gas mixtures because it was the only job I could get and it was sucking the life out of me just completely draining. I was always massaging people and loved dance. I kept getting all of these wonderful signals from the universe to do something different with my life. I eventually enrolled in massage school on the weekends and I eventually graduated and started working PT as a massage therapist. The body and movement have always been passions of mine, when I found the NIA class, it was like the rest was history, and I've never needed anything else. Once I found NIA there was no going back, because I get to dance every day and NIA is a way of life, it's like dancing through life. I couldn't be happier.

Michelle shared a similar story:

Before I started teaching, I studied classical violin for all my childhood until my 20's, then I just quit. I burned out and put the fiddle away. I didn't pick it back up again for almost 20 years. I started all over again but with contra dance and folk music, because I really love the sound of it. I didn't really start teaching until years later and it was kind of by accident. I soon discovered that I loved working with adults and didn't think of it as teaching at all. Every student I work with is different and I've developed different style to accommodate different learners.

I'm a performer as well as a teacher, and I feel some sort of a flow from above that is coming through me when I teach and perform, it's a positive energy that is kind.

The aforementioned responses seems particularly salient and congruent with the words of Vogel (2000),

Our spiritual lives reflect the dreams, fears and commitments of our which we live, work, play and pray. When we claim our spiritual selves and take responsibility for understanding and nurturing the spiritual dimension of our being, we learn to teach with a deeper sense of which we are. (p. 18)

Comparing this passage from Vogel (2000) to the response from Betty, Lenore, and Michelle, the following parallels can be seen: Their individual spiritual belief in how they all arrived at the current professional practice, supports a belief that all things are connected spiritually informs practice as an educator, as Lenore posited that "that all things in the universe and life are connected". It is the description of how they all came to practice as an instructor at the Senior Center is categorized as an emergent theme.

The passages above also demonstrates a strong sense of self in which Orr (2000) imparts that spirituality develops from a strong sense of self, without which we would have little inclination to move out into the world" (p. 30). Orr further goes onto to state that adults learn about themselves through encounters with other. Through forming relationships adults are provided with the opportunity to learn more about "their deepest longings and desires" in which they develop a stronger sense of self which is integral to spiritual development.

The theme of non-linear processes and interconnectedness was salient throughout the interviews and non-participant observation. The Senior Center is welcoming and friendly and people do not seem to judge or feel judged in that environment, people are free to express themselves and explore their interests and passions. This is part of the appeal of non-formal learning and the expression of non-linear processes, whereby people are encouraged to try new things and have fun.

Pauline provided the following response that is also congruent with lens 1:

Ok, about 10 years ago or so when I was teaching my Yoga class, I was approached by a student after class and she asked if we could get a copy of coffee, she has just moved here and was having a hard time adjusting and her husband had Alzheimer's. We started getting coffee and spending time together, she just really needed a friend. Then shortly after, another woman in the class approached me and was also new in town and having a hard time adjusting to life here. So she joined our coffee group and it turned about her husband also had Alzheimer's. We really became a little support group for each other. They tell stories about their husbands and the things that happen-one woman went home and found that her husband had thrown a chair through the living room window, he said he was hot and needed air. We laugh at these stories, because if we don't then we cry. We laugh a lot and have a rule that you can only say nice things about other people, no talking about people behind their back or gossip. Our coffee group has since grown and we all do all sorts of things together.

This passage provides additional thematic congruence to the role of personal interconnectedness and non-linear processes. Pauline's role is not only that of a yoga and

meditation instructor, she is also a conduit to social interaction and meaning making for woman struggling with life stage developmental tasks. The non-linear process of the group forming with the instructor to become a social/support-group demonstrates the organic nature of human interaction. The spiritual dimension of acceptance, kindness and reflection can also be seen through the support group. Dirx (2003) states, “the soul responds to less structured environments and activities that bring one’s inner life together with the outer world. The use of stories, images and dreams in our teaching help learners connect imaginal and intuitive dimensions through which the soul communicates. (p. 6).

Orr (2000) states that care, concern and outreach to others are integral aspects of spiritual development. Furthermore, “A full integrated spiritual person reaches beyond his or herself and acknowledges the interdependence of all creation, appreciates uniqueness others and ultimately assumes the responsibility for caring and concern about other humans” (p. 30). Pauline’s ability to reach out to others and form social bonds around caring and concern for others, outside of her classroom, demonstrate her spiritual dimensions as a person.

All of the adult educators I interviewed and observed demonstrated a strong sense of self, this can be seen as congruent with the notion provided by Orr (2000) “while adults are leaning, they frequently benefit from relationships with other people, especially from those that are safe and supportive” (p. 30). It is clear that the participants feels called to this work, and thus providing a comprehensive narrative that is supportive to aiding others in their journey.

Furthermore as seen through the lens of Vella (2000), Pauline’s coffee group acts as a new relationship between teacher and learner, thus the teacher and learner enter into

a “reciprocal relationship-dialogic teaching proposed as a transformative exchange, in which teachers and learners are involved in co-learning and co-teaching process, thereby cultivating the development of an authentic community of learners, characterized by sharing and support” (p. 14).

Pauline went onto further describe how she feels that spirituality impacts her practice in the classroom by stating: She says that, “Well I guess it just about providing a space for reflection, reinforced with loving kindness. Time and space for quiet, for peace and for purpose...I suppose that is all it is.” This statement seems to echo closely the work of Palmer (2003) and his pedagogy of the soul, “creating space that welcomes the soul”. Furthermore, Hill and Johnson (2003) communicate that “addressing spirituality in our adult education practice means bringing our whole selves-mind, spirit, and heart to our work and creating a learning space where learners can do the same” (p, 23). Michelle and Lenore articulated similar sentiments and their commitment to allowing spirituality to show up when they teach and the importance of making room for it in their practice. Lenore described that when she teaches she “allows the spirit to guide me, it is about a connection to each person’s uniqueness”. Michelle stated, “I have a strong belief in peace and respect for all people and I believe in creating positive environments that foster kindness and acceptance”.

All of the participants spoke either directly or indirectly about the role of contemplative practice in their life and in their work as an adult educator. Thus, it is through this passage that lens 2; contemplative practices emerged as a salient theme in this research. Contemplative practice were identified by the participants as evolving from periods of transition and/or life challenges.

Terry states:

I think I finally kinda tapped into spirituality when I was going through a divorce, my daughter was young and just became curious you know, because I was frustrated and sort of not sure about the world and what it was all about. I began reading about different religions, Buddhism has had a tremendous influence in my life, the eastern concepts. It all sort of consumed my life, so I ventured to make it part of my life, it flowed and ebbed into everything that I did-because I became conscious spiritual person. I am a conscious spiritual person, I'm mindful person- Taking this path of joy and expanding myself intellectually and spiritually, through travel and conversations, I just keep moving along this spiritual path and it has made me quiet and mindful of everything I do.

Vogel (2000) calls for adult educators to reckon our own spiritual lives as this can be life-giving as it may help educators find ways to invite students to reckon with their spiritual lives. Orr indicates that "Once we open the door to talking about beliefs and the practices of faith, we are called to listen in deep, open ways and to recognize that sharing faith can be done non- coercively so that we are able to understand and honor different life experiences" (p.21).

Orr (2000) states "the search for meaning is bound up in our understanding of everyday life-it involves a realization that life is greater than our sphere of influence and that our futures are connected to others. The opportunity to find relevance and meaning, to be part of something beyond ourselves is profoundly spiritual" (p. 30).

I was further moved by the congruence and salience of the following passage with relation to lens 2:

As educators, we have responsibilities for forging a broad educational belief system that involves the cultivation of awe and wonder of the earth, assisting students in their meaning making, creation of metaphors and worldviews that nourish our capacity to live with and in the real world (Hill & Johnston, 2003, p.23).

Michelle shared the following experience that impacted her view on religion and her love of the fiddle:

I was raised Catholic and it was very strict in the church at that time, and in my early 20's I made the decision it just was not where I wanted to be. So I left the church, and did not go to church for a very long time, and actually I still don't. It was at this time I also put down the fiddle, having felt burned out and exhausted from playing classically. In the past 20 years, I have read a lot about the history and society of Friend (Quakers) which appealed to me, so I went to those meetings for a while. I also started to read about existentialism, phenomenology, and humanism. I now go to church regularly, but this time it is just to perform, which I do at the Episcopal Church. I feel very in tune with that community, it's a very kind and generous kind of spirituality that occurs there, very different from what I experienced at prior points in my life. Additionally, I've learned to be much easier on myself than I used to be, when I played classical making a mistake was not acceptable, but now when I mess up, I take breath, smile wider and

remember that I'm not perfect. There is no such thing as total failure, you learn something from every experience.

One of the more salient aspects of my non-participant observations included an implicit feeling that the participants had all made peace with prior life struggles and experiences. Lenore spoke about coming to terms with an overbearing father that she was never going to make happy.

My dad was funny about everything I wanted to do in my life, he did not accept any of my career interests and basically said no to everything that interested me. So really at a certain point I realized that nothing was going to make my dad happy and I just started to look at my life and my priorities differently and eventually I found my passion in life.

It is through this narrative that lens 3, reckoning prior life experiences emanates. One aspect of lens 3- reckoning prior life experiences can be seen as initially developed through previous religious affiliations; this theme emerged naturally from conversation, as I did not explicitly ask about religion. Michelle shared her experience of leaving the Catholic Church as a young adult, this narrative was congruent with thoughts shared by Pauline. Pauline casually mentioned during her interview that she is a "lapsed Catholic" and does not regularly attend church or participate in formal religion. The striking relationship to what Michelle mentioned regarding her experience with the church to her current practice with the Society of Friends and the playing music for the Episcopal Church and Pauline's work in Yoga and Meditation; provide the pathway to further explore the importance of spirituality in their lives and professional practice, outside of formal dogmatic worship. Perhaps the spiritual dimension of these two individuals

existed for many years and is now much more relevant to their professional practice than previously identified. Milacci (2006) prefers to use the term faith as opposed to spirituality as he believes it better invokes the individual's core beliefs and how those beliefs frame and underpin practice. Perhaps, there is a strong philosophical or existential continuum between prior faith driven experiences and a more spiritually grounded less dogmatic worldview.

Lens 3 additionally encompasses prior work experience as part of collaborative learning, as seen through experience in contiguous capacities. Pauline provided the following passage on her previous life work:

I guess you could say that I traded in my gun for a yoga mat. About 15 years ago when we moved down here I was looking for something and I found yoga and meditation and I have been teaching at the Senior Center ever since. My daughter also teaches here, we both specialize in senior yoga. I was in law enforcement, I worked with the sex offender population in upstate NY. While many are not violent, mostly just have impulse control issues-streaking, etc. But I did carry a gun.

Betty provided the following narrative about her experience transitioning back to life in the US after living abroad: "I was really much happier living overseas, there is so many ageism in this country, everything here is so dependent on credentials and it's all just nonsense. I have to reconnect and learn to adjust in a different way now"

Vogel (2000) states that adults need "time and space to express and heal the inevitable pains and hurt of life" (p.20). She further goes on to reinforce the importance of these emotion in adult education by stating that "when these factors are present in

adult learners, teaching is greatly enhanced. When teachers are in touch with their own spiritual journeys, they engage learners in ways that encourage them to explore all dimensions of a topic” (p.20). In summary, it is important to be in touch with previous life experiences in order to be present in the teaching moment and encourage an authentic and meaningful dialogue with students that may be struggling and suffering. Having a clear connection to the past helps us to understand how and why we see the world the way we do and how it informs our practice.

Lens 4 is seen through strength and capacity building, which is particularly salient and meaningful for seniors. Michelle spoke eloquently during our interview about developing different teaching styles to accommodate different learners, “every student is different, so I’ve developed different mechanisms for working with people that have, dyslexia, poor eyesight, poor memory, arthritis, weight problems and all sorts of physical issues that could hold them back”. By working to develop and assist the students in her fiddle class, she is building confidence and encouraging her students to continue their musical journey. Michelle, mentioned that many of her students have no past experience in music or with the fiddle and she meets them where they are to assist in the journey. Says that, “I really try to take the frustration out and make it something positive and find the ‘divine’ force in all of us, it’s about kindness”. Building strength and capacity through kindness and compassion is meaningful and strongly resonates with the other participants in the study. Betty shared that she views her students with love and encouragement, “I’m helping people to try to reconnect to what makes them happy again, and that’s what Life Coaching is about. I want them to feel alive again and dream”

Lenore provided the following:

It's about trying to get people to express their bodies, their energy, and their spirit, who they are. Tapping into the authentic self. I think the community aspect of this, where you feel like you are more than yourself, so a lot of times I use a circle, and when we are in the circle we sense the oneness, when we are together it's a way of bringing the spiritual aspect forward. Connecting to different faces in the mirror, for me that is important. Slowing down and feeling life and our body's helps us find meaning and purpose.

Terry shared a similar narrative:

I enjoy teaching here so much, for me it is about sharing information with others and there is a joyfulness in that for me. Creating a sharing community that brings people together, inspires people to connect with others, getting people to do more things. You have to give your students time to participate in discourse allow them to freely express ideas and thoughts, that's what makes people present in the learning environment.

These two narratives articulate the value and importance placed on individuality, connectedness, and compassion as a means of building capacity. Creating a sense of community and togetherness transcends subject matter and facilitates inner directedness that is one component of capacity building. A critical and strong recurring theme in all the participants' interviews articulated how spirituality informs or frames the practice of community and capacity building in their work, either implicitly or explicitly. Engaging people on a deeper level, whether through faces in the mirror as described by Lenore, or through kindness and patience as described by both Betty and Michelle, it is clear that

this is an area of emphasis for the participants. This manifested through developing a reflective practice in all the courses I observed. Pauline repeatedly encouraged her students to stop and connect with their bodies, the earth and surroundings and used the phrase “make it your own” frequently. When interviewed her after observing her class, I asked her about using this phrase and she responded with; “it’s about connecting to where you are in your body and tuning into how that makes you feel, there is no right or wrong way, only your way”. Pauline and others seemed to work to facilitate personal growth and development not only through the subject matter, but through the use of group practice and dialogue.

Milacci (2006) adds to this narrative through his work on spirituality in adult education, he imparts through his research that there is an emphasis on community building as an outward manifestation or expression of spirituality in adult education practice that is reflective of the literature as seen through Palmer (1999) and Vella (2000). Furthermore, the holistic and diverse web woven into the fabric of imparting spirituality in the practice of teaching adults is tangible and salient to the outside observer. The 4 themes summarized in this chapter seek to describe and add to the current dialogue but are in no way an exhaustive list of potential avenues to develop and harness spirituality in practice. Rather, the scope and mission of this research was to present a snapshot of a current phenomenon and seek to describe the “how and why” spirituality is used to inform teaching practice.

Discussion

As I examined the 4 themes and the supporting narratives it became clear to me that spirituality is very much embedded in the work of

the adult educator and expressly their teaching practice. Perhaps it is congruent with the mission of lifelong learning, engaging the multiple dimensions of the learners, or is easier to access with a more seasoned learner; nevertheless, it was tangible and palpable during my time there. One of the unique aspects of the role of spirituality in teaching practice at the Senior Center was the varied and diverse background of the educator. I believe that is a major driver and impetuses for informing practice. Prior life careers, ups and downs, marriage, divorce, death of a spouse were all inextricably intertwined with the participants teaching posture. It's the totality of the life experience of the adult educator that allows them to relate to and harness spirituality in their classrooms. Additionally, Tisdell's work inserts spirituality in adult learning as a transformative experience. Spiritual transformation and learning are seen as a congruent and complimentary process. This notion is further delineated by the work of Jack Mezirow (1991) as he espoused the importance of personal transformation in learning.

Although current literature is beginning to emerge on spirituality in adult education a paucity exists on how it actually informs teaching practice. A possible linkage is seen through Palmer's (1998) connection to teaching from an authentic place of trust. Authentic teachers have the capacity to bring about vital connections between teacher and subject, through expressing care and concern for students and subject matter. While authenticity is not identified as a lens or theme in this research it is

certainly entrenched and well represented by all the participants in this study. I believe the spirituality cannot be accessed in teaching without an authentic adult educator leading the class. It is in many ways a precursor or prerequisite to teaching from a spirituality informed position.

Moreover, Palmer (1998) believes: “Good teaching possesses a capacity for connectedness. Teachers are able to weave a complex web of connections among themselves, their subjects, and their students so that students learn to weave a world for themselves” (p. 11).

Further situating adult teaching and spirituality into context is Lauzon (2007), insofar as he imparts that knowledge is not linear, rather abstract and textured; additionally, “knowledge construction in this context arises through engagement that is characterized by intimate relationship- relationship with self, others and other larger environment” (p. 43). Lauzon calls on adult educators to find comfort and congruence with ambiguity, paradox and the nebulous nature of knowledge transfer. I believe the adult educators that participated in this research all demonstrate this congruence to varying degrees. Perhaps this process like teaching, learning and spiritual connection happen across a continuum.

Furthermore, it is imperative to include the opportunity to explore the myriad of health benefits that accompany involvement at the senior center was addressed by all my participants. While anecdotal, the participants all shared stories and examples of seniors reporting feeling better, sleeping better and an improved sense of vitality through

connecting to subject matters they enjoy and enjoying the social interaction the center provides. By way of example, The National Council on Aging states on their 2014 fact sheet, the important impact senior centers have on their participants. Research shows that older adults that engage with their local senior centers learn to manage and delay the onset of chronic disease and experience measurable improvements in their physical, social, spiritual, mental well-being. Senior Centers can be seen as places of not only learning but empowerment. “Empowerment is important because it increases personal autonomy, encourages discussion, and provides opportunities for decision making” (Eaton & Salari, 2005, p.463).

Chapter Summary

This chapter commenced with an overview of the research purpose, research questions, followed by a detailed narrative, description of the research participants, and portions of the interview transcripts. A detailed account of the theoretical framework and how it shaped the case study was provided. The data collection methods were instrumental in yielding a large volume of information that was expounded on how the data retrieved were processed. After a thorough analysis, 4 themes or lenses emerged: non-linear processes and interconnectedness (lens 1) contemplative practices (lens 2) reckoning prior life experiences (lens 3) strength and capacity building (lens 4).

Chapter 5

Discussion and Implications

This chapter includes two major sections. The first is an overall summary of the study, which reviews the purpose of the study and the procedures utilized. The second section summarizes answers to the research questions and recommendations for future research. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the how spirituality informs teaching practice for five female adult educators teaching at a suburban senior center. An Andragogical framework was developed to frame the study. The research questions that informed the study were:

1. How do adult educators define spirituality?
2. How does their personal definition of spirituality influence their role as educators?
3. How do adult educators infuse spirituality in the classroom?
4. How does spirituality influence the career of adult educators?

The data collection methods included semi-structured interviews, and non-participant observation, field notes and artifacts. The findings revealed not only the implicit, enacted role of spirituality in teaching practice, but also yielded personal definitions of spirituality that were inextricably linked to their world view and manifestation of life experience.

My interest in spirituality and adult education started through a non-participant observation for a class on teaching adults. I observed a class at the same Senior Center and quickly began to notice a high level of engagement and joy for the adult learners and faculty. I started to focus in on spirituality and adult education and decided I would focus on how spirituality impacts and manifests in teaching adults, specifically seniors, this

became the main driver of this research. It was my instantaneous connection to the center and belief in something special informing the experience there, something transcending the emotional barriers, restrictions that chronic health and aging issues convey.

Chapter 1 highlighted the purpose for the research, to understand how spirituality can be used to enhance and inform teaching practice in the field of adult education. Gaining and more nuanced understanding of this practice as a means for expanding and building a conceptual framework for using spirituality as a teaching tool served as the basis for this research. Chapter 2 provided a comprehensive review of the literature and existing research expounding on current theories in adult education, as well as proposed 7 assumptions about spirituality that inform the current research. Furthermore the literature is organized by subheadings that reflect the dominant discourse; Spirited Epistemology, Meaning Making, Integration of Spirituality and Adult Learning, Gerontology and Adult Learning Theories. In Chapter 3, the methodology including data collection and analysis are discussed. The Methods for collecting data, non-participant observation and in semi-structured interviews is described as well as the data yielded, which is addressed in Chapter 4. My analysis produced 4 themes or lens that are congruent with the literature; non-linear processes and interconnectedness (lens 1) contemplative practices (lens 2) reckoning prior life experiences (lens 3) strength and capacity building (lens 4).

In this Chapter the study findings are compared with the literature and dominant themes provided in Chapter 2. Emphasis is given to implementation of best practices and tangible tools that can be used to inform teaching practice. For instance the opportunity to develop a spiritually infused teaching paradigm offered by Vella (2000) for adult educators to use a learning centered approach to teaching to inspire students to go deeper

level of awareness within themselves. Lauzon (2007) calls for a practice calls for a deeper level of autonomy and choice, that learning and knowledge acquisition is not linear, rather abstract and textured. Lauzon calls for educators to find comfort and peace in highly ambiguous, complex and paradoxical experiences. Being present and providing a space for solace in thought and experience are all seen as best practice takeaways. To this end, the participants in this study shared openly and freely of themselves, their life stories, personal struggles and their general experience of spirituality as an area of awareness in their teaching.

Summary of Findings Addressing Each Research Question

How do adult educators define spirituality? The various personal definitions that surfaced during the course of this research was: 1) a divine force; 2) a movement towards something; 3) enlightenment and life force; 4) universal consciousness; and 5) connecting the inside world to the outside world. These personal definitions were helpful in framing the analysis and developing themes. The personal definitions were influenced by life experience, adversity, hardship and overcoming obstacles. Enhancing the dimension and texture of the responses were the detailed personal narratives that were inextricably linked to their formation of a spiritual identity and a connection to seeking meaning in their lives. The personal experience and definition of spirituality is very much situated in personal context. It is this personal context that influences and informs how spirituality enters the classroom and is used to inform teaching practice.

How does their personal definition of spirituality influence their role as educators? The research participants shared detailed stories from their childhoods or earlier adult lives to situate their definitions, experience and understanding of spirituality

in practice. One of the more salient and personal realizations that informed my analysis and interpretation was the richness in life experience and acceptance of adversity and personal hardship as the locus of spiritual understanding in one's life because what was shared was not . By way of example, Terry shared that spirituality is influenced her work as an adult educator, as she finds joy in sharing information with others, building a sense of community through knowledge sharing. Spirituality is also used in classroom instruction as a means of going with the flow and not adhering to strictly to a curriculum or set of goals. All of the participants had a degree of flexibility in their teaching posture that allowed for time to veer of path and accommodate particular interests. Terry specifically mentioned that spirituality allows her to think about her students in what is good for them, what would be enriching, she refers to this as intellectual spirituality. Michelle remarked on the notion that there are no mistakes, just different pathways to learning and understanding material. It is kindness and acceptance that informs her teaching practice. Lenore spoke about connecting to faces in the mirror through movement and physicality that she connects spirituality to teaching. She adheres to a more kinesthetic approach to teaching. Pauline informs her teaching practice through trying to be present for her students, spiritually, mentally and physically. Betty utilized vision boards, storytelling and "generosity of the soul".

The role of spirituality seemed to be easy to access with my research participants. As if many of them were only now naming what they have been doing all along. By naming this practice it provided a conduit to gain deeper awareness into their personal process and journey towards spirituality as educators and people. Parker Palmer (1998)

famously said “we teach who we are”, it is through this belief that spirituality begins to be defined and infuse practice.

My other participants described in detail their journey towards teaching at the center, as a fulfillment of a passion or life goal, some referred to it as a calling. Being inner directed or guided towards the center by happenstance. It is being cognizant of spiritual dimensions of life that brought the participants to teach at the center. Spirituality as a value and interest are key aspects of my field work that were underscored through teaching practice.

How do adult educators infuse spirituality in the classroom? Study

participants identified an assortment of different techniques and ways they operationalize spirituality in their practice. The most common response is creating a classroom space that is inclusive, welcoming and open to sharing thoughts and opinions. Embracing a teaching posture that is less vertical and more horizontal. I made a field note during my non-participant observation of Michelle’s class that she acts as more of a tour guide, gently shepherding the students through new music, yet creating space and time for questions, comments, stories, divergent interests and experiences to all have an equal place and value. Pauline encourage students to connect outside of class and develop networks and friendships. She also encouraged all of her students to create meaning by making the experience their own, their own unique journey. Another commonality I observed was the openness of the classroom space as accepting and welcoming; allowing people to show up as themselves.

Several of the participants addressed specific activities they utilize to facilitate this practice. Betty spoke about using a dream board to inspire a deeper connection for

her students. Lenore talked about connecting with faces in the mirror during her dance class. Pauline referred to her coffee group after class as a place for meaningful connection and friendship. She added that importance of “listening and being present for others” as a major driver of her classroom experience. I observed others as engaging and welcoming all individuals and making people feel included and as contributing members of class, regardless of skill level.

My field notes provided another layer of texture to answer this question. I observed Lenore instructing her class to “give to yourself” also utilizing vivid imagery like time for “rainbow arms” and “open heart breathing”. Another mechanism she used to operationalize the spirituality in practice was through starting class with setting an intention for the hour. Each student quietly observed a moment of silence to set the intention for the class. Additionally, Pauline instructed her class to be in the moment and repeatedly instructed students to make the experience their own, anyway they wanted it.

My artifacts included diagrams and photographs of nonverbal spiritual aspects of my time in the field. Pauline’s Yoga class was held in the outdoor garden on a beautiful clear morning. The importance of scenery and visual aspects of spirituality are salient and powerful ways my instructors harnessed to form a connection. All of my participants spoke explicitly about the connection to nature as an imperative component. Nature was present in all the classes I observed, either through direct (plants or flowers) or indirect (discussion of nature) exposure.

Moreover, my experience being present for each class allowed me to begin to record how spirituality is operationalized in the classroom. In summation, some of what I observed was tangible while some was simply intangible. The sense of connecting with

others was seen through creating a welcoming environment demonstrated through introductions, setting an intention, commencing with a story, reflection or asking the students about their week. Storytelling and sharing is a very important aspect of teaching and learning at the senior center. Perhaps tied to life stage task, stories are important and have real value and meaning. All the participants in the study shared stories, asked for stories and provided ample class time to this endeavor. Developing an oral history as an educator and for the students is a valuable teaching tool. This compliments what Pauline imparts is critical in spiritually informed teaching, being present, baring witness to others, knowing when to listen and when to talk. Lastly, fostering a sense of community is seen through facilitator creating a welcoming space, providing companionship, engendering compassion and care. Pauline's coffee group and Michelle's fiddle class Monday night jam session at rotating houses. The class experience acts as a conduit to encourage and build relationships and meaningful connections to one another.

How has spirituality influenced their career as adult educators? This question was answered by participants through the use of story. The personal journey of Betty living in Egypt and losing her husband to returning to a new life in the US after 36 years; is seen through her spiritual journey and connection to life abroad and the value in multiculturalism and cultural pluralism. Whether implicit or explicit spiritual connections have been major drivers of career choice, career transition and present subject of the courses they each teach.

Lenore spoke about an unfulfilling life as a lab manager prior to finding dance and NIA, Michelle stopped playing her beloved fiddle for 20 years before finding it again, Pauline became a certified Yoga instructor after working with sex offenders for 35

years. The non-linear career path and diversity in life experience all inform and influence how spirituality is accessed and harnessed by each participant. The value in the experience of others and demonstrating an unconditional positive regard for all individuals seems like the most basic and tangible tenet I observed.

Implications

Spirituality is not explicitly spoken about as a tool for teaching and examined for how it can assist and advance teaching practice in adult educators. Adult learning environments, whether formal or non-formal can foster both skilled practitioners complimented by spiritually based teaching practices. Expressly, adults enter into learning environments for different reason with accompanying and varying skillsets. The Adult Center on Education (2005) states that adults enter into learning to create change in their life, this change can encompass change in their skills, behaviors, knowledge level and attitudes. The adult educator needs to be keenly aware of the adult learners' motivations for learning, Zemke and Zemke (1995) state the key to using adults natural motivation to learn is tapping into their most teachable moments. Additionally building on past experiences are key to fostering meaningful learning experiences. This study promotes an interest in adding to the narrative and current field of work on how we as adult educators can create environments and teach from a spirituality connected positionality. The research provided several salient themes as seen in the literature, such as a meaning making, spirited epistemology, and the infusion of adult learning and spirituality. This study was intended to add to the current scholarly narrative on creating a spiritually grounded conceptual framework for informing teaching practice in adult

education. It also encourages a more expansive discussion on the definitions of spirituality, to a more individual identity and notion of spiritual development.

The findings suggest that spirituality plays an extricable role in the life of the adult educator, and that the journey of spiritual development is a lifelong process. The art of teaching and working with adult learners is of high value and importance to the participants in the study; this can be understood through shared age related concerns and acceptance of life in ones later years. Nevertheless, the shared experience of teaching and learning is cyclical and grounded through a commonality identified by this research as spirituality.

The findings should serve as a guide to assist adult educators to develop more holistic, multi-dimensional learning environments that foster and influence spiritual growth and development. Additional research needs to be done to explore how this process can be grounded and developed in more formal learning environments. The findings from this study offer data that can assist with this endeavor. Through further examination of the role of spirituality in adult educators practice, placing emphasis and value on this conceptual frame, the senior center can continue to promote a sense of general wellness, resiliencies and health promotion. Linking the in-class experience, connection to others and spiritual dimensions of learning may help to assuage expensive chronic health issues, such as depression and loneliness. Disseminating the pro-social benefits of spirituality in adult education may provide greater traction and funding support in the public domain.

Future research might focus on the link between spirituality in adult education and mental health wellness in senior centers. Additional research may also be devoted to

further examination of lifelong learning policy with spirituality as core value in senior center learning. Opportunities to critically examine mentoring in adult education and the role of spirituality in senior centers may also add to the current narrative.

Recommendations for Future Research

Through further examination of the role of spirituality in adult educators practice, placing emphasis and value on this conceptual frame, senior centers can continue to promote a sense of general wellness, resiliencies and health promotion. Linking the in-class experience, connection to others and spiritual dimensions of learning may help to assuage expensive chronic health issues, such as depression and loneliness. Disseminating the pro-social benefits of spirituality in adult education may provide greater traction and funding support in the public domain.

Future research might focus on the link between spirituality in adult education and mental health wellness in senior centers. Additional research may also be devoted to further examination of lifelong learning policy with spirituality as core value in senior center learning. Opportunities to critically examine mentoring in adult education and the role of spirituality in senior centers may also add to the current narrative.

Conclusion

In the current study I examined the role of spirituality and adult educators. Examining the questions of “how does the role of spirituality influence teaching practice?” This inquiry did not reveal a specific set of outcomes, rather it provided a deeply contextualized nuanced understanding of the life experience of the adult educator and how one developed a sense of spirituality that influences teaching practice. Data analysis provided many linkages back to the literature and provided another opportunity

to examine the “how and why” question in context. The themes that resulted from the current study detailed in Chapter 4 were: non-linear processes and interconnectedness (lens 1) contemplative practices (lens 2) reckoning prior life experiences (lens 3) strength and capacity building (lens 4).

Furthermore, the role of spirituality in adult teaching and learning is present when the instructor invites and welcomes the openness of spirituality to the classroom. The formation of a spiritual paradigm is informed by a deeply personal life narrative and belief system. Inviting this practice to adult education provides a wonderfully complex and rich learning experience that transcends classroom boundaries. When teaching seniors spirituality seems to have a salient impact on both the teacher and student as boundaries erase and actual human bonds and profound connections are made. I believe adult education is moving closer to an accepted spiritually grounded framework for guiding learning and informing education.

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Appendix A

Good morning Jody,

I am in the process of completing my Doctorate in Adult and Higher Education at the University of Memphis and I will be conducting a qualitative research project (dissertation) focused specifically on Adult Educators. Having observed several classes at your center, I believe your center is an excellent place to examine the experience of adult educators.

I am specifically seeking 5 instructors to observe their class, followed by an interview for up to 60 minutes about their experience as an adult educator, their particular practice of teaching adults and their own spiritual connection to the work they do.

I would like to conduct the interviews onsite at the center in the new few weeks.

If you would please forward this message to your instructors and ask interested participants to email me at lauraecote@yahoo.com that would be excellent.

Thank you for your assistance.

Very best regards,

Appendix B

Interview Guide:

Research title: "The Role of Spirituality in Adult Education"

1. How did you come to work/volunteer at the Cary Senior Center?

2. Please describe your work at the Senior Center

3. Please describe your past work history.

Specifically looking for depth around:

Learning, family, interests, salient personal themes

4. Please describe how you spend your time outside of work.

*Trying to locate depth and scope around interests, recreation, hobbies, family,
volunteering*

5. What is your understanding of the term spirituality?

Looking for closely related words, concepts, ideas and life experiences

6. Can you describe "spiritual aspects" of your work as an adult educator?

7. In what ways do the "spiritual aspects" of your work influence how you teach your class? If so, please describe

8. Is there anything else significant to your practice as an adult educator and spirituality you would like to share?

Interview guide adapted from the Dissertation of F. A. Milacci (2003)

Appendix C

Hello,

The University of Memphis Institutional Review Board, FWA00006815, has reviewed and approved your submission in accordance with all applicable statutes and regulations as well as ethical principles.

PI NAME: Laura Demarse

CO-PI:

PROJECT TITLE: The Role of Spirituality in Adult Education

FACULTY ADVISOR NAME (if applicable): Barbara Mullins-Nelson

IRB ID: #3317

APPROVAL DATE: 6/20/2014

EXPIRATION DATE: 6/19/2015

LEVEL OF REVIEW: Expedited

Please Note: Modifications do not extend the expiration of the original approval

Approval of this project is given with the following obligations:

1. If this IRB approval has an expiration date, an approved renewal must be in effect to continue the project prior to that date. If approval is not obtained, the human consent form(s) and recruiting material(s) are no longer valid and any research activities involving human subjects must stop.

- 2. When the project is finished or terminated, a completion form must be completed and sent to the board.**
- 3. No change may be made in the approved protocol without prior board approval, whether the approved protocol was reviewed at the Exempt, Expedited or Full Board level.**
- 4. Exempt approval are considered to have no expiration date and no further review is necessary unless the protocol needs modification.**

Approval of this project is given with the following special obligations:

Pamela M. Valentine

Interim Institutional Review Board Chair

The University of Memphis.

Note: Review outcomes will be communicated to the email address on file. This email should be considered an official communication from the UM IRB. Consent Forms are no longer being stamped as well. Please contact the IRB at IRB@memphis.edu if a letter on IRB letterhead is required.