



Mind, Self, and Spirit

Advances in Transpersonal and Spiritual Psychology

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*Edited by: Dr. M. Mirunalini, Prof. (Dr.) Lubhawani Tripathi,
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Chapter : 18

FOSTERING SPIRITUALITY FOR THE SECONDARY LEVEL STUDENTS THROUGH LANGUAGE TEACHING

A. Pauanthie ¹, Dr. A. Tholappan ²

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Abstract:

In particular, this chapter reflects on how language teaching in high school can be a powerful tool for developing students' spirituality. This concept is integral to understanding the holistic human being. It is important to note and clarify that an understanding of spirituality in education is not about religion. However, its focus depends on meaning, purpose, and a sense of relatedness as well as interconnectedness in the world. Language is described as the agent of spiritual exploration, thought, intimacy, and moral development via reflection and dialogue. Four compatible pedagogies of self-reflectiveness, dialogue about values and meaning, connectedness and empathy, and generative creativity are suggested for classroom application. There are certainly drawbacks, especially in terms of blurring the line between spirituality and religion, but in these practices, the role of the teacher becomes that of the facilitator or nurturer of development. This chapter concludes that it is precisely the force of language that nurtures spiritual identity and provides students with the social and emotional fortitude necessary for mature and responsible human development.

Keywords: *Spirituality Development, Language Teaching, Education, Pedagogy, Transformative Learning, Holistic Education*

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Introduction:

Education is a lifelong process of learning, knowledge, skills, and character that is nurtured holistically (UNESCO, 2020). It is not just limited to teaching and learning, but rather it is about developing the whole person. This is consistent with the definition of human development as the process of expanding people's freedoms and opportunities to live long, healthy and creative lives and to advance other goals they have reason to value (UNDP, 2020). One important but often ignored dimension of this development is spirituality. In the educational context, spirituality is not to be confused with religion, but rather is the "process; the unfolding mystery through harmonious interconnectedness that arises from inner power" (Burkhardt, 1989, p. 72). It is the pursuit of meaning, purpose, and connectedness to self, others, and the world. The present essay contends that language instruction in secondary schools has the potential to be an effective tool to develop this spiritual dimension, and thus to contribute to the holistic development of emotionally intelligent, resilient, and socially responsible students.

Role of Language in Spiritual Development:

The spiritual development of secondary level students is not an "add on" curriculum but rather a necessary part of the holistic development of the human being, which is described as the search for meaning, purpose, connection, and a sense of self that is beyond the material world (Fisher, 2011). Language is the vehicle for this spiritual inquiry and articulation, and language is not primarily a tool for communication. For this reason, language teaching is the basis for the development of spirituality; it is the bridge between self-expression, abstract thought, and moral development.

Language has three important roles in spiritual development. The first is that it is the medium of conceptualization and interiority. Without words to define and articulate them, the more complex spiritual ideas – grace, compassion, justice, the divine – are not only unable to be understood, but they are unable to exist. As linguists remind, language creates reality and perception (Kuimova et al., 2017). In the language classroom, students are encouraged to go beyond the dictionary definition and begin to learn to grapple with deep ethical and existential ideas and to develop the vocabulary to do so. This realization is important as spirituality starts with the self and progresses

from “me” to “we” as individuals pursue connection (Miller & Weigand, 2021).

Secondly, language is the tool for connectivity and intercultural understanding. Growth in spirituality is, by its very nature, the growth of connectedness, to others, to nature, and to the universe at large (Hay & Nye, 2006). The teaching of foreign languages in particular, allows students to become acquainted with the religious, philosophical, and moral traditions of other cultures, thus enhancing their sensitivity to other cultures and respect for diversity (Kuimova et al., 2017). In reading texts, proverbs, and narratives from various traditions, be they sacred texts, poetry, or secular literature, students participate in interfaith dialogue, even if it is only with the text. This also helps in developing empathy, tolerance and humility as students come to realize that others may view the world differently, but are engaged in similar human struggles of meaning (Wong & Mahboob, 2018).

Third, language teaching is part of pedagogy for human development. In other words, the classroom is a spiritual place according to Spiritual Pedagogy, in which relationships of care that transcend the ego are established through love, authenticity, and wisdom (Noddings, 2003). This is a particularly compatible approach for language classes, which are already very interactive and based on common personal experience and storytelling (Nash, 2001). When students are encouraged to express their values, argue moral dilemmas posed in literature, or keep reflective journals in the target language they are participating in the process of moral enhancement. This type of active engagement helps to shape the students identity and sense of agency, both of which are essential aspects of human development.

This fusion of language and spirituality also takes learning from being a process of rote memorization of grammar and vocabulary to something that is transformational. In this sense, language teaching is a direct contribution to the individual’s path to wholeness because it allows students to have the linguistic resources to express their inner world, to understand diversity in the outside world, and to engage in moral conversations. The language curriculum is thus a critical component of spiritual development because it provides the secondary student, not only with the ability to communicate, but with the basis for a mature, reflective and connected humanity.

Pedagogical Strategies for the Classroom:

Therefore, incorporating spiritual development into language teaching does not mean adding yet another curriculum, but instead shifting our attention to reflection, connection, and authenticity in our teaching. The following are a few of the strategies to achieve this.

- **Cultivating Inner Awareness and Mindfulness:** Spiritual development begins with the development of an inner awareness, which links self-knowledge to a relationship with the world outside the self. This internal orientation is also linguistically represented by incorporating moments of both silence and speech in the narrative (Palmer, 2017). Starting a lesson with a short, mindfulness activity in the target language or one minute of silent reflection, which is comprehensible input and also serves to lower the affective filter (Krashen, 1982). At the same time, reflective journaling is an important mechanism for metacognition and connecting language with personal experiences (Demera & Fajardo, 2023). Prompts that force students to express their feelings or values activate the “embodied self” (Kramsch, 2012). These practices are directly related to the kind of inner strength (Burkhardt, 1989) that is a prerequisite for holistic human development because they link language use with fundamental values and deep reflection.
- **Exploring Values and Meaning through Content:** Development through language is spiritual and so the curriculum must be a curriculum of concern, not just of skills, where students can grapple with universal human issues and ethics. This attention to content requires a subject-centered orientation that places the content into a dialogue between teachers, students, and the subject matter itself (Palmer, 2017). Teachers choose literature, poetry, and non-fiction that addresses fundamental human questions of justice, identity, and love. The study of literary fiction is especially powerful for this purpose because the characters and moral dilemmas in literary fiction are complex and require a high degree of cognitive engagement, which has been associated with increased social cognition (Kidd & Castano, 2013). Questions like “What values are in conflict here?” are a form of structured prompts that help students to critically examine assumptions (Mezirow, 2000). It is through this process that “symbolic competence,” that is, the ability to

grasp how language represents meaning and power, is developed (Kramersch, 2009). Finally, these results are consistent with the idea that making meaning of difficult material leads to a “sense of coherence,” defined as the global orientation that life is meaningful, comprehensible, and manageable (Antonovsky, 1993 in Olsson et al., 2013).

- **Fostering Connection and Empathy:** Spirituality also involves a focus on deep connections with others, and thus encompasses the idea of establishing supportive, close relationships (Newlin et al., 2002). This is why language class activities should promote community and empathy, and help students “see” things from other perspectives. Even basic techniques such as group work, class discussion, and Socratic seminars require students to listen to and engage with one another. Powerful tools like Virtual Exchange (tele-collaboration) take this a step further by connecting students with peers from another culture, requiring them to see the world through someone else’s eyes and thus developing intercultural competence (O’Dowd, 2017) and a sense of humanity. Similarly, having students write and share “identity texts” – personal narratives or poetry about their own lives (Early & Cummins, 2011) – also encourages empathy. When these texts are performed or published by students, they learn that their experiences are legitimate and learn to care about the lives of others, which is a necessary social bond for long-term well-being (Olsson et al., 2013).
- **Encouraging Authentic Creative Expression:** To grow spiritually, students must find and use their own voice, thus shifting language learning from drills to the message rather than the grammatical form, as Krashen (1982) suggests. This means providing authentic avenues for creative self-expression in which students express their own values and stories. Engaging in activities such as writing personal narratives, poetry, or making digital stories can make the target language a tool for self-discovery. One master strategy here is the use of “identity texts” in which students begin to invest their personal identity in their work. This ownership, which one student described as “putting myself out there” (Early & Yeung, 2011, p. 92 in Early & Cummins, 2011), is a direct path to spiritual engagement. In promoting these forms of expression, the language classroom taps into the “mythic” dimension of language (Kramersch, 2006) –

the symbolic and emotional power of language – to help students build who they are inside and to contribute to the community with their own vision (Haydon, 2004).

Challenges and Considerations:

The use of spiritually-based language pedagogy is not without its own issues and must be approached with caution. The concern, of course, is to try to maintain spirituality, which is concerned with universal human needs such as meaning and connection, separate from religion, which is a particular “system of beliefs and practices” (Meraviglia, 1999). The classroom should be a space that remains neutral and inclusive of all backgrounds, while not privileging any one tradition (Juzwik et al., 2022). Teachers may also feel the pressure of standardized testing, but it is important to point out that identity-affirming, spiritually sensitive practices enhance student engagement, which is one of the strongest predictors of academic achievement (Cummins & Early, 2011). This requires the teacher to transition from being a provider of knowledge to being a facilitator who can create a “dialogic space” for a sensitive discussion (O’Dowd, 2017). In addition, educators should refrain from reification (Keddie, 2012), the process of reducing complex spiritual or cultural ideas to stereotypes, and instead concentrate on the common human questions. Assessment should be sensitive to and value qualitative and process-oriented forms of assessment, such as reflective portfolios and observation of creative work, over easily quantifiable measures.

Conclusion:

Secondary school language teaching represents a strong and, in many cases, unrealized opportunity to nurture students’ spirituality – not in the sense of a religious practice, but in the sense of a holistic quest for meaning, purpose, and connection. By consciously incorporating pedagogical approaches that focus on introspection (Mindfulness), universal values (Content-Based Instruction), empathic relationships (Virtual Exchange), and genuine self-expression (Identity Texts), language teachers can make the language classroom a different place. Though this approach is problematic in various ways, including the problem of differentiating spirituality from religion and the need to move beyond the traditional testing frenzy, the emphasis on the teacher as crucial to the facilitation of growth is a good one. In the end, it is the power of language to communicate that allows for the development of

the spiritual self, and it is this capacity that, when developed in adolescence, enables youth to become not just fluent speakers of a language, but also socially and emotionally adept, mature, connected, and responsible individuals.

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