Exploring Spiritual Needs in the Classroom – Implications for Educators

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ABSTRACT

This research replicated a previous mixed-methods exploratory study of spirituality and spiritual development (Yocum, 2014). 339 participants at two southeastern United States universities were administered a Likert-scale survey to collect data to explore the correlations between the existing components of the proposed spiritual development framework. Qualitative confirmation was obtained via 20 interviews from 10 participants at each university. Recurrent themes from interviews were identified that allow for a greater comprehension of spirituality and its role in educational success. The research evinces significant correlations between the spiritual development framework components. Phenomenological perspectives about the intersection of spiritual needs and education are presented that will be helpful in informing educators about connecting with students on a spiritual level in ways that may enhance educational successes.

Introduction

The Hierarchy of Needs was developed by Abraham Maslow as a "theory of human motivation" (Saeednia and Md Nor 2010, 94). Since our current study has found that many students believe that religion and spirituality are central to their lives, including their education, it is important to understand how the fulfillment of needs, as informed by Maslow, may fit into this process. While religious groups and organizations are often placed in the social need category, it is possible to have the interaction transcend to other areas of need and fulfillment (Gobin, Teeroovengadum, Becceea, and Teeroovengadum 2012).

The following study quantitatively and qualitatively examined the relationship between components of a Spiritual Needs/Motivation/Volition Framework developed by the lead author and shares students' perspectives regarding their sense of spiritual fulfillment and how their spirituality intersected with their academic success. Practical implications for educators will be presented to allow them to capitalize upon these student perceptions in ways that will help them connect with their students on a deeper, spiritual level and motivate them academically.

Review of Literature

Theoretical Framework

The proposed Spiritual Needs/Motivation/Volition Framework, as well as the operational definitions that will be offered for spirituality and religion, are informed by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow 1968) and his writings regarding religion and self-efficacy (Maslow 1964).

The fulfillment of the social need includes "the need to feel loved by others and be accepted" (Gobin, et al. 2012, 205). Because Maslow's view is holistic, it can be assumed that every element and aspect of human life works together to satisfy needs, helping people move from one level to the next in the hierarchy. Therefore, religion and spirituality are interwoven throughout the various needs, not just that of social need.

As students work their way up the pyramid, toward self-actualization, they must have their need for religious and spiritual community and practice satisfied at their individual level of need (Kroth 2007).

Since everyone, according to Maslow, is working towards self-actualization, something must motivate students to move from one need to the next. Educators and administration should strive to understand the importance that religion and spirituality play in motivating students, as these elements could very well be the driving force behind the fulfillment of individual needs. When social needs are not met, and this is where religion and spirituality fit most comfortably, it can be devastating to students (Sherwin and Stevenson 2010). A way that educators can assist in this fulfillment is to be empathetic to the needs of students, understanding that every student will have varying needs and will progress at different rates (Sherwin and Stevenson 2010). Therefore, it is necessary to respect and provide space and time for students to practice their religious beliefs (Sherwin and Stevenson 2010).

Students must feel "safe, secure, and comfortable" in order to be successful, thus a nurturing environment is necessary and important for self-actualization to be achieved (O'Connor 2008, 16). While public school practitioners have gradually moved from a concept of true holistic education that sought to educate students' minds, bodies, and spirits toward a reticence to even mention spirituality (Sink, Cleveland, and Stern 2007), educators should be aware that students are spiritual beings and retain their religious freedom even on public school campuses. Therefore, students should not be judged based upon their religious or spiritual preferences or practices. Educators can be pivotal in the process of nurturing spiritual development, as they are the ones that set the tone for the classroom and ensure that an efficient and effective learning environment is provided. Allowing students to participate in and practice their religious beliefs, as well as understanding and incorporating activities and lessons that allow for students to share and demonstrate their beliefs, creates an environment where students are able to work towards individual fulfillment of social needs.

Maslow (1964) has referenced the importance of religious gratification and incorporation of spiritual concerns into daily life in his book, *Religions, Values, & Peak-Experiences*. In this text, Maslow (1964) states that religious and spiritual fulfillment "are the general responsibility of all mankind. . . [therefore,] we shall have to reevaluate the possible place of spiritual and moral values in education" (16). Because of the importance and responsibility that this places upon the incorporation of religion and on the acceptance and tolerance of religion by educators, it is necessary to have "a renewed openness to matters of beliefs and values in college classrooms" (St. John and Parrish 2012, 131). However, in recent years, the incorporation of spirituality and religion has been almost nonexistent (Milacci 2006). While there is a slow movement towards the incorporation of these elements, there is still much ground to cover.

Spirituality in the Classroom

Multicultural and educational theories assert that spirituality and religion are components of every student's sense of cultural self-identity (Banks and Banks 2004; Tisdell 2003). Additionally, survey data reveal that more than 70 percent of new college freshman believe that spirituality and religion are important, guiding forces in their lives as students (Nash, Bradley, and Chickering 2008). Research by Goldstein (2010) shows that satisfaction of students' spiritual needs, largely through connections with others, is integral to their healthy establishment of ego, identity, and sexuality.

Having established that students are spiritual beings, one could argue that is their parents' or their own responsibility to see to it that their spiritual needs are met outside of the classroom setting. However, researchers espouse the overall and academic benefits that accrue to students when educators not only condone spiritual self-expression on the part of their students, but also actively attend to their students' spiritual needs in the classroom (Hindman 2002; Katz 2004; Pippin 1998).

Therefore, educators concerned with a truly holistic approach to education recognize students' spiritual natures and spiritual developmental needs and afford students with opportunities to express their spirituality in safe, tolerant educational settings (O'Sullivan 2005). Kessler further clarifies the place for spirituality in classrooms when he equates the importance of students' spiritual needs to their physical and emotional needs when he asserts that as a "[student's] body grows when the hunger for fuel and air is fed, and the child's emotional life grows when the hunger for love and guidance is met, meeting these spiritual yearnings [previously identified by Kessler as 'awareness, serenity, compassion, as well as other collaborative efforts'] supports, strengthens, and fosters the development of the spirit. . ." (Kessler 2005, 102).

In light of this importance of students' spiritual development a fairly straightforward assertion is that when students' spiritual needs are unmet, their emotional development will also be negatively impacted. Moreover, since a variety of Emotional Intelligence (EI) theories firmly place emotional well-being in the arena of intelligence and/or performance (Goleman 1998; Joshith 2012; Salovey and Mayer 1990) it is natural to extend the argument to the importance of spirituality in the classroom. If unmet spiritual needs results in stunted emotional development, and EI has a direct bearing on academic performance, then meeting students' spiritual needs has an undeniable place in the classroom. This connection begs for further clarification about the intersection of spirituality and education, how educators can meet students' spiritual needs in the classroom, and how students' spiritual development impacts their real and perceived academic success.

Methods

Definitions

In the interest of better understanding the current research (and also for educators who wish to promote their students' "spiritual literacy"), it is advantageous at this point to define spirituality and religion (Yocum 2014, 97). Previous works have established that while religion and spirituality often overlap, the two phenomena are distinctly different and our understanding of those phenomena should be assessed differently (Astin, Astin, and Lindholm 2011; Love 2001; Love & Talbot 1999; Maslow 1964). The current research operationally defines *spirituality* as an individual belief system by which one finds purpose and meaning in life, develops a sense of morals, establishes self-identity, and is able to connect with others, nature, or a higher power. *Religion*, on the other hand, is defined as a more corporate belief system that includes subscription to dogma, traditions, customs, and communally held morals.

It should be noted, that although these phenomena are separate and distinct, they are often comingled or even (erroneously) used interchangeably. A person can be fully in touch with his or her sense of self and purpose in life, being fully aware of his or her own spirituality, without being religious. Likewise, an individual can attend religious services regularly, and gain immense enjoyment from participating in the customs and traditions of that religion, without applying a true spiritual awareness to his or her relationship with self or others. The fact that many believe these phenomena to be the same is evidence of not only spiritual, but also religious illiteracy (Moore 2007). This errant juxtaposition of spirituality and religion is also, no doubt, a contributing factor to the abandonment of spiritually nourishing activities in the public school classroom, when in fact, only religious proselytization is disallowed (Nelson, Palonsky, and McCarthy 2004).

It should be noted there is room to develop a framework of spiritual needs that is even more congruent to Maslow's Hierarchy (Maslow 1968). For example, one could equate the physical needs on Maslow's Hierarchy to the concept of one relying on his or her faith for health and healing. However, the current framework is intended to deal solely in the realm of the spiritual and to be set in the context of education.

The forgoing literature, an initial compilation of instructional strategies which nourish students' spirits, and previous research by the lead author (Yocum 2014) inform the Spiritual Needs/Motivation/Volition Framework (See Figure 1).
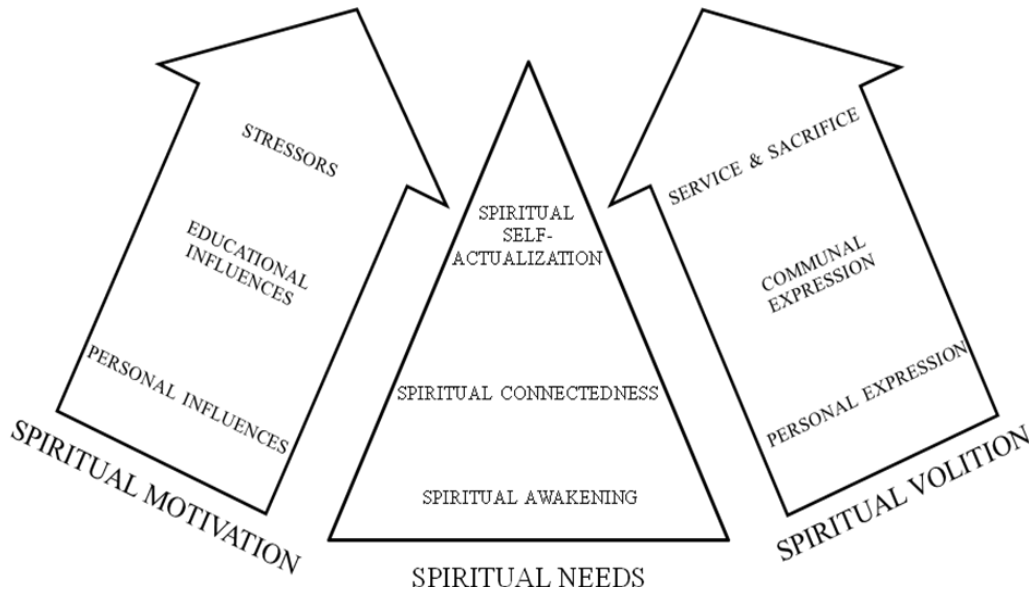

Figure 1. Spiritual Needs/Motivation/Volition Framework (Yocum 2014, 84).

Research Questions

In order to continue to understand the relationships between spiritual development, religion, and education, and to continue to explore the proposed framework, the following research questions were used to guide the present study:

- What is the nature and strength of the relationship between students' spiritual needs, levels of spiritual motivation, engagement in acts of spiritual volition and their self-perceived notions of personal and academic success?
- How do students perceive spirituality and how spirituality intersects with education?
- How can educators engage with students on a spiritual level without endorsing a specific religion?

Participants

Data were collected from 339 undergraduate student survey respondents and 20 interviewees at the two mid-size, public universities in the southeastern United States. The frequency tables below describe the make-up of the sample.

Table 1

Survey Respondent Demographics		Interview Respondent Demographics	
Ethnicity	Frequency	Ethnicity	Frequency
African-American	74	African-American	5
American Indian/Alaskan	31	American Indian/Alaskan	3
Asian	10	Asian	1
Caucasian	179	Caucasian	7
Hispanic/Latino	26	Hispanic/Latino	4
Other	18	Other	0
Undesignated	1	Undesignated	0
n	339	*n*	20

Table 2

Survey Respondent Religious Preference		Interview Respondent Religious Preference	
Religion	Frequency	Religion	Frequency
Baptist	126	Baptist	6
Buddhist	4	Buddhist	0
Catholic	48	Catholic	3
Islam	2	Islam	1
Methodist	19	Methodist	2
Other	91	Other	5
None/Undesignated	49	None/Undesignated	3
n	339	*n*	20

Table 3

Survey Respondent Gender		Interview Respondent Gender	
Gender	Frequency	Gender	Frequency
Male	138	Male	7
Female	201	Female	13
n	339	*n*	20

Procedures

The present continuing exploratory research of the framework employed sequential mixed-methods in the style of Thogersen-Ntoumani and Fox (as cited by Clark and Creswell 2008). This essentially allowed for the conveniently random sampling of survey respondents to sequentially inform the more purposive sampling for the qualitative sidebar of interviews. The Undergraduate Spiritual Expression Survey (USES), version 2 (see Figure 2), was piloted to determine the reliability of the instrument. An item-by-item Cronbach's alpha was calculated for each Likert-scale item on the survey, but for sake of brevity, the coefficients for each cluster of questions representing a component of the proposed framework are presented in Table 4 below and compared to Cronbach's alpha scores for the original USES. The only change between USES, version 1 and version 2, was that version 2 sought a more historic look at participants' self-reported grades throughout their academic careers, rather than just a current snapshot of their academic standing (Cronbach's was not calculated for this portion), along with the addition of a set of questions intended to measure self-actualization without the spirituality component. Differences on the

Cronbach's alpha coefficients between the other question clusters are due to the change in pilot sample; the instrument remains the same with the exception of those changes indicated above. Item-by-item Cronbach's alpha coefficients and both versions of the survey are available upon request.

Table 4
USESv.1 compared to USESv.2 Cronbach's alpha Coefficients

Question Cluster	USESv.1 Cronbach's	USESv.2 Cronbach's
Expressions of Spiritual Volition	0.82	0.58
Educ. Influences on Spiritual Motivation	0.74	0.80
Personal Influences on Spiritual Motivation	0.76	0.45
Perception of Personal Feelings of Success Attributable to Spirituality	0.76	0.74
Perception of Personal Feelings of Success	na	0.64
Total Instrument	0.84	0.79

Undergraduate Spiritual Expression Survey (USES) v.2
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CONTACT DATA

First Name: _____ Last Name: _____
Mailing Street Address: _____
City: _____ State: ____ Zip: _____
Email Address: _____
Phone Number: _____ Date of Birth: __-__-__

	Postal Delivery	Email	Phone
Best Contact Method	O	O	O

Best Contact Time: _____

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

	Male	Female					
Gender	O	O					

	African-American	American Indian or Alaskan Native	Asian	Caucasian	Hispanic or Latino	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	Other
Ethnicity	O	O	O	O	O	O	O

	Single	Married	Widowed	Divorced	Separated	Domestic Partnership
Marital Status	O	O	O	O	O	O

ACADEMIC DATA

	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Other
Current Academic Classification	O	O	O	O	O

	F	D	C	B	A
College Grade Average	O	O	O	O	O
High School Grade Average	O	O	O	O	O
Middle School Grade Average	O	O	O	O	O
Elementary School Grade Average	O	O	O	O	O

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RELIGIOUS PREFERENCE

Baptist	Buddhist	Catholic	Islam	Jewish	Methodist	Muslim	Other	None
O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O

EXPRESSIONS OF SPIRITUAL VOLITION

	Never	Rarely (less than once per month)	Occasionally (once per month)	Often (2-3 times per month)	Regularly (4 times per month or more)
I participate in self-reflection, prayer or meditation that is not part of a campus-sponsored class, event or activity.	O	O	O	O	O
I participate in yoga, tai chi, go for walks, visit the beach, commune with nature or other similarly spiritually nourishing activities that are not part of a campus-sponsored class, event or activity.	O	O	O	O	O
I enjoy and/or participate in religious singing/chanting/music that is not part of a campus-sponsored class, event or activity.	O	O	O	O	O
I read sacred texts (Bible, Koran, Torah, etc.) or other books about religion/spirituality that are not associated with my participation in a campus-sponsored class, event or activity.	O	O	O	O	O
I attend religious and/or worship services that are not part of a campus-sponsored class, event or activity.	O	O	O	O	O
I participate in spiritually fulfilling clubs or organizations that are not part of a campus-sponsored class, event or activity.	O	O	O	O	O
I participate in spiritually fulfilling forms of artistic expression (such as painting, drawing, journal or poetry writing) that are not associated with my participation in a campus-sponsored class, event or activity.	O	O	O	O	O
I participate in a personal relationship that is spiritually fulfilling.	O	O	O	O	O
I achieve spiritual fulfillment by volunteering my services and/or time for the benefit of others either by myself or as part of an effort that is not associated with class or campus-sponsorship (examples: volunteering at church, work at soup kitchens, volunteer work for organizations such as the Peace Corps or Habitat for Humanity).	O	O	O	O	O

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Figure 2. Undergraduate Spiritual Expression Survey, version 2, page 1, developed by lead author.

EDUCATIONAL INFLUENCES ON SPIRITUAL MOTIVATION					
	Never	Rarely (less than once per month)	Occasionally (once per month)	Often (2-3 times per month)	Regularly (4 times per month or more)
My college instructors care about me as a person and as a student and take steps to create a caring community of learners.	O	O	O	O	O
My elementary and secondary school teachers cared about me as a person and as a student and took steps to create caring communities of learners.	O	O	O	O	O
My college instructors acknowledge (and encourage tolerance of) all forms of spiritual expression.	O	O	O	O	O
My elementary and secondary school teachers acknowledged (and encouraged tolerance of) all forms of spiritual expression.	O	O	O	O	O
My college instructors use contemplation/meditation/quiet time as an instructional strategy.	O	O	O	O	O
My elementary and secondary school teachers used contemplation/meditation/quiet time as an instructional strategy.	O	O	O	O	O
My college instructors encourage or require reflective journaling and/or poetry writing as an instructional strategy.	O	O	O	O	O
My elementary and secondary school teachers encouraged or required reflective journaling and/or poetry writing as an instructional strategy.	O	O	O	O	O
My college instructors encourage or require students to share personal narratives and/or engage in storytelling as an instructional strategy.	O	O	O	O	O
My elementary and secondary school teachers encouraged or required students to share personal narratives and/or engage in storytelling as an instructional strategy.	O	O	O	O	O
My college instructors use art, music or drama as an instructional strategy.	O	O	O	O	O
My elementary and secondary school teachers used art, music or drama as an instructional strategy.	O	O	O	O	O
I participate in religious/spiritual discussions in class and/or with college instructors, faculty or staff.	O	O	O	O	O
During my elementary and secondary school career, I participated in religious/spiritual discussions in class and/or with elementary and secondary school teachers, faculty or staff.	O	O	O	O	O
I participate in college level religious studies classes.	O	O	O	O	O
During my elementary and secondary school career, I participated in religious studies classes as part of the formal school day.	O	O	O	O	O
I participate in service-learning opportunities (volunteer efforts) that are part of a class or that are conducted in association with a college campus-sponsored organization, event or activity.	O	O	O	O	O
During my elementary and secondary school career, I participated in service-learning opportunities (volunteer efforts) that were part of a class or that were conducted in association with a school-sponsored organization, event or activity.	O	O	O	O	O
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
A college instructor (or instructors) acts (or act) as a personal spiritual role model (or role models) in my life.	O	O	O	O	O
An elementary or secondary school teacher (or teachers) acted as a personal spiritual role model (or role models) in my life.	O	O	O	O	O
My college/university allows for personal expressions of spirituality.	O	O	O	O	O
My elementary and secondary schools allowed for personal expressions of spirituality.	O	O	O	O	O
At my college/university, there are spiritually fulfilling clubs and organizations that are sponsored by and/or located on-campus that meet my spiritual needs.	O	O	O	O	O
At my elementary and secondary schools, there were spiritually fulfilling clubs and organizations that were sponsored by and/or located on-campus that meet my spiritual needs.	O	O	O	O	O
At my college/university, there are spiritually fulfilling events and activities that are frequently sponsored by and/or located on-campus that meet my spiritual needs.	O	O	O	O	O
At my elementary and secondary schools, there were spiritually fulfilling events and activities that were frequently sponsored by and/or located on-campus that meet my spiritual needs.	O	O	O	O	O

(please continue to next page)

Figure 3. Undergraduate Spiritual Expression Survey, version 2, page 2, developed by lead author.

PERSONAL INFLUENCES ON SPIRITUAL MOTIVATION	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
A family member (or members) acted as a personal spiritual role model (or role models) in my life.	O	O	O	O	O
A personal friend (or friends) acted as a personal spiritual role model (or role models) in my life.	O	O	O	O	O
A mentor (or mentors) or friend (or friends) associated with organized religion (i.e. someone you know through your participation in organized religion) acted as a personal spiritual role model (or role models) in my life.	O	O	O	O	O
Throughout my life, I have faced crises of a personal nature (abuse, divorce, break-ups, loss of a loved one, loss of a job, alcoholism, illnesses, disabilities or other medical conditions, etc.) that have caused me to greater rely upon my spirituality.	O	O	O	O	O
My spirituality has helped me overcome personal obstacles and crises.	O	O	O	O	O
My spirituality has been a comfort to me through personal obstacles and crises.	O	O	O	O	O

PERSONAL SUCCESS	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel that I am successful in my academic endeavors.	O	O	O	O	O
I feel that I am successful at work, in business and/or in my personal finances.	O	O	O	O	O
I feel that I am successful in my relationships with others (family, friends, significant others, etc.).	O	O	O	O	O
My successes enable me to make a positive impact on others and/or society.	O	O	O	O	O
I am confident, in touch with my sense of self, and I aspire toward continuous self-improvement in one or more areas of my life.	O	O	O	O	O
My spirituality has helped me achieve academic success.	O	O	O	O	O
My spirituality has helped me achieve success at work, in business and/or in my personal finances.	O	O	O	O	O
My spirituality has helped me achieve success in building strong, positive personal relationships.	O	O	O	O	O
I have had a positive impact on other individuals and/or society because of my spirituality.	O	O	O	O	O
Being in touch with my spirituality has helped me improve myself and my life.	O	O	O	O	O

WILLINGNESS TO PARTICIPATE IN ONE-ON-ONE & FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS	Yes	No
You may contact me to participate in follow-up one-on-one and focus group recorded interviews regarding my views on spirituality and education.	O	O

INFORMED CONSENT

Data generated from this survey and participation in follow-up interviews are being used to determine whether or not there is a correlation between students' expressions of spirituality, personal spiritual motivators, and personal success. No participants' names or other identifying characteristics will be disclosed in any publication or product extending from this research. Participants may opt out of all or any portion of this research at any time. Your participation is both helpful and appreciated; however, no negative consequences will result should you choose to withdraw your participation.

Some survey questions may have had the potential to cause you to recall negative memories. If your response to any question has brought negative memories to the surface, and you require psychological, medical or legal counseling, please refer to the service providers listed below. Listing of these service providers does not constitute an endorsement of their services. Any fees associated with these services are the sole responsibility of the individual soliciting said services.

University Counseling and Wellness Services
850-474-2420 (M-F, 8:00am – 5:00pm)
After hours: Call University switchboard at 850-474-2000
and ask to speak to someone from the counseling center

University Student Health Center
850-473-2172

National Domestic Violence Hotline
1-800-799-SAFE (7233)

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
1-800-273-TALK (8255)

Florida Abuse Hotline
1-800-96-ABUSE (22873)

Escambia-Santa Rosa Bar Association
850-434-6009 (legal referrals)

Your signature below acknowledges your understanding of this informed consent and indicates your willingness to participate in the study.

Printed Name:	Signature:	Date:

Figure 4. Undergraduate Spiritual Expression Survey, version 2, page 3, developed by lead author.

After piloting, the USES, version 2 was distributed to a random selection of conveniently available samples at the two participating mid-size, public universities in the southeastern United States (quantitative $n = 339$, qualitative $n = 20$). After the completed surveys were collected, an initial, cursory analysis was conducted, so only respondents who indicated that spirituality was an important aspect of their lives in at least one of the question clusters would be contacted for a potential interview. In order to obtain valuable, narrative

interview data for analysis, this sequential, purposeful sampling was employed. In previous iterations of this research, interviewees whose survey answers indicated a lack of spirituality gave truncated interview responses, stating they did not believe in spirituality and had nothing of value to say.

The Likert-scale USES, version 2 survey results were analyzed via calculation of Pearson's *r*. Clusters of questions that represented the components of the framework along with question clusters that sought to capture an historical view of respondents' academic success were compared. Finally, the interviews were transcribed and phenomenological reductionism (Schutz, 1970) and open-coding were applied to identify recurrent themes.

Results

Undergraduate Spiritual Expression Survey

The USES, version 2 collected 55 Likert-scale responses from each of the participants. Nine of these questions were in the area of "Expressions of Spiritual Volition." This cluster of questions represented the Spiritual Volition component of the framework. There were 25 questions for "Educational Influences on Spiritual Motivation" and six questions for "Personal Influences on Spiritual Motivation." These two series of clustered questions were intended to represent the Spiritual Motivation portion of the framework. Ten questions were given in the "Personal Success" category (five for "Perception of Personal Feelings of Success" and five for "Perception of Personal Feelings of Success Attributable to Spirituality"), which speaks to the Spiritual Self-Actualization component of the framework. Finally, four questions were delivered to gauge students' "Self-reported Grade History." The statistics were calculated with the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Although the sample is diverse, it met all tests for statistical assumptions necessary for normal distribution of the sample as needed for calculating Pearson's *r* results as reported by SPSS. The Pearson's *r* results comparing each of these question clusters to one another are depicted in the matrix in Table 5 below.

Table 5
Correlations between USESv.2 question cluster categories

	Expressions of Spiritual Volition	Personal Influences on Spiritual Motivation	Educational Influences on Spiritual Motivation	Students' Self-Reported Grade History	Perception of Personal Feelings of Success	Perception of Personal Feelings of Success Attributable to Spirituality
Expressions of Spiritual Volition		$r = 0.643$ $p \leq 0.001$	$r = 0.383$ $p \leq 0.001$	$r = 0.131$ $p = 0.017$	$r = 0.240$ $p \leq 0.001$	$r = 0.651$ $p \leq 0.001$
Personal Influences on Spiritual Motivation	$r = 0.643$ $p \leq 0.001$		$r = 0.421$ $p \leq 0.001$	$r = 0.100$ $p = 0.053$	$r = 0.338$ $p \leq 0.001$	$r = 0.782$ $p \leq 0.001$
Educational Influences on Spiritual Motivation	$r = 0.383$ $p \leq 0.001$	$r = 0.421$ $p \leq 0.001$		$r = 0.116$ $p = 0.031$	$r = 0.171$ $p = 0.003$	$r = 0.333$ $p \leq 0.001$
Students' Self-Reported Grade History	$r = 0.131$ $p = 0.017$	$r = 0.100$ $p = 0.053$	$r = 0.116$ $p = 0.031$		$r = 0.205$ $p \leq 0.001$	$r = 0.036$ $p = 0.282$
Perception of Personal Feelings of Success	$r = 0.240$ $p \leq 0.001$	$r = 0.338$ $p \leq 0.001$	$r = 0.171$ $p = 0.003$	$r = 0.205$ $p \leq 0.001$		$r = 0.479$ $p \leq 0.001$
Perception of Personal Feelings of Success Attributable to Spirituality	$r = 0.651$ $p \leq 0.001$	$r = 0.782$ $p \leq 0.001$	$r = 0.333$ $p \leq 0.001$	$r = 0.036, p = 0.282$	$r = 0.479$ $p \leq 0.001$	

Quantitative Conclusions

Each of the aspects of the framework were positively and significantly correlated to each other, however, just two of the correlations were reasonably strong: "Personal Influences on Spiritual Motivation" as correlated to "Spiritual Volition" and "Perception of Personal Feelings of Success Attributable to Spirituality" as correlated to "Personal Influences on Spiritual Motivation." These correlations would seem to imply that when one is motivated by strong, spiritually-minded role models in his or her personal life, he or she is more likely to frequently participate in spiritual activities and is likely to believe that his or her personal successes are at least partially attributable to his or her spirituality.

Even though all the correlations between "Students' Self-reported Grade Histories" and the parts of the framework were positive, none were significant or strong, with the exception of "Perceptions of Personal Feelings of Success" (Pearson's $r = 0.205$, $p \leq 0.001$). This seems to suggest that the relationship between an individual's spirituality and his or her academic success is only indirect at most.

Phenomenological Themes

Phenomenological research is a qualitative research design type whereby researchers seen to gain a deeper, richer understanding of a social or abstract phenomenon by investigating the lived experiences of individuals who have relevant experiences with the phenomenon under exploration (Creswell 2007). Since a deeper understanding of the intersections of spirituality and education, along with the perceptions of the importance of spirituality to students' academic success were desired, a phenomenological approach to the qualitative interview sidebar was appropriate. A qualitative sidebar of interviews allowed for an exploration of phenomenological themes that supported the quantitative portion of the research. Audio recordings were made of each of the 20 one-on-one, face-to-face interviews and were then transcribed. The transcriptions were subjected to bracketing and phenomenological reductionism, which allowed for the identification of commonalities across participant responses (Schutz 1970). Open-coding was used to organize and name these recurrent themes.

Themes

The one-on-one interviews were transcribed. Open-coding was applied to the interview transcript data (see matrix in Table 6 below), frequency of occurrences of open-codes was tallied, and the open-codes collated into the themes listed. Select quotes from interviewees are provided to illustrate each of the listed themes.

Table 6
One-on-one interview open-codes and themes

Open-Codes	Frequency open-code appears in interview transcripts	Themes
Spiritual concepts/definitions	22	Spiritual and Religious Literacy
Religious concepts/definitions	33	
Personal relationships with teachers	27	Connections with Teachers as Spiritual Leaders
Teachers encouraging spiritual/religious expression	21	
Morality/Character/Values/ Ethics	17	Personal Values
Work Ethic	13	
Life Purpose	19	
Self-confidence/Positive Attitude	13	

- "Spiritual and Religious Literacy" – During the first iteration of this research by the lead author, participants would interchangeably use the terms spirituality and religion, even after being presented with, and confirming, the differences between the two. This carried on throughout their remaining interview responses and because they saw the two phenomena as one and the same, they were unable to see how educators could lawfully promote spirituality in the classroom. The current research participants supported the present study's operational definitions of spirituality and religion, and were able to distinguish between the two when asked about teachers' roles. Future research may pose the question as to the reasons for increase in spiritual and religious literacy. When students' spiritual and religious literacy is on the rise, they are more able to make informed decisions about these areas of their lives and are, perhaps, more tolerant of those who are perceived as different (Yocum 2014). This theme is nicely illustrated by one of our interviewees when he said:

> Religion to me is more of the process, it like, you get certain rules, like the bible gives you certain rules that you should follow. . . and you go to church every Sunday, things like that, it['s] more of a process. Spirituality to me is more of. . . I'm not a religious but I'm more from a philosophy perspective but spirituality to me is more of a connection to your beliefs. I don't know how I quite want to word it. It's less of the process but less of the rules of what you have to do day-to-day and more of just your personal connection with your beliefs (Personal communication with interviewee 2012).

- "Connections with Teachers as Spiritual Leaders" – Although teachers may not naturally see themselves as spiritual leaders for their students, an undisputed vocational role of educators is to nurture their students by meeting their needs, maintaining relationships with them, and establishing a sense of community in the learning environment - - these are things that spiritual leaders do (Banke, Maldonado, and Lacey 2012). Students believe that they succeed academically and spiritually when their educators work to form appropriate relationships by taking the time to understand students' strengths and weaknesses and investing in students' lives (on and off campus). One of the interview participants provided evidence of the value of teacher-student relationships when he told us that:

  > My 7th grade teacher, she was my earth science teacher, and she just took a special interest in me and we always stay after classes and answer questions and just show me that teaching for her went beyond that classroom experience and that really played a big role in my life in developing who I was (Personal communication with interviewee 2012).

  These educators are approachable and available. Another of the interviewees equated this to an almost familial relationship with a former teacher. As the interviewees emphasized the role spirituality plays with regard to a need for feeling connected, inclusion of connectedness as a spiritual need continues to be supported. The interviewees stated that they feel as if they are more successful academically and spiritually when teachers allow for the open discussion of legitimate, educative religious and spiritual topics in class while welcoming all beliefs.

- "Personal Values" – College students believe that spirituality is an integral part to their personal values system, and they expect education to play a role in providing avenues for spiritual expression (Astin 2004; Paredes-Collins and Collins 2011). The current interviewees similarly perceive that their spirituality contributes to the development of positive character, including maturity, work ethics, and healthy self-confidence. They believe these traits then help them to be better at school, work, relationships, and life. These spiritually-minded interviewees were also more likely to invoke the idea of predestation, and were more apt to be positive, even in light of unfavorable circumstances in life (i.e. by spiritually believing that "everything happens for a reason"). When she described how professors encouraged her by providing outlets for spiritual nourishment and expression, one of our participants beautifully showed how this could, in turn, impact work ethic, life purpose, and sense of identity.

  > I think that it would be a positive effect I think that students could get a grip on stopping for a moment and putting their phone down and self-reflecting on what is my purpose in life, what am I doing here, what do I hope to achieve, am I just here for a degree because my parents told me or is there a greater value to what I'm doing in this life, uhm, I think that would be such a positive effect in the classroom (Personal communication with interviewee 2012).

  Participants also claim that engaging in spiritual activities (such as meditation, reading sacred or spiritual texts, volunteerism, and worship) relieves stress, with all of the commonly held benefits associated with stress-relief.

Discussion

Implications of Results

Understanding the correlations between components of the Spiritual Needs/Motivation/ Volition Framework allows for a more complete understanding of spiritual development. According to this framework, when a person achieves spiritual self-actualization, he or she is more prone to feel as if he or she can succeed not only academically, but in life. As one respondent said, "Well, I know that when I feel more self-fulfilled and headed in the right direction life is going, I perform better in all areas" (Personal communication with interviewee 2012).

Limitations

Future iterations of this research should seek to continue to improve the USES, version 2 Likert-type survey questions. Specifically, we would like to achieve a more balanced number of questions for each variable cluster and to continue to adjust the questions intended to capture data regarding respondents' academic success and perceptions of self-actualization in general, and attributable to spirituality. Perhaps continued adjustments of this nature may reveal a more significant relationship between spirituality and academic success than the present research suggested.

Additionally, both the initial and second studies were conducted with undergraduate college students in the United States. Although the present work boasts an impressively diverse sample, it would be interesting to see results of this research with a more culturally, ethnically, and religiously diverse sample by partnering with institutions of higher learning in other countries.

Areas for Future Research

The limitations suggest some areas for future research including: A replicated study with an improved survey, a more globally diverse sample, and continued studies regarding spiritual and religious literacy and how these areas of literacy can be promoted within classrooms. Further, a comparative phenomenology between spirituality and religion would likewise reveal much about the existing state of spiritual and religious literacy. Additionally, it would be advisable to conduct a version of this research where the participants are educators. Do their perceptions about the roles of teachers and spirituality in education concur with the data gleaned from student participants? Further, the assessment scales for religion and spirituality as utilized by Astin, Astin, and Lindholm (2011) depict a more comprehensive set of categories for measurement and the present line of research could be greatly strengthened by a further consideration of these additional categories in both a future version of USES and in expanding the present Spiritual Needs/Motivation/Volition Framework. Likewise, it would be of interest to include scale items for activities that might hinder one's sense of spirituality and time spent on spiritual or religious activities, as suggested by the work of Bryant, Choi, and Yasuno (2003).

Although gender differences in spiritual development were beyond the scope of the current study, existing research indicates that there are differences in moral development based upon gender (Gilligan 1982) and likewise spiritual development is impacted by gender (Goldstein 2010). This informs a new study with research questions relating to gender differences in spiritual development, or at least a revisiting of the data generated for the current study to see if there were any statistically significant differences in responses based upon gender.

While the sample for the present study came from secular institutions and was wonderfully diverse, it would be of interest to see what differences, if any, could be noted between spiritual development levels of students at secular institutions versus the spiritual development levels of students at religious institutions. Finally,

spiritual developmental levels can change over the course of one's lifetime, and research questions that seek to compare the spiritual development of traditional undergraduate students with those of more non-traditional graduate students may also reveal insights about spirituality, education, and spiritual development for future research.

Conclusion

Practical Implications for Educators

A hermeneutic review of literature relevant to spirituality and holistic teaching reveals several non-controversial, research-based pedagogical strategies for helping teachers build connections with their students that are consistent with the kinds of relationships that our interviewees reported were beneficial to them both spiritually and academically. For starters, these kinds of strategies include: Aesthetic education (Greene 2001), moral education (Nash, Bradley, and Chickering 2008; Newman 2006), holistic education (Miller 2005), transformative education (Miller 2005), partnership education (Eisler 2005), and service-learning (Speck 2007).

The common denominator between teaching strategies and spiritual nourishment is that these learning activities encourage students' opportunities for self-expression and relationship building with educators and peers. The list provided is merely a smattering, and we encourage readers to add freely to the kinds of instructional practices that they believe will educate their students academically, while nourishing spirits.

In conclusion, the identified qualitative theme "Connections with Teachers," has far-reaching implications beyond instructional strategies educators employ in the classroom to make students feel as if they have a genuine, caring relationship with their teachers. Educators must take the time to discover their students' needs and interests. When teachers take the time to care about students as people, the students feel encouraged and empowered to learn. When asked how teachers helped them achieve a sense of self-identity, belonging, purpose, and success, one interviewee responded, "I noticed that a lot of teachers here have actually expressed concern for my feelings" (Personal communication with interviewee 2012). It should go without saying that educators should be careful to make sure interactions and communications outside the classroom are appropriate, but they should take place. When students invite teachers to see them participate in an extracurricular activity, they should express interest and try to attend. Another idea would be to set up classroom accounts using social media to communicate with students. One of our interview participants illustrated the difference such communication can make when she shared a story about one of her previous media services specialists (pseudonyms used), "Miss Stakes. . . I don't know how to put this. . . I have her on Facebook too. She really, you know, treated the students. . . as God would treat His only children." (Personal communication with interviewee 2012). Teachers should engage in extra-curricular activities, make use of hand-written notes to students and parents (to share good news), place phone calls, write e-mails, communicate via Edmodo and other social media sites, conduct read-alouds with students and have them express themselves with values affirmation writing activities (Rigoglioso 2012).

The bottom-line for implications for educators: It is important to make students feel spiritually nourished. Educators can achieve this by taking a personal interest in students' wants and needs, using instructional strategies that allow for self-expression and relationship building, and keeping positive, appropriate lines of communication open inside and outside of class. Make students feel like they are cared for and loved as people and they will be more likely to excel.

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