Teaching Spirituality in Higher Education Graduate Programs: A Duoethnography
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Abstract. Graduate programs provide learners with important transitions between exposure to scholarship in their fields and skills application for professional practice. These programs also provide space for continued personal development and campus environment interactions that influence student learning. In this article, we share dialogues focused on college teaching in higher education student affairs and the struggles we face in our classrooms to sustain a core foundational principle in our field – the spiritual development of student learners. This concern provides critical reflection on teaching within higher education graduate programs and how teaching in higher education encourages contemplation and reflective thinking. We use duoethnography as a collaborative research methodology to dialogue on what it means to develop a "pedagogy of spirituality" within our respective higher education graduate programs. In using this approach, we provide ideas on how we created such a pedagogy in our fields. The dialogues also provide our insights on the nature of teaching in higher education, especially for graduate students. Metaphysical and monastic philosophies provide the guiding and differing forces shaping themes emerging from our dialogues and pedagogical thoughts.

Keywords: spirituality; pedagogy; teaching; learning; faculty.

As faculty members in two higher education graduate preparation programs, we have noticed through our personal observations and conversations with our students in the classroom that current work demands and culture in higher education are troubling and at times, disheartening. Higher education graduate programs provide practitioners with important transitions between exposure to scholarship in the field and skills application for professional practice. Graduate preparation programs are also spaces where students understand the current state of higher education in its focus to enhance student development and campus experiences. The history of higher education student affairs has emphasized the importance of viewing students holistically, developing their full potential, and creating rewarding out-of-classroom experiences (American Council on Education, 1937; Roberts, 2012). While our profession's historic roots are often discussed in our graduate preparation programs through historical documents such as the Student Personnel Point of View 1937 and its revised document in 1949 (American Council on Education, 1949), faculty members may find it hard to ensure graduate students, the newest generation of higher education leaders, that similar goals of holistic development and reaching full potentials will be similarly addressed when they enter the field. Graduate preparation faculty members, in turn, can offer critical perspectives regarding the profession's response to these challenges.

Understanding Challenges to Spiritual Teaching Practice

Squire and Nicolazzo (2019) as faculty members critiqued higher education as pushing "our graduate students away from a developmental framework" towards one where we only value "them as laborers and production tools contributing only time and energy with little consideration for their being" (p. 4). They challenge higher education educators and leaders, especially graduate programs, to create "a humanizing place for the holistic development of students" (p. 4). We agree wholeheartedly that graduate preparation programs are important spaces to create "humanizing" experiences for future and current higher education professionals. Our roles as faculty members offer tremendous opportunities to provide students moments to reflect, contemplate, and transform themselves through intellectual curiosity and personal growth.

Problem Statement

The placement of these contemplative teaching practices in program curriculum is a challenge experienced in our graduate level teaching. Ideas associated with "humanizing" higher education are approached with some sense of uncertainty and even uncomfortableness by our colleagues in higher education student affairs (Love & Talbot, 2009; Glover & Montelongo, 2023, Montelongo, in press). Within higher education, discussing concepts such as spirituality and contemplation is often erroneously perceived as always being connected to religious discussions (Astin, 2004; Glover & Montelongo, 2023; Love & Talbot, 2009; Rendon, 2014). The challenge provided to faculty members is to center spirituality where "internal process of seeking personal authenticity, genuineness, and wholeness" is allowed in teaching graduate preparation courses (Love & Talbot, 2009, p. 617).

An additional challenge within our field and graduate preparation programs is the movement to professional competencies and dispositions. For example, in our own field of higher education student affairs, much focus in graduate preparation is on Professional Competency Areas for Student Affairs Practitioners (ACPA & NASPA, 2010). Eaton (2016) argues that a "checkbox mentality" has permeated our field of higher education, where assessment of outcomes largely reflects the field's response towards increasing organizational efficiency and standardization of professional practice (p. 576). We believe the development of competency areas used in the field further advances a culture where reflection and contemplative practices has been seen by students and faculty as "on the fringe of the educational world" (Barbezat & Bush, 2014, p. xii). Higher education organizational cultures, for example, have been described using metaphors like machines, engines, and factory models where less emphasis is placed on student development (Montelongo, in press). Adding such pedagogical practice is challenging and if not done with intentionality and strong relationship building, students will likely lose the meaning and inclusion of these in learning spaces (Barbezat & Bush, 2014). As Eaton (2016) mentions, the "individuality and creativity" of students and opportunities to allow growth and meaning making in the classroom is minimized to focus instead on desired objective levels of proficiency in competencies (p. 579).

Significance of Our Study

As faculty members of color, we both understand the importance of addressing how course topics reflect our own lived experiences both personally and professionally. In teaching in graduate preparation programs, we seek to create an environment in the classroom that encourages a collective care that focuses on understanding our responsibility for each other's learning and growth. As such, we honor that we are all both teachers and learners creating a mutual and shared space for education (Friere, 2000). The use of cultural ways of knowing draws on preexisting knowledge from collectivist cultures that center the importance of personal and community wisdom (Rendon, 2014). Spiritually, the ideas of universal energy, and inner knowing equate to the ability to recognize one's own personal power. Therefore, the goal is to recognize that we do not have to look outside of ourselves for knowledge, connection to spirit (e.g., creator, higher self, God, etc.), or spiritual awareness. Instead, we understand that we must use personal reflection to discover our divinity and facilitate that reflection in others. In addition, we draw on the ideas of call and response that are rooted in African American spirituality, literature, and music. Sale (1992) discusses that call and response creates new meaning from its original conception. It then gives ownership to those responding by recreating the story, moving, and shaping it to the needs of the community. Similarly, we ask through group reflection that students make their own meaning to concepts presented and manicure the experience of the collective through dialogue and energy sharing. We share dialogues focused on college teaching in higher education student affairs and the struggles we face in our classrooms to sustain a core foundational principle in our field – the spiritual development of student learners.

Metaphysical and Monastic Frameworks to Engage Students

Metaphysical and monastic philosophies provide the guiding and differing forces shaping our dialogue and pedagogical thoughts. Cultural ways of knowing that are intertwined with the metaphysical seek to focus on a communal well-being that draws on individual inner knowing that links to an overarching collective consciousness. These practices borrow from cultural spiritual perspectives that predate their use in academia. Integral to many Indigenous cultures is an innate harmony among people and spirit (Wane, 2005; Goduka, 1999; Kaya & Seleti, 2014). Rooted in these ideas is an emancipatory space for healing that connects one to the present moment, deeper knowledge, and reflection (Gayle, 2011). Understanding our collective connection to each other and our purpose within the universal energy promotes community wellness. The Rule of St. Benedict (516 A.D.) is used as a spiritual framework based within a Christian religious context. The Rule formed monastic cultures where work and personal well-being have been addressed for over fifteen hundred years (Steindl-Rast, 2017; Taylor, 1989). Applied to pedagogy, it is used to teach the importance of community building and viewing work as just one component of an individual's whole being (Valente, 2016). Monastic ideas of organizational structures for communal life, comfort through work, intellectual activity as scholar-educators, and living fully through work will be shared as part of this spiritual framework based within a religious context (Valente, 2016).

In considering the ways to engage students in the classroom, we draw further on the ideas expressed in sentipensante pedagogy (Rendon, 2009). Rendon believes teaching and learning benefits from ancient wisdom, where faith, and reason are seen as part of the whole sense making process. In essence, we aim to develop the whole person by using dialogue, meaning making and reflection that connects spiritual understanding with intellectual and social engagement. Intellectualism and insight work in "harmonious rhythm" in teaching and learning (Rendon, 2009, p. 2).

Purpose for the Study

The purpose of our study was for us to engage in critical reflection on teaching within higher education graduate programs and to dialogue on what it means to develop a "pedagogy of spirituality" within our respective higher education graduate programs. In using a collaborative research method that centers us as the site of our research inquiry, we provide ideas on how we created such a pedagogy in our field. Our dialogues also provide insights on the nature of teaching in higher education, especially for graduate students.

We approached our dialogue focusing on one primary question to develop critical thought on teaching within higher education graduate programs and desire to create a pedagogy of spirituality.

> How do we address our struggles to sustain a core foundational principle of our field and in our classrooms – the holistic spiritual development of our students?

In order to speak to this question, we use a duoethnographic approach towards analyzing our teaching experiences.

Method

We use duoethnography to dialogue on our process towards developing a pedagogy of spirituality in higher education graduate preparation programs. Our goal in this duoethnography is to examine challenges we faced when bringing spiritual ideas into our college teaching practices. Our use of duoethnography is not to offer a prescriptive strategy for issue resolution, as suggested by Norris and Sawyer (2012), but rather to provide an example of a pedagogy developed to introduce spiritual development and awareness in our graduate program courses. From our example, we encourage further examination of how this possibly expands into other disciplines and fields. Duoethnography is a critical methodology that challenges researchers to use it as a form of mediating two different perspectives to provide higher consciousness (Norris & Sawyer, 2012). Additionally, we use artifacts to engage in the dialogue while destroying metanarratives allowing no universal truth to be present. Instead, the methodology acts as a catalyst for critical thinking providing space for continued questions and processing instead of definitive resolutions (Norris & Sawyer, 2012). The resulting duoethnography follows methodology tenets described by Norris and Sawyer (2016).

Duoethnography

Duoethonography's emergent design is non-prescriptive and allows for an organic process through which to explore the data. However, a general outline by Norris & Sawyer (2012) is as follows:

A. Story generation. Instead of utilizing specific questions, story sharing is used to develop a consciousness raising discussion. Common conversation sparks recalled experiences that support the communal nature of writing and engagement. A chronological timeline may be used to begin the conversation but will only act as a guide, it will not be a regimented structure holder.

B. Artifacts. The use of artifacts may be used by the researchers to elicit memory and discussion. Each researcher will share integral memories through these pieces that explain their experiences with spirituality in their life as well as their use of techniques used in the classroom that speaks to spirituality.

C. Literature Integration. The traditional practice of literature review prior to the start of the study is a discouraged practice in this methodology. Instead, literature is incorporated as needed as it emerges from the conversation. Thus, it is used as an additional perspective generator that is separate from the researchers.

Metaphysical and monastic philosophies provide the forces that shape the dialogic narratives regarding pedagogical practices used to enhance spiritual development. We view our narratives in the duoethnography as "forces." Each spiritual force is seen as not owning universal truth or dominance (Norris & Sawyer, 2012). Additionally, we use personal narratives to highlight the merging of (non)religious ideas found within each force.

Metaphysical ideas are used as the first dialogic force. Decolonized spiritual practice that is often removed from religious ties, steeped in interconnectedness, and executed through multiple modalities underscores metaphysical spirituality. Further, this spirituality asks that we consider the core energy that lies within us that connects us to our creator, and all living things (Arewa,1998). Thus, we recognize we are part of a larger universal energy and must understand our inner self in the process of seeking truth and knowledge.

Monastic culture is used as the second dialogic force. Monastic culture and ways of living are used to provide examples of spirituality defined within a religious context. Monastic thought influenced by Benedictine philosophies based in Roman Catholicism offers lessons on organizational behavior, spiritual leadership, communal care, and life-long learning. Monastic life and monasteries have also offered examples of how to live life with meaning and purpose (Taylor, 1989; Steindl-Rast, 2017; Valente, 2016). Laypersons often see these communities as examples where work and learning co-exist with spiritual mentoring and well-being

(Valente, 2016).

Data Sources

We collected data for this study from two sources. The first source were recordings of conversations using the Zoom videoconferencing platform. Conversations occurred during summer 2021 and lasted approximately one-hour in length for each conversation. A total of six conversations took place during that time. We intentionally entered each conversation without any set prompt or topic sent in advance of our scheduled conversation. Instead, we allowed our conversations to develop organically with topics emerging from our most recent teaching experiences and personal triumphs and challenges since our last conversation. Recordings were saved and reviewed for topic themes and artifacts to elicit memory and further discussion. The second source of data were reflective essays using recordings to connect to how our guiding and differing spirituality lenses shaped our pedagogical thoughts and experiences.

Data Analysis

We utilized a consensual qualitative coding approach in understanding our initial dialogues and theme development (Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997). This analytical approach was utilized in our analysis of data gleaned from our conversations. Consensual qualitative research involves researchers analyzing data through multiple perspectives where consensus is reached to make meaning of the data collected (Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997). Throughout the course of our conversations and development of the paper, we shared notes, ideas, and initial drafts of personal narratives to arrive at consensus on the emergent themes of the conversations. The data was analyzed to construct themes that reflect our experiences in developing pedagogy focused on spirituality in higher education student affairs graduate programs.

Situating Ourselves: Positionality Statements

In keeping with the tenets of duoethnography developed by Sawyer and Norris (2012), we provide positionality statements describing our histories in developing our identities as faculty members, faculty members of color, and faculty concerned with bringing spirituality in our teaching practice. Our understanding of these facets of our current lives serves as "life as curriculum" where "one's present abilities, skills, and knowledge" are learned when one is "in conversation with another" (Norris & Sawyer, 2012, p. 12). Situating ourselves within our study involves recollecting how we understand spirituality in our teaching and how we, the researchers, created community with each other to understand how our differing spirituality perspectives complement each other in enhancing our teaching practices and goals in higher education student affairs graduate programs.

Cherjanét

I come to this work as a cisgender, Black lesbian woman, who came out within the

last five years. Most of my life my race and gender often overshadowed other aspects of my identity to the point of quelching their development and my own recognition of their existence. Essentially, I grew up focused on being Black. I internalized the perceived responsibilities dictated by my race that were determined by cultural ideas of gender roles. For me, there was a message focused on uplifting the Black race. This meant that I tried to reflect an image that centered the societal perceptions of the best aspects of Blackness; heterosexuality, multiple degrees, and professionalism. My reflection sparked an internal dive that helped me to understand my sexuality through the lens of metaphysical practice which provided openness and interconnectedness.

Finding my authentic self, created new definitions of Blackness that allowed me to show up whole through spiritual alignment. Still, I struggle with truly being able to fully articulate both my lesbian identity and the role spirituality played in helping me come to terms with that identity, because it is still new to me. It is only through continued reflection that I can piece together my feelings. My identity is a political stance that honors inclusivity and holds space for those without a community. It is more than relationships and partnerships; it is about a just mindset that is concerned with growth and change.

Creating community. In January 2021 I made my third transition to a non-tenure track faculty position at an R1 institution. Part of the draw to faculty work for me was the ability to take a deep dive into literature and develop research that could be used to create meaningful dialogue, spark programming, or jumpstart initiatives that would support student development. I intentionally tried to plan ways to develop my growing and continual interests in spirituality in academia. While finishing my Ph.D. I had begun to further explore metaphysical practices. I became a Reiki Master, and took several spiritual classes including a tarot class, and a few shamanistic based courses. Each training influenced my dissertation by giving me new ways to view my writing and helped me to see how my scholarship always had a spiritual overtone.

Previously, I had explored ACPA's Commission for Religion, Spirituality, Faith and Meaning (CRSFM). I was not sure it was a good fit professionally, but I decided to try again to make connections. During that year's conference meeting there was still a large focus on religion, and I was still the only person discussing metaphysical practices. However, during the CRSFM's round robin of introductions, I found a kindred spirit. Ricardo introduced himself as a HESA faculty member doing research on spirituality in higher education. Shortly after, I introduced myself and commented that we should work together.

Ricardo

Spirituality in higher education was not a topic that I planned to add to my scholarship, nor was it a topic that I shied away from in discussions. In reflecting on the importance of the topic to my own personal identity, I find it curious on how spirituality was something I found important, but I did not create space for it as a faculty member. I was reminded that achieving this career milestone was a lonely

journey, one where success and value were determined by others who possibly fail to see the importance of collective support in such journeys for faculty of color. The culture of higher education student affairs during my tenure journey was an interesting juxtaposition of enhancing student development at the cost of deflating professional development of those working in the field (Squire & Nicolazzo, 2019). The challenge of such a culture instilled motivation within me to use teaching and research as spaces to re-imagine our direction in the field.

I have expanded my reading and learning on the topic to create another journey for myself. As part of my learning, I have since become an oblate novice for a Benedictine monastery located in the Midwest. I am still early on this journey, but the lessons provided by my novice teacher and reading Benedictine teaching and philosophy has challenged me to use ideas from this journey into my teaching practices and interactions with colleagues and students in my graduate preparation program.

Creating community. As I developed this new branch of my scholarly identity, I used our virtual environments during the pandemic to explore further different networks and groups discussing spirituality in higher education. ACPA College Educators International has an active group working within their organization structure of commissions. The Commission for Spirituality, Faith, Religion, and Meaning provides space for higher education student affairs professionals to "enrich their self-knowledge and professional knowledge about issues related to meaning making, specifically spirituality, faith, religion, belief, and existentialism within the context of higher education" (ACPA, n.d.). I was aware of the Commission as a member of ACPA and I often thought about becoming more involved in the group to enhance my own personal curiosity of the topic.

I was drawn to Cherjanet's presence in the group. Among our various interests, she discussed how her spirituality was centered on metaphysical aspects. I was drawn to her interests since they were very unfamiliar to me. As someone who values interfaith dialogue, I thought the opportunity was too good to pass up. Our eventual conversations occurred soon after our initial interactions.

Duoethnographic Dialogues

We share a composite script of our six conversations highlighting three themes constructed from these recordings: Understanding our spirituality; spirituality interest, and teaching with spirituality and identity. Themes represent fundamental ideas to understand in creating teaching effectiveness in higher education which includes spiritual identity or awareness. Our first conversation involved understanding how spirituality influences our own learning. From there, we let our conversations flow freely on how spirituality shows in how we teach. Portions of our conversations are provided to communicate the essence of each theme.

Understanding Our Spirituality

Cherjanét: The uniqueness of metaphysical spirituality is that it is innately personal. No one person will practice similarly. There may be familiar methods of

connection but there is not one overarching doctrine, guiding principle, or specific rules. Instead, many, as I do, pull from multiple perspectives, modalities, readings, teachings, and philosophies. Fully explaining the process becomes quite challenging to virtually impossible. Specifically, I identify as I am a Reiki master (Usui Shiki Ryoho, Advanced /Level III) and intuitive empath which connects me to a heightened awareness to energy. I use multiple methods to connect to spirit, my ancestors and Source. Some of these tools are meditation, tarot cards, reflection, manifestation, dream processing, and several others. The more I learn the more practices I adopt. What has transpired is an understanding of my connection to the divine and my purpose, and then centering that understanding in my work.

Ricardo: I understood going into our planned conversations that as someone who identifies with a Christian faith, others would advise that I should enter cautiously conversations with someone who outwardly embraces practices such as tarot card reading and shamanism. I confess that a small voice in me was saying the same thing, but I find that spirituality is not always connected to one's religious background. I see myself as someone who can see spirituality in things that I try to include in my daily life: appreciating nature, recognizing moments of gratefulness, seeing the beauty of humanity, and most importantly, experiencing the element of surprise. As we started our conversation, I was immersed in readings on Benedictine philosophy and teachings. One thing I appreciated from my readings was the idea of radical hospitality (Valente, 2016). Simply put, this idea encouraged me to put extraordinary effort to make people feel welcomed. It motivated me to break barriers to further build community. I identify as a Roman Catholic and I regularly participate in activities associated with my faith. I also welcome the prospect of sharing my ideas and understanding of faith with others. While I avoid proselytizing in my interactions, I let my faith provide guidance in how I present myself.

Spirituality Interest

Cherjanét: What unfolded during our first meeting was a beautiful exchange of ideas and experiences. Though we had different backgrounds and connections to spirituality we still had a common basis on how spirituality allowed us to show up in our work as whole, connected beings.

Ricardo: To be quite honest, I was a bit nervous on what exactly we would converse about with the topic. Being that I am totally unfamiliar with metaphysical spirituality, I thought our conversation would be difficult or even hit a roadblock. Some would even say that a Christian perspective of spirituality goes totally against yours. However, I found that, at least for us, we welcomed the opportunity to share and learn.

Cherjanét: Though you were somewhat unfamiliar with metaphysical spirituality, you seemed to be truly interested. We discussed the ways that spirituality was important to us and how that shaped our teaching. Further, we made several connections around how many practices that I considered part of the metaphysical was rooted in cultural practices that are situated in both of our racial and ethnic

backgrounds.

Ricardo: This part I found especially intriguing. As I recall, we shared family practices rooted in our racial and ethnic background. We both shared stories of how our families, while both rooted in Christian beliefs, had aspects which were quite honestly shunned by organized faith groups. For example, Catholicism quite often looked down on Indigenous spirituality practices. My ancestors still blended elements of these practices in their daily prayer and actions. Our mutual identities of being faculty of color I think made us comfortable to share these specific elements of our family histories. We connected on these and have shared experiences.

Cherjanét: Your curiosity was quite powerful for me, Ricardo. Your openness indicated that you saw value in my spiritual practices. I have often experienced those with a Christian background shy away from the metaphysical, considering it not of God. However, your inquisitiveness was a simple act that further solidified my comfort with you.

Ricardo: I appreciate your comment Cherjanét. Again, I think our shared journey of being faculty of color in graduate preparation programs in higher education at least broke the ice a bit.

Cherjanét: Our conversation started with discussing the challenges of faculty life, personal transitions, and other general conversations.

Ricardo: We were both trying to find our place within academia. We learned more about this during our first meeting when we talked about our experiences of being among the few faculty of color in our programs.

Cherjanét: Still, the ways we navigated these experiences always centered spiritual principles and reflection.

Ricardo: I also found your willingness to talk with me to get my perspectives refreshing as well. I, too, saw an inquisitiveness in your wanting to learn how I approach the topic of spirituality in our teaching practices. Surprisingly, some ideas and concepts on how we use this part of ourselves in our teaching overlap.

Cherjanét: Our regular meetings became a safe space that I relied on for reenergizing and support.

Ricardo: In addition to safe spaces, they became spaces of respect. Our spirituality, we found, helped us to sustain in environments that had limited BIPOC faculty mentors to uplift and guide us. Being able to bring in these multiple facets of ourselves was indeed refreshing and important in understanding how we teach. I believed a strong connection was developed for us to further discuss.

Teaching with Spirituality and Identity

Cherjanét: At the time of our meetings, I was a non-tenure track faculty member. My most recent job was contractual with the potential of being renewed. Contractual teaching roles provided me flexibility from stringent research requirements but lacked much of the security tenure-track positions provide.

Ricardo: I understood the challenge you faced in being a contractual faculty member. As a recently tenured faculty member, I worried about how your labor and effort would be valued to create engaging class experiences. From the tenured side, I saw some of my colleagues getting lackadaisical with their teaching. There was no innovation left in adding something new to their courses.

Cherjanét: When I began to explore incorporating more of myself in my teaching via reflection and meditation, I worried students would feel I was forcing spiritual concepts onto them, a sentiment that I believed would be viewed negatively in my job evaluation.

Ricardo: True. I was conflicted on how to express my spirituality in my teaching. Especially at the doctoral level, I worried that adding such elements in teaching would be viewed as "fluff" and lacking rigor expected in that level of courses. Like you, I also thought about how spiritual activities like meditation, reflection, and even pausing, would be evaluated at the end of term.

Cherjanét: However, I have always held the value to create a classroom that allows space for students to show up whole.

Ricardo: I agree! Our students do not live in a vacuum. In our conversations, we reflected on the courses we taught during our pandemic semesters. Students at that time used our classes to share what they were going through at work and at home. It was hard not to discuss all their challenges regardless of what course you were teaching. Students needed to feel validated. For me, I felt one way to address this was utilizing contemplative behaviors in my teaching practices (Barbezat & Bush, 2014).

Cherjanét: I model this behavior through my own actions and thereby create room to hold my authenticity as well. I took on discussing spirituality through centering awareness and reflection to create a classroom that did not shy away from tough critical dialogue. Though I was not always sure how to do this, I knew it was worth exploring.

Ricardo: I also wanted to explore how to critically address higher education culture through spiritual and contemplative practice. I taught a leadership theory class during the summer of 2020 that was fully online due to the pandemic. I wanted the virtual space to include opportunities to "vent" about perspectives of leadership at that time, but in a creative way. I created a collaborative discussion space. Each week, I posted images or videos with no captions that I wanted my students to respond. These visual cues were meant to create introspective thought. I gave them the freedom to interpret the images (e.g., picture of Cesar Chavez, a video of a nature hike, an abstract painting, etc.) as they wish. It was an

interesting exercise. Some students understood its intent and saw images as metaphors to leadership. Others did not quite get it. As expected, my evaluations reflected these thoughts. One wrote that the weekly exercise was added work. Thoughts like these worried me when I tried contemplative teaching that reflects my spiritual and ethnic identities.

Cherjanét: Being early in my teaching career, I often tip-toed around my identities and questioned if I should mention my sexuality or my spirituality. Considering the numbers of Black women in higher education with doctorates, I knew I already had a spotlight on me. I worried that my queer and metaphysical identities would be adding fuel to the fire and singling me out even more. I worried I would become, the strange, woo-woo Black girl, instead of Dr. Cherjanét, erasing my accomplishments, my skill, and my knowledge. However, my desire to show up for students with similar identities pushed me to share all of myself.

Ricardo: I commend your goal to show up as your full authentic self in your classes. You identified the importance of intersectionality for faculty of color. We learned as we continued to converse with one another that we see ourselves more than just our race and we express that in our teaching. As I became an oblate novice, I started to let my students know my inspiration for lessons sometimes came from the ancient and modern teachings of Benedictine monks. The reflective assignments I included in courses encouraged them to refocus the way they viewed their higher education leadership. Did they live to work or work to live? This simple motto comes directly from my copy of The Rule of St. Benedict (516 A.D.). Once students found out that I was on my own journey to become a Benedictine lay monk, that identity seemed to take prominence over others. However, as a Christian, cisgender, heterosexual Latino male, I realized that my reception of identities would likely be more accepting when our intersectional selves are presented in the classroom.

Cherjanét: In further exploring ways to connect metaphysical spirituality to higher education, I landed on the foundations of student development to examine identity and connect it to preexisting conversations. Considering different ways of supporting students through identity development, I thought a natural place to incorporate spiritual concepts was in courses like student development theory. It is through this course that I piloted my ideas for this project. In class I introduced creating individual timelines that mapped experiences with spiritual lessons and when incorporating these ideas began. Even if students did not connect to, excluded, or were unsure about spirituality, we processed how these experiences impacted our identity and our work.

Ricardo: I'm glad to know that as we continue to converse with each other that we are enhancing our teaching with spiritual elements. As I mentioned earlier, my first exploration of introducing spirituality in teaching was in a doctoral level leadership theory course taught during our pandemic online semesters. Obviously, concepts such as servant and transformational leadership were a good match to introduce spiritual ways to talking about the topic. This past fall semester, I taught the course again and approached the course through an arts-based lens where we

dissected the meaning of "leadership is artistry." Leading with hands, head, and heart guided how I structured the course and the theories covered in lessons were placed under each area. My experience in approaching a full semester theory course with spirituality emphasis and contemplative practices was for the most part a positive one. Rendon (2014) inspired me to view the course beyond theory and to see that the "wholeness" of the course. Intellectual and social engagement included creating personal leadership philosophies and inviting higher education leaders who also were craftspersons (e.g., glassblower, nature photographer, and Hip-Hop DJ'ing). My students left the course understanding what it meant to be higher education leaders who led with hands, head, and most importantly, heart.

Cherjanét: As we continue to converse about our teaching, spirituality, and careers, we are reminded through our reflections that our teaching is on a constant journey of becoming. Rendon (2014) reminds us to continue striving to "create a pedagogy based on wholeness and inclusiveness" (p. 14). Our intersecting identities influence how we teach and develop our pedagogy. We should include who we are in our spiritual ways of making meaning in the world. Our conversations highlight how we actively reflect on why we teach. We value the shared construction of meaning with course content. In developing what we termed in our conversations as a "pedagogy of spirituality," we found it helpful to at least have a curiosity to learn how spirituality can be expressed in teaching practice. We also found it useful to enter this area with questions, no matter how simple or complex responses to them might be. For us, the creation of safe and respectful spaces allowed us to further dialogue on our own spiritual identities and how these are reflected in our daily teaching practices. While some of these practices were expressed directly in our lessons, we discovered that it was equally important to use our spiritual practices to center our identity as faculty members. Rituals and expressions of gratefulness and ancestral presence allowed us to focus and feel comfortable in a space that often did not include others like us and sometimes did not welcome us.

Ricardo: Personally, I recognized my ability to describe metaphysical practices and connect them to development and historical perspectives. Understanding my ability to breakdown terms and practices in a tangible manner sparked continued reflection as new spiritual pathways were unlocked. Before broaching conversations on spirituality, I spent years reflecting and exploring my own spiritual beliefs which lead to understanding my connection to teaching about spirituality as a space for furthering discussions on student development. Without this prior background, one could find themselves having to hold the space for students' development, without room to process their own. Naturally, new understandings and "a-ha" moments will happen that may require additional processing. However, using the classroom for all the work could impact the environment of the classroom discussion. You are the master of your own experiences. Still, others using similar philosophies, and practices may not show up in their understanding of their faith in the same manner. Leaving room for multiple interpretations and new knowledge in discussing spirituality in the classroom is important.

Discussion

Ultimately the work of incorporating spirituality into the classroom requires us to create safe and non-judgmental environments for students. Students will not be engaged in sharing their thoughts, concerns, and frustrations with spirituality if they feel the same is not required of those facilitating discussion (Barbezbat & Bush, 2013; Love & Talbot, 2009). This means that the basis for incorporating spirituality in the classroom is grounded in self-work, vulnerability, reflection and trial and error. As we continue our work towards incorporating spirituality in the classroom, we are finding that doing this is not an easy process.

However, creating spaces for students to show up whole has a direct benefit to the classroom. First, encouraging deep reflection, which is innate in the discussion of spirituality, prompts students to pay attention to the ways course material personally impacts them. Secondly, this impact can spur discussion on our interconnectedness and how our existence, beliefs, values, and morals, directly impact others. Using dialogue around these ideas leaves room for problematizing how we know what we know. Prioritizing spiritual development in the curriculum can act as a springboard into the foray of meaning-making and self-concept. Glover and Montelongo (2022) believe teaching practices rooted in spirituality enhance student learning with a sense of belonging and meaning making. The relationship between students and faculty members could include shared experiences and reasoning that results from contemplative practices in and outside the classroom (Glover & Montelongo, 2023). Mindful teaching practices that involve spiritual development help students understand their place and space in personal and professional development. These practices also provide faculty members awareness on how learning is influenced by shared reasoning and experiences with students (Glover & Montelongo, 2023).

Implications for Practice

We found in our conversations that we need to discuss how our own spiritual identities, or even absence of spirituality, influence our teaching practice. Teaching in higher education includes our identities and failing to understand if spirituality is part of these identities misses an opportunity to further develop teaching effectiveness. Understanding our spirituality helps us understand how we engage with students, deliver our course content, and develop pedagogy.

Shahjahan (2004) expands on this perspective stating,
> … as spiritually minded academics, what we know cannot be truly what we know until we have embodied and used it to teach others. How we teach and make others learn is a paramount question that we need to deal with for us to center spirituality in the academy (p. 295).
> Shahjahan (2004) goes on to note that "…for students to feel whole, we need faculty to feel whole and bring themselves to the classroom; if they don't, not only are they continuing to marginalize themselves but continuing to amputate the spiritual parts of students as well" (p. 300).

We understand relating course material to the topic of spirituality may seem far-fetched or even questionable to some disciplines. However, even those areas that may be considered the most structured, have a historical connection centered on spirituality that urges students to think holistically. Kessler (2019) reminds us that theorists Pythagoras and Plato "regarded mathematics as a spiritual path leading to the Divine", (Kessler, 2019). Further, science has explored the ideas of consciousness, and existence, by investigating the ideas of divine beings (Walton, 2017). Incorporating spirituality in the classroom, regardless of the subject matter, is not complicating the conversation, instead it is expanding it. We believe that all academic disciplines can connect to spirituality from their lens of influence, and in turn organically make room for a more inclusive learning environment.

When bringing new ideas to the classroom influenced by spirituality, it is easy to want to have every aspect planned. Allowing space for error to occur is necessary. However, in these spaces of error, much can be learned. We found in including elements of spirituality in our courses, things that did not always go as planned. Our trials and errors sparked valuable discussion for us. Honoring the organic nature of the teaching process is imperative and higher educators should leave room for the unplanned, which could bring powerful revelations. By expecting the unexpected, this teaching mentality aligns with spiritual ideas of being guided by the unseen and appreciating new perspectives brought forth by surprises (Steindl-Rast, 2017).

Conclusion

As stated in the Student Personnel Point of View 1949, higher education in the U.S. was built on the foundation of "well-rounded development – physically, socially, emotionally, and spiritually" (American Council of Education, 1949, p. 17). In our field of higher education student affairs, we understand that ideas of care, compassion, and understanding are necessary in higher education environments. Our unique experience with spirituality, coupled with our multiple identities, shaped our engagement with each other in our pedagogical conversations. Through our dialogues, significant personal reflection and new understandings were created to understand how faculty members discuss a topic that unfortunately is not discussed often in higher education (Love & Talbot, 2009). More critical conversations are needed on how graduate programs promote spiritual development to the next generation of researchers, leaders, and practitioners through program curricula. If we continue to ignore all aspects of identity, moral reasoning, and cultural ways of knowing, that is embedded in the lessons of spirituality, we are in essence shaving off the educational experience. Bringing our full selves to the classroom is a step toward decolonizing the curriculum instead of emphasizing a master narrative that suggests we only practice a banking system to educate (Friere, 2000). Sharing emergent themes from our dialogues hopefully encourage further discussions on pedagogical approaches that center spiritual embodiment and reflective engagement.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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