

A Case for Spirituality in the 21st Century Education

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If 21st Century education is to serve its desired goals and purposes, then spirituality must be a part of it. Scholars and researchers have ignored and neglected spirituality in equal measure. One obvious reason is because it is very hard to quantify, measure spirituality using the revered standards. I mean, how can we express spirituality in percentages: X% is 73% spiritual.

Our modern world with its rapid changes and the anxiety-inducing disruptions like covid-19 and generative AI's means we need to rethink the general purposes and approaches to education. As it is, the main approach ends up being reactive. That is, a phenomenon will only be studied after it has occurred. Incorporating spirituality into education will add a major proactive element.

What is spirituality? Scholars and researchers cannot agree on the meaning of spirituality. They prefer to use terms like spiritual intelligence and spiritual literacy. We define it as all that pertains to the spirit dimension of human beings. We contend that human beings have a body, soul, and a spirit.

Thus, spirituality is an inherent quality in all human beings. Jirásek (2023) argues that the spiritual qualities of life belong potentially to every human being, that it is a fundamental character of all human beings.

A major misconception is that spirituality is religion. Spirituality is not religion. According to Jirásek (2023), it is possible to approach spirituality without a religious dimension and spirituality can be developed in a secular environment. The two implications of that is that it not time to split hairs on the types of spirituality based on religious affiliations and two, spirituality is not to be confined to the walls of religion and places of worship, it also belongs with the hallowed walls of learning and other intellectual pursuits.

Benefits

- a. Wholesome transformation: a focus on all the dimensions of a human being; focus on both the inner and outer man; the seen and the unseen; the quantifiable and the unquantifiable. Flanagan (2025) concurs:

The challenges of these current times, however, invite us to reconceive the mission of a twenty-first-century university so as to integrate research, teaching, and application with the added task of contributing to praxis of deep transformation within the self and society. The self-implicating investigation of transformative praxis is at the core of contemporary

spirituality studies, and therefore such studies have much to contribute to the mission of the university in our challenging global circumstances (p3).

- b. Higher order thinking: Spirituality is the highest of the higher order thinking skills
- c. Life-long learning: Spirituality is a life-long journey of discovery thus it will inevitably lead to higher order thinking.
- d. Mental health: The causes of mental health related to the soul have been studied and documented. There are spiritual causes of mental health.
- e. Help address ethical issues: Spirituality will help add insights or even offer solutions to the many ethical issues arising in our modern world especially with the use of AI and robotics.

Spirituality in teaching and learning

In a typical formal learning environment, encourage both learners and instructors to share insights from spiritual elements or spiritual practices. Both learners and educators should be encouraged to make active connections of existing and known bodies with spirituality. For instance, statements like: As I was meditating...; As I was reflecting; As I was praying...; As I was journaling.... And search statements and the insights shared should be held in high esteem just like the famous “According to....” The goal of incorporating spirituality in the classroom is not to encourage pursuit of competence and mastery, but to encourage awareness and expression.

Spirituality in research

In research acknowledging and encouraging discussion around spirituality in the research process. The researchers should be encouraged to share spiritual insights. The current approaches to research are heavy on the much touted scientific and empirical methods – What can be seen; what can be proved or quantified.

Being deliberate about studying and documenting spirituality. This way, the methodologies of studying spirituality will become mainstream in education just like the other research methodologies.

If we are ready to embrace and incorporate artificial stuff like artificial intelligence into all areas of life, then we should not have a problem incorporating natural spirituality.

References

Flanagan, B., & Clough, K. (2024). *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in Spirituality and Contemplative Studies*. Taylor & Francis.

Jirásek, I. (2023). Spiritual literacy: non-religious reconceptualisation for education in a secular environment, *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 28:2, 61-75, DOI: 10.1080/1364436X.2023.2166467

