

What Does IT All Mean?: A Conversation on Students' Spiritual Development

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Facilitated by Karen Hauschild & Jennah Jones
First Year College
NC State University

Session Notes from breakout discussion groups:

Question 1: What does spirituality mean? How is it connected to religion, and how is it not connected to religion? How can you understand it in the most productive way possible, rather than the most problematic way? (questions driven from "Cultivating the Spirit," p. 141)

Group 1:

- a. What does spirituality mean?
 - i. Faith in something that is more than ourselves
 - ii. Higher power – nondenominational
 - iii. Peace (inner) - helping cope
 - iv. Dimension of who we are as beings (how we are) – connected to the world
 - v. Body, mind, and spirit
- b) Connected (or not) to religion
 - i. Religion is potential outlet to spirituality
 - ii. Depends on how you define religion
 - iii. "spiritual but not religious" – detachment from organized religion
 - iv. Not as structured
- c) Productive vs. Problematic
 - i. Healthy for us to debate – consider other options
 - ii. Depends on demographic, institutional culture, etc.
 - iii. Positive – coping method – spirituality studies
 - iv. Ethical base to operate from
 - v. Think outside of yourself
 - vi. Meet students where they are – doesn't impose own beliefs on them
 - vii. Way to identify individuality – empowering
 - viii. Private issue? Also situational
 - ix. How are we challenging students?
 - x. Conflict vs. discussion

Question 2: What are our personal fears/bias in having the conversations on campus (outside the expected places on campus) with each other and with students on spiritual matters? How can we negotiate or navigate these fears? Why is it so hard for us to discuss spiritual matters?

Group 1:

Fears:

- a) 1-way faith vs embracing other faiths
- b) State/church
- c) Don't discuss religion, politics
- d) Fear of other religions
- e) Religion is personal

Bias :

- a) own perspectives (1 way)
- b) set up discussions/guidelines of their belief

Group 2:

1. Personal fears/biases
 - a) State institution
 - b) Societal fear to not discuss
 - i. Forbidden topics (religion, politics, etc.)
 - c) Myopic view of religion and spirituality (Florida panhandle)
 - d) Not knowing enough or understanding beliefs of religions
 - e) Fear
 - f) It's very personal (rock, guiding force)
 - g) How to negotiate/navigate these fears
 - i. Discussions with guidelines
 - ii. Gaining a deeper understanding of spirituality and religion
 - iii. Willingness and desire to listen
 - iv. Faculty and staff discussions

Question 3: What can we do to help students explore and develop their spiritual selves as individuals, institutions, and the field of higher education?

Group 1:

- a) Definition: spirituality – “there is something more important than you.”
- b) Assigned readings
- c) Service learning
- d) Career development
 - v. “What makes you come alive?”
- e) “What are the most important things in your lives?” - discussion
 - vi. Why they do what they do
- f) Student affairs – faith based organizations
- g) “What motivates you in the classroom?” – discussion
- h) Viral YouTube clips
- i) What was important to you in high school?
- j) Becoming a member of a community. Fight the bowling alone theory.

- k) Newman Center, Wesley Foundation, Islamic Society, etc.
- l) Support idea of being other-centered
- m) Learning to live with the idea that life is ambiguous

Group 2:

Help students find their spirituality

- Know themselves
- Know other groups/beliefs
- Provide forums/facilitators/speakers/panels
- Dispel notion that higher education doesn't like religion/spiritual
- Social acceptance, dating, listening
- As educators we have to come out of our comfort zones
- Faith fair events
- Create kindness atmosphere

Group 3:

- Encourage student interaction in diverse setting to explore other viewpoints
- Provide a "safe zone" to discuss religious/spiritual differences and similarities
 - Spirituality = connectedness to one another and the world around us
 - Devotion to a faith tradition
 - Teach students how to reflect on experiences