Spiritual Journeys in the Classroom: Elementary Public School Teachers' Perspectives

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Abstract

This thesis explored 5 public elementary school teachers’ perceptions of spirituality and its implications for classroom practice. A generic qualitative study was conducted where each teacher shared her experiences and perceptions in one audiotaped semistructured interview. Transcripts were generated and coded for themes which emerged, resulting in the findings of the study. Following this process, the participants verified the accuracy of the transcripts and findings through a member-checking system.

The research found that each teacher has her own definition of spirituality. Furthermore, one’s personal connection with spirituality can involve a relationship with religion, the self, a higher being, others, and nature. These spiritual relationships were nurtured through a variety of methods outlined by the teachers. This resulted in the creation of a personal spiritual profile for each teacher which contained each teacher’s spiritual connections or facets and the methods used to develop these facets.

The teachers identified spiritual needs in their students warranting the need for and importance of spiritual education. Given this, a number of classroom practices were identified with the intention of meeting the spiritual needs of students. Among these practices, the teacher as role model was identified as a significant practice for students’ spiritual development in the classroom. The teachers further outlined a number of professional development initiatives with the intention to promote greater awareness for spiritual education and to provide resources for educators.
Acknowledgments

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CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM

As a lifelong learner and educator, I am dedicated to a journey of self-betterment or nourishment of the soul. I have often wondered about the role that spirituality plays in the lives of other educators and more specifically public school educators. It is spiritual growth that inspires the person that I am and the teacher the children see in the classroom. Spiritual growth or self-development refers to personal development of the inner self (Metzger, 2003). This goal of personal spiritual development motivated me to pursue this research as I immerse myself in the language, theory, and notions surrounding spirituality.

Due to the controversial nature of spirituality, some educators may feel challenged by the language used to describe terms such as spirituality and religiosity (Myers, 1997). Given this challenge, this study aimed to explore how public school teachers define spirituality. What perceptions of spirituality do public school teachers bring into the classroom? How do public school teachers define their students’ needs and aim to meet these needs? What classroom practices do public school teachers use to meet the spiritual needs of their students? What suggestions and ideas do public school teachers have for the future of spirituality in education? These questions formed the basis for this study.

More specifically, this study explored teachers’ perceptions of spirituality and implications for the classroom in a public school setting. Although important, children’s perspectives of spirituality were not examined. Teacher findings were drawn from qualitative interviews with public school educators in hopes of generating greater understanding of spirituality in the public school system.
Theoretical Background of the Problem and Personal Rationale

Spirituality shares equal significance to physical, mental, and emotional well-being (Westgate, 1996). This outlook lies within the holistic educational approach. Central to the holistic approach is the notion that the connections among body, mind, and spirit constitute the whole individual (Plunkett, 1990). Surprisingly, this relatively contemporary educational approach has beginnings credited back to Socrates (469-399 BC) and Plato (ca. 428-348 BC), who presented philosophical arguments to support the preexistence of the soul before birth (Nielsen, 2001). These arguments provided the basis for a spiritual-holistic approach to education that has been further developed by Dewey and his followers (Nielsen).

Within the context of education, the holistic approach seeks to educate the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects of the learner within a learning community (Plunkett, 1990). In contrast to the back-to-basics and progressive educational approaches, which overlook the spiritual aspects of the learner, holistic education is deeply rooted in a commitment to spirituality and personal transformation (Hutchinson & Bosacki, 2000).

During the late 1980s Western school curriculum tended towards a more holistic approach but was replaced by the Ontario curriculum of the 1990s (Nielsen, 2001). The shift to the Ontario curriculum brought greater focus on accountability and performance with little regard for holistic values (Nielsen). It is of little wonder that R. Miller (2001) defines this era as one in epistemological crisis where “by learning how to control virtually every aspect of the world, we no longer know how to dwell in its mystery” (p. 31). Nielsen further supports Miller’s view and deems us in the midst of a “social crisis,”
as society has lost its way through its insatiable appetite for consumption. This outcry for transformation is mirrored by world leader, Pope John Paul II, who appealed to hundreds of thousands of youth during World Youth Day 2002 to follow their faith and to live in the spirit of the Beatitudes (Rolheiser, 2002). The need for holism in society continues to be heard.

The spiritual connection has been neglected in society and is often overlooked in education (Dillon, 2000; J. P. Miller, 2000; Nielsen, 2001). Still others deny the existence of spirituality (Solomon, 2002). Western society does not promote the internal spirit of human beings (R. Miller, 1999; Palmer, 1999b), and to promote spirituality in the classroom is to risk backlash and ridicule (Nielsen). It is suggested that people fear spirituality in education, as it is perceived to force values, habits, and beliefs onto impressionable minds (Nielsen). Teachers need to have the courage to teach holistically/spiritually in the classroom for personal and student betterment (J. P. Miller; Nielsen; Suhor, 1999).

The conceptual complexities of spirituality underlie the educational implications. The consensus among researchers is that spirituality is difficult to define and that a universal definition fails to exist (Wenman, 2001). This is supported by Bosacki (2001b), who chooses to describe spirituality, and Haluza-Delay (2000), who finds the definition of spirituality reliant on personal distinctions and experiences. The ambiguity surrounding spirituality hinders the development and implementation of an appropriate model for classroom practice (Cupit, 2004). Watson (2000) further suggests that issues of spirituality in the classroom are difficult to explore due to the varied nature of spirituality.
Historically, spirituality was synonymous with religious belief (Wenman, 2001); however, more recent work on spirituality embraces a broader view (Bosacki, 2002; Hutchinson, 1998; Kessler, 2000; J. P. Miller, 2000; Wenman). Presently, spirituality is seen as a reflection of life’s experiences and the search for fundamental answers of life and death (Wenman) that need or need not contain a religious element (Bosacki). The separation or amalgamation of spirituality and religion is reliant on individual connotations (Haluza-Delay, 2000). In a simpler form, spirituality is how we make sense of our world and our selves (Hutchinson). Despite varied views of spirituality, there is much agreement in its existence and importance to the quality of life.

Spiritual well-being is an indicator of the quality of life spiritually (J. W. Fisher, Francis, & Johnson, 2002). The importance of treating and developing this well-being has been acknowledged outside of education in such disciplines as nursing, psychology, and mental health care. Westgate (1996) suggests that reduced spirituality leads to lower levels of mental health and thus lessened quality of life. This reality transfers to the need to address the spiritual health of individuals in mental health care settings (Poll & Smith, 2003) and, arguably, the spiritual health of people in all walks and areas of life.

Spiritual health affects all aspects of life (Westgate, 1996). This is upheld by Noddings (1999), who identifies spiritual development as a contributing factor to happiness in life. Since spiritual health is an integral component of an individual’s quality of life, the importance of spirituality needs to be recognized in education.

Researchers are beginning to explore the possibility of spiritual or existential intelligence (Gardner, 2006; Hyde, 2004; Levine, 1999). Such a proposed intelligence allows individuals “to solve problems of meaning and value in life” (Hyde, p. 44). Levine
believes that children's cognitive abilities include the necessary skills required for spiritual intelligence. Given that the educational system seeks to develop the intelligence of individuals it would then logically follow that spiritual intelligence would be worth developing. As such, all levels of the school system—from the Ministry of Education to curriculum writers to administrators and teachers—should be called to reexamine the spiritual state of education.

Within the school, teachers, as curriculum deliverers, are personally called to awaken spirituality in the classroom. Palmer (1999a) proclaims that teachers take their spirituality into the classroom with them and, as such, teachers need to first examine their own spirituality before constructing classroom spirituality. Spirituality is a part of every teacher that cannot be separated from the whole. Thus, when teachers enter the classroom, their spirituality goes with them.

Problems with teacher spirituality reportedly exist (Sutton & Watson, 1995), as teachers are not untouched by the spiritual voids of Western society. Such spiritual voids or loss of spirit are generally demonstrated by a Western society that advocates vocational and economic growth rather than internal spiritual development (Nielsen, 2001). Thus, teachers need to nourish their own souls and spirits to reenergize and revitalize their work (J. P. Miller, 2000). Furthermore, reflection on personal philosophies and connections with others, nature/universe, and oneself is required of teachers (Bosacki, 2001b). Educators need to be mindful of their spiritual journey and to seek opportunities for spiritual development.

Unfortunately, with the present state of Ontario education, all ownership of holistic education, spirituality in the classroom, and personal spiritual wellness is placed
on the classroom teacher. Palmer (1999a) believes that “the most important step toward evoking the spirit in public education is to bring teachers together to talk not about curriculum, technique, budget, or politics, but about the deepest questions of our teaching lives” (p. 11). According to Palmer, very few programs are reportedly available to teachers to answer the call of spirituality.

I uphold the belief that “we teach who we are” (Palmer, 1998, p. 2) in the classroom. This means that teachers model their values and beliefs to their students. Moreover, teachers have the ability to reach every level of the development of students’ spirit through meaningful relationships (Brown, 2002). As such, it is imperative to students’ spiritual development that teachers have the courage to examine their inner selves. This would prove beneficial to both teachers and students for the nourishment of their souls.

Very few opportunities are given to teachers to explore the deepest questions of their souls (Palmer, 1999a). Such questions may include, what are your spiritual truths? and in what ways do you bring balance to your professional and personal life? (B. Fisher, 2000). It is hoped that this study provided opportunities for teachers to share their personal spiritual values, beliefs, and classroom practices.

As a lifelong learner, I was excited about the prospect of furthering my professional development regarding notions of spirituality. I anticipated and also hoped to better my spiritual self from listening to the spiritual stories of others.

Through this research report I wished to promote greater awareness of children’s spiritual education. Given the disconnected spiritual state of Western society (J. P. Miller, 2000; Nielsen, 2001), the call for education of the whole person needs to be heard.
Educators’ ultimate goal must focus on developing better people and connecting souls (Bosacki, 2001b).

Problem Context

Much fear and angst surround holistic and spiritual education (Nielsen, 2001). Western culture portrays spirituality as individualistic and private (Myers, 1997). As such, it is thought that many educators are reluctant to incorporate spirituality into the classroom for risk of pushing values and beliefs on students (Nielsen). According to R. Miller (2001), educators need to be careful regarding the possibility that the aggressive technological and economic arrangements of our culture may give rise to self-centeredness and individualism rather than a sense of community and connection. The aggressive state of technology refers to the need to “alter, improve, or commodify everything, and therefore we cannot see the world’s intrinsic beauty, discern its inherent patterns or hear its spiritual secrets” (Miller, p. 31).

Given the standardized and outcomes-based state of education (Young, 2001), very little literature exists on teachers’ and learners’ perceptions of spirituality. The Ontario curriculum does not address the spiritual needs of learners. It is only in recent years that a societal interest in spirituality in the Western world has surfaced (Fraser & Grootenboer, 2004). Furthermore, few researchers have addressed the development of teachers’ spirituality. This study aims to generate further awareness and promotion of the importance of spirituality in education and to gain a greater understanding of teachers’ perceptions of spirituality in the classroom.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of the study was twofold.
First, this study explored 5 elementary public school teachers' perceptions of their spiritual beliefs and practices. Spirituality is how we make sense of our world and ourselves (Hutchinson, 1998) and describes the connection between others, nature, and ourselves that may or may not contain the aspect of religion (Bosacki, 2002).

Second, this study explored how public school teachers meet the spiritual needs of their learners within elementary schools.

The following research questions shaped the study: (a) How do elementary public school teachers define spirituality? (b) What perceptions of spirituality do public school teachers bring into the classroom? (c) How do public school teachers define their students’ needs and aim to meet these needs? (d) What classroom practices do public school teachers use to meet the spiritual needs of their students? (e) What suggestions and ideas do public school teachers have for the future of spirituality in education?

**Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of the present study, the following definitions apply:

**Religion:** “is an organized and institutional group experience with accepted faiths and beliefs” (Henderson, 2000, p. 128).

**Secular ethics:** are universal spiritual values that seek to develop “a warm heart [and] a sense of caring for one another” regardless of specific religious faith (Dalai Lama, 1999, p. 88).

**Soul/spirit:** “is a deep and vital energy that gives meaning and direction to our lives” (J. P. Miller, 2000, p. 9).

**Spirituality:** describes the “feeling of genuine, connectedness, not only with others and nature/universe, but also with oneself” (Bosacki, 2002, p. 57) and is how we
make sense of our world and our self (Hutchinson, 1998). It may or may not contain an element of religion, depending on the personal views of the individual.

**Spiritual well-being:** "is understood as an indicator of an individual’s quality of life in the spiritual dimension and as an indicator of an individual’s spiritual health" (J. W. Fisher et al., 2002, p. 3).

**Research Methods**

A generic qualitative study was implemented to explore teachers’ perceptions of their spiritual beliefs and classroom practices and is commonly used in educational research to better understand the perspectives of individuals (Merriam, 1998).

Participants were recruited from schools situated within the Ontario elementary public school setting using the snowball method of sampling (Denscombe, 1998). Five participants were needed for the study, and in the event that more than 5 teachers wished to participate in the study, participants would be drawn by lottery. In the instance that a lottery system was needed, all participants’ names would be placed in a hat and the first five names drawn would be asked to participate in the study. This system was not needed.

One set of one-on-one, semistructured interviews was administered, and qualitative data were generated. During the interview, I used an observational protocol form to collect reflective and demographic notes. Furthermore, I kept a reflective journal during the data collection period. Audiotaped interviews and observational protocol forms were transcribed by me.

Following the transcription process, transcripts were coded for emerging themes and findings. As a method to ensure the reliability of the transcripts and the accuracy of the findings, member-checking was used (Creswell, 2003). In the member-checking
process, participants received and reviewed their respective transcripts and findings (Tilley & Powick, 2002). This allowed participants to clarify and/or expand on the transcripts and preliminary research findings (Tilley & Powick). The results represented the perceptions of 5 public elementary school teachers and their views on education and spirituality.

**Importance of the Study**

The need for further research in spiritual education is warranted. Little research is available about public school teachers’ perceptions of spirituality in and out of the classroom. Thus, conversations with 5 public elementary school teachers aim to fill the gap presently found in the literature by furthering our understanding of spirituality in the classroom.

It is hoped that findings from this research will be beneficial to public school teachers and other stakeholders within the public school system. The findings of this study aimed to promote a greater awareness of spiritual and holistic education. Also, findings from this study may provide possible justification for further professional development and classroom and teacher education programming concerning spiritual issues.

**Scope and Limitations of the Study**

As a researcher and educator, I hold a philosophy of education which is holistic in its approach. Furthermore, I strongly believe in the spiritual development of both teachers and students and the need to nurture this development in others. I identify with the view of spirituality that is seen as how you see your self in connection to the universe (Hutchinson, 1998), and this connection occurs between others, nature, and your self
(Bosacki, 2002). This study did not aim to focus on my position on holistic education, but rather presented the participants’ voices as accurately as possible.

**Outline of the Remainder of the Document**

Chapter Two is a critical presentation of relevant and related literature to spirituality. The holistic approach is described as well as its relationship to spiritual education. Teachers’ and learners’ spirituality is discussed. This is followed by spirituality in the elementary school. The Chapter culminates with a synopsis of the present study.

The methodology and procedures of the study are outlined in Chapter Three. The research design and recruitment process are presented. This is followed by data collection methods and limitations of the study.

Chapter Four presents the interview findings and the themes that emerged from the data.

Chapter Five provides an overview of the study. Implications and suggestions for future research are given.
CHAPTER TWO: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter is a critical discussion of the theoretical, empirical, and educational issues concerning spirituality. The historical beginnings of holistic education are examined, providing the foundation for notions surrounding spirituality. Spirituality in teachers is closely explored, followed by spirituality in the elementary school. Finally, the present study is discussed, setting the groundwork for further investigation of spirituality in education.

A Historical Overview of the Holistic Tradition of Education

Holism as a theory of education has roots that reach back to the philosophers Socrates (469-399 BC) and Plato (ca. 428-348 BC; Nielsen, 2001). These philosophers began to lay the foundation for holistic education and viewed teaching as a vehicle for tending to the soul—the whole person (Nielsen). They further contended that education should emphasize the learner as a member of the community rather than as an isolated individual (Frost, 1962). This is a point still upheld by current holistic researchers.

The movement towards holistic education was further perpetuated by thinkers like Rousseau (1712-1779) and Froebel (1782-1852; Nielsen, 2001; Plunkett, 1990). Although coming from dissimilar backgrounds and experiences, these theorists supported the belief that a connection existed between the child’s imagination and soul (Nielsen). They further advocated the need to cultivate the moral and spiritual growth of the learner as part of his or her whole development (Nielsen; Plunkett).

Dewey (1934) also influenced the early advances of holistic theory. Unlike Rousseau and Froebel, Dewey framed the growth of the learner as a natural, individual progression rather than an artificial process (Cahan, 1992). As such, the goals and
objectives of education should be directed by the interests and capabilities of the learner (Cahan). Furthermore, Dewey (1912-1913) contended that the education system should facilitate desirable intellectual, mental, and moral growth in learners (Cahan; Nielsen, 2001). Dewey’s aforementioned ideas are currently upheld in the holistic approach to education.

Maria Montessori (1870-1952) had similar views to Dewey (1934) and developed and implemented Montessori schools which were based in these holistic notions (Nielsen, 2001). Montessori argued that the learner’s intellectual, emotional, and spiritual domains are an integrated part of the whole that cannot be separated from one another (Nielsen). Waldorf schools, founded by Steiner (1861-1925), are similarly grounded in holistic beliefs (Goral & Chlebo, 2000). Both Montessori and Waldorf schools share the belief in an educational system that aims to meet the intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and physical needs of each child (Nielsen).

The current literature revealed holistic education to be education of the whole learner, where the physical, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual domains are integrated (Plunkett, 1990). To develop these domains, R. Miller (2001) argues that holistic learning must be meaningful to the learner through a sense of connection to the world. As such, holistic education strives to create meaning for learners by meeting their individual needs (Plunkett).

The transformative position directly relates to the holistic approach and is “the search for meaning- including personal, situational, cultural, anthropological, and cosmological meanings” (Hutchison & Bosacki, 2000, p. 178). Through the search for meaning, the needs of learners can be met through a balance of self-development in mind,
body, emotion, and spirit (Hutchison & Bosacki). The notion of balance is central to the transformational nature of holistic education as each facet (mind, body, emotion, and spirit) of the learner is appropriately developed or balanced in relation to the other facets (Hutchison & Bosacki). The transformative position also emphasizes the interconnectedness between self-development and the social community (Bosacki, 1997). Thus, the community and universe as a whole is an integral component of holistic education (Hutchison & Bosacki). Holistic learners attempt to make sense of themselves in the world.

A further principle of holistic education is that it is not primarily concerned with the “transmission of what has already been established in our culture” (R. Miller, 1999, p. 194). Such a position seeks to question and transform a school system as the needs of individuals and communities change.

Given the complex background and development of holistic education, researchers need to continue to explore such an approach. Current Ontario educational settings “promote a transmission (behavioural) and transactional (cognitive) approach to education, but not a transformational approach” (Brown, 2002, p. 26). Pitawanakwat (2001) believes that mainstream Western society stresses intellectual development to the exclusion of the emotional, physical, and spiritual facets of the learner. As such, the cognitive domain continues to be emphasized in education rather than the spiritual (Bosacki, 2001b). Thus, holistic approaches to education rest with educators who are further called to meet the challenge proposed by Aldous Huxley more than 2 decades ago:
We are both intellect and passion, our minds have both objective knowledge of the outer world and subjective experience. To discover methods of bringing these separate worlds together, to show the relationship between them, is, I feel, the most important task of modern education. (Huxley, 1980 cited in Plunkett, 1990, p. 63)

Building on Huxley’s claim, current educators need to place equal significance on the spiritual, emotional, physical, and cognitive needs of their learners.

**Conceptual Theory of Holistic Education and Spirituality**

According to many holistic educators (Bosacki, 2001b; Kessler, 2000; J. P. Miller, 2000; R. Miller, 2001; Nielsen, 2001; Palmer, 1999a; Plunkett, 1990; Young, 2001), spirituality, an integral component of the holistic educational approach, is largely overlooked in the educational system and society at large. Nielsen (2001) believes the lack of spirituality may be connected to the rising suicide rate among teens and the ever-climbing percentage of divorces. This spiritual void is further seen in education with the unprecedented level of violence among school children (Noddings, 1995).

The state of education is reflected by the ways of society (Nielsen, 2001). Western society as a whole is consumed with technology, economic growth, and consumerism (Nielsen). Technology is deemed to be the solution to all societal problems (Dalai Lama, 1999). Furthermore, the need to manipulate and control technology is so strong that people have become disconnected from the natural world (R. Miller, 2001). Such emphasis is placed on technology that spirituality in Western society and education is essentially ignored.
Furthermore, despite material affluence in Western culture, an emptiness in society is noted (Dalai Lama, 1999; R. Miller, 2001). Some theorists claim that this emptiness is attributed to a lack of soul or spirit (J. P. Miller, 2000). Society has lost the value of love, forgiveness, and compassion—spirituality (Dalai Lama). R. Miller (1999) further argues that “our culture, as it now stands, is fundamentally hostile to the meanings of spirituality” (p. 189). The spiritual value of reverence, reflection, wonderment, and awe is lost on the ways of society.

Arguably, this loss of spirituality would go unnoticed by those who do not believe in its existence. Many people are uncomfortable with even the possibility of spirituality (Solomon, 2002). The outlook of these individuals is not overlooked by the philosopher Solomon, who writes to this audience in his book entitled, *Spirituality for the Skeptic.* Solomon himself once rejected the notion of spirituality and at the very least ignored the concept of spirituality. He previously “found most of what passed as spirituality something of a sham, fueled by pretension and dominated by hypocrisy” (p. xi).

Solomon is not the only thoughtful mind to have misgivings concerning spirituality. Gardner’s (2006) work on the theory of multiple intelligences (MI) has been criticized for its exclusion of spirituality. The MI theory proposes that each individual is made up of several intellectual competencies which, among many, include linguistic, musical, and spatial intelligences (Gardner, 1983). Gardner (2006) is not convinced that spiritual intelligence exists, although he is exploring the possibility of existential intelligence. Existential intelligence refers to the intelligence of humans to ask and explore large questions (Gardner, 2006).
Gardner’s (2006) preference for existential intelligence over spiritual intelligence does not capture the entire breadth of spirituality. Spirituality, as later explored in this chapter, includes asking and thinking about big questions but extends beyond this. Coupling interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences, intelligences that focus on relationships and understanding of others and the self, with existential intelligence may begin to capture what the critics are asking for in spiritual intelligence.

The views of society are reflected in the current state of education. According to J. P. Miller (2000), one of the main goals of the current educational system is to prepare learners to compete in a global economy. This is achieved by teaching to the cognitive domain of the learner, through standardized tests, grading and fierce competition (R. Miller, 1999). Meaningful self-development cannot be a focus when competing with others as one’s attention is shifted to grades and test scores (Young, 2001). This manner of education damages the soul (J. P. Miller). Furthermore, Palmer (1999b) strongly states that education is death dealing to the spirit of learners.

Noddings (2005) supports J. P. Miller’s (2000) point regarding the state of education and the soul. She believes that the educational system produces learners who are proficient in the academic areas (e.g., reading and mathematics). These learners are prepared to compete in the global economy, however; in Noddings’s view, “too many highly proficient people commit fraud, pursue paths to success marked by greed, and care little about how their actions affect the lives of others” (p. 10). These individuals are the damaged souls of education.
Given the arguments of J. P. Miller, Noddings, and Palmer, the current Western educational system would benefit from greater emphasis on the holistic educational approach and spirituality.

Educators need to recognize spirituality within themselves and learners. Although not easily defined, spirituality is often described as the inner part of the self which is used to make sense of understanding by using both the affective and cognitive domains (Bosacki, 1998). It is how we make sense of our world and our selves (Hutchinson, 1998). Furthermore, it is the connection that is felt between others, the universe, and oneself (Bosacki, 2001b). Moreover, it may be a belief in something greater than the self (Henderson, 2000; Plunkett, 1990). Spirituality involves recognizing the kindness and goodness in ourselves and others (Bosacki, 2001a). Furthermore, spirituality may or may not involve the element of religion, though classical definitions tended to emphasize the religious nature of spirituality (J. W. Fisher et al., 2002).

When the classical definition of spirituality is considered, should an individual have a disbelief in religion, a disbelief in spirituality simultaneously occurs. Thus, given such an outlook, to reject religion is to also reject spirituality. Solomon (2002) previously balked at spirituality as he related it to religion, in which he had no belief. Furthermore, individuals such as Nietzsche, Sartre, and Dawkins, to name a few, have written on their disbelief in religion, providing further arguments for a disbelief in classical spirituality (Dawkins, 2006; Solomon).

Much fear exists around the notion of spirituality (Nielsen, 2001). This stems from the concern that spirituality indoctrinates particular beliefs, values, and habits on others (Nielsen). This is of particular concern in the educational system where young
learners are seen as having impressionable minds. Watson (2000) supports this view and believes that spiritual education must match the learner’s religious and/or spiritual tradition. She further argues that spiritual development cannot take place within the public school system (Watson). This point is refuted by Bosacki (2005), who contends that “public school teachers can discuss religious and spirituality within the context of curricula about history, culture, or other appropriate academic topics” (p. 149).

Noddings (1993) supports Bosacki’s view and further argues that public education should integrate discussions of religious beliefs and even religious unbelief into all subject areas of the curriculum. Poetry, music, and movies are a few mediums used in society to convey messages of belief or disbelief in religion and spirituality (Noddings). These mediums could be used in high school classes to explore issues surrounding religion and spirituality. Public education could provide the forum to discuss meaningful questions of the soul, regardless of one’s spiritual or religious outlook (Noddings).

The Dalai Lama (1999) teaches that spiritual development is not necessarily religious in nature. His view of spirituality is one that develops “a warm heart [and] a sense of caring for one another” (p. 88). These values are an integral component of all religious traditions and are seen as secular ethics (Dalai Lama). Secular ethics are universal spiritual values that develop a greater sense of care for one another (Dalai Lama). As such, these secular ethics can be developed in learners regardless of religious beliefs (Dalai Lama). Kessler (2000) supports this statement and believes “the most important challenge has always been not whether we can address spiritual development in secular schools but how” (p. ix).
Holism and spirituality are beginning to get attention in the fields of psychology and medicine (Larson & Larson, 2003; Westgate, 1996). Illness or disturbances of the body, under the holistic approach, are being treated with equal significance placed on the spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional functioning of the individual (Westgate). It has been further suggested that a lack of spirituality is linked to lower levels of mental health (Larson & Larson; Westgate). This finding, coupled with previously mentioned research, advocates the need for spiritual development within our society.

Furthermore, some researchers are considering the notion of spiritual intelligence as a plausible intelligence (Hyde, 2004; Levine, 1999). Such intelligence involves gaining greater perspective from experiences deemed as spiritual and creatively solving problems relating to meaning and value (Hyde). Levine further argues that children are equipped with the necessary skills for spiritual intelligence. Despite this, Gardner (2006) disagrees with the notion of spiritual intelligence and instead, is considering adding existential intelligence, the exploration of large questions, to his MI theory. The outcome of such research could help inform educators of the cognitive capabilities of learners.

Much research has been focused on defining and noting the need for the spiritual in our society (R. Miller, 2001; Nielsen, 2001; Plunkett, 1990). In contrast, few studies have explored educators' perceptions of spiritual development (Fraser & Grootenboer, 2004; Wenman, 2001). Thus, a greater need for research has been noted in this area.

Traditionally, spiritual development has been viewed as a series of steps or stages that take place over a lifetime. Such a view is consistent with the work of cognitive developmentalists Piaget and Freud (Dillon, 2000). In this sequential theory of spiritual development, lower levels must be completed before moving to higher levels, and
optimal spiritual being cannot be achieved until midlife (Dillon). According to Wilber (1977), spiritual development consists of three levels: the preegoic, egoic, and transegoic. The preegoic and egoic levels each consist of three stages that must be achieved before advancing to the four stages found in the transegoic level (Dillon).

Upon further examination of Wilber’s (1977) outlook of spiritual development, one difficulty was noted. This difficulty lies in his belief that little spiritual growth can occur during childhood. In fact, Rousseau (1993) argued that spirituality should not be discussed with children under the age of 14. Although not all of these beliefs are still upheld, researchers such as Coe (2000) still maintain the stage-like development of spirituality.

Fowler (1995) identified stages of faith development or arguably stages of spiritual development. He contends, “faith is a generic feature of the human struggle to find and maintain meaning and that it may or may not find religious expression” (p. 91). This description of faith is similar to descriptions of spirituality (Bosacki, 2001b; Hutchinson, 1998).

Unlike the model of development proposed by Wilber (1977), Fowler’s (1995) stages of faith follow a spiraling model rather than a sequential model. The faith stages are: infancy and undifferentiated faith (ages 0-1½), stage 1: intuitive-projective faith (ages 2-6), stage 2: mythic-literal faith (ages 7-12), stage 3: synthetic-conventional faith (ages 13-21), stage 4: individuative-reflective faith (ages 21-35), stage 5: conjunctive faith (ages 35 and beyond), and stage 6: universalizing faith (ages 35 and beyond; Fowler, p. vii-viii).
In the spiraling model, movement through faith stages can involve transition, regression, conversion, or arrests (Fowler, 1995). Transition implies the movement from one faith stage, to another and is often emotionally painful (Fowler). Regression involves moving backwards on a given faith stage and an arrest is neither a forward or backward movement on the spiral of faith development (Fowler). Conversion can involve a dramatic change in faith development and result in a stage change in either a forward or backward movement (Fowler).

In Fowler’s (1995) stages of faith, movement between stages is not automatic, and each person’s development through the faith stages is individualistic. Although minimum chronological ages are assigned to given stages, individuals may enter stages before the outlined age (Fowler). Furthermore, some individuals may never reach certain stages regardless of assigned chronological ages (Fowler). In fact, Fowler contends that few people ever reach stage 6 and considers representatives of this stage to be such figures as Gandhi and Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Despite this, “each stage has the potential for wholeness, grace and integrity and for strengths sufficient for either life’s blows or blessings” (Fowler, p. 274).

A contrasting view to Fowler’s (1995) stages of faith is a cyclical outlook (Wenman, 2001). In this model, development is seen as a circle rather than a spiraling model, and the circle is broken into two divisions: “morning” and “afternoon” (Dillon, 2000). Morning is depicted as the mastery and achievement portion of life, while afternoon is characterized by the awe and wonder of infancy and childhood (Dillon).

In the cyclical model, value is placed on the earlier thinking of awe, wonder, and spontaneity of childhood (Dillon, 2000). This part of the cycle is often surpassed with the
busyness of achievement and mastery in life, only to be revisited should the individual wish to shift back to an earlier way of being (Dillon). In doing this, one full cycle or circle of spiritual development has been traveled. Furthermore, no beginning or end to spiritual development is noted, meaning that individuals are always on some part of a spiritual journey.

In the Aboriginal culture, a “Medicine Wheel” is a metaphor used to represent the philosophical outlook of life (Murk, 1994). The outlook of life upheld in this culture is that each individual is a whole person with spiritual, physical, intellectual, and emotional needs that need to be developed (Pitawanakwat, 2001). The Medicine Wheel is described as a legend using a circle with countless points as a symbol (Murk). Variations of the Medicine Wheel legend are as plentiful as there are Aboriginal tribes, meaning that a singular legend of the Medicine Wheel does not exist (Murk).

In one version of the Medicine Wheel legend, the points are given four main directions—north, south, east, and west (Murk, 1994). A gift, colour, and animal are associated with each direction (Murk). The gift of wisdom, colour white, and the buffalo are connected to the north (Murk). The gift of illumination, colour yellow, and the eagle represent the east, while the gift of the south is innocence, the colour is green, and the animal is a mouse (Murk). Finally, the gift of introspection, colour black, and the bear are associated with the west (Murk).

Each direction on the Medicine Wheel signifies an outlook or perception of life (Murk, 1994). “Any person who perceives from only one of these four great directions will remain just a partial man” (Storm, 1972 cited in Murk, p. 6). Thus, perceptions from the four main directions on the Medicine Wheel equate to a whole person (Murk). A
whole person implies an individual with well-developed emotional, spiritual, physical, and intellectual realms.

**The Empirical Research and Practice of Spirituality in Teachers and Learners**

Researchers are beginning to examine the spirituality of teachers and learners. Spiritual well-being or wellness was explored in teachers and those who practice spiritual wellness seek opportunities for growth (J. W. Fisher et al., 2002; Perri-Gillesby, 1999). Furthermore, barriers to spirituality in education were investigated.

A variety of methods to promote spiritual growth are reported by researchers. These methods include practices to foster growth in both teachers and learners.

**Empirical Evidence**

"As soul thrives, everything around it thrives as well" (McNiff, 1992 cited in Young, 2001, p. 25).

The teacher has the ability to permeate every level of the development of students' spirit (Brown, 2002). Thus, if students' souls are to be nurtured in the classroom the process must begin with the souls of teachers (J. P. Miller, 2000; Palmer, 1999b). Educators must have the willingness to explore the inner landscape (spirituality) of their lives to truly promote spiritual education (Bosacki, 2001b). Their personal values play an integral part in the development of a holistic approach to education (Plunkett, 1990). Teachers are called to examine their own lives as they bring their spirituality into the classroom (Miller; Palmer, 1999a).

Spiritual well-being, the indicator of the quality of life in the spiritual dimension of an individual, has been measured in teacher participants. In England, a quantitative study was carried out with a sample of 311 teachers (J. W. Fisher et al., 2002). Two
separate questionnaires were used as a method of data collection to determine the 
spiritual well-being of teachers (Fisher et al.). This study found that older teachers have 
higher levels of spiritual wellness than younger teachers, suggesting the need for greater 
spiritual development for the latter group of educators (Fisher et al.). The importance of 
inner spirituality is not fully realized by beginning teachers (Hopp, 2001). In fact, many 
teachers remain unclear as to what spiritual development is, and still others are too busy 
to even think about spirituality (Eaude, 2001).

Spiritual well-being or wellness was further explored by Perri-Gillesby (1999). 
She examined the wellness journey of 4 teachers who practiced wellness in both their 
personal and professional lives. Wellness refers to the development and state of the 
spiritual, social, emotional, intellectual, and physical dimensions of an individual.

Perri-Gillesby (1999) found that teachers who practice wellness, including 
spiritual wellness, are individuals who have an understanding of wellness, are self-aware, 
have the desire to learn, and seek continual opportunities for growth.

Furthermore, in Perri-Gillesby’s (1999) study, one teacher participant reported 
that her overall wellness is contingent on the state of her spiritual wellness. The teacher 
participant remarked, “If you are not healthy from your soul and your heart and if you are 
not coming out from here (pointing to her heart) with your wellness…nothing will work” 
(p. 60). This points to the importance of spiritual wellness in teachers.

A further study identified teacher, student, and parental spiritual problems as a 
contributing barrier to excellence in a Christian school system (Sutton & Watson, 1995). 
A sample of 169 schools was randomly chosen from Christian schools in membership 
with the American Association of Christian Schools. A questionnaire was given to each
participatory school administrator who distributed the surveys. The questionnaire contained both a quantitative and qualitative component, and statistical analysis and categorical coding were conducted on 201 completed teacher questionnaires.

From the questionnaire, categories of problems were identified and ranked according to the most significant problems in the Christian education setting (Sutton & Watson, 1995). The fifth, sixth, and seventh ranked categories of problems reported by teachers were respectively, student, parent, and teacher spiritual problems. Greater research is required in this area to gain a better understanding of the difficulties surrounding student, parent, and teacher spirituality.

In New Zealand, Fraser and Grootenboer (2004) examined classroom experiences that teachers deemed as spiritual. Two schools were selected for the study, and 9 teachers engaged in semistructured group interviews (Fraser & Grootenboer). The participants all had an interest in spirituality and were selected for the study for this reason (Fraser & Grootenboer).

In Fraser and Grootenboer’s (2004) study, the qualitative audiotaped data were transcribed, and the transcripts were individually coded before common themes across transcripts were identified. The results found that teachers considered the group interviews as spiritual experiences, since the meetings allowed them to discuss “things that were dear to their heart; often the very same things they felt they could not or should not discuss with colleagues” (Fraser & Grootenboer, p. 312).

The teachers further identified themes that were inherent to spiritual classrooms (Fraser & Grootenboer, 2004). The themes for spiritual classrooms were:

1. the classroom is characterized as nonjudgmental and non-self-conscious;
2. a community that encourages spiritual discourse;

3. deeply meaningful activities and events occur that initiate a transcendent experience (Fraser & Grootenboer, p. 312).

Nonjudgmental and non-self-conscious classrooms are classrooms where spiritual experiences are encouraged and each child’s spiritual well-being is supported (Fraser & Grootenboer, 2004). Furthermore, a suggested strategy to create a community that encourages spiritual discourse is to allow students to contribute topics and ideas that are spiritual to classroom activities and discussion (Fraser & Grootenboer). Literature was identified as a meaningful activity to generate transcendent experiences (Fraser & Grootenboer). Transcendent experiences were described as events that enlarge and enhance an individual’s sense of spirit (Fraser & Grootenboer). Although activities to enhance classroom spirituality can be suggested, the participants believed that spiritual education is “not a planned or programmed curriculum” (Fraser & Grootenboer, p. 317).

Teacher Education: Strategies and Programs

Rolph (1991) proposes that spirituality must be addressed in the Faculty of Education. Quality teacher education must include teacher candidates’ spirituality, as this has important implications for learning and teaching (Rolph; Young, 2001). Palmer (1999a) further advocates the need for formal programs for teachers’ spiritual growth. His “Courage to Teach” program or “Teacher Formation Program” offers teachers an opportunity to develop their inner self. This program is successful when it is invitational rather than demanded of teachers (Palmer). Teachers must be ready and willing to examine their inner selves, as this cannot be forced (Palmer).
The first and most crucial element in the journey of spiritual development in education is openness (Glazer, 1999). By looking inward, teachers can open themselves to feeling their experiences and to explore their inner spirit (Bosacki, 2001b; Glazer). Being open or prepared to explore spirituality helps to center and balance the personal and professional lives of teachers (B. Fisher, 2000). Such an attitude can impact relationships, classrooms, schools, and community (Glazer).

A number of methods and occurrences can be further utilized to develop teachers' spirituality. One such method is transcendent experiences, which are events that occur in an individual’s life that change that person forever (Hopp, 2001). These experiences have the power to stimulate self-discovery and inward examination and can be invaluable to teachers (Hopp; Suhor, 1999). Transcendent experiences can lead to transformation and can “significantly affect teacher choices in content and curriculum,” providing the basis for improved instruction (Hopp, p. 275).

An effective method for reflecting on transcendent experiences is LifeMapping (Kompf, 2001). This method uses a series of reflective activities which help to reveal greater knowledge of the self in relation to critical experiences that have occurred in an individual’s life. Greater purpose and meaning can be derived from the LifeMapping process. This in turn leads to an increased knowledge of self or spirituality. Such a practice would be beneficial to teachers.

Reflection or contemplation can be carried out in a number of ways. Contemplation opens new horizons for the soul (J. P. Miller, 2000). One effective method of contemplation is meditation (Miller; Suhor, 1999; Wheal, 2000). Such a practice is commonly used by educational administrators to further develop the inner self (Metzger,
There are a number of approaches to meditation ranging from breath, mantra, visualization, movement, and loving-kindness (Miller). Other techniques or practices used while meditating are yoga, prayer, running, symphony concerts, and affirmations (Metzger). An essential element to meditation is the ability to let go of the calculating mind and to open up the listening mind that is "characterized by a relaxed alertness" (Miller, p. 124).

A further method thought to bring greater understanding of the spirit is the interpretation of divine dreams. A divine dream is a dream where a god appears or a spoken message, usually from a god, is received by the dreamer (Adams, 2005). Interpretations of these dreams by the dreamer can offer insight into the spiritual thoughts and ideas of the individual (Adams, 2005).

A soulful teacher is mindful teacher. Mindfulness is the ability to live in the present situation (J. P. Miller, 2000). This is a skill where the individual takes pleasure in what is being done at that particular moment. Slowing down and being mindful support each other. Becoming too driven and busy allows little time to connect with one's soul. The path to consciousness takes much effort and commitment (B. Fisher, 2000). The result of these practices in the classroom is usually quite wonderful, as students sense that teachers are happier people (Miller).

The art forms have the ability to revive the spirit (Suhor, 1999). The creation of art (poetry, music, pottery, etc.) provides pleasure to the artist even if the piece is not masterful (Suhor). Furthermore, the appreciation of artistic works such as paintings and music can powerfully elevate an individual's experiences (Suhor). Through music, the soul can be shifted to experience something larger than the individual person (J. P.
Miller, 2000). The arts can bring on a contemplative state, providing greater insight into the soul (Miller).

Journaling is another method that nurtures the spirits of educators (J. P. Miller, 2000; Wheal, 2000). It offers a place where deep feelings and longings can be recorded (Miller). Through this process moments can be recorded where the soul is exposed (Miller).

Yet another beneficial tool into the heart of spirituality is silence. Silence is often viewed as uncomfortable, especially in the company of others (R. Miller, 2001). To overpower silence, technology, such as the radio and television, can be used to fill the space (Miller). Greater balance between talk and silence needs to be established (Miller). Noddings (1999) "believes that moments of solitude and quiet are necessary" for spiritual development (p. 174). This is supported by Kessler (2000), who believes that "deep connection to the self" can be achieved through silence and that silence is an opportunity to restore the body's equilibrium or balance (p. 36). Through silence, educators are able to listen to their own thoughts.

Communing with nature can provide the landscape for deeply moving spiritual experiences (Suhor, 1999). For some individuals, sunsets, hurricanes, and nature walks can foster peak spiritual opportunities (Suhor). As a whole, Western society is not highly receptive to bonding with natural settings (J. W. Fisher et al., 2002; Suhor). Regardless of this, teachers have found their relationship to the environment to be a contributing factor to spiritual wellness (Fisher et al).

Another important aspect in the development of spirituality is community. Spirituality is rooted in community life (Hull, 1996). Relationships with others are of
paramount importance for the spirituality of teachers (J. W. Fisher et al., 2002). Interactions with children in the classroom can enable teachers to open "forgotten dimensions of spiritual being" (Dillon, 2000, p. 7). Children can be teachers of spirituality. Teachers can relearn hope, rebirth, renewal, spontaneity, and zeal for living from their students (Dillon). Students are an invaluable resource for teachers’ spirituality.

Within the educational community, teachers can provide each other with insightful spiritual moments. Discussions with colleagues allow a sense of unity of thought and ideas (Suhor, 1999). Palmer (1999a) believes that bringing teachers together to discuss the deepest questions of teaching is "the most important step toward evoking the spirit in public education" (p. 11). Furthermore, "educators can model the practices of openness, awareness, tolerance, respect, and kindness" to one another (Bosacki, 2001b, p. 163). Greater opportunities within the school setting must be provided for teachers as a community to reflect on questions that drive and nourish the spirit (Palmer). Teachers are further encouraged to reach out to the wider social community for the common goal of societal betterment (B. Fisher, 2000).

A final dimension that is beneficial to teachers’ spiritual well-being is a relationship that exists beyond themselves (J. W. Fisher et al., 2002). This includes a personal relationship with God or something larger than the self (Fisher et al.). The impact of this type of relationship on spiritual betterment was linked to the individual beliefs and values of teachers (Fisher et al.).

Through the conscious process of personal spiritual development, teachers become more prepared in their approach as holistic educators. Such an educator has the ability to connect with students and to make connections among students (Palmer,
1999b). They are sensitive to the needs of their students at that moment in time (R. Miller, 2001). Furthermore, holistic educators strive to better their students as people and to connect students' souls by awakening their awareness of spirituality (Bosacki, 2001b). This is a huge undertaking and is met with criticism and apprehension by some teachers, who believe they are being asked to become therapists or priests (Palmer, 1999a). Palmer (1999a) refutes this criticism and contends that teaching to the whole student is merely becoming a better teacher by teaching as a whole person.

Developing learners' spirituality begins with spiritual mentoring. Teachers act as role models for their students as they invite their students to participate in the transformational experiences they provide within the school curriculum (Bosacki, 2001b). As mentors and role models, teachers guide learners into asking meaningful questions (Palmer, 1999a). In such discussions, the teacher is the facilitator and does not answer all the asked questions (Palmer). Ultimately, as mentors, teachers are encouraged to provide students with the means to understand and accept their individual spirituality in a society that culturally rejects it (Hull, 1996).

The physical learning environment for students needs to be a sacred place. Such "sacred classrooms" or places are classrooms where teachers have enabled students to feel more secure and trusting of their teacher and surroundings (Bosacki, 2001a). Teachers can promote such an environment by sharing their spiritual experiences with their students (Bosacki, 2005). This type of learning environment encourages meaningful spiritual development.

Teachers can gain insight into understanding students' spirituality by exploring students' divine dreams (Adams, 2001). As previously mentioned, divine dreams are
dreams where a god appears or a message is sent by a god to the dreamer (Adams, 2005). “A significant number of children have had divine dreams which play a meaningful role in their lives” (Adams, 2001, p. 109). The discussion of divine dreams or dream-talk can be an effective way to explore spirituality and religious feelings in the classroom (Adams, 2001).

Much like teachers’ spirituality, learners’ spirituality can be nurtured through openness, meditation, mindfulness, art forms, journaling, silence, and nature (Bosacki, 2001a; Wheal, 2000). Furthermore, meaningful relationships with self, others, and a higher order (God or something beyond) can be nurtured to develop spirituality in students. Many of these practices are advocated by Kessler (2000), who describes seven gateways to spiritually nourish the souls of students. These gateways are: the yearning for deep connection, the longing for silence and solitude, the search for meaning and purpose, the hunger for joy and delight, the creative drive, the urge for transcendence, and the need for initiation (Kessler, p. 17).

The gateways are not seen as stages, nor will every student engage in all paths (Kessler, 2000). Gateways overlap one another, and each student’s interaction with them is individualistic (Kessler). The ideas proposed by Kessler can help teachers nurture the spirituality of their students.

Teachers can implement a variety of activities and strategies to develop the gateways of students’ spirituality (Kessler, 2000). The yearning for deep connection involves the development of student relationships with the self, others, or a higher being (Kessler). Activities that teachers can use as a valuable vehicle for self development include personal story-telling, self-narration, and mythology (Bosacki, 2001b). Another
technique, mandalas, allows students to learn about their heart as well as their mind (Young, 2001). Mandalas, “magic circles,” can be two-dimensional drawings that contain symbols that represent the self (Young). In many instances, a deep connection to the self may occur in times of solitude (Kessler).

Silence, another gateway, is beneficial for the efficiency processes of the brain and can even invite a sense of classroom community (Kessler, 2000). Many students are unaccustomed to silence, and it often needs to be introduced in the classroom (Kessler). Teachers can introduce silence to the classroom through activities such as silent reading, silent games, and meditation (J. P. Miller, 2000; Wolf, 2000).

Bosacki (2005) notes that classroom silence is able to create an outer calm while simultaneously increasing inner anxiety and agitation in students. This may be attributed to the discomfort that some individuals have with silence (Bosacki). As such, it is important for teachers to be mindful of the possible discomfort created by silence in the classroom.

The search for meaning and purpose can often be developed in students through meaningful discussion and dialogue (Kessler, 2000). Brown (2002) supports this finding and further contends that encouragement from peers and/or the teacher is an integral component for fostering meaning and connections.

Joy and delight and the creative drive are often related. Students should be encouraged to enjoy and celebrate their creations. Unfortunately, students are often taught to hide and suppress these feelings (Kessler, 2000). To counteract this, teachers can use humour in the classroom to generate positive feelings of pleasure (Kessler).
Furthermore, celebrations and the sharing of joyful events and experiences can help to invite creativity and joy to the classroom (Kessler).

Nye and Hay (1996) propose that teachers begin to develop spiritual curriculum around three main areas of spirituality. These areas of spirituality are awareness, mystery, and value (Nye & Hay). Spiritual awareness involves a quality of consciousness which is needed to recognize spiritual experiences (Nye & Hay). Mystery involves the mystery of uncovering our inner self as well as mystery in the world (Nye & Hay). For a child, mystery may involve investigating how a cloud is formed in the atmosphere. The final element of spiritual curriculum, value, focuses on the emotional aspect of spirituality and involves the progression of a self-centered focus on emotion to the value of emotion outside of one's self (Nye & Hay).

To develop learners' spirituality, meaningful school curriculum needs to be established. This can be formed "by seeing life as the curriculum and classroom" (Bosacki, 2001a, p. 218). Wolf (2000) cautions that spiritual development in learners is not merely a series of techniques used in the classroom, as it needs to flow directly from teachers themselves. Even if students are given every benefit from meaningful spiritual curricula, it ultimately lies within the learner to develop their spiritual success (Bosacki, 2002).

**Spirituality in the Public Elementary School**

Whether acknowledged or not, spirituality is always present in the public school system (Palmer 1999a). However, despite this, many schools remain mechanistic or machine-like in approach, meaning that time is spent on standardized tests and achievement and little opportunity is given to spirituality (J. P. Miller, 2000). In some
Western schools spirituality is labeled as “touchy-feely thinking” and given little to no attention (Miller, p. 108). Many educational settings value immediate gains that can be observed and have little interest in sowing imagination in the souls of learners, as no visible outcome can be observed (Nielsen, 2001). The spiritual dimension in students has almost been completely excluded in the school setting (Carisson-Paige, 2001).

Moreover, tension surrounds notions of spirituality in the school system, as spirituality is often viewed as synonymous to religion. The use of religious language in a publicly funded school is not permitted, and the term spirituality is often seen as controversial (Myers, 1997). Researchers such as Carr (1996) still argue that spirituality cannot be separated from its roots in religious tradition, as transferring it outside of religion would be a misuse of the term.

When the spirituality of primary schools in the United Kingdom was examined, little programming could be found to support the spiritual development of students (Wenman, 2001). Furthermore, planning in support of spiritual development was found to be weak or did not exist (Wenman). Findings from this study suggested that reporting spirituality may be too difficult or it is an unimportant area in the school system (Wenman). Similar studies in this area should be carried out, particularly in a Canadian school setting.

Despite the present state of the public elementary school system, many researchers, such as Bosacki (1997), remain hopeful that a holistic approach to education will be implemented and a truly humanistic and personal educational system will be formed.
The Present Study

As proposed by Palmer (1999a), spirituality is ever present in the public education system, whether acknowledged or not. As such, teachers are called to respond to the spiritual crisis in education (R. Miller, 2001). Given the lack of Canadian research and the complex cultural mosaic, the present study explored the following questions: How do public school teachers define spirituality? What perceptions of spirituality do public school teachers bring into the classroom? How do public school teachers define their students' needs and aim to meet these needs? What classroom practices do public school teachers use to meet the spiritual needs of their students? What suggestions and ideas do public school teachers have for the future of spirituality in education?

Five public elementary school teachers were interviewed from Ontario public schools. Each teacher was interviewed individually and was given an opportunity to share her personal insights on the topic of spirituality and its relevance to the classroom.

In summation, this chapter examined the holistic approach, which includes a focus on spirituality. Furthermore, spirituality and its relation to teachers and learners was examined with a focus on spiritual development. The current state of spirituality in the public elementary setting was also considered, setting the stage for the present study.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This study aimed to explore elementary public school teachers’ perceptions of their spiritual beliefs and classroom practices. To determine the perspectives of the elementary public teacher participants, 5 teachers were interviewed. A generic qualitative study was the implemented research design.

Research Design

To explore public elementary teachers’ perceptions of their spiritual beliefs and practices within the classroom, a generic qualitative study was conducted. An interpretivist research approach was chosen because I wanted to explore public school teachers' perceptions of their spirituality and classroom practices. In line with an interpretivist research approach, qualitative research methods aim to explore human events such as interpersonal relationships and social structures (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). A goal of qualitative research is to reveal the multiple perspectives offered by participants (Leedy & Ormrod). Such research involves collecting data in a natural setting where the researcher is seen as the instrument of data collection (Creswell, 1998). Data collection techniques such as interviews, observations, and documents are appropriate methods in qualitative research (Creswell).

One of the most common forms of qualitative research in education is a generic qualitative study (Merriam, 1998). Such a study aims to “discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved” (Merriam, p. 11). The latter goal was part of the purpose for this study.

A key element to the qualitative nature of this study is that all participants have a perspective to offer in relation to the topic of study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). Each
recorded conversation will add value to the study. The conversations will then be analyzed and interpreted. The findings will be “partly based on participants’ perspectives and partly based on our [researchers’] own interpretations” (Creswell, 1998, p. 20). The interpreted results will help to better understand public elementary teachers’ perspectives of spirituality.

Selection and Description of Participants

During the preliminary stages of this report, I was personally drawn to the perspectives of teachers. As a teacher and lifelong learner, teachers’ perspectives were appealing to me, as I hoped to gain valuable classroom practices and insights from others. As my research progressed, I quickly realized that few studies on spirituality focused on the perspectives of teachers. This finding solidified my interest to explore teachers’ perspectives and is the reason why teachers rather than other stakeholders (e.g., administrators, students, parents, etc.) in the educational field were selected.

I was further interested in public school teachers’ perspectives of spirituality as they are presented, according to the holistic approach, with the challenge to develop the spirituality of their learners within the culturally diverse landscape of Canadian schools. Contemporary Canadian schools are progressively becoming more culturally diverse (Goddard, 1994; Piluso, 2002). “Each cultural and ethnic group has different learning styles which require different teaching styles,” warranting greater teacher awareness and preparedness in a culturally diverse classroom (Goddard, p. 8).

Public school educators are unable to discuss or make reference to religious terms (Myers, 1997). Spirituality is often seen as synonymous with religion. The close relationship between spirituality and religion may partially explain the controversial view
that spirituality has in the public school setting. I was interested to find out if teachers within the public school setting felt that spirituality is too closely linked to religion and whether they are teaching to the spiritual side of students. Furthermore, I wanted to know if teachers felt spirituality is relevant in a public school setting. As such, participants were selected from a public school board.

Elementary school teachers spend approximately 5 hours daily in an instructional environment with their students. This is compared to high school teachers who spend no greater than 72 minutes a day with a particular class of students over one school term or possibly two terms. Thus, elementary teachers have greater opportunities to develop the spirituality of their learners. Furthermore, since elementary teachers spend more time than high school teachers do with their students, there is a greater chance for teachable moments to occur. A teachable moment is seen as the chance to teach outside of the prescribed lesson plan and curriculum and is often initiated by students’ comments or discussion (Hyun, 2002). This made the perspectives of elementary school teachers of particular interest to me.

Before the recruitment process began, I created a recruitment script to ensure that each potential participant would receive all the pertinent information regarding the study. I then implemented a snowball method of sampling for recruiting purposes. The snowball method is useful, as it is an effective and efficient way to gather participants (Denscombe, 1998).

The 5 participants for this study were recruited by the snowball method of sampling. This method of sampling began when I contacted a colleague in a public school board and informed her about my study, via the recruitment script. An information
letter was given to the potential participant, who then decided to participate in the study. This individual, now a participant, signed an informed consent form and indicated that she would speak to her colleagues regarding my study. Two informed consent forms were signed. One copy was given to the participant and I kept the second copy for my records. When the informed consent form was signed, an interview date and time were set that were mutually agreeable for the participant and me. This process was repeated for the 4 other participants in the study.

Each individual that I spoke with regarding my study felt comfortable speaking to other colleagues for the purposes of recruiting participants. Interested individuals were asked to contact me by email or, if they were comfortable, could pass their contact information to the individual who initially spoke to them regarding the study, who then forwarded the information to me. This process was continued until 5 participants consented to participate in the study.

In the event that greater than 5 people expressed interest in participating, participants would be selected by lottery. All participants’ names would be placed in a hat, and 5 names would be drawn to determine the participants for the study. The lottery system was not needed, as I continued to recruit until 5 participants were accepted into the study.

Data Collection and Recording

Data were collected from 5 teacher participants using in-person, individual, semistructured interviews. Semistructured interviews allow participants to develop ideas and to elaborate more widely on a given topic (Denscombe, 1998). A single interview was conducted per participant and lasted between 30 and 90 minutes. Before the
interviews began, each participant was greeted and an interview script was used, which ensured that all the participants were aware of their rights and were given the opportunity to ask questions before the interview began.

As a further method for recording data, an observational protocol form was used before and during the interview (Creswell, 2003). General demographic notes were gathered on each participant before the interview which included participant information such as age, gender, and number of years teaching as well as the time, date, and location of the interview (Creswell). During the interview, I used this protocol or form for recording data as a collection of reflective notes. The reflective notes included my personal thoughts or feelings on the interview. I also added to these notes following the interviews.

Interviews were tape recorded in an appropriate quiet place within the participant’s home or my home. The setting for the interview was dependent on the preference of the participant.

To protect the confidentiality of each participant, pseudonyms were assigned to the participants. The participants were informed of this right prior to beginning and following the interview. Interviews occurred at a time and place convenient to both the participants and me.

Throughout the data collection period, I kept a reflective journal that documented my thought processes during research procedures. The journal also served as a log of further questions that I had.

Following each interview, I transcribed the audiotapes. Although it is impossible to achieve a “perfect transcript,” greater accuracy will be achieved by having the
researcher transcribe than a transcriber who is distanced from the data (Tilley & Powick, 2002, p. 306). A perfect transcript refers to one-to-one direct correspondence between the audiotapes and the transcript (Tilley & Powick). I also typed the observational protocol.

Transcription is a valuable element of the research process and is interpretive by nature (Tilley & Powick, 2002). Unfamiliar language often creates distance from the research for transcribers, and “this [distance] presented its own complications” to the transcription process (Tilley & Powick, p. 301). Choosing or hiring an individual to transcribe data is an important decision, as it impacts the reliability of the data (Tilley & Powick). Tilley and Powick recommend selecting an individual that has an investment or connection to the research as a method of creating quality transcripts. For the purposes of this study, the invested individual is me, the researcher.

After each interview was transcribed, I contacted each participant to begin the member-checking validation system. A meeting was arranged where the participant’s transcript was given to her. Each participant was asked to read her transcript to verify the accuracy of the transcription process. During the meeting, I arranged an agreeable date with the participant for the transcript to be picked up, as each transcript was left with the participant to validate.

Revisions were not needed, but in the event that they had been I intended to give the transcript and report to the participant a second time for verification. This process would be carried out until the participants deemed the transcripts to be accurate.

Data Analysis and Data Presentation

The data analysis process involved a series of steps to prepare, understand, represent, and interpret the data (Creswell, 2003). Central to this analysis is the inductive
nature of qualitative research (Johnson & Christensen, 2000). This means that the themes and findings on spirituality found in this study emerged from codes and categories developed directly from the data.

The first step that was carried out was the organization and preparation of the data. I transcribed the audiotaped interviews and typed the observational protocol forms. Furthermore, a member-checking validation process was used to ensure accuracy of the transcribed data. Participants were given the opportunity to read the transcribed transcripts to ensure accuracy.

Following this, the data were read and reread as I tried to gain some first impressions and meaning from the data. My reflective journal was a valuable tool for collecting general impressions and questions regarding the data during the beginning stages of analysis. Notes, comments, and observations were jotted in the margins of the interview transcripts (Merriam, 1998). These marginal notes formed the basis for the coding process and were the initial findings for the study (Creswell, 2003).

These initial codes and findings for the study were recorded on each individual transcript. The member-checking validation system was repeated with the intention to verify the reliability of the findings. Each participant was contacted, and an agreeable meeting time was set where each participant received her transcript with the initial findings. This method helped to determine the accuracy of qualitative findings by having participants verify the transcripts and report findings for accuracy (Creswell, 2003).

Once the member-checking process was completed, participants were sent an appreciation letter which expressed my gratitude for their participation in my study.
Next, the category construction process began. The marginal notes and comments were read and sorted into groupings (Merriam, 1998). A list of the groupings was recorded on a separate memo to myself. This process was repeated for each transcribed interview. This list constituted the patterns found in the study (Merriam). The groupings were then named, establishing the codes for the study.

Following this, the data were reread to incorporate the newly developed codes. The codes were assigned to the data as they were reexamined. Descriptive wordings were developed for the codes to establish category names (Creswell, 2003).

The observational protocol forms were examined in the same manner to further add to the findings of the study.

Once the categories had been established, each category was assigned a different colour. From this, conversational passages in the transcripts were highlighted in the colour that corresponded to the given conceptual category. These grouped passages were then placed on cue cards. The passages generated the descriptions for each category (Creswell, 2003).

The findings were reported using interpreted findings and conversational passages. Direct quotes from the data were used to support the findings. A conceptual web organizer, in the form of a memo to myself, was used to show the relationship of the conceptual findings.

As the final step to the data analysis process, interpretations were made of the findings (Creswell, 2003). Personal interpretations and comparisons were made to existing literature. Also, further questions for inquiry were formulated.
Methodological Assumptions and Limitations

The only methodological assumption for this study, as similarly stated by Brown (2002), is that views of spirituality can be accurately conveyed in an interview.

Various limitations were presented in this study. The first limitation involves the qualitative nature of the study. Since “the researcher is an instrument” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001, p. 147), the qualitative study was affected by the subjective lens or view that I brought to the study. This is supported by Leedy and Ormrod, who contend that to some degree, every level of the study will be impacted by the biases and values of the researcher.

A further limitation of the study is the interview process. Due to the semistructured nature of the interview, participants may have been limited in their ability to speak on the topic of spirituality, as an opportunity may not have been presented to express a particular view. Furthermore, participants may have felt nervous or hindered by a formal interview setting (i.e., audiotaped interview, observational forms), although every effort was made to make the participants feel at ease.

“Transcription [is] an important aspect of the research process” (Tilley & Powick, 2002, p. 291), and the accuracy of my transcripts is dependent on my ability to transcribe audiotapes. It is often assumed that the tape and text is a “one-to-one correspondence” (Tilley & Powick, p. 292), but in reality the perfect transcript can not be achieved. Thus, the accuracy of the transcripts was limited by the transcription process.

As previously mentioned, the researcher is an integral part of the interpretive process. As such, any interpretation of observational reflections, coding, and categorical development was restricted by my thoughts and abilities as a researcher. As a
preventative measure, validating strategies were implemented to ensure the reliability of the data and findings.

**Ethical Considerations**

Qualitative studies by their very nature seek to explore the thoughts and views of human beings. As such, ethical considerations must be closely examined when human participants are the focus of study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). As outlined by Leedy & Ormrod, my research must consider the following areas: “protection from harm, informed consent, right to privacy, honesty with professional colleagues” (p. 107).

Once the participants had agreed to participate in the study, they each signed an informed consent form. This form outlined the purpose of the study, study procedures, possible risks of the study, potential benefits of participation, confidentiality/anonymity, contact information, and consent. Having been informed on the process of the study and its risks and benefits, participants made an informed decision to participate in the study.

To ensure that the participants were protected from harm, before the interview began, I informed participants that they could remove themselves from the study at any point during the process. This included the opportunity to remove oneself from the study during the interview, after receiving the initial transcript, and following the receipt of the findings. Furthermore, participants could choose to remove portions of the transcript if they so desired. Participants were again informed of this right following the interview.

Participants were advised of their right to privacy in the informed consent and before and after the interview. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant, and only my thesis committee and I had access to the data from this study. The audiotapes and
transcripts for this study were locked in a filing cabinet in my home to ensure participant privacy.

An honest relationship was established between the participants and me when they were included in the verification of their personal transcript and findings. Any suggestions and questions were taken into consideration and addressed during the member-checking process.

To ensure that the above areas were not violated in any way, the Brock University Research Ethics Review Board reviewed my proposed research study (see Appendix).

Restating the Problem

The need for holistic education continues to be present in our society (R. Miller, 2001). Moreover, particular attention to the spiritual needs of learners is warranted, as education is often "death dealing" to the souls of learners (Palmer, 1999b, p. 17). Thus, the primary focus of this study was to explore teachers' perceptions of their spiritual beliefs and classroom practices through the use of one-on-one, semistructured interviews.

The following research questions shaped the study: (a) How do elementary public school teachers define spirituality? (b) What perceptions of spirituality do public school teachers bring into the classroom? (c) How do public school teachers define their students' needs and aim to meet these needs? (d) What classroom practices do public school teachers use to meet the spiritual needs of their students? (e) What suggestions and ideas do public school teachers have for the future of spirituality in education?

The findings of this study aimed to fill the gap in the literature that exists surrounding Canadian teachers' spiritual development and the methods used to meet the spiritual needs of learners in the public school setting.
CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS

The 5 teacher participants in this study were given the opportunity to explore spirituality and its meaning in the educational field. The teachers further examined spirituality in the context of their lives and in the lives of their students. This came from five separate interviews of data.

The results from the analyzed data are presented in this chapter. From the five semistructured interviews conducted, data were generated from the participating elementary public school teachers. The results were gathered using an inductive method of collection, whereby themes emerged from codes and categories arising from the data.

Description of Participants

Five female elementary public teachers participated in the study. All of the participants have spent their teaching careers, thus far, in Ontario public school boards. Four of the participants were similar in age and years of teaching experience and are considered novice teachers (1-9 years experience; Celli, 2000). These 4 teachers also share the experience of currently teaching for the same Ontario public school board. The fifth teacher is nearing the end of her teaching career and is qualified, according to Celli, as an experienced professional with greater than 20 years of teaching experience.

Each participant completed a participant information form prior to the interview that described her experiences in education and contained other general demographic information. I used this form after the interview for reflective notes regarding each participant and the interview process. A single one-on-one semistructured interview was conducted with each teacher, which lasted between 30 minutes and 90 minutes depending
on the views and experiences offered by the participants. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant to protect her right to confidentiality.

Sarah

Sarah, the first participant to share her insights on spirituality in education, is a novice teacher with 5 years of experience in education. Her teaching career has been spent in a public school setting. She currently teaches grade 1 and has taught grades 1/2, 5, and 5/6 and is qualified as a primary-junior teacher. Sarah was an eager participant whose initial nervousness dissipated early in the interview, and she seemed comfortable sharing her views on spirituality and religion (Bower, research journal, June 2005).

Megan

The second participant, Megan, has taught for 5 years in the same southern Ontario public school board as Sarah. She is a primary-junior teacher who has considerable experience teaching in blended or split-grade classrooms and has a Master of Education degree. She appeared most comfortable in the interview discussing the explicit aspects of the Ontario curriculum, such as math and language expectations and achievement (Bower, reflective notes, July 2005). Megan’s answers during the interview were generally quite succinct, which may be attributed to some personal discomfort with the discussion of spirituality.

Angela

Angela has taught for three different school boards during her 5 years in education. She is currently working on a Master of Education degree and has taught only in public school boards, mainly in primary and junior classrooms. Angela expressed concern before the interview process began that she might not be able to add much
insight into the study. This concern was quickly allayed in the beginning stages of the interview as Angela gave thoughtful and insightful answers.

Rachel

Rachel has the greatest teaching experience among the participants and has shared her 24 years in education among three different school boards. Rachel has taught all grades between junior kindergarten and grade 6 and has spent some time teaching students with disabilities at the high school level. Rachel shared many ideas on the topics of spirituality and religion and considers herself to be a spiritual person. At the end of the interview, she remarked that:

It's [the interview] given me a lot to think about too...I'm sure it will create further thoughts going on, you know over the next number of days and weeks as well. It has stimulated something here, which is good for me for growth.

(Interview, July 30, 2005, p. 13)

It was evident to me from her above comment and many of her interview responses that Rachel is a reflective individual, in both her personal and professional life.

Natalie

The final participant in the study was Natalie, who has been teaching for 7 years. Her current teaching responsibilities are preparation and planning for junior and senior kindergarten classes as well as teaching science to primary (grades 1-3) students. This is the second school year that Natalie has taught halftime. Prior to her current position, Natalie taught grade 7 and 8 students. She is also working on her Master of Education degree parttime. Natalie had much to offer on the topic of spirituality and remarked, “I’m
not necessarily a religious person, but I’m a spiritual person” (Interview, September 26, 2005, p. 4).

Table 1 provides an overview of the demographic information provided by the participants prior to the interview process.

**Emerging Themes**

Following a careful analysis and organization of the data, five main themes emerged, which were:

1. Notions of Spirituality
2. Personal Spiritual Development and Spiritual Profiles
3. Exploring Students’ Spiritual Needs
4. Spiritual Classroom Practices
5. Teacher Development

The first theme presents the perspectives of the teacher participants regarding the idea of spirituality and explains what spirituality means to them. “Personal Spiritual Development and Spiritual Profiles” is the notion that each participant has an individualized spiritual profile, which is developed in many meaningful ways. The participants identified different aspects of spirituality in their lives and how they develop their spirituality. The third theme relays the spiritual needs of students in the classroom as identified by the participants, while the fourth theme outlines the practices within the classroom which are aimed at developing students’ spirituality. The final theme of “Teacher Development” is presented as ideas fostered by the participants to further develop teachers’ outlooks and classroom pedagogy. The perspectives offered by all 5 participants during the interview process supported each of these themes.
Table 1

Demographic Information Given by Participants Prior to the Interview Process Arranged from Least to Greatest Years in Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Number of years in education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angela</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Megan</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Notions of Spirituality

When given the opportunity to express their ideas of what spirituality means to them, the participants’ perspectives overlapped and also differed in many ways. This is a significant finding, as the varied perspectives on spirituality resulted in a personal definition of spirituality for each participant. This means that each participant had her own definition of spirituality. Rachel and Natalie relayed during the interview process that individuals can have different outlooks on spirituality and feel that their perspective could be different from others. Although unique, some overlap of ideas was observed between the definitions.

Natalie believes spirituality to be her personal connection with a higher being, which does not involve religion. Rachel echoed Natalie’s belief that spirituality is about a personal connection, and she further added that it is how she reacts to life. However, Rachel differed from Natalie in her definition of spirituality, as Rachel’s outlook includes a connection to religion.

A third definition is provided by Angela, who feels that spirituality is how she acts and what she says. Her outlook is connected to religion, as she believes that religion can give you spiritual guidance. This perspective is not unlike Rachel’s outlook.

Megan associated spirituality with her morals, values, and beliefs and does not elaborate much further than this. As mentioned previously, Megan seemed uncomfortable discussing ideas surrounding spirituality.

Although Sarah did not appear to be uncomfortable talking about spirituality, she was uncertain as to what spirituality meant to her. She was the only participant to believe that spirituality and religion were the same thing. When asked about what spirituality was
to her, she began discussing religion. However, later in the interview she expressed her uncertainty around spirituality by saying, “See, I’m still thinking of it [spirituality] as religion. Is that right?” (Interview, June 22, 2005, p. 6).

Only 2 of the 5 participants, Natalie and Rachel, neither spoke of nor exhibited to me feelings or displays of discomfort or uncertainty surrounding spirituality.

A further idea surrounding spirituality is the notion that it is not a static entity. Spirituality can develop, grow, and change as a person changes. Natalie shared that she has been on a “spiritual journey” (Interview, September 26, 2005, p. 6) and that her sense and understanding of her own spirituality have developed over time. This outlook was mirrored by Megan and Rachel, who also remarked on the development of spirituality over time. Megan sees spirituality as “a continuum…[that] as you’re growing up you develop it more” (Interview, July 22, 2005, p. 4).

Rachel’s life has been profoundly affected by her spiritual development. She shared that she has had a “spiritual awakening” (Interview, July 30, 2005, p. 5) and attributes her happiness in life to her awakening. She further believes that she cannot separate her outlook on spirituality from her different roles in life as she relayed:

I find it difficult really to separate the teaching Rachel, the parent Rachel, and the friend, and the person Rachel, so there’s certain aspects of my spirituality that will definitely influence in the classroom because of who I am and spirituality to me is kinda all inclusive, it’s the way I think and act and feel…it’s how I react to life. (Interview, July 30, 2005, p. 5)
Rachel has a holistic outlook to spirituality and believes that because her spirituality is a part of her, it touches every aspect of her life. This view was further seen through Natalie, who believes that spirituality becomes ingrained in your personality.

Among the varied accounts of spirituality provided by the participants, six subthemes of spirituality emerged. These subthemes were:

1. Spirituality and Religion
2. A Spiritual Relationship with the Self
3. Spirituality and a Higher Being
4. Spiritual Relationships with Others
5. A Spiritual Connection with Nature

Each of these subthemes is considered to be a facet of spirituality.

*Spirituality and Religion*

The definitions of religion provided by the participants were as varied as their thoughts on spirituality. The agreement among the responses is that religion can be seen as a denomination such as Anglican, Protestant, or Catholic.

In the simplest explanation, provided by Megan, “Religion is the faith that you believe in” (Interview, July 22, 2005, p. 4). A broader definition is given by Angela, who discussed the multicultural nature of religion and refers to it as a number of different religions with different gods, holidays, and celebrations. The multicultural aspect of religion is further mentioned by Rachel, who described religion as different groups who meet as communities in a shared belief in God or another higher power.

The participants were consistent in their responses that a relationship exists between spirituality and religion. To Sarah, spirituality and religion are synonymous, and
she doesn’t believe them to be different things. During the interview she began to question this belief and even asked me if spirituality and religion were the same thing. I responded to her that I was interested in her perspectives and that her perspectives could not be incorrect.

Although Sarah’s belief that spirituality and religion are alike was not personally upheld by the other participants, it is not an uncommon belief. Natalie remarked during the interview process that an Ontario public school board would not promote spirituality within its schools as spirituality is linked too closely to religion. This statement is not unbelievable to me, because when I explained the topic of this study to various interested people in the Ontario community, many of them asked me what spirituality/religion had to do with teachers in a public school board. They expressed that they did not know what religion had to do with the public school system (Bower, research journal, June 2005). These comments were interesting to me, as I had mentioned only the word spirituality (not religion) when describing this study. Although the feeling that spirituality and religion are interchangeable concepts was personally upheld only by 1 participant, it is a noteworthy and important perspective.

According to the participants, the relationship between spirituality and religion begins with religion, as religion is typically introduced before spirituality. Rachel remarked that “a lot of us start out with religion and then our spirituality develops” (Interview, July 30, 2005, p. 7), and she further added that she became acquainted with religion through Sunday school at age 5. Similar to Rachel, both Megan and Natalie were introduced to religion at young ages. It was not until later in life that Natalie began to develop a personal connection with spirituality.
Religion can guide your spiritual development. Megan and Angela felt that an individual’s religion could influence his or her character and spirituality. Angela commented, “I think religion can give you guidance as to…what kind of person you want to be. And so spirituality is reflective upon that” (Interview, July 26, 2005, p. 4). Angela often spoke about the reflective nature of spirituality and how, through reflection, she has a greater understanding of her personal spirituality.

Natalie shared similar views regarding religion as a guiding force for spiritual growth. She felt that religious teachings could be a vehicle for spiritual development. This was seen when she stated:

I think spirituality is when…they take the teaching from the religious establishment that they’re at or whatever establishment, and they apply it to, they personally apply it to their life and they take those teachings and they believe in them and they practice them in their life. (Interview, September 26, 2005, p. 4)

Religion and spirituality can share a symbiotic relationship where individuals can use each idea to better develop themselves.

Furthermore, spirituality was viewed as having a more personal element than religion. “To me spirituality is more individual and religion is more broad” (Interview, July 30, 2005, p. 8), stated Rachel, who was not alone in this outlook. Natalie also spoke about the personal nature of spirituality and speaks of it as a personal relationship she has with God. Religion was more apt to include a specific community that meets and shares similar beliefs.

Although it is believed that religion and spirituality can share a symbiotic relationship, it is possible for no obvious relationship whatsoever to exist between the
two. Rachel was very uncomfortable with the thought of having religion without spirituality but admitted that such an idea was possible. Natalie supported this idea by stating, "But just because somebody goes to church, I don’t truly believe that means that they’re a spiritual person" (Interview, September 26, 2005, p. 4). Likewise, Angela’s personal spiritual development exists with the complete absence of religion.

Spirituality, according to Rachel, involves awareness. Religion had been in her life for many years, but "it was like an [spiritual] awareness needed to be developed" (Interview, July 30, 2005, p. 6), and it wasn’t until much later in her life that Rachel developed this spiritual awareness. As such, on an individual basis, it is possible for religion and not spirituality to exist and conversely, spirituality and not religion to be valued and developed.

_A Spiritual Relationship with the Self_

The perspectives offered by the participants on spirituality were linked to the self or to other individuals. This finding supports the notion that a connection exists between spirituality and a person or the self. Natalie stated, "Spirituality is just a part of who a person is, and it can be developed in a lot of different ways" (Interview, September 26, 2005, p. 8). This means that you cannot separate an individual’s spirituality from who they are. As such, a relationship between the inner self and spirituality is shown to exist.

Even though the self and spirituality are thought to have a relationship, individuals are not always aware of it. Sarah, Megan, Angela, and Natalie were not aware of spirituality until it was introduced to them by their parents. Furthermore, Rachel would argue that her parents did not know anything about spirituality and, as such, Rachel felt
they lacked this awareness. A spiritual awareness is needed to self-direct one’s spiritual growth.

It wasn’t until much later in life that Rachel developed spiritual awareness through the life-changing event of attending Alcoholics Anonymous, which she refers to as “a very spiritual program” (Interview, July 30, 2005, p. 7). As mentioned previously, Rachel didn’t feel truly happy until she was spiritually awakened and expressed, “It’s just so exciting. I’m glad I didn’t miss out on it [happiness]; it might have come late in life but our family lives long, I still have another 50 years to feel this way. It’s wonderful!” (p. 6).

Along with spiritual awareness, exploration and nourishment are needed to fully develop and sustain the relationship between spirituality and the self. Although Natalie first became aware of spirituality through her parents, it wasn’t until her teenage years that she really began questioning it. Prior to this, Natalie felt “that I was a spiritual person but I didn’t really know what it meant in my life” (Interview, September 26, 2005, p. 4). Through exploration, Natalie has greater spiritual meaning in her life.

Nourishing the spirit or one’s spirituality can happen in a number of different ways. “Personal Spiritual Development and Spiritual Profiles,” a later section in this chapter, outlines methods to develop a greater sense of spirituality. Both Rachel and Natalie feel strongly that developing one’s spirituality involves a commitment to the self. Rachel continues to actively develop her spirituality and admitted that she needs to “check in with God several times during the day” (Interview, September 26, 2005, p. 6) to maintain the spiritual relationship she already has within her self.
The stage that you are at in life can have an impact on the relationship between the self and spirituality. Since Angela is content with her life, she doesn’t feel she has to actively seek new opportunities to nurture the spiritual relationship within her self. Furthermore, Megan admitted, “Do I nurture it [spirituality]? Uhmm…I would say at this time in my life, no, uhmm, just ‘cause I’ve been very busy” (Interview, July 22, 2005, p. 4). Thus, life stage directly relates to an individual’s desire to further develop the spiritual self.

**Spirituality and a Higher Being**

Another facet of spirituality is its relationship with a higher being. Higher beings are seen as any entities that have a higher power than human beings, such as God or gods. The participants who related their spirituality to a relationship with a higher being discussed a Christian relationship with God.

Three of the participants, Sarah, Natalie, and Rachel, related their spirituality to a relationship with God. Natalie and Rachel discussed a significant connection with God, while Sarah remarked that her relationship “means something to me but not a lot” (Interview, June 22, 2005, p. 5). Sarah finds comfort with thinking of, talking with, and praying to God. She did not indicate a spiritual connection with God further than this.

Both Natalie and Rachel believe that their spirituality is directly connected to their relationship with God, and they actively search and look for God in their lives. Natalie’s relationship was very purposeful, as she “didn’t want to believe in God just because my parents said there was a God” (Interview, September 26, 2005, pp. 3-4). Through the questioning of God’s existence, Natalie has been able to see Him working in her life.
Rachel’s connection with God became very significant following her spiritual awakening, and she commented:

Since seeing, thinking more about my spirituality and God and starting to do some things like pray and listen for God in my life and recognize God’s work in other people around me or hearing God from other people’s words or seeing miracles happening around me and with me, that I was able to really attribute all of that to God in my life. (Interview, July 30, 2006, p. 5)

Rachel was able to satisfy some of the “spiritual hunger” (p. 6) in her life through a closer relationship with God and believes she can maintain her spirit through prayer with God in the morning, at night, and several times throughout the day, as she needs it.

A higher being, such as God, can have a significant impact on the spirituality of a person. The extent of the relationship with a higher being is determined by each individual and, as such, a meaningful connection with a higher being can be attained through an individual’s direct efforts. Thus, the impact of God on a spirit is very unique to the person.

*Spiritual Relationships with Others*

Learning from and interacting with others can help develop your own spirituality. Individuals such as teachers, group facilitators, friends, students, and church members have the ability to promote spiritual thinking in others.

Natalie enjoys attending church because she gets to “hear other people’s views, and I can take them home and see, I question them, think about them, apply them to my life or maybe not apply them to my life” (Interview, September 26, 2005, p. 5). Likewise,
Rachel finds interacting with people at a spiritual retreat thought provoking and interesting.

Furthermore, Rachel receives spiritual guidance from a friend with whom she is working on a 6-week spiritual program. She remarked, “Then we come together once a week and just discuss what we did during the week and how it went. So we have each other’s perspectives as well as our own” (Interview, July 30, 2005, p. 9). Such a relationship has proven to be spiritually beneficial for Rachel.

As an adult learner in the Master of Education program, Natalie has not only grown professionally as a teacher; she has grown spiritually as a person. Her concept of spirituality has become broader since taking some of her Master of Education courses at the university. She remarked, “I think Sandra’s [Dr. Bosacki’s] courses really played a big part for me and making me think I could really uhmm, develop the spiritual side of my [classroom] kids without forcing on them what I believe” (Interview, September 26, 2005, p. 5). This broadened sense of spirituality has had an impact on Natalie as well as her children at school.

Students are not the only ones who are learning in the classroom; teachers are also learning from their students. Both Angela and Natalie shared that their interactions with students can directly change who they are as a person. Natalie sees herself part of “a community of learners…. [where] we can learn from each other and we can grow from each other” (Interview, September 26, 2005, p. 2). As such, it is possible for students, children and adult learners alike, to have a spiritual impact on their teachers.

A final finding regarding relationships is taking learned spiritual teachings and implementing them while interacting with others. One of the participants, Rachel,
examines her defects of character and applies the opposite of the defect to life. Rather than being judgmental, Rachel consciously tries to treat people with love and respect. A further example of this is when she practices patience and acceptance rather than impatience. By practicing kindness and patience, Rachel is able to feel good about her inner self and how she conducts herself as a person.

A Spiritual Connection with Nature

The final facet of spirituality found was spiritually connecting with nature. This facet was seen in the perspectives of only 1 participant, Rachel. She found that she experienced a spiritual connection while in the woods and remarked, “I find when I’m out in nature, that’s when I, I feel that real closeness to God and I find that is a really replenishing thing, to go on meditative walks” (Interview, July 30, 2006, p. 9). Being in a natural setting can be a powerful way to connect with your inner spirituality.

The participants’ perspectives on spirituality were varied, as was the degree to which spirituality played a part in each of their lives. Five distinctly different facets of spirituality were described by the participants. Each facet involved a relationship or connection with spirituality; however, not all of the participants offered perspectives on each facet. Each participant described a relationship between spirituality and religion, while only 1 participant offered a perspective on the connection of spirituality and nature. This, again, points to an individual’s personal connection to spirituality.

Personal Spiritual Development and Spiritual Profiles

Each teacher develops her spirituality in different ways. A variety of methods for personal spiritual development were described by the participants. This led to the
development of a spiritual profile for each participant which outlines the facets of each participant’s spirituality, and the methods used to personally develop her own spirituality.

Personal Spiritual Development

Spirituality is connected to each of the participants in a number of different ways. Each participant has her own outlook on spirituality and value for its place in her life. Regardless of the role that spirituality played in each participant’s life, each participant was able to describe particular methods to develop spirituality. These methods were used, in most cases, to develop their spirituality as a whole person rather than their spirituality in the role of a teacher.

Some of the methods described by the participants were purposefully chosen to enrich their own spirituality, while others were mainly methods carried out by the participants that happened to develop spirituality. The difference between the intentional and accidental methods seemed to be spiritual awareness. Both Rachel and Natalie, participants who described themselves as spiritually aware, outlined a number of methods specifically aimed to enrich their spiritual lives. It would then seem obvious that an individual who lacked spiritual awareness would have some difficulty identifying and implementing spiritual practices.

The methods described by the participants that enriched their spiritual lives were grouped into the following categories:

1. Activities
2. Resources
3. Religious Practices
4. Spiritual Programs
5. Education

6. Reflection

7. Attitude and Practice

As previously mentioned, the methods seemed to spiritually develop their selves as a whole rather than just develop their spirituality as a teacher.

Table 2 displays the various methods as outlined by the participants. While all methods are significant, some of the activities were self-explanatory and did not require additional explanation. As such, some of the methods, not all, are further expanded upon under the appropriate subheading.

Activities. The participants outlined a variety of activities, found in Table 2, that they felt enriched their lives spiritually. Among the list of activities is journaling. Two types of journals were described. The first was a journal used by the participant to record thoughts and events that occurred during the day, and the second was a gratitude journal. Rachel explained:

Something that I do every day and have for about a year now is write a gratitude journal. And, so I don’t want to forget the, the things that happen to me every day that I really need to be grateful for, and that puts things in a, a positive light for me and it could be, big things like my kids and their love, or it could be things like air conditioning on a very hot day that I’m grateful for. (Interview, July 30, 2005, p. 9)

Rachel found her gratitude journal to be an important part of her day and an important part of her spirituality, as it helps her to have a greater appreciation for life.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Method(s)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activities</td>
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<td>Meditative walks in nature</td>
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<td>Books</td>
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<td>Six-week spiritual program</td>
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<td>Religious Practices</td>
<td>Attending church</td>
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<td>Prayer</td>
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<td>Looking for God</td>
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<td>Spiritual Programs</td>
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<td>Six-week spiritual program</td>
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<td>Alcoholics Anonymous</td>
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<td>Education</td>
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<td>Reflection</td>
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<td>Attitude and Practice</td>
<td>Positive outlook</td>
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<td>Asking for help</td>
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<td>Need for spirituality</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Applying spirituality to life</td>
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</table>
Both Natalie and Rachel spoke about the role of discussion in their spiritual development. Natalie has had open discussions with some of her grade 8 students after class who had been interested in her spirituality. Through some of these discussions, Natalie has a clearer understanding of her personal spirituality. Discussion can be a powerful tool because “we have each other’s perspectives as well as our own” (Interview, July 30, 2005, p. 9) to hear and think about.

Listening to stories, an activity described by Rachel, involved hearing the life stories of other adults. These experiences taught her how to be more compassionate and were beneficial in both her personal and professional life.

The last activity to be described is questioning. This activity is part of the thinking process and is twofold, as it can involve questioning others and yourself. It involves delving into issues and not accepting presented ideas as fact without further personal exploration. Natalie believes questioning is an integral component of spiritual development because it develops critical thinking and allows you to look at issues more closely.

Resources. Another aspect of Rachel’s spiritual development involves the use of resources. She described the use of a book, The Cup of Our Life, by Joyce Rupp (1997), as a practical 6-week spiritual program. This resource will be further outlined under “Spiritual Programs.”

Religious practices. Religious practices were practices depicted by the participants that connected to their religion and spiritual development. Although these practices were considered religious by the participants, all of the methods, with the exception of attending church, could hypothetically fit under the subheading, “Higher
Being Practices.” They are not categorized into this hypothetical subheading because the practices were described in a religious context by 4 of the 5 participants. Angela was the only participant to speak of prayer outside of religion.

Listening and looking for God, to Rachel, involved recognize [recognizing] God’s work in other people around me or hearing God from other people’s words or seeing miracles happening around me and with me, that I was able to really attribute all of that to God in my life. (Interview, July 30, 2006, p. 5)

This process allowed Rachel to be grateful for things in her life and also helped her to change for the better as a person by further developing her spirituality.

Spiritual programs. Participating in spiritual programs was an important part of Rachel’s spiritual development. She learned a lot about her self and spirituality through these programs.

The retreats that Rachel was involved with typically occurred over the weekend and involved many components. Rachel discussed her enjoyment of sessions with facilitators, reading books, meditative walks, and spiritual services. She particularly enjoyed “being with a community of people that are very interested in spirituality, so it’s very thought provoking” (Interview, July 30, 2005, p. 9) at the retreat.

A further program discussed by Rachel was one she called a 6-week spiritual guidance program. The program was based on the use of the book by Joyce Rupp (1997) called The Cup of Our Life and involved daily readings and reflections to help guide spiritual thoughts for the day. Rachel dedicated 20 to 30 minutes each day to the program for meditation, reading, and journaling. She then met once a week with a friend, who was
also participating in the program, to discuss and share perspectives of their progress for the week.

The final spiritual program in Rachel’s life is her continued involvement in Alcoholics Anonymous. Rachel relayed that she was not fearful to share that she was involved in such a program because she knew a pseudonym would be assigned to her for the purpose of this study. She didn’t delve greatly into her experiences with what she calls a spiritual program but does credit it for opening her eyes to spirituality. Rachel felt that her spiritual journey began with Alcoholics Anonymous.

*Education.* Although all of the methods outlined in Table 2 could arguably be described as educational, the methods in this category were those where a professional teacher (other than the participants), professor, or facilitator was the spiritual educator.

The seminars, workshops, and courses were all educational experiences that the participants, Rachel and Natalie, had enrolled in. These particular educational tools were offered by the community or by a university and were deemed to be valuable to the spiritual development of the participants.

*Reflection.* Reflection involves taking life experiences and using tools such as questioning and thinking to make sense and understanding of these experiences. It further involves learning how the methods listed in Table 2 can work for you spiritually. Developing spiritual awareness involves a reflective process.

Three of the participants, Angela, Natalie, and Rachel, commented that they are reflective individuals who use this process for self-betterment. Natalie remarked:

I want to keep learning more and I want to, I’m not perfect, and so I think you, a
big part of my spirituality is reflecting on my past, the mistakes I’ve made or maybe things I didn’t necessarily know or haven’t thought about before. Questioning those things and then trying to live a better life because of them.

(Interview, September, 26, 2005, p. 6)

The use of reflection is evidently an essential aspect of Natalie’s spiritual life and arguably of all 3 participants’ lives.

An individual can have the benefit of participating in a number of different spiritual practices, such as retreats and attending church, but unless he or she is able to process these experiences through reflection and thought, they may be of little use to the individual’s spiritual life.

**Attitude and practice.** The final category developed from the participants’ perspectives is “Attitude and Practice.” Part of spiritual development involves having a positive outlook on life. Angela and Rachel believe that spirituality involves living positively, and Angela practices her spirituality by “just trying to remain positive” (Interview, July 26, 2005, p. 5).

As well as trying to put a positive spin on life, using what you have spiritually learned can be beneficial to spiritual development. Two of the participants, Rachel and Natalie, openly speak of learning from others’ mistakes, and using learned lessons in their lives. Applying spirituality to life, simply involves making an effort to practice what you have gained from your spiritual learning.

**Spiritual Profiles**

After careful examination of the perspectives offered by the participants, it became apparent that each participant had their own outlook on spirituality. Furthermore,
the role that spirituality played in each participant's life varied. The participants' individualized viewpoints on spirituality inspired the development of a spiritual profile for each participant.

Each profile is comprised of three parts: spirituality, the subthemes or facets of spirituality, and the methods used to develop spirituality. Using these ideas, a conceptual representation was created to reflect each participant's spiritual profile (see Figures 1-5).

Only the facets of spirituality and methods described by that participant were included in her spiritual profile. Furthermore, a generic profile, seen in Figure 6, is shown, to demonstrate what a spiritual profile would look like if all the facets of spirituality and categorized methods were incorporated.

Just as the perspectives and ideas offered by the participants on spirituality were detailed and complex, so too are the spiritual profile representations (see Figures 1-6) drawn from these perspectives. Since all of the spiritual profiles are comprised of the same underlying ideas and concepts, the examination of one spiritual profile will lead to the understanding of all profiles. Thus, let us decipher these profiles by first examining the generic spiritual profile (see Figure 6).

The generic spiritual profile, as previously mentioned, is made up of three parts: spirituality, the subthemes or facets of spirituality, and the methods used to develop spirituality. Spirituality is exemplified by the large, darkly outlined circle in the center of the representation. The facets of spirituality, religion, higher being, self, nature, and others are each shown as circles that surround spirituality. These are the only facets considered in the spiritual profiles as they were generated directly from the perspectives provided by the participants. Finally, the rectangles neighboring the circles are used to
Figure 1. My conceptual representation of Sarah’s spiritual profile on June 22, 2005.
Figure 2. My conceptual representation of Megan's spiritual profile on July 22, 2005.
Figure 3. My conceptual representation of Angela's spiritual profile on July 26, 2005.
Figure 4. My conceptual representation of Rachel’s spiritual profile on July 30, 2005.
Figure 5. My conceptual representation of Natalie's spiritual profile on September 26, 2005.
Figure 6. My conceptual representation of a spiritual profile.
depict the methods which develop spirituality.

To further understand the spiritual profile representations, consider the metaphor of a kaleidoscope. A kaleidoscope, as defined by *Webster’s Dictionary* (1991), is a “tube in which patterns are produced by reflection of pieces of colored glass as tube is rotated” (p. 221). A picture of beautiful glass is created when the tube is rotated and held still. When the tube is rotated, the same glass is used to create yet another distinct picture.

Like the kaleidoscope, spiritual profiles are ever changing. Spirituality is not a static entity. This finding was previously stated and is reiterated by Megan’s point that “when you’re young and single you’re less likely to be more into it [spirituality]. But when you have a family you’re more into it [spirituality]. I think” (Interview, July 22, 2005, p. 5). As such, each spiritual profile is dated at the time of the interview to reflect the ideas and methods used by the participants at that time.

To further reflect the kaleidoscopic nature of the spiritual profile representations, large bolded arrows are placed around the circles to indicate motion and change. As new ideas and development regarding spirituality are introduced, a change is brought about. Thus, the ability to change is represented by the bolded arrows situated between the facets of spirituality.

If a kaleidoscope is held still, the same image will be maintained and no change will occur. Likewise, should no new ideas or development occur within a person, the spiritual profile would remain unaltered. This notion seems unlikely, since people are ever changing, but is a possibility.

Let us imagine the tube that contains the glass to be spirituality and the beautiful glass to be the facets that makeup spirituality. Furthermore, consider the motion of
rotation that changes the picture to be the methods that develop spirituality. Thus, as methods which develop spirituality are considered and practiced by individuals, a change can be brought about in the facets of spirituality and within spirituality itself. This is like a new picture being created within a kaleidoscope when the tube is rotated.

In some instances, the same ideas regarding spirituality are viewed by the individual but are seen in a different manner or reinforced. An example of this is when Rachel, Angela, and Natalie use their knowledge and learned lessons regarding spirituality and apply this to their lives.

New knowledge or lessons concerning spirituality would be like rotating the kaleidoscope to a picture never seen before; this is because methods which develop spirituality generate a better understanding of the facets of spirituality and of spirituality itself. Rachel used a variety of methods to develop her spirituality and, because of this, has a better understanding of her spiritual self.

Another aspect of the spiritual profile representation to be considered is the overlap of the facet circles with the circle of spirituality. The overlap between the circles is portrayed because a relationship between the facets and spirituality was shown to exist. The degree to which the circles overlap is unknown and is outside the scope of this study.

It is known from the perspectives offered by the participants that the overlap between the facets themselves and spirituality is ever changing. Rachel’s perspective attested to this when she stated:

In the last couple of years I guess I’ve had a spiritual awakening. I’d always believed in God, but It’s just lately I’ve realized that I’m able to have a deeper
relationship with God. I didn’t know what to do with my relationship with God before; it was sorta superficial without realizing it. (Interview, July 30, 2005, p. 5) Rachel’s experiences brought a greater understanding of the relationship between spirituality and her higher being, God. As such, an overlap between higher being and spirituality is shown in her spiritual profile (see Figure 4), and this overlap would arguably be greater than the one that would have been hypothetically seen before her spiritual awakening.

In the generic spiritual profile, a portion of each facet circle exists outside of the spirituality circle. This is because aspects of each facet may not be entirely influenced by spirituality. An example of this would be the self, which involves spirituality but is further made up of emotional, physical, and cognitive aspects.

All of the spiritual facets are included as a part of the spiritual profile in the generic spiritual profile. This is not the case for the spiritual profiles of the participants. The only exception to this is Rachel, whose spiritual profile includes all facets. In the remaining five profiles, the facets that are not directly related to the individual’s spirituality are left outside of the circle of spirituality. These facets remain outside and are not entirely removed from Figures 1 to 3 and Figure 5, because at some point in time they could possibly be introduced into the participant’s perspective of spirituality.

In all the figures, the methods to develop spirituality are interpreted in the same manner as the facets of spirituality. For example, in Megan’s profile, education is not shown to have a relationship to her sense of spirituality. This method is not removed from Figure 2, as it may be introduced as a method by Megan at a later point.
When the generic profile is reexamined, a portion of the spirituality circle is left unexplored, as the facet circles do not completely overlap it. This implies that there are always new ideas and discoveries to be made regarding spirituality. Natalie implied this when she spoke of her “spiritual journey” (Interview, September 26, 2005, p. 6) and the fact that she wants “to keep developing it [her spirituality], I want to keep learning more” (p. 6).

The notion of a spiritual profile for each participant is exciting but complex. It is hoped that the explanations given haven’t been too technical or daunting as to detract from the profiles themselves.

*Sarah’s spiritual profile.* Sarah’s spiritual profile directly involves the facets of religion and higher being in relationship to spirituality. She did not include her self, others, or nature when offering her perspectives on spirituality.

Sarah develops her spirituality through religious practices such as prayer and attending church and admitted that she does not engage in these practices regularly.

It is interesting to note that Sarah was unsure of what spirituality meant to her and that her profile involves two facets of spirituality. Furthermore, a few select methods are utilized by Sarah to develop her spirituality.

*Megan’s spiritual profile.* Megan directly links spirituality to religion, and this is reflected in her spiritual profile. The one facet of spirituality included in her profile is religion.

At this point in her life, Megan does not actively engage in activities or practices to develop her spirituality, as she is too busy. Prior to this, she was involved in singing and attending church, which she believes enhanced her spirituality.
Megan's views related to spirituality involve religion. Thus, when she is not actively involved in her religion she is not consciously developing her spirituality. Spirituality and religion go hand in hand for Megan.

*Angela's spiritual profile.* Angela's spiritual profile reflects her relationships with a higher being and self in connection to spirituality. A variety of methods were used by Angela to develop her spirituality.

Angela mainly spoke of her personal connection to spirituality and discussed the importance of reflection in her life. From her perspectives, it was easily understood that she tries to be the best person she can be and that this involves a lot of thought and reflection.

Angela is quite content with her spiritual self. She admitted that she is not actively engaging in new practices to develop her spirituality and maintains her current spiritual connections through much reflection and a positive outlook on life.

*Rachel's spiritual profile.* All five facets of spirituality are seen in Rachel's spiritual profile. Furthermore, a wide variety of methods are exercised in her spiritual development. Spirituality is a significant part of Rachel's life, and this is directly seen in her profile.

Rachel actively searches for new opportunities to develop her spirituality and engages in daily practices to further enhance her spiritual self. She has a clear sense of what spirituality means to her and how it weaves into her life.

Of all the participants in the study, Rachel engages in the greatest variety and most methods to develop spirituality. Furthermore, her understanding of spirituality is the
broadest of the participants, as it includes all five facets of spirituality. The spiritual facet of nature is not seen in the other profiles.

Rachel is the only participant to speak of a “spiritual awakening” and arguably has the most life experience among the participants, as she is the eldest at 53 years of age. Are these the reasons that Rachel has such a deepened understanding of spirituality? It is unsure.

_Natalie’s spiritual profile._ Natalie proclaimed that she is a spiritual person, and her spiritual profile affirms this. A wide array of methods are adopted in her spiritual development, which involves the facets of religion, higher being, self, and others.

Spirituality is an important part of Natalie’s life, and even her grade 8 students recognized this. She believes that questioning and reflection are powerful tools to develop spirituality. Natalie is on a “spiritual journey” and continues to seek opportunities to improve her spiritual self.

All of the participants have distinctly different profiles which reflect their spirituality. The 2 participants, Rachel and Natalie, who actively develop and seek new occasions to develop their spirituality have the broadest sense of spirituality and the most variety of methods for its development. Likewise, Sarah and Megan, who place less importance on spirituality in their lives, have a narrower scope of spirituality and methods by which to develop it.

_Exploring Students’ Spiritual Needs_

Regardless of the role that spirituality plays in each of the participants’ lives, the teacher participants agreed that students in the classroom have spiritual needs. These
needs vary from social skills to the guiding role of the teacher. Furthermore, whether to even explore these needs in the classroom comes into question.

_Students' Spiritual Needs_

Students' spiritual needs are very individualistic. This finding is congruent with the notion that spirituality itself is quite personal. Some students have greater spiritual needs than others, and Rachel revealed, “Some of them [students’ spiritual needs] may be being fulfilled very well, that’s something that probably is coming from home, but I know some of them [students’ spiritual needs] probably aren’t being fulfilled very well” (Interview, July 30, 2005, p. 10).

Sarah attributed the greater need for spirituality in some students than others to parenting. Megan agreed and further stated, “[Today] society is so different, parenting is so different. Every kid comes to school on a different [spiritual] level” (Interview, July 22, 2005, p. 6). The participants’ perspectives revealed parents directly influence the spiritual development of their children.

The participants identified a number of students’ spiritual needs in the classroom. These needs are:

1. The Need for Guidance
2. The Need for Comfort
3. The Need for Knowledge
4. Individualized Needs

All of these outlined needs were connected to the spirituality of the students.
The need for guidance. Students in the classroom require the gentle but firm guidance of the teacher. This guidance goes beyond academics and is focused on meeting the inner or spiritual needs of the students.

The students would benefit from direction with social skills in the classroom and on the play yard. Rachel commented:

The one thing that I found very important over the last number of years is social skills, which to me is a, does have elements of spirituality for sure in it. More for the characteristics of things like kindness and thoughtfulness and compassion and, and following rules for the social good. (Interview, July 30, 2005, p. 11)

Sarah further added that students socially require help with manners and morals, knowing right from wrong, and it is important for them to learn how to treat other people appropriately.

Critical student thinking is another aspect in the classroom that requires teacher guidance. Natalie identified critical thinking as an area of spiritual need among her older students. She believes that it is important for students to think carefully about issues that directly impact on their spirit and stated:

Those things [her spiritual guidance] come out especially in a grade 8 conversation when we talk about drinking and we talk about drugs and we talk about sex and we talk about all those different big societal issues, my spirituality plays a big role in those. (Interview, September 26, 2005, p. 5)

Natalie tries to guide her students' thinking by developing questioning and reflection in her students so that they can better deal with issues that impact their spirituality.
The need for comfort. Moments arise in the classroom where the students require compassion and understanding from the teacher in the form of comfort. Students bring their life experiences with them. In her primary classroom, Sarah has encountered students who have lost a loved one or a pet, and these students needed to be consoled. Sarah was able to step outside her role as an academic teacher to meet this spiritual need in her students.

The need for knowledge. The need for knowledge involves presenting students with information on various spiritual topics ranging from multiculturalism to global issues so they are informed and have an educated voice. In the public school system, this involves exposing students to all sides of the topic or to the whole picture so as to respect everyone within the school community.

The students would benefit from information on multicultural topics such as different faiths. Learning about different religions, including celebrations, traditions, and rituals, would promote greater acceptance and appreciation of different cultures. Angela remarked:

I guess most people would mainly focus on one or two religions, and to educate them [students] in all or a few more [religions] would help, you know, make it easier for the children to accept and to understand all the religions and why they do the things that they do, why they dress the way that they dress, or why they have celebrations at the times of year that they do. (Interview, July 26, 2005, p. 7)

Developing character traits such as acceptance and appreciation are an important part of spirituality and a great need in students.
A further need for knowledge in students is the need to understand global issues. This need was seen in Natalie’s grade 8 classroom as issues such as hurricanes and tsunamis would come up in discussion of current events. Discussion of these topics often required a spiritual approach, as “we’ve had so many horrible things happen on the Earth, and this idea of spirituality is a big part of what people are thinking” (Interview, September, 26, 2005, p. 7). The media presented ideas about God and prayer in connection to these events, and the students required further knowledge on the topic to generate greater spiritual understanding.

*Individualized needs.* All of the participants, with the exception of Megan, recognized that each student has his or her own individual spiritual needs. The focus of spirituality in each student’s life varies from household to household and, as such, the teacher is required to recognize individual needs in each student. This is not unlike a student needing greater attention in mathematics than other students or needing further assistance with organization. Classrooms are made up of individual students and, as such, it is understandable that each student would have individual spiritual needs.

*The Importance of Each Spiritual Need*

The participants believe that Ontario public schools, at least the ones they have taught in, have little focus on the spirituality of students. In theory, to adopt a holistic approach to education would mean to focus on all aspects of the learner, including the spiritual side. Both Natalie and Rachel believe in a holistic approach to education. As such, they support education that considers the spiritual side of learners in the classroom. The remaining participants, not including Megan, further agree that spirituality in the classroom is an important issue that should be addressed.
Megan refuted the importance of spirituality in the classroom. For her, the curriculum is such a demand that a further area to explore in the classroom would be unwelcome. She further believes that parents should be responsible for the spiritual development of their children. Even though Megan believes that teachers should focus their attention on curriculum matters such as mathematics and language, she admitted that “society has changed. So. I think kids are not as well behaved as before, I don’t know, it’s scary, to see what will happen” (Interview, July 22, 2005, p. 5). Megan has identified a need in students but does not necessarily qualify it as a spiritual need.

Yet another aspect of spirituality which is important to education is different faiths and cultures in the classroom. Sarah believes this strongly and stated:

Canada is known to be very multicultural and very welcome and open to people of all races and everything. So I think it’s important for children, and from a young age, to be exposed to it and to learn about different customs and different beliefs and different traditions and celebrations that people have so that, you know, so that they’re appreciative rather than growing older and a lot of this ignorance that people just don’t know about other cultures and things like that, and then, a lot of times it led to, you know, racism or stereotypes or other things.

(Interview, June 22, 2005, p. 8)

Furthermore, the other participants agreed with Sarah regarding the importance of promoting different faiths in the classroom, as it can lead to acceptance and understanding of other people.

Since spirituality is a significant part of each learner, it should have a place in public education. Rachel believes that spirituality in education is “important because
null
we’re teaching kids how to deal with, well academics, but also dealing with the world they live in...so I see that [spirituality] as an important part of our job” (Interview, July 30, 2005, p. 12). As such, identifying the spiritual needs in each student would be the beginning of spiritual education in the classroom; meeting those needs would be the extension.

**Spiritual Classroom Practices**

A variety of spiritual classroom practices were identified by the participants with the intent to meet the needs of their students. However, in some instances, it was difficult to generate such a list. Moreover, each participant spoke of the sensitive nature of spirituality in the classroom prior to outlining effective classroom practices.

*The Sensitivity of Spirituality in Public Education*

Although spirituality was found to have a place in public education, there is much trepidation surrounding the topic. This fear comes from the outlook promoted by the public school boards and from the teachers themselves. The consensus among the participants is that spirituality in the public school classroom should be approached with great sensitivity and thought.

All of the participants alluded to restrictions placed by their particular school board on addressing spirituality in the classroom. Natalie outwardly commented on this and remarked:

They [the school board] told me basically, as soon as they hear the word spirituality, it’s associated with religion and we are not religious and so we can’t promote that within the board. But I don’t think that that’s really what spirituality
is and I think that that's the first stumbling block, the first thing, the first hurdle to get over. (Interview, September 26, 2005, p. 8)

As such, teachers should exercise great care when meeting the spiritual needs of their students so as not to violate the policies mandated by their particular school board.

Aside from restrictions on spirituality in public education placed by the school boards, the participants spoke of a fear of imposing their beliefs on the students. All of the participants were in agreement that the classroom is not the forum for stating personal beliefs on religion and spirituality.

The participants were mindful of the various cultural groups and different faiths represented in their classrooms. Sarah openly spoke about her lack of knowledge surrounding different faiths and cultures and the difficulty of teaching this content with limited understanding. As such, considerable care must be exercised by the teacher when approaching topics which involve spirituality.

Both Sarah and Natalie utilized methods, which I call strategies, in the classroom to avoid imposing their beliefs on the students. The first strategy, described by Sarah, was student-evoked discussion, whereby spiritual issues such as God and death were discussed only when questions were raised by the students.

Rather than avoiding issues such as sex and drugs, which can affect the students' sense of spirit, Natalie chooses to approach these issues from all perspectives. She feels that providing the students with the whole pictures allows them to make informed decisions and promotes critical thinking. This strategy was helpful for Natalie in her classrooms with older students.
Focusing on Spiritual Classroom Practices

The participant implemented classroom practices outlined in Table 3 were not always carried out with students' spirituality in mind. Natalie was the only participant to intentionally use classroom activities aimed at spiritually developing her students. Although this means that the other participants were not consciously practicing spirituality in the classroom, after some thought, spiritual practices were identified.

Teacher. The teacher is an integral part of the classroom. Aside from teaching the prescribed curriculum, the teacher has responsibilities as a role model and guiding force. Furthermore, the teacher must establish classroom expectations for the students. These added responsibilities can have an impact on students' spirituality and are viewed as spiritual classroom practices.

Both Rachel and Natalie spoke about acting as a role model for their students as part of their spiritual classroom practices. Natalie's spirituality is such a part of her as a teacher in the classroom that her older students often question her about her religion and spirituality. Although Rachel's students have not questioned her spirituality, she tries to emulate the teacher God would want her to be. For her this means acting as a role model I guess for the children of, living that, a good and healthy life, a life that God would have me live, but I wouldn't be saying that to the children. As far as my attitude, that makes a big difference, and trying not to judge other people around me, staff members or students or parents, but to accept them the way that they are and treat them with love and respect and expect the same back from them too. (Interview, July 30, 2005, p. 8)
Table 3

*Participant Described Spiritual Classroom Practices*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Practice(s)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>As role model</td>
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<td></td>
<td>As guiding force</td>
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<td>Expectations</td>
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<td>Activities</td>
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<td>LifeMapping</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Celebrate and appreciate cultures</td>
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<td>Experts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>Books</td>
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<td>Reflection</td>
<td>Thinking</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Questioning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Courses</td>
<td>World religions</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Spirituality</td>
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The children in the classroom can benefit from teachers who have a strong sense of spirituality and who model the qualities, such as respect and love, which nourish the spirit.

Guiding the students' spiritual growth involves teaching and directing the students with any aspect that touches their spirits. More specifically mentioned was the students' development of social skills and goals. The relevance of goals to spiritual practices will be discussed at a later point in the chapter.

Sarah believes students' social development involves spirituality and that a lot of my kids come from homes where they struggle with that [social skills], and they don’t have proper parenting at home, so, to learn socially how to act with other people or how to be treated or manners and moral...those kind of things are important, but I guess I teach a lot of those things as more social skills, not really having thought of them as spirituality. (Interview, June 22, 2005, p. 7)

Rachel echoed Sarah's belief that social skills are an essential part of students' spiritual development, as these skills contain elements of spirituality.

Establishing and setting expectations were identified classroom practices that touch the students' spirit. These expectations are meant to outline appropriate student behaviour which is respectful and encourages acceptance between students. Both respect and acceptance are considered to be aspects of spirituality.

Activities. A variety of classroom activities were discussed by the participants which focus on developing students' spirituality. These activities ranged from goal setting to discussion to having experts visit the classroom.
Goal setting was identified by Angela and can be used to develop students' spirituality. She encourages students to develop academic goals as well as spiritual goals. Examples of spiritual goals that she advised her students to set were “becoming a better friend or getting to know one person that they don’t really know” (Interview, July 26, 2005, p. 5). As a follow-up activity, Angela has her students reflect on the progress of their goals both in written form and through conversations. She has found this process effectively develops students’ sense of pride.

Discussion was a practice utilized in all of the classrooms to develop students’ spirituality. Conversations on a variety of topics, from drugs to death of a pet, were held. Both Sarah and Rachel felt most comfortable discussing such sensitive subjects when the issues were brought up by the students. The other participants may have felt this way too, but they did not relay this to me during the interview process.

A very specific activity used in Natalie’s classroom to develop students’ spirituality was LifeMapping. This activity was developed by Dr. Michael Kompf from Brock University and involves taking the 10 greatest events that have had an impact on your life and rating each event on a number scale in three ways. These three ways are: how did the event impact your life at the time? how does the event impact your life presently? and how much of an impact will the event have in the future?

Natalie has used this activity with her students in grade 8 and has found the activity to show whether students have grown from their experiences or remained stagnant. Furthermore, the activity is beneficial for “getting them [the students] to think about growing and developing and maturing and be independent thinkers rather than just taking what they’re told and just going through life” (Interview, September, 26, 2005, p.
7). Such a reflective activity can help develop a greater understanding of your self or spirit.

Developing acceptance and an appreciation for other cultures and faiths was an identified part of spirituality. Three of the participants, Sarah, Rachel, and Angela, spoke in great detail about the utilization of activities used with multiculturalism in mind. Natalie felt she was unable to speak to activities involving multiculturalism because the classes that she has taught in have been generally made up of Caucasian students.

To the participants, to celebrate and appreciate different cultures and faiths involved a variety of things. Conversations were often used to educate the students on different cultures and faiths. Subjects such as food, music, and clothing were often discussed. Furthermore, holidays and traditions such as Hanukah, Quansah, Ramadan, and Chinese New Year were celebrated in some classrooms. These celebrations often involved the food and music of the culture.

Sarah has experienced great success in the classroom with the utilization of experts, who are often the students’ parents, on a particular culture.

I’ve had parents come in. That also works because I find, like I said, I mean I don’t know everything there is to know about other cultures because I wasn’t grown up in them, so a lot of times I have parents come in and they’ll do presentations, so they’ll bring in different artifacts or food or music or wear different clothing. Like, anything that is an aspect of their culture. (Interview, June, 22, 2005, p. 9)

The students are able to gain firsthand knowledge from individuals that have grown up in a particular culture.
Resources. Natalie has provided students who have approached her with books on a variety of sensitive topics that touch on spirituality. She was quick to add that she had obtained consent from the students' parents prior to sending literature home. One such book discussed evolution and creationism. Natalie found that books help students to think and reflect further on issues and also encourage students to form their own opinions or sense of self.

Reflection. Reflection involves both thinking and questioning. The process for personal reflection (see Table 2) and student reflection were described in similar ways by the participants. More specifically, classroom reflection involved providing the students with opportunities to reflect on particular whole-class issues and also occurred on an individual basis when inappropriate behaviour was presented or a student approached the teacher with an issue. These practices were used by participants with junior (grades 4-6) and elementary intermediate (grades 7 & 8) classes. Reflection can be a powerful tool to help students better know themselves.

Courses. Both world religion and spirituality courses are practices thought to aid in the development of students' spirituality. Presently, these courses are not formally offered in Ontario public elementary schools. These courses would be integrated into the curriculum and would educate the students on the various world religions and on the topic of spirituality.

Angela completed her teacher education in Scotland and was impressed with the world religion courses that were offered to the Scottish public school students. She felt that her Scottish students benefited from the courses and indicated:
[World religion courses] make it easier for the children to accept and to understand all the religions and why they do the things that they do, why they dress the way that they dress, or why they have celebrations at the times of year that they do. (Interview, July 26, 2005, p. 7)

Angela saw a benefit to world religion courses in public education.

Connecting Practices to a Philosophy of Education

Prior to any discussion of spirituality, the participants described their personal philosophy of education during the interview process. Some interesting connections were made between spiritual classroom practices and philosophies of education.

Both Natalie’s and Rachel’s philosophies included a holistic approach to education. They believe that students’ cognitive, emotional, spiritual, and physical elements should be addressed through education. Interestingly, the greatest variety of spiritual classroom practices were described by these two participants. Moreover, as previously stated, Natalie was the only participant to explicitly teach to the spiritual needs of her students.

Angela’s approach to education involves having students strive for betterment. This philosophy encourages students to constantly improve on their achievements. For Angela, this improvement involves goal setting and reflection. The strategies included in Angela’s philosophy of education were practices she felt would be beneficial to students’ spiritual development.

Among all the participants, Megan’s philosophy of education was the briefest in description and involved encouraging students to reach their fullest potential. Later in her interview, Megan clarified that meeting their fullest potential involves meeting the
students’ academic needs in subjects such as math and language. Megan’s philosophy does not touch on the spiritual aspect of learners, and she admitted that students’ spiritual needs are not a priority given the current demands of the outlined curriculum.

Philosophies of education were connected to spiritual classroom practices. Participants whose philosophies included spirituality described multiple spiritual practices to meet students’ needs. Furthermore, the participant who believed that students’ spiritual needs were not significant in education had a philosophy of education which accordingly matched this belief.

**Teacher Development**

The participants recommended methods to develop teachers’ sense of spirituality in the classroom. Rachel believes that a need for awareness and knowledge of spirituality exists among educators. Natalie further added that this awareness needs to reach all educators, which includes the school board level.

Courses and workshops offered on spirituality and world religions were recommended to foster professional development among teachers. School boards would be responsible for providing this type of development for teachers. Such courses would be beneficial for developing awareness and knowledge among educators and were suggested by all the participants involved. Currently, these courses are not offered by the public school boards where the participants are employed.

Another educational tool, teacher resources, would include books and activities with the objective to inform teachers and to provide activities which could be implemented in the classroom. Rachel’s current school board provided her with a teacher resource on multiculturalism and multiple faiths which was both informative and
contained practical activities for the classroom. Among the participants, Rachel was the only teacher to receive such a resource from her school board.

**Summary of Chapter Four**

The thoughts and opinions of 5 public elementary school teachers on the subject of spirituality were presented in this chapter. The perceptions of spirituality offered by the participants were first explored. The notions and ideas varied among the teachers and conversely contained many similarities.

From the ideas presented by the teachers, spiritual profiles were made. These profiles represented the participants as a whole rather than just in their role as a teacher. How each individual developed her own spirituality was described and included as a part of her spiritual profile. These profiles change as the individual changes.

The connection between spirituality and education was then made and began with an explanation of perceived student spiritual needs. This was followed with implemented and suggested classroom practices to meet the spiritual needs of students.

The chapter culminated with a discussion of professional development aimed at helping teachers meet the spiritual needs of their students.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The research conducted was based on a holistic educational approach. This approach places equal importance on the spiritual, emotional, cognitive, and physical aspects of the learner. The literature presented supports the holistic movement and led to the current study of public teachers who shared their ideas on spirituality and its place in the classroom.

More specifically, the main focus of the study was to explore the perspectives of 5 Ontario public elementary teachers on the topic of spirituality and its implications for classroom practice. A qualitative study was conducted where the female participants shared information through a participant information form and one semistructured interview. Data were generated through transcripts, and following a careful analysis, resulted in the findings of this study.

These findings led to teacher-defined concepts of spirituality and how spirituality is developed both personally and professionally. From there, a series of individual spiritual profiles were created which generated a conceptual organization of an individual’s spirituality and outlook on spirituality. Students’ spiritual needs were identified, and classroom practices to meet these needs were outlined. Finally, the teachers suggested a variety of professional development initiatives to further educate themselves as well as other teacher colleagues.

The findings from the current study were compared to the current literature and research on the holistic approach and spirituality and are revealed in the present chapter. Implications for theory, practice, and further research in this area are suggested.
Discussion and Conclusions

The current state of education in Ontario supports a transmission-based approach to education. Such an approach emphasizes the development of the cognitive domain in students rather than a holistic approach which develops each domain equally including the spiritual facet (Bosacki, 2001b). The responsibility for implementing a holistic approach in Ontario classroom rests on teachers.

The findings support an educational environment where teachers are individually responsible for the implementation of a holistic approach to education. Teacher participants shared their personal philosophies of education, revealing their approach to education. The only approach prescribed by the Ministry of Education and public school boards is one that supports an outcomes-based cognitive curriculum. The philosophies of education varied among the teachers. Teachers whose philosophies were based on holism had practices and teachings which supported a holistic approach to education. These teachers were individually responsible for bringing holism into their classrooms.

The questions that shaped this study were: (a) How do elementary public school teachers define spirituality? (b) What perceptions of spirituality do public school teachers bring into the classroom? (c) How do public school teachers define their students’ needs and aim to meet these needs? (d) What classroom practices do public school teachers use to meet the spiritual needs of their students? (e) What suggestions and ideas do public school teachers have for the future of spirituality in education?

The 5 teacher participants offered five different definitions of spirituality. As such, spirituality is based on personal definitions. Furthermore, definitions of spirituality are as individual as people themselves. Moreover, researchers such as Hutchinson (1998)
and Bosacki (1998) often describe, rather than define, spirituality due to its ambiguous nature. Spirituality tends to be unclear, as it means different things to different people.

The literature revealed that classical definitions of spirituality included and emphasized a religious and spiritual connection (J. W. Fisher et al., 2002). Furthermore, current descriptions of spirituality focus on the connections with others and the universe (Bosacki, 2002). It need not include a religious aspect, although it may (Dalai Lama, 1999).

Similarly, the teacher participants relayed accounts of spirituality which differed in relation to a religious connection. One definition tended toward the classical approach to spirituality, as the teacher believes spirituality and religion are synonymous. The remaining definitions of spirituality included a relationship with religion which ranged from a close relationship to no relationship whatsoever. Spirituality and religion may or may not share a relationship, depending on the outlook of the individual.

Greater awareness of spirituality is needed and, in particular, spirituality and education. Only 2 of the participants, Natalie and Rachel, seemed to have a broadened view of spirituality. Natalie has taken courses with a focus on spirituality in education, and Rachel actively seeks out opportunities to attend workshops and retreats on the subject of spirituality. Spiritual education cannot be fully realized without an awareness of spirituality.

Six subthemes of spirituality emerged from the teachers’ perspectives. These subthemes are facets that help makeup an individual’s spirituality. These subthemes were: (a) spirituality and religion, (b) a spiritual relationship with the self, (c) spirituality and a higher being, (d) spiritual relationships with others, and (e) a spiritual connection
with nature. These subthemes of spirituality are all important aspects of spirituality in the literature.

The teachers outlined a number of ways in which they develop their own spirituality. The methods of spiritual development were extensive and grouped into appropriate categories, which were: (a) activities, (b) resources, (c) religious practices, (d) spiritual programs, (e) education, (f) reflection, and (g) attitude and practice. These practices were carried out with the intent to develop their spirituality as a whole person rather than their spirituality as a teacher.

The facets of spirituality and the methods of spiritual development were combined together to create a generic spiritual profile. Moreover, individual spiritual profiles were created for each teacher participant. The profiles revealed the components or subthemes which makeup each teacher’s spirituality and the methods used to develop each component. These profiles were displayed in conceptual organizers and clearly communicated information regarding each teacher’s spirituality. For instance, one could easily discern the importance placed on spirituality by each teacher by looking at the individual spiritual profiles.

Several notions regarding spirituality were brought into the classroom by the teachers. The first idea is that spirituality is a part of an individual’s make-up. It cannot be separated from who the individual is. This finding is congruent with Palmer’s (1999a) statement, “When I hear teachers ask whether they can take their spirituality into the classroom with them, I wonder what the option is: As long as we take ourselves into the classroom, we take our spirituality with us!” (p. 10). Spirituality is an ingrained part of our personality.
Rachel believes that she has become a better teacher since becoming spiritually aware. She has a better understanding of the difficulties that students bring into the classroom and is more patient and kind as a result. Rachel’s personal spiritual journey has a direct impact on her students.

Moreover, the teachers commented on a fear of imposing their beliefs on students in the classroom. Furthermore, any issues on and surrounding the topic of spirituality must be approached with sensitivity and careful thought. This fear is revealed and supported by Nielsen (2001) in the literature.

Setting aside any angst surrounding spirituality, the teachers identified four spiritual needs in their students. These needs were: (a) the need for guidance, (b) the need for comfort, (c) the need for knowledge, and (d) individualized needs. The current literature recognizes that a spiritual need exists in students, and this study identifies some of these needs.

With these needs in mind, spiritual classroom practices were described by the teachers. These practices ranged from the teacher as role model, a powerful method according to Palmer (1999a) and Bosacki (2005), to having students reflect on a personal choice. These activities are thought to be helpful for meeting the spiritual needs of students.

Although a number of classroom practices were outlined, at the time of the study only 1 teacher was consciously carrying out practices to meet the spiritual needs of her students. It was only after careful thought and reflection that the remaining teachers were able to identify spiritual classroom practices. This supports Pitawanakwat’s (2001) belief
that Western society continues to stress cognitive development to the exclusion of the other facets of the learner and, in this situation, the spiritual facet was overlooked.

The public elementary school teachers recommended educational courses, seminars, workshops, and the use of resources to create a greater focus on spiritual education for the future. These initiatives would be directed at professionally developing teachers and would be put in place by the school boards. This requires, as one teacher mentioned, first educating public school board administrators on the premise that spirituality spans much further than religion and that there is a place for spirituality in public education.

**Implications**

The findings from the data generated implications for theory, practice, and further research. It is hoped that these implications further richen the field of spirituality and education.

**Implications for Theory**

A holistic approach to education seeks to educate the emotional, cognitive, physical, and spiritual facets of learners (Plunkett, 1990). This approach strives to bring a balance to education by developing each facet of the learner equally (Hutchinson & Bosacki, 2000). According to many holistic educators (Bosacki, 2001b; Kessler, 2000; J. P. Miller, 2000; R. Miller, 2001; Nielsen, 2001; Palmer, 1999a; Plunkett, 1990; Young, 2001), this balance is greatly needed in our current educational system.

In the late 1990s, the Ontario curriculum was introduced to public elementary schools, shifting much focus onto accountability and performance with little thought of holistic values (Nielsen, 2001). This curriculum approach reflects a state of Western
society which places importance on information and measurable outcomes (Young, 2001). In this curriculum, much emphasis is focused on the cognitive development of students with little regard to the other facets.

The findings generated by the 5 teacher participants support Palmer’s (1999b) and J. P. Miller’s (2000) view that little value is placed on a holistic approach and more specifically a spiritual approach to education. Only a single teacher among the participants consciously sought to spiritually educate her students through a variety of activities. Conversely, another teacher participant felt that spiritual education is of little importance in the classroom given the current curriculum, as adding spiritual education would increase teachers’ workload.

Despite personal beliefs regarding spiritual education, each teacher defined spirituality in the context of her life. Teachers provided personal definitions of spirituality which differed from one another. This supports Bosacki’s (1998) view that spirituality is better described than defined, as spirituality contains a personal component.

Furthermore, Megan, Sarah, and Angela each expressed some discomfort or uncertainty when asked to define spirituality. This points to the sensitive nature of spirituality and a lack of awareness. Eaude (2001) contends that many teachers lack an understanding of spirituality and development. Moreover, in England, J. W. Fisher et al. (2002) found that younger teachers, like Megan, Sarah, and Angela, would benefit from greater spiritual development.

From the definitions and perspectives provided by the teachers, subthemes of spirituality were identified. These subthemes were: (a) spirituality and religion, (b) a spiritual relationship with the self, (c) spirituality and a higher being, (d) spiritual
relationships with others, and (e) a spiritual connection with nature. These subthemes or facets of spirituality were generated as a significant relationship was shown to exist between spirituality and the outlined counterparts.

Researchers such as Hull (1996), J. W. Fisher et al. (2002), Suhor (1999), and Kessler (2000) describe the importance of developing spirituality through connections with nature, a higher being, other people, and with one’s self. The findings support these connections in the literature.

Palmer (1999a) emphasized the importance of connecting with one’s spiritual self and being open to the exploration of the inner spirit. This view is supported by researchers such as Glazer (1999), B. Fisher (2000), and Bosacki (2001b) and the findings in this study. It was interesting to note that the only participant, Megan, to believe that spirituality has little place in the public school setting lacked a spiritual connection with the self in her spiritual profile. Glazer’s research suggested that attitude toward spirituality can influence teaching practices. This point is upheld by Megan, who is currently not open to spirituality in her life and has classroom practices which reflect this outlook. Megan further supports Eaude’s (2001) thought that some teachers are too busy to even think about spirituality.

The importance of a spiritual relationship between the self and a higher being was recognized by J. W. Fisher et al. (2002). This relationship was contingent on the beliefs of each individual, as some individual’s beliefs do not include a higher being. The findings in this study uphold the current literature, as only 4 of the 5 participants spoke of a spiritual connection with a higher being. Thus, an individual’s sense of spirituality can exist in the absence of a relationship with a higher being. It is interesting to note that the
2 participants, Natalie and Rachel, with the broadest definitions of spirituality and the most varied methods for personal spiritual development have a personal relationship with a higher being.

Both Natalie and Rachel feel an enhanced sense of spirituality when connecting with others. As a lifelong learner, Natalie continues to learn from her students who encourage her to reflect on her own spirituality. This is consistent with Dillon’s (2000) reports that students are an invaluable part of a teacher’s spirituality. Researchers such as Palmer (1999a) and Suhor (1999) further advocate for the need for teachers to spiritually connect with colleagues through dialogue and conversations. Rachel has found such discussions to be invaluable to her personal spiritual development.

Just as Suhor (1999) indicated, nature provides teachers with the opportunity to make spiritual connections. Rachel finds that her spirituality is further enhanced in the presence of nature. She was the only participant to mention such a connection. This latter point is also supportive of the notion that Western society is not highly receptive to bonding in natural settings, as only 1 of the 5 participants felt such a connection (J. W. Fisher et al., 2002).

Furthermore, the findings richen the literature in this area, as not all connections are seen in all of the teacher participants. Although each teacher had the potential to personally connect her spirituality with nature, a higher being, other people, and one’s self, in 4 participants, only some of these relationships were shown to exist. Rachel was the only participant who reported a relationship between her spirituality and all of the outlined facets.
Each teacher differed on the degree to which spirituality was incorporated into her life, both personally and professionally. Some individuals may lack spiritual awareness and, as such, place little importance on developing their self spiritually. Spiritual awareness is needed to consciously develop spiritually. With this awareness, spirituality can be developed as an individual develops. The need for such awareness is described by Palmer (1999b), who encourages teachers to awaken their own spirituality.

Regardless of whether spiritual awareness was found among the teacher participants, each individual is at her own stage of spiritual development. This is consistent with models of spiritual development, which are described in stages (Dillon, 2000; Fowler, 1995; Wilber, 1977).

Fowler (1995) outlines seven stages of faith development where each participating teacher could be placed. The development among the teachers can be described as developing forward or at an arrest. These terms, as well as regression and conversion, are outlined in Fowler's spiraling model of faith. Furthermore, one teacher participant experienced a dramatic change in spiritual development, or a conversion, on her spiritual journey.

The attitude or outlook an individual has towards spirituality impacts its development. One teacher was too busy to actively develop her own spirituality. Eaude (2001) and J. P. Miller (2000) agree that working too hard and not finding time prevents people from thinking about spirituality.

A concept based on the findings, which extends beyond the current literature and research in the area of spirituality, was the formation of spiritual profiles. A generic conceptual spiritual profile was created from all the spiritual relationships and practices
to develop spirituality described by the teachers. The profile shows the spiritual relationships with religion, a higher being, the self, nature, and others in connection with methods to develop spirituality.

Personal spiritual profiles were created for each teacher participant containing the appropriate relationships and methods of each teacher. The profiles were dated to the day of each participant interview to show that profiles are ever changing, as each teacher is on her own personal spiritual journey. Spirituality is not a static entity; it has the capacity to develop. This is known from the findings and from the models of spiritual development provided by Wilber (1977), Fowler (1995), Wenman (2001), and Dillon (2000).

The teachers with the broadest definitions of spirituality had the most developed spiritual profiles. Rachel and Natalie had the most connections between their spirituality and the other facets. Furthermore, these teachers used the greatest number of methods to develop their own spirituality.

More specifically, in the spiritual profiles it was interesting to note that Rachel, the eldest participant, had the most developed spiritual profile. This supports Fowler’s (1995) and J. W. Fisher et al.’s (2002) view that older and more experienced individuals can have greater spiritual development than younger individuals.

The catalyst for Rachel’s keen interest in her spiritual development arose from her experiences as an alcoholic seeking recovery. The journey towards Rachel’s recovery resulted in a transcendent experience. Transcendent experiences are events that happen in a person’s life that change that person forever (Hopp, 2001). Rachel experienced a “spiritual awakening” while participating in the spiritual program of Alcoholics
Anonymous. This experience proved to be invaluable to Rachel’s journey of spiritual development (Hopp; Suhor, 1999).

R. Miller (2001) identifies that students have individual spiritual needs. The current literature does not specifically identify the spiritual needs of students, while this study identifies four spiritual needs. These individual needs were described by the teacher participants and were expanded to include four areas of need in students. Students’ spiritual needs were grouped into the categories of: (a) the need for guidance, (b) the need for comfort, (c) the need for knowledge, and (d) individualized needs. The first three needs add depth and extend the current literature to identify the need for every student to have spiritual guidance, spiritual comfort, and spiritual knowledge in the classroom.

Each teacher carried out practices in the classroom to spiritually develop their students, although, Natalie was the only teacher participant to intentionally use activities to develop her students’ spirituality. The other teacher participants carried out their activities with other purposes in mind and, after careful thought, found that these activities also helped to develop the spirituality of their students. This points to Palmer’s (1999a) belief that spirituality is always present in the public school system whether acknowledged or not.

The participants, with the exception of Megan, spoke of the importance of addressing students’ spiritual needs in the classroom. Palmer (1999b), R. Miller (2001), Bosacki (2001b), Hull (1996), and Kessler (2000) would agree with these participants on the importance of addressing the spiritual needs of students.

Before addressing the needs of their students, teachers are encouraged to become professionally educated in the area of spirituality. More specifically, a need for awareness
and knowledge of spirituality exists among educators according to Rachel. Natalie further argued that such an awareness must be carried to all educators, including those at the board level. Developing spiritual awareness and knowledge in educators, according to Suhor (1999) and Palmer (1999a), is the necessary trigger needed for developing spirituality in public education.

Implications for Practice

The findings support the need for spirituality in education. This is consistent with holistic educators (Bosacki, 2001b; Kessler, 2000; J. P. Miller, 2000; R. Miller, 2001; Nielsen, 2001; Palmer, 1999a; Plunkett, 1990; Young, 2001), who advocate for a balanced approach to education which includes all facets of learning, including the spiritual facet. With this in mind, a series of practical methods based on findings can be used to help bridge the gap between the current transmission state of education and a transformational or holistic approach based on spirituality.

According to Palmer (1999a), spiritual education begins with educators. This notion was also supported in the findings, as the topic of spiritual education would not be of interest to Megan who honestly reported that this form of education is of no importance in the classroom. Thus, educators need to be the starting place for spiritual education.

With this in mind, beginning with educators, the following sections outline strategies to develop spirituality in education. These sections are:

1. Professional Spiritual Development for Educators
2. Personal Spiritual Development for Educators
3. Spiritual Development for Students
Professional Spiritual Development for Educators

Based on the findings, professional spiritual development among educators is recommended to generate awareness and knowledge of spiritual education. Palmer (1999a) advocates the need for such professional development. Rolph (1991) and Young (2001) are supporters of this type of development. A number of methods of professional development were suggested by the teacher participants. School boards would be responsible for the development and implementation of these initiatives.

Courses. Courses on spirituality and world religions would help to develop awareness and understanding of holistic education. Educators would be better informed on current spirituality issues and practices.

Workshops. Workshops, condensed versions of courses, on spirituality and world religions would be carried out with the same objectives as courses.

Teacher resources. Books and activities on spiritual education including multiple faiths and multiculturalism would be a welcome resource for the teacher participants. The purpose of these resources would be to educate teachers on the aforementioned topics and to provide teachers with age-appropriate, practical resources for the classroom.

Personal Spiritual Development for Educators

Both Natalie and Rachel believe that they cannot separate their spiritual self from the teacher they are in the classroom, a finding that is in agreement with Palmer’s (1999b) views. These teachers consider themselves to be on a journey of personal spiritual betterment, and Rachel’s spiritual journey has made her a better classroom teacher. The use of personal spiritual practices has further developed Natalie’s and Rachel’s inner spirituality as well as the other teacher participants’. The practices
described below are methods used by one or more of the participant(s) on her (their) spiritual journey.

*Activities.* Singing in a choir and meditative walks in nature are activities that further nourished the spirit. Suhor (1999), J. P. Miller (2000), and Wheal (2000) find meditation to be an effective practice to improve the inner spirit.

Gratitude and free thinking journals, also reported by J. P. Miller (2000) and Wheal (2000), allow teachers to be mindful and reflective of the important things in life.

Discussions, listening to stories, and questioning all allow interaction with others and can provide teachers with learning opportunities. These moments can be particularly helpful when topics of a spiritual nature are pondered.

*Resources.* Books and other resources provide opportunities for personal spiritual betterment. More specifically, a 6-week spiritual book entitled, *The Cup of Our Life*, by Joyce Rupp (1997) was a practical resource on spirituality which inspired growth.

*Religious practices.* Attending church, prayer, and looking for and listening for God in your life were all religious practices which encouraged spiritual growth in the teacher participants.

*Spiritual programs.* Rachel is a firm believer in the benefits of spiritual programs. She believes that she was spiritually awakened through her participation in the spiritual program of Alcoholics Anonymous. Rachel’s experience with Alcoholics Anonymous would be described by Hopp (2001) as a transcendent experience. A transcendent experience is an experience that change a person’s life forever (Hopp). Rachel commented that she has and will continue to participate in retreats and programs of a spiritual nature to further develop her spirituality.
Education. Seminars and workshops offered in the community on the topic of spirituality helped to develop Rachel’s spirituality. Furthermore, Natalie found a course offered by Dr. Sandra Bosacki on holistic and global issues in education to be thought provoking and inspiring to her personal spiritual journey.

Reflection. Reflection involves thinking and questioning actions before and after they have occurred. It involves taking the previously mentioned spiritual practices and others and reflecting on these practices for personal spiritual improvement.

Attitude and practice. Attitude involves having the willingness to look positively on life. It further entails the ability to be open to spirituality and to welcome spiritual direction. It is important to have a positive attitude and to be willing to practice spirituality in your life.

Spiritual Development for Students

Many of the practices outlined to develop teachers’ spirituality were also suggested activities for students’ spiritual development. The practices listed below, as with the teacher practices, were described by one or more of the participants.

Teacher. The teacher is an important instrument in the classroom who acts as both a role model and guiding force. Acting as role models, teachers can invite their students to participate in activities of a spiritual nature (Bosacki, 2001b). Moreover, students can benefit from having teachers with a well-developed sense of spirituality, as these teachers often model the spiritual qualities of love and respect.

Furthermore, the teacher guides students’ social development in any area that touches their spirits. The development of social skills, which contains aspects of spirituality, encourages appropriate behaviour and acceptance among students. Moreover,
the establishment of classroom expectations by the teacher allows for a respectful classroom environment.

*Activities.* Goal setting can be a useful activity in the classroom for students' spiritual development when students are encouraged to set spiritual goals such as being a better friend.

Another activity, discussion, allows for spiritual topics to be discussed in the classroom. In some instances, these discussions occurred when students posed questions, and on other occasions the discussions were teacher directed. Discussion topics included death, drugs, and sex to name a few.

Natalie spoke of using a very specific activity, LifeMapping, in her classroom. This activity was developed by Dr. Michael Kompf (2001) from Brock University. Students were asked to take the 10 most significant events in their life and to reflect on these situations from three different perspectives: the past, present, and future. Natalie hoped that such an activity would help the students better know themselves.

The appreciation and celebration of different cultures and faiths is an important part of public school education, particularly given their multicultural nature. Conversations regarding different cultures and faiths took place in classrooms, and food, music, and clothing were often discussed. Furthermore, holidays and traditions such as Hanukah and the Chinese New Year were celebrated. Experts in a particular culture or faith were often consulted and asked to speak in the class. Such activities helped to develop an acceptance and appreciation for culture and diversity.
**Resources.** Providing students with books on sensitive topics such as evolution and creationism, with parent permission, can aid in the development of older students’ critical thinking skills and can help shape their inner self.

**Reflection.** Encouraging students to think about and respectfully question issues can develop their spirit. Opportunities for reflection occurred in whole-class situations as well as on an individual basis with students.

**Courses.** Courses offered on world religions and spirituality for students are thought to be beneficial. These courses are not currently in place in Ontario public schools. Angela saw the benefit of such courses for developing cultural acceptance in students while completing her teacher education abroad.

**Implications for Further Research**

This study has laid the foundation for further qualitative studies in the area of spirituality. More specifically, further studies in the areas of the nature of spirituality, the educator and spirituality, and teacher gender and spirituality are warranted.

Researchers should continue to explore the nature of spirituality. It was evident from the findings in this study that teachers have varied levels of knowledge regarding spirituality. Greater awareness is needed in teachers and arguably in the public at large. Further research could help bring awareness to such an important topic.

Further studies are needed regarding educators and spiritual education. Would the results of this study be any different if educators in administrative positions and at the board level were interviewed? What suggestions would these educators have for the future of spiritual education?
Furthermore, the current study could be expanded to include a second interview with the teacher participants. This second interview would be conducted following a series of sessions on spiritual professional development. At the time of the second interview, teachers could examine their spiritual profiles and comment on whether changes had occurred following their own spiritual development and the professional development sessions.

A further suggestion for research would be to have teachers keep a log of their dreams with particular attention given to divine dreams. The teachers could log their dreams between the first and second interview and would be given the opportunity to share their dreams at the second interview. These dreams could help provide greater insight into the understanding of teachers’ spirituality.

Teacher gender and spirituality could also be examined. The current study coincidentally interviewed female participants. Would the results of the study have been any different with all male participants? Would the results of the study have been different with both male and female participants?

Reflective Summary

As an individual on a personal spiritual journey, I was excited to hear the perspectives of other educators on the topic of spirituality. I wanted to find out how they defined spirituality and what practices they used to develop their own spirituality. I further set out to have teachers identify the spiritual needs of their students and to identify any implemented practices to meet these needs. I wished to hear their ideas regarding the future of spirituality in education.
When reviewing the literature for this study, my enthusiasm was somewhat dampened by researchers who painted the public education system as spiritless and void of soul. I feared that these researchers would be correct about the spiritual state of public education and that this study would have little to add to the spiritual educational world.

I was pleasantly surprised to find that all of the teacher participants were practicing forms of spirituality and carrying some of these practices into the classroom. Although not all of the teachers were initially cognizant of spiritual practices, they were able to generate a list after some thought. This was inspiring to me.

The researchers were right. Spiritual education has a long way to come given our current approach to Ontario curriculum and education. Greater awareness of spiritual education is needed at all levels of education from board members to students. I guess I am just happy that they were not totally right. Good things are happening in our Ontario public schools, and these good things are helping to develop the spirit of public education.
References


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Appendix

Ethics Approval