Spirituality and Education
(Special Topical Seminar H637, Section 6353)
Fall 2003

Dr. Bradley A.U. Levinson
Tuesdays, 1-3:45 p.m., ED 3004
Office Hours: M,W 2:30-4 p.m., T, 10-11, or by appointment
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Overview and Objectives

This advanced graduate seminar broadly explores the relationship between spirituality and education. Often banished from educational discourse and practice by the twin sabers of science and secularism, spirituality nevertheless persists as an educational concern. The instructor will create a space for dialogue and intellectual/spiritual growth as students pursue their own questions about the intersections between spirituality and education. Some of the inquiries that will be conducted during the seminar are as follows:

- An interrogation of the assumptions about knowing that are embedded in educational practices, and the ways of knowing that are developed through educational practices, with special attention to whether and how “spiritual” knowledge is addressed within different educational traditions and educational scholarship.
- An examination of the divide between scientific (“rational”) and spiritual knowing, and whether these forms of knowing can be brought together in contemporary educational practice.
- An exploration of ways that spirituality can inform curriculum, school organization, teaching, educational leadership, and student culture.
- An interrogation of the forms of spiritual expression that are allowed or encouraged in the schools of different nations.
- An examination of the forms of intensive education used in different spiritual and religious traditions and communities.
- An examination of theoretical and methodological approaches for studying education in spiritual traditions and communities.
- An exploration of the links between emerging areas of educational policy and practice (e.g., peace education, environmental/ecological education, wilderness education, civic and citizenship education) and spirituality.

The objectives of the course are to enable graduate students to understand and appreciate the challenges involved in each of the above domains of inquiry, and to advance significantly in their understanding of a particular problem or area of spirituality and education which they choose to pursue in greater depth. One aim is for collective projects and publications to emerge out of the seminar.
Required Readings

The instructor has pre-selected these books to encourage grounding in, and initiate discussion around, crucial issues of spirituality and education. Our reading and discussion of these books will take us to the latter half of the course, when students will propose their own readings and topics for discussion.

Catherine Allen. *The Hold Life Has: Coca and Cultural Identity in an Andean Community*.
Alan Peshkin. *God’s Choice: The Total World of a Fundamentalist School*.
Elizabeth Tisdell. *Exploring Spirituality and Culture in Adult and Higher Education*.

In addition to these readings, students will consult during the first 2 weeks of the course to propose other topics and readings that can be addressed over the second half of the course.

Assignments and Evaluation

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<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tr>
<td>Attendance /Seminar Leadership and Participation</td>
<td>200</td>
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<tr>
<td>Definition Paper</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spiritual Growth/ Critical Discussion Briefs (4 x 50)</td>
<td>200</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Project</td>
<td>500</td>
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The final grade will be assigned along a traditional point scale, with 930 and above an “A”, 900-930, A-,” and so forth.

**Attendance and Participation:** It is important that you make your best effort to attend every meeting of the seminar. More than one absence over the semester may lower your grade and therefore should be addressed to the professor. This part of your course grade includes active and constructive participation in class discussions, in addition to serving as seminar co-leader on 2 separate days: 1) The first day will be between Weeks 3 and 10 of the course, when you will pay especially close attention to the assigned reading for the week and help the instructor guide the discussion by preparing commentary and questions to share with the seminar. Such preparation will include finding and sharing at least 2 published reviews of the book under discussion. 2) The second day will be between Weeks 11 and 15, when you will choose an
outside reading for the class related to your interests/final project, and lead the class in a
discussion of that reading, along with providing a report about your larger final project.

**Definition Paper:** This is a brief paper of approximately 3-4 pages in which, at the outset of the
course, you lay out some of your fundamental questions, assumptions and beliefs regarding
spirituality and education.

**Spiritual Growth/ Critical Discussion Briefs:** Between Weeks 3 and 10 of the course, you will
be expected to submit as an Oncourse posting 4 different briefs of approximately 500-600 words
each. These briefs should document your reactions to the assigned reading for the week, as well
as the spiritual and intellectual growth occasioned by the reading. Briefs should be submitted by
the end of the week for which the reading was originally assigned. You are encouraged to
elaborate your briefs by documenting also your response to class discussion.

**Final Project:** You are encouraged to use the final project to explore in some depth an area of
spirituality and education that interests you (see the schedule for course topics, as well as the
“alternatives” listed at the end of the syllabus). The project can take many different forms,
including a traditional research paper (review, critical synthesis), a field-based empirical study of
some aspect of spirituality and education, the development of a curriculum, an arts-based
performance, etc. Collective projects involving 2-4 students are encouraged. A typical final
research paper should be comprised of roughly 25 pages of text and be informed by a substantial
bibliography. Other kinds of projects, though less expository in nature, should nevertheless be
accompanied by some documentation of sources of ideas, field notes, action outcomes of the
project, and the like. All projects should eventuate in some written description that can be
contributed to a special journal issue or publication.

**Tentative Schedule**

Week 1—September 2: *Introductions; Defining spirituality and education*

--Assign: Interviews and definition paper

Week 2—September 9: *The relationship between spirituality and education*

Read: *Educational Yearning*, pp. 1-21; *School with Spirit*, Foreword, Preface, and pp. 7-20
--Report on interviews with people about the meaning of spirituality, and relation to education
--Meet in small groups to discuss final project topics

Week 3—September 16 (Viva México!): *Indigenous education: encompassing spirituality*

Read: *The Hold Life Has* (especially first half of book)
**Due: Definition paper**
Week 4—September 23: *Modes of knowing: Science and religion*

Read: *The Marriage of Sense and Soul*

Week 5—September 30: *Modes of education in “modern” spiritual communities*

Read: *God’s Choice*

**Due: Proposed reading(s) for second seminar day, second half of class**

Week 6—October 7: *Restructuring schools for spirit*

Read: *Schools with Spirit*, pp. 21 ff.

(optional) *Educational Yearning*, pp. 163-190

Week 7—October 14: *Spirituality and curriculum*

Read: *Educational Yearning*, pp. 46-162

**Due: Proposal for Final Project**

Week 8—October 21: *The spiritual teacher*

Read: *The Courage to Teach*

Week 9—October 28: *Spirituality in educational leadership*

Read: *Principles of Power*

Week 10—November 4: *Spirituality in post-secondary education*

Read: *Exploring Spirituality and Culture in Adult and Higher Education*

Weeks 11 and 12—November 11 and November 18

Student-chosen and led themes for discussion

Week 13—November 25

No regular class meeting: Students meet in small groups or with instructor
Weeks 14 and 15: December 2 and December 9

Student-chosen and led themes for discussion

**Final Exam Period:** Thursday, December 18, 12:30-2:30; Submission of Final Projects and coordination of future ventures

**First Day Discussions, Final Projects, Definition Paper, and Interview Project**

Greetings and welcome to this unprecedented graduate seminar in spirituality and education. Our first order of business is to discuss and define what we mean by spirituality, and what we mean by education. It is imperative that we all approach the seminar with an ecumenical attitude of open-mindedness and that we learn to find some common ground between the different traditions and metaphysical systems that have formed our unique approaches to spirituality. Thus, we begin with discussions involving self-revelation and definition.

I’d like to take the lead in discussing and defining “education.” Consistent with my own anthropological perspective, as well as the diverse goals of this seminar, I want to insist on a broad definition of education that encompasses much more than modern schools. For those of you who have taken a course in the anthropology of education, such an understanding of education will already be part of your conceptual toolkit. For those of you who haven’t, I urge you to go to the electronic reserve and read the brief introduction to my book, *Schooling the Symbolic Animal*.

We may not reach common ground in defining spirituality, but we can sure try. At least the attempt will be illuminating. Here’s what I’d like you to do for today’s class session: Take about 45 minutes of alone time to reflect on your own understanding of spirituality and attempt a biographical definition. Write down some notes to share a very brief biography of your spiritual formation, along with your definition of spirituality. Think also about the approach that you may wish to take for your final project. You can look over the list of topics on the course schedule, or some of the other alternatives that I have suggested, in order to get your juices flowing. If you have time left after this, you can look over the syllabus in more detail.

The next step is for you to circle up and share with one another, in sequence, some of your thoughts. Each of you should take about 5 minutes (no more than ten) to 1) give a brief introduction (full name, graduate program and prior degrees, etc.), 2) share your definition and the thumbnail sketch of your spiritual biography, and finally, 3) briefly share your initial idea(s) for a final project. If there is time left over after everyone has shared, class will be formally dismissed, but I’m hoping that some of you may wish to chat further about possible collaborations this semester.
The notes you have jotted down in class should serve as a basis for your first formal writing assignment—what I’m calling the Definition Paper. In this paper, I’m asking you to document more fully some of your fundamental questions, assumptions and beliefs regarding spirituality and education. The paper should be approximately 1,000 words in length. Tell a story about your own spiritual education, your own spiritual beliefs, in which you attempt to hone your definition of spirituality. Tell us also where you are now, and what you hope for your future spiritual education, including what you hope to gain from a course such as this. The paper, double-spaced and typed, should be brought to our third class meeting, on September 16th. The paper should also be submitted through Oncourse, where it will be made available for at least 2 of your classmates to read and comment on.

And now for one other little interview project to start the course: By the beginning of class next week, I would like you to assess the public mood in our area of inquiry by engaging 5 different people in a very brief discussion about spirituality and education. These 5 people should have something to do with public education—they may be professors, students, parents, or teachers. Here’s my idea about how you should proceed:

1. Tell each person that you’re taking a graduate course called “Spirituality and Education” and, without revealing much of the course content, ask them if they think the course sounds like a good idea, and whether they might like to take it themselves some day. If so, why? If not, why not?
2. Ask each person if they think there is a distinction between spirituality and religion, and if so, what it is?
3. Ask each person if they think that religion, or spirituality, respectively, have any place in today’s public schools? If so, what role could they play? If not, why not?

You need not take detailed notes, because you won’t be writing this up formally. However, please do jot down some notes after each response, and then come prepared to share some of your “findings” at our second class meeting.

Finally, do give some further thought to possible topics and formats for your final projects. Look at pertinent materials and begin honing your topic. We will take some time out of our second class to share possible project ideas and to begin defining the content of the latter half of the course. You may sign up for seminar leadership during this time. Note that proposed class readings for your seminar day during the latter half of the course are due by September 30th. Note also that your proposal for a final project is due by October 14th.

Alternatives topics for final projects

This is just a tentative and evolving list of topics and resources for a wide range of inquiries in spirituality and education:

--Education in spiritual communities (e.g. The Sound of Two Hands Clapping: The Education of a Tibetan Buddhist Monk, G. Dreyfus)
--Jewish frameworks for education and meaning (e.g., Michael Lerner, Spirit Matters)
--Rudolf Steiner and the Waldorf concept
--Wiccan traditions and gynocentric education (e.g., Starhawk, Dreaming the Dark, etc.)
-- Humanistic/Transpersonal psychology and education (e.g., M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Travelled*)
-- Afrocentric spirituality and education (e.g., Cornel West, Michael Dantley, “Critical spirituality: enhancing transformative leadership through critical theory and African American prophetic spirituality” *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 2003, 1(3-17).)
-- Christian mysticism and education (e.g., Thomas Merton, Matthew Fox, etc.)
-- Sufi and Islamic mysticism
-- Native American/indigenous traditions in spiritual education