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RSE

EDUCATION, SPIRITUALITY, RELIGION AND TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING IN AGED ADULTS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

EDUCAZIONE, SPIRITUALITÀ, RELIGIONE E APPRENDIMENTO TRASFORMATIVO NELLA TERZA ETÀ: UNO STUDIO QUALITATIVO

ROSA CERA[1]

1. Educative dimension of spirituality

There are several studies on religion and spirituality, understood as key components of health in the context of global aging and life expectancy;[2] on the other hand, there are very few empirical studies on how spirituality and religion can influence learning experiences, thus acquiring an educational value. Therefore, this study initially intended to understand whether spirituality and religion indistinctly influence the learning experiences of the senior persons interviewed and whether their being religious and spiritual has changed their way of understanding the learning experience. The distinction between religion and spirituality emerged only after the interviews with the elderly people and had not been foreseen: this often happens in qualitative research where not everything can always be planned and foreseen. The distinction between religion and spirituality has thus become a fundamental element in the interpretation of results, since the way of understanding and living learning experiences by the interviewees turned out to be different according to their own being religious or spiritual. It has been scientifically proven that as people grow older, they also increase their sense of spirituality,[3] even if the distinction between spirituality and religion is not yet clear.[4] The confusion arises from the common characteristics of the two concepts: both of them can produce personal transformation and stimulate the search for ultimate truths. Religion is generally based on precise systems of beliefs, practices and rituals that take place within the communities of believers. On the other hand, it is more difficult to define spirituality, as its characteristics are not always shared and can mean different things to different individuals in different contests.[5] For example, the levels of religiosity are observable according to the presence in places of worship, while it is more difficult to observe a lived out spirituality, based on personal experiences, on the search for meaning in life and

on feelings about a personal relationship with a superior power.[6] Therefore, it is rather complex to find a single definition of spirituality and scholars have tried to define it in different ways:[7] Bean saw spirituality as the creation of meaning from life experiences; Tisdell described spirituality as part of the journey of life that leads to the fullness of life itself; instead, Puchalski, Vitillo, Hull, and Reller believe that spirituality consists of the ways human beings experience their connection with themselves, with others, nature and sacredness. In short, spirituality could therefore be understood as a journey in search of the meaning of life, aimed at achieving common good; as a path where adults' learning experiences acquire a particular and specific educational value, when learning goes beyond rationality to give voice to the soul, emotions and images. In this way, learning assumes a liberating and enabling value[8] and acquires the idea of human learning, based on precise psychological processes and on a strong relationship between body and mind.[9]

In the process of adult learning, only when the emotions interact with cognition, the actions performed in everyday life acquire meaning.[10] As a matter of fact, it has been scientifically proven that every decision made and every action taken is the result of the interaction between reason, emotions and feelings.[11] According to Dirkx, emotions are associated with images that emerge within the consciousness of the person, and for this reason emotions and feelings represent a way of bringing the soul closer to the outside world.[12] For example, adults engaged in learning activities can discover images related to emotions experienced in everyday life.[13] This is the reason why - when adults live their daily experiences intensely - images tend to bridge the gap between the external world and the spiritual dimension. Then, imagination becomes the means that connects spirituality with reality, helping adults to relate to their own soul. Therefore, spirituality helps control emotions and cognitivity within the learning process, thus educating adults to direct knowledge and actions to the achievement of common good. Specifically, spirituality helps the elderly people alleviate the physical and emotional stress related to age and helps them find the strength and will to continue engaging in learning processes aimed at enriching the educational daily life. Indeed, some studies have shown that spirituality represents an added value in advanced age.[14]

2. Transformative learning and spirituality

Adults' way of learning is characterized by being transformative, bringing changes in the way of being and thinking. However, transformations do not take place in any learning process. According to the theory of transformative learning, especially adults who live critical moments, committed to overcoming their fears and anxieties, accept novelties and transform themselves into people who are more aware and willing to accept uncertainty that characterizes existence. In fact, according to Jack Mezirow, transformative learning is the process

RIASSUNTO

La finalità della presente ricerca è di comprendere le ricadute educative della spiritualità e della religione nelle esperienze di apprendimento degli anziani intervistati che frequentano l'Università della Terza Età. In particolare, l'indagine intende indagare se la dimensione spirituale e l'essere religiosi possano trasformare il modo di apprendere degli intervistati e come questo modifichi le loro modalità di relazionarsi agli altri e di vivere la propria età senile. Il campione è composto da trenta anziani. Il metodo di indagine è fenomenologico nell'obiettivo della ricerca, mentre nella fase euristica i dati sono stati analizzati secondo la metodologia della Grounded Theory. I risultati dell'indagine hanno mostrato come il significato che gli anziani attribuiscono alle loro esperienze di apprendimento dipenda dal loro essere spirituali e religiosi.

Parole chiave

Spiritualità, religione, apprendimento trasformativo, ricadute educative, anziani.

SUMMARY

The purpose of this research is to understand the educational consequences of spirituality and religion in the learning experiences of the aged people interviewed, who attend classes at the "University of the Third Age". In particular, the survey intends to investigate whether the spiritual dimension and being religious can transform the respondents' way of learning and how this changes their ways of relating to others and of living their advanced age in life. The sample is made up of thirty senior persons. The investigation method is phenomenological in the research objective, while in the heuristic phase, the data were analyzed according to the methodology of the Grounded Theory. The results of the survey showed that the meaning that elders attach to their learning experiences, depends on their spiritual and religious being.

Key words

Spirituality, religion, transformative learning, educational repercussions, aged adults.

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that leads the person to change her/his reference systems, through critical reflection and reflective dialogue made with others.[15]

Critical reflection can be distinguished in three ways: content reflection, process reflection and premise reflection. Content reflection consists of a content examination pertaining to a problematic situation; process reflection, instead, includes the examination of intellectual strategies used to solve a problem; finally, premise reflection is the re-interrogation of the initial problem. Transformation in the way of analysing a situation and of solving a problematic situation depends on premise reflection, there where transformation of the meaning of some previously acquired knowledge oc-

RESUMEN

El propósito de esta investigación es comprender las repercusiones educativas de la espiritualidad y la religión en las experiencias de aprendizaje de los ancianos entrevistados que asisten a la Universidad de la Tercera Edad. En particular, la investigación tiene la intención de investigar si la dimensión espiritual y el ser religioso pueden cambiar la forma de aprender de los entrevistados y cómo esto modifica su forma de relacionarse con los demás y de vivir su edad avanzada. La muestra consta de treinta personas mayores. El método de investigación es fenomenológico en el objetivo de la investigación, mientras que en la fase heurística, los datos se analizaron de acuerdo con la metodología de la teoría fundamentada. Los resultados de la encuesta mostraron el significado que las personas mayores atribuyen a las experiencias de aprendizaje dependen de su ser espiritual y religioso.

Palabras clave

Espiritualidad, religión, aprendizaje transformador, efectos educativos, ancianos.

curs. Some scholars believe that an authentic transformation does not happen only through the three different kinds of reflection indicated by Jack Mezirow: a decisive role is played by spiritual or transcendent reflection too.[16] The phase of transcendent reflection allows the person to profoundly ask her/him meaningful and broader existential questions: this represents the foundation of the Theory of Spiritual Intelligence.[17] As an example, Howard Gardner believes that spiritual or existential intelligence can be manifested by anyone who shows in-depth thinking about "ultimate problems", and that its existence must be scientifically demonstrated.[18] The scientific demonstration of the existence of spiritual intelligence has been sought by some biologists: according to them, spirituality is a natural cognitive process, a brain function which produces a unique form of intelligence.[19] Therefore, neural processes in the brain are dedicated to creating interconnections that unify spiritual, rational, emotional and transcendental experiences. Each person should therefore be considered in her/his intellectual, social, moral and physical entirety, as constituted by physical, emotional, cognitive and spiritual aspects. In the light of study results on spiritual intelligence, transcendent reflection should therefore be considered as the constituting element of transformative learning, so as to allow adults to identify connections between questions and existential ideas with perspectives of social and cultural significance, thus providing self-efficacy skills and greater empathic understanding of others. Actually, spiritual intelligence can be seen as a capacity for deeper transformative learning which can include not only content, process and premise reflections, but also transcendent reflection.

The type of transformative learning that emerges from the research data has been considered from a holistic view point, where four different dimensions interact: cognitive, affective, spiritual

and religious. The cognitive dimension allows knowledge' achievement of the real world;[20] however, it cannot be considered as the only dimension of adult learning. The emotional dimension, in turn, pertains to reactions, feelings and adult emotions,[21] which are often implicit in the learning process. Spiritual and religious dimensions offer the opportunity to reflect inwardly, in order to express outward aspects of the inner transformation that may have taken place.[22] Transformative learning that includes also spirituality, could, therefore, produce changes in deeply rooted awareness and beliefs, so as to encourage equity and inclusion. In fact, spirituality is related to a person's belief system, a system that influences decision making, interactions with others and mental habits that help define who a person is.[23] In order to positively activate the various dimensions of transformative learning, the role played by those who deal with adult education is important; the use of specific teaching strategies such as diaries, narrative and work with pictures and images, can help channelling educational outcomes towards achieving common good.[24] This is a kind of education that cannot, therefore, be only utilitarian and aimed at achieving economic and practical goals, but an educative process aimed at greater knowledge of oneself and others. However, all this can be achieved only in the presence of strong human spiritual and reflective capacities.[25]

3. The research method

The research method is mixed, phenomenological in the survey objective, aimed at identifying the kind of influence religion and spirituality have on the interviewees learning experiences, while in the research heuristic phase, Grounded Theory was followed.[26] The phenomenological approach used has indeed allowed us to bring out the in-depth view point of the interviewees and the profound meaning they attribute to their way of learning, thus stimulating them to reflect.[27] Instead, Grounded Theory in the data codification has allowed us to identify the most significant and salient extracts in the interviewees accounts: a label and a category were then assigned to them. Lastly, qualitative method used has ensured internal and external research validity: the internal validity ensured by the correspondence between the data collected and the research problem[28] and the external validity which refers to the fact that the study data could be of a help to those who carry out research in this field and applies to other more numerous samples.[29]

At the very beginning of the investigation, relevant scientific literature was not taken into consideration, according to Grounded Theory, data supplied information and the researcher did not undergo any kind of influence in interpreting them. Only subsequently, it was possible to compare present literature knowledge with that emerging from the survey. Research originality, however, is such that present literature has proved to be minimal. As a matter of fact, various studies on how spiritual and religious dimensions grow with increasing age[30] and on how spiritual dimension contributes

		Elderly interviewed
Table 1: socio-demographic characteristics of the elderly interviewed		
Age	From 65 to 82 years	
Context	University of the Third Age	30
Geographic distribution	Milan (Lombardy)	30
Gender	Male	15
	Female	15
Level of education	Primary school	6
	Lower and upper secondary school	15
	Degree	9
Marital status	Married, cohabiting	12
	Separated	5
	Widow(er)	13
Total interviews		30

to the adult overall well-being.[31] On the other hand, there are few empirical studies on how spirituality and religion influence the way of thinking about learning among the aged adults and in understanding whether they exercise the same influence.[32]

3.1. Participants

The sample consists of thirty elderly people attending classes at the University of the Third Age in the region of Lombardy. The sampling method is random and based on the availability of the elderly to be interviewed; the sample consists, unintentionally, of fifteen women and fifteen men aged between 65 and 82 years of age. As far as socio-demographic characteristics are concerned, the majority of them attended lower and upper level secondary school, a few also graduated at the university. Marital status includes a majority consisting of wi-dows or (to a lesser extent) married persons or cohabitants (cf. Table 1).

3.2. Procedure

The aged adults attending the University of the Third Age were interviewed before meetings with their teachers began. It was not possible to interview them all in a single day; every adult was interviewed on a different day, so as to be able to guarantee to every interview all the necessary and required time. Therefore, interviews were carried out in a total of thirty days and each interview lasted approximately 50 minutes. Each interviewee was adequately explained about research objectives and the topic under investigation. The interviews took place between March and May 2018.

3.3. Materials

Thirty semi-structured interviews - face to face type - were conducted

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and allowed direct contact with the elderly. Flexibility of the instrument used also allowed us to take into consideration even what was not pre-dictable.[33] The semi-structured inter-views allowed us to investigate in-depth questions pertaining to spiritual and religious dimensions and to vital experiences of learning of the parti-cipants, bringing out aspects related to the emotional and relational sphere. Actually, an interview allows access to the subject perspective, to grasp her/his interpretations, feelings and implicit theories.[34] Interviews were recorded with the participants' con-sent and then transcribed. After li-stening to the elderly, interviews were read several times, in order to identify salient extracts that were congruent to the research objectives and related categories and labels. At the begin-ning of the research process, the text units to be considered as significant were not established: what was con-sidered worthy of attention gradually emerged during data analysis. The text units reported were selected and considered to be particularly illustra-tive, meaningful and congruent to the investigation. The question addressed to the respondents was: "Do spiritu-ality and religion influence your lear-ning experiences and how?"

4. Results

Table 2 presents the results that emerged from the interviews: each unit of text (salient extract) selected was categorized and labelled, ac-cording to grounded theory. Each unit of text present has only an e-xemplary value, aimed at highlighting the meanings that emerged from the codification of data. The numbers in brackets indicate the frequencies of the answers received (Tab. 2).

5. Discussion

Overall, the data that emerged show that the concept that older people have of learning, varies according to their being or not being spiritual and religious. Moreover, from the very beginning there was no plan of making any distinction between spirituality and religion, but - as often happens in qualitative research, where the questions are semi-structured - topics and data emerge during the interview that end up influencing the whole process of the research itself. Indeed, it was precisely some interviewees who wanted to clarify with their an-swers the difference between being spiritual and being religious or under-lining how there is no difference for them between religion and spirituality. Based on the distinction made be-tween spirituality and religion, the re-spondents expressed their concept of learning.

In addition to the differences between spirituality and religion that emerged during the interviews, the majority of respondents (24 out of 30) believe, however, that spirituality, along with religion, influences one's own learning experiences, making them be more constructive and transformative. How-ever, considerations expressed by the interviewees regarding their own learning experiences vary, depending on what they think about spirituality and religion: fifteen interviewees out of thirty who are both religious and

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Table 2: Spirituality and religion in learning experiences

Learning with spirituality and religion	Learning is communication (11)	"Spirituality and my religion give me the force to believe in others and in what I can offer to others and in what others can give me. And on this continuum, by communicating which means giving, I always learn new things that enrich me every day."
	Learning is relationship (4)	"I think you cannot talk about spirituality without referring to religion because they are equivalent. Spirituality, together with religion, allows me to believe in others, to trust and, in so doing, every day I build and take care of my relationships, learning much through relationships, rather than from teachers' lectures."
Learning distinguishing between spirituality and religion	Learning for a change (4)	"I am a spiritual and religious being, but I believe that it is spirituality that guides me in learning, by stimulating me to think. When I realize that I have acquired new knowledge, I also apply it to reality. I notice that I have also changed in my way of thinking and acting. And it is precisely spirituality that, by acting on my emotions, stimulates my change."
Learning with religion without spirituality	Learning for the common good (1)	"I am very religious and I do not believe in spirituality. Everything depends only on the will of God, even our learning experiences. Only religion can help us to understand what things to learn in order to do good to everyone."
Learning with spirituality without religion	Learning is reflection (5)	"I believe that in all of us there is a spiritual dimension that helps us to reflect on the meaning of everything that happens. A reflection that allows us to understand the most controversial events and to reason about the importance of religion."
Learning without religion and spirituality	Learning is boring (5)	"I come to university because I have nothing better to do. I come to meet people and spend some time. What the teachers say bores me and I often fall asleep. At my age it is no longer the time to learn. I have never believed in religion nor in spirituality: they are things that are not needed and all that I have learnt in life has happened by chance".

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spiritual believe that learning is above all based on communication and on relating to others. It is evident that the learning experiences for elderly people represent a way of maintaining contacts with the social world and on-going acquirement of new knowledge and skills despite their advanced age.[35] It has been scientifically proven that belief in spirituality and religion increases with the age, thus helping elderly find a new and profound meaning in life.[36] Therefore, being spiritual and religious leads elderly people to consider learning experiences as an eye-opener to others, in an on-going process of communication and relationship in which everyone helps and supports others in difficult times and in finding relief from and solution to frequent problems. In addition, respondents said they learned more by relating to others rather than from the lectures of the university faculty they attend, and this fact highlights the importance of non-formal and informal education for adults.

In the past the European Union had paid little attention to non-formal and informal education and only recently has it highlighted the positive aspects of this kind of education both from an economic and social cohesion point of view.[37] As a matter of fact, when learning favours socialization and social relationships, it helps aged adults develop a strong sense of self, as an integral part of spiritual development, and helps improve one's own understanding and of others. Particularly interesting are the opinions of those (4) who, by claiming to believe in both

religion and spirituality, still believe they are two different things, and assert that only spirituality influences and guides their learning processes. This is a kind of learning that is characterized above all by making changes in the life style and in thinking, because it helps them understand the importance of religion and become believers. In this case, spirituality is something that helps elderly people who learn to go beyond rationality, so as to bring out even feelings and emotions. Therefore, only through the interaction between reason, feelings and emotions, a person becomes able to make important decisions that bring changes in his/her life and in his/her way of being. Indeed, some scholars have argued that emotions in adult education are always present and help enlighten the extra rational and collective dimensions of learning.[38] This last figure demonstrates how the respondents' ability to differentiate religion from spirituality leads them to express a different concept of learning than those who confuse the two dimensions.

Those who differentiate religion from spirituality expressed a concept of learning based - above all - on the awareness of the transformations that can occur during learning experiences. This last type of learning certainly brings about a certain transformation in their way of being and thinking. Therefore, spiritual dimension encourages reflection on what happens during the learning processes and a deeper understanding of the meaning and the way in which connection to oneself, to others and to

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nature becomes possible. The important role played by spirituality in learning experiences is further confirmed by the opinions expressed by five other interviewees who believe that learning is particularly based on reflection. This further datum highlights how spirituality is considered as a dimension that stimulates reflection on the meaning of events, and helps understanding what happens in daily life, thus assuming a transformative value and an educational function. Therefore, spirituality represents, as some scholars have argued,[39] the fourth type of reflection in addition to content, process and premise reflection expressed by Mezirow. A fourth type of reflection defined transcendental and considered as the intellectual process based on the solicitation of profoundly meaningful and broader existential questions.

It is precisely through reflection that respondents are able to recognize their values and beliefs as different from others, thus initiating a process of transformation that leads to further authenticity and, in a continuous process, to ulterior individuation and transformation. Therefore, spirituality represents the intellectual ability of transcendent reflections that helps the elderly ask themselves questions about the meaning of life and use their creativity to look for significant answers to their existence. Furthermore, according to the interviewees, spirituality helps ask themselves questions about the meaning and importance of religion. Spirituality is that cognitive force that helps human beings to reflect on and solve problems,

so as to perform significant actions that generate social changes and conscious transformation. As an example, the role of reflection in spirituality could help elderly who find themselves living in multicultural contexts, totally new to them and different from their usual life contexts, understand and, therefore, accept comparison, assimilation and coexistence with other people, different from themselves in origins, culture and religion, thus positively transforming their way of thinking and of relating to others, coming from different backgrounds. Critical reflection and imagination are both basic elements of the process of transformative learning and represent the different selves of the adult who learns. Critical reflection brings out the rational self and stimulates self-understanding, while imagination brings out emotions, as a forerunner of reason and helps the adult understand what actions to take and what behaviour to adopt.[40] The importance of critical reflection in transformative learning was highlighted by Mezirow.[41] The critical approach to Mezirow's understanding of self in adult education was considered to be the most popular approach.[42] However, that approach was criticized by some scholars, because based too strongly on the rational and cognitive dimensions, to which was just added the role played by imagination and emotions that influence the processes of adult transformative learning in the same way, if not even to a greater extent.

Only one interviewee declared that he did not believe in the existence of the spiritual dimension, and that he

was religious and his way of expressing learning is focused on performing actions for the common good. In fact, religious human beings recognize that the whole creation is interdependent and, for this reason, they take responsibility for caring for others and for the surrounding environment through learning.[43] This type of learning is certainly aimed at adopting behaviours that guarantee our common good.

Lastly, significant data emerged from the interviews with those who claimed to believe neither in religion nor in spirituality: for them the learning process is just something boring. Learning cannot take place where a reflexive dimension, motivation and personal enrichment are completely absent through the acquisition of new knowledge and skills. These data make us reflect on how the absence of spirituality and religion makes life of the five interviewees quite 'dry', without the desire to keep on learning and the awareness of cultural and personal enrichment. The influence exerted by the spiritual dimension in learning experiences is much more evident in the answers given by the nine interviewees, of whom four are religious and spiritual, aware of the difference between the two dimensions, and five other respondents who are not religious, but believe in the existence of spirituality. These nine interviewees pointed up that spirituality influences precisely the processes of one's own learning and his/her approach to religion. Indeed, the nine interviewees asserted that learning is characterized by being primarily rooted in reflection, a typical aspect of spirituality, and in

change, a typical characteristic of those who resort to transcendent spirituality and to religion by perceiving the various transformations that the learning process produces in their life and in their way of being.

In conclusion, the data showed that spirituality and religion have a specific influence on the learning process of the elderly citizens interviewed. Spirituality undoubtedly plays an important role in senile learning processes but, if considered disjointedly from religion, seems to favour only a kind of arid learning that is not aimed at the common good and towards the whole society. Therefore, the data offered quite a telling figure, not in contrast with what the scientific literature identifies as learning in advanced age: learning as socialization, learning as communication, learning as a cultural up-to-date, learning as a transformation.[44] Particularly, the results of this research have underscored how spirituality and religion in advanced age facilitates reflection, transformation and awareness on how we can change through a learning process, specifically of a non-formal and informal kind.

6. Implications of the proposed study for educational practice

Human beings generally tend to attribute meaning to the experiences they have and through religion and spirituality are often able to overcome problems typical of older people. For this reason, the results of the survey, even though it pertains a small sample, might be useful for those who teach at the so called "universities of

the third age" or those who generally deal with adult education, who are called on to adopt strategies and teaching methods that can involve the spiritual dimension in the learning processes, so that adults acquire a deeper knowledge of life experiences. In this way, learning would facilitate not only knowledge of oneself, but also the acquisition of a way of acting and thinking aimed at the common good. For example, some teaching methods that could be used consist in working with images and pictures, considered as an expression of one's emotions which, by bridging the distances between the external world and the spiritual dimensions, often communicate goals, behaviours and deeper feelings regardless of reason. In this way, imagination is needed to get in touch spiritual dimension and communication with the outside world, thus becoming the link that adults use to establish a relationship with one's soul. Learning how to work with emotions and identify images that evoke emotions allow adults to tap into a powerful inner aspect of their being. As an example, one of the strategies for working with images could be that of writing diaries and of story-telling, as they allow development of self-awareness and a greater understanding of others.[45] As a matter of fact, data analysis has revealed the central role that emotions and relationships play in learning processes, since they promote development and, at the same time, facilitate the understanding of spirituality.

Therefore, emotions, relationships and images, but also mind and soul,

are the roots for transformative learning as well as rationality. When spiritual dimension is involved in learning paths, reason connects with the emotions thus generating a process of on-going transformation and spiritual development. Therefore, Mezirow's theory of transformative learning, besides facilitating a better comprehension of the nature of adult learning, could become a foundation on which to build a further theory of learning that includes spirituality. For this reason, some studies have supported the need for holistic pedagogy, which considers the learning process in all its intellectual, social, emotional, moral and spiritual dimensions.[46] However, today studies that investigate the relationship between spirituality and learning are still limited and, on the other hand, studies on transformative learning geared to cognition alone can be found. But these studies have also been subjected to a certain criticism due to being excessively dependent on linearity, rationality and cognitivism in order to contribute to a complete and profound transformation of the person.[47]

A transformation process takes place when those who deal with adult education are able to activate not only the cognitive dimension, but also the emotional and spiritual dimensions in those who learn. For instance, some scholars have proposed the "tending the soul" module in their students' curricula, a module designed in order to show the important role played by spirituality in old age, especially for those who will take care of elderly.[48]

Body, mind and spiritual dimension

continuously interact with each other and, for this reason, they cannot be considered separately in adult teaching/learning processes. Moreover, linear and fragmented approaches of education cannot explain the very articulate complexity of human nature or how deeply articulated the learning processes are, there where the person experiences profound anxieties and emotions. Consequently, it would be desirable to deepen the relationship between spirituality and religion in adult learning in further researches and studies.

NOTE

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[6] Cf ZINNBAUER Brian J. - PARGAMENT Kenneth I. - COLE Brenda - RYE Mark S. - BUTTER Eric M. - BELAVICH Timothy G. - HIPP Kathleen M. - SCOTT Allie B. - KADAR Jill L., *Religion and spirituality: Unfuzzying the fuzzy*, in *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 36(1997)4, 549-564.

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[10] Cf Dirkx John M., *The power of feelings. Emotion, imagination, and the construction of meaning in adult learning*, in *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education,* 2001(2002)89, 63-72.

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[12] Cf Dirkx, *The power of feelings* 63-72.

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[14] Cf Jarvis Peter, *Learning in Later Life. An introduction for Educators and Carers*, London, Kogan 2001; Pocinho Ricardo - Belo Pedro - Antunes Ana - Rodrigues Jose, *Importance of Religiosity and Spirituality in Institutionalized Elderly*, in *ARC Journal of Public Health and Community Medicine* 1(2016)1, 22-30.

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[16] In order to know the function of spiritual reflection in transformative learning, consult the following authors: Emslie Neville, *Transformative Learning and Ministry Formation*, in *Journal of Adult Theological Education* 13(2016)1, 48-63; Kroth Michael - Cranton Patricia, *Transformative Learning and Spirituality*, in Kroth Michael - Cranton Patricia (eds.), *Stories of Transformative Learning*. International Issues in Adult Education, Rotterdam, Sense Publishers 2014; Manning, Lydia, *Spirituality as a lived experience. Exploring the essence of spirituality for women in late life*, in *International Journal of Aging & Human Development* 75(2012)2, 95-113.

[17] Cf White Stephen R., *A New Model of Adult Transformative Learning. Contextualizing Spiritual Intelligence (SQ) Theory*, in *World Journal of Educational Research* 1(2014)1, 1-12.

[18] To deepen the concept of spiritual intelligence, see: Gardner Howard E., *Intelligence reframed: Multiple intelligence for the 21st century,* New York, NY, Basic Books 1999.

[19] Even some biologists support the existence of spiritual intelligence: Hamer Dean H., *The God gene. How faith is hardwired into our genes*, Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, New York: NY 2004; Newberg Andrew - Waldman Mark R., *How God changes your brain. Breakthrough findings from a leading neuroscientist,* New York: NY, Random House Publishing Group 2009.

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[21] Cf Buchanan Michael T. - Hyde Brendan, *Learning beyond the surface. Engaging the cognitive, affective and spiritual dimensions within the curriculum*, in *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 13(2008)4, 309-320

[22] Cf *l. cit.*

[23] Regarding the relationship between spirituality and the belief system, see: Oxhandler Holly - Polson Edward C. - Moffatt Kelsey M. - Achenbaum Andrew W., *The Religious and Spiritual Beliefs and Practices among Practitioners across Five Helping Professions*, in *Religions* 8 (2017)11*,* 237.

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28 Cf PONCE Omar A. - PAGÁN-MALDONADO Nellie, *Mixed Methods Research in Education. Capturing the Complexity of the Profession*, in *International Journal of Educational Excellence* 1(2015)1, 111-135.

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