Democracy & Education

Democratic Foundations for Spiritually Responsive Pedagogy

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Abstract

Spirituality has been identified as an important component of democratic education by influential scholars such as Dewey, Freire, hooks, and Noddings. However, many teachers in the United States do not engage openly with a framework for understanding, organizing, and integrating pedagogical knowledge of spirituality within the context of culturally conscious social justice education. Drawing from an analysis of the works of Dewey, Noddings, Freire, and hooks and using a critical construct of spirituality that emphasizes inquiry, practical experience, meaning making, and awareness of interconnectedness, I argue that spiritually responsive pedagogy is a vital element of emancipatory, culturally responsive education in public schools.

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THE PURPOSE OF this essay is to disrupt practitioner silence around spirituality by analyzing the works of four influential democratic educators on the topic of teaching with a spiritually responsive pedagogy. Use of the term *spiritual* may be problematic due to its discursive ambiguity. However, within the literature on democratic pedagogy, there is some guidance for educators who seek to incorporate a spiritually responsive pedagogy. Eloquent voices on democratic and critical social justice pedagogy, such as those of Dewey, Noddings, Freire, and hooks, explicitly included spirituality as relevant to the enactment of democratic education. Yet often talk of spirituality feels taboo in the context of public schooling in the United States, to the extent that the spiritual content of Dewey, Noddings, Freire, and hooks has been for the most part obscured from the dominant discourse on democratic education.[1]

It is my view that democratic educators should directly engage with an emancipatory construct of spirituality as enthusiastically as they engage with other equally significant topics of critical social justice pedagogy. Such engagement is necessary as a political act that challenges the aggressive binary of mind/soul foisted upon education by Western male epistemic privilege wherein students and teachers who experience their spirituality as central are expected to leave this part of their humanity at the schoolhouse entrance. In this essay, I frame spiritually responsive pedagogy as a component of critical culturally responsive teaching; insomuch as we expect that democratic educators be culturally responsive, then educators need to be spiritually responsive.

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1   For example, Kristjánsson (2007, pp. 137–138) noted that the English translation of Freire's (1973) *Education for Critical Consciousness* omitted original text that referenced the spiritual aspects of Freirean pedagogy.

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Tisdell, who has explored the role of emancipatory spirituality (Tolliver & Tisdell, 2002) in educational contexts for almost 20 years, characterized the ways in which some people respond to the notion of situating spiritualy in education:

> *"What do you mean by spirituality?" This is a question I've often heard in the past decade as I tell people of my research interest in the role of spirituality in learning in adult and higher education. Typically, there are three follow-up responses. The first is often another question: "Is spirituality the same as religion?" The second is a look (often from other academics) that seems to indicate they wonder if I'm some sort of new age flake. The third is something like, "Oh, that's fascinating!" which often results in a continued conversation where the person shares a significant spiritual experience and what was learned from it. (Tisdell, 2008, p. 27)*

Tisdell captured the difficulty of addressing spirituality in the context of public schools: the persistence of a cultural and historical dominant narrative that treats spirituality as a subjective, unknowable construct. The themes arising from that hegemonic discourse include a conflation of spirituality with religiosity, aversion manifesting as suspicious judgment, and enthusiastic recognition followed by risk-taking through personal disclosure.

"What do you mean by spirituality?" Like Tisdell, I have heard this question often in the course of my work as a democratic educator curious about what it means and looks like to see spirituality as a pedagogical resource. Outing myself as an educator-scholar interested in applying knowledge about spirituality as part of my pedagogy feels akin to outing myself as a queer advocate for LGBTQ students in K–12 schools. Both disclosures activate my awareness of the personal power that comes from feeling pride about a core aspect of my pedagogical commitments. At the same time, I am acutely aware of my vulnerability in sharing aspects of my teaching identity that are not always embraced or understood in most of my professional contexts.

The similarity between the two forms of disclosure does not end with a description of my internal experience. As has been true historically—less so currently—for LGBTQ issues in education, addressing spirituality's relevance in education occurs within the context of a dominant narrative that demands the silencing of matters spiritual (Dillard, 2006, 2013; hooks, 1999, 2003; Tisdell, 2003). Those of us who hope to openly address how spiritualy is pedagogically relevant need encouragement through the examples of other educators who are willing to expose their own vulnerability and power (Palmer, 1998). In this sense, we give and receive permission not in the more conventional sense of the word *permission*—which suggests a hierarchal power structure—but in expressions of solidarity and acknowledgment. In writing about how his own spiritual faith energized his political work, Freire (1997) told a friend "the struggle for hope is permanent, and it becomes intensified when one realizes it is not a solitary struggle" (p. 106). My intent in this essay is not to offer a comprehensive theory of systemic change with which to implement a pedagogical framework guided by the spiritual paradigm, although I

acknowledge that such work is necessary from a pragmatic perspective. That said, the appropriate change theory must include risky dialogue (Dillard, 2006) that is grounded in political trust (Allen, 2004; Parker, 2010) and a courageous willingness to sit with the many paradoxes inherent in a conversation about operationalizing a spiritually responsive pedagogy (Lingley, 2014; Palmer, 1998). I hope this piece will contribute to that ongoing dialogue.[2]

In this essay, I demystify the potential of a spiritually responsive pedagogy in relationship to democratic education. I posit that democratic educators who possess an explicit grasp on pedagogical strategies for integrating spirituality are positioned for social action capable of disrupting the marginalizing expectation that student and teacher spirituality should be excluded from schooling. The process of choosing to openly address spirituality as a component of social justice education can be fraught with negotiations of vulnerability and power. This essay is intended to support educators who are engaged in those emotional-spiritual-political negotiations by reviewing how four influential democratic and critical educators—Dewey, Noddings, Freire, and hooks—argued for the inclusion of spiritually responsive pedagogy in their foundational work on democratic and critical social justice education. I intend to illuminate their positions on the democratic relevance of spirituality because these educator-scholars represent authoritative voices in democratic education in the 20th and 21st centuries. As such, their perspectives on spirituality and democratic pedagogy lend credibility.

Many pieces on spirituality in education begin with a definition of spirituality, given the relative lack of scholarly and popular consensus, as reflected by the inquiry "What do you mean by spirituality?" The defining elements of spirituality—as I see them for the purpose of a pedagogical framework—are an engagement in a search for purpose and meaning; an orientation of faith in regards to something larger than oneself (including, but not limited to, community); a capacity for self-aware consciousness; experiences of awe, love, and transcendence; an interest in ethical or moral commitments; and a disposition of wonder and inquiry. However, because I situate a construct of spirituality within the context of my analysis of the views of Dewey, Noddings, Freire, and hooks, a more substantive definition will follow—rather than introduce—the analysis. In the definitional discussion, I provide a critical construct of a spiritually responsive pedagogical framework to be integrated within the practice of democratic and critical social justice educators in secular school settings.

Spirituality and Democratic Education

I frame spiritualy responsive pedagogy as a form of cultural and political critique to emphasize the role of public schools as mutually constitutive of the cultural meaning-making systems

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[2] I am not suggesting that *all* democratic or critical educators shy away from the topic of spirituality in the context of education. An example of a recent, profoundly moving academic conversation in which spirituality was integrated into critical pedagogy is Hannegan-Martinez, Johnson, Sacramento, & Tintiango-Cubales (2015).

within which they operate (Kincheloe, 2008). The political aspect of education explicitly inclusive of spirituality is central to my argument for the necessity of spiritually responsive pedagogy. Scholars such as Dantley (2007), Dillard (2006), Miller (1997), Palmer (1998, 2011), and Bai (2001, 2009) have addressed the political implications of schooling in democratic societies that do not explicitly acknowledge the spiritual dimension of learning. For example, Miller (1997) argued "that modern schooling is a spiritually devastating form of engineering that is hostile to human values and democratic ideals," (p. 4). These scholars, in diverse ways, have called on schools in democratic societies to be accountable to their students—especially students who are oppressed through schooling practices that do not acknowledge spirituality—through a more holistic worldview, namely, one that includes spirituality. An implication of their work is a rationale for all democratic educators to study the spiritual elements of foundational analyses of the role of education in a democratic society. In the following section, I explore Dewey's arguments for the relevance of spirituality in the context of democratic teaching and learning as well as the arguments of a contemporary democratic pedagogue, Noddings. Following this review, I analyze the pedagogical relationship between spirituality and critical social justice education, focusing on how that theme is manifest in the work of Freire and hooks. After describing how spirituality plays an explicit role in the democratic pedagogy of Dewey, Noddings, Freire, and hooks, I introduce Thayer-Bacon's democratic theoretical framework as a pragmatic lens with which to situate the relevance of spiritually responsive pedagogy.

John Dewey and Nel Noddings

Dewey (1934) explicitly argued for the relevance of spirituality in democratic societies. He invited educators to explore a construct of spirituality that emphasized inquiry, practical experience, and awareness of commonalities in the interests of promoting the democratic way of life. He distinguished between *religion* as an unquestioning affiliation to a specific doctrine/set of practices and *religious* as a descriptor for experiences of transcendence, connection, and faith. In *A Common Faith* (1934), Dewey proposed "the emancipation of elements and outlooks that may be called religious" (p. 8), in the interests of utilizing those (spiritual) elements to promote liberal democratic ideals of individual freedom, rational inquiry, and a universal common good. Rockefeller's (1992) analysis of the spiritual implications of Dewey's democratic philosophy pointed to how living a democratic way of life had the effect of cultivating spiritual growth: "One finds here in Dewey a theory of what might be called a secular democratic form of spiritual practice" (p. 182). Dewey saw the relationship between spirituality and democracy as reciprocal. Spiritual practices—such as cultivating sympathetic understanding, focusing on connections, and fostering an orientation toward ethical behaviors—support democracy at all levels. A commitment on the part of a society and an individual to sustain governance practices that emphasize a sense of a greater good, shared values, and the full development of human potential support the spiritual growth of individuals, in or out of specific religious affiliations.

Dewey rejected the Western dualism of secular and spiritual; he viewed this dualism as not only false but also dehumanizing and unpragmatic in its sequestration of spiritual elements of human life from everyday experiences and responsibilities (Rockefeller, 1992). Put in the context of public schooling, it is both unrealistic and counterproductive to the stated aims of democratic education to expect students to tuck away their spiritual aspects before crossing the threshold of a classroom (Palmer, 1998, 2011). As I address in more depth later, attempts to segregate student spirituality are detrimental for students whose cultural identities reflect a deeply integrated sense of spirituality (hooks, 2003). For these students, educational experiences that require splitting off a core aspect of their humanity are distinctly undemocratic (e.g., Garett, Bellon-Harn, Torres-Rivera, Garrett, & Roberts, 2003).

Dewey's (1916) conceptualization of the role of education in a democratic society was offered as a historically contingent counter-narrative to the supremacy of industrialized education that dominated the expansion of formal, public systems of schooling in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He emphasized democracy as a process within which education has a role in cultivating individual competencies and dispositions—inquiry and dialogue, for example—that support a "mode of associated living" (p. 87). A democracy, in other words, is more than merely the sum of its constituents; its health depends upon the continuous growth of the constituents: "the criterion of the value of school education is the extent in which it creates a desire for continued growth and supplies means for making the desire effective in fact" (Dewey, 1916, p. 53). In Dewey's theory of education, both the learner and the educative environment are equally significant within the context of democratic education.

Inquiry, as a disposition and as a primary learning activity, is Dewey's anchor for educative experiences. Dewey may not have addressed the impact of unequal power relationships manifest in his idealized, face-to-face interactions among learners (Thayer-Bacon, 2008). However, his emphasis on democratizing pedagogy that privileged active, engaged, student-centered inquiry over passive compliance to fixed knowledge reflected a similar emphasis on inquiry made by scholars working in the field of spirituality as a developmental domain (e.g., Benson, Scales, Syvertsen, & Roehlkepartain, 2012; Feldman, 2008). In that field, the process of spiritual development is conceived of as active, conscious engagement, not passive acceptance.[3] The primacy of inquiry in both democratic education and spiritual development is one of the richest resources for educators seeking to implement spiritually responsive pedagogy.

Dewey's invitation to situate spirituality within democratic pedagogy has been embraced by a significant contemporary scholar in democratic and holistic education, Noddings. Noddings has included pedagogical acknowledgment of spirituality as part of

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3   Note that even though some conceptualize part of spiritual growth as a state of surrender or an acceptance of a difficulty, the process of spiritual growth is not characterized by contemporary psychologists as passive compliance. This characteristic of spiritual development is one of the factors distinguishing it from religiosity (Feldman, 2008; Hamilton & Jackson, 1998; King & Roeser, 2009).

her work since the early 1980s. Interviewed in 1998 for *Educational Leadership*'s issue on spirituality in education, Noddings argued for the place of spirituality in public education by linking spiritual and religious issues to educational goals such as fostering critical thinking, stimulating and responding to student interest in existential questions, meeting the needs of diverse learners, and promoting critical cultural literacy (Halford, 1998/9).

In that interview, as well as in her other work (e.g., 2006), Noddings directly confronted the often-invoked issue of the First Amendment's prohibition of state-sponsored religion by advising educators to discern between activities that are verboten and those that are not. Noddings (in Halford, 1998/9) offered school administrators a rationale for acknowledging the spiritual aspects of teaching and learning that is grounded in Dewey's emphasis on the role of dialogue in democratic schools: "The administrator's role is to open up the avenues of discourse and to learn enough about spirituality and religion so that he or she knows exactly what educators can't do. That leaves so much that they *can* do" (Halford, 1998/9, p. 30). In her view, it is educators' ignorance of the limitations of the First Amendment that accounts for some of the fear about responding to student spirituality in a school context.

For Noddings, the consequences of ignoring spirituality are serious because of the potential for this exclusion to extinguish vitality, creativity, hope, and engagement as learners suppress a core aspect of their humanity in order to adapt to a restrictive educational environment. In her seminal text *The Challenge to Care in Schools*, Noddings (2005) reflected, "The more I think about the centrality of spirituality in our lives, the more concerned I become about its shameful neglect in the public undertaking we call 'education'" (p. 84). In her characterization of the absence of spiritually responsive pedagogy Noddings used strong language—"shameful neglect"—that clearly challenged the assumption of a neutral absence and reframes it as intentional exclusion.

A compelling feature of Noddings' (2013) recent work in relation to a discussion on the relevance of spirituality in democratic education has been her characterization of spirituality as a necessary component of education moving forward into the 21st century. In *Education and Democracy in the 21st Century*, Noddings (2013) summarized Dewey's (and her own) philosophical project as "starting with a realistic view of where we are and looking ahead to a society more appreciative of interdependence, to a fuller recognition of individual differences and diversity, to education for fuller, more satisfying relational lives" (pp. 12–13). Her work has been less of a neoholism as much as it has been a feminist and pragmatic reflection of the influence of postsecular (Habermas, 2008; Taylor, 2007), social constructivist (Foucault, 1972), and critical theoretical (Giroux, 1983) thought in the late 20th century. Significantly, Noddings's vision of democracy and education has reflected some of the same qualities identified by developmental psychologists as part of spiritual development: awareness of interconnections, experiences of transcendence of self, acceptance of paradox, intrapersonal integration, and the application of interpretive frameworks to find meaning and purpose in one's existence.

Noddings—a self-described secularist—seized the opportunity presented by the contemporary reconceptualization of spirituality as a heuristic construct, with its weakening ties to religion, to articulate how the inclusion of spirituality in education is essential for teaching and learning that embodies democratic principles.

Paulo Freire and bell hooks
The work of critical pedagogues Freire and hooks has illustrated a manifestation of the ascension of the postcolonial perspective, which calls for the inclusion of spiritually responsive pedagogy (e.g., L. T. Smith, 1999). In this section, I offer an account of the lives and work of these two democratic educators as exemplars for embodying spiritual worldviews in one's political-pedagogical praxis.

Freire (1997) described his faith as a resource with which to energize, sustain, and give hope to his political activities. However, he confessed in a posthumous publication, "I do not feel very comfortable speaking about my faith. At least, I do not feel as comfortable as I do when speaking about my political choice, my utopia, and my pedagogical dreams" (p. 104). Freire was not alone in his discomfort with directly addressing the relationship between his spirituality and his political activism. Boyd (2012) and Kristjánsson (2007) found in their reviews of the literature on Freire that few North American scholars included analysis or even mention of the relationship between Freire's faith and his political-pedagogical theory. Kristjánsson noted the willingness of critical scholars to explicitly connect Freire's work to Marxist theory, yet "an acknowledgment of the influence of theology and Christian humanism is conspicuous by its absence . . . This is noteworthy in light of Freire's own claims" (p. 136).

A look at the ways in which Freire's construct of spirituality influenced his critical social justice work is helpful as part of an argument for the incorporation of spiritually responsive pedagogy as a resource for social justice educators. When Freire (1997) reflected on his spirituality, the significance of this aspect of his life was clear:

> I do want to mention . . . the fundamental importance of my faith in my struggle for overcoming an oppressive reality and for building a less ugly society, one that is less evil and more humane. All arguments in favor of the legitimacy of my struggle for a more people-oriented society have their deepest roots in my faith. (p. 104)

Freire's religious background as a Roman Catholic in Brazil influenced his spiritual development. The influence of Catholic doctrine regarding service, responding to a higher calling, justice for all, and prophetic vision can be seen in Freire's emphasis on working in community with people experiencing economic poverty and political oppression, as well as his lifelong commitment to a vision of humanization through dialogue and praxis.

Praxis, Freire's central pedagogical framework for critical consciousness, involves three elements: (a) an internal process of cultivating awareness of self and other as subjects through theory,

practice, reflection, and action; (b) an external process of engaging in genuine dialogue for the purpose of transformative learning; and (c) a commitment to situating both of these processes within a historicized struggle for social justice. These elements reflect the self-reflective, cultural, dialogic, redemptive, and political aspects of spirituality invoked by others engaged in the work of articulating a definition of spirituality in an educational context (Dantley, 2003; Dillard, 2006). Freire (1984) spoke of educators needing to undergo an internal process of death of an old self that was riddled with notions of intellectual, political, economic, and social superiority. His Easter metaphor used the Catholic promise of a rebirth through service to others and to a higher calling. Freire's spiritual worldview framed his pedagogical emphasis on horizontal relationships between teachers and learners in which knowledge was coconstructed within interpersonal dialogue grounded in love, trust, humility, and faith (Freire, 2000).

The purpose of a review of the spiritual perspectives that informed Freire's pedagogical and political work is not to argue for critical social justice teachers in the United States to uncritically herald the specific religious dogma that informed his spirituality. Recall Dewey's (1934) insistence on distinguishing between religion (unquestioning affiliation to doctrine) and religious (as a descriptor for spiritual experiences) in order to leverage spirituality as a resource for democratization. Freire (1997, 2000) rejected fundamentalist Christian dogma that simply reinforced the plight of the oppressed through either the promise of salvation after death or the charitable "good works" that reinforced the privilege of some at the expense of others. The purposes of calling forth the connections between Freire's spirituality and his pedagogy are twofold: as a demonstration of the significance of spirituality to the person who is perhaps the most influential scholar on critical social justice education in the late 20th century and as a concrete example of a pedagogical relationship between personal spirituality and democratic education. This raises the issue of the practical implications of the relationship between an educator's spiritual perspectives and her or his democratic pedagogy. The issue of how an educator relates with, or doesn't, an ontology that includes a spiritual element is vital to a spiritually responsive pedagogy that can be utilized in a public school context and will be revisited later in this essay.

hooks's position on the relationship between spirituality and critical social justice education is similar to the position of Freire in that she frames her spirituality as both a rationale for her political work and as a resource for transcending and surviving political oppression (1999, 2003, 2010). In *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope* (2003), she identified her spiritual practices as essential to her work as a liberationist educator:

> I began to use the vision of spiritual self-recovery in relationship to the political self-recovery of colonized and oppressed peoples. I did this to see the points of convergence between the effort to live in the spirit and the effort of oppressed peoples to renew their spirits—to find themselves again in suffering and in resistance. (pp. 161–162)

In hooks's (2003) account of her spiritual development from the Christian mysticism of her Southern youth to her adult adoption of Buddhist principles as taught by Thich Nhat Hanh and Chōgyam Trungpa Rinpoche, she made visible the threads that connected her political, intellectual, and pedagogical aspirations with the evolution of her spiritual practices: "To me, it seemed only natural that a black person living in our nation, which was slowly turning away from exploitation and oppression based on race, would understand a spirituality based on the [Buddhist] premise that 'all life is suffering'" (p. 176). A theme throughout her descriptions of her spiritual practices has been how her spirituality serves as a homing beacon in the midst of situations that threaten to dislocate her from herself, her identity, and her power. Although she often was aware of the expectation to minimize or silence her spirituality in academic classrooms, she found that "honestly naming spirituality as a force strengthening my capacity to resist enabled me to stand within centers of dominator culture and courageously offer alternatives" (hooks, 2003, p. 181). What has been noteworthy of hooks's reflection has been her emphasis on the power unleashed through her "honestly naming spirituality": hooks's work raised the following important questions, which I hope will be taken up in the responses to this article: In what ways do well-meaning democratic educators disempower students by refusing to acknowledge spirituality as a source of strength, identity, connection, and meaning? Why does the honest naming of spirituality seem obvious for educators who speak from African, Latina, and indigenous perspectives?

In addition to describing how her own spirituality influenced her commitment to challenging dominator culture and supporting her capacity for doing so, hooks provided spiritually centered strategies for cultivating democratic classrooms of trust, love, respect, and authentic engagement. Like Dewey (1934), Noddings (2006), and Freire (1997), hooks (2003, 2010) emphasized the theoretical and pragmatic distinctions between religion and spirituality as a strategy for giving public school teachers permission to engage in the spiritual aspects of classroom-based learning. She also emphasized the aspects of spirituality that encompass awareness of interconnection with other people. In her stories about her critically conscious classrooms, hooks (1994, 2003) often recounted moments when students experiencing privilege transcended their blindness to how their gender identity, skin color, and/or economic status have afforded them opportunities and a sense of belonging through their awareness of how others have been denied access and marginalized. As others have argued (Orr, 2005; Ryoo, Crawford, Moreno, & McLaren, 2009), students experiencing privilege *may* access their awareness of their privilege through a rational process of critical reflection, but the more subtle, subconscious processes of prejudice, fear, and hatred are neglected if they are not also accessed through spiritually centered activities such as deep listening, contemplation, mindfulness, intuitive art, lovingkindness meditation, and poetry. hooks did not necessarily position spirituality as more important than rationality when cultivating democratic classrooms; she argued, as do I, that neglecting the spiritual aspects of the processes of oppression

renders a critical social justice education that is incomplete. Accordingly, in my argument for a spiritually responsive pedagogy that benefits democratic education, I characterize the framework as one that complements but does not replace the rational foundations of democratic pedagogy.

Despite the call by Freire and hooks—two leading critical social justice educators—for democratic pedagogy that includes and acknowledges a spiritual component, the field of democratic education has been slow and/or reluctant to incorporate spiritually responsive pedagogy as enthusiastically as other components of Freire's or hooks's work (i.e., education as liberation for the oppressed and the oppressor). As Freire has argued that pedagogy is connected to historical and social forces, I also argue that the absence of spirituality in democratic and critical pedagogy is a result of historical and social forces. As such, the fact of its absence in most of the North American literature on critical social justice and democratic education does not mean it is insignificant or irrelevant to those educational orientations. On the contrary, the absence is a profound indicator of the significance of spirituality to supporting inclusive classrooms for all students, as it suggests the hand of oppression at work when one considers the cultural groups most harmed by the exclusion of spirituality. For that view, I turn to a final democratic philosopher before describing a critical construct of spirituality.

Relational, Pluralistic Democratic Education

The perspectives of leading figures in liberal democratic theory (Dewey), holistic democratic theory (Noddings), and critical democratic theory (Freire, hooks) have included spirituality as part of their vision for democratic education. I conclude this review of spirituality and democratic education by invoking a fourth democratic perspective on how spiritually responsive pedagogy is a resource for democratic educators. Thayer-Bacon (1995, 2003, 2008) offered a relational democratic framework that leverages pluralism through awareness of interconnection and an ethic of care. The relevance of spiritually responsive pedagogy was strongly implied—though not fully developed—in her theory, as its central elements include core aspects of spiritual development.

Thayer-Bacon's scholarship refined Dewey's (1916) construct of a democratic education based on shared interests by emphasizing the relational and pluralistic elements of democratic theory. In her multicultural, international research project, Thayer-Bacon (2008) identified three themes of a relational, pluralistic democratic theory: shared authority, shared responsibility, and shared identities. Each of these themes was grounded in the transactional relationships she observed in schools populated by students from cultural groups that have experienced oppression in the United States (e.g., Mexicans) as well as informed by her site visits to schools in the home nations of the groups (e.g., Mexico). Thayer-Bacon built on Dewey's concept of democratic education by addressing the ways in which the assumptions underlying Dewey's liberal democratic theory—individualism, universalism, and rationalism—have contributed to the marginalization of some Americans through democratic pedagogy influenced by those assumptions. She found

that—particularly for those who live in collectivist cultures such as Native Americans—liberal democratic pedagogy was insufficient at best and destructive at worst. She called for a "differentiated politics of difference" (p. 32) that acknowledged that democratic education is not a universal with a one-size-fits-all approach. Rejecting the illusion of equality that is promoted through (liberal) democratic education, Thayer-Bacon argued instead that a relational, pluralistic democratic pedagogy navigates—and even leverages—the tensions of pluralism through classroom practices that reflect shared responsibility, encourage shared authority, and value shared identities.

In her work, Thayer-Bacon (1995, 2003) also expanded upon Dewey's notion of the shared interests that characterize democracy. If shared interests must be cultivated through frequent, localized interactions, Thayer-Bacon argued that Dewey's democratic theory required an additional element of caring, as conceived by Noddings (2005). From a critical feminist perspective, the inclusion of caring as both a political and a spiritual element of democratic education reflects a challenge to the dominance of the liberal democratic assumptions of individualism, universalism, and rationality. Caring is a quality that can be cultivated in democratic schools by a teacher's pedagogical understanding of student spiritual development. Therefore, from a pragmatic perspective, spiritually responsive pedagogy is a means of enacting relational, pluralistic democratic pedagogy.

A place where all five of the democratic philosophers unite is in their valuation of a pluralistic citizenry aware of their shared humanity through dialogue grounded in compassion, trust, and willingness. One of the challenges for democratic educators in today's schools is negotiating the powerful forces of school systems that act in ways that alienate students and teachers from each other and from themselves. As hooks (2003) observed:

> Dominator culture has tried to keep us all afraid, to make us choose safety instead of risk, sameness instead of diversity. Moving through that fear, finding out what connects us, reveling in our differences; this is the process that brings us closer, that gives us a world of shared values, of meaningful community. (p. 197)

I assert that the process hooks referred to can be supported by a spiritually responsive pedagogy that is grounded in critical theory as a rationale for engaging in that work, as well as as a resource for the process of moving through fear, increasing awareness of connection, and embracing pluralism.

Critical Construct of Spiritually Responsive Pedagogy

Above, I have reviewed how certain philosopher-practitioners of democratic and critical social justice education locate spirituality within democratic pedagogy. In what follows, I also describe and advocate for a spiritually responsive pedagogy that reinforces the aims of democratic education in secular schools. As I see them, the promises of connecting spiritual responsive pedagogy with education in a democratic society are: reduction in alienation through awareness of interconnection; strong sense of personal agency through integration of internal navigational feelings

(Woods & Woods, 2008) with external meaning-systems; and empowered commitment to a common good for *all* community members through cultivation of spiritual resources such as compassion and resilience. More specifically, spiritually responsive pedagogy honors the principle of pluralism and challenges oppressive schooling practices through the inclusion of marginalized epistemological and ontological perspectives, such as those of African and indigenous students.

For teachers inclined to respond pedagogically to the spirituality of their students, the lack of a practitioner-oriented framework is a barrier. How can teachers incorporate spirituality into their democratic pedagogy if they lack a clear understanding of the dimension of human growth and experience characterized as spiritual? Is such a "clear understanding" even possible while still honoring diverse cultural perspectives on spirituality, spiritual experiences, and spiritual development? I raise these questions not just as rhetorical devices but also as guideposts for the conceptual and pragmatic challenges inherent in the project I propose herein.

However, at times I wonder if the definitional issue is a red herring. As Dewey (1934), Noddings (2006), and hooks (2003) pointed out, compounding the definitional issue is a tendency to conflate spirituality with religion. While I certainly don't want to discount First Amendment issues in the United States, I suspect this line of objection is specious. The real resistance, I believe, comes from a refusal on the part of members of the dominator class to relinquish epistemological and ontological control when it comes to certifying what counts as legitimate knowledge and learning in schools. For that analysis, I turn to the critical perspective.

Critical Construct of Spirituality

The foundational constructs of the "spirituality" in spiritually responsive pedagogy reflect critical and holistic commitments. A critical construct of spirituality draws from culturally diverse frameworks that link spirituality, social justice, and culturally responsive pedagogy: emancipatory spirituality (Lerner, 2000; Tisdell, 2003); critical spiritual pedagogy (Augustine, 2014; Ryoo, Crawford, Moreno, & McLaren, 2009); anticolonial spiritual paradigms (Dillard, 2013; Shahjahan, 2009); critical spirituality (Dantley, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2010); and liberationist spirituality (Freire, 1984, 1997, 2000; hooks, 1999, 2003). A common feature of the variations cited above is the authors' positioning of spirituality as an inner resource of strength, purpose, and connection to the sacred as well as a tool for disrupting hegemonic epistemological assumptions buried in mainstream pedagogy. This point is well argued by Shahjahan (2009), whose work has focused on spirituality in higher education:

> Anti-colonialism recognizes and counters the displacement of spirituality and other non-dominant ways of knowing the world by western knowledge systems (L. T. Smith, 1999). Spirituality is an integral part of Indigenous knowledge, particularly for colonized peoples, yet it has largely been left out of pedagogical practices in higher education. Centering spirituality in the academy can help in decolonizing the secular academy as to strip away people's spirituality is to perpetuate colonization of their bodies and souls. (p. 123)

It is this critical construct of spirituality that I call upon for a spiritually responsive pedagogical framework. Inclusive in spiritually responsive pedagogy is an understanding of spirituality as a developmental domain. My understanding of spirituality as developmental is grounded in the critical perspective.

I define *spiritual development* as a multidimensional process encompassing the evolution of many dynamics: a disposition of genuine or authentic inquiry; an engagement in a search for purpose and meaning; an orientation of faith in regards to something larger than or beyond oneself; a capacity for self-aware consciousness; an interest in ethical relations and behaviors; and the experiences of awe, love, wonder, and transcendence.[4] I subscribe to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) social-ecology model of human development, which accounts for how complex interactions among self, significant others, and cultural environments are mutually constitutive. Although Western models of human development in the 20th century tended to emphasize a linear, stage-based process dependent upon passage of time toward a state of perfection, one of the contributions of a theory of spiritual development to the field of developmental psychology has been a broadening of the foundational assumptions of the temporality of human development (Mattis, Ahluwalia, Cowie, & Kirkland-Harris, 2006).

My framing of a domain of spiritual development reflects a critical stance. I distinguish between theories of human development that rely on knowledge claims derived from typically male, Christian, White, European/North American sources of research with their embedded notions of class-based, hegemonic privilege and theories of human development derived from culturally diverse epistemologies with multiple models for characterizing positive human growth. This multilogical framing affirms my position that the inclusion of a domain of spiritual development is a critical challenge to the traditional models of human development associated with the integration of developmental psychology into education.

Inclusion of Spirituality as Epistemological and Ontological Counter-narrative

The inclusion of spirituality within educational psychological constructs signifies ontological perspectives and epistemological priorities that challenge hegemonic beliefs about learning in schools. Indeed, its explicit inclusion problematizes the supposed neutrality of spirituality's absence from conceptions of learning that influence educational psychology. As such, situating spirualty within educational discourse acts as a counter-narrative to a vision of learning that privileges Eurocentric rationality, empiricism, and binary thinking. The exclusion of spiritually centered knowing is epistemicide, which McLaren (2014) described as the destruction

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4   This definition is a consolidation of several scholars' theoretical work and research studies on spirituality and spiritual development. The primary sources I draw from in my definition are (in alphabetical order): Benson, Roehlkepartain, & Rude, 2003; Benson, 2006; Dantley, 2007; Dillard, 2013; Feldman, 2008; Good & Willoughby, 2008; Hamilton & Jackson, 1998; Kessler, 2000; King & Benson, 2006; King & Roeser, 2009; Miller, 2007; Roehlkepartain, Benson, King, & Wagener, 2006.

of indigenous knowledges. Indeed, when citing the relevance of a spiritually responsive pedagogy in democratic and critical social justice education, Noddings (2013) and hooks (2003) argued that inviting or allowing spiritual ways of knowing and of viewing the world are culturally responsive, emancipatory ways of teaching.

In much of the literature on the intersectionality among spirituality, education, and spiritual development, the authors began their text with a justification—sometimes defensive—for including spirituality. A recent example is Mata's (2015) book on addressing spirituality in early childhood classrooms: The first section of her book is titled "Making the Case for Spirituality." The pattern of preemptive qualification signals to me that the explicit inclusion of spiritual development in scholarly work represents a political challenge to dominant academic discourse. The Eurocentric binary of secular and spiritual reflects the socially constructed epistemology of dominator culture; accordingly, challenging the binary through spiritually responsive pedagogy is necessary as a leverage point for pedagogical inclusion of socially constructed epistemologies of students (and teachers) from historically marginalized groups.

If my inference about the tension that is activated when spirituality is situated as educationally relevant is accurate, then critical democratic education and spiritually responsive pedagogy share a common purpose: Both act as counter-narratives to educational practices that sustain majority culture–based systems of oppression, marginalization, and alienation. A philosophy about teaching and learning that renders spirituality and spiritual growth as irrelevant to the learning process requires that both teachers and students see themselves as fragmented entities. Excluding pedagogical knowledge about spiritual development facilitates the suppression of compassion, wonder, tolerance for ambiguity, and a sense of interconnection in the classroom. Oppressive political systems depend upon participants who are not aware of each other's essential humanity. Dewey (1916) argued as much in his insistence on democratic societies as places where citizens engage in direct, face-to-face conversations for the purpose of sharing diverse perspectives. Therefore, the routine of defensive justification when a scholar explicitly addresses student spirituality is not as much an academic issue as it is a political one that is deeply relevant in democratic education (Lingley, 2014). Mata (2015), in her introduction to her study of spirituality in kindergarten classrooms makes this point strongly: "One of the main purposes of democratic education is to form and guide children to become active participants in society, not only to conform to it, but also to help change and improve it. It is the role of teachers to help their students be the best they can possibly be, to grow into their full human potential, and spirituality is a fundamental component of who these children are" (p. 3).

Principles of Spiritually Responsive Pedagogy
The first principle of spiritually responsive pedagogy situates a learner's spiritual development within a holistic framework of human growth. As both a pragmatic and a conceptual matter, a teacher's knowledge of spiritual development should reflect an understanding of the complex alchemy among spirituality,

cognition, physical maturity, emotion, and social contexts (Benson, Roehklkepartain, & Rude, 2003; Good & Willoughby, 2008; Kessler, 2000; King & Benson, 2006; Lingley, 2014). In my interpretation of this principle of spiritually responsive pedagogy, I distinguish between teaching spirituality in schools and leveraging knowledge of spirituality in schools. The former may be an issue in school systems that mandate spiritual education in the curriculum, but the latter reflects more broadly the principles of a responsive pedagogy. As a political and ethical matter, the intentional acknowledgment of and engagement with the spiritual domain of human growth can be a pedagogical intervention against dehumanizing, undemocratic schooling practices that inhibit or suppress achievement, engagement, and positive growth.

Implementation of this first principle can occur in teacher education settings (e.g., Augustine, 2014) and can be found in professional learning materials (e.g., Caskey & Anfara, 2014). Educators who support the pedagogical inclusion of spirituality argue that, as a central component of human growth, it should not be overlooked in teacher preparation:

> When we speak of faith as the dynamic and symbolic frame of orientation or the ultimate concern to which a person is committed and from which one derives purpose in life, it is clear how critical it is that we prepare ourselves to work with adolescents as they develop in this domain. (Nakkula & Toshalis, 2006, p. 222)

This point is argued well, both explicitly and implicitly, by Dewey, Noddings, Freire, and hooks, who have pointed to the aspects of spiritual development that most directly support democratic education: a proclivity towards genuine inquiry, a search for meaning and purpose, a dynamic understanding of our relationships with self, others, and our environment, and a growing capacity for allowing paradox.

A second principle of a spiritually responsive pedagogy is the integration of curriculum, instruction, and assessment that is invitational of spiritual ways of knowing and supports positive developmental trajectories for healthy spiritual growth. This integration can involve learning activities that cultivate awareness of interconnectedness with others (e.g., DeBlasio, 2011; Owen Wilson, 2005); stimulate contemplative senses though poetry, music, and visual arts (e.g., Hart, 2004); and support the capacity for resilience (e.g., Bruce & Cockerham, 2004). This element is crucial for democratic educators seeking to respond to Thayer-Bacon's (2008) call for a differentiated politics of difference by affirming the epistemologies of learners from historically marginalized cultural and ethnic groups.

The work of critical educators such as Freire and hooks has suggested that emancipatory education is incomplete without an active and intentional engagement with the inner processes associated with spirituality (i.e., critical reflection through genuine inquiry). Spiritual practices such as mindfulness have the utilitarian purpose of allowing students who experience privilege to have greater access to interior assumptions that perpetuate oppression. The use of mindfulness—which is by no

means overtly characterized as a "spiritual" practice by many in the mindfulness in education movement in order to strategically incorporate the practice in public school communities who conflate spirituality with religion—allows students to tap into subconscious thoughts and beliefs through the intentional cultivation of curiosity and nonjudgment with one's awareness turned inward. Used for this intention, mindfulness exercises can complement students' rational understanding of sources of injustice and oppression (Orr, 2002).[5]

A third principle of spiritually responsive pedagogy is an acknowledgement of spirituality as part of the teaching and learning process. This is one of the toughest elements to incorporate into mainstream education as an acknowledgment of spirituality presumes a holistic ontology—a worldview that is inclusive of spirituality and spiritual elements such as divinity, sacred connections, and a larger purpose in life (Palmer, 1998; Schoonmaker, 2009). This worldview directly challenges the ontology propagated by dominator culture in the United States. It is this acknowledgment, however, that dismantles a suffocating pedagogy that discounts the full humanity of students for whom a praxis of the sacred is essential (i.e., all students, oppressed and oppressor alike).

Something to consider when addressing this principle is teacher disposition—attitudes and habitual behaviors—as disposition often determines actions in the classroom (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2011). As Augustine (2014) asserted, "the level of engagement required of the teacher using spiritual paradigm as pedagogy necessitates intentional decisions to move into such spaces" (p. 17). Kessler (2000, 2002) offered the same word of caution after her fifteen years working to support the spiritual development of adolescents in their school contexts. Kessler's work has been noteworthy for the practical set of exercises she provided for teachers interested in cultivating their own spirituality as a means to the goal of increasing their effectiveness as educators (see Kessler, 2002, pp. 126–131). D. I. Smith (2009) offered an easy-to-implement technique for educators interested in self-assessing their acknowledgment of spirituality in schools. He suggested that teachers ask themselves, "How would I teach differently if I believed that my students were spiritual beings?"

A final principle of spiritually responsive pedagogy is holistic accountability. This principle captures the responsibility of democratic educators to integrate spiritual aspects of teaching and learning in classrooms to support critical social justice goals. Unlike the punitive, corporate associations with accountability in education, holistic accountability as part of a spiritually responsive pedagogy reflects an ecological, cross-cultural paradigm wherein teachers embrace an engaged sensibility grounded in a deep sense of presence within spiritually diverse classroom communities.

Little has been written about holistic accountability in spiritually diverse classrooms, especially at the secondary level. Recent emphasis has focused on other forms of student diversity such as language, gender expression, ethnicity, learning modalities and so on. However, the spiritual diversity of a classroom community is a significant issue. Spiritually responsive pedagogy should not be applied as just another "master's tool" for oppression through the privileging of any one specific spiritual expression or perspective (such as Judeo-Christian religion, White spirituality, or so-called secularized forms of Asian spiritual practices such as mindfulness). Nwalutu (2014) made this point strongly in his work on teaching for transformation in spiritually diverse classrooms: "The idea of exposing every member of an academic classroom to one archetype of spirituality . . . irrespective of their cultural background or philosophical inclination, is tantamount to the coloniality of spirituality" (p. 182). Being spiritually responsive as a democratic teacher calls for differentiation and inclusion informed by a critical spiritual paradigm that holds space for a diversity of spiritual perspectives.

Conclusion

Dewey's (1934) description of the characteristics of a "common faith" in democratic society situated spirituality as relevant to democratic education. Dewey did not intend to promote a universal construct of spirituality through his use of the descriptor *common*; his intention was to lay claim to the aspects of our humanity that allow us to experience transcendence of self-interest, awareness of interconnectedness, appreciation of the sacred, and pathways for comprehending meaning. I see spiritually responsive pedagogy as a means of empowering democratic educators by exploring these spiritual qualities, especially in accordance with how the holistic and ecological paradigms implicit in spiritually responsive pedagogy support culturally responsive education that counters the alienation and oppression of learners for whom spirituality is a core element of their identity. Portelli (2014) emphasized this last point in his foreword to the excellent collection *Spiritual Discourse in the Academy: A Global Indigenous Perspective*: "We cannot claim to be democratic and open in our academic inquires, and at the same time marginalize perspectives that are rooted in the spiritual lives of human beings" (p. xii).

I suspect that discomfort about a praxis that allows for spirituality is rooted in a complex blend of fear, racism, and neoliberal indoctrination, depending on the positionality of the democratic educator experiencing the discomfort. For some, the discomfort may emanate from a fear of offending the religious students, or from a fear of not being able to skillfully navigate one's own tender spirituality within a spiritually diverse classroom community. For teachers experiencing White privilege, denial of the spirituality (humanity) of their students of color is a means of maintaining privilege through a façade of cool rationality. This denial may be conscious or, more likely within a community of democratic educators, a manifestation of Mills's (1997) epistemology of ignorance. Finally, the discomfort with a praxis of

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5   I stress that holding the intention of increasing awareness of one's own privilege and cultural constructions about race, gender, ethnicity, language is essential to the use of mindfulness as a complement to social justice education. When mindfulness is offered as a practice intended to help students tolerate alienating or unjust educational circumstances through cultivation of nonjudgment and resilience, it can just as easily become one more tool of oppression. There is much more to be written about mindfulness as part of social justice pedagogy, but I refrain here due to space considerations.

the sacred may be a product of neoliberal indoctrination wherein, as Palmer (2003) described, "students are told from an early age that school is not the place to bring their questions of meaning: take them home, to your religious community, or to your therapist but do not bring them to school" (p. 379).[6]

When taken as a whole, the works of Dewey, Noddings, Freire, and hooks provide a rationale as well as guidance for democratic education that incorporates spirituality and diverse spiritual perspectives. The spiritual elements of Dewey and Freire in particular have been obfuscated (perhaps it is more acceptable for women—i.e., Noddings and hooks—to tend to the interior lives of students than it is for men). But the ascendency of critical consciousness through the broader acceptance of culturally responsive teaching (e.g., Gay, 2010), as manifest in school district equity initiatives and in teacher education programs, provides an opportunity to position the spiritual elements of democratic pedagogy as relevant in public education. The promise of spiritually responsive pedagogy is twofold: It stands in the conviction that classrooms embracing it will exhibit students who are actively engaged participants in reciprocal teaching and learning within academic relationships grounded in presence, creativity, and a shared sense of purpose and belonging, as well as affords an increased application of democratic principles in educational experiences through recognition of the central role of spirituality in the lives of students who have been epistemologically and ontologically marginalized by a Western male binary that first cleaves spirituality away from knowledge production then privileges rationality as the sole source of knowledge legitimacy.

Dewey (1934) suggested a construct of spirituality that closely resembled his democratic pedagogy, as illustrated by this concluding excerpt from *A Common Faith*: "When we begin to select, to choose, and say that . . . the reverence shown by a free and self-respecting human being is better than the servile obedience rendered to an arbitrary power by frightened men . . . we have entered upon a road that has not yet come to an end. We have reached a point that invites us to proceed farther" (p. 7). As democratic educators, we should accept Dewey's invitation to embrace the political and educational relevance of spirituality and proceed further down that road.

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6   In this quotation, Palmer was referring to spirituality in his use of the phrase *questions of meaning*.

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