

## **The Role of the School in the Constitution of Transcendence**

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**ABSTRACT – The Role of the School in the Constitution of Transcendence.** This study aimed to investigate the contributions of contemporary schools to the development of transcendence among high school students in the city of São Paulo. The instruments for the collection of data were: 1) surveys and 2) discussion groups. Descriptive frequency and variance analysis, as well as prose analysis, were used to process the data thus produced. The results revealed that schools contribute to the development of transcendence when: 1) they provide an environment in which the transcendental dimension can be explored; 2) they offer psycho-emotional support to students; 3) their teachers become mediators of deep knowledge by developing relationships based on humanizing practices.

**Keywords: Transcendence. Education. School.**

**RESUMO – O Papel da Escola na Constituição da Transcendência.** Este trabalho teve como objetivo investigar as contribuições da escola contemporânea para a constituição da transcendência em alunos do Ensino Médio, na cidade de São Paulo. Os instrumentos de produção de dados foram: 1) aplicação de questionários e 2) grupos de discussão. Como metodologia para o tratamento dos dados assim produzidos, empregou-se a análise descritiva de frequências e variância bem como a análise de prosa. Os resultados revelaram que a escola contribui para a constituição da transcendência quando: 1) proporciona ambientes em que a dimensão transcendental possa ser explorada; 2) oferece auxílio psicoemocional aos alunos; 3) seus professores se tornam mediadores de conhecimentos profundos ao desenvolverem relações baseadas em práticas humanizadoras.

**Palavras-chave: Transcendência. Educação. Escola.**

## Introduction

Historically, education has relegated transcendence to a secondary place. According to Miller (2019, p. 165), both progressive and humanistic education addressed the “whole person,” but focused on the intellectual, emotional, physical, social, and aesthetic domains; by doing so, these approaches ignored the spiritual dimension of humanity. Over the past 20 years, given the pervasiveness of spirituality, there has been increasing attention to its role in education and school practices (Glazer, 1999). What does this increased attention really mean for education? Does the school have a fundamental role in this process? Valuing spirituality can bring benefits to both schools and students. In any case, it is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore the influence that the spiritual dimension exerts on one’s learning environment.

## Transcendence as a part of being and its implications to education

Many authors in the fields of education and psychology have written about the spiritual dimension and have made relevant contributions to its understanding. Due to an individual’s perceptions about their concrete and abstract experiences, spirituality has had different meanings for different people. Explaining the spiritual aspect can be as difficult as defining it. However, Viktor Frankl sheds light on this issue when he says that existence is something essentially spiritual (Frankl, 2017, p. 20). In fact, one’s spirituality it is not only a question of greater ontological importance, but also of special psychotherapeutic relevance. In logo-therapy, Viktor Frankl’s psychological theory, the dimension of the spirit, the noetic dimension, governed by the realm of values, is of paramount importance. He discovers, at the unconscious level, the presence of spirituality which other psychotherapy schools deny. Frankl’s theory becomes an authentic “deep psychology”, as it descends not only into the instinctive unconscious, but also into the spiritual unconscious. It is a psychotherapy based on the spiritual (Pascual, 2003). The phrase “into the spiritual” means resorting to the *logos* (a Greek word that also signifies meaning), from which the term logo-therapy comes from, since it means “therapy through meaning” or “healing through meaning”. Logo-therapy is a psychotherapy centered on meaning (Frankl, 2005). Frankl resorts to the noetic or spiritual dimension when he touches on the essence of what it is to be human: the capacity to transcend an extremely dehumanizing situation, maintain inner freedom and, in this way, not renounce the “meaning of life”, which is related to each person specifically, is changeable and can be found or discovered. This noological dimension, which includes the human being in its entirety, body, psyche and spirit (*nous*), is situated beyond the psycho-physical, in a broader vision, which includes the spiritual, not only in a religious dimension, but also in a value-based, intellectual and artistic dimen-

sion. It has to do with the person in their concrete existence, in their daily life, in their lived experience (Frankl, 2017).

Frankl (2014, p. 62) conceives of man as being a corporeal-psychic-spiritual unity and as a totality. In other words, as made up of the physical (corporeal/somatic/biological/factual), psychic (mental/animeic) and noetic (spiritual) dimensions. The spiritual or noetic dimension encompasses all others, since it is a specifically human dimension. In this abyssal instance, primarily and genuinely human, we find personal decisions, creativity, religiosity, an ethical sense, and an understanding of value (Frankl, 2017, p. 30). In fact, it is the source of subjectivity, freedom, moral conscience and responsibility. Spirituality, in Frankl's view, is the very essence of the human being, because as pure consciousness it is the primary source of the act (Frankl, 2016). Although primordial, the noetic dimension is, in a certain sense, unconscious, and to achieve it, one needs to transcend oneself. Self-transcendence is the essence of human existence, since what is essential is not the duration of life, but rather the fullness of meaning:

[...] 'self-transcendence' of existence. This means that to be human means to direct oneself beyond oneself, towards something other than oneself, towards something or someone [...] on the basis of one's pre-reflexive ontological self-understanding, one is aware that one self-realizes precisely to the extent that one forgets oneself; and one forgets oneself again to the extent that one gives oneself to a cause that one serves, or to a person whom one loves (Frankl, 2017, p. 77-78).

According to Frankl (2016), existential fulfillment can occur in three ways: 1) Through creative values, "creating a work or performing an act", transcending one's sphere to something in the world, discovering meaning in what one does, through creation and production, when composing a scientific or artistic work, when polishing a rough stone, when giving colors to a canvas, etc. 2) Through experiential or experiential values, finding meaning in experiencing something or loving someone, in relationships, in the encounter between an I and a you. And also, 3) through attitudinal values, situations of inevitable suffering, moments of despair, which an individual faces with an attitude of meaning, in which, even in the face of pain, one has the possibility and freedom to position oneself, transforming a condition of suffering into an achievement, allowing one to give a testimony of which only human beings are capable.

All human beings are endowed with these elements, and Frankl does not show any kind of favoritism (whether to religious people or atheists). Although Frankl is often referred to as being deeply religious, he is committed to medical neutrality, striving not to impose any religious beliefs or spiritual visions on his patients; consequently, he takes a neutral stance on religiosity. He sees spiritual development as a universal experience, accessible to all human beings, regardless of their religious orientation, so that in his anthropological view there is room for the religious person (of any denomination or religious per-

suasion) and also for the non-religious, whether agnostic, atheist or of any other orientation.

Edgar Morin, author of the Complexity Theory, also developed some very significant insights regarding the spiritual dimension and how the study of this dimension (noology) is crucial, not only for science, but for all studies (Morin; Coppay, 1983, p. 236) and also, perhaps more importantly, for human thought (Morin, 2005). It is through this dimension that human questioning is formed, it is the noosphere that establishes contact with the unknown, the inaudible, the mystery... (Morin, 1992, p. 127). Morin names human noetic activities in many ways, but the two main focuses are the noosphere (that articulates the life of ideas) and noology (that articulates the organization of ideas). "The noosphere is in us and we are in the noosphere" (Morin, 1992), he states emphatically.

Morin's work is a formidable articulation of human spirituality, in an era plagued by reductionism in the forms of technicism, scientism and logocentrism. It is his reflection on *nous* that leads Morin (1998) to equate us to minds that think and noology to the science of the thinking mind. Morin characterizes noology as the organization of ideas that are found in the noosphere, whence they call for integration. The noosphere is the immediate, albeit subtle and sometimes challenging, way of discerning the ecosystem. All of our actions, whether consciously intentional or not, are mediated through the noosphere (spiritual dimension).

Therefore, it is necessary to reconnect spirituality with this knowledge, in order to give value to issues that are essential to our survival and our human identity. By arguing in favor of a multidimensional approach that considers the science of human nature in an integral way, we give new significance to words whose meaning has been lost and emptied in the sciences, including cognitive sciences: soul, spirit and thought (Morin, 2012b, p. 19). Therefore, Morin offers important contributions for a possible reflection on the role of schools in the development of spirituality.

For Morin, the role and one of the challenges for the school of the future is to teach us about the human condition, which expresses precisely this conception of the human being as a plural, multiple being, with diverse and interconnected dimensions. For that reason, education should treat it as such. In a simplifying and fragmentary paradigm, such as the one that prevails in the current educational system, the human being who is being educated ends up developing only some of his/her dimensions. Morin argues that the goal of harmonious and simultaneous development of multiple dimensions can stimulate us towards a practice in which the student would be understood under the prism of a more integral concept, leading humanity to knowledge of its own complex realities, since education can only be viable if it is an integral education of the human being, the type of education that addresses the open totality of the human being and not just one of its components (Amorin, 2003; Morin, 2000b, p. 11).

In fact, the aim of education is not to transmit ever more knowledge to the student, but to create a deep inner state, a polarity of spirit that guides in a definite direction, not only during childhood, but throughout life (Morin, 2000a, p. 47).

Morin's thinking confirms the importance of spirituality in the process of individual formation. The complexity involved in this process requires a change of paradigms in all areas, especially in education. We must increase our understanding of the theme that unites spirituality and education. We must encourage different ways of seeing the dynamics of the implementation of the teaching-learning phenomena. We must identify and reflect on education as a process of formation of the human being. We must seek understanding of the relationship between man and the transcendental dimension of his/her personality in order to understand the individual, collective, social and global conditions of being (Lau, 2016).

Morin et al. seek answers to the question: "Who are we?" (2007, p. 88). And this fundamental question can only be truly answered in the spiritual sphere, because it helps students on their journey in search of the meaning of life. His approach creates serious implications for education and for the study of human spirituality, since his efforts are directed towards the formative processes of human beings, and towards the acquisition of a new planetary consciousness, a mixture of autonomy, freedom, and heteronomy, ideals that specifically belong to human complexities (Morin, 2005, p. 68).

It turns out that, of all social institutions, the school is one of the few that can be planned to influence spiritual processes, as well as to assist cognitive development, so that this social and emotional development can occur. Furthermore, in his argument about a possible epistemic object specific to education, Röhr (2007) lists three fundamental elements that are indispensable to education as a human phenomenon: the educator, the student, and the educational task, also known as the Didactic-Pedagogical Triangle. For him, education does not exist without the educators who take the responsibility that falls upon them to humanize the students, fulfilling the educational tasks that this humanization involves (Röhr, 2007, p. 58).

With respect to the first element, we must consider the educator as the "main person responsible for fulfilling the educational task" (Röhr, 2007, p. 67), which is a fundamental contribution to the educational thinking of educators, given that "the more secure is the knowledge that educators acquire in their conceptualization of the wholeness of the human being, the more guidelines they have to guide their pedagogical practice" (Röhr, 2007, p. 63).

There is an extensive debate about the purpose of the school (Callas, 2020; Lenoir; Adiguzel; Lebrun; Lenoir *et al.*, 2016) because the educational purposes of the school determine what it does and exists for. They involve the assumptions that precede and guide

[...] decisions on educational policies, curricular guidelines, student training objectives, content selection, teaching-learning ac-

tions, school operating methods, teacher training guidelines and policies for evaluating education systems and school learning. At the same time, educational purposes are the main references for teaching quality criteria and for programs and projects of educational systems and, consequently, for schools and teachers (Libâneo, 2016, p. 2).

It is necessary to recognize -- on the other hand -- that the purpose of school, a strong element in knowledge transmission, is limited and insufficient to account for the integral formation of the individual. For Röhr (2007), the teleological question of education is not limited to the intellectual acquisition of knowledge because a certain awareness of educational assumptions is necessary although not always present. Whatever the objective of education, one must assume that human lives have meaning. Thus, we must start from the assumption that meaning exists. Without this, "Education is a baseless endeavor" (Röhr, 2007, p. 61).

The role of school, in light of these reflections, consists -- in more general terms -- in providing help to the student on their path towards fulfillment, humanizing each human being as fully as possible. "Education, as a practice of freedom, [...] implies moving from the condition of object to the condition of subject. Humanization does not occur spontaneously, but through a liberating pedagogical process" (Freire, 1970). Therefore, we must always ask ourselves the same question: what is the student lacking at a certain moment to get closer to their fulfillment?

This reflection shows us that spirituality is a dimension of the multidimensional being that makes human beings truly human. It is the deep and superior dimension that gives meaning to life and allows us to achieve self-transcendence. This self-transcendence can be achieved in countless ways, but mainly by discovering a meaning in what we do, by having experiences or by loving someone and also through meaningful attitudes that transform one's inhospitable condition into an achievement.

Spirituality is not hostage to religion, but it is more than religion, since it can manifest itself in the individual, regardless of beliefs or dogmas. Even atheists and Gnostics can develop spirituality and manifest it through relationships and loving encounters with others in a real experience of transformation of reality that gives meaning to life itself. Developing the spiritual dimension means recognizing human beings as complex and bringing them into the process of integral development, which was once lost when human nature was partitioned. Helping students to recover the integrality of one's being is a challenging role for contemporary and future schools, because this recovery occurs only when it promotes the full development of all dimensions. In order to do this, we must train educators to be capable of helping students seek knowledge that is not simply transferred, but can be revealed and accessed in a human, spiritual and intersubjective way. Then and only then, the purpose of the school will be

come a basis from which to promote the integral formation of the being.

Röhr helps us to unveil the meanings of transcendence and to better clarify the analyses of students' statements regarding the development of their spirituality and the role of the school in that development.

### **Methodological procedures**

To obtain the data for this research, we used two data production and collection instruments: 1) questionnaires that consisted of 26 closed questions and two open questions, that was responded by 34 high school students whose ages varied between 14 and 18 from four schools (2 religious and 2 public schools) in the city of Sao Paulo; and 2) Discussion Groups, in which 21 students from two schools (1 religious and 1 public school) participated to portray the role of school education in the formation of spirituality. For data analysis procedures, we chose to use the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) statistical program for the questionnaire responses, with descriptive analysis of frequencies, variance and inferential statistics using Student's t-test in some questions. To understand the statements of the discussion groups, we resorted to Prose Analysis. This research was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Pontifical Catholic University of Sao Paulo.

### **Results and discussion**

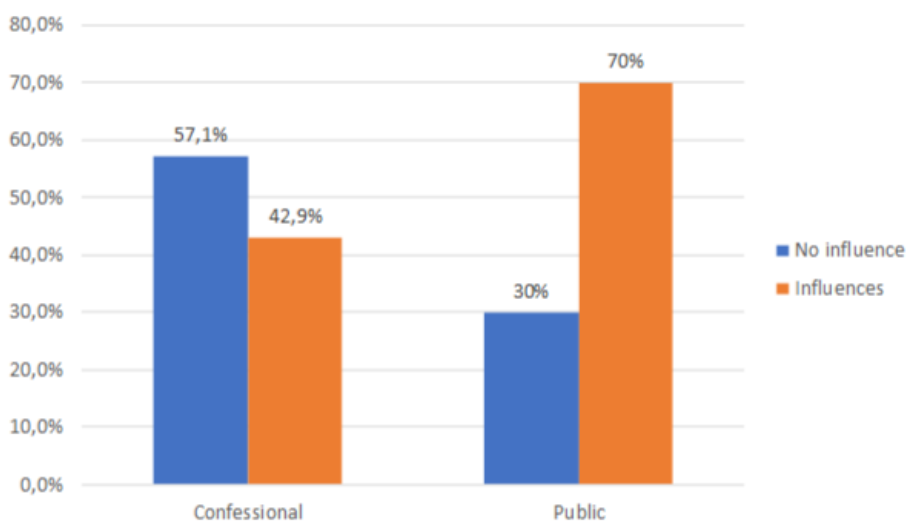
The deepest human needs, the experience of self-knowledge, the capacity for resilience and triumph, the feeling of wonder in a vast and impersonal universe, and the sense of mystery that we find in our experience in the world are related to the spiritual dimension and cannot be the monopoly of the study of religion; they are also part of the educational experience. Different studies offer explanations for the positive influence of spirituality on the lives of individuals, and only a negligent educator would ignore the powerful concepts that they express. In the questionnaire used during our research, there were questions that assessed one's perception regarding the constitution of spirituality and the role of the educational institution in the development of the spiritual dimension.

One of the questions assessed the influence of spirituality on academic performance, and 58.8% of the participants stated that there is a significant influence of spirituality while 41.2% stated that it has no bearing. When comparing the results from religious schools with those from public schools, we also observed that more public school students believe that spirituality influences academic performance, as shown in Graph 1. In other words, students from the public schools investigated are more convinced that spirituality positively influences academic performance. Lancuna *et al.* (2021) state that factors such as economic status, family problems, and academic performance can cause anxiety and depression, in addition to exposing students to sit-



uations of vulnerability and possible difficulties in facing them, causing them to find relief from tension in spirituality. If we take into account the fact that students from public schools experience more situations of socioeconomic vulnerability, it is possible that they are more likely to face adverse situations as well.

**Graph 1 – The influence of spirituality on academic performance according to type of school**



Source: Prepared by the author.

For Frankl (2016, p. 192), the ability to deal with extreme situations, which cannot be changed or avoided, forms what he calls “attitudinal values” which are, in his opinion, the highest values (Frankl, 2010). A student may feel that it is impossible to complete a certain school task, they may have no motivation to attend school, but -- even so -- they can find meaning in life. Even when one accepts that a situation is difficult, one may take action against that adversity and may face such circumstances with resilience; thus, students become capable of changing themselves to triumph over adversity (Frankl, 2018). Together with resilience, the student can also obtain spiritual help to improve his academic performance. While young people and teenagers are transitioning to adulthood, they can go through existential crises. Pestana (2021) argues that these existential crises can also affect school performance and that activities involving the spiritual dimension produce positive effects on academic performance and other aspects under those circumstances. Frankl’s (2005) clinical experiments established existential emptiness as the problem that most affects young people. For May (2011), the search for the meaning of life that happens during the development of the spiritual dimension, works as a strategy to prevent crises and experiences of existential frustration.



Despite the scarcity of research that evaluates the direct influence of spirituality on school performance, some studies emphasize that spirituality is a protective factor. Besides, Abdala *et al.* (2009), for example, studied university students and discovered that all students, regardless of religious beliefs, stated that they felt a positive influence of spirituality on academic performance. Encouraging the development of the spiritual dimension in educational settings can be essential for young people and adolescents to go through social growth and integration in a more favorable way.

In the educational field, the universe of attitudinal values is very broad, since there are countless situations that require young people and teenagers to overcome situations that are physically or psychologically demanding, accept challenges, get around obstacles, solve problems, and face conflicts – in the context of schoolwork, social co-existence, and relationship with themselves. In addition to their daily experiences, these young students often find themselves in situations of family, social, or economic vulnerability. However, schools can become a positive influence in the lives of students if they help students to develop their spirituality. In our research, we asked participants to indicate, on a scale of 100 points (0 = no significance, 100 = great significance), how much their teachers contribute to their spiritual growth. Only 44.12% (SD = 37.67 – high degree of data dispersion), that is, less than half of the participants, considered that teachers contributed to their spiritual growth. Most of them said that their teachers had not contributed at all to the development of their spirituality.

Some studies show the relevance of the role played by the school and the teacher in aspects that go well beyond a student's cognitive development (Arantes, 2014; Röhr, 2007). However, it is not always possible to assess the contribution of the school and the teacher separately, since their roles are intertwined in the broad scope of the teaching-learning process. At the same time, understanding the teacher's contribution to the constitution of spirituality is not an easy task, especially because the meanings that students construct from the stimuli they receive are broad and diverse. This lack of significance, reported by the participants, may, in our view, mean that the topics that contribute to a reflection on the spiritual sphere in a deep and critical way are not addressed.

Another hypothesis is that the teacher may be considering the act of educating as only the transmission of historically accumulated knowledge. If that is the case, teachers would abstain from the pedagogical task of mediation and addressing problems, that is, they would not act as a bridge between the student and deeper knowledge, preventing students from experiencing critical learning that would enable them for their role as subjects in society, and from developing skills that come from the spiritual dimension. Vieira and Placco (2013, p. 24) also emphasize that “the teacher is not a neutral agent”: whether they like it or not, whether they only work on their subject in a mediocre job, to achieve the end of education, they need to help students

establish meanings for the experience that they live and help them in the process of seeking meaning for their own lives.

It is also possible that teachers do not clearly understand the concept of spirituality. In fact, if they have a mistaken conception, they may think that there is no room at school for such an issue. This lack of understanding possibly comes from limited training that does not consider the spiritual dimension or even from personal experience that does not involve it. The more reliable is the knowledge that educators acquire in their conceptualization of the wholeness of the human being, the more guidance they would gather to guide their pedagogical practice (Röhr, 2007). Vieira (2009) also shows that, when the spiritual dimension is nurtured, the technical dimension, the pedagogical practice and the relationship between the teacher and the student are directly affected, and this brings relevance to the meaning that students ascribe to life and to work.

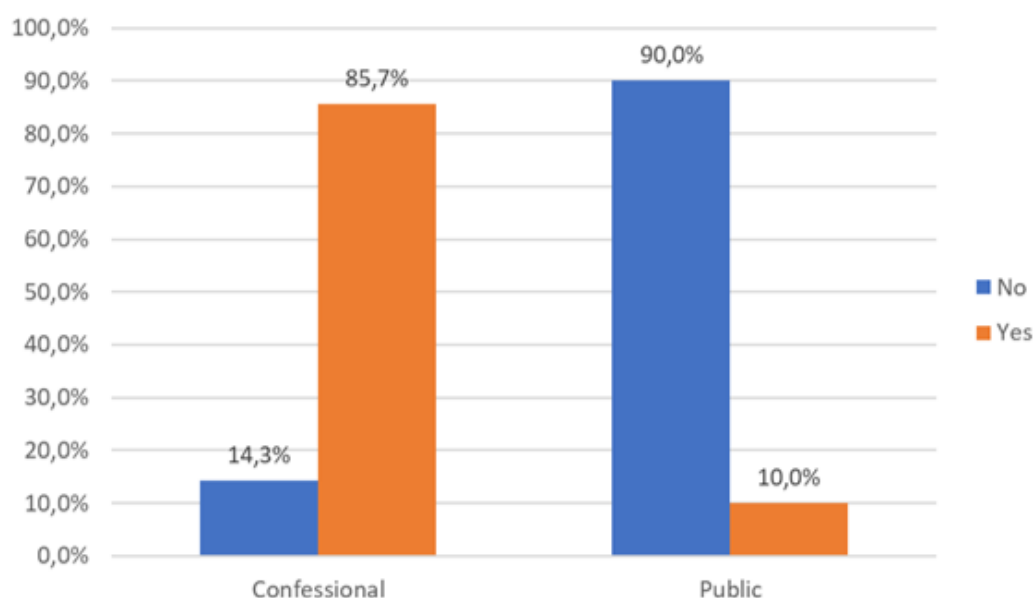
Teachers are also seen by students as role models and as a source of support and advice. According to Röhr, if they themselves have not faced different circumstances, felt all the difficulties on the path to the search for fulfillment, teachers will not be able to guide others. "Those who do not know the multiple ways to stop or deviate on a path will hardly be able to help students on their path" (Röhr, 2007). On the other hand, if educators are not capable of experiencing a certain coherence in their own spiritual lives, we cannot expect them to encourage students in their spiritual lives. This means that spirituality is essential for educators, because, by reflecting on the meaning of their own existence, this practice will influence students in the same direction and, consequently, will affect the identity of the school itself (Röhr, 2012; Vieira; Placco, 2013).

According to Freire (1970), educators are the main coaches that contribute to the humanization of students through a comprehensive type of education. "Human formation includes all educational efforts in preparing students to find their spirituality" (Röhr, 2011). For Röhr, educators must seek appropriate, ethically justified ways that contribute to the dimensions that lead to human fullness. In this case, they would be acting in favor of the wholeness of these dimensions, according to the individuality of the students themselves. Educators must always ask themselves this question: what is the student lacking at this moment to get closer to his or her full potential? Educators must have the ability to diagnose what is lacking for one's full potential and to gain intrinsic knowledge of the internal and external obstacles that hinder progress in integral development (Rogers, 1969).

Besides, in order to understand the perception of the students regarding the institution's actions, the questionnaire asked the students if, at school, there were opportunities to learn more about spirituality. 41.2% said yes and 58.8% said that there was no opportunity for them to learn about spirituality. When comparing denominational schools with public schools, a significant difference is perceived, be-

cause there is much more opportunity for learning it in confessional schools than in the public schools surveyed, as Graph 2 shows.

**Graph 2 – Comparison between institutions regarding the opportunity to learn about spirituality**



Source: Prepared by the author.

We must consider the fact that the religious schools in our study offer religious education classes, in addition to spiritual events such as “chapels” and religious programs. These factors may explain the different response from the students of public and private educational institutions regarding the opportunity to learn about spirituality. The concept that the students value the most is spirituality in a religious context, and this explains why students in religious schools report that they have more opportunities for spiritual learning.

Religious education can also be significant in the integral formation of human beings, because religiosity belongs to the spiritual dimension that is intrinsic to humanness. Various disciplines can contribute to the development of values, but the specifically spiritual mission of education -- which is to teach understanding among people as a condition and guarantee of the intellectual and moral solidarity of humanity -- will promote the growth of more humane people (Morin, 2000b).

In the questionnaire, students also expressed the opinion that it is important that schools should offer some type of spiritual assistance to students. 70.6% of them answered affirmatively, while 29.4% did not consider it important for schools to offer spiritual assistance to students. Religious schools offer some type of spiritual counseling,

which can be provided by a pastor, a school chaplain, or a religious education teacher.

Considering the global scenario in which there are so many social inequalities, young people are considered a particularly vulnerable population (Dayrell; Carrano, 2002). For that reason, spiritual support for young people in different environments can help them to become resilient and effectively provide individual and social resources to help them face adversity. These factors help to solve problems and maintain a healthy development, especially in the spiritual dimension.

The discussion groups also expanded our understanding of the data when these topics were addressed. Regarding the influence of the school on the spirituality of students, students generally understand that there is such influence, but that it happens indirectly: “[The school] has some influence on spirituality. And it’s like I said: spirituality is not just about religion. Even if it’s not a religious school, it can influence one’s spirituality (EC).” “I think that the school has some influence on spirituality, but not directly. Like, they show you some things about life, some things you see for yourself. What you like most is what you follow, but it’s rather indirect (EC).” “Ah, I believe that spirituality has more to do with feelings than spirits, religiosity, or things of this sort. So, in other words, the school helps our spiritual development through feelings (EP).”

The indirect way mentioned by the participant may mean that it is not done in an imposing way, but in a subtle way, without violating the student's religious freedom and conscience. For Röhr (2012), thinking about an education focused on spirituality necessarily requires thinking about indirect education, an education in which the ground can be prepared, but the student decides what steps to take. According to Röhr (2012), the first way to act indirectly is through the example of the educators themselves.

In addition, we found that the participants understand that, by helping students deal with their psycho-emotional problems, the school is helping them in their spiritual development. According to Dayrell & Alves (2015) and Aquino *et al.* (2016), young people worry about the future, and there is a negative correlation between depression, lack of meaning and perception of time, especially related to the future. According to Frankl (2015), doubts about the meaning of life can play an important role in the establishment and maintenance of a depressive condition. By discussing the meaning of life, as well as by bringing awareness regarding the future, and by providing support for students to face possible challenges that may arise, the school can foster spirituality, which is an important factor in preventing existential emptiness. By doing this, the school helps young people to discover new meanings, and prevents mental illnesses (Aquino *et al.*, 2011).

On the other hand, in the discussion group at the public school, the participants stated negatively that the school has not effectively contributed to their spirituality. In fact, they demonstrated some dis-

satisfaction with the fact that there are no religion classes. For them, this would be the occasion in which the school would help in the development of spirituality. According to them, “the school has not developed our spirituality, the school has helped more in classes, and even so it is not helping much (EP)”. One student said, “I think that the school would help if it had a religion class so that other students could talk about their religion and we could talk about ours and we could have discussions about it, but since there is none, we can’t talk, you know? (EP)”. Another student said,

I think that it depends, *because at school they don't talk much about it with the students. So if they wanted to teach a class like this*, not to make people believe in a religion, but to talk, I think they could try. But what kind of spirituality, about us or about religion, like believing in something? (EP).

For these students, religious education is the most appropriate means to address spirituality. It is a school discipline that offers the best opportunity for students to learn about spirituality, since its epistemological object is that which is Transcendent, and which Frankl (2016, p. 88-95) calls a “super-sense”. On the other hand, spirituality should not be considered as the sole responsibility of religious education. Those who limit the teaching of spirituality to a subject or event make the educational process itself unfeasible. Spiritual education is therefore not a separate subject or discipline, nor is it a specific content to be taught (Röhr, 2012).

When we discussed the influence of school, we also talked about the contribution of teachers to students’ spirituality. Students think that the religious rituals performed by teachers contribute to the development of their spirituality, as an excerpt from a dialogue that took place in the discussion group of the confessional school shows, as transcribed below:

[Student 1]: I think so, the fact that *some teachers have the habit of praying has a bearing* (EC).

[Student 2]: But here [in this school specifically] (EC).

[Student 3]: If it’s in another school and *the teacher also has this habit, it will also have a bearing*, but not everyone has this habit (EC).

[Student 2]: I went to a school for a year and then moved to this one where I have been for a long time, and where I stay every afternoon. But that other school was Catholic. Then, as soon as we would arrive, we would pray the whole rosary and we would read Christian books, but the other school that I attended had no prayers. It was Japanese too, like this one, but it didn’t stress religion. The other schools that I attended put no emphasis on religion, belief or spirituality. So, if it depended on those specific schools, I wouldn’t know anything about it (EC).

The mention of prayer reveals an understanding of spirituality as connected to religion, in which rituals are valued as an expression of the spiritual dimension. It seems that the students also state that, if the teachers did not act in such a way, they might not have knowledge about spirituality. In other words, the type of religiosity manifested in the school can help students understand the spiritual dimension.

However, in the public school discussion group, the participants also stated that some teachers contribute to their spirituality, while others do not: According to one student, “there are teachers who, like, just teach lessons.” In fact, students say that

[...] *there are teachers who talk and help*. There are teachers who, like Mr. [teacher's name], if someone treats you badly, he goes there and talks to them. There are teachers who are like that, they go there, give lessons and leave. But there are others who want to know if students are okay, they want to know and find out how they are doing (EP).

The teacher sometimes asks us about our lives as students, and if he wants, he gives students freedom to talk about their lives. Then the teacher tries to give us good advice to try to solve some of the students' problems, because there are many students who are at school and who are having problems at home, with friends or teachers, since a teacher has authority in the classroom *and can provide help*. This is like a duty, too, because teaching is not just about giving a bunch of texts and questions and not knowing the reasons why the students do not make progress in the class. Because many students do not make progress because they are very sad, angry and have serious problems at home. It is not just, 'Oh, he is stupid and does not learn at all'. No! There are many students who need help (EP).

According to Röhr (2007), the educational task -- which is the fullest possible humanization of an individual -- is not limited to the intellectual acquisition of knowledge. It also encompasses actions, emotions, attitudes, convictions and everything that supports them. A good teacher-student relationship and spirituality are protective factors because they offer personal support for young people when exposed to risk factors. In fact, teachers can create situations in the classroom that foster protective factors that can positively affect both learning and spiritual development.

When asked about how the school could help develop spirituality, students at the confessional school spoke about a routine activity that influences their spirituality. The students also raised the possibility of being influenced by spirituality in disciplines that are not necessarily religious in nature, such as philosophy and sociology:

No! Not always. Maybe. It depends. I don't know. For example, *in philosophy class*, let's say, you can *connect more with yourself*, being influenced by that class. It helps you understand your own thoughts and other people's thoughts better. *For me, that's a type of spirituality, a connection with yourself*. So, the influence of a non-religious school is not always negative (EC).

I think that the school already does what it can to the extent that is possible. Like, I think that our school is very complete in that sense. For example, *we have a chapel service that, whether we like it or not, greatly influences our spirituality*. Many people believe that, because it's a Christian school, *there are many people who believe in God, who connect with God, and the chapel promotes that*. We meditate in the morning, we have... Now, if a person, like, doesn't believe in God, it's not God who motivates them, who connects with them, *we have philosophy classes, sociology classes*, I think that's very complete and very important, because it makes you understand. If you don't want to connect with God, try to connect with yourself, do you understand? (EC).

For those students, it is not only religious education that is capable of aiding with a student's spiritual dimension, because it is pos-

sible for other disciplines and areas of knowledge to address spiritual aspects. For Morin, young people do not find it difficult to connect knowledge, but we teach them to constitute knowledge separately. Our approach finds support in Morin's concept of transdisciplinarity (2000b; 2015), which promotes a dialogue between traditions of spiritual wisdom and science. Transdisciplinarity does not rule out deep knowledge, but understands it as a field of knowledge open to the fact that disciplines considered scientific complement one another. It is a teacher's role to foster a way of knowing that reconnects.

It is interesting to note that, when talking about how schools can influence the development of spirituality, a student mentioned the possibility that schools would promote indoctrination:

*I think this school already does a lot. I think doing more than it does, would sometimes interfere with other things and would easily promotef indoctrination and a way of doing things according to what the school thinks is right. That's what I think. It is good that it does what it does, but moving beyond that is already going too far (EC).*

*So the school is not obligated to teach a class on religion nor is it obligated to indoctrinate. Because, the moment the school teaches a class on religion, it will also indoctrinate on behalf of a religion. Then, the school's obligation is to teach mathematics, languages and science, not religion. A person must seek religion elsewhere (EP).*

Röhr (2007; 2011; 2012) seems to agree with this position, when stating that, in relation to the spiritual dimension, any attempt to impose a religion is prohibited. For him, there is no education that can make the student truly turn to spirituality and commit to it. The development of one's spirituality pertains to the student's free decision and any type of coercion on the part of the educator or the school, however subtle, can ruin an entire educational effort. According to Rogers (1961), "Only when I am free to be myself, without any expectations or belief systems being imposed on me, can I begin to explore what is most true for me, including the spiritual dimension."

The study of religiosity or spirituality is not bad in itself; it becomes problematic when these issues are used to exclude or discriminate against groups or beliefs that do not have any similarities or worldviews. Thus, it is important to reflect on how to foster spirituality amid diversity. Even though the spiritual dimension is inherent to human beings, its development is not automatic. It requires active pursuit and conscious decisions, often provoked by challenges and suffering (Frankl, 2005), while at the same time requiring external practices and stimuli (Wilber, 2011). To this end, it is necessary to recognize spirituality as secular, because it does not necessarily imply religious adherence.

We need an education that works that accepts our spiritual nature, that sees people as more than beings endowed only with reason, as sensitive beings capable of dealing with different ways of constructing knowledge, not just the so-called scientific-academic way. From this perspective, the educational stance (of teachers, students, admin-



istrators, parents, and the entire educational community) will need to be transdisciplinary, bias-free, if we want to facilitate the creation of environments conducive to open dialogue among disciplines, so that they can act together and not in a fragmented manner, in favor of humanization. As stated by Delors *et al.* (1996, p. 19): “Utopia, some will think, but a necessary utopia, a vital utopia to escape the dangerous cycle that feeds on cynicism and resignation”.

### **Final remarks**

Some participants stated that school offered them no opportunity to learn about spirituality. However, it should be taken into account that some of the schools surveyed do not offer religious education classes, which is a more conducive environment for exploring the topic, in their opinion. Similarly, students consider it important for schools to offer some type of spiritual assistance and that this assistance can function as a support network for students in vulnerable situations.

The analysis of the statements from the discussion groups showed that there is no consensus on whether schools contribute to spirituality and that, in the opinion of some participants, schools should offer religious education classes. However, despite this desire, some expressed concern about the way spirituality could be presented by schools, as religious beliefs may be imposed on students.

As for the contribution of teachers, it is clear that participants understand this contribution as some type of psycho-emotional assistance, a teacher-student relationship based on a humanizing practice that takes into account the conditions experienced by students. At the same time, participants value their teachers' manifestations of religiosity as contributing to their spiritual formation. Finally, it is possible to understand the principles of transdisciplinarity applied in the teaching of spirituality, according to which spirituality presents itself as a discipline or topic that collaborates with other disciplines so that the school can more fully influence its students' full development.

In summary, we found that most participants believe that spirituality affects academic performance. When we offer them spiritual resources to face life's adversities, students develop the ability to overcome difficulties, deal with existential crises, and relieve tension. All of these factors can influence performance in the cognitive dimension. However, further research should be conducted to delve deeper into this issue. We also found that most of the young students who participated in this research understand that their teachers do not contribute to the development of their spirituality, maybe due to the fact that educators neglect the issues that go beyond the task of transmitting knowledge since they tend to circumscribe themselves to their specialties. This may also mean that teachers do not clearly understand the concept of spirituality and that they have not developed spiritually on a personal level.

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