THE INFLUENCE OF SPIRITUALITY ON LEARNING FOR ADULT LEARNERS
IN TECHNICAL COLLEGE PRACTICAL NURSING PROGRAMS

by

JUNE ELIZABETH MCCLAIN

(Under the direction of Bradley C. Courtenay)

ABSTRACT

Adult education and nursing education are two fields of study that advocate the incorporation of spirituality as a component of teaching to the whole person. Adult educators provide examples of ways to address spirituality, and some nurse educators advocate for incorporating spirituality in the curriculum as one aspect of caring for patients’ needs.

The purpose of this study was to understand how adult learners perceive the influence of spirituality on their learning in practical nursing programs in technical colleges. A basic qualitative design was used to conduct the study. Eleven practical nursing students were interviewed to answer these research questions:

1. How do adult nursing students define spirituality?
2. In what ways do adult nursing students describe how spirituality is manifested in practical nursing programs in technical colleges?
3. What is the role of spirituality for students’ learning in practical nursing programs in technical colleges?

Eight categories within the three research areas emerged from the data. Definitions of spirituality are: 1) belief in a higher power, 2) connection to others, self or to a higher power,
and 3) putting beliefs into practice. Spiritual experiences in classes or clinicals were described as: 1) guided by God or higher power, 2) a revelation of one’s purpose for life, and 3) involving the act of prayer. The role of spirituality in learning is to: 1) assist in classroom and clinical performance and 2) instill confidence.

The findings lead to three conclusions: 1) belief in a transcendent being is the most pervasive perception of spirituality for nursing student; 2) spiritual experiences for nursing students involve acts of prayer, are guided by God or a higher power, and lead to an understanding of one’s purpose in life; and 3) nursing students perceive that spirituality enhances their capacity for learning.

The conclusions suggest that adult learners in nursing education programs bring their spirituality into the class, and they have spiritual experiences in classes and clinicals. Suggestions are posed for ways instructors can increase students’ awareness of their own spirituality.

INDEX WORDS: Spirituality, Adult learners, Adult educators, Nursing education, Nursing programs, Adult education, Learning, Technical colleges
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother,

Vellon Olivie Carithers McClain,

who has always believed in me.
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In 2002 I decided to join the doctoral program designed for employees working within the Department of Technical and Adult Education. I knew this journey would be a long one but I was prepared to make sacrifices along the way. However, those in my household also had to make sacrifices also, and I am deeply grateful to my family and furry friends for their enduring patience.

My parents, Vellon Olivie Carithers McClain and Levie Russell McClain, are both always supportive of every endeavor that I undertake. They both have confidence in my abilities that sometimes I don’t even have.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Background of the Study</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trends in Spirituality</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spirituality in Adult Education</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spirituality in Nursing Education</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Design of the Study</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sample Selection</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

Page

TABLE 1: SELECTED PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS ...........................................81

TABLE 2: PERCEPTIONS OF SPIRITUALITY IN PRACTICAL NURSING

PROGRAMS IN TECHNICAL COLLEGES .......................................................89
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The September 2005 issue of *Newsweek* reported the results of a poll conducted on spirituality in America today. The poll results indicated that 79% of Americans describe themselves as spiritual rather than religious. The results of the *Newsweek* poll are a reflection of changes in spirituality that have been underway in America for several decades. The outcomes of the poll confirmed the diversity of ways Americans are seeking spiritual enlightenment today. These changes in how Americans view and engage in spiritual learning have been documented by several scholars (Bartlett, 2005; Crossman, 2003; Forman, 2004; Leonard, 1999; Patrick, 1999; Roof, 1999).

The diversity of America has increased the ways in which Americans seek spiritual enlightenment. The old way of acknowledging religion is changing and has been replaced with many new ways to reach enlightenment which includes some of the old religions and variations on those as well. People are seeking meaning whether they are atheists, Christians, Muslims or any other religious or spiritual orientation.

Roof (1999) suggested that the emphasis on diversity and changes in spirituality can be traced to baby boomers. He stated that the baby boomers in their rebellion against the culture of the 60s and 70s rediscovered the “Romantic tradition, the Transcendentalists, and spiritual teachings from the east” (p. 132). The changes in the spiritual landscape gave rise to new age
movements. Forman’s (2004) views of the baby boomers are similar to that of Roof. Forman stated that “the current interest in spirituality is in part an inheritance of the sixties” (p. 115).

Patrick (1999) confirms Roof’s finding when she asserts that there is a new willingness by Americans to affirm interest in spiritual practices different from their own. She remarks on the fact that church attendance is on the decline while interest in spirituality continues to rise. Patrick shows two distinctly different systems of spirituality. The first system of spirituality represents the traditional religions, and the second system is linked with love of nature, art, beauty and concern for ecology, justice and peace and/or pursuit of physical and mental health.

Forman (2004) stated that: “many of our spiritual informants reported feeling disaffected from our large scale institutions” (p. 118). Forman affirms “religiously, the deepest disappointment was clearly with the churches and synagogues” (p. 118). Grimes (1999) also claims that spirituality and religion tend to be perceived separately and that spirituality is in vogue. Grimes concludes that it “makes little sense to let spirituality and religion be mere synonyms, but it also makes no sense to set them up as opposites with one superior to the other” (p. 152).

Although this explosion of interest in spirituality is not new, according to Leonard (1999) what is different is that Americans are exploring a number of paths to the spiritual life. “In short, large numbers of Americans seem concerned about spiritual fulfillment and, like good American consumers, are willing to shop around until they find what they are looking for” (p. 153).

The field of higher education has not been immune to these developments in spirituality in America. For example Chickering, Dalton and Stamm (2006) recently published Encouraging Authenticity and Spirituality in Higher Education which reflects their preliminary findings. They cite the College Student Belief and Values national study reported in 2005 and conducted

Some disciplines in Western universities which have implemented spiritually inclusive curricula or are developing an underpinning knowledge base of spirituality are cognitive psychology (Lonborg, & Bowen, 2004), social work (Okundaye, Gray & Gray, 1999), medicine (Ferrell, Smith, Juarez, & Melancon, 2003; Hoover, 2002; Kirsh, Dawson, Antolikova & Reynolds, 2001; Kliewer, 2004; Koenig, 2004), education (Astin, 2004; Love, 2001; Michalec, 2002), and management and business (Garcia-Zamor, 2003; Mitroff & Denton, 1999; Thompson, 2000).

The growing interest in spirituality in society in general and higher education particularly is also evident in adult education. Although the literature on spirituality in adult education is based mostly on the authors’ experiences and anecdotal data, three themes are evident: the rationale or need for spirituality; definition or what spirituality means; and ways to integrate spirituality in teaching. The rationale or the need for spirituality in adult education is based on five explanations: 1) the history which includes a social justice theme; 2) the omnipresence of spirituality even in the adult education classroom; 3) the need to address the whole learner as in holistic learning; 4) the belief that spirituality helps learners make meaning; and 5) the belief that spirituality may promote transformational learning.

_Rationale for Spirituality in Adult Education_

Recent books, articles and papers presented at adult education conferences have been among the documents which highlight the history of spirituality in adult education. For example, in a recent article, English (2005) claims that spirituality has been a full part of adult education from the early days in 1925 until the present time. English cites the emphasis on spirituality in
the general education literature from authors such as Glazer (1999), Palmer (1998) and Miller (2000). English provides snapshots of several movements in early adult education that shows the influence of the social gospel on adult education. These movements included Chautauqua, the Antigonish Movement, Mondragon, and the Shramadana Movement. English reminds us of adult education leaders of the past who were motivated by their spiritual and often religious impulses. Basil Yeaxlee, Myles Horton, Paulo Freire, Ivan Illich, and Eduard Lindeman are cited as having their thinking and writing influenced by spirituality.

One of the long-term missions of adult education has been for social justice. In the history of adult education some scholars have observed that spirituality is often related to or even underpins this social justice mission. For example, English (2005) points out that two purposes of adult education are education for social change and education for spiritual growth. Recent research by Tisdell (2002) confirms that spirituality does indeed provide the basis for adult educators who are involved in social justice. Lauzon (2005) supports the idea of social change in adult education when he claims that “spiritually inspired adult education must address the issue of oppression and focus its energy on social change through the transformation of structural power relationships” (p. 6).

Another part of the rationale to support the importance of spirituality and adult education is the claim that spirituality is everywhere—even in the classroom. For example, Palmer (1999) claims that “the spiritual is always present in public education whether we acknowledge it or not” (p. 8). He further states that spiritual questions are embedded in every discipline from health to history to English. “As long as we take ourselves into the classroom, we take our spirituality with us!” (Palmer, p. 10). Tisdell (2003) has a similar view: “People’s spirituality is always present (though usually unacknowledged) in the learning environment” (p. 31).
Courtenay and Milton (2004), Hart and Holton (1993), Vogel (2000), and Zinn (1997) are scholars who also acknowledge that spirituality is everywhere.

The concept of teaching for the whole person is a third component of the rationale that some adult educators turn to in support of addressing spirituality in adult education. Heron (1992) states that learning involves the whole person either by inclusion or by default. Heron further states that “either all of us is explicitly involved in the learning process, or only part of us is explicitly involved and what is excluded can be negatively influential, undermining either the content or the process” (p. 223).

Zinn (1997) states ideas similar to English and Gillen (2000) and Tisdell (2001) in addressing learning for the whole person. She proposes that one of the fundamental adult education principles is that learning is for the whole person which includes spiritual, biological, intellectual, and emotional dimensions. The implication is that by addressing spirituality, as well as other aspects of the learner, you are addressing the whole learner.

The rationale or need for spirituality in adult education is also evident in what adult educators refer to as meaning making for adult learners. Lauzon (2005) claims that “contemporary spirituality is grounded in an attempt to make sense of the world, to create meaning in order to escape our alienated condition” (p. 2). Likewise, English (2000) claims that “the opportunity to find relevance and meaning, to be part of something beyond ourselves, is profoundly spiritual” (p. 30). English, Fenwick, and Parsons (2003) state that “spirituality may indeed be about finding meaning in relationships or work itself, or in oneself” (p. 7).

There are a few studies that link transformational learning and spirituality; and, therefore, some scholars argue that spirituality is involved in transformational learning. In their study of environmental activists, Kovan and Dirkx (2003) discovered that there is a spiritual element in
environmental work. The activists spoke of head, heart, and spirit as part of their work. Kovan and Dirkx report that transformative learning was also experienced by this group in their everyday experience. Kovan and Dirkx (2003) claim that:

Environmental activism furnishes a context that evokes ardent passions, emotions, and commitment, hence providing a context for deepening our understanding of the emotional and spiritual dimensions of transformative learning, its relationship to a sense of calling, and the essential mystery at the core of this process. (p. 102)

Taylor (1995) in his review of empirical studies on transformational learning, discovered studies which identified the significance of whole person learning including the spiritual dimension. Similarly, McDonald (1998) discovered that spirituality was an important factor in the transformational experience of ethical vegans. In her study, McDonald identified one of the main findings in her study as “participants were motivated by a spiritual praxis that helped them to persist in their transformation.” (p. 193).

**Defining Spirituality**

A second theme in the adult education literature is the definition of spirituality. In addition to providing a rationale or need for spirituality, adult educators have also addressed what is meant by spirituality. A review of the literature shows there is no consensus on the definition of spirituality in adult education. Whereas English, Fenwick and Parsons are interested in the etymology of the word spirituality as interpreted from different languages, Tolliver and Tisdell (2002, 2006) take a more functional approach to the meaning of spirituality. For example, Tolliver and Tisdell use assumptions from their reading of the literature and their experience and use definitions such as “honoring of Life-force” and “interconnectedness of all of Life” (p. 391).
Although adult educators have many ways of expressing the definition of spirituality, some of the main ideas seem to focus on life-force (Tolliver & Tisdell, 2002, 2006), sense of connection or interconnectedness to others and to creation (Courtenay & Milton, 2004; English & Gillen, 2000; Mackerarcher, 2004), relating to the soul rather than material things (Zinn, 1997), a way of life (Hart & Holton, 1993), an awareness of something greater or a transcendent force (Courtenay & Milton, 2004; English & Gillen, 2002; Mackerarcher, 2004), a way of making meaning in life (Courtenay & Milton, 2004; Tolliver & Tisdell, 2002), and a relationship to either church or religion.

**Integrating Spirituality in Teaching**

Adult education scholars have also been concerned with the theme of integrating spirituality into the practice of adult education. These adult educators (English, Fenwick & Parsons, 2003; English & Gillen, 2000; Gillen & English, 2000; Lauzon, 2001) have offered suggestions for integrating spirituality into the adult education classroom. For example, English, Fenwick and Parsons (2003) suggest that adult educators and trainers can incorporate a spiritual dimension into their teaching by “honoring spiritual questions from learners, challenging learners to consider how particular topics affect their spirituality, and supporting dialogue about crucial life issues such as death and illness” (p. 49). Some ways that they claim educators or learners can cultivate their own spirituality is through purposeful reflection, journal writing, reflective reading, artwork, music, and body movement, among other practices.

Despite the fact that some adult educators have given attention to spirituality with respect to the rationale, the definition, and the integration of spirituality in adult learning experiences, there is scant evidence that helps us understand the importance of spirituality in adult learning from the perspective of the adult learner. Most of the contributions to the topic of spirituality in
adult education are theoretical or anecdotal experiences of the adult education scholars. Although claims are made about the importance of spirituality in adult education, there is little research with learners about how spirituality has been integrated into their learning experiences and its importance for their learning. Consequently, we don’t know from empirical evidence whether or not spirituality is important to the learning experience at least from the perspective of the learner. There is one adult and higher education learning context that provides an opportunity for examining the interaction between spirituality and adult and higher education and that is the area of nursing education.

Nursing education is one discipline which includes spiritual care as an important aspect of nursing care. The spiritual aspect of nursing care can be traced to Florence Nightingale. According to Burkhardt and Nagai-Jacobson (2002), Nightingale saw no conflict between spirituality and science. A review of the literature in nursing education indicates that numerous subjects have been investigated by scholars with respect to spirituality. Like the literature on spirituality in adult education, the literature on spirituality in nursing has little empirical basis. Most of the literature is drawn from experience of the scholars or through anecdotal information. The themes that are reported with some frequency in the nursing education literature are: integration of caring and spirituality in nursing; spirituality in the preparation of nurses; and the effects of spirituality on patient recovery and wellness. The medical literature for nursing tells us that spirituality is important in caring for patients, but what it doesn’t tell us is the importance of integrating spiritual learning into the nursing education classroom.

Nurse educators acknowledge that caring and spirituality are important in addressing spiritual needs of patients, and there are some articles and studies which approach these spiritual needs (Burkhardt and Nagai-Jacobson, 2004; Ross, 1994; Tanyi, 2002; Watson & Foster, 2003;
Watson, 2005). Among some of the conclusions from these articles and studies are that spiritual care is a natural part of nursing care and that taking this approach enables the nurse to attend to care of the whole person.

Some studies have examined the importance of integrating spirituality into nursing education courses (Callister, Bond, Matsumura, & Mangum, 2004; Garner, McGuire, Snow, Gray, and Wright, 2002; Hoover, 2002; Purnell, Walsh & Milone, 2004). Among the conclusions of these studies were that incorporation of spiritual care in the curricula may impact students’ abilities to recognize patients’ spiritual needs and that students will develop sensitivity in dealing with seriously ill patients.

There are a few studies which identify the spiritual needs of patients (Davis, 2005; Ferrell, Smith, Juarez & Melancon, 2003; Galek, Flannelly, Vane & Galek, 2005; Gebhardt, 2005; Hermann, 2001; Narayansamy, 2003). These studies seek to understand the spiritual needs of patients in order to determine how best to care for these needs. The spiritual needs of patients which were identified in these studies are the need for religion, companionship, involvement and control, finishing business, experiencing nature, positive outlook, privacy, meaning and purpose, connectedness to others, and feeling connected to God. The results of these studies are important because they identify that spiritual needs of patients are acknowledged, and, therefore, spirituality is considered to be an important factor in nursing. Among the conclusions were that providing spiritual care is a professional responsibility of nurses in order to enhance the quality of life of dying patients and that spirituality is a coping mechanism and a way that patients derive meaning.

In summary then, the literature in healthcare and particularly nursing education is focused primarily on the spiritual aspects of patient care. Although nursing educators claim that they
should focus on the whole person, including spirituality, in the learning experiences of the
students, there is very little empirical research which supports this. One study by Hoover (2002)
claims that transformational learning was experienced by students in their caring relationships of
patients. Although this study deals with caring and spiritual care, it is not specifically about how
spirituality affects learning of nursing students. Adults in nursing education, where spirituality is
considered to be an important component, provides a context for examining spirituality and adult
learning.

Nursing education occurs in technical colleges, community colleges, state colleges and
state universities. However, studies that include the topic of spirituality were conducted in
colleges and universities and not in technical colleges. The studies also deal primarily with the
spirituality of the nurse and the spiritual needs of the patients rather than the effects of
spirituality on the learning of the nursing students.

In this southeastern state students in licensed practical nursing programs are primarily
trained in technical colleges. Once employed, practical nurses work under the supervision of
physicians and registered nurses. Practical nurses have the most contact with patients, and
therefore, practical nurses are at the level where spirituality is most likely to be important to their
patients. This involvement with patients and their spirituality has implications for incorporating
opportunities for accessing students’ spirituality within the curricula. Practical nurses (also
known as LPNs) provide direct patient care in such areas as vital signs, administering
medications, collecting samples for tests, and keeping patients comfortable. Associate degree
programs in nursing are offered in state colleges and universities and in some technical colleges.
Registered nurses complete a minimum of an associate degree program. Practical nurses
complete many more clinical hours than registered nurses. However, if an LPN bridges to the
registered nurse program status then they would have the benefit of clinical hours as well as registered nurse status. Bachelor’s degrees in nursing are provided by colleges and universities to train nurses who want a bachelor’s degree, or administrative positions, or admission to graduate schools of nursing. Nurses with bachelor’s degrees spend less contact time with patients than LPNs.

LPNs are trained at technical colleges in Georgia and have more contact with patients than other categories of nurses. Despite the fact that most LPNs are trained in technical colleges, the majority of studies have taken place in colleges and universities. Further, those surveys involve samples at the registered nurse or higher level. LPNs are primary caregivers in institutions and are concerned with all aspects of patient care including spiritual care.

Statement of the Problem

Spirituality holds considerable interest in society today. National surveys conducted by *Newsweek* and the Higher Education Research Institute affirm this interest in spirituality in the United States. Some educators in public education and higher education have observed the influence of spirituality on students and many faculty members have incorporated components of spirituality within their teaching strategies. Adult education and nursing education are two fields of study that advocate the incorporation of spirituality as a component of teaching to the whole person. Adult educators provide examples of ways to address spirituality, and some nurse educators advocate for incorporating spirituality in the curriculum as one aspect of caring for patients’ needs.

However, the extant research on spirituality in adult education and nursing education is mostly descriptive or anecdotal. Although Fenwick and English (2004) maintain that “spirituality is gaining prominence as an integral part of adult education practice and adult development
theory” (p. 49), they go on to conclude: “A rather wild eclecticism currently prevails. As educators we lack robust theoretical tools to help illuminate the wide variation among spiritual orientations, each with different fundamental beliefs and values” (p. 49).

Despite the fact that the meaning of spirituality has been addressed in many disciplines such as psychology, religion, philosophy and adult and nursing education, there is little research which identifies the effects of spirituality on adult learning as perceived by the learner. If instructors can know the role of spirituality in student learning, they will be better prepared to design learning experiences for students which will build on the spiritual aspect of their learning.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand how adult learners perceive the influence of spirituality on their learning in practical nursing programs in technical colleges. Specifically, I examined:

1. How do adult nursing students define spirituality?
2. In what ways do adult nursing students describe how spirituality is manifested in practical nursing programs in technical colleges?
3. What is the role of spirituality for students’ learning in practical nursing programs in technical colleges?

Significance of the Study

Nurse educators acknowledge that caring and spirituality are important for addressing spiritual needs of patients. The nursing literature also indicates that spirituality should be integrated into practical nursing programs, and that those who understand their own spirituality will be better able to attend to the spiritual needs of their patients.
Although the meaning of spirituality has been addressed in many disciplines, there is in general a lack of research which identifies the role of spirituality in the learning process. This study shows that spirituality provides a positive influence on the learning of nursing students; therefore, instructors should be able to increase ways of making students aware of their own spirituality as well as how their own spirituality can help the spiritual needs of others. Practical nursing instructors can benefit from knowing how students’ spirituality affects their learning. This will be important in designing learning experiences for students which will build on the spiritual aspect of their learning. The findings of this study are important for educators of nursing students and the adult learners themselves.

This study has the potential for informing theories of adult learning by explaining the role spirituality plays. Both adult educators and nursing education scholars claim that a holistic approach to teaching adults is the most effective adult learning approach and that a holistic approach is incomplete without integration of spirituality. The findings of this study contribute to our understanding of spirituality as a component in a holistic theory of adult learning by demonstrating that spirituality is an important part of students’ learning.

This study provides insight into the perceptions of adult learners regarding the effects of spirituality on their learning experiences in practical nursing courses. This insight is provided in the form of descriptions by the nursing students on spiritual experiences in their classroom and clinical settings. Because there is little empirical evidence on the topic of spirituality in the learning process for adult learners in practical nursing programs in technical colleges, this study provides a contribution to the area of spirituality and learning in the field of adult education.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to understand how adult learners perceive the influence of spirituality on their learning in practical nursing courses in technical colleges. Specifically, the questions examined were:

1. How do adult nursing students define spirituality?
2. In what ways do adult nursing students describe how spirituality is manifested in practical nursing programs in technical colleges?
3. What is the role of spirituality for students’ learning in practical nursing programs in technical colleges?

This review of the literature investigated spirituality as it relates to the learning of adult students. In the first section, trends in spirituality are explored from various sources. In the second section, spirituality as it relates to the field of adult education is explored. In the third section, spirituality in the field of nursing is reviewed. The examination of these topic areas will provide a background for the importance of understanding the influence of spirituality on adult learning.

The studies reviewed in this chapter were collected from many sources including searches of the University of Georgia libraries GALILEO system. The data bases searched included: academic search premier, MEDLINE, Health Source, Nursing/Academic Edition,
PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, ERIC, Dissertation abstracts, professional development collection, psychological and behavioral science collection, religious and philosophical collection, and sociological collection. The parameters used for the searches included spirituality and definitions, nursing and spirituality, spirituality and adult education, holistic learning and spirituality, adult learning and spirituality.

Trends in Spirituality

Based on his research of the baby boom generation, Roof (1999) explored American faith and spirituality. According to Roof, the baby boomers rediscovered spiritual teachings from the east. The collapse of the old establishment created a religious vacuum which made it possible for submerged traditions to rise to the surface. Young people began leaving mainstream churches and participating in evangelical and charismatic faiths and there was also some interest in Eastern and Native American teachings. The changes in the spiritual landscape gave rise to new age movements. Over the years book chains began capitalizing on the new religious themes and created spiritual and religious sections along with Angels and astrology among other spiritual choices.

Another influence that Roof mentions is the media. He cites television shows such as “Touched by an Angel” which cut across religious boundaries. Roof proposed that a new style of spirituality is emerging that he calls “reflexive spirituality” which is a more deliberate awareness to take charge of our inner well-being using symbolic resources, discipline, and practice. Roof also suggests that there is the possibility that the current type of spirituality represents a quantum leap from anything we have seen in the past and which may not end up in religion as we know it.
Patrick (1999) claims there is a new American willingness to affirm interest in spiritual practices different from their own. She remarks on the fact that churches are on the decline while interest in spirituality continues to rise. Patrick shows two distinctly different systems of spirituality. The first system of spirituality she identifies as the traditional spiritual or religious such as Christian, Jewish, Muslim or Buddhist and all the variations within. The second system is not associated with institutional or traditional region but is linked with love of nature, art, beauty and concern for ecology, justice and peace and/or pursuit of physical and mental health. This second system is also associated with New Age spirituality and feminist spiritualities and may derive from Celtic, Native American, or Wiccan practices. Patrick also states that the development of religious programs in secular institutions of higher learning has sparked interest of nonreligious persons in meditation and other spiritual disciplines and these individuals will be the first to seek out yoga and tai-chi classes. Patrick claims that feminism will have a profound effect on the way the streams of spirituality are interrelating. As a result, there are now very different interpretations of God and Christian life which are now widely accepted. She claims the newer view seeks more various images for deity than male political power and includes female ones and offers a balance between God’s immanence in creation and in human relationships. Patrick further claims that this new model includes a concern for justice and ecology which are central and are characterized variously by “‘creation-centered,’ ‘liberationist,’ ‘womanist,’ ‘mujerista,’ ‘feminist,’ and ‘ecofeminist’” (p. 143).

Grimes (1999) provides further evidence that spirituality and religion tend to be perceived separately. Grimes notes the growing tendency in America to distinguish between religion and spirituality. Religion is seen as less desirable because of the institutional influence. He states that the current notion of spirituality at the time was not identified with the
establishment mainstream such as Christianity. However, he also states that spirituality itself is undergoing a transformation. He states that spirituality is a meta-religion. By meta-religion he means sort of religion and sort of not religion. In the new age spirituality, ritual has become a conflict. Sometimes ritual is identified with religion and sometimes with spirituality. In Native American culture, the term spirituality is used rather than religion because religion is identified with Christianity. However, Native people consider ritual and ceremony to be important. Western religions such as Christianity use ceremony or rituals like weddings and funerals.

Grimes’ objective is to be critical and to provide definitions of religious, spirituality, and ritual that are not synonymous in order to “differentiate and connect ideas that are important to the discipline of religious studies” (p. 152). His definitions are as follows:

Imagine, for instance, that we define rites as sequences of action rendered special by virtue of their condensation, elevation, or stylization; spirituality as practiced attentiveness aimed at nurturing a sense for the interdependence of all beings sacred and all things ordinary; and religion and spirituality sustained as a tradition or organized into an institution. (p. 152)

Leonard (1999) claims that while interest in spirituality is not new, Americans are exploring a number of paths to the spiritual life. Leonard provides three illustrations of the new ways seekers are using multiple religious traditions, methodologies and literatures in their search for the spiritual. The first illustration is of those who seek guidance through Roman Catholic approaches such as the increased interest by Americans in the monastic retreat. The second illustration is in the charismatic movement. This movement involves such spiritual gifts as speaking in tongues, healing, shouting, dancing and other signs of spiritual experiences. The third illustration is the enthusiasm for spirituality shaped by religious globalism or an increasing
awareness of religious practices around the world. Because of television, film, travel and immigration, Americans have access to faiths they once ignored or dismissed. “Globalism has made those religions and the spirituality they represent less threatening if not more appealing” (p. 155).

Crossman (2003) explored secular spiritual development from a global and international perspective with a focus on cultural implications. She determined that a number of factors have contributed to the increased interest in spiritual development. The factors that Crossman attributes to this interest include: increase in spiritual interests in the west, the search for solutions to modern day societal ills, the influence of holistic philosophies, shifts in paradigms, and discourse that influence professions and disciplines which includes education. Crossman points out that the rise of secular spirituality in the West is attributed to the western individualistic society motivated by personal preference. Crossman states that the “recent reception to educational spiritual development is a reaction against materialism, drug addition, racism and a gamut of social and family ills” (p. 505). In the holistic approach the emphasis is on the importance of broader human factors which is where Eastern religions are able to offer “insight into interconnectedness and pluralism” (p. 506). Crossman claims that spirituality has emerged as a “metaphysical scientific document” (p. 507). Crossman also claims that diverse university disciplines and preferences in the West have “implemented spiritually inclusive curricula or are developing an underpinning knowledge with these kinds of changes in mind” (p. 507).

Forman (2004) claims “there has never before been an era in which every single major religious tradition is readily available to any educated person” (p. 122). He discusses the
hundreds of books that can be found in all major bookstores on every major religion and spiritual school. He calls this a “smorgasbord of religions” implying a vast array from which to choose.

Bartlett (2005) reports on a national study of 112,232 freshmen who were asked about their religious practices. He states that the 69% of first-year students say their beliefs provide guidance. The remaining students describe themselves as doubting, seeking, or conflicted. According to Bartlett, there was a strong correlation between religious beliefs and views on political issues. He further states that although students were not always sure of what they believed, most of them were interested in big questions such as the meaning of life. The conclusions drawn from this study are that students are seeking answers to questions and the meaning of life, and college courses don’t always help provide the answers. Students feel as if the important life issues are being ignored in college. The implications here are that colleges need to do a better job of findings way to encourage students to explore spiritual and religious issues and help them to figure out what life is about and what matters to them.

Some disciplines which have implemented spiritually inclusive curricula are cognitive psychology, social work, medicine, teaching, management and business. Adult education is another field of study where spirituality has appeared in the past ten years.

Spirituality in Adult Education

The growing interest in spirituality in society has made its way to adult education. Most of the literature on spirituality in adult education is based on the authors’ experiences and anecdotal data. However, several themes have been identified: the rationale or need for spirituality; definition or what is means; and ways to integrate spirituality in teaching. Within the rationale for spirituality is the history including the social justice theme; spirituality is everywhere; holism; meaning making; and transformational learning.
**Rationale or Need for Spirituality**

One of the themes evident in a review of the literature is a discussion of the rationale or need for spirituality. This discussion is based on the history of adult education. Spiritual themes included are social justice; the assumption that spirituality is located everywhere; the generally held adult education perspective to address whole learning; adults seek meaning to questions about life and to what they are learning; addressing spirituality helps in addressing meaning making; and some adult educators suggest that spirituality helps facilitate transformational learning.

**History**

According to English, Fenwick and Parsons (2003), spirituality has long been a part of adult education and training practice. English (2005) provides snapshots of several movements in early education that shows the influence of the social gospel on adult education. These movements included Chautauqua, the Antigonish Movement, Mondragon, and the Shramadana Movement. English also reminds us of adult education leaders of the past who were motivated by their spiritual and often religious impulses. Among those leaders cited as having their thinking and writing influenced by spirituality are Basil Yeaxlee, Myles Horton, Paulo Freire, Ivan Illich, and Eduard Lindeman.

Chautauqua is associated with early spiritually based adult education activities and features spiritual study as a part of its adult education program (English, 2005). The Antigonish movement was founded on Christian principles and on the ideology that everyone should be free and masters of their own destiny. “The Antigonish Movement was a socioeconomic movement to organize miners and fishers in Eastern Nova Scotia into cooperatives and credit unions” (English, Fenwick & Parsons, 2003, p. 12). According to Bean (2000), Moses Coady and Jimmy
Tompkins began the community development-adult education approach. Coady’s vision of participation from the community later became known as the Antigonish Movement. Bean (2000) points out that Coady’s vision for this movement was both material and spiritual.

In Spain the Mondragon program was another successful movement which was founded by Father Jose’ Arrizmendiarrrietta in the mid 20th century as an extension of his Christian beliefs. The Mondragon movement is an example where workers share in organizing and administering an economy (English, 2005).

In Britain in 1925, Basil Yeaxlee promoted the spiritual dimension of adult education in his writing and professional work with the YMCA (English, Fenwick & Parsons, 2003; English, 2005). Yeaxlee was an early adult educator influenced by the social gospel along with many others such as Miles Coady and Edward Lindeman (English, 2005).

According to English, in Brazil, Paulo Freire, who is one of the most revered educators in the 20th century, also had strong cultural and religious roots but saw his work as being spiritual. Lauzon (2005) claims that the work of Freire’s publication *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

Began the shift of the practice of adult education and provides the foundations for the rise in the 1980s of critical pedagogy, a pedagogy that once again embodied a belief that adult education could be a vehicle for social transformation, particularly for those who exist on the margins of society. (p. 4)

A contemporary of Freire, Ivan Illich was another “influential adult educator and critic of the conventional school system and in fact of most systems and institutions in society” (English, 2005, p. 1185). Illich had a major impact “on the importance of education for social change and spirituality” (English, p. 1185).
Eduard Lindeman was another early adult educator who was involved with Christian audiences and social gospel themes. Fisher (1989) reported on Eduard Lindeman’s ideas about the social gospel movement. Themes identified are a collective sense of morality and an active and experimental approach to social change. In analyzing historical documents by Lindeman and Rauschenbush, Fisher found that the documents reveal a strong sense of moral concern by social gospel proponents. Fisher claims:

Social gospel was the name given to a movement which had developed in the latter decades of the nineteenth century out of dissatisfaction with the current emphases of orthodox theology which ignored the social ills attendant to urban, economic, and industrial problems in American society. (p. 139)

Lindeman’s views represented a secular version of the social gospel. He felt that “individual piety must be combined with social morality in order to achieve the ideal social order” (p. 140).

English, Fenwick and Parsons (2003) claim that adult education should embrace its spiritual roots. “Historically, adult educators and trainers were interested in change and improvement in society as part of the common good and as part of one’s social and spiritual responsibility” (p. 12)

According to English (2005), education for social change and education for spiritual growth have always been part of the purpose of adult education. In providing the groundwork for social change and spiritual growth, English addresses the description of spirituality and definitions. She cites English and Gillen (2000), Berry (1988), Tisdell (2003), Daloz, Keen, Keen and Parks (1996). English has determined from the works of these authors that they are identifying spirituality as public or secular spirituality. This public spirituality is focusing on awareness of something greater than ourselves and represents more of a secular spirituality
which may or may not be associated with organized religion. English notes that these authors conducted qualitative research which determined that there are links between social change and spirituality in adult education.

Further, English (2005) asserts that the time is now “ripe for adult educators to contribute to a wide variety of purposes and causes, yet to establish some core concerns and commitments” (p. 1188). She argues that accepting the twofold purpose of spirituality and social change will “move adult educators closer to reconciling the personal and collective divide in our field” (p. 1187). According to English, the acceptance of these two purposes of spiritual and social change will result in new ways to “reconcile personal and collective responsibility” (p. 1187).

A more recent study that reflects the importance of spirituality and social change, particularly social justice, was conducted by Tisdell (2002). She examined the spiritual development of a multicultural group of women adult educators who are teaching for social justice and are motivated to do so because of their spiritual commitments.

Tisdell’s (2002) qualitative research study is informed conceptually by a call for more integrative perspectives in adult development and greater attention to how the sociocultural context informs adult development. This particular study was informed by a poststructural feminist research theoretical framework that suggests that the positionality (race, gender, class, sexual orientation) of researchers, teachers, and students affects how they gather and access data and how they construct and view knowledge. Within the research frame, the author clarifies her biases in that she identifies the assumption that her positionality as a White, middle-class, woman who grew up Catholic was a factor that affected the data collection and analysis processes.
Because the Tisdell study (2002) was about a multicultural group of women adult educators, more than half of the 16 participants of the study were women of color. The criteria for the sample were that all participants be women adult educators for social change working either in higher education or as community activists, be educated in a specific religious tradition as a child, and note that their adult spirituality strongly motivated them to do their social justice work. Many of them are informed by the critical, feminist, or antiracist education literature.

The Tisdell (2002) study focused on participants’ definitions of spirituality, the sharing of three significant spiritual experiences, how their spirituality has changed over the years, how it motivates and informs their adult education practices, and how it relates to their cultural backgrounds. All of the women had personal experiences of marginalization based on race, ethnicity or sexual orientation. For the participants in the study, “spirituality was about experiences of a perceived higher power or a Lifeforce, about an understanding of the wholeness of all of creation, about making ultimate meaning out of one’s life purpose” (p. 138). Tisdell concludes that these experiences have contributed to their interest in teaching across these types of borders and relates to the overlapping of spiritual development discussed by participants.

While Tisdell conducted a study of adult educators focusing on social justice, Tisdell and Tolliver (2001, 2002) focused on the cultural dimension within spirituality. They draw a connection between the two and create a set of assumptions from which to teach for social transformation and cultural relevance. Tolliver and Tisdell (2002) make several assumptions about the meaning of the word spirituality based on the literature and their experiences. The purpose of their paper is to “briefly review and analyze the literature of several different disciplinary perspectives to help us understand the relationships between cultural identity, spirituality, sociopolitical development and how these interactions can inform our engagement in
transformative educational practices” (p. 391). Their first assumption is their definition of spirituality which they relate to: 1) a connection to a Lifeforce, 2) a sense of wholeness and interconnectedness of all things, 3) meaning making, 4) development of one’s identity, 5) how people construct knowledge, and 6) that spiritual experiences often happen by surprise. The second assumption is that people “are more likely to have transformed experience if they are engaged on three levels of their individuality: the cognitive, the affective, and the symbolic or spiritual” (p. 13). The third assumption is that in order for learning to be “transformational and culturally relevant, people need to be engaged in learning that pays attention to the sociocultural aspects of their being, particularly in relation to issues of race, gender, class and culture” (p. 14). The fourth assumption is that instructors need to bring their authentic selves to the learning environment and be grounded in their own cultural identity. Their meaning of authentic self has to do with the sharing of their cultural and ethnic background. For example, Elizabeth Tisdell is white, Irish-Catholic and Derise Tolliver is of African descent. Tisdell and Tolliver emphasize that what is needed is a blend and examination of culture and spiritual self for transformative learning.

*Spirituality is Everywhere*

Another reason often used to support the importance of spirituality and adult education is the claim that spirituality is everywhere—even in the classroom. Palmer (199) is an example of one author who makes the claim “the spiritual is always present in public education whether we acknowledge it or not” (p. 8). He further states that spiritual questions are embedded in every discipline from health to history to English. “As long as we take ourselves into the classroom, we take our spirituality with us!” (Palmer, 1999, p. 10). Tisdell (2003) has a similar view,
“people’s spirituality is always present (though usually unacknowledged) in the learning environment” (p. 31).

Zinn (1997) acknowledges that spirituality is everywhere though she does so indirectly. She states:

There is a widespread concern that our social order may be in a state of moral decline and disrepair. Yet in the midst of it all, the human spirit must still be nourished and nurtured, uplifted and sustained. That is where spirituality comes into the picture. And the adult learners in our classes are just as likely to be interested in spirituality as are adults in the general population. (p. 29)

Hart and Holton (1993) affirm the position that spirituality is everywhere. There is “a spiritual dimension which is always present in educational situations” (p. 238). Also in agreement with this position, Vogel (2000) claims that “persons should never feel that they need to check their faith and their religious commitments and questions at any door: church classroom, work, or home” (p. 19).

In their findings on adult educators and learners, Courtenay and Milton (2004) add to the position that spirituality is everywhere in the rationale for addressing spirituality in adult education. They assume that spirituality is in the learning experience “whether it’s acknowledged or not” (p. 103).

*Holism*

The concept of teaching for the whole person is a third reason which supports addressing spirituality in adult education. Heron’s work is often referenced by adult education scholars who call for a more holistic approach to adult education. Heron (1992) states that learning involves the whole person either by inclusion or by default. Heron further states that “either all of us is..."
explicitly involved in the learning process, or only part of us is explicitly involved and what is excluded can be negatively influential, undermining either the content or the process” (p. 223).

Heron (1992) identifies four levels of student holism.

The first involves only the four individuating modes of emotion, imagery, discrimination and action: this is limited holism at the egoic level. The second level combines the individuating and participatory modes in particular creative classroom activities where the focus is on the content of some subject matter. The third level involves the individuating and participatory modes in more person-centered concerns: personal development, interpersonal skills, professional work, group and team work, organizational structures, wider social, ecological and planetary commitments. The fourth level includes the second and third levels, integrated with development in psychic and spiritual dimensions. (p. 224)

Heron claims that because there are four kinds of knowledge, there are four kinds of learning which he identifies as experiential, presentational, propositional and practical. Heron describes the four kinds of learning as follows:

   Experiential learning is acquiring knowledge of being and beings through empathic resonance, felt participation. Imaginal learning is acquiring knowledge of the patterning of experience through the exercise of intuition, imagination and perception.

Propositional learning is acquiring knowledge stated in propositions through the exercise of the intellect. And practical learning is acquiring knowledge of how to do something through the practice of the particular skill in question. (p. 224)

Heron provides four classes of media [instruments or means of learning] of holistic ego learning which correspond to the four stages of learning cycle. Heron aligns music and
celebration with the affective-imaginial modes; presentations with the imaginal-conceptual modes; propositions with the conceptual-practical modes; and activities with the practical-affective modes. Heron suggests playing music during breaks or before and after sessions to facilitate relaxation and emotional enjoyment and as a background to the presentation of some types of material. Heron suggests using presentations so that material to be learned can be directly grasped by the imaginal mind prior to explicit verbal and intellectual understanding. The material can be spoken aloud using different emotional tones and inflections, volume, pitch and timber and paying attention to pauses and silences. In the propositional class of media, statements are used which are made in words or numbers that yield the explicit intellectual and conceptual content of the material to be learned. In the fourth class of media, activities are used so that student pairs can practice and rehearse learning. The types of practice include simulations, role-playing, games, projects and fieldwork.

Yorks and Kasl (2002) promote the theoretical work of John Heron whom they assert illustrates that when experience is conceptualized from a phenomenological perspective, the foundational role of affect becomes clear. They claim this is particularly relevant for learning events where groups of learners bring highly diverse, lived experience to the learning setting.

Yorks and Kasl argue that the influence of American pragmatism contributes to a cultural bias favoring reflective discourse and thereby a theoretical inattention to the role of affect. They feel that taking a phenomenological perspective suggests how adult learning strategies can be linked to a group habit of being what they call learning-within relationship. Yorks and Kasl describe this learning-within relationship phenomenon as “a process in which persons strive to become engaged with both their own whole-person knowing and the whole-person knowing of their fellow learners” (p. 185).
Heron (1992) describes the psyche as having four primary modes of functioning that “are all in play to some degree at all times in waking life” (p. 14). These four modes of psyche are the affective, imaginal, conceptual, and practical which gives rise to Heron’s four ways of knowing: experiential, presentational, propositional, and practical.

Yorks and Kasl provide a lens with which to get a better understanding of Heron’s work. Although Yorks and Kasl do not use the word spiritual in their understanding of John Heron’s work, they assert that when experiences are conceptualized from phenomenological perspective the foundational role of affect becomes clear. By affect, they are referring to non-rational ways of learning; spirituality is included in the category of non-rational ways of knowing or learning. Yorks and Kasl affirm from their experience that “fostering the artful interdependence of four ways of knowing--experiential, presentational, propositional, and practical--supports learners as whole persons and ultimately supports their capacity to learn deeply” (p. 185). They continue:

When learners begin with expressive processes, they often are made aware of emotions that they are bringing to the learning encounter. With increased awareness, learners are more able to create congruence between their affective states and their conceptual sense-making, thus bringing more authentic participation to propositional knowing and discourse. (p. 187)

Yorks and Kasl suggest that adult educators routinely develop strategies that provide pathways into the felt knowing of the self and others. “These pathways may include drawing, dance, storytelling, and other forms of expression, which are frequently used as a part of experiential learning” (p. 187).

Although adult educators have long recognized that affect plays an important role in learning, its role has been undertheorized. In part, this reflects a strong cultural bias in
English-speaking society for subordinating feeling and emotion to rational, propositional thought and discourse. One consequence of this undertheorizing is the tendency for writers in adult education to conceptualize rational discourse and the affective as separate and distinct from one another, even while acknowledging that people learn wholistically. Another consequence of this undertheorizing is a lack of guidance to educators for working with the affective domain in balance with other domains of knowing. (p. 189)

Furthering the notion of a holistic approach to teaching adults, English and Gillen (2000) conclude that:

Adult educators have paid a great deal of attention to the aesthetic, social, emotional, physical, intellectual, and other aspects of education but have neglected the equally important spiritual dimension. We argue that to omit the spiritual dimension is to ignore the importance of a holistic approach to adult learning as well as the complexity of the adult learner. (p. 2)

Fenwick and English (2004) also affirm the importance of holistic approaches to education. They offer two prominent themes which they have identified as the influence of spiritual within adult education literature. The first theme is the historic influence which is predominately North American and Christian. The second theme is the contemporary shift to incorporate non-religious spirituality as a part of holistic educational practice. The second theme accepts spirituality as a human impulse without reference to any particular ideology or doctrinal beliefs beyond those of the sharing of participants’ religious backgrounds.
**Spirituality as Meaning Making**

The rationale or need for spirituality is also evident in what adult educators refer to as meaning making for adult learners. Tisdell (2001) identified the key reasons for obtaining an understanding of how spirituality affects learning:

Spirituality is one of the ways people construct knowledge and meaning. It works in consort with the affective, the rational or cognitive, and the unconscious and symbolic domains. To ignore it, particularly in how it relates to teaching for personal and social transformation, is to ignore an important aspect of human experience and avenue of learning and meaning-making. This is why spirituality is important to the work of adult learning. (p. 3)

Lauzon (2005) claims that “contemporary spirituality is grounded in an attempt to make sense of the world, to create meaning in order to escape our alienated condition” (p. 2).

Likewise, English (2000) claims that “the opportunity to find relevance and meaning, to be part of something beyond ourselves, is profoundly spiritual” (p. 30). English, Fenwick, and Parsons (2003) state that “spirituality may indeed be about finding meaning in relationships or work itself, or in oneself” (p. 7).

One of the outcomes which emerged in a study conducted by Courtenay and Milton (2004) is that “adult educators and learners are in agreement that the goal of integrating spirituality in adult education is to create an environment that provides an opportunity for learners to address questions about meaning and purpose in life” (p. 105).

**Transformational Learning**

The fourth component of the rationale for integrating spirituality into adult education is the suggestion that spirituality facilitates transformational learning. Even though there do not
appear to be any studies that directly link transformational learning and spirituality, there are some studies which identify spirituality as being important to transformational learning. Taylor (1995) in his review of empirical studies on transformational learning, discovered studies which identified the significance of whole person learning including the spiritual dimension. However, in his most recent review of the literature, spirituality is not identified as a part of fostering learning (Taylor, 1995). According to Taylor, none of the studies conducted between 1999-2005 identify spirituality as a factor in fostering learning. However, in 1998, McDonald discovered that spirituality was an important factor in the transformational experience of ethical vegans. McDonald summarizes these experiences as follows:

As participants reflected on their learning process during the interviews, they described something like a spiritual praxis as the invisible thread woven throughout their experience. This spirituality was described as a moral value, as a feeling of unity and connectedness, as finding themselves, as being open-minded, or as a gift from God. It was manifested in a praxis that respects all life and shows compassion for all living things. (p. 115)

Although not offering empirical evidence to support the importance of spirituality in transformational learning, Tisdell and Tolliver (2001) suggest that spirituality may facilitate transformational learning. For example, Tisdell and Tolliver (2001) claim:

that there is a place for spirituality in culturally relevant and transformative adult education efforts. By engaging learners on the personal, cultural, structural, political, and the spiritual levels, we believe there is greater chance that education is transformed both personally and collectively, both for learners and educators. (p. 14)
Definitions of Spirituality

A second theme that is evident in adult education is in the definition of spirituality. In order to gain a perspective on the definition of spirituality, definitions from adult education literature are explored. English, Fenwick and Parsons (2003) provide the following definitions for spirituality:

The etymology of the word spirit can be traced to the Latin word *spiritus*, which means breath. The word in Greek, *pneuma*, means air or wind. The word in Hebrew is *ruach* or spit. The word in Chinese is *ch‘i* or vitality-spirit. These words obviously sound different, but they have one essential commonality. In every language, the notion of spirit implicitly carries with it the idea that spirit is something we cannot live without. Our spirit fills our being, and is all of us. It is our life, our sustenance. (p. 81)

English and Gillen (2000) define spirituality as awareness of something greater than ourselves, a sense that we are connected to all human beings and to all of creation.

Hart and Holton (1993) describe spirituality “as a practice, as a way of life” with “insights growing out of experience” (p. 241). Hart and Houlton claim that the spiritual “suffuses a person’s entire existence within the world, integrating not only her entire organism in a unified system, but integrating her into the world as a whole” (p. 241).

Mackerarcher (2004) understands spirit and spirituality “to be the experience of feeling expanded beyond the normal limits of my body and mind, of feeling connected to aspects of the external world that are of value to me—to other, to the earth, and to a greater cosmic being” (p. 172).
Tolliver and Tisdell (2002) use the following definition of spirituality:

First, “spirituality is an aware honoring of the Life-force that’s happening through everything (from Riddle, cited in Tisdell, 2000).” Second, given that this Life-force is everywhere, people’s spirituality is always present (though usually unacknowledged) in the learning environment. Third, spirituality is about how people make meaning, and about experiences that get at the wholeness and interconnectedness of all Life. Fourth, spirituality is about how people construct knowledge through largely unconscious and symbolic processes, often cultural, manifested in such things as image, symbol, music. Fifth, spirituality invites people into their own authenticity. Sixth, spirituality and religion are NOT [emphasis in the original] the same, although for many people they are inter-related. And, finally, spiritual experiences generally happen by surprise. (p. 391)

In order to show that one may be spiritual without being religious and religious without being spiritual, some literature reviews compare meanings of religious and spirituality.

Zinnbauer, Pargament, Cole, Rye, Butter et al. (1997) examine traditional and modern psychological characterizations of religiousness and spirituality. They completed a study with a sample of 346 individuals drawn from a wide range of religious backgrounds. A content analysis of participants’ definitions was performed.

There were three conclusions from the study. The first conclusion was that the two terms represent different concepts. Religiousness means to be associated with “higher levels of authoritarianism, religious orthodoxy, intrinsic religion, parental religious attendance, self-righteousness, and church attendance” (Zinnbauer, Pargament, Cole, Rye, Butter et al., 1997, p. 561). Spirituality was associated with “mystical experiences, New Age beliefs and practices” (Zinnbauer, Pargament, Cole, Rye, Butter et al., 1997, p. 561).
The second conclusion was that the concepts are not fully independent. Both were associated with prayer, relate to church attendance and religion and incorporated traditional concepts of the sacred such as God or Christ. The third conclusion was that there were variations in the definition of the terms in relation to the individuals within the group. Those in the New Age group, for example, rated themselves as highly spiritual but not very religious. The groups who were in nursing homes or who were Roman Catholics rated themselves as moderately spiritual and religious. The study helps to give new definitions and understanding of how different groups define themselves in terms of religiousness and spirituality.

Courtenay and Milton (2004) conducted a qualitative study of 10 adult instructors and 10 adult learners with teaching experience or participation in higher education classes. The purpose of the study was to understand the role of spirituality in adult education from the perspective of the adult instructor and the adult learner. The learners were either participating in classes for a degree or continuing education credit. Their primary interest was in instructors who view spirituality as “important in their teaching and learners who believed that spirituality had a place in the adult classroom” (p. 101). They conducted semi-structured interviews with individual participants in an office or by telephone.

Since they were only able to interview four educators and seven adult learners at the time they presented their findings, they report that the findings are preliminary. However, they identified three components of spirituality which combined together served as a definition of spirituality. The three components are sense of connectedness, search for meaning, and awareness of a transcendent force.
Courtenay and Milton (2004) defined spirituality as follows:

The definitions of spirituality that flowed from these experiences embodied some essential components for both, including a feeling of interconnectedness and a search for meaning and purpose in life. An awareness of a transcendent force was more evident among the educators, although the learners spoke about a dynamic force as a part of their spirituality. (p. 102)

The literature provides a variety of definitions beginning with the meaning of “breath” provided by English, Fenwick and Parsons (2003) to more applicable definitions. Spirit can be synonymous with religion or completely different (Tolliver & Tisdell, 2002; Zinnbauer, et al., 2001). Spirituality can be an awareness of something greater (English & Gillen, 2000); a sense of connection (Courtney & Milton, 2004; English & Gillen, 2000; Mackerarcher, 2004; Tolliver & Tisdell, 2002;) a way of life (Hart & Holton, 1993); honoring of lifeforce or transcendent force (Courtney & Milton, 2004; Tolliver, & Tisdell, 2002); always present (Tolliver & Tisdell, 2002); and how people make meaning (Courtenay & Milton, 2004; Tolliver & Tisdell, 2002).

*Integrating Spirituality into Adult Education*

The third theme is integrating spirituality into adult education. Integrating spirituality into adult education is acknowledgment of the spiritual in each learner and incorporating learning experiences which will nurture their spirit in learning situations. Adult educators (English, Fenwick & Parsons, 2003; English & Gillen, 2000; Gillen & English, 2000; Lauzon, 2001) provide suggestions for integrating spirituality into the adult education classroom. These suggestions range from a general view of integrating spirituality into adult education classrooms to specific techniques for use in the adult education classroom.
Gillen and English (2000) offer this view as a general starting point of looking at the integration of spirituality into adult learning. They claim that responding to learners’ spiritual needs does not demand “any additional preparation or require any supernatural gift or teaching ability” (p. 88). They simply conclude that “…spirituality requires adult educators to challenge themselves continuously, to engage in a critically reflective practice that encourages the questioning of assumptions and beliefs, and to listen carefully to the needs of the learners” (p. 88).

Vella (2000) states that “the spiritual dimensions of adult education are the human dimensions, and attention to these dimensions makes for excellent, effective adult learning” (p. 7). Vella advocates recognizing adult learners as the decision makers in their own learning which involves a moral stance from the teacher and the learners. “Each learning event is a moment of spiritual development in which people practice being what they are—Subjects of their own lives and learning” (p. 8).

Fenwick and English (2004) offer a framework that adult educators are encouraged to consider if they intend to integrate spirituality into adult learning. The framework consists of eight dimensions and reflects the complexity of integrating spirituality into adult education. There should be some distinctions made amongst spiritual bases, and they share their view of eight dimensions which they claim is a beginning step to comparing spiritual bases. These eight dimensions reflect complexity in the way they deal with spirituality. The implication is that if one is considering incorporating spirituality, then these eight dimensions must be considered. These dimensions are: 1) life and death; 2) soul and self; 3) cosmology; 4) knowledge; 5) the ‘way’; 6) focus; 7) practices of spirituality and the role of others; and 8) responses.
The life and death theme means the meaning of life on earth or beyond. The soul and self theme means the nature of the spirit. The cosmology theme refers to the nature of the spiritual universe including higher power. The knowledge theme refers to the nature of truth and includes the power of absolute truth, the presence of divine knowledge, and the role of human intellect in seeking spiritual knowledge. The way refers to the nature of the spiritual journey or the search. The focus theme refers to the purpose of spiritual seeking. The focus could be an inner journey of healing, peace, and exalting of the self or an outward journey of servanthood and integrating spiritual perspective in everyday life. The theme of the practice of spirituality and the role of others refers to various practices such as meditating, ritual, divine revelation, theological discipline, service, community as well as many others. The theme of responses refers to the action and application arising from spiritual pursuits. This may involve social transformation or conversion of others.

In addition to the eight dimensions, Fenwick and English developed three theoretical implications for adult educators who are considering the integration of spirituality into their teaching:

1. First is that certain themes of spirituality would appear to offer a natural alignment with concerns of adult education. Interest in understanding the nature of self/selves and the learning journey embodied in life-course development are also prominent in theological literature.

2. Second is that meaningful references to the spiritual cannot be divorced from clear identification of the specific position taken in terms of belief about the nature of spirit, life, universe and ‘right’ expression.
3. Third is that while recognition of diversity and discussions of ecumenical possibilities persist in theological literature, the problem of how to ethically enact one’s spirituality in public spaces in a highly pluralistic world remains unresolved. (pp. 58-59)

Fenwick and English urge adult educators to start by examining their own biographies and to reconcile the influence of religious upbringing with current spiritual preferences. They also state that it is important to be engaged in critical thinking. Finally, they urge a balance of the rational with the intuitive and spiritual.

Lauzon (2001) affirms that adult educators should create a safe environment for spiritual learning. Lauzon claims that educators must first know their own story and create a space for their own learning. Educators can then create a space for learners to explore and express their spirituality. This space must be one in which learners can share experiences but which also allows for quiet moments alone for reflection and expression. Some students may want to share stories, thoughts and reflections.

In her book on spirituality and cultural relevance, Tisdell (2003) maintains that educators should create an environment “where people can bring their whole selves into the learning environment and acknowledge the powerful ways they create meaning through their cultural, symbolic, and spiritual experience, as well as through the cognitive” (p. 42).

English, Fenwick and Parsons (2003) suggest that adult educators and trainers “move from a stance of tolerating to a stance of authentically respecting what another person has to say and what that person chooses to do” (p. 78). English et al. also suggest that courtesy is not sufficient. Adult educators and trainers should consider thinking of their practice “in terms of hospitality: a spirit of welcoming and inviting others into our spaces” (p. 78).
The specific techniques for integrating spirituality and adult education offered by English, Fenwick and Parsons (2003) are underpinned by four key beliefs: 1) spirituality is an integral part of the fabric of adult education and training; 2) spiritual practices can be fostered; 3) spirituality challenges the work of the educator and trainer; and 4) spirituality has value for workplace education. Some ways they suggest educators can cultivate their own spirituality is through purposeful reflection, journal writing, reflective reading, artwork, music, and body movement among other practices.

Complementing the framework for integrating spirituality into adult education provided by Fenwick and English is a list of questions that adult educators can use to examine the integration of spirituality into their education practice (English, 2001). These questions include:

- Do I challenge learners to interpret meaning for their lives?
- Do I provide time periods for reflection and inner exploration?
- Does my teaching encourage learners to find the spiritual dimensions of everyday life?
- Do I integrate religion, literature, poetry, art, and music into my teaching, and help learners search for the meaning and value that they contain?
- Do I spend time fostering my own spiritual life?
- Do I engage students as subjects (not objects) of their own learning? (p. 2)

Dirkx (2001) feels that subject matter can evoke personal responses among adult learners which can then manifest in distinctive emotional reactions. One way that Dirkx recommends for learners to keep track of their relationship with the subject matter is through the use of personal journals. He suggests to teachers that they should help learners recognize and name the emotions and feelings associated with their learning experiences. The journals can be used to describe
these emotions and what comes to mind when they recall the emotion. As the learners reflect on the emotion, then they can write whatever they associate with the emotion. Dirkx also suggests drawing or painting as other ways for learners to connect to the learning. Dirkx cautions teachers to first work with this method in their own lives before they use it with their students and incorporate this method into their teaching once they feel comfortable with the process. Learners should not feel as though they have to participate if they are not interested.

In summary, the literature provides suggestions for the integration of spirituality into the adult education classroom from the general to the specific. Educators should practice critical reflection and listen to their learners’ needs (Gillen & English, 2000). Vella (2000) urges us to remember that learners are decision makers in their learning. Fenwick and English (2004) provide a framework of eight dimensions for adult educators to consider using. In addition Fenwick and English (2004) also provide three theoretical implications for adult educators to consider. Fenwick and English also encourage critical thinking and a balance of the intuitive, rational and spiritual.

Lauzon (2001) asks educators to create a safe environment for spiritual learning. English, Fenwick and Parsons (2003) suggest that educators should respect the choices of others and create a welcoming and inviting space. English (2001) provides a set of questions that educators can use to examine integration of spirituality into their own practice.

Fenwick, English, and Parsons (2003) suggest several ways for educators to cultivate their own spirituality which includes reflection, journal writing, reflective reading, artwork, music, and body movement. Dirkx (2001) encourages learners to keep journals to describe emotions and feelings, or to draw or write in order to connect to the learning. In addition, he encourages educators to first use these method in their own lives.
Despite the fact that some adult educators have given attention to spirituality on these three themes, there is very little evidence that helps us understand the importance of spirituality in adult learning from the perspective of the adult learner. There is one adult education learning context that provides an opportunity for examining the interaction between spirituality and adult education and that is the area of nursing education.

**Spirituality in Nursing Education**

Nursing is one discipline which includes spiritual care as an important aspect of nursing care. The spiritual aspect of nursing care can be traced to Florence Nightingale. According to Burkhardt and Nagai-Jacobson (2002), Nightingale saw no conflict between spirituality and science. Because spirituality is seen as an integral part of nursing, it is important for educators to have knowledge about how nursing students use their spirituality in the learning environment.

A review of the literature in nursing education indicates that numerous subjects have been investigated by scholars with respect to spirituality. Like the literature on spirituality in adult education, the literature on spirituality in nursing has little empirical basis. Most of the literature is drawn from experience of the scholars or through anecdotal information. The spirituality themes that are reported with some frequency in the nursing education literature are: caring and spirituality in nursing, spirituality in the preparation of nurses, and the effects of spirituality on patient recovery and wellness.

**Caring and Spirituality in Nursing Education**

Nurses and nurse educators acknowledge that caring and spirituality are important in addressing spiritual needs of patients in order to provide holistic care. Some articles and studies show how caring and spirituality in nursing can be approached. This information is important for nurse educators in preparation of their students for the nursing profession.
Ross (1994) claims that the function of nursing is “to promote health, to prevent illness, to restore health and to alleviate suffering” (p. 441). Ross states that spiritual care is a natural part of nursing care. She reviewed the literature to explore the role of spiritual care in nursing, and developed a proposed framework for spiritual care based upon her review. Incorporated within this framework is an assessment of the patient’s spiritual needs and a plan for giving spiritual care during the nursing process.

Burkhardt and Nagai-Jacobson (2004) claim that healing and spirituality are intimately connected. They state that “healing is essentially a spiritual process that attends to the wholeness of a person” (p. 25). Burkhardt and Nagai-Jackson draw strongly upon the work of Florence Nightingale and claim that “spiritual life was an ever present reality for Florence Nightingale” (p. 6).

Watson and Foster (2003) developed a model called the Attending Nursing Caring Model which uses Watson’s theory of human caring as a guide. Watson and Foster claim that nurses today are torn between the human caring model which attracted them to nursing and the demands of healthcare institutions on their time. According to Watson and Foster, nurses who are not allowed to practice in a caring context become hardened and worn-down. They also claim that there is a shifting trend towards “managed care environment, integrated with a caring-healing emphasis which holds promise for transforming both practices and settings” (p. 361).

Watson (2005) developed the Theory of Human Caring while teaching at the University of Colorado. Her theory emerged from her own views of nursing along with her doctoral studies in clinical and social psychology. Watson developed ten carative factors which she identifies as the current terminology for the core of nursing. These carative factors as developed in 1979 are:

- Formation of a humanistic-altruistic system of values;
• Instillation of faith-hope;
• Cultivation of sensitivity to one’s self and to others;
• Development of a helping-trusting, human caring relationship
• Promotion and acceptance of the expression of positive and negative feelings;
• Systematic use of a creative problem-solving process;
• Promotion of transpersonal teaching-learning;
• Provision for a supportive, protective, and/or corrective mental, physical, societal, spiritual environment;
• Assistance with gratification of human needs;
• Allowance for existential-phenomenological-spiritual forces. (p. 2)

Watson changed some of her terminology to reflect her more recent views. The original theory was developed in 1979.

While "carative factors" are still the current terminology for the "core" of nursing, providing a structure for the initial work, the term "factor" is too stagnant for my sensibilities today. I offer another concept today that is more in keeping with my own evolution and future directions for the "theory". I offer now the concept of "clinical caritas" and "caritas processes" as consistent with a more fluid and contemporary movement with these ideas and my expanding directions. (p. 4)

This model ties back to Nightingale and the “deep sense of commitment and covenantal ethic of human service; cherishing our phenomena, our subject matter, and those we serve” (p. 4).

Tanyi (2002) promotes the inclusion of the spiritual into the nursing discipline to increase nurses’ knowledge, understanding, and provision of spiritual care. Tanyi states:
Understanding the spiritual dimension of human experience is paramount to nursing, because nursing is a practice-based discipline interested in human concerns. Although it is relevant for nurses to provide spiritual care, research has suggested that nurses encounter many barriers providing this care, such as insufficient academic preparation, lack of postacademic training, inadequate time and staffing, and lack of privacy to counsel patients (Narayanasamy 1993, McSherry 1998). Spiritual care is also hindered by some nurses’ perception that spiritual care is a religious issue best addressed by hospital chaplains (Narayanasamy 1993, Narayanasamy & Owens 2001). (p. 506)

**Spirituality in the Preparation of Nurses**

There are some educators and trainers of medical professionals who address spirituality in nursing education courses. For example, Hoover (2002) conducted a study to evaluate the personal and professional impact of undertaking a 15-week degree level module on nursing as human caring. The purpose of using the module was to develop students’ capacity to be caring nurses. The group used in the study was the 25 part-time students in a cohort in the nursing degree program in Wales. As will be shown in the discussion of the findings, spirituality is an important part of the findings.

Hoover used Watson’s transformative caring-healing model as the conceptual framework for the research to view the personal and professional impact of using an education module on human caring. Watson’s’ transpersonal caring-healing model is a holistic model for nursing which suggests that “a conscious intention to care potentiates healing and wholeness” (p. 80). “Transpersonal caring looks for deeper sources of inner healing that are defined more in spiritual terms than in relation to elimination of disuse” (p. 80). One of Hoover’s conclusions serves as an example of what she means. This particular conclusion is that “spirituality was illuminated
for the students as an important means of developing both themselves and their caring practices’’ (p. 79). Hoover used this model because it is a holistic model for nursing. Hoover claims that professionally the module resulted in an increased knowledge and understanding of caring theory and related concepts, a more holistic approach to care, and enhanced caring practice. Hoover claims that the use of Watson’s model was tentatively supported by the findings of the study. The findings of the study showed that students experienced increased spiritual awareness. The spiritual awareness of the students was characterized by: enhanced connecting relationships with self and others, finding purpose and meaning in life, and clarification of values.

Hoover concluded that spirituality was illuminated for the students as an important means of developing both themselves and their caring practices. Hoover further claims that the students experienced transformative learning. The reason for stating that the students experienced transformative learning was because both the person caring and the person being cared for are influenced by the relationships. The transformative caring aspect is referenced back to Watson’s model of transformative caring-healing.

According to Garner, McGuire, Snow, Gray, and Wright (2002), spirituality is defined as a person’s inner resources and values that guide and give meaning to life. They feel that spirituality is the inner core of the individual permeating all aspects of their life which includes physical, psychological and social. In addition, they feel that spirituality involves relationships with self, others and a Higher Power. They claim it is manifested through creative works, rituals, meaningful work, and religious practices. The definitions found in this work by Garner et al. parallels some of the definitions found in adult education literature. For example, some common themes from definitions include meaning and purpose in life, connectedness and transcendence.
Garner, et. al discuss nursing as holistic care. They refer back to Florence Nightingale who also felt it was important to care for the entire person. Garner, et. al conducted a study for the purpose of comparing spiritual attitudes and practices of nursing students at a private religious institute and a state institute. The authors surveyed approximately 150 undergraduate students from two baccalaureate schools of nursing.

One claim by Garner et al. is that educators need to understand students’ perspectives of spirituality in order to understand the links between spiritual care in practice and in education. The authors define spirituality as a person’s inner resources and values that guide and give meaning to life. Further rationale for the study was that patients suffer spiritual distress due to the result of illness and may not make the connection between spiritual distress and the illness. Therefore, patients may seek help from nurses regarding this problem.

The instruments used to survey the 150 students were the Spiritual Perspective Scale (SPS) and the Spiritual Care Inventory (SCI). The SPS is used to measure spiritual perspective and uses a 10-item, 6-point Likert Scale. The SCI scale is used to measure awareness of spiritual needs and practices of spiritual care. The design was cross-paired and descriptive comparative. All juniors and seniors at the two schools of nursing in Texas completed both survey instruments.

The findings show that the students at the religious school had higher scores on 4 of the 10 items and on the total score of the SPS than students at the state university. However, the study showed no significant differences in spiritual care preparedness between students in the two schools. Seventy-four percent of the total sample responded that they felt at least adequately prepared to provide spiritual care. Both schools provide instruction in spirituality and spiritual care. The authors claim that “the incorporation of spiritual care in the curricula does increase
preparedness of students to address spiritual needs of clients” (p. 371). Further, the authors claim that “nurse educators need to consider the importance of including spirituality as a core aspect in all nursing curricula” (p. 381).

Purnell, Walsh, and Milone (2004) report on a special course developed for oncology nursing students in a baccalaureate program. Purnell et al. wanted to enhance students’ knowing and appreciation of persons living with cancer. Various class activities were included to give students a rich variety of experiences. The different activities included were designed to engage students in groups of understanding of self, the patient, and the patients’ families. The 30 students selected for the study rank ordered class activities in order of their preference: cancer survivor interview, seminar on spirituality, and clinical inquiry project.

Carper’s Ways of Knowing was used as a framework for creating the course. Carpers’ Ways of Knowing includes empiric knowing, personal knowing, ethical knowing, and aesthetic knowing. Empiric knowing is the integration of general laws and theories for describing, explaining, and predicting nursing phenomena. Personal knowing is that in which the nurse strives to recognize the person as a whole person within an authentic personal relationship. Ethical knowing focuses on matters of obligation and what ought to be done and requires a broad understanding of different ethics frameworks in nursing situations in complex critical values. Aesthetic knowing refers to expression and requires abstraction and articulation—a practice of the whole with attention to specific particulars of a situation. The aesthetic mode integrates personal, empiric and ethical knowing and transforms and creates new meaning.

In the cancer interview which the students participated in for the course, each student was assigned the task of interviewing a cancer survivor. This gave students a better understanding of the patient as a whole person. The spiritual seminar focused on the students’ gaining a better
understanding of themselves as spiritual beings. The third activity of clinical inquiry gave the students a project on facing reality where they spent time in cancer-treatment centers, observed autopsies, and experienced a variety of clinical settings. The outcome of all activities was that the students developed sensitivity, readiness and an openness to encounter with seriously ill persons.

The combination of strategies appeared to help students address the topic of spirituality. Since several responded similarly to the questions, emphasizing religion and God, it was not surprising that the class on spirituality received a high ranking. Many students affirmed an understanding that humans are complex organisms with very basic needs that center on a spiritual being. (Purnell, Walsh & Milone, 2004, p. 307)

Callister, Bond, Matsumura, and Mangum (2004) also address spirituality and baccalaureate nursing programs in their article about integration of spirituality into a nursing program. In their review of literature in nursing education, they report that there is a paucity of literature on spirituality in nursing education. They suggest ways to integrate spirituality into baccalaureate nursing programs based on their courses at Brigham Young University College of Nursing in Provo, Utah.

The definition of holism as used by Callister, et al. (2004) is “the view that an integrated whole has a reality independent of and greater than the sum of its parts” (p. 160). Callister et al. provide journal entries from their students. The students described spiritual care during their nursing clinicals. The most frequent entries included

(1) establishing a trusting relationship;

(2) providing and facilitating a supportive spiritual environment;
(3) responding sensitively to the spiritual and cultural belief systems of patients and families;

(4) acknowledging the importance of “presence” or therapeutic use of self during spiritual distress;

(5) demonstrating caring; and

(6) integrating spirituality into the plan of care. (p. 163)

According to Callister et al., holistic nursing supports the connectedness of mind, body and spirit. They cite several reasons that nurses have been hesitant to provide spiritual care. These barriers include:

- failure to be in touch with one’s own spirituality;
- confusion about the nurse’s role in providing spiritual care;
- a lack of knowledge;
- hesitancy to invade a patient’s private “space”;
- fear of imposing their own philosophy or religious preference on patients who may be vulnerable or in crisis;
- and lack of time. (p. 160)

Callister et al. assert that it is critical that spirituality be addressed in nursing education and practice. At Brigham Young University College of Nursing there is an integrated curricular model which includes the threads of inquiry, practice, stewardship, service, and spirituality. The threads used were based on the American Association for Colleges of Nursing’s Essentials of Baccalaureate Education for Professional Nursing Practice as well as the Aims of a Brigham Young University Education.

The results of incorporating spirituality throughout the curriculum is that students demonstrate a growing awareness of their own spirituality which the authors assert is an essential foundation for providing spiritual care. Callister et al. state that “students learned to respect and
value those whose beliefs differed from their own, even those who did not believe in a Higher Power or were unwilling or unable to articulate their spiritual needs” (p. 165).

Based on the literature provided in this section, educators of health care professionals are more aware than ever of the need to address spirituality in the education and clinical practice of their students. As evidenced by the literature, the need for incorporating spirituality into education and training programs exists in other countries as well as the United States. Spirituality can serve as a framework for patients to help make sense of their illness. Because of the nature of nursing education, and the holistic view of nursing, nursing is a natural fit for incorporating spirituality.

Effects of Spirituality on Patient Recovery and Wellness

Some studies have identified the spiritual needs of patients. Dying patients, terminally ill patients, and cancer survivors are some of the groups for which spirituality needs have been identified. These studies are important because they acknowledge that spiritual care is important for the patients, but it is also important for nurses to provide spiritual care. In order for nurses to provide spiritual care, they must be concerned with care of the whole person. They must also be able to recognize their own spirituality so that they can acknowledge and assess their patients’ needs.

Hermann (2001) was an associate professor in a school of nursing at the time she conducted a study to identify dying patients’ definitions of spirituality and their spiritual needs. Hermann states that few studies have examined spiritual needs of patients, and she found none that were focused exclusively on spiritual needs of dying patients. Hermann claims that all aspects of an individual including mind, body and spirit should be addressed. Spirituality and religiosity have been used interchangeably in the past; however, today they are recognized as
having different meanings. Spirituality is considered a broader concept than religion and involves the quest for meaning and purpose in life and a sense of relatedness to a transcendent dimension. For some participants, religion may be a key component of spirituality, but for others, religion may not be important.

Hermann’s criteria for inclusion in the study was that patients had to be at least 18 years old, alert, able to communicate in English, terminally ill and willing to participate in an interview. Hospices nurses, social workers and chaplains identified patients who met the criteria. There were ten females and nine males. Three-fourths of the group was Caucasian, the majority were Protestant and the mean age was 72 years old. Interviews were conducted in one, 45-minute session. There were 14 participants who all agreed to be tape recorded. Hermann acknowledged the lack of cultural and religious diversity in this study.

Semi-structured interviews were used to interview the participants. Transcripts of interviews and field notes were analyzed to reduce data into codes and themes. Data were coded by extracted verbatim phrases used to describe spirituality and spiritual needs. Twenty-nine spiritual needs were identified and grouped into six themes. The six themes include need for religion, need for companionship, need for involvement and control, need to finish business, need to experience nature, and need for positive outlook.

Hermann concludes that the participants perceived spirituality as a broad concept that may or may not involve religion. Hermann concluded that providing spiritual care is a professional responsibility of nurses that must be fulfilled to enhance the quality of life of dying patients.

Ferrell, Smith, Juarez, and Melancon (2003) conducted a study to describe spirituality and meaning of illness in survivors of ovarian cancer. At the time of the study the authors were
researchers in a department of nursing and research education in a medical center. This ethnographic study was based on seven years of natural correspondence among survivors of ovarian cancer. The research relates to spirituality and the search for a meaning in the ovarian cancer experience.

The data consisted of 21,806 letters, cards, and e-mails received from survivors of ovarian cancer from 1994 through 2000. The Quality of Life (QOL) Ovarian Cancer instrument was used for analysis. This instrument was considered by the authors to be appropriate given the use of the model in cancer survivorship studies. Data were analyzed into tables according to the items within the four QOL domains. Ferrell et al. claim that “knowledge of the unique survivorship issues of patients with ovarian cancer can enable nurses to improve their care of these women” (p. 249). This also gives implications for ways to incorporate this instrument into nursing education courses.

Themes from the Ferrell et al. study were derived using content analysis of the letters, cards and e-mails. Themes included religious practices and experiences; spiritual activities and experiences; changes in religion and spirituality (both positive and negative); purpose in survivorship; hopefulness; and awareness of mortality. Ferrell et al. found that spirituality is linked to life meaning and that spirituality is an important component of deriving meaning from cancer. The findings indicated that spirituality was relied on heavily as a coping mechanism and a method of deriving meaning from the cancer experience.

Implications of the Ferrell et al. study are that nurses should recognize that attention to spirituality and meaning will be particularly important to women diagnosed with ovarian cancer because ovarian cancer symptoms are subtle and usually diagnosed in latter stages of the disease; the five-year survival rate is only 35%. Nurses should recognize that women may experience
distress related to a delayed diagnosis and may need psychosocial intervention to cope. The Ferrell et al. study is important for students in nursing education programs. The same types of needs are addressed in the next study by Narayansamy.

Narayanasamy (2004) at the time of the study was on faculty in a school of nursing in the United Kingdom. Narayanasamy conducted a study to capture the lived experience of spiritual coping mechanisms of chronically ill patients. Identifying spiritual needs of patients is important to nursing education and for the learners to be able to relate to their patients. The sample consisted of 15 chronically ill patients ranging from 23 to 80 years of age. There were ten men and five women. Nine participants were Christians, two were Hindus and the remaining four had no religious affiliations. The illnesses included leukemia, melia fibrosis, bowel cancer, chronic liver disease, Crohn’s disease, lung cancer, ulcerative colitis and melanoma.

Data from the interviews were collected, and the phenomenological method of analysis was used to determine categories and themes. Themes identified in the study were 1) reaching out to God in the belief and faith that help will be forthcoming; 2) feeling connected to God through prayer; 3) meaning and purpose; 4) strategy of privacy; and 5) connectedness with others. “The significance of the study is that it reveals that the lived experience of connectedness with God and others, and the search of meaning and purpose appear to be important spiritual coping mechanisms during chronic illness” (p. 116). The author claims the implications of the study are that patients benefit from nursing interventions which are responsive to their spiritual needs.

Davis (2005) conducted a phenomenological study to explore the expectations that patients have of nursing care, specifically spiritual care, and how patients describe good nursing care using the framework of humanistic caring. There are few studies regarding patients’
perceptions of spiritual care; therefore, it is important to understand what patients expect and how they perceive the spiritual care they receive. The reason for understanding patient’s perceptions is so that students can address mind and spirit as well as body according to the holistic discipline of nursing.

There were 11 participants in the study and the religious preferences included Protestant, Catholic, agnostic, atheist, and none. Davis notes that there were some limitations of the study because all respondents were Caucasian and predominantly from a Christian background.

This phenomenological study used “purposive sampling and conceptually driven sequential sampling” (p. 128). The participants were “informed that nursing is taught as a holistic science to include the body, mind and spirit” (p. 128). They were then asked four questions dealing with expectations about nursing care and spiritual care. Participants were interviewed, audio taped, and interviews were then transcribed. The data were analyzed using the Giorgi method of repetitive reflection. Davis does not explain this particular method; however, her findings show four themes that emerged, and she discusses answers to each research question.

The four themes were: good and bad nursing care, surveillance and competence expectations, spiritual care expectation and definition, and time constraints and the nursing shortage. In the theme of good and bad nursing care, participants differentiated good nursing care as being key to “overall hospitalization satisfaction and bad nursing care defined a negative experience” (p. 129). The theme of surveillance and competence expectations meant that participants expected “nurses to realize that being hospitalized is not routine for the patient” (p. 129). The theme of spiritual care expectations and definitions shows that the majority did not expect spiritual care from their nurses. The participants’ definitions of spiritual care were
consistent with the literature. Participants defined spiritual care in terms of religiosity, religious beliefs, and connection to a higher power. Other definitions included appreciating nature, music, taking time to determine what is meaningful to the patient, active listening, sharing self, connection to others, and connection to a higher power. Theme four of time constraints and the nursing shortage shows that participants were aware that nurses were busy and were surprised and grateful when nurses took time to establish a relationship with them.

Davis claims “the findings contribute to the understanding of the nurse’s role in providing spiritual care within a holistic nursing care framework” (p. 133) She states that “one of the most compelling conclusions reached with regard to spiritual care, based on the responses of study participants, is that existential spiritual care is the hallmark of good nursing care. Conversely, lack of existential spiritual care was definitive of bad nursing care” (p. 133). The author is using existential synonymously with psychological. Davis affirms that exploring the meaning of spiritual nursing care is “imperative in investigating quality nursing care practices and nursing education” (p. 133).

These studies show that the majority of patients have spiritual needs even though they may not be acknowledged or expressed in a religious context. Often patients do not know how to fully express their spiritual needs, and this is where the literature suggests that nurses in particular should conduct spiritual assessments to determine these needs.

**Rationale for Integrating Spirituality into Practical Nursing Curriculum**

Although the meaning of spirituality has been addressed in many disciplines, there is a lack of research which identifies the effects of spirituality on the learning process of students in nursing programs in technical colleges. Practical nursing instructors can benefit from knowing
how students’ spirituality affects their learning. This will be important in designing learning experiences for students which will build on the spiritual aspect of their learning.

Burkhardt and Nagai-Jacobson (1985) affirm that nurses concerned with the whole person must learn to recognize the expression of spiritual concerns and to respond to these expressions in ways that encourage wholeness.

Because persons do act out of their own beliefs and values, it is important that nurses recognize themselves as spiritual beings and answer for themselves the question of what gives their lives meaning. This self-awareness helps nurses acknowledge and appreciate clients’ beliefs and values as different from their own in many instances. (p. 193)

Burkhart and Ngai-Jacobson (2000) support spirituality as a part of holistic learning:

Within the holistic perspective, spirituality cannot be separate from our lives and experiences as physical, emotional, social, and thinking persons. Indeed, spirituality infuses all of who we are, and we come to know our spiritual selves as we embrace all the spheres of our being. Because spirituality permeates all of life, we can access our spiritual core through every sphere of our being. (p. 5)

Tanyi (2002) makes the following comments about spirituality:

Spirituality is a personal search for meaning and purpose in life, which may or may not be related to religion. It entails connection to self-chosen and or religious beliefs, values, and practices that give meaning to life, thereby inspiring and motivating individuals to achieve their optimal being. This connection brings faith, hope, peace, and empowerment. The results are joy, forgiveness of oneself and others, awareness and acceptance of hardship and mortality, a heightened sense of physical and emotional well-being, and the ability to transcend beyond the infirmities of existence. (p. 506)
Pesut (2003) explores how definitions of spirituality can inform the integration of spirituality into the nursing curriculum. The definition that Pesut uses incorporates the three aspects of spirituality that she has identified: worldviews, intrapersonal connectedness, and interpersonal connectedness. Worldviews are the way in which the person views reality. “Intrapersonal and interpersonal connectedness are shared values that are important as part of the ‘hidden curriculum,’ that is, the culture of the educational climate” (p. 291).

According to Pesut (2003), individuals who have a deeper sense of their own spirituality are better equipped to deal with the spiritual situations of others. Some of Pesut’s suggested teaching strategies include reflective journaling, assignments around the literature on spirituality, facilitated dialogue among students, and faith-based clinical placements such as parish nursing. Pesut cautions instructors not to create agendas in their courses which become oppressive or inhibit students, but rather they should try to inspire students.

The adult education and nursing education literature claims that spirituality is important to the learner. Therefore, we can interpret from adult educators and nurse educators that spirituality should be integrated into practical nursing programs. Instructors of nursing students and nursing students themselves need to be aware that the whole person should be addressed in the learning experience and this includes spirituality. If nursing students are aware of their own spirituality, then they will be better able to identify and cope with spiritual needs of others. Also, since spirituality is incorporated to help address the whole person in the learning process, the adult students will be better able to incorporate learning in the classroom and clinical setting.

A review of the nursing literature shows a need for nurses to understand the spiritual needs of the patient in order to provide better care. The literature available is specifically related to college and university programs in nursing. There is a lack of literature which relates to the
topic of spirituality in technical colleges. Nursing literature focuses on the need for spiritual care by nurses; therefore, there is an assumption that nursing students will be affected by their spirituality in caring for patients. It is important for nurse educators to understand both the spirituality of their students and how this can be incorporated into their learning experiences.

Summary

This chapter reviews the literature on three major topics: (a) the trends in spirituality, (b) spirituality in adult education, and (c) spirituality and nursing. Based on the literature, there have been changes in American faith and spirituality beginning with the baby boomers and today’s influence of the media. Many Americans have a new willingness to embrace religions other than their own. Americans have opportunities to explore different paths toward spirituality that globalism has made available. College students are seeking answers to spiritual questions and hoping for colleges to help them.

One discipline in higher education which does explore spirituality in learning is adult education. Within the adult education literature, several themes emerged: the rationale or need for spirituality; definitions of spirituality; and ways to integrate spirituality in teaching. The rationale for spirituality includes the history which incorporates the social gospel theme; spirituality is everywhere; holism; meaning making; and transformational learning.

The rationale for spirituality includes evidence from adult education history which shows several movements in early education and several leaders who were motivated by spiritual and religious impulses. The notion that spirituality is everywhere even in the classroom has been confirmed in the literature. The concept of teaching for the whole person is affirmed. Additional rationale for spirituality is how adults make meaning of their lives. The fourth component of the
rationale is that spirituality facilitates transformational learning. There are some studies which identify spirituality as being important to transformational leaning.

A second theme identified is the definition of spirituality. Several definitions emerge from the literature which makes up the meaning of spirituality. Among the various definitions are those definitions which come from the dictionary, are defined in relation to religion, and remark on higher power and meaning making.

The third theme identified is integrating spirituality into adult education. Several educators provide suggestions for integrating spirituality into adult education. Some educators have provided us with general guidelines for critical reflection or provide a framework for adult educators to consider. Then there are guidelines for creating a safe, welcoming environment, and there are specific suggestions for ways educators can cultivate their own spirituality and that of their learners.

The nursing literature shows us how caring and spirituality go hand in hand in the nursing profession. Other educators provide evidence that spirituality is incorporated into the preparation of nurses. The nursing literature includes many studies which identify spiritual needs of patients. Many nursing educators assert that spirituality should be integrated into the nursing curriculum.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Since one way that people make meaning of their lives is through their spirituality, it is important for educators to understand how spirituality influences their students in the learning process. To better understand how adults make meaning of their lives in their learning, we need to ask these students about their spiritual learning experiences in the classroom and clinical setting. Therefore, the problem to be researched was to identify the role of spirituality in the learning of students in nursing programs.

The purpose of this study was to understand how adult learners perceive the influence of spirituality on their learning in practical nursing programs in technical college. Specifically, the following research questions guided the study:

1. How do adult nursing students define spirituality?
2. In what ways do adult nursing students describe how spirituality is manifested in practical nursing programs in technical colleges?
3. What is the role of spirituality for students’ learning in practical nursing programs in technical colleges?

Design of the Study

A basic qualitative research design was used to conduct this study. This type of study is interested in 1) how people interpret their experiences, 2) how they construct their worlds, and 3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences (Merriam & Associates, 2002). Since my
interest is in understanding the perceptions of adult learners about spirituality in their nursing courses in technical colleges, the qualitative research approach fits this study.

According to Merriam and Associates (2002), meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their world. Qualitative research attempts to understand and make sense of phenomena from a participant’s perspective (Merriam & Associates, 2002). This study helped to determine the meanings that adult students have about their learning experiences and spirituality in the technical college setting. The nature of this study was suited for qualitative analysis because the purpose deals with meanings, experiences, and individual perceptions and cannot be summarized with numerical data such as that used in quantitative analysis.

In qualitative inquiry, the researcher is the instrument and the credibility of qualitative methods hinges on the skill, competence, and rigor of the person doing the fieldwork as well as other things going on that might cause distractions (Patton, 2002). However, this “loss in rigor is more than offset by the flexibility, insight, and ability to build on tacit knowledge that is the peculiar province of the human instrument” (Patton, p. 14).

According to Merriam and Associates (2002), “several key characteristics cut across the various interpretive qualitative research designs” (p. 4). First, researchers strive to understand the meanings people have constructed in their world and their experience (Merriam & Associates, 2002). “During fieldwork, the researcher spends time in the setting under study. The researcher talks with people about their experiences and perceptions” (Patton, 2002, p. 4-5). I assumed that each participant I interviewed for this study would have his or her own personal meaning and understanding of spirituality and how that spirituality affected them in their learning experience.
Second, the researcher is the primary instrument for all data collection and analysis (Merriam & Associates, 2002). The researcher has many advantages in collecting the data firsthand. The researcher is able to immediately respond and adapt to information which is gathered. Nonverbal as well as verbal communication can expand the researcher’s understanding and help to clarify the material.

Next, the process is inductive, and the researcher must build an interpretation rather than prove theory (Merriam, 2002). The researcher must gather data in order to build concepts, hypotheses, or theories. This building toward theory is obtained from observations, interviews, and intuitive understandings gathered from the data. The findings in a qualitative study result in themes, categories, typologies, concepts, tentative hypotheses and/or substantive theory.

Finally, the end result is a product which has rich, thick descriptions (Merriam & Associates, 2002). “Words and pictures rather than numbers are used to convey what the researcher has learned about a phenomenon” (p. 5). The results of this study are descriptions provided from participants which created key concepts about the perceptions of adult learners in practical nursing programs. Quotations from the interviews provide the support for findings and conclusions.

Sample Selection

A qualitative study involves shaping a problem, determining the purpose, selecting a sample, collecting and analyzing data, and writing up the findings (Merriam & Associates, 2002). According to Merriam and Simpson (2000), a sample is a strategically and systematically identified group of people or events that meet the criterion of representativeness for a particular study.
There are several different types of sampling strategies available including purposeful sampling, random sampling, criterion sampling, and snowball or chain sampling just to name a few (Creswell, 1998). A purposeful sample was selected because of the interest in having an in-depth understanding of those who know the most about the phenomena to be studied (Merriam & Simpson, 2000).

Qualitative inquiry typically focuses on relatively small samples, even single cases which are selected purposefully to permit inquiry into and understanding of the phenomenon in depth (Patton, 2002). According to Patton, the logic and power of purposeful sampling derive from the emphasis on in-depth understanding which leads to selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. “Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term purposeful sampling” (p. 46). “Purposeful sampling should be judged according to the purpose and rationale of the study: Does the sampling strategy support the study’s purpose? The sample, like all other aspects of qualitative inquiry, must be judged in context” (p. 245). “The purpose of purposeful sampling is to select information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study” (p. 46). Patton (2002) claims that in purposeful sampling the size of the sample is determined by informational considerations. Patton uses redundancy to determine the sample size. The sampling is terminated when no new information is forthcoming from new sampled units.

Purposeful sampling is selecting those participants who will provide the rich, thick descriptions that are needed for analysis. Patton (2002) says these cases are selected because they offer useful manifestations of the phenomenon of interest. Sampling is aimed at insight about the phenomenon. Since we want to understand the meaning of phenomena from the
perspective of the participants, it is important to select a sample from which the most can be learned (Merriam, 2002).

Patton (2002) suggested several strategies for purposefully selecting information-rich cases. The strategy which fit my study best was snowball or chain sampling. In this approach the process begins by asking questions of well-situated people who could provide key names of informants. Initially, I asked practical nursing instructors for permission to interview students in their program and to identify a few students whom they felt would be willing to participate in the study. On two occasions I visited classrooms and made the initial inquiry by telling students the purpose of my study, asking if any students felt they had had spiritual experiences in their nursing classes or clinicals, and if they were willing to participate. Next, I spoke to the practical nursing students referred by instructors and those that I identified, and conducted interviews of all interested students. I then asked these students for the names of other students who might be interested in participating. In this way I found students in addition to those recommended who could also provide insight into the research questions.

Criterion sampling is another way of determining participants for a study (Patton, 2002). Criterion sampling was used in this study. The sample for the study was students in practical nursing programs in a technical college program within the Department of Technical and Adult Education (DTAE) in a southeastern state. The practical nursing program at the technical college level is completed in four quarters if the program is a full-time day program. An evening program will take three years to complete. In the day program in some technical colleges and in particular the one under study, students complete general core courses prior to official acceptance into the practical nursing program. Once accepted, students begin a four quarter program. During the first quarter, the students learn basic nursing skills to apply in the clinical
setting and complete 60 hours of clinical rotation. The next three quarters are primarily clinical rotations in the major categories which include mother/baby, pediatric care, and general nursing care within a hospital.

Additionally, the practical nursing program in the technical colleges within the DTAE system of this southeastern state are often partnered with a bridge program which allows the LPN student to finish coursework leading to a bachelor’s degree in the registered nursing program.

The criteria used to select participants in the study were: 1) the participant was currently a practical nursing student at one of the southeastern state’s technical colleges or a recent graduate; 2) the participant attended classes and clinical practice in the nursing discipline and had completed all of the core courses required for entrance into the practical nursing program; and 3) the student was at least in the fourth quarter of the nursing program or had graduated.

Since the study was designed to understand the perceptions of adult learners about spirituality in practical nursing courses in technical colleges, students in practical nursing programs at southeastern technical colleges were the obvious choice as participants. The reason for the selection of nursing students is because it is assumed that these students will have contact in the clinical setting with birth, death, injury, and illness; and, therefore, will handle situations with family members of patients which deal with matters of spirituality and religion. The criterion of acceptance into the nursing program is important because they will have taken a few core courses which will give them a better understanding of the requirements of the nursing field.

Eleven participants were selected for this study. There were four cohorts of nursing students used from the same technical college. Some of the students were in the same cohort together.
Data Collection

The three main sources of data for qualitative research are interviews, observations, and documents (Merriam, 2002). However, only interviews and documents were the projected main sources of data for this study. Although, I asked participants for any documents that may or may not be relevant to the study, no documents were provided by any of the students. Some claimed that during some of their coursework they wrote journals, but they did not keep these documents. Interviews provide questions which yield in-depth responses about the respondent’s experiences, perceptions, opinions, feelings, and knowledge (Patton, 2002). Patton recommends asking questions aimed at eliciting emotions. Although I did not intentionally aim for students to become emotional during the interviews, many of them did. Some of the students became emotional while talking about their personal lives and some became emotional while talking about their spiritual experiences.

The results of the interviews were the data which was analyzed and direct quotations which are used to support the analysis of the data. “Direct quotations are a basic source of raw data in qualitative inquiry, revealing respondents’ depth of emotion, the ways they have organized their world, their thoughts about what is happening, their experiences, and their basic perceptions” (Patton, 2002, p. 21).

Open-ended interviews with semi-structured questions were used for data collection in this study. Patton (2002) claimed that “the purpose of gathering responses to open-ended questions is to enable the researcher to understand and capture the points of view of other people without predetermining those points of view” (p.21). “A semi-structured interview contains a mix of more and less structured questions” (Merriam, 2002, p. 13). The highly structured portion of the interview is used to obtain specific information from all of the participants (Merriam,
The less structured questions consist of a list of questions which guides the interview, and the order of the questions is not determined in advance (Merriam, 2002).

The interviews were conducted for approximately one to one and a half hours. Three research questions were addressed. The areas of focus for these questions were: the students’ definition of spirituality; how spirituality was manifested in the instructional setting with adult learners; and, the role of spirituality for students in practical nursing courses in technical colleges. Interview questions were designed to address these three research questions. There were 11 open-ended and two follow-up questions used (see Appendix A) to gather information. Each interview was audio taped and each tape was transcribed by the researcher. Interviews were conducted in person with each subject in a quiet, non-threatening environment. Most of the interviews were conducted in a private conference room on the main campus of the technical college. One interview was conducted in the researcher’s office on the main campus at the technical college. One interview was conducted at the medical center. One interview was conducted at a branch campus of the technical college. Follow-up probes were used to obtain additional information throughout the interviews. The researcher checked immediately with the participants for accuracy about interpretations of the material and explored any unanticipated responses. Since I conducted each interview, I was able to collect information and observe nonverbal cues from the participants.

A secondary source of data would have been documents such as diaries, journals or poems which participants may already have and would be willing to share. However, as stated previously, students were asked for such documents but none were available.
Data Analysis

The constant-comparative method was used to analyze the data in this study (Merriam & Associates, 2002). In the constant-comparative method, the units of data which are deemed meaningful by the researcher are compared with each other in order to generate tentative categories and category. By constantly comparing the data, categories will emerge and similar categories can be reduced into a smaller number of highly conceptual categories. Categories or themes result from this constant comparison of data.

Transforming data into research results is called analysis, according to LeCompte (2000). Data analysis is simultaneous with data collection (Merriam, 2002). This simultaneous data collection and analysis allows the researcher to make adjustments and to test emerging concepts, themes, and categories against subsequent data (Merriam, 2002).

To wait until all data are collected is to lose the opportunity to gather more reliable and valid data; to wait until the end is also to court disaster, as many a qualitative researcher has found himself or herself facing hundreds of pages of transcripts or field notes without a clue where to begin. (Merriam, 2002, p. 14)

Data analysis is an inductive strategy (Merriam, 2002). The researcher begins with a unit of data such as a meaningful word, phrase, or narrative and compares it to another unit of data and this continues while looking for common patterns across the data. The patterns which result are given names or codes and are adjusted as the analysis proceeds.

Upon transcription of each taped interview, I began reading the transcript and coding the material. The first step in analysis is to develop a coding scheme or classification system. I began by reading through the interview and making comments in the margins. Next, I read through the interview again to develop a formal coding system based on my initial comments
noted in the margins. The system I used was to read through the manuscript and highlight key phrases which I felt were directly related to the research questions. I also began putting key words in the right margin of the transcripts to determine what was repeated from each participant. I began to look for items which fit together in order to establish themes. Next, one transcript was compared to the next and so on until all the transcripts were compared. Once all tapes were transcribed and coded, further analysis was conducted comparing the different transcripts in order to identify specific patterns and categories or themes. After two transcripts were coded and possible categories and category were identified, the major professor and methodologist of the doctoral committee reviewed the categories and category that I identified and made suggestions for further refinement. I continued to go through each transcript again to try to identify anything that had been missed or misinterpreted. Further coding was made by using colored strips of paper at the right edge of pages where key items had been identified. I also wrote on these colored strips. The analysis of findings was put together and further refined. The major professor made further assessments and more refinements were made. Once adjustments were made, the committee chair consulted with the methodologist for additional suggestions. Further refinements were made which resulted in the final set of findings.

Validity and Reliability

Consumers and producers of research want to be assured that findings of research are trustworthy; therefore, the issues of validity and reliability must be addressed (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). Because qualitative researchers are the primary instruments for data collection and analysis, interpretations of reality are accessed directly through observations and interviews (Merriam & Associates, 2002). The researcher must be sure to explain her or his own position in
the study and explain the basis for selecting participants, the context of the study, and values and assumptions which will affect data collection and analysis (Merriam, 2002).

“Qualitative researchers routinely employ member checking, triangulation, thick description, peer reviews, and external audits. Researchers engage in one or more of these procedures and report results in their investigations” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 124). Creswell and Miller define validity as how accurately the account represents participants’ realities of the social phenomena and is credible to them.

In internal validity the researcher wants to determine how congruent the findings are with reality (Merriam & Associates, 2002). In qualitative inquiry the assumption is that there are multiple, changing realities and that individuals have their own unique constructions of reality (Merriam & Associates, 2002). “In qualitative research, the understanding of reality is really the researcher’s interpretation of participants’ interpretations or understandings of the phenomenon of interest” (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 25). In qualitative research “it is important to understand the perspectives of those involved, uncover the complexity of human behavior in context, and present a holistic interpretation of what is happening” (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 25).

There are several strategies that can be used to improve internal validity in a qualitative research study (Merriam & Associates, 2002). These strategies include 1) triangulation which is the use of multiple investigators, multiple sources of data, or multiple methods to confirm the emerging findings; 2) member checks to take data collected from participants and interpretations of data back to the people from whom they were derived; 3) peer examination which is asking colleagues to examine the data and comment on the emerging findings; 4) statement of
researcher bias; and 5) submersion in the research in order to collect data over a long enough period to ensure in-depth understanding of the phenomenon (Merriam & Simpson, 2000).

The first strategy used was member checks. In member checks, participants are asked to comment on tentative findings and whether the researcher’s interpretation sounds correct (Merriam & Associates, 2002). Member checking shifts the validity procedure from the researcher to the participants in the study (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Creswell, 2002). During this process the participants should be able to recognize their experience in the interpretations or they may suggest ways to better capture their perspectives (Merriam & Associates, 2002; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Creswell, 2002). “In member checks, the researcher solicits informants’ views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations” (Creswell, 2002, p. 202).

The member check method may be the most critical technique for establishing credibility (Creswell, 2002). Member checks were used in my study. Member checks were conducted by sending the interpretation of the findings of the transcripts to all 11 participants. Four participants responded with positive responses confirming my interpretation of their comments. I asked each participant to review chapter four with the analysis of findings and check to make sure that I had accurately interpreted their quotes. I asked them to let me know if they had comments or wanted to clarify their perceptions in case I had misinterpreted them. Susan stated “How interesting. Everything looks okay from my end, except that in ‘Table 1’, I am listed as married. Actually, I am divorced.” Based on Susan’s input, I changed the information in Table 1. Lynn stated “Thank you for the preview of your paper. I was interested by its read. Good luck!” Aaron’s only comments regarded the description of his duties as a hospice nurse. I made adjustments to that section based on his input. Justina responded with “everything looks great!”
A second strategy for ensuring internal validity is the peer review (Merriam & Associates, 2002). Creswell (2002) maintains that a peer review “helps keep the researcher honest; asks hard questions about methods, meanings, and interpretations; and provides the researcher with the opportunity for catharsis by sympathetically listening to the researcher’s feelings” (Creswell, 2002, p. 202). A peer review is a review of the data and research process by someone who knows the research or the phenomena under examination (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The doctoral committee serves as the peer review for my study.

Investigators should explain their position in relation to the topic being studied, the basis for selecting participants, the context of the study, and what values or assumptions might affect data collection and analysis (Merriam & Associates, 2002). The researcher’s position or reflexivity is the process of reflecting on the self as the instrument (Merriam & Associates, 2002). Creswell and Miller (2000) state that researcher reflexivity is for researchers to self-disclose their assumptions, beliefs and biases. This process provides clarification for the reader to understand how the researcher arrived at a particular interpretation of the data (Merriam & Associates, 2002). Researcher reflexivity is a validity procedure in which researchers report on personal beliefs, values, and biases that may shape their inquiry (Creswell & Miller, 2000). My biases and assumptions are included in the next section.

Another component of ensuring internal validity is for the researcher to engage in data collection “over a long enough period to ensure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon” (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 26). The way to determine whether there has been sufficient time for in-depth understanding is when “the data and emerging findings must feel saturated; that is, you begin to see or hear the same things over and over again, and no new information surfaces as you collect more data” (Merriam & Associates, p. 26). Creswell and Miller (2000) affirm that
prolonged engagement in the field is another validity procedure. There is no set duration to
determine prolonged engagement in the field (Creswell & Miller). I conducted interviews in my
study until I reached the point of saturation based on participant responses.

Reliability determines the extent to which one’s findings would be found again if
replicated (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). The issue of reliability involves the question of whether
two researchers independently studying the same setting or subjects come up with the same
findings (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). However, qualitative researchers do not necessarily have this
expectation of having the same findings as another researcher (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Since
human behavior is dynamic, then replication of a qualitative study will not yield the same results
(Merriam & Simpson). However, this does not discredit the results of any study because there
can be numerous interpretations of the same data (Merriam & Simpson). Whether the results are
consistent with the data collected is the more important question for qualitative researchers
(Merriam & Simpson).

In qualitative studies, researchers are concerned with the accuracy and
comprehensiveness of their data. Qualitative researchers tend to view reliability as a fit
between what they record as data and what actually occurs in the setting under study,
rather than the literal consistency across different observations. (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003,
p. 36).

In this situation then, researchers studying a single setting may come up with different
data and produce different findings and both would be considered reliable. The question of
reliability would be a concern if both researchers yielded incompatible results (Bogdan & Biklen,
2003).
Strategies which can be used to ensure reliability are triangulation, peer examination, investigator’s position, and audit trail (Merriam & Associates, 2002). Triangulation, peer examination, and investigator’s position are also important in internal validity as discussed earlier (Merriam & Associates). Audit trail, peer examination, and investigator’s position were the methods used in this study.

The audit trail is a detailed account of how the study was conducted and how the data were analyzed (Merriam & Associates, 2002). An audit trail authenticates the findings of the researcher by following the trail of the researcher (Merriam & Associates). “An audit trail in a qualitative study describes in detail how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry” (Merriam & Associates, p. 27). The researcher should keep a research journal or record memos throughout the study (Merriam & Associates). The journal should include reflections, questions, and decisions on problems, issues and ideas encountered during collection of the data (Merriam & Associates). “A running record of your interaction with the data as you engage in analysis and interpretation is also recommended” (Merriam & Associates, p. 28). It is important for the researcher to capture reflections and thoughts about themselves as the researcher, about data collection issues, and about interpretations of the data (Merriam & Associates).

The following is a detailed account of how an audit trail was used in my study. The audit trail includes how data were collected, how categories or themes were identified, and how decisions were made (Merriam & Associates). The audit trail also includes my thoughts, reflections, questions, issues and ideas that I have in the process through a series of memos and notes that I kept throughout the study. I began the study by making contact with the instructors of the students to be identified for the study. Interviews began in January 2007 and continued
through November 2007. Several cohorts were used for participants. There were four different groups of nursing students who provided the final total of 11 participants. Once students were identified, I arranged to meet with each participant and conducted the interview. I also took brief notes throughout the interviews. These notes helped as I transcribed the tape to put me back into the moment and remember the situation at that time. The first three transcripts were provided to the major professor for review of the interviews with the participants. Feedback was given and adjustments were made in regard to one transcript in particular in the way that I had asked the questions. All meetings with the major professor were taped and transcribed. This allowed again hearing what was said and having a written record to refer to when making changes to the analysis of findings. As tapes were transcribed, I also began reading and highlighting key phrases and making notes of key words in the right-hand margin. This process of reading transcripts, interviewing, transcribing, reviewing notes, reviewing notes with the major professor and comparing transcripts continued throughout the months of the process.

External validity is the extent to which findings can be generalized to other situations (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). External validity is also called generalizability in qualitative research (Merriam & Associates, 2002). In qualitative research the best way to think of generalizability is in terms of the extent to which findings from an investigation can be applied to other situations determined by people in those situations (Merriam & Simpson). This conception is called reader or user generalizability (Merriam & Simpson). The researcher does not speculate on how findings can be applied to their settings because that is up to the consumer of the research (Merriam & Simpson).

“The basic question even for qualitative research is the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations” (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 28). However,
because small, non-random samples are selected purposefully in qualitative research, it is not possible to generalize statistically (Merriam & Associates). “A small sample is selected precisely because the researcher wishes to understand the particular in depth, not to find out what is generally true of the many” (Merriam & Associates, p. 28). “If one thinks of what can be learned from an in-depth analysis of a particular situation or incident and how that knowledge can be transferred to another situation, generalizability in qualitative research becomes possible” (Merriam & Associates, p. 28). The most common way generalizability has been conceptualized in qualitative research is as reader or user generalizability (Merriam & Associates). “In this view, readers themselves determine the extent to which findings from a study can be applied to their context” (Merriam & Associates, p. 29). “Qualitative methods typically produce a wealth of detailed information about a much smaller number of people and cases. This increases the depth of understanding of the case and situations studied but reduces generalizability” (Merriam & Associates, p. 14)

One major strategy to ensure external validity or generalizability for qualitative research is in providing rich, thick description (Merriam & Associates, 2002). By providing rich, thick description, the researcher enables the reader to determine how closely the reader’s situations match and whether findings can be transferred (Merriam & Associates, 2002; Creswell, 2002). I believe the participants had very good descriptions of events. Some participants were better able to describe their feelings and the events in better detail than others. All comments were taped and transcribed and key portions were identified which best fit the categories and category identified. Excerpts from these transcripts which confirm the findings have been included in the analysis of findings section.
Validity, reliability and external validity are all intertwined if a qualitative study has been designed properly. However, as Merriam (2002) stated “there is no point in considering reliability without validity” (p. 27). My study incorporated audit trail, member checks, peer review, statement of researcher position and bias, and submersion in the research to ensure internal validity. The doctoral committee served as the peer review.

Researcher Bias and Assumptions

Qualitative research attempts to understand and make sense of phenomena from a participant’s perspective (Merriam & Associates, 2002). In qualitative analysis, reality assumes that there are multiple, changing realities and that each individual has his or her own construction of reality. Reality is the researcher’s interpretation of the participants’ interpretations or understandings of the phenomenon of interest. Therefore, it is assumed that the researcher will have certain biases entering the study and that those biases may influence the interpretations of the data collected.

According to Merriam and Associates (2002), the researcher identifies and monitors biases. Rather than eliminate biases, Merriam and Associates state it is important to identify and monitor them to show how they may be shaping the collection and interpretation of data. Although my early religious and spiritual influence was from a Christian perspective, I have evolved to have an understanding of many other religious and spiritual beliefs.

Based on the criteria established, my assumptions were that all students in this study have some religious or spiritual background from which to draw spiritual beliefs. One of the results of the study was obtaining meanings and definitions from the participants in their own words about what spirituality means to them. As Zinnbauer, Pargament and Scott (1999) explained, there are numerous religious, social and political movements which include Eastern spiritualities, Native
American spiritualities, feminist spiritualities, Goddess spiritualities, men’s spiritualities, ecological spiritualities, Judeo-Christian spiritualities, Hindus, Buddhists, and Muslims. There are possibly numerous other spiritualities that have not been named here but which might become apparent from discussions with the participants. The main religions represented in the study were Catholic and Baptist.

My reason for studying the topic of spirituality in the technical college is because I work in a technical college as a supervisor of instructors. Prior to being a supervisor, I was also an instructor. Based on my own experience in dealing with students and with instructors, I find that spirituality plays an important part in the day-to-day classroom or clinical setting.

Based on my discussions with instructors in the practical nursing program, I also believe that spirituality plays a major role in the way that instructors approach their students. This is true of teachers in other disciplines as well but it seems more obvious in the nursing industry where they are surrounded with birth, death and illness on a daily basis.

I feel that my experience as a teacher of adults in the technical college setting and as a supervisor of instructors in the technical college setting helped me to understand and interpret the results of this study. Peer review and an audit trail helped to minimize any researcher biases and assumptions. In one instance while reviewing the transcript, the major professor for the doctoral committee, Dr. Courtenay, commented that some of the questions that I asked one of the participants were leading the participant. This was an early participant who was having a hard time trying to collect his thoughts. Thereafter, I did not use this type of questioning and waited for responses. However, the direct quotations and analysis of the results with references to other empirical research will also help to minimize researcher bias.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to understand how adult learners perceive the influence of spirituality on their learning in practical nursing programs in technical colleges. Specifically, I addressed these research questions:

1. How do adult nursing students define spirituality?

2. In what ways do adult nursing students describe how spirituality is manifested in practical nursing programs in technical colleges?

3. What is the role of spirituality for students’ learning in practical nursing programs in technical colleges?

The sample for the study was students in practical nursing programs in a technical college in a southeastern state. The criteria which was used to select participants in the study were as follows: 1) the participant was currently a practical nursing student at one of the southeastern state’s technical colleges or a recent graduate; and 2) the participant attended classes and clinical practice in the nursing discipline and had completed all of the core courses required for entrance into the practical nursing program, and 3) the student was at least in the fourth quarter or had graduated.
Description of Participants

Table 1 shows the list of participants by pseudonym, age, gender, ethnicity, marital status, number of children, religion and previous education. There are 11 participants in the study.

Participants are from four different cohorts at the same technical college. The resulting group is predominately white, mature, and middle aged female. The majority of the participants have some education other than nursing, and most are Christian, specifically of the Baptist faith. Ten participants are female and one is male. The ages ranged from 24 to 58 years old. There were nine Caucasians, one Latina and one African American. Seven of the participants are married, two are divorced and two are single. Of the two single participants, one of them stated that she is a Lesbian in a stable relationship. Two of the participants had no children. The other nine participants had from one to four children.

Table 1: Selected Profile of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Number of Children</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Prior Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alice</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Universal</td>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aaron</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Baptist</td>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angel</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>1 year of college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jo</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Baptist</td>
<td>2 years of college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hollie</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Baptist</td>
<td>Associate’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Baptist</td>
<td>Associate degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justina</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Baptist</td>
<td>Several technical certificates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Baptist</td>
<td>Some postsecondary courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Baptist</td>
<td>Some college; technical certificates; real estate license</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynn</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>LDS Mormon</td>
<td>Some postsecondary courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicole</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Nondenominational</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Alice

Alice is a 45 year old female, Caucasian. She is a lesbian and is currently in a stable relationship. She started life as a practicing Catholic but has since changed to a universal fellowship church. Her prior educational training includes a medical laboratory technician degree from a university in the south and a BS in Special Elementary Education from the same university. At the time of the interview she had just graduated from the nursing program and was working as a patient care technician, and she was also waiting to take her practical nursing boards.

Alice is a very open and honest individual. Her honesty could be from her experience in having gone through therapy to resolve some of her childhood issues stemming from molestation by her father. Her caring attitude about other people comes through in the way she describes her treatment of people and the way she approaches life. Alice says she used to fear God but now thinks of him as a daddy or father figure.

Alice went through many jobs before deciding on nursing school. She worked in customer service at a retail store and at a bottled water distributor and in catalog sales. Finally she ended up in the healthcare industry and worked in home health and then worked for an assisted living home nearby. She received a lot of compliments in her health care jobs and decided to proceed with the LPN program.

Aaron

Aaron is a 45 year old Caucasian male. He is married with two adult children. He has three grandchildren. He is a Baptist and a minister as well as being a practical nurse. His education background includes a bachelor’s degree in theology from a college in the south. He has served as chaplain in state institutions in the south. He has also worked at a state mental
health facility and the prison system. He moved back to his hometown to take care of ailing parents. At the time of the interview he had just graduated from the nursing program, passed his boards and was working as a hospice nurse.

Aaron said that God called him to go to nursing school, and after two years of telling God no, he finally decided to give in and say yes. In his job as a hospice nurse he provides caregiver (CG) education regarding the signs and symptoms of death, teaches the CG how to administer medications to manage pain, and provides emotional support to the patient and CG as they face the end of life.

Angel

Angel is a 51 year old Caucasian female. She is married and has four children. She is of the Catholic faith. She worked in the home until the children were older and then worked in sales until she was laid off from her job. She did an excellent job in her sales position in the computer industry and even won an award. After “911,” the bottom dropped out of the computer industry; and she lost her job. But, she soon got another job. After being on the job for only four months, she learned that she had to have surgery for ovarian cysts. Company policy required that she wait a year, and she told them she couldn’t wait that long; so she was laid off from this job as well. This was a wake-up call for her so she did some soul searching and praying and decided to switch careers. Finally, she decided to pursue a nursing career.

Angel has a strong faith and even experienced a visitation by an angel in the form of her hairdresser. The hairdresser gave her a message that Angel felt was from God. The message was for her to be patient in the pursuit of her desire to be a hospice nurse.
Jo

Jo is a 32 year old white female Caucasian. She is married and has three children. She was raised Catholic and is now a practicing Baptist. Jo says that God comes first in her life followed by her family. At the time of the interview Jo was in the fourth quarter of the nursing program.

Jo worked for four years as a medical assistant and then stayed home with her children until they went to school. Then she decided to go to technical college and pursue a nursing career. Jo’s typical day is to get up, get the children ready for school, get herself ready for school and get her husband ready for work. She then drives her sons to school every morning. After she drops off the kids at school, she goes to class or clinical depending upon her schedule. She returns home after clinical or class and then spends time with her family, does her homework and her chores.

Hollie

Hollie is a 58 year old Caucasian female. She is of the Baptist faith. She has been married for 34 years and has three children. She retired from a major telecommunications corporation and then worked with a manufacturing company for five years until they went out of business. Because of the Trade Act which paid for her to be retrained, she was able to go back to school. She then decided to pursue a nursing career. She has an associate’s degree from a state junior college and also an additional year and a half of coursework at a four-year institution.

During the time that Hollie was going to school, she was diagnosed with breast cancer. She had a successful outcome, and she believes it was because of her strong faith and belief in God. She felt that God put her in such a position with the people surrounding her at school that she had the right emotional support and medical guidance.
Holly doesn’t have any living relatives on her side of the family except a stepmother whom she visits once a year out of a sense of obligation to her deceased father.

Maria

Maria is a 38 year old Latina female. She is a single parent and has three children. At the time of the interview she had graduated from the nursing program and was working at the local hospital as a translator. She is currently attempting to switch to a practical nursing job.

Maria was born and raised in another part of the country; she moved south in 1989. Before coming to this southeastern state she had never been the victim of racial remarks or prejudices; but when she tried getting a job in this state, it was difficult. A lot of doors were closed to her, and she was told there were no job openings sometimes when she knew there were. Finally she did get a job and also met her now ex-husband. In 2000 she entered the healthcare management associate degree program at the local technical college. After graduation, she immediately proceeded into the LPN program.

Maria is the third of six children but often the family gives her responsibilities that would normally be given to the eldest. She thinks that is because the older children are sons and they look to her as the oldest daughter for leadership. Maria is well known in the community and has worked at the local hospital for 13 years. Her major job is as a translator, and sometimes she does this outside of her normal working hours for free. However, her ultimate goal is to be a nurse even though she says it may decrease her income.

While healing from the trauma of a divorce, Maria decided to participate in Christian ministry institute training. She traveled three days a week for three years and all of her training was in Spanish. As a part of her ritual before going to bed, she reads the Bible every night.
Justina

Justina is a 36 year old African-American female. She is married and has two children. She is of the Baptist faith. She has worked as a patient care assistant and also trained for phlebotomy, certified nursing assistant and EKG. She worked in ICU in a major hospital before attending the nursing program. She worked part-time as a receptionist while going to school. At the time of the interview she had just graduated and was waiting to hear the outcome of her boards. She had a nursing job lined up contingent on passing the boards.

Justina is very involved in church functions. She is in the choir, praise team and usher board. She continued these activities while going to school and working two jobs. She admits she was gone from home a lot but her husband was very supportive. She originally decided to go to nursing school in order to help supplement the family income. She saw the stress her husband was under to provide for the family, and she felt like this was a way for her to contribute to the income.

Jenny

Jenny is a 30 year old Caucasian female. She has a two and a half year old son. She took a few courses at a nearby junior college before attending the nursing program at the technical college. She is a Baptist. During the time of the interview, she was in the fourth quarter of the nursing program.

The church that Jenny attends encourages free worship and encompasses different cultures. There are thousands of members. Jenny grew up in this church and still maintains that church affiliation. She also stays in close contact with her friends that she made as early as elementary school. She is close to her family and depends on them for support.
Susan

Susan is a 49 year old Caucasian female. She is a single mother of three children. Two of the children are grown and one is in middle school. Susan is a Baptist now but was previously a Catholic. She is now in the fourth quarter of the nursing program. Susan’s previous career was as a database administrator in the computer field, and she was forced into an early retirement. She considers that job a “doctor” for computers and says the hours aren’t any better than in the medical field. She spent a lot of overnight jobs with computers that “got sick.”

Susan has some college coursework, and she has her real estate license. She also attended technical school for computer languages and maintained her vendor specific certifications while she was in the computer field.

Susan calls her family “slimmed down.” Both of her parents are deceased. Susan feels that her parents are still around her in spirit, and she feels comforted and loved and she attributes this experience to God. She says that she is estranged from one of her children because of different things that happened through the divorce but feels that daughter will come around eventually.

Lynn

Lynn is a 37 year old Caucasian female. She is married and has four children. She says she has been taking college courses and enrichment courses since she graduated from high school. She has been married for 13 years and has only worked when she felt like she wanted some extra money. Her previous career was in construction. Her religion is LDS (Latter Day Saints) Mormon. During the time of the interview she was in the fourth quarter of the nursing program.
Lynn is originally from another part of the country. She is the oldest of six children. Lynn’s youngest sister is 16 years younger than she. She and her husband moved to the south six years ago for his job. The company moved the family and paid her husband’s loan for school. Lynn feels that she is in tune with the Holy Ghost, and the more in tune with him she is, the better she is able to anticipate what her children will need.

Nicole

Nicole is a 24 year old Caucasian female. She is married and has no children. She is a member of a nondenominational church. She was unhappy in her job and pursued the nursing program. During the time of the interview she was in the fourth quarter of the program.

Nicole has four brothers and lives down the street from her mom and step dad. She spends a lot of time with her two youngest brothers who live with their mom. They are ages 14 and 16. Another brother lives with their dad and the fourth brother is in college. She rarely sees that brother. Nicole feels that it was God who brought about changes in her life that allowed her to go to school without having to work while attending school.

Results

Introduction

As previously stated, the purpose of this study was to understand how adult learners perceive the influence of spirituality on their learning in practical nursing programs in technical colleges. There were three research questions used to determine the results. The findings of this study show that there were eight categories. Table 2 shows each category grouped with the research area. In the research area of adult nursing students’ definitions of spirituality, there were three categories which are: 1) belief in a higher power 2) connection to others, self or to a higher power, and 3) putting beliefs into practice. For the second research area of spiritual
experiences in nursing education programs, there are three categories which are: 1) guided by God or higher power; 2) reveals purpose for one’s life, and 3) involves the act of prayer. For the third research area of importance of spirituality in learning, there were two categories which are: 1) assists in classroom and clinical performance, and 2) instills confidence.

Table 2
Perceptions of Spirituality in Practical Nursing Programs in Technical Colleges

Adult Nursing Students’ Definitions of Spirituality

1) Belief in a higher power
2) Connection to others, self or to a higher power.
3) Putting beliefs into practice

Students’ Descriptions of How Spiritual Experiences are Manifested in Their Courses

1) Guided by God or higher power
2) Reveals purpose for one’s life
3) Involves the act of prayer

Role of Spirituality in Learning

1) Assists in classroom and clinical performance
2) Instills confidence

Adult Nursing Students’ Definitions of Spirituality

Three kinds of definitions emerged from the transcripts. The results of the interviews show that adult nursing students define spirituality as: 1) belief in a higher power 2) connection to others, self or to a higher power, and 3) putting beliefs into practice.
Belief in a higher power. When talking about their spirituality, participants referred to a higher power or God, or the Lord or Heavenly Father, or a higher calling. Alice’s definition of spirituality shows her belief in a higher power: In speaking of her definition, Alice also speaks of a higher calling and that the higher power doesn’t just have to be Jesus or God.

Spirituality is probably having a belief in a higher person, a higher calling that helps a person to become better and to have a focus and grounding in their life. And, uh, it doesn’t so much have to be you know Jesus Christ and God like we believe, I think he can also be like someone who is a Hindu or a Buddhist who has that belief too even though I haven’t researched a lot on it.

Aaron’s definition of spirituality is tied with his view of God. He doesn’t believe that God and God’s spirit are separate. Aaron, in response to the inquiry of his definition of spirituality, said the following:

God. You know. He is a vital part of my life, and uh, and the world around us. You know, I don’t think you can separate him and his spirit from the world that we live in. Folks try to, folks try to say there’s no such thing, but you know, if they’re really honest with themselves, they’ve got to see God’s hand in everything that happens. He’s provider, strength, guide, comfort, uh, he’s the sunrise, you know.

Angel gives her definition of spirituality as knowing that there is a God. Angel said: To me, spirituality is knowing that there is a God. I don’t believe that everybody has to believe in the same God. And, wanting to do his will in your life, whatever his will in your life, trying to find out what that will is and then working towards doing his will in your life. And, seeing what happens when you do do his will, because it’s beautiful, when you do. I mean, from what I’ve seen.
Jo describes spirituality as believing and as God. She says that spirituality is believing in what you don’t see and how you feel when no one is looking.

I think spirituality is believing. For me, it is God. Believing in fully what you don’t see, what you can’t touch, but knowing that God is there for me, even though I can’t see him physically, it’s the belief of knowing and trusting.

Hollie gives her definition of spirituality as a feeling of a spirit, a presence and a power that is more in control of your life than you are. “Well…I don’t know how to formulate a real definition, but basically it’s just a feeling of a spirit…of a presence, of a power that’s much more in control of things than you are.”

Susan relates spirituality to God and something that happens that you interpret as a result of God.

I think spirituality is something…a feeling or thought process…something you believe in that you’re passionate about…which you adhere a lot of process to…apply to not adhere to…relating to God. The spirituality is something that you feel, something that actually happens that you interpret as a result of God and that spirituality doesn’t have to be something who attends or is obedient to worship the Bible, attendance, obedience, baptism, that’s not spirituality

Nicole’s definition includes a variety of things but amongst them is belief in a higher power. She further identifies the higher power as God. Nicole believes that spirituality incorporates forgiveness, understanding and unconditional love. She feels that spirituality is the beliefs that you have and the way you feel about your religion. She states that God is the person who makes things possible for her.
I guess just a sense of knowing that you’re not ever really alone. Like there’s always somebody that’s going to be there for you. Spirituality is the beliefs that you have, the way you feel about your religion. God is the only person who could have made those things to the point where I was able to quit working and I’m very blessed that I don’t have to work while I’m going to school and can concentrate on that. Those sequence of events to me were very much influenced by God.

Justina’s definition also reflects the idea that there is a higher power. Justina’s definition incorporates the faith of believing in something that isn’t there.

But to me spirituality is believing in something that’s not there. Believing in a feeling that no matter what you go through there’s always a presence that can pull you through. I do believe there’s one God. That he did die on the cross for us and our sins and I just believe in a higher power.

*Connection to others, self, or higher power.* In describing their definition, some of the participants related instances when they felt some connection to other people, to self, or to a higher power. Jenny emphasizes connection to a higher power. She and Justina share a concept of knowing that they aren’t walking alone. Jenny says:

I think spirituality to me is not finding my strength but in God’s strength. Spirituality would just be knowing that I’m not walking alone. That I know I have somebody that’s with me all the time. I don’t have to rely on myself because I would fail.

Thoughts from Justina emphasize a connection to others, self and higher power:

I think that your spirituality is just a personal relationship. It’s what you seek from whatever higher power you believe in and I just think that it’s everyone’s own individual choice. Uh, whomever they decide to serve, whatever way they decide to develop that
relationship whether it be meditation, reading or studying or worship or praise. I just think that spirituality to me is a whole lot like your personal character.

Maria also includes connection to higher power in her definition and she practices through rituals basic to religion.

To me it is being connected [to God], praying, reading the Bible, actually since I went back in January, it is when I started going back to church. Spirituality to me is more of prayer, Bible, believing in God. To me it’s like if you don’t believe in God, you really don’t believe in anything.

*Putting beliefs into practice.* When she describes her spirituality, Alice talks about putting what you believe into practice and, particularly, being able to forgive others.

But spirituality means putting what you believe into practice, which makes you a loving, caring and more giving person. And, also being able to forgive. Because I hated my dad for a long time for what he did [her father molested her and her sister as children] which is understandable. But, I’ve been able to forgive him because I look at it like even though what he did was terribly wrong, number 1, he was hurt too, he wound up hurting me.

Susan claims that her spirituality “… keeps me really disciplined. And focused.” Susan also compares the way she conducts herself as one always performing for a secret judge.

Nursing and spirituality probably are two different things but in my opinion somehow I think they go together in a way you know love of God, love of people. Uh, you never know…I was taught this as a child…it’s not nursing…well I should stay on the track…but in school, my schoolmates or my patients, you never really know, this might sound silly…it’s not an excuse, it’s a basis. God….there’s all kinds of tests and you never
know if you’re talking to or caring for an angel that’s placed there. That’s the way I conduct myself. It’s almost like you’re a beauty queen in a beauty pageant. You never know who are silent judges type thing. You do that enough and that becomes a way a life and that’s the kind of person you are.

Lynn’s definition closely fits with the idea of putting her beliefs into practice because she lives every day of her life behaving and doing things that she believes in for herself and her family.

My in-tuneness with my Heavenly Father and the way that I do that is through living the Gospel, doing things that I am asked to do in regards to...we’re asked to pray, we’re asked to read the scriptures, we’re asked to attend our meetings, our church meetings, we’re asked to live the whole Christian type attitude. As long as you’re living that way, you’re in tune with those feelings like spirituality. Spirituality is not something that you have…it grows…or it regresses. It’s not a stagnant thing. It does not stand still. If you’re not doing the things you need to do, then you’re losing bits and pieces. If you’re doing things that are wrong, you begin to lose the ability to sense spiritual things possibly that you’re apt to be tempted to do things that are wrong. It gives you a freedom, not necessarily a physical freedom when you obey the commandments and keep them, but it gives you intellectual freedom, it gives you emotional freedom cause you’re not going through the psychological guilts.

Through their definitions the participants show their belief in a higher power. For instance, Alice’s reference to Jesus Christ and God but also acknowledging that the higher power could be whatever the person believes depending upon religion. Participants also show how they feel a connection to a higher power, self, or others such as Justina’s personal relationship with
her higher power which she uses for strength in times of loss or stress. The definitions of others show that spirituality is acting on your beliefs. For example, Susan’s belief that there are tests in life and each person should behave as if they are being judged.

*Students’ Descriptions of How Spiritual Experiences are Manifested in Their Courses*

The second research area resulted from participants discussing a rich variety of spiritual experiences in their nursing program primarily in the clinical setting. Spiritual experiences are manifested through the following: 1) guided by God or higher power; 2) reveals purpose for one’s life, and 3) involves the act of prayer. The nursing program in technical colleges relies heavily on clinical practice in hospitals for teaching students important nursing skills. Due to the nature of the nursing occupation and these clinical learning experiences, the majority of incidents described by students took place in the clinical setting.

*Guided by God or higher power.* Some participants of the study relate experiences in which they perceive that a higher power was at work in their lives. Alice believes that she is an instrument of God, and that God is in control of her life, using it to help other people. In the following incident Alice and her classmates were visiting a mental hospital. She and her classmates used games and music to reach out to patients. One patient that Alice interacted with made a breakthrough that no one else had been able to achieve with him.

Anyway we were there for three days and on the last day that we were there we had a little party; we had snacks, a karaoke machine. So some of the clients got up and sang, and our class did the Macarena for them and they liked that and they were real excited.

…I was looking through the songs that they had, and I saw “You’ve got a Friend” by James Taylor. The refrain goes “When you’re down and troubled and you need a helping hand, all you have to do is call out my name, you’ve got a friend.” So I was singing that,
and there was this fella he was one that was just walking around mumbling all the time and hadn’t responded to anyone in years. He was just standing up in front of me, he just happened to start singing with me, and I put my hand on his shoulder. And, when we were singing the chorus part of “You’ve got a friend, people try to take your soul, don’t you let them,” I just reached out and got his hand. …so he takes over the microphone and we’re holding the microphone and he was singing with me. When we finished the song, this fella was so happy that he jumped up and down in the air, was clapping his hands, and then got down in the floor and did a somersault.

After this episode occurred, Alice received her evaluation for this clinical experience. Alice tells how her nursing instructor evaluated her on her performance in this clinical. However, once she hears the comments, Alice feels she can’t take credit for what happened with the patient.

So, when Miss R. said when I had exit evaluation told me “I want to be sure to tell you how well you had done when you went to Milledgeville because this was just an absolute major breakthrough for that patient and that was all the staff had talked about.” But I knew it wasn’t me that did, it was God through me, cause there is no way I could have done it. I just said, Hey here I am, if you can use me, use me. All, I did was obey what he had placed in me. I have done that before.

When asked why this was a spiritual experience, Alice replied:

Pretty obviously. That guy had walked around and mumbled for years and then all of a sudden he’s smiling, jumping up and down, actually happy, does a summersault. When no medication had been able to do that, no one had been able to talk to him, to help him. He does that. I mean no human could have done that. It had to be a higher power. It just so happens that I was used by a higher power to help that person.
Jo had an experience with a patient who died. She explained that because the patient died this reinforced to her that she was not in control, that God was in control. She knew the family had faith and because of that they would be alright. In this instance Jo says she had to lean on God to get through the experience.

I lost a patient. I had her for three days and I got to know her husband very well and her son as well and got to know the family during that time and a week later I attended her funeral and a week later her husband died. …at the funeral when he was hugging me and telling me how much he appreciated everything. For me, and I know I’m not in control, God’s in control of everything I do, everything he’s in control.

Jo explains why this was a spiritual experience.

Because it made me really think about what I’m doing with my life, if this is where I need to be, and if I can handle situations like this, um, and if I can turn it over and really see the reasoning behind it. There was nothing of course that I did or anything like that. Just that it was sad. Just to get through that. Had to lean on God.

Jenny believes she is here to be used by God and that her experiences with patients in clinical are a plan from someone higher. She feels she is sent to the specific patients that she has by God for a reason. In this incident she had a patient dying of cancer. She prayed with the family and she felt that in this instance God had placed her with this patient to be there to provide comfort and prayer. Jenny talks about one of her patients and the patient’s family:

I think this was one of my first patient’s that I had. She had cancer. And, uh, she ended up dying when I took care of her. She ended up on hospice care. I got really close to the family and uh, it was just almost like she was family to me and I was family to them as she was deteriorating. Before she died I went in there, knowing the family, they knew
where I stood as far as my Christian, you know, spirituality, and I just asked them if I could pray before it was her last breath. I just felt like I should do that and they were just like, Jenny, we would love for you to do that. I did and I just felt like that was what I was supposed to do at the time. That was a very special patient because that was my first patient and I made a bond with the family. I think that was one instance that God placed me the way it was supposed to be.

*Reveals purpose for one’s life.* Angel describes an experience with a patient which shows her connection and reaching out to others. In this particular incident Angel treated the patient with dignity and respect where others did not:

Towards the end I had a patient that was an alcoholic. She was drunk the night before. This sounds really bizarre. She fell on one of those huge pickle jars this big [shows with hands] and lacerated her buttock, not in the crack, but in the buttock and almost bled to death and she almost died. She was in. She had…she was very sick because of the alcohol. She had a hangover.

Angel next describes how her patient reacted when she learned that Angel knew her problem and the reason she was in the hospital:

I didn’t want her to know that I knew why she was there. To me that was unchristian. I took care of her. I took care of everything that needed to be taken care of with her. I didn’t feel the need to belittle her or bring her down. Well when she wouldn’t leave, the nurse, not the charge nurse, but the nurse that was over….you know how there’s us and there’s a nurse that it’s actually their patient but you take care of them all day. That nurse. She went in. She treated her awful. But I guess she had to to make her leave. All of sudden she looks at me and realizes I had known all day what she had done and why
she was there. She looked at me like she couldn’t believe I had treated her that well. The nurse said “I want you to put her in a wheelchair and take her out.”

Angel was frustrated with the situation of making the patient leave, but she tried to provide encouragement and understanding as she escorted the patient out of the hospital:

And, so, anyway, I took her out. And as we were going out, she said “I want you pray for me” and I said “absolutely.” First of all, I pray for all my patients before I come and when I leave I say the Rosary, on the way and on the way when I’m driving. And I said, “I will. I will pray for you.” She said “I know I have to give something up.” She wouldn’t admit that she was alcoholic. “I know I have to give something up that I don’t think I can.” I turned the wheelchair around and had her face me and I said, “You can do whatever you want to with your life. You have to make a commitment and you have to do it. If you ask God for help, he will give it to you, I promise you.”

Angel says that her experiences with the alcoholic patient were spiritual because the patient was being treated terribly by other medical personnel. She was treating this patient the same as every other patient that she took care of. She felt this was another validation of her vocation. She also felt she was being in Christ when she listened to her and encouraged her to quit drinking in a subtle way. She feels the patient appreciated having someone thinking of her and praying for her:

My experiences with the alcoholic patient were spiritual because she was being treated terribly by other medical personnel. I was treating her the same as I would every other patient I take care of. As a nurse you will take care of patients that are non compliant with their medicine, lifestyle etc. I felt this was another validation of my vocation.
Jo explains how her spirituality and religion are an integral part of her life and helps her reach out and connect with her fellow students and how this impacts her clinicals and her studies:

But having that connection to priests before I started school and doing the same rituals, and the same things, I think that really helps keep me balanced and keeps my family balanced as well. So, and you know, I know things are gonna be tough especially when I get out there. But as long as I can pray about ‘em and I know I can turn it over, for me that’s my comfort and I’m joyful and I take things easier. I take criticism, I think, easier. I think…

Justina described an incident in clinical where she realized that she made a difference in the lives of her patients. She had an obese patient who was being difficult, but Justina connected with her by singing a song and treating her with respect and talking to her rather than ordering her to do things. She felt the words of the song calmed the patient and offered the patient a sense of peace:

I was at a clinical and that day I got the patient I think that was, [sighs] I guess she was, I don’t know if she was upset, she was belligerent, she was quite obese. And everyone that had been in there she had practically bit their head off. She was throwing things at ‘em, and I mean from bodily fluids to whatever she could get to. So, I get there and I figure out, Justina this is your patient for the day and I say, “Oh Lord, what is she going to do to me.” So I put on the gear I put on all the protective equipment and I went in.

Justina went into the patient’s room with a positive attitude despite the negative impression others had given to her of this patient:

So I was humming a song, you know, I had been learning a song for church and I was humming a song. And, when I got in the room I had the mask on and I just kinda looked
at her. I guess even though you may not…they can’t see your mouth with the mask on your face, a lot of time when you smile your eyes will close or they will squint tighter and I was humming and I just kind walked in and I said, “Hey, how you doin’. I’m gonna take your vitals,” and I started humming a song.

The patient begins to respond to Justina’s methods of treating her:

And all she did was look at me and her eyes got teary and she said, “You have a beautiful voice” and I said “thank you.” I said, “I’m going to take your blood pressure, and I’m gonna check your pulse and listen to your lungs and stuff” and again, she was extremely obese so it was hard for her to even turn over to her side and listen as far as her lungs through her back. But, she was fine. And all day long she asked for me.

When asked if she felt that she had connected with the patient on a personal level, she said “I think I did. I think she was intimidated by everyone looking at her as an object not as a person.” Justina realizes that she has a gift beyond what others have been able to do for this particular patient, and she realizes that this is her purpose in life. Justina also said:

I think the words of the song calmed her. I think, uhm, it offered her a peace or a sense that somebody cared. I think maybe because she was obese and maybe because everybody that went in there may have shown the expression on their face even if they didn’t say something “ooh she’s so big and I got to turn her over.” I think she read everybody’s face that she didn’t want to be bothered. And I just went in and smiled at her behind my gown and I just kept humming and I said, “Do you want to open the blinds? It’s kind of dark in here; do you want to let the light in”? I think I probably may have been kind of the first person that held a general conversation with her instead of barking orders on what you needed or what you wanted her to do or what you need to do.
Angel describes a spiritual experience reaching out to a patient in clinical. This patient had blood clots in her feet and Angel used prayer to ask for guidance:

And, then there was a patient that on one of the days, I told you I have days I have my doubts and I had prayed that morning and said, “I need a sign. I know it’s wrong to ask for a sign. You know that I need this today.” It wasn’t even one of my patients. It was Sandy’s patient. She had blood clots, her foot was swollen. The doctor wanted to lance it and of course he didn’t want her to watch.

Angel seems to make an instant connection with this patient and gains her trust:

I just kind of hit it off with her. I said, “You look in my eyes. Don’t look down there. Look in my eyes and let’s talk. How many grandkids do you have? What do they do”? She started talking about one that was playing ball. He started lancing it, and I’m watching it out of the corner of my eyes. Blood clots this big were coming out of this woman’s leg. And I said, “Okay, and what else do they do”? And, that was another affirmation. After I walked out of that room, I went, “this is why I’m doing this. Because I can do this. I can actually see it. I can actually do something that will make a difference in peoples’ lives.”

Angel said that what made this experience spiritual was the fact that “I felt I needed validation that I was doing God’s will. My prayer of asking for a sign was answered when I had a good day and knew that I made a difference in the lives of the patients I had that day.” This experience for Angel shows that she is trying to validate her purpose.

*Involves the act of prayer.* Participants often used prayer to invoke a higher power in order to help a patient through a crisis. Maria describes a spiritual experience with a patient in clinical. In this incident a patient asked Maria to pray with her. Maria prayed in Spanish and the
patient prayed in English. During the course of the prayer, they both felt a rush of electricity which made them feel this was a special and spiritual event.

I was doing clinicals at the local hospital one day and she was an older lady, had no family and she said, “do you mind praying with me?” and she was American. Believe it or not, I’ve never prayed in English cause I’ve never gone to an English church. I looked at her and probably my face told her, “Are you crazy? I’m not gonna pray with you.” To me it was a shock when she asked she’d like to pray with me and I looked at her… my eyes…and she said, “Well you don’t have to” and I said, “No, No, Yes, I would love to pray with you. It’s just that I’ve always prayed in Spanish. I’ve never prayed in English. You can pray in English, and I’ll pray in Spanish, and the Lord still understands us.” And she started laughing. She said, “that’s fine as long as you can pray with me.” So we prayed and, of course, I prayed in Spanish it’s because I’m more comfortable I guess, and we finished praying, I just felt something within me like a rush, of, I don’t know, heat, electricity. She looked at me and said, “Did you feel that?” I was like, “Wooo.”

Aaron has an intuitive sense about the spiritual needs of others, and when he feels the time is right, he will offer to pray with them. Aaron describes a spiritual incident during his clinical experience that shows how he used prayer to connect with others:

And, it was a patient that was elderly, had broke a hip and a lot of things going on besides just the broken hip. A lot of family dynamics and needs. But, I’ve always been able to feel the spirit, to identify, our spirits communicate you know. In this particular situation, as I worked with them that 12 hour day, I was like, “you know, there’s a need there, more than I can provide for with a clinical aspect of it, nursing wise. Medicine’s not gonna do it.” Doctors can provide for the physical but there’s so much more than that. And, uh, in
talking to ‘em, I found out they did believe, they were Christians, and knew there was needs. But, when I went back in there to tell them goodbye, that I was gone for the evening, I asked them if we could pray. And, uh, oh, it was just automatic, “Oh yes, please do.” and they thanked me for caring for ‘em that day. But you know all the care that I provided that day, I don’t think made as much difference as touching God, and taking that time to go to Him and pray. Uh, and you know as oftentimes happens when you stop and you turn to God with your needs, there’s a peace, you know, it makes cold chills. And, uh, the scripture says it’s a peace that passes all understanding. And, I didn’t understand it, and I’ve been there before and will be there again I hope. But, they were so grateful that I was willing to stop and take that time out and lift them up.

Aaron feels this is a spiritual experience because when he prays it is like he is talking to a friend and he feels God is a friend that will help.

Angel describes how prayer as a spiritual experience is manifested in the classroom. She relates a specific experience from her cohort which had a unique member of the group who along with being a nursing student was also a minister.

We had a deacon, not a deacon, a pastor, Aaron, was a Baptist minister. Before tests we would always pray, he would pray with all of us praying with him. That I think helped. Because then I would say “bring the knowledge” Aaron would say, “If you haven’t studied, this isn’t gonna help you. I’m praying for God to give you the knowledge that you have studied and learned.”

Some participants in the study described experiences in which they felt events were controlled by God or a higher power such as Alice’s incident with the mental patient. Others discovered their purpose in life such as Angel who feels she is making a difference in people’s
lives such as the patient with the blood clots. Finally, some participants engaged in prayer to invoke a higher power. The best example of this is Maria’s experience with the patient who asked her to pray with her and they both felt a spark of electricity at the end of the prayer.

**Role of Spirituality in Learning**

This research area refers to the ways that spirituality affects participants’ learning in the classroom or clinical setting. The finding resulted in two categories which are that spirituality: 1) assists in classroom and clinical performance, and 2) instills confidence. Among these participants, spirituality is the ultimate source of success for a student in a nursing program. For many participants, spirituality was an aid for recalling information to pass tests or to carry out a clinical procedure successfully. This spirituality does not preclude preparation by the student which is essential. If the student has prepared, the belief is that God or a higher power will help get the student through the academic challenge successfully. Additionally, as reported by the participants, spirituality helps reduce stress, induce calmness and instill confidence.

*Assists in classroom and clinical performance.* Jo explains how she perceives what happens through prayer. She describes the times that she prays and how praying affects her learning.

Well especially before tests and before a new procedure that I haven’t done before, and I’m scared to do it [laughs] or I’m nervous about a test, I pray. I pray in the morning in the car, umn before I do clinicals, before I go to class. I don’t do anything without first praying about it. I think with my studies, it’s helped me to relax a little bit and especially during a big test because I know I’ve done the best that I can and just have to let it go with that. With procedures, I definitely pray to protect my patients, but I know that
God’s with me every step of the way. I think it really has reduced a lot of stress, although I do have stress, especially with finals and state boards coming up.

Alice describes how she and her classmates leaned on their spirituality through prayer in taking tests.

In class, we had a student there who is a minister; he’s working on getting his LPN. A lot of times before class especially if we were going to have a test, we would get him to pray. He would pray, “God please help us to be calm and relaxed to do well on the test and recall what we studied.” They allowed us to do that in class.

For me, I’m usually calm about taking tests. It was just like a little boost which was helpful. We had Thanksgiving dinner in class and we prayed over our food and that was good. He would pray, “We thank you for our instructors and pray that you would bless them and help them and that we would learn from the instruction that they have given us.” He spoke at our pinning and capping and that was really cool that he had gotten to do that.

Hollie explains how prayer is important for her in her learning during clinical activities. She affirms her belief in prayer and her ritualistic approach.

Well, I’m a firm believer in prayer. I always, I pray every day. Every morning before I come to school and every night before I go to bed. And, I always pray before clinicals, I always pray that “don’t let me hurt anybody, please, be with me,” you know and give me the fortitude to handle difficult situations and be as good of an example as I can.

Maria describes what prayer does for her learning. She claims that praying helps her emotionally and mentally.
I think it’s just gave me that mentality of relaxation and within me, just knowing the Lord is with me. I’m not saying that the Lord is gonna take the test for me, of course not, but for me just for my emotional and mental, just for me.

When asked how spirituality affects the way she learns, Lynn responded “I think it gives me more of an idea of life’s process. I don’t fear death.”

Probably it’s my belief in that if I do my part that anything I lack, he’ll step in. So as far as studying as long as I’ve gone through and read the things I need to read and studied the things I need to study. Then I will have the blessing of having those things brought to mind when I need to. That is one thing that us LDS [Latter Day Saints] people have…the belief that the Holy Ghost is a teacher. And, he is able to help bring to mind what you have seen and studied before. That’s something that’s gone all through school.

*Instills confidence.* Alice describes how her spirituality helped her to reach out to patients in the clinical setting. Her spirituality was influential in helping her to remain calm and confident:

Well, I guess the aspects that having the spiritual component to me helped me to be more calm and confident around the clients. Because there was one we were told specifically do not be alone around this fella because he was violent. It just helped me to be more calm and to know that God was actually using us to actually reach out to these people not only the patients but to the staff. Because I think if anything what happened when we went down there helped to encourage the staff that even though some of those clients are really, really bad off, it’s possible to reach them and I think that through the music, through the karaoke machine that they got, that they had hinged upon something that could help reach them.
I pray every day before I go in “God help me to be a blessing to my coworkers and to my patients and their family members. Give me the wisdom to jump around and be funny and when to be serious. And, help me to reach out to them to be a source of comfort and healing.” And I just ask that I be used as his instrument. Aaron explains how his spirituality helps him with his learning in practical nursing courses. As mentioned previously in the definition, Aaron believes that God and spirituality are the same:

It was a quarter that I had three classes that quarter, English, math and something else and research papers due for those classes. I went and bought the book for the NLN to study and never opened it. And, uh, I went in knowing I hadn’t studied and had no anticipation of passing it, because I’m not good at math, reading skills were not what I considered, what anybody considers high. I struggle, always have. And, uh, it’s in those times that you have a trust, and a faith, you know, that if God wants those doors to open, that he’ll make you sharp and, you know, I could look back and regret that I didn’t study for that test. That’s probably the only test in my whole career that I didn’t study for (laughs). Because I was like, God you’ve opened that door, I better do my part. Spirituality and study, I think once you study, once you give it your best shot, there comes a point where you have to trust and have faith and that he’s gonna enable you to do your best. And, he has.

When God has a direction for you, He can make all things work together. He can enable you to do more than you ever expected. Scripture says and I can’t recall the verse, when we’re weak, then he’s strong.
Jenny explains how her spirituality is important in instilling confidence by bringing a sense of peace during her learning:

I guess it comes back to I just try not to depend on my knowledge and my mind to remember and uhm, depend on God to give me that wisdom and knowledge and memory recall when it comes time. I wouldn’t say I’m completely calm before a test, but more of a peace that I’m not doing things on my own maybe.

Justina explains how her spirituality gives her confidence and assurance in learning.

I think because I am strong in my faith, I feel like it gives me a confidence and assurance that if I make the effort, if I try, then everything’ll be OK, you know. Back to the old adage, if you make one step, I’ll take two. I think if I show beyond everything he can put in front of me to get it right or to do it right, then success is inevitable as long as you have that faith.

One participant, Nicole, offered very little in the way of her perception of spirituality because she understood the question to be about the presence of spirituality in the syllabus and readings. This is evident from her response to an early question during the interview:

No, I mean I think that a lot that God has been removed so much from curriculum now that you really don’t get any spirituality…that was an experience that I had solely because I had a patient but I don’t think….I think that was very abnormal. I don’t think you run across that often and I don’t think that in our courses and in our clinicals that we get much….Of course we’re taught to respect people’s cultures and beliefs because they’re so different. But there’s never any teaching that focuses on that I don’t think.

However, later in the interview, Nicole did offer a perception similar to other participants that reflects spirituality as being important in her learning:
Well, of course, I’m going to school for nursing so I do believe in the power of medicine. But I also believe in the power of God. I don’t think that medicine alone heals people. I think that it goes a long way towards helping people but in the long run I think that God is the person who really heals you.

I pray, I do, every morning before I have a test especially to have a clear head and to help remember the things that I learn and not to get so anxious that I forget it. I do have that test anxiety. But as far as ritual, I just believe in the power of prayer so that’s pretty much it.

Some participants felt their spirituality through prayer helps them recall information for tests and when performing a new procedure in clinical. An example is Hollie who prays ritually in the morning and at night but also before she goes into clinicals. She prays before clinicals so that she will perform her duties correctly and will give the right comfort to her patients. Some participants also felt more confident as a result of their spirituality. An example of this is Justina who says she has the confidence and assurance that if she makes the effort then everything will be all right.

Summary

The findings of this study have provided insight into understanding how adult learners perceive the influence of spirituality on their learning in practical nursing programs in technical colleges. Participants provided answers to questions specifically designed to obtain the information which would answer the research questions. The definitions of belief in a higher power, connection to others, self or to a higher power and putting beliefs into practice are evident in the participants descriptions of their experiences of spirituality in their clinicals particularly and occasionally in the classroom. The definitions of the participants are similar to their beliefs.
It is their belief and confidence in the higher power that they turn to for recall on tests or for performing a new procedure in the clinical setting. The belief and connection with this higher power also instills confidence and gives them peace and calmness to do their best.

Definitions of spirituality by participants include belief in a higher power, connection to others, self or to a higher power, and putting beliefs into practice. The perception of a higher power is the most pervasive category and occurs across all categories. Participants used the phrase belief in a higher power, God, Jesus and other names to help define their perception of spirituality. Participants also feel guided by a higher power and pray to a higher power in times of need with patients and to recall learning on tests.

The manifestation of spiritual experiences of nursing students occurs primarily in the clinical setting with the exception of prayer before tests to recall learning. The spiritual experiences are explained by the students as controlled by higher power, reveal purpose for one’s life and often include the act of prayer. Through the shared experiences of the students, one can conclude that most of the time these spiritual experiences occur in clinical settings.

The role of spirituality in the learning of nursing students is found in performance in the classroom and clinical but particularly in the clinical setting. Because of their spirituality which is primarily through invoking of a higher power through prayer, students feel confident to perform well in the classroom during tests and to perform new procedures or deal with new patients in the clinical setting.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to understand how adult learners perceive the influence of spirituality on their learning in practical nursing programs in technical colleges. Specifically, I addressed these research questions:

1. How do adult nursing students define spirituality?
2. In what ways do adult nursing students describe how spirituality is manifested in practical nursing programs in technical colleges?
3. What is the role of spirituality for students’ learning in practical nursing programs in technical colleges?

A literature review provided an overview of the trends in spirituality, spirituality in adult education, definitions of spirituality, integrating spirituality into adult education, and spirituality and nursing. A basic qualitative design was used to conduct the study. Data was collected through interviews with 1) practical nursing students in their fourth quarter or students who had recently graduated from a technical college setting set in a southeastern state, 2) the participant attended classes and clinical practice in the nursing discipline and had completed all of the core courses required for entrance into the practical nursing program, and 3) the student was at least in the fourth quarter or had graduated. The three research areas are adult nursing students’ definition of spirituality, how spiritual experiences are manifested in nursing education programs and the role of spirituality in learning. There are eight categories found within the three research areas. There are three conclusions based on the findings:
Conclusion one: Belief in a transcendent being is the most pervasive perception of spirituality for nursing students.

Conclusion two: Spiritual experiences for nursing students involve acts of prayer, are guided by God or a higher power, and lead to an understanding of one’s purpose in life.

Conclusion three: Nursing students perceive that spirituality enhances their capacity for learning.

Conclusions and Discussion

Conclusion one: Belief in a transcendent being is the most pervasive perception of spirituality for nursing students. This conclusion is based on the weight of evidence that reflects spirituality for these nursing students is influenced by their perception of God or a higher power. This researcher was not able to locate other literature in adult or nursing education that gives this much weight to a transcendent being in definitions of spirituality. Spirituality, viewed as a transcendent being, is in the literature but is not presented as the overarching definition. This conclusion is made because of the influence of God or a higher power across all eight categories. For example, acts of prayer are to the higher power; they are guided by a higher power; and the higher power is responsible for helping them have meaning and purpose in their lives. In conclusion three it is found that the learning process for many students involved prayer to the higher power to assist in taking tests or performing procedures and instilling confidence.

One possible explanation for the findings that underpin this conclusion is that the sample is almost all Christian in religious belief. With God or a higher power at the center of Christianity, it is reasonable that these participants would be influenced by this perception of spirituality.
The literature provides very little on what students perceive of spirituality. In this study, three definitions of spirituality emerged from the interviews. Participants’ definitions revealed three categories: 1) belief in a higher power 2) connection to others, self or to a higher power, and 3) putting beliefs into practice. However, across all findings, belief in a higher power or transcendent being influences every category.

Although all three categories are found within this research area, belief in a higher power pervades the other two as well. With a connection to others, self or to a higher power, the key connection with the first category of belief in a higher power is that this category exists in order to feel a connection to the higher power. With the third category of putting beliefs into practice, the beliefs mentioned are that it is evident that they believe in a higher power and conduct themselves accordingly through prayer and general day to day practices. All three categories are found within the adult education literature.

As discussed in the findings, the first research area involved the definition of spirituality. The first category of the definition regarding belief in a higher power is similar to that found by English and Gillen (2000) who state their definition as an awareness of something greater. One of the assumptions made by Tisdell (2003) is about awareness and honoring of all things through what she refers to as Life-force:

Spirituality is about an awareness and honoring of wholeness and the interconnectedness of all things through the mystery of what many I interviewed referred to as the Life-force, God, higher power, higher self, cosmic energy, Buddha nature, or Great spirit. (p. 28)

A similar concept occurs in Tolliver and Tisdell (2001) and Tisdell and Tolliver (2001). For example, Tisdell and Tolliver (2001) use “a connection to what many refer to as the Life-force, God, a higher power or purpose, Great Mystery, or Buddha Nature” (p.13) as part of their
definition. Indeed, Tolliver and Tisdell (2006) continue to make this reference to “Life-force, God, a higher power or purpose, Great spirit, or Buddha Nature” (p. 38). In addition, Fenwick, English and Parsons (2003) in their dimensions of spirituality identify higher power within the third dimension of cosmology. They state “the simple answer is that people often simply believe in a higher power” (p. 31).

The second category of the definition regarding connection to others, self or to a higher power can also be seen in the study by Courtenay and Milton (2004) who further defined spirituality as a sense of connectedness, search for meaning, and awareness of a transcendent force. Alice’s definition is also in line with that of Courtenay and Milton since it overlaps the first and third category of the definition in this study. Alice stated that “spirituality is probably having a belief in a higher person, a higher calling that helps a person to become better and to have a focus and grounding in their life.” Along with an awareness of something greater than ourselves, English and Gillen (2000) also include a sense that we are connected to all human beings and to all of creation. The connection to others, self or higher power is similar to that found by Courtenay and Milton (2004); English and Gillen (2000); Mackerarcher (2004) and Tolliver and Tisdell (2002). Hoover (2001) found in her study on nursing as human caring that one of the characteristics of spiritual awareness was enhanced connecting relationships with self and others.

As further evidence of this category within the definitions, Jenny and Justina share a concept of knowing that they aren’t alone. Jenny states “I think spirituality to me is not finding my strength but in God’s strength.” Justina states “I think that your spirituality is just a personal relationship. It’s what you seek from whatever higher power you believe in.”
The third category of the definition is putting beliefs into practice. Aaron’s definition of spirituality and his philosophy about his life is similar to Hart and Holton (1993) who describe spirituality “as a practice, as a way of life” (p. 241). This belief coincides with the results of the study by Zinnbauer et al. (2001) who concluded that the concepts of religion and spirituality are not fully independent and that both are associated with prayer, church attendance and incorporate traditional concepts of the sacred such as God or Jesus. Since Aaron is a preacher as well as a nurse, he is a great example of putting beliefs into practice.

This conclusion is closely related to knowledge previously established in the literature. There is little difference in this conclusion from the literature other than with the exception that there is one category which was dominant in the findings. The finding and therefore the basis of this conclusion is the belief in a higher power or transcendent being.

**Conclusion two: Spiritual experiences for nursing students involve acts of prayer, are guided by God or a higher power, and lead to an understanding of one’s purpose in life.** The findings for this conclusion were from research area two regarding spiritual experiences manifested in four cohorts within the nursing education program of a technical college. The categories are 1) guided by God or higher power, 2) reveals purpose for one’s life, and 3) involves the act of prayer. This conclusion reinforces conclusion one that the belief in a higher power is pervasive over all findings. For example, acts of prayer are to the higher power; the perception that one is guided by a higher power; and the higher power is responsible for helping them have meaning and purpose in their lives. In this study, learners were asked to talk about spiritual experiences in the learning setting. In the adult education literature, the adult education scholars describe how to make these experiences happen rather than describing the experiences themselves.
In their study, Courtenay and Milton (2004) addressed the issue of integrating spirituality in adult education. Educators responded to a question about how they integrate spirituality in their teaching. Some of their results include: “Libby [Tisdell] advocates that spirituality is important because ‘it is always there,’ meaning that learners and educators bring spirituality to a learning experience whether it’s acknowledged or not” (p.103).

Courtenay and Milton (2004) provide a rationale for goals from instructors’ perspectives with respect to how learners feel about those goals. When describing Tisdell’s response, they report that she incorporates “things around music, image, and symbol and things like this that are to me, some people map to as spiritual because it gets at unconscious stuff that we are not fully aware [of]” (p. 104). “Her goal is to help learners tap into their unconscious, using their sensory capabilities in the learning experience” (p. 104). Although adult educators have these types of goals for learners, the learners in my study did not have these specific types of activities incorporated to inspire spiritual experiences. There were some activities which the learners themselves initiated which provided spiritual insight. An example is one of the participants, Alice, when she incorporated karaoke to help mentally challenged adults in a state facility.

The results shown by Henry in the Courtenay and Milton study are similar to the way adult learners in my study responded with the category of purpose for one’s life.

Henry advocated integrating spirituality in adult education because: when we’re working with the learners,…who are fundamentally sort of bound up with this sort of spiritual matrix…and the kinds of things that we do in adult education, by and large, are questions that are not that far removed from these kinds of what I would call perennial questions or possibly essential…questions about the meaning of life. (Courtenay & Milton, 2004, p. 103-104)
Hoover (2001) in her study on nursing as human caring also found that spiritual awareness of the students was characterized by finding purpose and meaning in life and clarifications of values. In addition, Garner, McGuire, Snow, Gray, and Wright (2002) define spirituality as a person’s inner resources and values that guide and give meaning to life. The literature in nursing education discusses treating the whole person. Burkhardt and Nagai-Jacobson (2004) state that “healing is essentially a spiritual process that attends to the wholeness of a person” (p. 25). References to spirituality are primarily related to patient’s spirituality or recognizing one’s own spirituality in attending to the patient’s spiritual care.

Students relate spiritual experiences by referencing prayer in some way. Often students will pray prior to a clinical experience and sometimes prior to taking tests in the classroom. Those experiences occurring in clinicals will cause situations which make students realize that they are not in control or sometimes the death of a patient makes them realize that they are not in control and they attribute control to God. The spiritual experiences that involve prayer are the person’s perception that the spiritual aspect is communication between themselves and a higher power. Also, the realization that the spiritual experiences were guided by a higher power.

The first category of being guided by a higher power reveals itself in the clinical experiences of the participants. Alice is an example of a participant who believes that she is an instrument of God and that God is guiding the situation. In referencing an experience in a mental health facility, Alice stated “it had to be a higher power. It just so happens that I was used by a higher power to help that person.”

The second category, reveal purpose for one’s life, is found in clinical experiences of participants as well. The spiritual experience here was that there is an understanding of the meaning or purpose in life that came about through activities engaged in with the patient. Their
purpose in life was revealed to them as a result of interacting with the patient. In Jo’s description of a spiritual experience she had in the clinic, she explained that the experience “made me really think about what I’m doing with my life.”

Jo’s reaction to her spirituality and nursing care are reflective of Garner, McGuire, Snow, Gray, and Wright (2002) who define spirituality as a person’s resources and values that guide and give meaning to life. Hoover (2001) discovered in her study that spiritual awareness of students was characterized by enhanced connecting relationship with self and others, finding purpose and meaning in life, and clarification of values.

Tisdell (2001) stated that “spirituality is one of the ways people construct knowledge and meaning” (p. 3). English, Fenwick, and Parsons (2003) claim that “spirituality may indeed be about finding meaning in relationship or work itself, or in oneself” (p. 7). In Courtenay and Milton’s (2004) study, one of the outcomes was that “adult educators and learners are in agreement that the goal of integrating spirituality in adult education is to create an environment that provides an opportunity for learners to address questions about meaning and purpose in life” (p. 105).

The third category is “involves the act of prayer.” Prayer is often used in the classroom and clinicals to invoke a higher power to help a patient with a crisis or to bring calmness and confidence before a test. Maria encountered a patient who asked her to pray with her. During the prayer, both Maria and the patient felt what Maria described as a rush of electricity. She claimed “We finished praying, I just felt something within me like a rush, of, I don’t know, heat, electricity.”

Many adult educators (English, Fenwick & Parsons, 2003; English & Gillen, 2000; Gillen & English, 2000; Lauzon, 2000) advocate integrating spirituality into adult education
experiences. Gillen and English (2000) assert that spirituality requires adult educators to challenge themselves to listen to the needs of the learners. Vella (2000) states “each learning event is a moment of spiritual development” (p. 8). Fenwick and English (2004) developed an eight dimensional framework which can be used by adult educators to integrate spirituality into the adult learning experience.

Lauzon (2001) advocates a safe environment for spiritual learning which should be created by the adult educator. In this way learners can feel free to explore and express their spirituality. Tisdell (2003) also advocates the right environment “where people can bring their whole selves into the learning environment” (p. 42). Although Lauzon and Tisdell make an important point, learners in my study did not mention anything about needing the right environment in which to feel safe. However, based on how they explained their experiences, it can be inferred that they were free to express their feelings about their spiritual experiences and not feel vulnerable. Participants were more focused on the aspects of the higher power as their main element and that higher power guiding their lives. On the other hand, it is apparent that these learners were allowed to have these kinds of experiences because they were allowed to pray before tests so in that way there was a safe environment.

The spiritual experiences by the learners in this study are not specifically addressed in the literature. The experiences of the learners in this study suggest that the adult educator should allow students to focus on communication or acknowledgement of a higher power, communication with a higher power, and focus on activities that help students get meaning and purpose for their life, if they wish to address learners’ spiritual needs. None of the experiences reported by the learners in this study were intentionally manipulated or caused by their teachers. They were not planned or contrived by the educators or any other individuals. These events were
naturally occurring or evolved from their daily experiences. In my opinion, based on responses by the students, the instructors were open to the students praying; but they did not encourage prayer nor did they discourage prayer. There is no direct evidence to determine that there was any direct intervention by the instructors to promote any specific spiritual experiences.

Not having evidence from the interviews about the presence or absence of spirituality in the readings or syllabi of the courses completed by the participants, I contacted four nursing instructors to obtain more information. One instructor replied to the request noting that there is a reference to holistic care in almost all competencies of the courses primarily in the clinical. She went on to say that care for the mind, body, spirit of the patient is emphasized in this holistic approach. However, she stated that there are no readings on spirituality related to the patient or the student. In a follow-up e-mail, when she wished to elaborate on her first answer, she pointed out that the courses do not include a “chapter on spirituality” but that spirituality is integrated throughout the program. This information served to bolster the inference that I made with respect to the fact that the courses do not include a look at the spirituality of the student.

**Conclusion three: Nursing students perceive that spirituality enhances their capacity for learning.** One of the reasons for this study was to try to understand the role spirituality plays in the learning of students. The literature claims that spirituality can aid in student’s learning and may even encourage transformational learning. Therefore, this study attempted to understand what learners say with respect to the influence of spirituality on learning. The findings for this conclusion are based on the third research area from the findings which is the role of spirituality in learning. The categories in this research area indicate that prayer assists in classroom and clinical performance and instills confidence in clinicals and classroom.
Hoover (2001) claims that students in her study experienced transformative learning. Her reasons for making this claim are because both the person caring and the person being cared for are influenced by the relationship. Hoover references back to Watson’s model of transformative caring-healing as her source. Since Watson’s model was not used in my study, I cannot claim transformative learning by the students although some may have occurred. However, Tisdell and Tolliver (2001) suggest that spirituality may facilitate transformational learning. Although not providing empirical evidence, they claim “by engaging learners on the personal, cultural, structural, political, and the spiritual levels, we believe there is greater chance that education is transformed both personally and collectively, both for learners and educators” (p. 14).

Courtenay and Milton (2004) concluded that it is important to use methods that establish an appropriate environment for addressing spirituality. Some of the educators in their study suggested techniques that get to the day-to-day experiences of the adult learner. Creating a classroom environment that allowed individuals to discover their own spirituality was important, as was respecting the opinions of the adult learner. In the Courtenay and Milton study, Henry and Allison proposed incorporating spirituality into the everydayness of learning. As Henry states: “It’s using the readings, it’s using the questions that are coming up, the discussions that are present in class, the interactions” (Courtenay & Milton, 2004, p. 105). For Allison this meant taking advantage of the “small moments…when I can really focus on a student and when I think about and focus on finding the sacred in what’s going on between us and sometimes when I let…go of the agenda” (Courtenay & Milton, 2004, p. 105).

English, Fenwick and Parsons (2003) suggest that adult educators should think “in terms of hospitality” (p. 78). In addition, English, et. al. (2003) suggest that educators cultivate their own spirituality through such things as journal writing, artwork, music and body movement to
name a few. These scholars are talking about tapping into the learners’ unconscious or non-rational ways of knowing and learning. While these techniques are advocated, based on the findings, the learners in this study did not experience these techniques in their learning.

What the learners in this study conveyed was that their spiritual experiences enhanced their learning capacity and confidence as a learner. This is specific learning expressed by learners that emerged from the experience and not from the action of the educator. The only planned component would be the fact that nursing students must participate in the clinical setting. Based on the responses from the participants, there was not a goal or intention by the instructors that a spiritual experience would occur. Participants learned from those experiences as a part of their everyday work in relating with other people. The nursing context environment is naturally conducive to these types of experiences, but it does not necessarily follow that all students will have these experiences.

Burkhardt and Nagai-Jacobson (2000) are supportive of spirituality being a part of holistic learning. They state that “spirituality cannot be separate from our lives and experiences as physical, emotional, social, and thinking persons” (p. 5). In addition, Pesut (2003) states that those with a deeper understanding of their own spirituality can better deal with the spirituality of others.

Tisdell (2003) maintains that educators should create an environment “where people can bring their whole selves into the learning environment and acknowledge the powerful ways they create meaning through their cultural, symbolic, and spiritual experience, as well as through the cognitive” (p. 42). Lauzon (2001) also affirms creating a safe environment for spiritual learning.

The first category that spirituality “assists in classroom and clinical performance” can be found in Jo’s perception of what happens with prayer. Jo states “Well especially before tests and
before a new procedure that I haven’t done before, and I’m scared to do it [laughs] or I’m nervous about a test, I pray.” Alice shares one incident in which the preacher in the class was asked to pray. She stated that he would say “God please help us to be calm and relaxed to do well on the test and recall what we studied.” Alice claimed this gave her a “little boost which was helpful.”

The second category, “instills confidence,” is explained by Alice. Alice stated “Well, I guess the aspects that having a spiritual component to me helped me to be more calm and confident around the clients.”

These conclusions can be important for adult and nursing education and for the learners’ themselves. Because there is very little of this type of research to inform nurse educators, the results of this study will be important for providing an understanding of their students’ spirituality. An important point is that these spiritual experiences occurred naturally in the educational environment for adult learners in nursing programs such as in the clinical setting. These naturally occurring experiences will be helpful for providing nurse educators a reference point to provide students points of discussions and inspiration for journaling their experiences.

Implications

This study does confirm the fact that some learners in a nursing education program do bring their spirituality into the classroom, and they do have spiritual experiences. Adult and nursing educators need to be aware of this fact as a part of the learning experience.

This study provides evidence that spirituality does have a positive influence on the learning of nursing students. The implication here is that instructors can increase ways of making students aware of their own spirituality through different instructional techniques as well as how their spirituality can help the spiritual needs of others. Nurse educators could use the fact
that some students are engaging in prayer as it relates to their role as a learner and, therefore, incorporate different scenarios in the first quarter of courses. The first quarter is a good place to incorporate these techniques because the first half of the first quarter usually covers theoretical material and some skill building while the second half of the quarter will place the students in the clinical area. These scenarios could focus on how learners’ spirituality affects their learning; and, in addition, how students have used their spirituality in the past to succeed in taking tests, in performing procedures for patients, and in praying for the patients themselves. Practical nursing instructors can benefit from knowing how the spirituality of their students affects their learning. This same knowledge can be applied to other levels of nursing students who deal directly with patients such as registered nurses.

Specific activities that nurse educators could do would be to incorporate a section on discussion about individual spirituality of the student and what it means and the possibility that for some students’ spirituality may be a factor in their learning experiences. One means of approaching the spiritual aspect of their students would be to suggest that students discuss these types of experiences in their study groups. Guidelines for discussion would restrict specific discussion to spirituality rather than religion. Instructors could provide definitions for religion and spirituality. One thing to avoid is advocating any specific religious affiliations in the classroom or clinical while acknowledging that these two are usually intertwined.

Because spiritual experiences do occur in the classroom and clinicals and may occur for some students repeatedly, as one method it would be appropriate for teachers in these situations to provide quiet time prior to each test. This time prior to a test could be described as quiet time for meditation, prayer, to gather thoughts or any similar activity as long as they maintain silence for the required time.
Another implication of this research is that it makes a contribution to the literature and is important for both adult education and nursing education. Because scholars in both adult and nursing education claim that a holistic approach to teaching adults is the most effective adult learning approach, the integration of spirituality completes this holistic approach.

Heron (1992) is an example of one adult educator who claims that learning involves the whole person. Yorks and Kasl (2002) concur with Heron’s work on holism. Fenwick and English (2004) also share the view of the importance of the holistic approach to education. Garner, McGuire, Snow, Gray, and Wright (2002) are nursing educators who promote nursing as holistic care. They claim it is important to care for the entire person. Because of this claim, they assert that educators need to understand students’ perspectives of spirituality in order to understand the links between spiritual care and education.

English, Fenwick and Parsons (2003) invite educators “to make spaces for the holy within their busy lives. We also invite educators to consider weaving their spirituality into their vocation. They can then communicate this personal integration of spirituality into their interactions with adult learners” (p. 49). They claim that adult educators can “incorporate a spiritual dimension into their teaching in a number of different ways” (p. 49). The ways for incorporating a spiritual dimension include: “honoring spiritual questions from learners, challenging learners to consider how particular topics affect their spirituality, and supporting dialogue about crucial life issues such as death and illness” (p. 49). These topics and issues raised by students in nursing programs can be catalysts for discussions in the nursing classes and clinical settings.

English (2000) claims that a spiritual dimension can be fostered in self-directed learners. She further claims that these “connections can be maintained through listservs, e-mail, fax, and
telephone, along with personal contact” (p. 36). Vogel (2000) maintains fostering “holistic ways of thinking critically and imaginatively in adults. These strategies include working together on critical incidents or case studies, journaling, and using contemporary film and literature” (p. 25). Adult educators and specifically nurse educators in this instance can use the types of strategies listed to stimulate spiritual development within their students.

In terms of clinical activities, instructors could explain to learners that there may be moments where their abilities, skills and knowledge can only take them so far. Learners need to be aware of that and that some of their patients don’t always have the ability to make it through a situation and live. Students need to realize their limitations. For some students, this will be an understanding that a higher power “is in control.” Instructors need to be aware that spiritual experiences do occur and can provide understanding, meaning and purpose for those students who do have these experiences. Instructors need to make themselves available to those students who do have spiritual experiences and want to discuss the impact of those experiences on their lives. Instructors should be willing to help students interpret their experiences as they have to do with meaning and purpose in life.

Spirituality can help some students build confidence. Instructors should be aware of this and allow it to happen for those students who require it. Instructors have to be aware and be willing to allow students to express their spirituality to learn, to know that they’re going to have these experiences, to affirm them, and to be willing to discuss them. Instructors should admit to students that they realize that spirituality for some students is an anchor and a confidence builder, and they should encourage those students to lean on it.

Instructors could add a component to their orientation for students on the topic of spirituality that involves the student and his/her spirituality. Since nursing instructors in the
technical college are required to have office hours, instructors could again acknowledge that students may come to them to discuss any difficulties, problems in coursework or clinical, personal problems hindering their success, successes they are having in clinical, accomplishments they have made, and any spiritual issues that might come up with respect to learning in the course. They should let their students know that these spiritual experiences may occur for some of them and that it is acceptable. This would necessitate giving the students the definitions and boundaries they have for discussing the spiritual as opposed to religion.

Another avenue for discussion about spiritual experiences could be in the weekly discussion of clinical cases. Students should feel free to bring spiritual experiences into the discussion of the general cases they are working with.

The implications for the adult education literature are that it provides more insight into the actual perceptions of adult learners in the educational setting. Educators in public education and higher education are aware that spirituality can have an influence on students. Many faculty members have incorporated components of spirituality within their teaching strategies. Since most of the research on spirituality in adult education is mostly from the perception of the instructor, the findings from this study are important in providing the students’ perspective of spirituality and learning.

Recommendations

The following recommendations for future research are based on the findings and conclusions of the study.

1. A spirituality study could be conducted using practical nursing instructors in technical colleges as the participants. The reason for conducting this type of study
would be to see the similarities or differences between how the instructors and students perceive spirituality and its relevance in the learning environment.

2. A broader study could be conducted seeking students of more varied religious backgrounds as participants. The majority (seven) of the participants in this study were of the Baptist religion. Seeking students with different religious backgrounds could add richness to the study in terms of how spirituality is manifested in their learning. Whereas participants in this study relied on prayer, other religions may use different types of methods to access their spirituality.

3. A similar study could be conducted using participants in a different course of study. Results could be compared with this study to see the similarities and differences among the participants. An example of a program of study which might be used would be in a technical or industrial field such as automotive collision repair or small engine repair. It would be interesting to see if a higher power and prayer are also used in a field which does not typically deal with life and death matters.

4. A study could be conducted on whether or not the perception of a higher power or transcendent being is the most predominant perception of spirituality with a different group of adult learners. The literature has provided no single definition but several definitions, and the literature does not make a judgment about one definition being more important than another. My study shows that spirituality is viewed as a higher power and this provides a foundational component of these students’ definition.

5. A similar study could be conducted in a different geographical region of the country. This study was limited to the southeastern area of the country where the perceptions about spirituality may be different from another region of the country. In addition to
region, one might also examine differences between urban and rural participants. The purpose of the study would be to determine if similar results are obtained in a different geographic setting.
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Tisdell, E. J. (2002). Spiritual development and cultural context in the lives of women adult educators for social change. *Journal of Adult Development, 9*(2), 127-140.


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APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW GUIDE

**Explanation of purpose of research:** I am conducting a research project as a part of my doctoral program at the University of Georgia. My focus is on students of Lanier Technical College who are enrolled in the Practical Nursing program. I want to understand how adult students perceive the influence of spirituality on their learning. I hope that my research will provide information to nursing educators in order to better incorporate learners’ spirituality into their learning.

I will be using alias to refer to you in the results of the research so that your privacy will be protected. You may select the name for the alias if you like, or I can choose one for you.

I would like to tape record what you say so that I don’t miss it and can get it completely and accurately. Is that OK with you?

**Biographical and Personal Information**

Interview Questions:

1. Tell me about yourself.

Things to Look for:
How old are you?
What gender?
What is your ethnic background?
What is your educational level/background?
What is your religious affiliation or beliefs?
What are your family relationships and your responsibilities within those relationships?
Describe a typical day in your life for me.

**Research Question 1: How do adult nursing students define spirituality?**

1. Please describe an event in your life which you believe was spiritual.
2. Why was this experience a spiritual event?

3. In describing this spiritual experience, you’ve used words like______ and _____. Would you agree that those words make up your definition of spirituality?

4. What is your definition of spirituality?

5. Describe your thoughts and feelings about religion and spirituality?
   - Do you think religion and spirituality are the same? If not, how are they different? If they are the same, tell me in what way?

Research Question 2: In what ways do adult nursing students describe how spirituality is manifested in practical nursing courses in technical colleges?

1. Describe a specific incident during your nursing courses or clinical that you felt was a spiritual experience.

Things to Look for:
   - Who was involved;
   - Exactly what happened;
   - How long did the experience last;
   - Did any one person have a role in influencing this spiritual event;
   - In what ways did this person or persons carry out the role;
   - If the teacher is not named; then what role did the instructor play in the experience?

2. Why do you believe this experience was a spiritual experience?

3. Describe an interaction with a patient which involved spirituality in some way.

Research Question 3: What is the role of spirituality for students’ learning in practical nursing course in technical colleges?

1. Would you explain to me how your spirituality affects the way you learn in your nursing courses?
2. Let's return to the classroom experience that you described as being spiritual. What aspects of that spiritual experience helped your learning in that course?

Follow-up

1. What else would you like to tell me?

2. Do you know of other students in your program who you think would be interested in participating in this study?
APPENDIX 2:
Consent Form for The Influence of Spirituality on Learning for Adult Learners in Technical College Practical Nursing Programs

I agree to take part in a research study entitled, “The Influence of Spirituality on Learning for Adult Learners in Technical College Practical Nursing Programs” that is being conducted by June E. McClain (706-654-1476), doctoral student in the Adult Education Program, University of Georgia, under the direction of Dr. Bradley C. Courtenay (706-542-4012), Professor, Adult Education Program, University of Georgia.

I do not have to take part in this study; I can stop taking part at any time without giving any reason, and without penalty. I can ask to have information related to me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed. I understand that the reason for this study is to understand the influence of spirituality on learning for adult students in technical college practical nursing programs. Interviews of adult learners in practical nursing programs will be audio taped. The finished study will be in the form of a dissertation.

I understand that I may benefit from the results of the research by realizing how spirituality influences my learning.

If I volunteer to take part in the study, I will be asked to participate in one audiotape interview about my experiences of spirituality in the learning environment including classroom, clinical, or study groups. I understand that the interview will take approximately 60 minutes to an hour and a half at a place that is convenient to me. I may be contacted by phone, or E-mail after the interview to review the themes identified during my interview or to schedule additional time to review the themes.

I understand that my participation is voluntary. I understand that no risks are expected. No deception will take place on the part of the researcher. Confidentiality statement: No information about me, or provided by me during the research, will be shared with others without my written permission, except if required by law. If I provide information that is used in this study, confidentiality will be maintained in the written report, as well as in any presentation of the information. I will choose or be assigned a pseudonym and this pseudonym will be used on all of the data pertaining to me. Pseudonyms will be used on the audio tape and the written transcript. I understand that I am agreeing by my signature on this form to take part in this research project and understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form for my records. The transcribed interview will be analyzed by the researcher and the dissertation committee. Any written report will contain no identifying data. I understand the tapes will be destroyed once the dissertation is approved. Demographic data will be presented as group data.

Ms. McClain will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project, and can be reached by telephone at: 706-654-1476 or 770-531-6360.

My signature below indicates that Ms. McClain has answered all of my questions to my satisfaction and that I consent to volunteer for this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

June E. McClain  _______________  __________   __________   __________
Name of Researcher   Signature    Date
Telephone: 706-654-1476
Email: junemcclain01@msn.com

_________________________     _____________________ __  __________
Name of Participant   Signature    Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.
Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 612 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu