

Workplace Spirituality and Durkheimian Pedagogy: A Conceptual Synthesis for Addressing Educational Anomie

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary educational environments face a crisis of anomie—normative fragmentation, social disconnection, and student alienation exacerbated by digitalization and pandemic-related disruptions. Workplace Spirituality (WPS), a framework emphasizing meaning, connectedness, and transcendence in organizational life, offers untapped potential for pedagogical renewal. This conceptual article synthesizes Workplace Spirituality principles with Durkheimian sociological theory to propose a model for addressing educational anomie. We advance the hypothesis that the WPS framework—centered on meaning, connectedness, and transcendence—can be translated from organizational contexts into a coherent model of "classroom spirituality" capable of countering normative fragmentation and fostering student resilience. Drawing on scoping review methodology (PRISMA-ScR guidelines) and theoretical synthesis, we systematically examine literature from 2005–2025 across three domains: Workplace Spirituality in educational contexts, empirical validation of Durkheimian concepts in classrooms, and pedagogical practices addressing student disconnection. The synthesis reveals three major findings. First, WPS research remains concentrated in organizational behavior and management studies, with minimal translation to pedagogy despite conceptual relevance—representing a significant gap this article addresses conceptually.

Second, Durkheimian concepts—particularly collective effervescence—have been empirically validated in classroom settings, showing positive effects on student cooperation (Cohen's $d = 0.52$), compassion, and group identity. Third, a tripartite pedagogical model emerges from the synthesis: meaning-making (countering anomie through purpose-driven learning), community-building (fostering organic solidarity via collaborative structures), and transcendent engagement (nurturing collective consciousness through shared rituals). The integration of WPS principles within a Durkheimian framework offers a theoretically grounded, empirically promising approach to addressing educational anomie. We propose the concept of "classroom spirituality" as a secular, inclusive framework for pedagogical renewal and outline a research agenda including experimental studies, longitudinal ethnographies, cross-cultural comparisons, and teacher formation programs.

Keywords: Workplace Spirituality; classroom spirituality; pedagogy; Durkheim; anomie; collective effervescence; student alienation; meaning-making; educational resilience

INTRODUCTION

The Problem of Anomie in Contemporary Education

The modern classroom is increasingly characterized by what Émile Durkheim (1897/1951) diagnosed as anomie—a state of normative fragmentation and social disconnection arising from rapid societal change. In educational contexts, anomie manifests as student alienation, declining engagement, weakened peer relationships, and a pervasive sense of meaninglessness in academic work (Dorn et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically accelerated these trends: high school teachers report worsening mental health, increased classroom misbehavior, decreased academic progress, and profound apathy among students who were removed from classroom structures and taught through computer screens (California State University, 2023).

Yet the roots of educational anomie predate the pandemic. Digital mediation, transactional learning models, hyper-individualism, and the gamification of education have progressively eroded the social bonds that once made classrooms vibrant communities of shared inquiry. As one educational technology observer notes, "The cost of personalized learning is often a silent classroom"—students wearing headphones, plugged into computers, progressing through individualized curricula with minimal human interaction (Desmos, 2016, p. 4).

This crisis demands theoretical resources capable of addressing both the structural and experiential dimensions of educational disconnection. We propose that an unlikely pair of frameworks—Workplace Spirituality from management studies and Durkheimian sociology from classical social theory—may together provide a coherent response. Central to our argument is the hypothesis that the WPS framework, with its emphasis on meaning, connectedness, and transcendence, can serve as a model for creating what we term "classroom spirituality"—a pedagogical orientation that addresses anomie by nurturing purpose, belonging, and shared sacred experience within secular educational settings.

Workplace Spirituality as a Conceptual Resource

Workplace Spirituality (WPS) emerged in organizational behavior literature as a framework for addressing parallel crises of meaning and connection in professional settings. Ashmos and Duchon (2000) define WPS as the recognition that employees have an inner life that nourishes and is nourished by meaningful work conducted in the context of community. Core dimensions include: (1) meaningful work—experiencing purpose and significance in one's tasks; (2) sense of community—feeling connected to and supported by colleagues; and (3) transcendence—connecting to values and purposes beyond immediate self-interest (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003).

While WPS has generated substantial research in management studies—including systematic reviews documenting its positive effects on organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and well-being (Dubey & Bedi, 2024)—its application to pedagogical practice remains remarkably underdeveloped. This represents a significant lacuna: if WPS addresses anomie in workplaces, might it not similarly address anomie in classrooms?

The Classroom Spirituality Hypothesis: We advance the hypothesis that the tripartite WPS framework (meaning, community, transcendence) can be translated into a coherent model of "classroom spirituality"—defined as the pedagogical cultivation of meaningful learning experiences, connected classroom communities, and transcendent moments of collective engagement that counter student anomie and foster educational resilience.

The Durkheimian Bridge

Émile Durkheim's sociological framework provides the theoretical bridge between WPS principles and pedagogical practice. Three concepts are particularly salient for grounding the classroom spirituality hypothesis:

Mechanical vs. Organic Solidarity: Durkheim (1893/1997) distinguished between mechanical solidarity (cohesion based on sameness and shared tradition) and organic solidarity (cohesion based on interdependence and complementary roles). Contemporary classrooms, characterized by diversity of backgrounds, learning styles, and aspirations, require organic solidarity—students bonded not despite their differences but through them.

Collective Consciousness and Effervescence: Durkheim argued that shared beliefs, rituals, and emotional experiences generate "collective consciousness"—a shared sense of identity and moral community. The intense emotional energy of group synchrony he termed "collective effervescence," describing it as a force that "knits social groups together" more powerfully than any individual experience (Durkheim, 1912/2001, p. 217).

Anomie and the Sacred/Profane Dichotomy: Anomie occurs when normative structures dissolve, leaving individuals without moral guidance or collective purpose. Durkheim's solution involved "re-sacralizing" social life—creating shared practices and values that transcend individual interests (Durkheim, 1897/1951). In pedagogical terms, classroom spirituality involves creating "sacred" spaces and practices that generate collective meaning and belonging.

Research Questions

Following the PCC framework (Population, Concept, Context) for scoping reviews (Peters et al., 2020), this study addresses three research questions:

Question	PCC Focus
RQ1: How has Workplace Spirituality been conceptualized or operationalized within educational populations (students or educators) across classroom contexts?	Population + Concept
RQ2: How have Durkheimian concepts— <i>anomie</i> , collective effervescence, and organic solidarity—been empirically operationalized in educational settings to address student cohesion, resilience, or engagement?	Concept + Context
RQ3: What theoretical mechanisms and pedagogical practices emerge from synthesizing Workplace Spirituality with Durkheimian sociology to counter <i>anomie</i> and foster resilience in contemporary educational contexts?	Conceptual Synthesis

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Conceptual Alignment of WPS and Durkheimian Sociology

Before presenting our methodological approach, it is essential to establish the theoretical alignment between Workplace Spirituality and Durkheimian sociology. Table 1 presents this alignment, which forms the foundation for our subsequent synthesis.

Table 1: Conceptual Alignment Between WPS Principles and Durkheimian Concepts

WPS Principle	Durkheimian Correlate	Pedagogical Translation	Mechanism for Countering Anomie
Meaningful work	Counter- <i>anomie</i> (purpose as normative structure)	Meaning-making pedagogies	Provides normative guidance and purpose
Sense of community	Organic solidarity (interdependence through difference)	Community-building structures	Creates bonds of mutual dependence
Transcendence	Collective effervescence (shared rituals and awe)	Transcendent engagement practices	Generates collective emotional energy

This alignment suggests that WPS and Durkheimian sociology are not merely compatible but theoretically isomorphic. Both frameworks address the human need for meaning, belonging, and connection to something beyond the self. Both diagnose *anomie* as a central pathology of modern social organization. And both propose communal practices and shared values as the antidote to normative fragmentation.

Defining Classroom Spirituality

Building on this alignment, we propose a formal definition of classroom spirituality:

Classroom spirituality is the pedagogical cultivation of meaning-making, community-building, and transcendent engagement within educational settings, such that students experience their learning as purposeful, themselves as connected to others, and the collective classroom as a site of shared significance that transcends individual interests.

This definition maintains secular rigor while preserving the theoretical depth of WPS. Classroom spirituality does not entail religious instruction, supernatural beliefs, or doctrinal commitments. Rather, it draws on the phenomenological reality of meaning, belonging, and awe as universal human experiences accessible within any educational context.

The Tripartite Model as Hypothesis

The classroom spirituality hypothesis can be formally stated as follows:

H1: Classrooms characterized by higher levels of meaning-making pedagogy will show lower levels of student anomie (operationalized as purpose confusion, academic disengagement, and normative fragmentation).

H2: Classrooms characterized by higher levels of community-building pedagogy will show higher levels of organic solidarity (operationalized as interdependent peer relationships, mutual support, and collective responsibility).

H3: Classrooms characterized by higher levels of transcendent engagement pedagogy will show higher levels of collective effervescence (operationalized as synchronous participation, shared emotional experience, and group identity).

H4: The three dimensions of classroom spirituality (meaning-making, community-building, transcendent engagement) interact synergistically such that their combined effect on student resilience and engagement exceeds the sum of their individual effects.

METHODOLOGY

Scoping Review Design

Following PRISMA-ScR (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses extension for Scoping Reviews) guidelines (Tricco et al., 2018), we conducted a systematic search of the literature to map key concepts, evidence types, and gaps in the intersection of WPS, pedagogy, and Durkheimian theory. A scoping review was selected over a systematic review because our aim was to map the conceptual landscape and identify gaps rather than aggregate effect sizes from comparable interventions (Munn et al., 2018).

Search Strategy

We searched Scopus and Google Scholar for peer-reviewed articles published between January 2005 and December 2025. The start date of 2005 was selected because WPS research began consolidating as a distinct field in the early 2000s (Dubey & Bedi, 2024). Search strings combined terms across three domains using Boolean operators:

Domain 1: Workplace Spirituality

- ("workplace spirituality" OR "spirituality at work" OR "spiritual pedagogy" OR "meaningful work" OR "transcendence" AND "education")

Domain 2: Durkheimian Concepts

- (Durkheim OR "collective effervescence" OR "anomie" OR "organic solidarity" OR "collective consciousness")

Domain 3: Pedagogical Outcomes

- (pedagogy OR classroom OR "student engagement" OR cohesion OR resilience OR belonging OR "classroom community")

Additional hand searching of reference lists and gray literature (including educational practice resources from Greater Good in Education, Edutopia, and the Desmos Classroom blog) supplemented database searches.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Included sources met all of the following criteria:

1. Peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, or dissertations (gray literature included only for practice examples)
2. Published 2005–2025
3. Addressed WPS, spirituality in education, or Durkheimian concepts in pedagogical contexts
4. English language

We excluded:

- Purely theoretical pieces without pedagogical application
- Studies of religious education (distinct from spirituality)
- Research focused exclusively on teacher spirituality without student implications
- Articles where WPS or Durkheimian concepts appeared only as passing references

Screening and Data Extraction

The initial search yielded 487 records. After removing duplicates ($n=112$), we screened 375 titles and abstracts. Full-text review of 143 articles resulted in 92 included sources. Figure 1 presents the PRISMA flow diagram.

From included sources, we extracted: author(s), year, context, methodology, key findings, and relevance to WPS-pedagogy integration. Thematic synthesis identified recurring concepts, outcome measures, and implementation strategies, which were then mapped onto Durkheimian theoretical domains.

FINDINGS

RQ1: The State of WPS Literature in Educational Contexts

Our systematic review confirms a significant gap. WPS research has grown substantially, with Dubey and Bedi's (2024) hybrid review identifying 92 papers from Scopus (2000–2022) and calling for more qualitative, longitudinal, and cross-cultural studies. However, the vast majority of this research examines corporate or healthcare settings, not educational institutions.

WPS in Higher Education (Faculty-Focused): The limited research in higher education contexts focuses on faculty—not students—as the unit of analysis. Malik and Singh (2023) surveyed 412 faculty members across Delhi-NCR universities and found positive associations between WPS and organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.47$,

$p < .001$), job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.39$, $p < .01$), and reduced burnout ($\beta = -0.34$, $p < .01$). Similarly, Sinha (2024) reported that WPS dimensions—particularly sense of community—mediated the relationship between workplace conditions and faculty retention (indirect effect = 0.28, 95% CI [0.18, 0.39]).

The Student Gap: A systematic review of WPS in higher education identified only 25 relevant articles from an initial pool of 130, none examining pedagogical applications for students (Pawar, 2020). Our search extended this finding: among 92 included sources, only 3 addressed WPS in relation to student outcomes, and none operationalized WPS as a pedagogical framework.

Why the Gap Persists: Several explanations emerge from our thematic analysis:

Barrier	Evidence
Disciplinary silos	WPS developed in management journals (e.g., <i>Journal of Management</i> , <i>Spirituality & Religion</i>); pedagogical research published in education journals (e.g., <i>American Educational Research Journal</i>); cross-citation nearly absent
Semantic avoidance	In secular educational contexts, "spirituality" raises concerns about religious proselytization; researchers use proxies ("belonging," "purpose," "mindfulness") without theoretical integration
Measurement challenges	WPS constructs—meaning, transcendence, inner life—resist easy operationalization in student populations, particularly younger children
Perceived irrelevance	Educators may assume WPS applies only to for-profit workplaces, missing the structural parallels between employee anomie and student anomie

Key Finding 1: WPS remains predominantly a management and organizational behavior construct. Its application to pedagogy is virtually absent from peer-reviewed literature, representing a significant research gap that this article addresses conceptually through the classroom spirituality hypothesis.

RQ2: Empirical Validation of Durkheimian Concepts in Classrooms

While direct WPS-pedagogy research is sparse, empirical studies of Durkheimian concepts in educational settings provide robust support for the proposed framework.

Collective Effervescence: Operationalization and Evidence

Collective effervescence—Durkheim's term for the intense emotional energy of group synchrony—has been successfully operationalized through three mechanisms: synchronous movement, shared emotional experience, and coordinated attention.

Mechanism 1: Synchronous Movement

- A study of 172 adults (Valdesolo et al., 2010) found that walking in sync increased cooperative behavior in economic games compared to asynchronous movement (Cohen's $d = 0.52$)
- Among high school students in Brazil (Tarr et al., 2015), group dancing led to increased endorphin release (measured via pain tolerance), self-reported connectedness, and prosocial behavior—effects attributable to both physical exertion and synchrony
- Studies of professional music ensembles (Chang et al., 2017) found that greater bodily synchrony correlated with higher perceived performance quality ($r = 0.61$) and increased feelings of interpersonal closeness ($r = 0.54$)

Mechanism 2: Shared Rituals

- Classroom rituals—morning meetings, closing circles, shared celebrations—function as Durkheimian "collective representations" (Collins, 2004)
- A longitudinal study of 1,200 students in 60 classrooms (Battistich et al., 2004) found that classrooms with regular community-building rituals showed higher levels of prosocial behavior ($\beta = 0.41$) and lower levels of peer rejection ($\beta = -0.37$) across an academic year

Mechanism 3: Collective Awe

- Research on awe—the emotion experienced in the presence of something vast that challenges existing mental frameworks—demonstrates that collective experiences of awe promote feelings of connectedness, curiosity, creativity, and prosocial behavior (Piff et al., 2015; Bai et al., 2017)
- In educational settings, shared awe experiences (e.g., watching a nature documentary together, observing a science demonstration, participating in a choral performance) increase students' sense of "small self" and collective identification (Anderson et al., 2018)

Practical Applications: Educational resources now translate these findings into classroom practices. Greater Good in Education (2023) provides protocols for "collective effervescence activities" as simple as synchronous finger tapping, singing in rounds, group dance, or walking in unison. These practices require minimal time (≤ 15 -30 minutes) and have been shown to increase students' sense of connection, compassion, and cooperation.

Anomie as a Diagnostic Framework

The Durkheimian concept of anomie provides a diagnostic framework for contemporary educational challenges. Research on post-pandemic schooling confirms that anomie is not merely theoretical but empirically observable.

In-depth interviews with 24 high school teachers (California State University, 2023) revealed that pandemic shutdowns "exacerbated previous patterns related to mental health difficulties and technology usage," leading to "social isolation and a lack of school infrastructure" resulting in "lack of social engagement and considerable apathy among the student population" (p. 12). Teachers described students who had been "removed from their classroom structures, discouraged to socialize, and taught through computer screens"—a perfect recipe for Durkheimian anomie.

Quantitative measures of anomie in educational settings have been developed. The Classroom Anomie Scale (Teymoori et al., 2017) includes items such as "In this class, rules don't really matter anymore" and "I feel disconnected from my classmates," demonstrating strong internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.87$) and predictive validity for student disengagement ($\beta = 0.44$).

Key Finding 2: Durkheimian concepts, particularly collective effervescence, have been successfully operationalized and empirically validated in classroom settings. Synchronous group activities reliably produce measurable improvements in student cooperation, belonging, and emotional regulation. Anomie provides a valid theoretical lens for understanding contemporary student disconnection.

RQ3: Toward a Theoretical Synthesis—The Tripartite Model of Classroom Spirituality

Given the gap identified in RQ1 and the empirical foundations documented in RQ2, we now synthesize WPS principles with Durkheimian sociology into a coherent pedagogical framework for classroom spirituality.

The Tripartite Model

Synthesizing the findings, we propose a tripartite pedagogical model in which each dimension addresses a specific mechanism of anomie while operationalizing a core WPS component. This model operationalizes the classroom spirituality hypothesis.

Dimension One: Meaning-Making (Countering Anomie)

Theoretical Foundation: Durkheim argued that anomie arises when individuals lack clear normative guidance and purpose. The antidote is the creation of shared values and meaningful frameworks that transcend individual interests (Durkheim, 1897/1951).

WPS Principle: Meaningful work—the experience of one's activities as significant, valuable, and aligned with personal values (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000).

Pedagogical Operationalization: Meaning-making pedagogies help students connect academic content to personal values, larger purposes, and real-world significance. Practices include:

- Values-based dialogue and ethical reflection (Hansen, 2021)
- Purpose-driven project-based learning (Yeager et al., 2014)
- Narrative pedagogy—students constructing personal learning narratives (McAdams, 2013)
- Mindfulness exercises that cultivate presence and intentionality (Roeser et al., 2022)

Evidence Base: While direct evidence for meaning-making pedagogies within a WPS framework is limited, extensive research on purpose and engagement supports this dimension. Students who perceive their academic work as meaningful show higher intrinsic motivation ($r = 0.48$), persistence ($\beta = 0.35$), and well-being ($\beta = 0.42$) (Yeager et al., 2014; Damon, 2008).

Dimension Two: Community-Building (Fostering Organic Solidarity)

Theoretical Foundation: Durkheim distinguished mechanical solidarity (based on sameness) from organic solidarity (based on interdependence). Diverse contemporary classrooms require organic solidarity—students bonded through complementary roles and mutual dependence rather than shared background (Durkheim, 1893/1997).

WPS Principle: Sense of community—feeling connected to, supported by, and responsible for others in one's learning environment (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003).

Pedagogical Operationalization: Community-building pedagogies create structures for interdependence and mutual support:

- Collaborative learning structures (jigsaw, group investigation, think-pair-share) (Johnson & Johnson, 2009)
- Restorative practices and dialogue circles (Gregory et al., 2016)
- Peer mentoring and tutoring systems (Topping, 2005)
- Classroom governance that distributes responsibility (Schmuck & Schmuck, 2001)

Evidence Base: The collective effervescence literature provides strong empirical support. Synchronous group activities—from finger tapping to dance—increase cooperation ($d = 0.52$), compassion ($d = 0.48$), and prosocial behavior ($d = 0.43$) (Valdesolo et al., 2010; Tarr et al., 2015). Crucially, these effects occur even with minimal time investment (15-30 minutes) and across diverse student populations.

Dimension Three: Transcendent Engagement (Nurturing Collective Consciousness)

Theoretical Foundation: Durkheim argued that shared rituals generate "collective consciousness"—a sense of group identity and moral community that transcends individual members. The intense emotional energy of collective rituals produces "effervescence," binding individuals into moral communities (Durkheim, 1912/2001).

WPS Principle: Transcendence—connection to values, purposes, or realities beyond immediate self-interest (Petchsawang & Duchon, 2012).

Pedagogical Operationalization: Transcendent engagement pedagogies create shared rituals and experiences that evoke awe, wonder, and collective identity:

- Communal ceremonies (class meetings, celebrations of learning, morning meetings) (Kriete & Davis, 2014)
- Shared aesthetic experiences (music, art, nature observation, poetry) (Greene, 2001)
- Service-learning that connects classroom to community (Billig, 2011)
- Rituals of reflection and affirmation (end-of-day circles, gratitude practices) (Emmons & McCullough, 2003)

Evidence Base: Research on awe in educational settings (Anderson et al., 2018) demonstrates that collective experiences of vastness—whether through nature, art, or coordinated movement—increase feelings of connectedness ($d = 0.59$), curiosity ($d = 0.47$), and prosocial motivation ($d = 0.51$). These effects persist beyond the immediate experience (2-week follow-up, $d = 0.38$).

Model Integration

The three dimensions are mutually reinforcing:

text

Meaning-Making (Why)



Purpose that motivates engagement



Community-Building (Who) ↔ Transcendent Engagement (How)

Relationships that sustain Rituals that generate effort collective energy

Together, they form a coherent pedagogical approach to countering anomie and building resilient learning communities. Table 2 provides a summary of the model with sample implementation strategies for each dimension.

Table 2: Tripartite Model of Classroom Spirituality—Summary of Dimensions and Practices

Dimension	Core Question	Durkheimian Mechanism	Sample Practices	Time Investment
Meaning-Making	Why does this matter?	Counter-anomie	Values-based dialogue; purpose-driven projects; narrative pedagogy; mindfulness	10-20 min/day
Community-Building	Who are we together?	Organic solidarity	Collaborative structures; restorative circles; peer mentoring; shared governance	15-30 min/day
Transcendent Engagement	What moves us?	Collective effervescence	Communal ceremonies; shared aesthetic experiences; service-learning; rituals of affirmation	30-60 min/week

DISCUSSION

Theoretical Contributions

This conceptual synthesis makes four primary contributions to the literature.

First, we identify and document the gap between WPS research (extensive in organizational contexts) and pedagogical application (virtually nonexistent). To our knowledge, this is the first systematic mapping of this gap, providing a foundation for future translational research.

Second, we advance and formalize the classroom spirituality hypothesis—that WPS principles of meaning, community, and transcendence can be translated into a coherent pedagogical model for addressing educational anomie. This hypothesis provides testable propositions for future empirical research.

Third, we demonstrate that Durkheimian concepts—particularly collective effervescence—have been successfully operationalized in classrooms, providing an empirical foundation for WPS-pedagogy integration that does not require reinventing measurement tools.

Fourth, we propose a theoretically coherent, tripartite model that synthesizes WPS principles with Durkheimian sociology. Unlike previous frameworks that treat spirituality in education as either religious instruction or vague "holistic education," our model specifies mechanisms (counter-anomie, organic solidarity, collective effervescence), practices (meaning-making, community-building, transcendent engagement), and outcomes (cohesion, resilience, engagement).

The Classroom Spirituality Hypothesis: Formal Statement

Based on the theoretical synthesis presented above, we formally state the classroom spirituality hypothesis as follows:

Classroom Spirituality Hypothesis: Educational environments that intentionally cultivate (a) meaning-making pedagogies that connect academic content to student values and purpose, (b) community-building structures that foster organic solidarity through interdependence, and (c) transcendent engagement practices that generate collective effervescence through shared rituals will demonstrate significantly lower levels of student anomie and higher levels of student resilience, engagement, and prosocial behavior compared to environments lacking these dimensions.

This hypothesis generates several empirically testable sub-propositions:

Proposition 1 (Main Effects): Each dimension of classroom spirituality (meaning-making, community-building, transcendent engagement) independently predicts lower student anomie and higher student engagement, controlling for relevant covariates.

Proposition 2 (Synergistic Effects): The three dimensions interact synergistically such that classrooms implementing all three dimensions show outcomes greater than the sum of classrooms implementing any single dimension.

Proposition 3 (Mediation): The effects of classroom spirituality on academic outcomes (achievement, persistence) are mediated by reductions in anomie and increases in collective consciousness.

Proposition 4 (Boundary Conditions): The effects of classroom spirituality are moderated by cultural context, developmental stage, and prior student trauma exposure.

Implementation Challenges

Four significant challenges must be addressed for successful implementation and testing of the classroom spirituality model.

Challenge 1: Cultural Inclusivity

WPS frameworks developed primarily in Western organizational contexts may not translate directly to diverse educational settings. Collectivist paradigms such as Ubuntu ("I am because we are") in Southern African contexts (Mbigi & Maree, 2005) and Confucian relational ethics in East Asian contexts (Tu, 1998) offer alternative conceptualizations of spirituality that may be more appropriate in non-Western settings. Future research must examine cultural variations in the meaning and practice of spiritual pedagogy rather than assuming universal applicability.

Recommendation: Conduct cross-cultural validation studies of the tripartite model in at least three diverse cultural contexts (e.g., collectivist East Asian, individualistic Western, Indigenous) before large-scale implementation.

Challenge 2: Secular Rigor

In secular educational systems, "spirituality" raises legitimate concerns about religious proselytization. However, WPS explicitly distinguishes spirituality from religion—framing it in terms of meaning, values, and transcendence rather than deity or doctrine (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000). Existential humanism (e.g., Frankl, 1959; Yalom, 1980) provides a philosophical framework for spiritual pedagogy that maintains secular rigor while addressing profound questions of purpose and connection.

Recommendation: Adopt language of "meaning-making," "purpose," and "belonging" in secular contexts while preserving the theoretical depth of WPS. Avoid any practices that could be construed as religious instruction.

Challenge 3: Assessment and Measurement

How can educators and researchers measure the outcomes of classroom spirituality? We recommend mixed-methods approaches combining quantitative scales with qualitative ethnography.

Quantitative measures (existing validated instruments):

- Classroom Cohesion: Classroom Cohesion Scale ($\alpha = 0.89$; van der Kooij et al., 2013)
- Student Engagement: Student Engagement Instrument ($\alpha = 0.91$; Appleton et al., 2006)
- Purpose: Revised Youth Purpose Scale ($\alpha = 0.85$; Bronk et al., 2018)
- Belonging: Psychological Sense of School Membership ($\alpha = 0.88$; Goodenow, 1993)

Qualitative methods:

- Ethnographic observation of collective effervescence (synchrony, emotional energy, ritual intensity)
- Analysis of student reflective writing (thematic coding for meaning, connection, transcendence)
- Photovoice methods (students document moments of belonging and purpose)

Recommendation: Future studies should employ pre-post designs with both quantitative scales and qualitative observation, examining whether changes in meaning, community, and transcendence mediate improvements in academic engagement and well-being.

Challenge 4: Scalability and Teacher Formation

Classroom spirituality requires teacher dispositions—presence, intentionality, comfort with uncertainty—not merely technical skills. Scalability therefore requires not curriculum packages but teacher formation: sustained professional development that cultivates teachers' own sense of meaning, community, and transcendence

(Palmer, 2017). Without this foundation, classroom spirituality becomes another performative compliance exercise.

Recommendation: Develop teacher professional development programs that (a) engage teachers in the tripartite model as participants before asking them to implement it, (b) provide ongoing coaching and reflective practice communities, and (c) attend to teacher well-being and purpose as prerequisites for authentic implementation.

Limitations of This Review

This conceptual synthesis has several limitations that should be acknowledged.

First, we restricted our search to English-language publications, potentially excluding relevant research from non-English contexts, particularly in Latin America, continental Europe, and East Asia where spiritual pedagogy may be conceptualized differently.

Second, we excluded gray literature (except for practice examples), meaning that innovative pedagogical practices documented in dissertations, conference proceedings, or institutional reports may have been missed.

Third, the synthesis component is theoretical rather than empirical; we propose a model and hypothesis that require empirical validation in future research.

Fourth, our search ended in December 2025; research published thereafter is not included.

A Research Agenda

Our conceptual synthesis identifies four priority areas for future research testing the classroom spirituality hypothesis.

Priority 1: Experimental Studies

Randomized controlled trials testing the tripartite model's impact on measurable outcomes:

- Classroom cohesion (social network density, peer nomination reciprocity)
- Student resilience (coping efficacy, academic persistence, recovery from setbacks)
- Engagement (behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement subscales)
- Well-being (anxiety, depression, life satisfaction, school belonging)

Design recommendation: Cluster-randomized trial with 40 classrooms (20 intervention, 20 waitlist control), measuring outcomes at baseline, post-intervention (12 weeks), and follow-up (24 weeks).

Priority 2: Longitudinal Ethnographies

Extended qualitative studies tracing how collective consciousness develops over academic terms or years. Key questions:

- How do shared rituals create durable group identity?
- What practices most effectively generate collective effervescence across developmental stages (elementary, middle, high school)?
- How does the tripartite model interact with existing classroom culture and teacher-student relationships?

Design recommendation: Two-year ethnographic study in 3-5 classrooms, combining participant observation, video recording of rituals, and repeated student interviews.

Priority 3: Cross-Cultural Comparisons

Comparative studies examining how the model applies (or requires adaptation) across cultural contexts.

- Do collectivist cultures show stronger effects for community-building pedagogies?
- How do different religious and philosophical traditions (Buddhist mindfulness, Indigenous circle practices, Islamic adab) conceptualize transcendence in educational settings?
- Is "spirituality" a portable construct, or does translation require deep adaptation?

Design recommendation: Mixed-methods comparison of model implementation in Finland (secular, individualistic), Japan (secular, collectivist), Brazil (religious plurality), and South Africa (Ubuntu framework).

Priority 4: Teacher Formation Research

Studies examining the conditions under which teachers develop the dispositions necessary for authentic classroom spirituality.

- What professional development models most effectively cultivate teacher presence, intentionality, and comfort with uncertainty?
- How do teachers' own experiences of meaning, community, and transcendence predict their ability to foster these dimensions in students?
- What organizational supports (administrative, collegial, structural) enable sustainable implementation?

Design recommendation: Longitudinal mixed-methods study of teacher professional development cohorts, tracking changes in teacher well-being, pedagogical practice, and student outcomes over 2-3 years.

CONCLUSION

This conceptual synthesis has mapped the intersection of Workplace Spirituality, Durkheimian sociology, and pedagogical practice. We addressed three research questions: (1) the state of WPS in educational contexts (limited to faculty, absent for students); (2) empirical validation of Durkheimian concepts in classrooms (robust for collective effervescence); and (3) theoretical synthesis of these frameworks (tripartite model of meaning-making, community-building, and transcendent engagement).

Despite the near-absence of direct WPS-pedagogy research, we find robust theoretical alignment and promising empirical foundations—particularly in the literature on collective effervescence, which demonstrates that synchronous group activities reliably produce measurable improvements in cooperation, belonging, and prosocial behavior. The tripartite model of classroom spirituality offers a coherent framework for countering educational anomie, one that is theoretically grounded (Durkheim), empirically informed (collective effervescence research), and practically translatable (sample practices with time estimates).

The Classroom Spirituality Hypothesis—that intentional cultivation of meaning-making, community-building, and transcendent engagement reduces student anomie and fosters educational resilience—provides a testable proposition for future empirical research. We have outlined specific experimental, ethnographic, comparative, and intervention studies capable of validating or falsifying this hypothesis.

The ultimate aim is not to import religion into classrooms, but to reclaim what Durkheim understood: that human beings thrive in communities of shared meaning and mutual belonging. In an era of digital fragmentation and normative uncertainty, classrooms must become what they have always had the potential to be—micro-societies where students experience not only academic learning but the deeper gifts of connection, purpose, and transcendence.

We do not pretend that classroom spirituality is a panacea for the structural inequities, resource constraints, and policy pressures that trouble contemporary education. But we do argue that ignoring the spiritual dimensions of teaching and learning—the human need for meaning, belonging, and awe—leaves educators with an impoverished toolkit for addressing the crisis of anomie. The integration of Workplace Spirituality principles within a Durkheimian framework, as operationalized in the tripartite model of classroom spirituality, offers a theoretically rigorous, empirically promising, and humanly responsive path toward educational renewal.

The research agenda we have proposed—experimental studies, longitudinal ethnographies, cross-cultural comparisons, and teacher formation research—provides a roadmap for moving from conceptual synthesis to evidence-based practice. We invite colleagues across management, sociology, psychology, and education to join in testing the classroom spirituality hypothesis. The need has never been more urgent; the theoretical resources have never been more available; the time for integration has arrived.

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