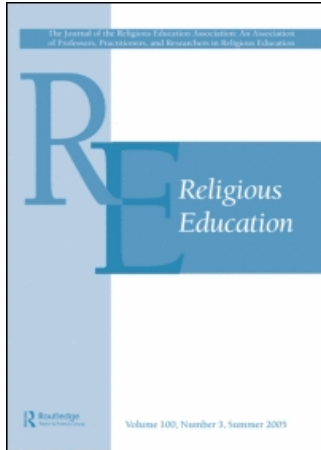


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DIALOGUE OF THE SOUL: THE PHENOMENON OF INTRAPERSONAL PEACE AND THE ADULT EXPERIENCE OF PROTESTANT RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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Abstract

This year-long study explored how adult church members experienced the phenomenon of spirit and the relationship between their experience and peace. Four themes emerged from the analysis of personal journal entries and transcripts of individual and group interviews: depth in the encounter with spirit, soul as the locus of spiritual growth, dialogue as the language of spiritual communication, and the phenomenon of third space. The intersection of these themes suggests that spiritual encounter is an intrapersonal, dialogical process leading to changes in perspective and action. These findings extend the concepts of peacemaking and adult education pedagogy in parish settings.

INTRODUCTION

We live in a time when adults increasingly recognize the importance of the spiritual experience for their lives (Tisdell 2003; Dirks 1997; Spencer 1992). Spirit has long been identified as a powerful, deeply felt, ineffable force of energy. The encounter with spirit is a type of learning experience that occurs when a person becomes conscious of, reflects on, remembers, and acts on those “private experiences that contain, in some form, a contact with a realm that is greater than the self” (Spencer 1992, 4). Spiritual growth is often associated with significant experiences of transformation, termed variously as conversion experiences, enlightenment, peak experiences, transformations of consciousness, or transcendent experiences.

Ours is also a time when violence and warfare threaten the survival of the planet, and structural and cultural forms of violence are virtually universal in their effects. The experience of spirit has long been associated with the experience of peace. Writing from a spiritual perspective, some scholars focus on the intrapersonal dimensions of peace

advocating such practices as prayer and meditation (Dear 2001; Foster 1998). Others focus on the interpersonal dimensions of peace focusing on therapy, spiritual guidance, dialogue, and worship (Peck 1987; Forest 1988). Still others view the spiritual aspects of peace as foundational to various nonviolent political approaches to peacemaking, such as conscientization (Freire 1970), nonviolent confrontation, civil disobedience, and collaboration (Cobban 2000; Zinn 2002). World religions view some type of spiritual encounter as the foundation of religious experience and practice, and advocate peace as a goal (Nipkow 2003).

Peace education is defined variously as “commitment to resolving conflicts nonviolently, building cultures of justice, human and earth rights, gender and racial equality and equity, and respect for indigenous peoples’ rights” (Turay 2000, 465). In North America, there has been a focus on conflict resolution, human-rights education, citizenship education, and development education (Reardon 1997). Brock-Utne (1985) also underscores the importance of inter-religious dialogue. From a variety of perspectives authors affirm that “the universal primary purpose of peace education is to transform all forms of violence, including physical, emotional, psychological and structural, and build sustainable cultures of peace at the local and global levels” (Turay 2000, 466).

Turay (2000; 2005) notes that the theoretical frameworks utilized in peace education are not holistic. Reardon (1997) and Brock-Utne (1985) also echo this concern, noting a tendency in the peace literature to focus on specific problems and concerns rather than the larger picture. As Turay (2005, 466) notes: “The literature is silent on the role of spirituality in peace education.” A greater awareness of the role of spirituality in peace education holds promise for enabling the adult learner and educator to “rediscover and value the good in them, other people, and their non human environment” (Turay 2005, 466).

Much is written about adult religious education practices for spiritual growth such as meditation, prayer, dialogue, and various spiritual disciplines. Although the encounter with spirit is foundational for religious education, and important for a deeper understanding of peace, little is known about the phenomenon of the spiritual encounter from the perspective of those who experience it. A better understanding of the human experience of spirit and its implications for peace could assist in the development of religious education practices that might be more effective in addressing increasing levels of violence and conflict experienced today. The purpose of this study was to better understand how adult church members experienced the phenomenon of spirit in

their lives and the implications of their experience for peacemaking as a form of religious education.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research methods were used because they were consistent with the conceptual model of this study as well as the topic (Garrison and Shale 1994). These methods also supported the heuristic dimension of the study, as participants sought to understand their experience by sharing their perceptions in order to make sense of a complex phenomenon (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Rather than testing existing theory, use of these methods allowed theory to emerge from the data (Brookfield 1990).

Key assumptions guided this study: an ontological assumption that essential reality was not external to the individual but rather a product of experience and that “experience is an indispensable clue to understanding” (Polanyi 1962, 150); an epistemological assumption that the process of knowing itself is experiential; an assumption concerning human nature that the human subject actively participates in the process of knowledge identification and that knowledge is not a predetermined “given”; a postmodern assumption that understanding is particular to the individual without favoring, *a priori*, a more general understanding (Aronowitz and Giroux 1991; Lather 1991); and an assumption that a particular understanding is always affected by its context (Elias and Merriam 1994).

Building on a subjective, interpretivist, and postmodern conceptual framework, this article reports the results of a year-long qualitative research study involving adult members of a large Protestant congregation. Twelve adult volunteers, eight women and four men, ranging in age from 25 to 65 years of age, participated by documenting their experiences of spirit for several months in a personal journal. At the midpoint of the study, each participant was interviewed, and the individual interviews were followed by two group interviews. The study concluded with each participant completing a written reflection paper. Data sources included verbatim transcriptions of journal entries, individual and group interviews, and final reflection papers. Data were analyzed using QSR NVivo software by constant comparison of data across subjects and sources in order to determine themes that described participants’ experiences (Miles and Huberman 1984). Through member checking participants clarified

the findings and ensured that the written interpretation corresponded to the participants' experiences (Lincoln and Guba 1985).

Findings include themes that emerged from the data analysis. The presentation of study findings is integrated with the literature as suggested by Bogden and Bilken (1992).

FINDINGS

Four key themes emerged from the data describing the phenomenon of participant experiences of spirit and the relationship of those experiences to peace education: depth in the encounter with spirit, soul as the locus of spiritual growth, dialogue as the language of spiritual communication, and the identification of the phenomenon of third space. For participants, the combination of these factors was often associated with experiences of peace that they described as transformative.

Depth in the Encounter with Spirit

The phenomenon of spirit has been described variously in the literature. Some authors view spiritual growth as transpersonal; that is, including but extending beyond the person and normal consciousness, focusing on "those deeper or higher aspects of human experience that transcend the ordinary and the average" (Scotton 1996, xviii). Participants in this study used the metaphor "deep" to describe their experiences of spiritual growth. As a metaphor, deep was not intended to imply a specific location, but rather as a way to map the complex reality of the spiritual encounter and tease out dimensions of meaning that may not be readily apparent (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). Reported experiences of spirit were associated with the process of "going deeper": a deeper experience of reflection, of asking "deep questions" or "thinking deeply" about something, becoming aware of "a deep mystery," or encountering "deep feelings and emotions." Sometimes participants spoke of a depth of meaning. Several spoke of the experience as one of "baring your soul," noting that "the process of going deeper is itself spiritual." Educators who write of spiritual dimensions of the learning experience also refer to depth as a part of the process. Depth is viewed as an intra-psychic phenomenon. Dirkx (1997, 81) for example, speaks of "nurturing soul in adult learning" through a process of "looking deeper into one's life experience."

For participants in this study a part of going deeper was to engage in reflection, to pause, and be open to discovery. As one participant said, "Most of my spiritual growth comes when I pause to think. I don't realize I'm growing or recognize that I'm growing because my life is so busy. So, spiritual growth for me occurs when I'm quiet." Participants in this study clearly attributed their "deep" experiences to spirit, even when they found it almost impossible to describe the experience. This echoes James' (1920, 420) description of the encounter with spirit as "a conversation with the unseen." Participants identified two dimensions to depth that are useful in describing the human encounter with spirit: the soul as the locus of spiritual growth and conversation or dialogue as the language of spiritual growth.

Soul as the Locus of Spiritual Growth

Participants connected the metaphor of depth to the word soul. For example, one participant described her soul as that "the deepest part of me that I have to be true to." For others spiritual encounter involved a process of "opening up your heart and your soul." Prayer was described by one as adding "rhythm to my soul," and "the place I feel closest to God." For participants, soul was important in describing that part of the human being most closely associated with the spirit. The word soul was used metaphorically to describe the locus or place of spiritual encounter for participants. Educators refer to soul as a part of the learning process. As Scott (1997, 49) says, "Engagement with the depth is at the soul level. It is when one dwells in the interior with the soul and goes down into the body (heart) that fundamental transformation occurs." Dirkx (1997, 80) writes of "learning through soul." Classically the term soul has been used to describe spiritual encounters in both Western and Eastern traditions (Miller 2000). Many authors speak of the difficulty in defining soul (Cousineau 1994). In this study soul refers to the deeper aspects of human life. One participant, herself a musician, likened spiritual growth to the experience of playing music, saying, "If you keep at it long enough, the music comes again. You begin to hear it in your soul, and then you can play it and live it." Soul describes the core unity of the personal and spiritual dimensions of the person, which in Western religious terms is rooted in a relationship with the divine. Today one might say the soul is where the spirit is reflected in a person's life and is seen in a person's emotions, senses, gestures, instincts and activities as well as ideas, thoughts and ideals. As Lauzon (1998, 322) says, "The soul embodies all that makes

us human.” The soul is the spiritual self, the subjective essence of the individual, or “the most enduring and intimate part of the self” (James 1950/1890, 296). The encounter of the soul with spirit often finds its expression in dialogue.

Dialogue as the Language of Spiritual Encounter

If soul represents the locus of spiritual encounter, dialogue may be the process that best describes the language of the encounter between one’s soul and the spirit. Although study participants rarely used the word dialogue, the type of conversation they described was very similar to descriptions of dialogue in the literature. Spiritual forms of dialogue had both an interpersonal and intrapersonal dimension.

Dialogue as interpersonal communication was often associated with the experience of spirit by participants. The human encounter with spirit is fundamentally concerned with communication. One participant said, “Communication is the key to spiritual experience. . . . God touches me through other people.” “Spiritual growth is like a conversation,” another said, a “deep spirit-filled conversation.” As Jackson (1998, 207) said, “Soul reveals itself, not in the deep recesses of the psyche nor in the extra-personal world of history and culture, but in forms of encounter, interaction, exchange and dialogue in everyday life.” In the literature, dialogue is often viewed as a way to build interpersonal understanding. Dialogue is an activity “directed toward discovery and new understanding, which stands to improve the knowledge, insight or sensitivity of its participants” (Burbules 1993, xii). Sidorkin (1999, 19) characterizes the dialogical experience as one involving “mutuality, directness, presentness, intensity and ineffability.” *Mutuality* was also an important part of participant descriptions of spiritual growth. As one participant said, “The more intimate my relationship with God is, the deeper my spiritual experience.” *Directness* or honesty was also noted as important. For participants spiritual growth is associated with “telling it like it is,” and being authentic: “You have to be honest.” *Presentness* or focus was identified by study participants as important. Presentness is attending to and focusing on an immediate experience. As one participant said, “I’ve got to pay attention, wake up and notice what God is trying to tell me.” Participants associated spiritual encounter with their experiences of slowing down and listening, as one said, “. . . when I turn my thoughts off and become more aware of God.” Encounters with spirit were often described as *intense and emotional*. As one participant reported, “I was overwhelmed by the

experience. When it happened I just broke down and cried." An experience of *ineffability* was common as participants struggled to describe the unknown dimensions of the encounter with spirit as "a mystery" that is "beyond words." These findings extend the meaning of dialogue to include spirit as a dialogue partner and suggest that the spiritual encounter has important dialogical elements that can be transformative in a person's life.

In this study dialogue was more than a communication tool and involved more than human interaction. Participants also reported intrapersonal conversation with spirit that was suggestive of a deeper understanding of the dialogical process, times "when the Lord is interacting with me," as one participant said. These experiences involved deep sharing and inquiry. One participant explained: "To go deeper spiritually you have to bare your soul." Another described her conversation with God as a time when she "just shared what was on my heart honestly and openly and then just listened. Sometimes it was deep." Participants also suggested that dialogue could involve a communion with nature, inanimate objects, and spiritual realities in ways similar to what Bohm (1996) has described. Although the importance of language was widely noted by participants in this study, they implied that the language of soul included more than words. "Speech, music, art, all gestures, singing, dancing, laughing, crying, painting and sculpture are considered language" (Clark 1997, 17). Images such as a cross or sunset, or purely physical activity, were the context for an encounter with spirit that communicated in ways that participants said were difficult to describe. Dialogue can occur between people and also in silence within a single mind, "between perspectives and modalities within a single awareness" (Grudin 1996, ix). Participants spoke paradoxically of spiritual encounter as being intensely individual yet highly relational, an experience of profound insight, yet "beyond words." Spiritual encounters often point toward an "unseen aspect of human life" that "does not have a material location." In a sense this spiritual dialogue is neither "within nor without an individual," rather it is "between self and other" (Sidorkin 1999, 16).

Dialogue is not simply an exchange of information, but rather an engagement that enacts meaning and has an effect on those participating. Buber (1987/1958, 6) asserts that when a person, an "I," meets another with authenticity and compassion, they encounter a "Thou" and "every particular Thou is a glimpse through to the eternal Thou." Participants reported that at times when they encountered another person, issue, place, or thing with respect and understanding, they

also encountered spirit, and it was the encounter with spirit that was fundamental to their transformative experiences. This spiritual dimension is known by various names. Participants in this study commonly used terms God, Jesus, or spirit. Whatever form this unseen spiritual reality took, it represented the ground of their being, or as one participant said, “the center of my life.” Such an encounter often led to a profound experience of change.

These experiences of change resulted in the transformation of perspective, lifestyle, belief, assumption, and attitude in both sudden and cumulative ways. In their encounters with spirit, participants reported changes that seemed to involve an ontological shift that transcended traditional subject/object boundaries. The encounter led to a different consciousness or sense of self that participants described as including a greater appreciation of difference and a lessening of combative attitudes. The story of one participant is illustrative:

I was living in Pensacola in 1985. I was probably in my 20s. I'm 42 now, and it was specific. It happened in church. I was singing a hymn. Suddenly I was overwhelmed by feelings of sadness. Perhaps I felt that way because I was overwhelmed by my responsibilities as a mom and a wife in a brand new town away from old friends and family. As I was singing the words, the words just seemed to jump off the page and into my heart. They were addressing the innermost thoughts and feelings. Speaking directly to me as if a person was talking to me. It's kind of hard to explain, but I believe that God spoke those words of compassion and love and understanding to me in that place. His presence was so strong that I sat down and didn't hear another word. I went home, and I told my husband that I was going to join the church. Since then I have been a different person.

This experience resulted in changes that included lessening of resentment toward a family member, the ability to forgive a wrong, and a greater ability to see the value of other very different perspectives. The participant reflected on her experience, saying, “It's like I could feel God. I just knew God was with me, and that was the first time in my whole life that I had ever felt that way. An incredible peace seemed to settle on me.”

Other participants reported encounters with the Spirit in contexts outside of church. One woman who was present when her husband died unexpectedly related her experience:

When Bill died, there was this big light around him. I could feel the presence of a power much greater than me. That was the biggest single thing that's ever happened to me. That was the only time I've ever heard a voice, well

maybe not actually a voice, but boy it grabbed me and something passed between us. Whatever it was, it gave me a sense of peace and calm that got me through it [that experience].

This story illustrates a common finding: participants described their experiences of spirit as a conversation. Although most participants described their experiences of spirit as conversational, in virtually all cases the conversation was non-audible. One participant related an experience that occurred shortly after the death of a family member:

It was just so—I don't want to say bizarre, but it was like that. Very curious. I was particularly close to my grandmother and we had a special relationship. It was three days after she passed away. I was struggling to understand and deal with her death. I woke up in the middle of the night wide-awake. More awake than I ever remember being before. I went downstairs and there was an odd. . . it was as if there was an awareness of something. I don't know if it was a dream or my imagination or what. I had this feeling, a kind of strange and comforting feeling both disturbing and peaceful all at the same time. It was frightening in some ways and yet eerie in some ways. It was a calmer sort of peacefulness or presence, a special experience. I didn't quite know what to make of it. It wasn't life changing, but it helped me. It was like something or someone was counseling me saying, 'It's okay; it's going to be okay.' And in a strange kind of way, it was. I've never forgotten.

In this instance, Will, a male participant, described a numinous experience characterized by a sense of a supernatural spiritual presence—a communication without words that led to a change in perspective.

Although no two participant experiences were the same, many shared common elements: a sense of new awareness of a greater power that participants attributed to an experience of God's Spirit, given in the midst of life experiences and often during times of challenge that resulted in changes they associated with peace. Participants often described their experiences in conversational terms, but then quickly pointed out that the experience was not like a normal interpersonal conversation. Participants associated these experiences with times of new insight, experiences of forgiveness, and changes in relationships and activities.

Third Space

Although relationships were often positive contextual factors in participants' spiritual growth, at times they represented a kind of "negative catalyst" because they were difficult and unpleasant. Divorce

represents one example. Two participants told of very difficult and painful relationships with former spouses and how these were contexts for encountering a form of spiritual peace in their lives. The relationship, a “miserable experience” in itself, was like a catalyst where a deep spiritual insight became clear. As Angela said:

One of the most vivid moments for me when I really felt like God was literally speaking to me to give me a direct answer happened at the time when I realized my marriage was at a horrible state and that we would probably separate.

As she related the experience, she picked up a book and began reading. During her experience of reading, God spoke to her and gave her an answer to her problem. That answer involved forgiveness, as she said, “Forgiveness for him, but also for me.” Angela was convinced that her answer was a part of an encounter with God—a kind of conversation without words—yet it came through the act of reading. Another person who stopped to read the same book might have had a very different experience. They might have read the text and had no insight. Or they might have read the text, perceived its importance, but not attributed the insight to anything beyond their mental process or simple good fortune. Angela exhibited a desire to “look deeper” into her life experience. In that depth she experienced a dialogical encounter that she perceived as transcending her perceptions of her situation. As she said, “I had a strange sense of peace even in the chaos and pain of the moment.” What was distinct for participants in this study was their field of perception. Their epistemology or way of knowing extended beyond the realm of sight and sense (Kelsey 1972). This different way of knowing offered the possibility of a different perception, a third perspective, and that perception, at times, led to change. As Angela said, “It was really hard, but from that point I saw things differently.”

In this study participants reported experiences of spirit as a phenomenon that bears significant similarities to the concept of “third space” (Bhabha 1994). Third space is that place where there is a shared space, an interconnection and flow between different spaces (Todd 1997). Third space refers to the place where identity is not a given, but negotiated and enacted in the context of difference. It is a place of hybridity and liminality; a place of change and transformation (English 2005). It is the concept of third that suggests new and different possibilities extending beyond present reality or the common polarities of either/or. Third space holds the promise of peace.

First space is my reality, perception, belief, and vision. Second space is difference perceived in interaction with a second party, a perception that is often associated with ethnocentrism, orthodoxy, and righteousness, and accompanied by feelings of anxiety, fear, anger, and conflict, which can be combative and violent. The phenomenon of peace is an experience involving a perception of third space; in this study a spiritual phenomenon interrupting and interpenetrating the interaction of first space and second space, often transforming the relationship between the two. This interaction is often described in ways that bear remarkable resemblance to dialogical descriptions of human encounters but are said to occur in the depths of the human soul. Often accompanying this experience are moments of heightened awareness, experiences of reflection, instances of physical movement and activity, and a sense of making connections with other aspects of life, although in no particular order. The encounter with third space is often attributed to God and associated with artifacts, signs, symbols, words, and feelings. In spite of its association with these more concrete phenomena, the encounter itself is often perceived as ineffable. This encounter with God, experienced as an interruption to more normal binary interactions, is often associated with transformative changes in perspective, attitude, belief, and behaviors that are described by participants as instilling peace. The concept of third space in the spiritual encounter provided a distinct awareness that was a catalyst in the formation of different perspectives and decisions to change behaviors. These changes have significant implications for the practice of religious education.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The purpose of the study was to better understand how adult church members experience the phenomenon of spirit in their lives and the implications of their experience for peacemaking as a form of religious education.

Perception was foundational to the spiritual encounter. The phenomenon of spiritual encounter was powerful and formative for participants in this study. If this phenomenon is so important according to the participants in this study, why is it seldom recognized as an integral part of adult religious education and education for peace? Cranton (1994) suggested that learning is dependent on perception. James (1950/1890, vol. 1, 444) was even more emphatic, "The only things which we commonly see are those which we perceive."

Perception is a foundational concept in psychology and refers to the process of selecting, acquiring, organizing, and interpreting sensory information (Casey 1991). According to May (1982), willingness is an important part of the spiritual experience. May suggests that our over-emphasis on willful control often excludes the possibility for perceiving the spiritual. Worldview and basic scientific assumptions often block the perception of spirit. Merleau-Ponty (1962/1945, 229) linked spirit with perception, saying that, "We are unaware of it only because scientific knowledge shifts the center of gravity of experience, so that we have unlearned how we see, hear, and generally speaking, feel." Focused on sensing only a limited spectrum of data, we simply do not see the spiritual realities before us. Perception in this study was often viewed as a gift given in mysterious ways and associated with considerable efforts in reflection and activity. This study suggests that lack of perception may be one reason that the phenomenon of spirit may have played so little role in education for peace or religious education.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ADULT RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Findings from this study suggest spiritual encounter is a form of adult learning that leads to changes in perspective and actions in ways that are more inclusive and less combative. The spiritual encounter was experienced as a heuristic process involving a powerful perception of spirit encountered in a third space (Bhahba 1994). Most adult religious education is focused on transmitting content or knowledge based on received norms, doctrines, and customs as a part of formal learning experiences. Study participants reported powerful and formative experiences of spirit often occurring in incidental, informal, and non-formal ways.

Often the religious education process pays scant attention to the spiritual dimensions of education for peace (Turay 2005), focusing rather on discrete skills such as conflict management, or historical or theological considerations. In adult religious education generally the spiritual dimensions of learning are often downplayed in favor of the transmission of knowledge or skills, and formal approaches to learning are favored over more informal approaches. Assisting people in becoming more conscious of their encounters with spirit and the practical implications of those encounters for faith and life could extend the scope and effectiveness of adult religious education as well as the effectiveness of peace education.

Echoing the work of English (2000) and others, this study also points to the need for greater attention to the informal and non-formal ways adults learn faith. Developing skills in attending and perception as well as dialogic skills in questioning and reflection (Miller 2000) could help strengthen adult learning in the church. Even in the context of formal adult learning classes that utilize specified curriculum and objectives, awareness of the potential for informal and incidental learning can extend the possibilities for learning in new ways as teachers and students explore unexpected insights and questions. To be effective, however, such questions and possibilities have to be acknowledged, accenting the importance of the role of the teacher as facilitator.

The study also highlights the importance of heuristic learning in adult religious education and in spiritual formation generally. The Bible is filled with stories about how the spirit interrupts the lives of individuals, changing perspectives and behaviors in unexpected ways, sometimes contrary to the formal received religious traditions of faith. Openness to the unexpected is a fundamental aspect of learning that is often overlooked in formal learning environments (Palmer 1983).

The study points to the intrapersonal effectiveness of interactive learning, and especially dialogue in spiritual formation for peace. This suggests the potential for interactive, dialogical forms of learning in religious education more generally that could strengthen the potential for participants' encounter with God as well as each other. Increased attention to awareness and perception, questioning, and openness to the Spirit's presence in learning, whatever the topic of the class, could also enrich the heuristic dimensions of participants' learning.

Humility is the virtue that allows us to pay attention and perceive things in different ways. Palmer (1983, 108) links humility and understanding, a metaphorical process of "standing under" a phenomenon. Humility is "an attitude towards facts and messages outside oneself . . . openness to experience as well as to criticism . . . a sensitivity and responsiveness to the needs and desires of others" (Deutsch 1966, 230). In an age of escalating conflict and violence, increasing participant interest in the experience of spirit, and need for more effective forms of adult religious education, perhaps it is time to encourage humility while attending more closely to a pedagogy of spiritual discernment grounded in the life experience of believers.

CONCLUSION

Peacemaking in this study includes a dialogical awareness of and encounter with spirit as a third party that results in changes in perspectives, relationships, and actions in both sudden and cumulative ways often associated with a sense of greater inclusivity, more appreciation of difference, and decreased combative attitudes and actions. Participants viewed the intrapersonal dialogical spiritual dimension of peace as foundational in dealing with interpersonal and intrapersonal conflict as well as their contextual experiences of structural violence. Findings support the increasing attention given in the adult learning literature to the importance of discernment, non-verbal and non-rational expression, contextual learning, and reflection (Cranton and Roy 2003).

Even within the sample represented by this study, limited in number and cultural diversity, findings suggest a wide variety of spiritual learning experiences many associated with an experience of peace and underscore the importance of an expanded conceptual framework for peace education that would more effectively address issues of spirituality. This framework extends common notions of the culture of peace foregrounding the importance of spiritual encounter, and has implications for the pedagogy of adult religious education especially in the parish suggesting closer attention to the phenomenon of spiritual encounter. In an age of increasing religious violence and contested educational practice, transformational dimensions of the experience of spirit offer opportunity for a new perspective, a more inclusive vision for life for individuals, groups, and congregations that holds promise for making an important contribution to the reduction of violence in the world.

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