

SPIRITUALITY in EDUCATION: THE NORTH STAR

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STORY: MY RESEARCH JOURNEY

1. Does spirituality belong in the classroom?
2. What do teachers understand spirituality to be?
3. How do children experience and express spirituality?
4. How can spirituality be supported in the classroom? What are the teachers doing?
5. How can we teach teachers how to teach spiritually?

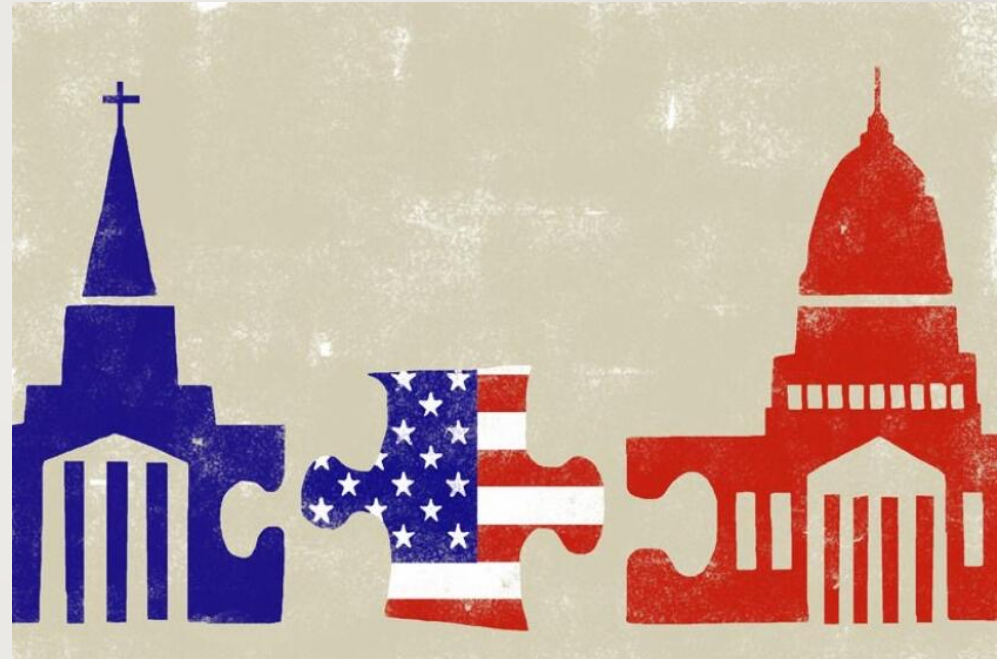
DOES SPIRITUALITY BELONG IN THE CLASSROOM?

MAKING THE CASE

ASKING IN-SERVICE TEACHERS

- “Within the classroom, we are looking at children to ponder those still unanswered questions, those deep thoughts that really linger and raise right or wrong answers [...] we work on getting them to really ponder those unanswered questions, getting them to have those dialogues and make them consider alternate views of thinking about the world, your place in the world, your role in the world and all those interconnected relationships.” (Helen) (Mata, 2012, p. 242)
- “I do believe spirituality can be achieved in the classroom through a brief daily moment of silence/reflection. By giving special attention to one’s own self, breathing pattern, and/or thoughts, children can subconsciously connect with their inner being.” (Roberta) (Mata, 2014, p. 118)

UNDERSTANDING OUR CONSTITUTIONAL CONSTRAINTS



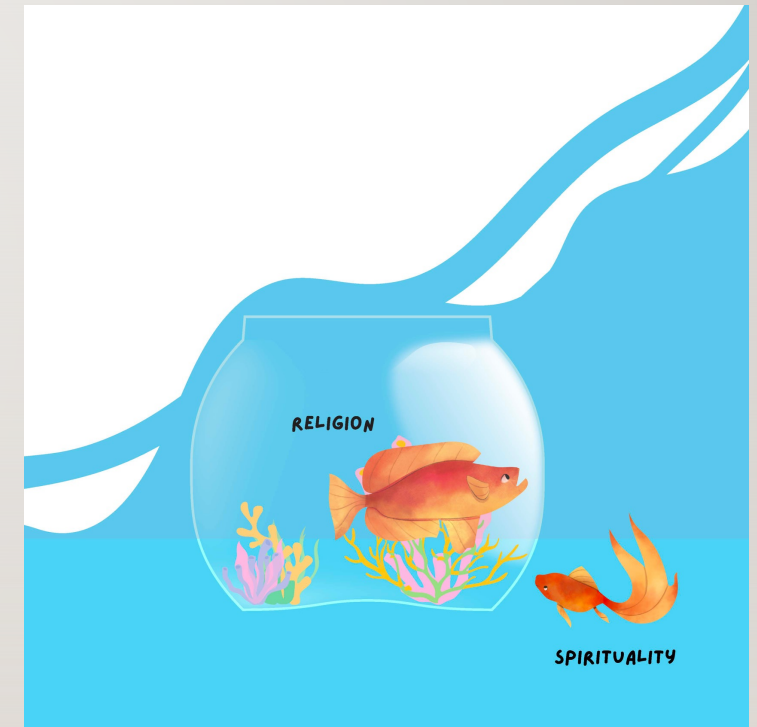
WHAT DO TEACHERS UNDERSTAND SPIRITUALITY TO BE?

REDEFINING SPIRITUALITY FROM A SECULAR PERSPECTIVE

RELIGION vs. SPIRITUALITY

Religion: a set of beliefs and practices generally held by a human community, involving adherence to codified beliefs and rituals (Oxford Dictionary, 2005)

Spirituality: an innate human characteristic that allows us to relate and connect with the transcendent or higher power, beyond our minds and emotions, in order to feel part of something greater than ourselves (Bosacki, 2001; Hart, 2003; Lantieri, 2001; Miller, 2000; Myers & Myers, 1999)



Mata-McMahon & Escarfuller, (submitted)

SPIRITUALITY AS DEFINED IN LITERATURE

Being Religious Not Necessary for Being Spiritual

(Champagne, 20001; Elkins, 1998; Fowler, 1981; Hart, 2003; Kubler-Ross, 1999; Mata, 2015; Miller, 2000; Newberg, et al., 2001; Noddings, 2005).

Spirituality as Human Nature

“Spirituality is a universal human phenomenon found in all cultures and in every age; it is not the exclusive possession of any religious group” (Elkins, 1998, p. 5; Coles, 1990; Ferguson et al., 2022; Hart, 2003; Haugen, 2018; Hay, 1987; Kessler, 1998/99; Lipton, 2015; McCreery, 1994; Miller, 2021; Newberg et al., 2001; Palmer, 1998/99; Phillips, 2003; Rosenblum & Kuttner, 2011; Scott, 2001, 2003; Tan, 2009).

Spirituality as Human Nature and Otherness

“Relationship between the self and a higher power that is dynamic, interpretive, rational, and integral part of human life” (DeMarco, 2000 in Stutts and Schloemann, 2002, p. 26; see also Bellous, 2019; Benson et al., 2003; Berrymann, 1990; Champagne, 2001; de Souza, 2016; Hay & Nye, 2006; Hyde, 2020; Mata, 2015; Parks, 2000; Robinson, 2019, Schein, 2012; Trousdale, 2005).

Spirituality as Unifying With “Something Other”

“A sense of being connected beyond one’s own self, connected to something ‘greater’” (Bosacki, 2001, p. 157; see also Bone, 2007; Fowler, 1981; Harris, 2007; Hart 2003; Myers & Myers, 1999; Palmer, 2003).

Spirituality as Essence, Consciousness, and Direct Sensory Awareness

“The spiritual is seen in terms of being active, energetic, vibrant, vigorous and vital” (McCreery, 1994, p. 97; see also Faver, 2004; Hart, 2003; Hay & Nye, 1998; Johnson, 2006; Lahood, 2010; Miller, 2000; Reimer & Furrow, 2001; Tomlinson et al., 2016).

Mata-McMahon & Escarfuller, (submitted)

SECULAR SPIRITUALITY - Connecting to spirit beyond religious confines

- Secular spirituality is the adherence to a **spiritual philosophy** without adherence to a religion. Secular spirituality emphasizes the **personal** growth and inner peace of the individual, rather than a relationship with the divine.
- Secular spirituality is composed of the search for meaning outside of a religious institution; it considers one's **relationship with the self, others, nature**, and whatever else one considers to be the **ultimate**. Often, the goal of secular spirituality is living happily and/or helping others.

MY DEFINITION OF SPIRITUALITY

- Spirituality as an **innate** human potential or ability to be fully present in order to **connect** with ourselves, with others, and with the greater *Other* intangible beyond us, which some call the transcendent or the divine, and others refer to as energy or Spirit. This connection affords us the possibility **to relate** or be in relation with the spiritual realm, and move toward finding **meaning** and direction in life, and rediscover our **purpose** as human beings (Mata, 2015).

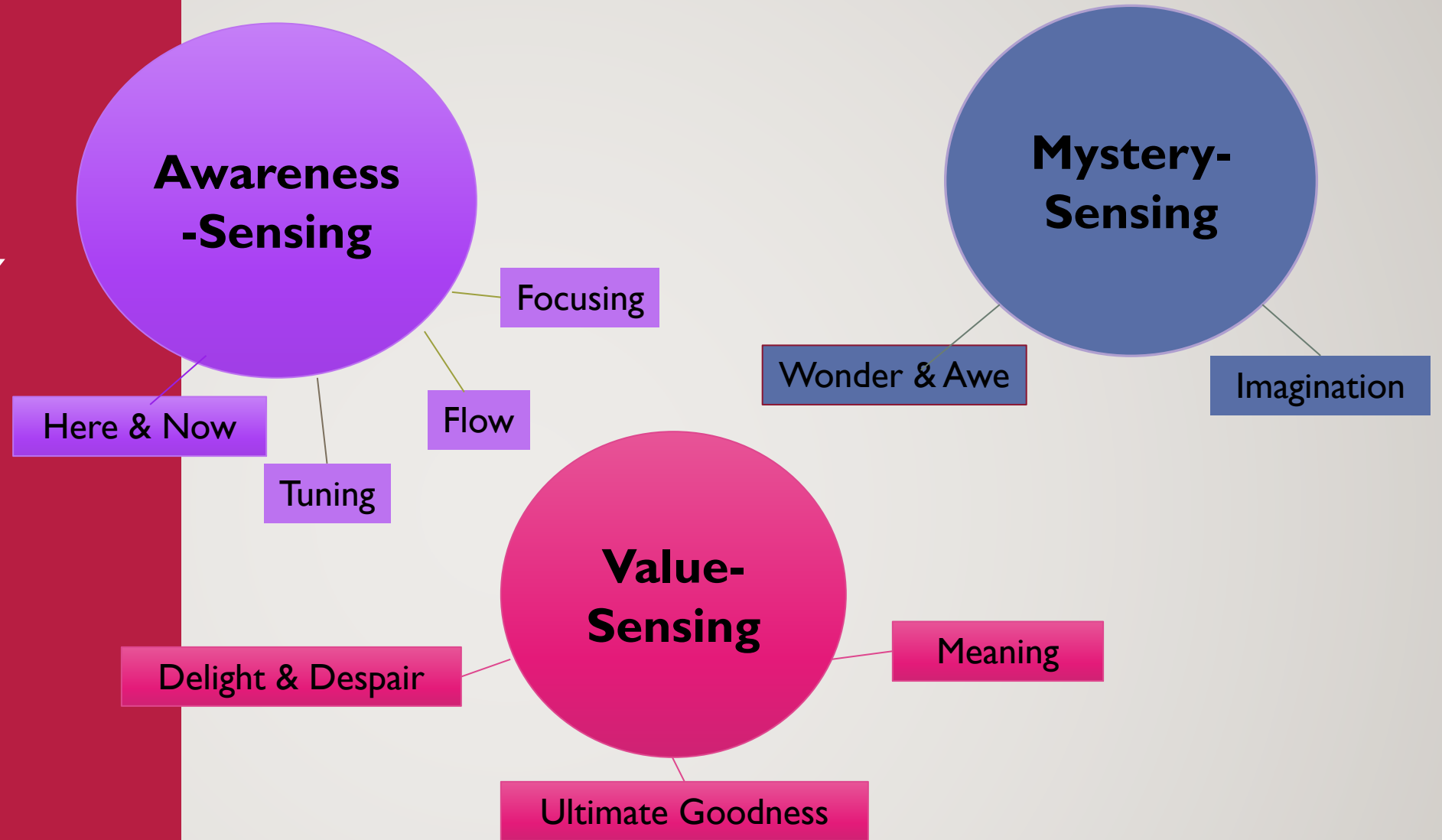
IN-SERVICE EDUCATORS DEFINITION OF SPIRITUALITY

- From a survey study conducted with 33 early childhood educators in the U.S., it was found that they have multilayered understanding of children's spirituality and most commonly believe **children's spirituality includes building connections, practicing virtues, and making-meaning**. To a lesser degree educators also mentioned **God and religion, self-awareness, mindfulness and presence, humanness and inner-feelings** when describing children's spirituality. (Mata-McMahon et al., 2020)

HOW DO CHILDREN EXPERIENCE AND EXPRESS SPIRITUALITY?

FOUR KINDERGARTENERS

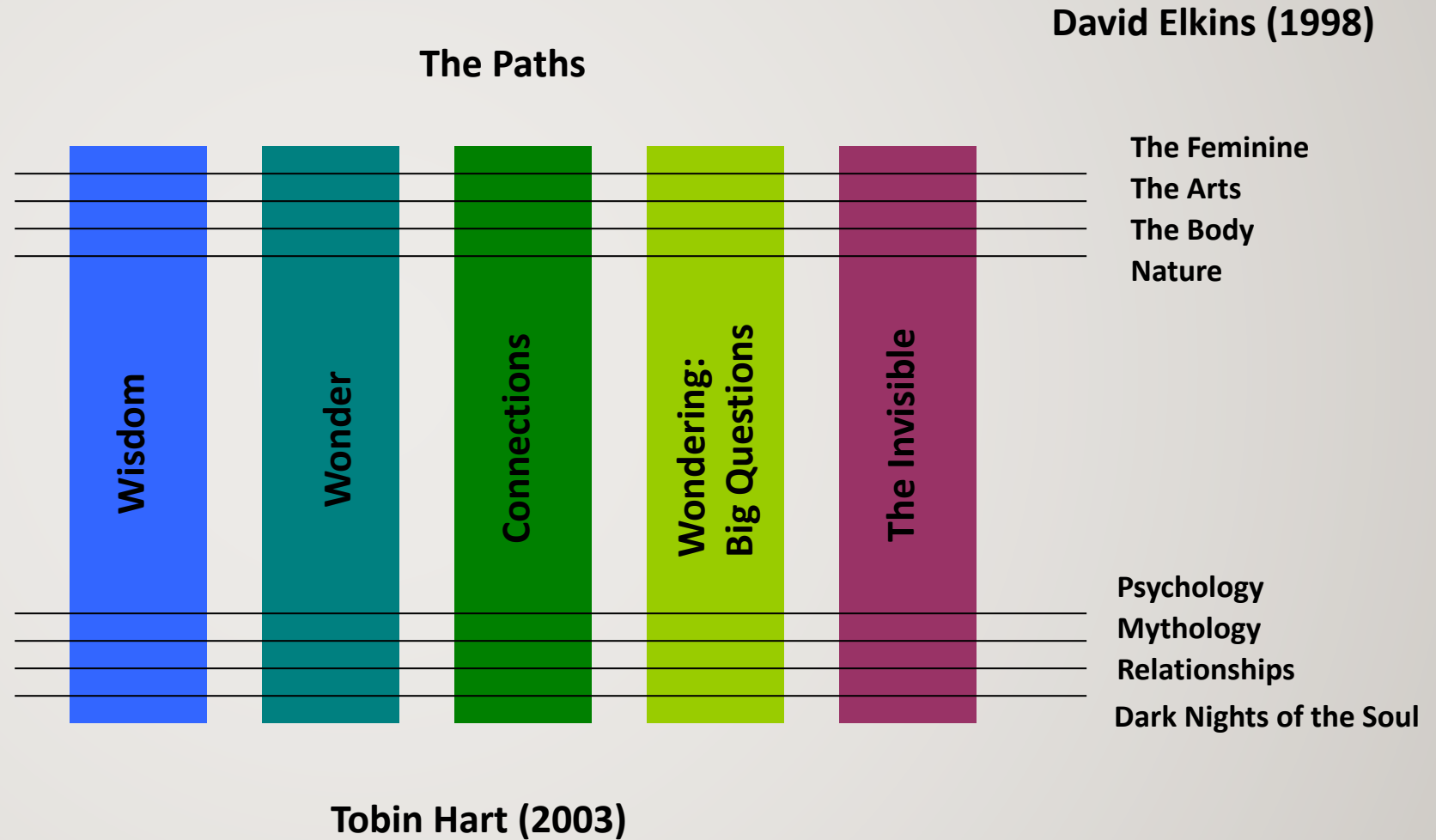
CHILDREN'S SPIRITUALITY



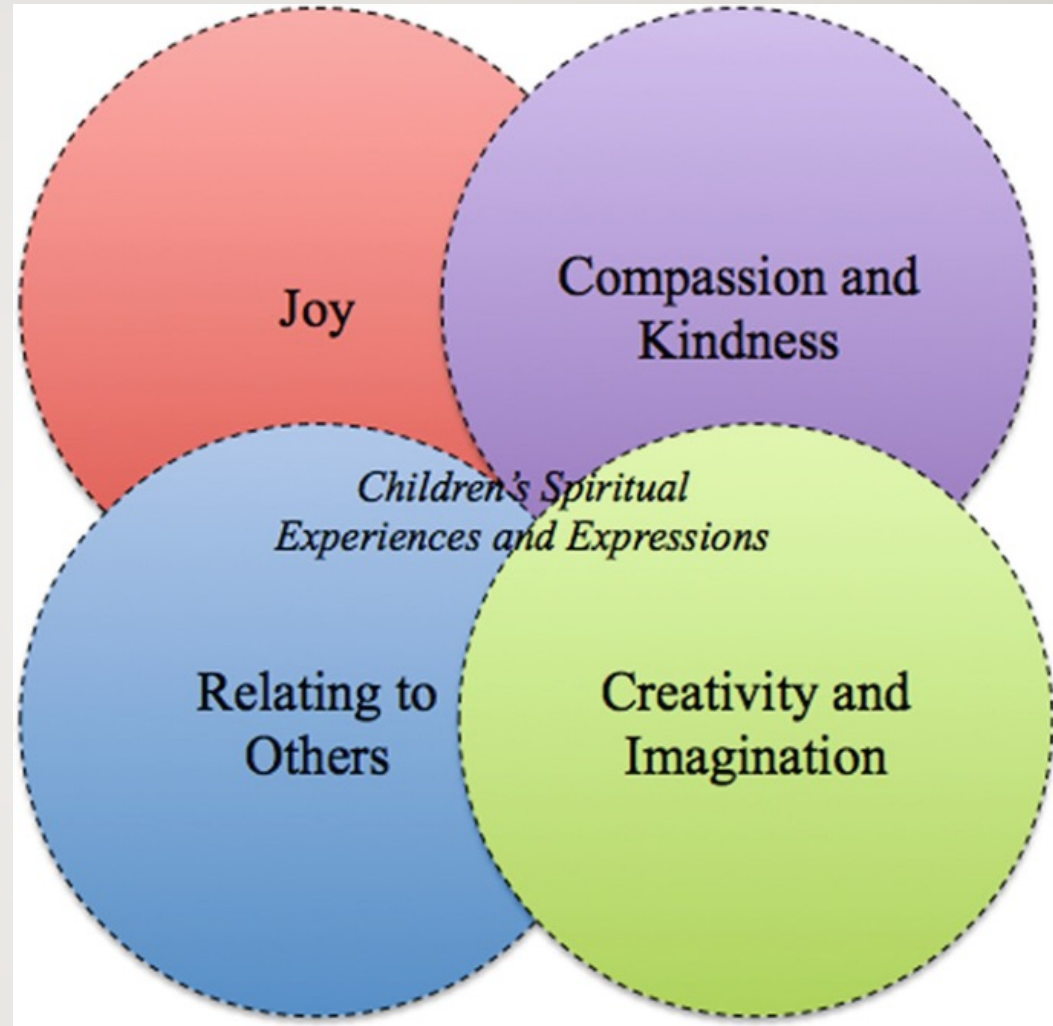
Hay & Nye (2006)

CHILDREN'S SPIRITUALITY

Spiritual Components



CHILDREN'S SPIRITUALITY



Mata-McMahon (2019b., p. 228)

HOW CAN SPIRITUALITY BE SUPPORTED IN THE CLASSROOM?

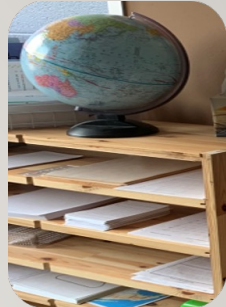
WHAT ARE THE TEACHERS DOING?

WHAT THE TEACHERS ARE DOING

- From a survey study conducted with 33 early childhood educators in the U.S., it was found that:
 - Creative expression
 - Free play
 - Engagement with nature
 - Contemplative practices
 - Building relationships
 - Moral and character development
 - Good examples

Mata-McMahon et al., 2018)

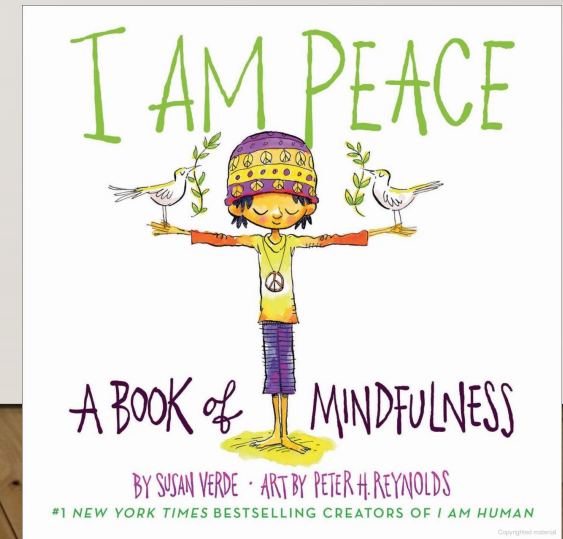
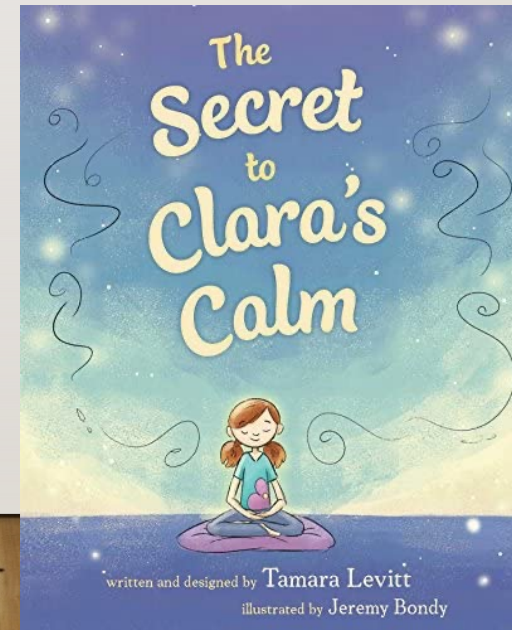
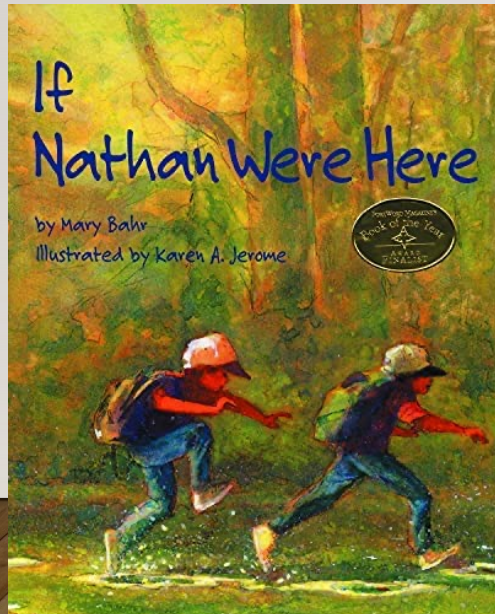
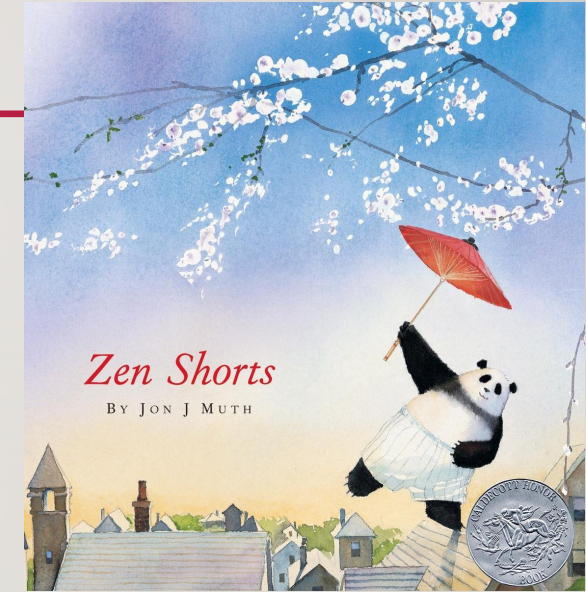
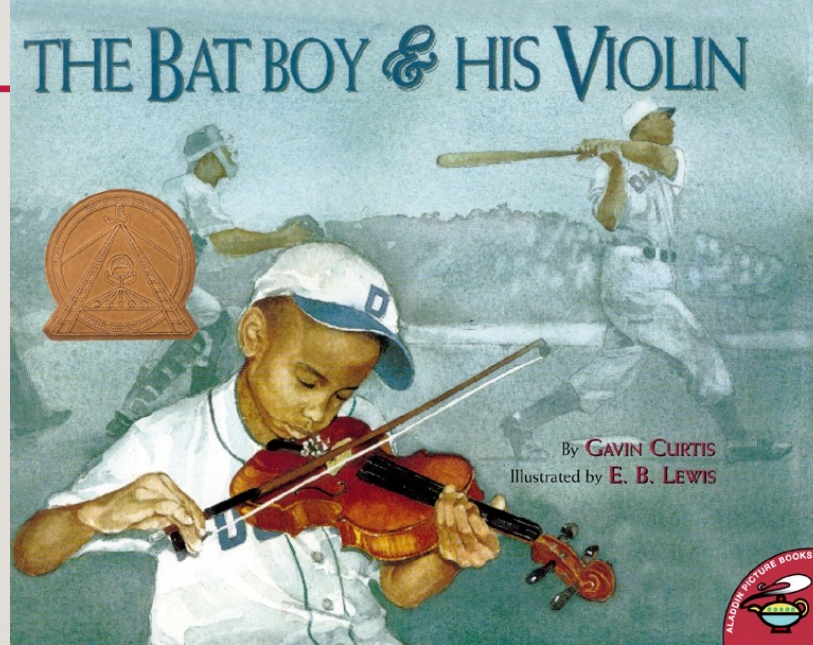
MS. ESCARFULLER'S CLASSROOM



EXISTING PROGRAMS TO SUPPORT SPIRITUALITY



CHILDREN'S SPIRITUALITY – BOOKS



HOW CAN WE TEACH TEACHERS HOW TO TEACH SPIRITUALLY?

INTRODUCING SPIRITUALITY THROUGH MEDITATION AND MINDFULNESS

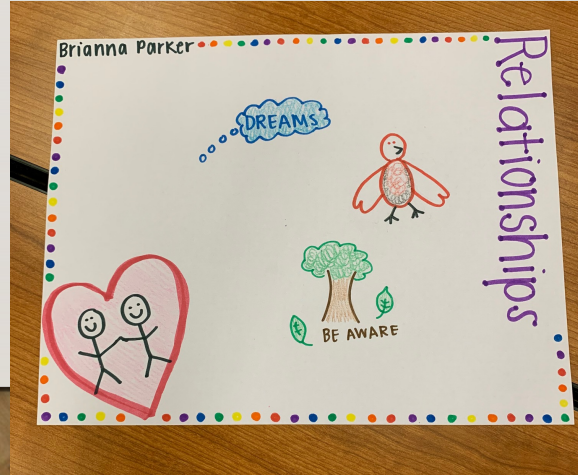
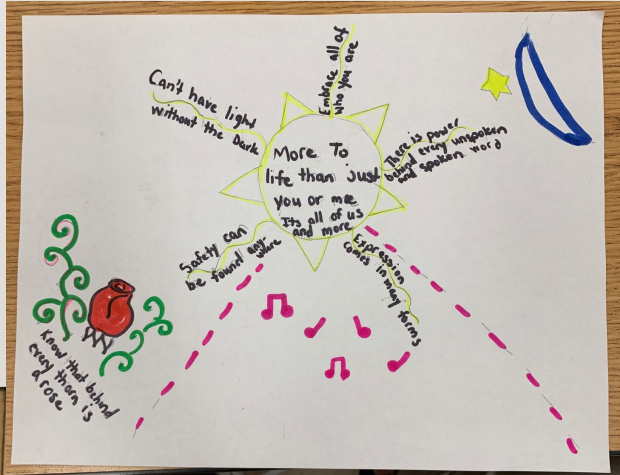
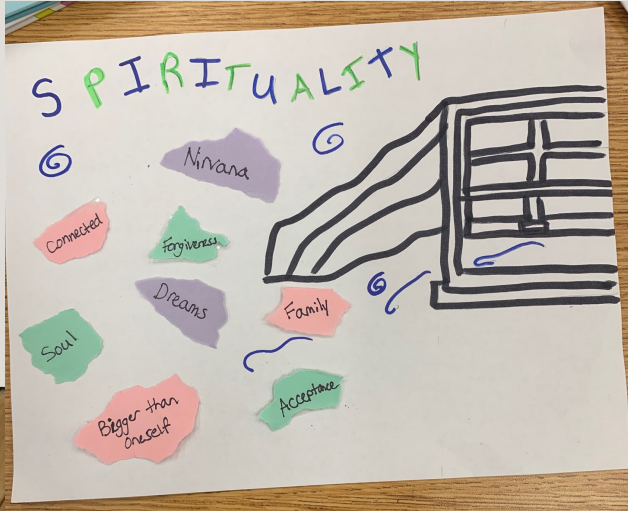
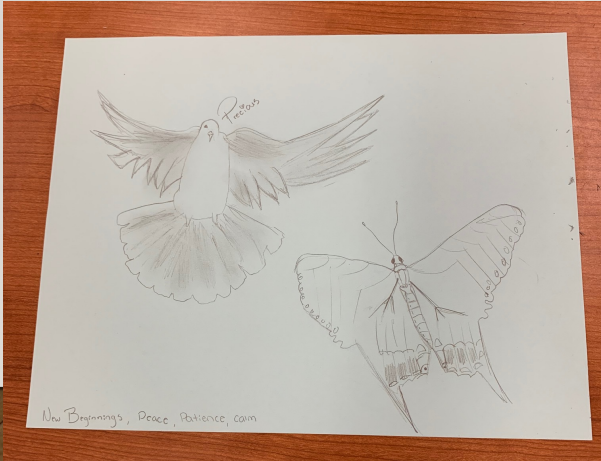
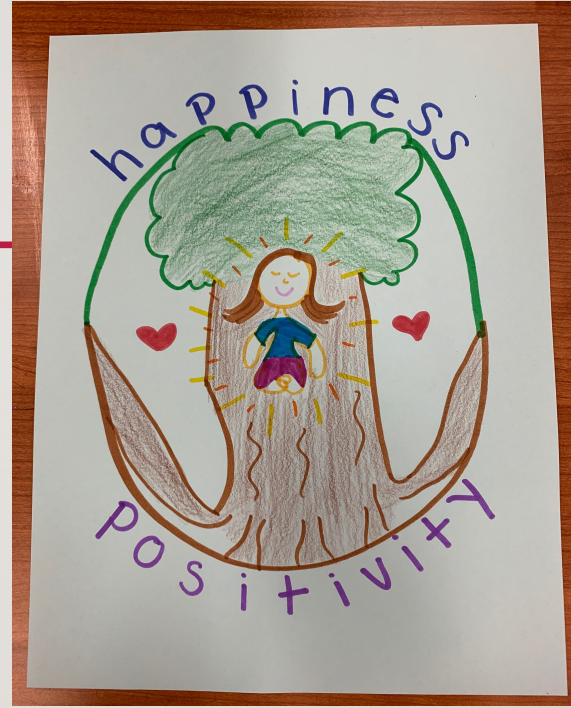
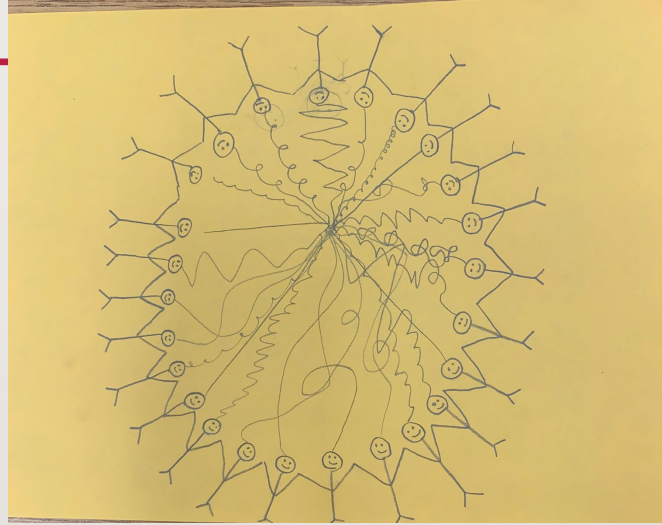
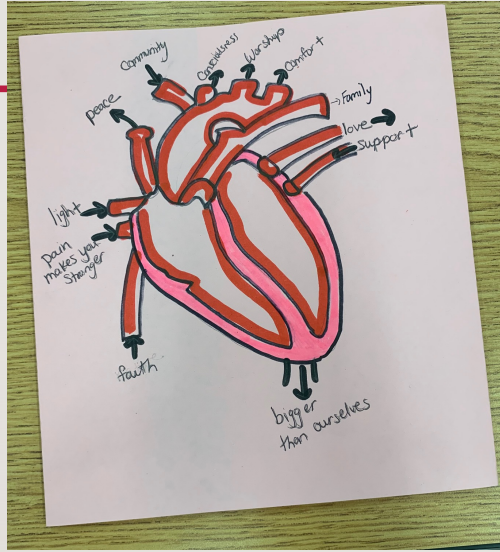
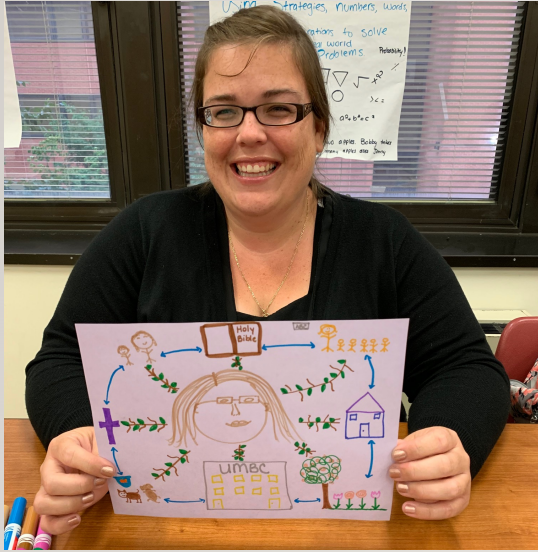
REDESIGNING THE ECE SEMINAR

- **Course Redesign – EDUC 451/782 Internship Seminar in ECE (Fall 2019 and Fall 2020)**
- Purpose: Spiritually support teacher candidates and the young children they teach.
- Objectives:
 1. Students will learn and practice weekly meditation techniques to promote mindfulness.
 2. Students will implement a Meditation Project with their students for two weeks to promote mindfulness.
- Intervention:
 1. One meditation technique a week, f2f and **online** (breath meditation, tension release, anchoring technique, bubble of light, unguided meditation with music, setting an intention, active/walking meditation, body scan, caring for yourself, mindful breathing, connecting with nature)
 2. Assignment: Meditation Project (2 weeks with the children).
 3. Pre and Post Survey.

ACTIVITY – DEFINING SPIRITUALITY

1. Using the materials provided respond to the following questions:
 - a. What does spirituality mean to you?
 - b. How do you understand, feel, live and/or grow in your spirituality?
2. Be as creative as you want. You can write a poem, draw a picture, use symbols, and/or combine words and images. Feel free to embellish and include as many components to this piece as you see fit. Let the materials and medium help express yourself. If you need to move, take a break and come back to it, you may do that too.
3. We will have 30 minutes to create this personal definition or our Spiritual Journey.

COHORT I – DEFINITION OF SPIRITUALITY



COHORT II – DEFINITION OF SPIRITUALITY

25



My Spirituality

My Spirituality is like a tree or a flower
 It Blossoms all with in me
 and around me

My Spirituality is like
 a connection, very concrete
 it connects to the earth,
 the world and nature
 around me

My Spirituality is like
 a river, a lake
 It's flowing, moving
 feeling the love, the peace
 of the people and everything
 around me

My Spirituality is
 like my roots deep
 with in my soul

health experience Positive
 Whole Journal breathe feelings
 love Connection
 Optimism meaning
 Self-care growth Meditation
 Prayer senses Peace Yoga
 Purpose Well-being

Spirituality

9/19/20, 8:58 PM • NEW

Spirituality Poem

Calm, peace, relax
 Worries melt away
 Breathe in, breathe out
 Blow those fears away
 Quiet, purpose, faith
 Re-center for the day

For me, spirituality is just about being one with yourself. Centering your mind and letting stress and fears leave your body. Taking time to simply be.

[Reply](#)

empathy light positivity love compassion
 peace emotion kindness

Spirituality

RELEVANT PUBLICATIONS

PUBLISHED AND UPCOMING

ARTICLES

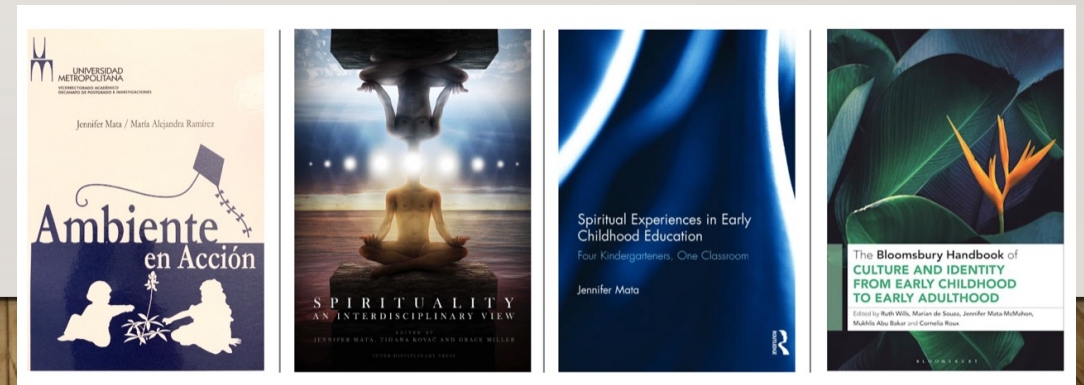
- Mata-McMahon, J., Haslip, M. J., and Schein, D. L. (2020). Connections, Virtues, and Meaning-Making: How Early Childhood Educators describe Children's Spirituality. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 48(5), pp. 657-669. DOI: 10.1007/s10643-020-01026-8
- Mata-McMahon, J. (2019a). Finding Connections between Spirituality and Play for Early Childhood Education. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 24(1), pp. 44-57. DOI: 10.1080/1364436X.2019.1619528
- Mata-McMahon, J., Haslip, M. J., and Schein, D. L. (2018). Early Childhood Educators' Perceptions of Nurturing Spirituality in Secular Settings. *Early Child Development and Care*, 189(14), pp. 2233-2251. DOI: 10.1080/03004430.2018.1445734
- Mata-McMahon, J. (2017). Spirituality and Humor: Making Connections for Early Childhood Education. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 22(2), pp. 170-178. DOI: 10.1080/1364436X.2017.1287681
- Mata-McMahon, J. (2016). Reviewing the Research in Children's Spirituality (2005-2015): Proposing a Pluricultural Approach. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 21(2), pp. 140-152. DOI: 10.1080/1364436X.2016.1186611
- Mata, J. (2014a). Sharing my Journey and Opening Spaces: Spirituality in the Classroom. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 19(2), pp. 112-122. DOI: 10.1080/1364436X.2014.922464

BOOK CHAPTERS

- Mata-McMahon, J. (2019b). Exploring Connections between Humor and Children's Spirituality. In E. Loizou and S. Recchia (Eds.) *Research on Young Children's Humor: Theoretical and Practical Implications for Early Childhood Education* (pp. 223-241). Cham, Switzerland: Springer. ISBN: 978-3-030-15201-7
- Mata-McMahon, J. (2018). What do Kindergarteners' Spiritual Experiences and Expressions look like in a Secular Classroom? In B. Espinoza, J. R. Estep, and S. Morgenthaler (Eds.) *Story, Formation, and Culture: From Theory to Practice in Ministry with Children* (pp. 235-252). Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications. ISBN: 978-1-5326-4685-0
- Mata, J. (2013). Meditation: Using it in the Classroom. In W. Van Moer, D. A. Celik & J. L. Hochheimer (Eds.), *Spirituality in the 21st Century: Journeys Beyond Entrenched Boundaries* (pp. 109-119). Oxford, UK: Inter-Disciplinary Press. ISBN: 978-1-84888-257-7
- Mata, J. (2012). Nurturing Spirituality in Early Childhood Classrooms: The Teacher's View. In M. Fowler, J. D. Martin III, & J. L. Hochheimer (Eds.), *Spirituality: Theory, Praxis and Pedagogy* (pp. 239-248). Oxford, UK: Inter-Disciplinary Press. ISBN: 978-1-84888-091-7

BOOKS

- Wills, R., deSouza, M., **Mata-McMahon, J.**, Abu Bakar, M., and Roux C. (Eds). (2021). *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Culture and Identity from Early Childhood to Early Adulthood: Perceptions and Implications*. London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic. ISBN: 9781350157101
- Mata-McMahon, J., Kovač, T., and Miller, G. (Eds). (2016). *Spirituality: An Interdisciplinary View*. Oxford, UK: Inter-Disciplinary Press. ISBN: 978-1-84888-371-0
- Mata, J. (2015). *Spiritual Experiences in Early Childhood Education: Four Kindergarteners, One Classroom*. Routledge. ISBN: 978-0-41583-470-4



PUBLICATIONS SUBMITTED & UNDER REVIEW

- Mata-McMahon, J., Haslip, M. J., and Kruse, L. (under review). Validation Study of the *Early Childhood Educators' Spiritual Practices in the Classroom (ECE-SPC)* Instrument using Rasch. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*.
- Mata-McMahon, J. and Escarfuller, P. (submitted). *Children's Spirituality in Early Childhood Education: Theory to Practice*. New York, NY: Routledge.



Early Childhood Educator's Spiritual Practices in the Classroom (ECE-SPC)

Instructions: Answer the following questions thinking about your role as an educator, the educational environment in which you teach, and the curriculum and activities you design and implement for the children with whom you work.

Section I: Spiritual Views and Practices

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

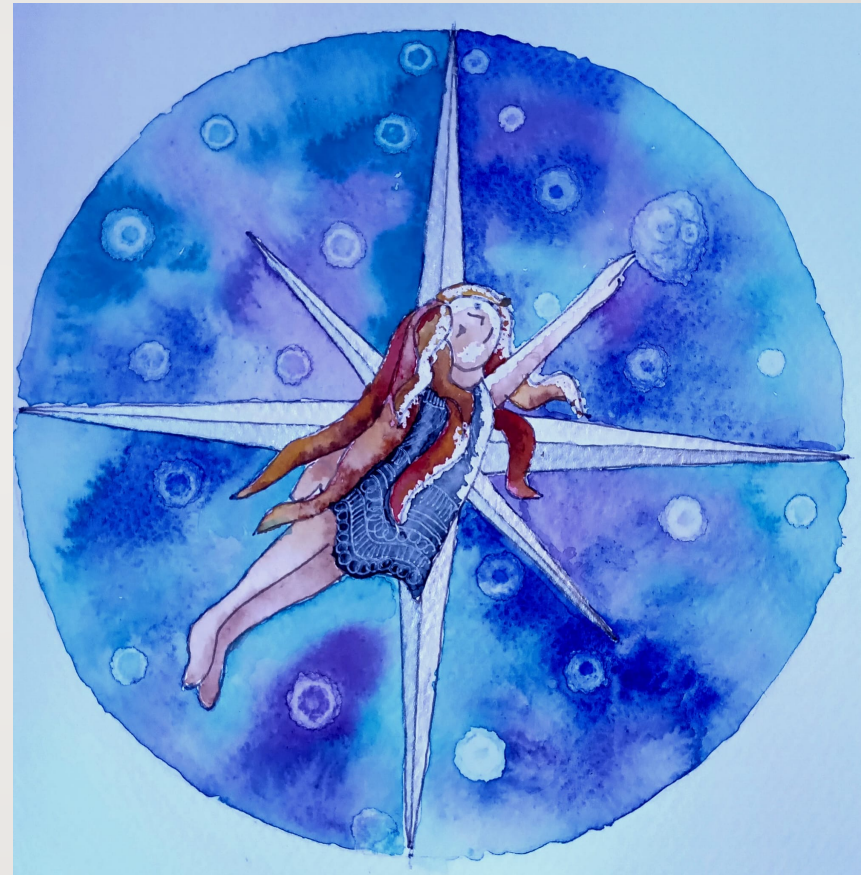
	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Uncertain (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
1. Spirituality is important to me, in my life.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. Spirituality is important for children.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. Schools should nurture children's spirituality.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. Children's spirituality should be nurtured only at home.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. Spirituality is an inherent domain of human life.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

AN INVITATION

A SHIFT IN PARADIGM: VISUALIZING OUR NORTH STAR

LET'S VISUALIZE OUR NORTH STAR

- Meditation experience for visualization (10 mins)



Mata-McMahon & Escarfuller, (submitted)

LET'S DO IT!

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