Unifying Spiritual and Psychological Principles in Education
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Abstract

Identifies the basic unifying spiritual concepts and principles found in world religions that are relevant to learning; presents them in a simplified model of learning and spirituality; explains that model; then relates it to a synthesis of psychological learning principles and gives some suggestions for educational applications.

Human capacities related to spirituality and learning found in the sacred scriptures can be broadly categorized as knowing, loving and doing. These capacities have been conceptualized differently by various authors in philosophy, psychology, religion, education and other areas of endeavor (see Figure 1 for a list of comparisons). For explanatory purposes, these three spiritual faculties are represented as three spokes of a wheel or three blades of a propeller (see Figure 2 for a visual representation). The full and proper development of these capacities results in learning, spirituality and spiritual growth. Morality can then be defined as what furthers the advance of that process. These spiritual and moral principles have been given in all of the major religions. Education then, according to these definitions, is a spiritual and moral process.

Three spokes working in harmony, the individual be furthering growth, development and advancement to higher goals. For those who love falsehood, know hate and/or do not know love, a problem of growth is created. The same is true when any of these positive capacities crossvalue attributes of another.

This model has further developed and explained elsewhere (see author’s web site). Below is a brief synopsis of how it relates to each of the fourteen learner-centered psychological principles developed as a synthesis of research and theory on this topic by the Mid-continent Regional Educational Laboratory in cooperation with a special task force of the American Psychological Association (see www.apa.org/ed/lcp2.html and McCombs & Whisler, 1997 for background, explanation and more information).

Cognitive and Metacognitive Factors

Process

Understanding the learning processes is a key to promoting human happiness and well-being, two of the goals of the spiritual traditions. Learning is as natural for human life as growing is for a plant. It is part of human nature. Given the right conditions each person will reach his/her full potential and bear fruit. There are five spiritual senses or properties said to operate through the mind. The first is imagination, which imagines things transmitted through the light which thinks about or conceives, then comprehension that comprehends, and finally memory, which remembers. The last of the five is that of the property that transmits the sensory information to the mind and the spiritual faculties to the senses.

As we are aware of our goals, define them and consciously work towards them, the more likely we are to achieve them. This process can be learned.

Self-esteem, sense of personal capability and an internal locus of control. Goals give meaning to life. They direct energy towards the things we value.

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With all three spokes working in harmony, the individual is furthering growth, development and advancement to higher goals. For those who love falsehood, know hate and or do not know love, a problem of growth is created. The same is true when any of these positive capacities exceed the other.

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Self-esteem, sense of personal capability and an internal locus of control. Goals give meaning to life. They direct energy towards the things we value.
Spiritual traditions are important in identifying worthy and positive goals.

Construction of Knowledge

Educators can help students to develop the skills to construct meaning and integrate their potentialities in relation to the world, each other and the self. Religion is a construction of knowledge about life, loving and living. Sacred scriptures help individuals and societies construct healthy ways of knowing, feeling and behaving.

Strategic Thinking

Helping students develop their own spiritual faculties is itself a form of strategic thinking. As they develop and use these capacities in more complex, expanded and unique situations, they will be enhanced. The faith traditions offer many effective ideas for strategic thinking such as consultation, reasoning, independent investigation of truth, meditation, parables, stories, metaphors, prayer and reflection. These methods allow our head and heart to interact, and it is through them of the great discoveries and accomplishments of knowledge, science, technology and the arts have been made.

Metacognition

There are four basic ways of knowing truth. All are limited and open to error. Used in conjunction, they allow for greater likelihood of finding truth or reality. The first is through our senses or experiences, the second through reasoning and logic, the third through tradition and the fourth through intuition or inspiration. Some would call the Word of God as a fifth way of knowing. Educators can help learners think about their thought processes to improve them and become better thinkers.

Context of Learning

Interactions with the self, unknowns, others and objects are the cause of learning. Most interactions are a combination or collection of the above entities with one or more being dominant. The first and primary interaction is the self with the self. The educators’ use of love, power, truth, justice and service, affect the environment and learning. Spiritual capacities are essential in the context of learning and affect the inner context of all parties. The individual who moves out on any of the faculties starts the learning and growing process.

Motivational and Emotional Factors

Motivational and Emotional Influences

Feelings or emotions are different expressions of our loving capacity, and are intimately related to motivation. Happiness results when a love object or self is well treated, sadness is when it is removed or hurt. Anger is when a love object is unjustly mistreated or threatened, fear is when a love object might be there is limited ability to effectively respond to threat and disgust is when a love object is somehow violated. Understanding these as forces of love can help us to regulate and direct their influence in ways that are more beneficial. Love can be defined as an active force of attraction and as such can be the most elemental force in the universe. It is considered the fundamental element in most, if not all, religions.

Intrinsic Motivation

The higher the purpose, the higher and more sustaining the intrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivators, though needed and useful, are limited and can actually hinder motivation, especially if one is intrinsically motivated. Intrinsic motivation depends on a level of autonomy of love, knowledge and action within a set based on justice, truth and love. Those who reach self-actualization are at the stage of all three capacities fully and actively engaged. A number of factors affect intrinsic motivation including anxiety or level of concern, feelings, success and feedback.

Effort and effort

Interactions with the environment are more likely if they are seen as opportunities for growth rather than threats to well-being. Fear, anger and disgust, all are very motivating emotions and may assist learners to exert needed effort. If learners do not see the relevance of learning and their lives, their motivation will be negatively affected. Knowing what to do, wanting to do it and acting on it, increase effort, mastery and courage. Energy must be exerted to create a change of state. Perceptions of reality and cause and effect relationships determine our actions and motivations. If our perceptions are not reality statements will need to be made. Effort is related to will, which is a combination of knowing, loving and doing. Will starts with love, desire or attraction...
nowing how to fulfill our wants, and results in action to realize the object sought. Will involves discipline, self-regulation, goal directedness, act responsibility, resolution, endurance, perseverance, constancy, strength, determination, striving, firmness of purpose and other cognitive, metacognitive factors. The sincerity and purity of our motivations is vital to success and affects every action. Love gives us energy and directs our actions

Developmental and Social Factors

Developmental influences

Development is the process of potentiality becoming actuality. The basic human capacities of loving, knowing and doing seek expression in life. Differentiation, integration and generalization are the processes of learning and development physically, intellectually, emotionally, socially and spiritually. The spiritual capacities progress through predictable and identifiable stages of development. Educators need to diagnose and prescribe what is needed for each stage of development.

Social Influences

It is primarily in social groups that love and justice are exercised and developed. Relationships that are caring, complementary, collaborative and cooperative are productive. An environment where individuals are realizing their potential by developing their capacities is dynamic and energized. Teachers need to establish protection, security and justice, needed for unity and peace to exist, and to discourage wrongful acts and harmful social structures.

Individual Differences Factors

son has unique endowments, powers, responsibilities, talents, interests and capabilities based on innate, inherited and acquired characteristics. To their students know themselves, accept themselves, trust themselves and develop themselves by helping them know, accept, trust and develop their capacities. The ultimate authority and responsibility to do this lies with the individual. As part of that process, one begins to recognize one’s limitations and the limitations of acting on one’s personal loving, knowing and doing capacities alone. At this stage, it is a natural next step to look for valid sources outside of oneself for further development. The spiritual truths enshrined in the religions offer potent guidance.

Diversity

Our similarities are greater than our differences, but we are all unique. Each person has had unique endowments, experiences and heredity. The individual is like a mine filled with rich gems and minerals which education can reveal. Every person can mine and be mined to find their unique value and contribution. If justice are one point, then the diverse individuals will all be moving toward that point from their various perspectives. The watchword for society and the classroom is unity in diversity.

Standards and Assessment

There is a right and a wrong. The right should be taught and encouraged, the wrong discouraged. The root of wrongdoing is ignorance. Knowledge is like a key to openm or a ladder for the ascent of the individual. Education is a necessity; it is the foundation of human excellence, prosperity, joy and glory. Everyone should be encouraged to reach his or her highest levels of excellence. Equity is key in discussing standards and assessment. Justice depends on altruistic love and equity in the loving capacities, and fair mindedness in the knowing capacities. Equity is a fundamental virtue and the evaluation of all things depends upon it. In view of justice and equity, all should be given using an equitable universal curriculum and standard.

References

### Figures

**Figure 1. Comparison of Human Capacities**

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**Figure 2. Model of Learning and Spiritual Growth**