

INTERSECTIONS OF  
FINANCIAL LITERACY,  
CITIZENSHIP, AND  
SPIRITUALITY

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INTERSECTIONS OF  
FINANCIAL LITERACY,  
CITIZENSHIP, AND  
SPIRITUALITY: EXAMINING  
A FORBIDDEN FRONTIER  
OF SOCIAL EDUCATION

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THE IMPORTANCE OF  
SEPARATING FROM OURSELVES:  
AN ARGUMENT FOR A SPIRITUAL  
ELEMENT OF SOCIAL EDUCATION  
IN AN ERA OF SCIENTIFIC-BASED  
STANDARDS\*

Optical illusions present intriguing opportunities to exercise the mind. One's awareness of background information and the manner by which one views objects or concepts shape his or her interpretation of the item or concept presented. In his Frustration, Anxiety, and Tension (FAT) City workshop video (1989), Rick Lavoie uses the classic double picture *All is Vanity* (Gilbert, 1892) to illustrate the frustration of a student inappropriately judged by an educator. The student understands assignment expectations differently from other students and submits a work product that presents an alternative perspective from the teacher's view. The simulation illustrates how educators may interpret a child unfairly because they lack the openness to appreciate the child's view of the environment.

In a double picture – both the images in the illusion are present – the viewer’s perspective bias influences his or her receptivity to different possibilities for viewing the image. How may one reduce this bias to appreciate the alternatives? One strategy would simply study the picture for other images until one finds them or gives up. Another approach would be to avoid, resist, or abandon a sense of superiority and acknowledge that he or she lacks the resources to realize the alternative views on his or her own. This admission could allow one to seek other views by asking for assistance from others. Yet, one should exercise care to seek help from individuals who could point out an alternative perspective. Seeking help from one who does not see the possibilities may not reveal the true picture and may reinforce the ignorance practiced.

After much frustration from being unable to see the alternative, one may simply give up and even deny the existence of the other image. Indeed, one who experiences extreme frustration and has difficulty practicing modesty or humility may attempt to convince or coerce others to claim that the other image does not really exist. The focus now becomes the conditions within the individual and the context that shape the patterns of feeling about the illusion and relationship to the unrecognized image. The unrecognized image exists; however, the individual simply gives up and denies its presence.

As the first quintile of the twenty-first century approaches its completion, social educators may consider that the world that we share presents a double image of which the community resists appreciation. The unappreciated, ignored, or denied image offers an alternative vision of humanity and social education. Social educators may pursue the study and teaching of human relationships and interpret past, present, and future social environments. Through the disciplines of geography, civics, economics, history, sociology, psychology,

anthropology, and other areas, social educators interpret human relationships to the physical environment and its resources. By acknowledging the existence of this alternative image, social educators may reexamine the validity of another perspective of the world, that being the metaphysical or spiritual.

Social education examines social relationships and develops theories based on such views and observations. Yet, the presence of intangible elements that prompt unanticipated or extraordinary individual and group behaviors, or black swans, constantly reshape academic dialogue and modify explanations for these relationships (Taleb, 2004). Social education represents an imperfect discipline that lacks sufficient information to provide objective conclusions about human society and maintains biases that distort social vision. The nature of human thought is inherently flawed, and the social theories upon which its knowledge originate from intellectual traditions grounded in biased epistemological views that provide partial accounting of a whole steeped in cultural vanity (Herman, 2014; Menand, 2002; Painter, 2010).

Appreciating a spiritual dimension acknowledges the imperfection of scientific knowledge in general and social science in particular. It necessitates reconsideration of social science teaching and research to acknowledge and examine the intangible or metaphysical elements of existence. These abstractions represent the double images of experiences that human society shares.

What is it that prompts a call for such a pursuit at this time? Consider the suppression of social education efforts within the United States through an emphasis on high stakes literacy and mathematics testing in early childhood and elementary environments (Heafner & Fitchett, 2012; Rock et al., 2006). How may these conditions inform about the successes and failures to teach the young children (today's social leaders) of the 1970s and 1980s about democratic rights and responsibilities?

The reader may reflect upon whether social education effectively prepares the citizenry to examine the substance of its own identity or if it simply represents another institution that modifies its practice to conform to political demands. For the present, it would seem that the socially advantaged use behaviorist strategies to control funding resources and influence the emotions of educators who guide district and classroom decisions (Mehta, 2012; Picciano & Spring, 2013). Such patterns of resource control have influenced social relationships for some time, yet experienced developing intensity since the 1980s. How is it that social educators would believe that an education in democracy could substantially alter these conditions?

A science of social education cannot fully appreciate the historical and cultural biases that shape interpretations of civic understanding without considering a vision of spirituality. The acknowledgement of a metaphysical or spiritual basis for explaining the world offers a sense of creativity that scientifically-based materialist views discourage. Speck's (2005) identification of three (the perceived separation of church and state, the recognition of higher education as defining epistemology, and the lack of faculty preparation in spirituality) principles of contention that discourage discussion of spirituality in higher education serve as a praxis for interpreting these tensions. The current chapter presents spirituality and science as two sides of the same experience. It suggests that broaching the possibility that spirituality contributes to a legitimate worldview that complements scientific understanding lends potential to approaching social education in a manner that reframes citizenship in a holistic, global sense.

This chapter serves to initiate a dialogue about the concept of spirituality and its place in standard-based environment founded on scientific principles. If one accepts Cottingham's (2003/2013) view of spirituality as an endeavor in reconciling

oneself to the finite nature of being human, spirituality represents a highly individualized pursuit. Yet, one may consider another path that presents a holistic vision that removes individual bias as best one can to resist judgement and embrace subjectivity. This alternative vision provides the second image in the double picture that defines social existence.

The remainder of this chapter considers the nature of spirituality and its relationship to social education. It begins by examining the concept of teacher identity and the importance of broadening associated conceptions to a vision of community. It then provides background about the concept of spirituality, its relationship to religion, and thoughts about its measure. Finally, it considers the relationship of spirituality to education standards before providing concluding thoughts and ideas for professional direction.

## IDENTITY

This discussion about the nature of teacher identity begins by considering the essence of the teaching practice. Parker [Palmer \(1998\)](#) identifies the teaching practice as one of paradox related to self and pedagogy. In his view, teaching represents a process of negotiation and balance, exploring the truth of curriculum required by administrators to be disseminated to or examined with students. This process simultaneously reflects on the preparation directives and personal values that define the inner sense of “me” within the teacher, while expressing the professional role expected by the school community.

While [Palmer \(2003\)](#) claims that a fulfilling teaching process involves an inner journey that examines the soul, one may consider that identity presents an ongoing process of negotiation between one’s own sense and the world’s interpretation of oneself. Reviews of literature find that teacher identity has

been studied in terms of (1) teacher self-reinvention, (2) defining stories, (3), discourse patterns, (4) metaphors of practice, and (5) contexts of practice (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). The process of wrestling presents the essential element around which these themes revolve. Yet, one may also consider that being a teacher represents only one component of a person's entire existence. Just as teachers serve in many social capacities such as parents, children, friends, customers, clients, and spectators, so, too do social educators fulfill many roles. To interpret a teacher's identities purely based on their school interactions represents an incomplete endeavor. Social educators face a challenge of valuing the sense of negotiation experienced by each other. And yet, each person experiences this negotiation in a different way.

One's sense of identity relates to an emotional undergirding often overlooked or ignored. The nature of one's feelings about oneself shapes his or her interpretation of his or her identity. Panksepp and Biven's (2012) seminal work on the brain structures of animals indicates that the patterns of affective imprints within humans guide their patterns of cognition. In other words, one's core emotional state guides his or her patterns of thinking. For example, a person who experiences high degrees of anger reasons differently from one who experiences great sense of compassion. Affective brain circuitry represents an environmental response system designed to seek, play, and protect. One's sense of identity originates from a mix of emotions associated with his or her experiences. The analogy to consider would be the hot and cold temperature blend on a car dashboard. One adjusts the hot/cold mix in response to the climate within the car. The nature of the emotional composite guides the patterns of interactions with others.

The fascinating element of Panksepp and Biven's (2012) work relates to the environmental influence on emotional

development. The blends of fear, anger, love, and openness that people experience relate to the conditions under which they are raised. Thus, being raised in an environment of peacefulness and acceptance provides for an emotional predisposition toward a sense of openness. An environment of conflict and confrontation that yields emotional anxiety and trauma may prompt a disposition of selfishness and aggression (Narvaez, 2014).

Individuals bring a variety of emotional experiences to social education that shape their environmental impressions. These emotional imprints also influence individuals' interpretations of appropriate behavior and their ability to acknowledge their transgressions. Thus, a person raised in an environment of conflict will perceive conflict as normal. Narvaez and Bock's (2014) notion of multi-ethics theory holds that everyone has a sense of being moral, yet development in various contexts creates for different senses of what morality represents. These authors define true morality as involving a sense of appreciating other perspectives as well as one's own and responding compassionately to them.

To one who experiences openness and adaptability to different perspectives and contexts, this sense of morality (and emotional wellness) would make intuitive sense. A healthy community would seem to involve a sense of mutuality among the members founded on principles of acceptance and protection. When circumstances arise that disrupt this state, the community works together to resolve the situation in a manner that fits the mutual needs and interests of all.

One can imagine that the ancient Greek city-state of Athens may have been like this, whereas the city-state of Sparta may have experienced a community founded upon mutual trauma and anxiety. Of course, we know that Sparta won the Peloponnesian Wars over Athens. Yet, we may very well also ask if winning the war provided a healthier environment for

the victors. This question represents one to which the concept of spirit is relevant.

Certainly, contemporary society presents many complex conditions. Communities provide different concentrations of mutuality and selfishness. Indeed, violent selfishness often-times presents the basis for mutuality. A pursuit of mindfulness that provides a sense of distancing from material objects may offer potential for appreciating human existence within a global story as individual narratives, rather than objects for social positioning. Indeed, one may experience this sense of distancing as the subsiding of excessive synaptic brain activity during a transition from unsafe to safe settings (Ledoux, 2003; Panksepp & Biven, 2012). Narvaez (2014) indicates that openness to multiple perspectives requires an element of psychological flexibility that derives from a safe developmental context. The distancing of oneself from material attachment and control prompts an appreciation for the environment and a respect of other people for what and who they are, rather than as pawns for one's social agenda.

A focus on the accumulation of external objects as the basis for identity potentially distracts from the metaphysical nature of the individual's defining story. The father of modern economics, Adam Smith (1759/1976), strived to define self-worth independently from financial resources and social relationships; however, met with struggle and contradiction. This philosophical conflict discredited him in the views of economists who demanded scientific vividness and precision, and who perceived his theories as indefinite and unclear (Wilson & Dixon, 2012). They held no tolerance for unprovable abstractions.

Early twenty-first century education focuses on attainment of prescribed standards while resisting consideration of the contexts that shape patterns of student interaction (Cochran-Smith et al., 2018). Social educator consideration of the