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Cathy Yeulet, 123RF.com.

The single most consistent attribute brought up regarding impactful teachers was love.

Developing Teenage Testimonies: Programs and Pedagogy with Spiritual Impact

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Introduction

One of the key objectives of religious educators is to facilitate spiritual growth that leads to the making and keeping of covenants. This purpose is stated in various ways by different organizations of the Church. For example, “the purpose of the Young Women organization is to help each young woman be worthy to make and keep sacred covenants and receive the ordinances of the temple.”¹ The objective statement of Seminaries and Institutes (S&I) states in part, “Our purpose is to help youth and young adults understand and rely on the teachings and Atonement of Jesus Christ, qualify for the blessings of the temple, and prepare themselves, their families, and others for eternal life with their Father in Heaven.”² The Sunday School’s stated purpose is to “strengthen individuals’ and families’ faith in Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ.”³ Clearly religious educators in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have an explicit mission to help students grow spiritually.⁴

Although LDS religious educators might generally agree with this assertion, we note very little research has explored which programs or pedagogical

approaches are most conducive to inculcating spiritual growth,⁵ and our review of the literature has revealed very few studies that report on LDS student perceptions of which Church programs have helped them to develop spiritually.⁶ The purpose of the present study is to describe the results of 30 interviews with young adults in which they reflect upon and share their perceptions regarding Church programs and pedagogical approaches that helped them grow spiritually in their teenage years. Specifically, the following research questions guided our study:

1. Could young adults recall specific Church classes (such as in seminary, Young Women, Young Men, Sunday School) that they felt significantly increased their testimony or helped them grow spiritually? If so, were there any commonalities between these classes?
2. Could young adults recall a particular Church teacher that they felt helped them significantly increase their testimony or helped them grow spiritually? If so, were there any commonalities between these teachers?
3. Could young adults identify a particular Church “event” in their youth (e.g., girls’ camp, high adventure activities, youth conference, Especially for Youth) that they felt was particularly beneficial in helping them grow spiritually or increasing their testimony? If so, did these activities have anything in common?
4. Was there a teaching approach from a Church teacher that young adults identified as being particularly efficacious in helping them grow spiritually?
5. Do young adults perceive that their spiritual growth came primarily from learning gospel concepts, experiencing divine feelings, or applying gospel truths, or some combination of the three?
6. Which Church programs do young adults perceive as having the most spiritual impact on their teenage years?

Methods

We utilized a snowball sampling technique by posting a request for interviews on several social media sites and encouraging friends to share these posts with others.⁷ Potential interviewees completed a prequalification survey that asked them various questions to determine their eligibility for the study. In total, 216 individuals completed this prequalification survey indicating their

willingness to participate in the study. We initially filtered out respondents who (1) had not attended seminary or Young Men or Young Women programs, (2) lived outside the United States, and (3) were over the age of 30. Our rationale for filtering by participation in Church programs was that if we were asking about how these programs influenced spiritual growth, those we surveyed should have participated in them. We limited our study to people living in the United States, and in order to gather relatively recent data, participants needed to be between the ages of 18 and 30. This left us with 160 potential participants.

At this point we grouped participants into geographic clusters as follows: (1) Utah (55 potential participants), (2) West Coast (28 potential participants), (3) other states west of Colorado (30 potential participants), northeastern states (7 potential participants), southern states (18 potential participants), and other states (22 potential participants). We next randomly selected participants based on their geographic region resulting in a final sample that included 30 students, 9 of whom were from Utah, 6 from West Coast states, 6 from other western states, and 3 each from northeastern states, southern states, and other states. Sixteen of the participants were female and 14 were male, and their ages ranged from 18 to 25. All of the participants had been baptized at the age of 8, 20 had served missions, and 20 had attended Especially for Youth (EFY). All had participated in seminary, Sunday School, and Young Men/Young Women activities during high school. We note that about half of the students had released-time seminary and the other half participated in early morning seminary.

Interviews with these individuals were held over the phone in the spring of 2016. Interviewees were asked questions (see appendix) regarding their spiritual growth in high school through participating in church classes and events and were told that their names would not be associated with their answers to these questions. Interviews were conducted by the researchers, John Hilton III and Anthony Sweat, along with research assistants Sarah Harper and Jordan Hadley.

Results

Specific Impactful Classes

We begin with results regarding whether participants could recall a specific Church class (meaning one class period) that contributed to their testimony

or spiritual growth. Fourteen of the people we interviewed could spontaneously remember a specific class that affected them spiritually. Notably, however, 9 of the respondents (almost 30 percent) could not identify a single, specific class. Five of the people who could identify a particular class spoke about classes that were unusual or novel in some way, such as re-creating Lehi's vision of the tree of life, special guest speakers, a silent lesson, or an extremely unique object lesson. One student recalled, "I remember that it was a special lesson so we sang extra hymns, and he set it up in a very special way to have the Spirit there."

Three people specifically brought up classes in which they had been asked to teach. One person said, "I'd just received my mission call . . . as the instructor taught it he asked me to help and to participate and to try and teach the plan of salvation. That was the first time I'd thought about it from the perspective of trying to share it with someone else." Another individual recalled, "In priests quorum, . . . each of us had an assigned Sunday where we would teach the lesson. . . . It kind of sparked an interest in teaching, which ultimately led to me going on a mission."

Another theme that occurred three times centered on learning new concepts. One person recalled a lesson on ancient symbolism and stated, "I remember the Spirit being super powerful, and I was just so excited about the gospel and so excited about going back to the temple, and trying to look for those symbols." Another student said, "We had a lesson on the plan of salvation. . . . I still remember that lesson because it was a huge breakthrough for me. It was like so many things about the plan of salvation that I had never thought about before."

One of the other 2 students who could recall a specific class mentioned feeling the love of a Young Women leader during a lesson. The other brought up a class on repentance in which the teacher was very direct, which significantly affected the student.

Specific Teachers with Impact

Twenty-six people we interviewed could recall a specific Church teacher who had a strong spiritual impact on them. Two of these people talked about 2 different teachers, for a total of 28 teachers discussed by our interviewees. Of these, 12 twelve were seminary teachers, 11 eleven were Young Men or Young Women teachers. Three were Sunday School teachers.

The single most consistent attribute brought up regarding these impactful teachers was love. Eleven interviewees specifically talked about the love they felt from their teachers and the relationship they had with them. The following statements are representative of the 11 responses on this topic:

- If we missed a day of seminary, she would call us. And I could tell that it was out of a genuine love that she had for each of us students rather than any other motive.
- I would go on runs [with my Young Women president] in the morning and we would talk just about different things. And I felt comfortable asking her both spiritual things, but also other things that [were] going on in my life. I felt that she cared for me, but that she also cared for everyone else.
- He took the time . . . to really get to know me. The relationship that I had with him helped a lot.

Another key theme mentioned by the people we interviewed centered on pedagogical issues. Five people talked about teachers who used innovative techniques such as acting out Book of Mormon scenes, object lessons, and fun in-class games. Four people specifically described teachers who would set aside the teacher manual and teach from the heart by sharing personal experiences. For example, “My teacher mostly used the manual as a reference point. She never did really teach out of the manual, she was able to incorporate in personal experiences. . . . Hearing her experiences really helped me.” Four people commented about a teacher’s passion or enthusiasm for the gospel, and three people talked about teachers who they felt knew the gospel really well and helped them learn new things. Two other topics that were mentioned by multiple participants were teachers that could relate well with others (4 times) and being able to learn from the example of their teachers (3 times).

Specific Impactful Events

Of the thirty participants, 3 could not recall a specific event, and 9 people mentioned 2 events, for a total of 36 events recalled. The most frequently mentioned events were EFY and youth conference (11 times each) and girls’ camp (9 times). Girls’ camp and EFY are particularly notable given that only 16 participants had been to girls’ camp and 21 attended EFY. Four of the 11 youth conferences that were mentioned were pioneer treks for youth.

One theme that came out strongly across many different events was the sharing or hearing of testimonies. This was mentioned by 12 different individuals in settings including EFY, girls' camp, high adventure trips, and a special stake seminary event. One person said, "[It was my] second year of EFY. I was fifteen years old. . . . I didn't have a supersolid testimony yet. And the last day of EFY, I decided to get up and bear my testimony, and . . . that was pretty much the first time in my life that I actually got emotional over the testimony, and I actually believed the words that I was saying."

EFY reportedly had multiple benefits, including opportunities to hear and bear testimony, study scriptures, and interact with other LDS youth in a wholesome environment. One participant summed up these perspectives saying, "[Although] the big increase [in spirituality] after [EFY] just faded, I was left a little bit better each time. . . . I think part of [the spiritual growth] was the opportunity to really immerse myself in scriptures and spiritual things and have a good time doing it. And I think some of those friendships that were formed also were helpful." Similarly, participants described testimony meetings at girls' camp, along with building social connections, and in particular, leadership opportunities.

Another consistent theme across activities was quiet study time, or "solo" time as some referred to it. Eight of the participants commented on how quiet time alone to study and ponder scriptures or write in their journal was spiritually impactful. One female remembered, "I went to girls' camp and I kind of rolled my eyes when the leaders pulled out the crafts. So, I didn't like that, but there was always that time where those things were put away and we would just go into nature . . . just me, myself, and my prayers and nature where I got to reflect on my life and where I would improve myself." Related to quiet time alone to study, think, and reflect, several people described pioneer trek experiences or high adventure camps where they felt closer to God simply by being in nature. One person stated, "There's just something about being outdoors and being able to connect with the Spirit. . . . I just thought it was super amazing that we were able to be outside in God's creation and have these spiritual experiences."

Several interviewees described experiences pertaining to developing habits of scripture study or being touched by a scriptural lesson. For example, one young man said, "We did a three-day backpacking trip down in Southern Utah. . . . I specifically remember one evening I was at a devotional and our leaders sat us down and we talked through the story of . . . Nephi and Lehi

and how they baptized all the Lamanites, how they taught and brought down the walls of the jail cell [and fire encircled them]. . . . I have always remembered that as one of the earliest times I really felt the Spirit from studying a specific story from the Book of Mormon.”

Efficacious Patterns of Pedagogy for Spiritual Growth

Pedagogically, when participants were asked about a particular teaching approach from a religious teacher that helped them grow spiritually, 7 comments centered on having a class discussion or involving students actively in some way, usually through questions and answers, as opposed to merely hearing a teacher “lecture.” One student commented, “I think when my teachers would make it more of a discussion instead of a lecture, instead . . . they wanted to hear what we thought or asked good questions or probing questions to make us think and to help us participate.”

Another prevalent pedagogical theme was having class content be relatable or applicable to real life, with 6 responses touching on that point. One female participant said she felt spiritually affected, “When I felt like they were real, they either dealt with real problems, or actually applied to my life, I got a lot out of them and I liked them a lot more. Sometimes, I felt like some Young Women lessons were too fluffy and they were either too theoretical. . . . They just didn’t seem to apply. . . . The experiences that actually addressed those so that I felt like I could take real things and apply them to my life, or that they really heard me or understood the world that I was living in as a high school student, that those were what I enjoyed the most and what I felt I got the most out of.”

Four responses specifically mentioned when teachers took a pedagogical approach of being straightforward, direct, and not afraid to tackle difficult questions or subjects. One young woman remembered, “I just like people being straightforward. . . . It doesn’t work for me as much when people sugar-coat things. I like when people are blunt and honest.” In general, a pedagogical approach that involves students in dialogical discussion is relatable or applicable to their real-life situations, and seeks to address difficult subjects and questions head-on in an honest way resonated spiritually with the sampled LDS participants.

Learning, Feeling, Doing, and Spiritual Growth

Students were asked the question, “If you had to divide your spiritual growth into three parts, what percentage of your adolescent spiritual growth came from your ‘learning’ gospel concepts or truths, what percentage came from divine ‘feelings’ that you experienced in Church education settings, and what percentage came from your efforts to ‘apply’ or put into practice the truths you were encouraged to live in gospel classes?” We asked this question in an attempt to ascertain whether knowing, feeling, or doing seemed to be most important to the spiritual growth of young people we interviewed.

The results indicate a balanced variety in how students answered this question. Six students attributed 50 percent or more of their spiritual growth to applying gospel principles, 5 attributed 50 percent or more to feelings, and 4 attributed 50 percent or more to learning. The overall averages were 37 percent attributed to feeling, 36 percent attributed to doing (applying), and 27 percent to knowing. This is consistent with other research indicating that LDS youth attribute spiritual growth and experiences more to affective feelings and action-oriented application than cognitive knowledge-level outcomes.⁸

Learning

When participants were asked to identify a setting where they “learned a gospel concept or truth” that significantly contributed to their spiritual growth, LDS seminary was mentioned most frequently (with 10 out of 30 responses) with no other church class setting receiving more than 3 responses. As we analyzed the 10 seminary responses, the following themes emerged: an engaging, applicable topic, having a prepared and knowledgeable teacher, and an expectation of student scripture study.

Feeling

When participants were asked to identify a setting where they “experienced divine feelings” that significantly contributed to their spiritual growth, there were 32 responses (some people mentioned multiple experiences). Of those 32 responses, 9 mentioned a testimony meeting and 5 specified experiences at girls’ camp. All other responses were spread over a variety of settings, several of which were not related to church class settings (e.g., receiving a blessing or attending the temple). The effect of testimony meetings was discussed in preceding paragraphs on specific “events” that led to spiritual growth, but

in the context of this question, it is clear that the LDS youth in our sample correlate affective spiritual feelings most strongly to testimony sharing. One participant remembered, “I think I can remember having similar [spiritual] feelings bearing my testimony, when it was in, I guess, priesthood quorums or in sacrament meeting. My teachers would encourage us to go and bear our testimonies during fast and testimony meetings. I remember really feeling the Spirit pretty powerfully there.” Another said, “Me actively sharing my own testimony. Or listening to other people share theirs. . . . And I think that the opportunity to study and to express and to really say things? I think that helps you to understand them better and also to believe them more. And I think that can give people the opportunity to feel the Spirit more as well.”

Doing

When participants were asked to identify a setting where they were “invited or challenged to apply a gospel truth” that they felt contributed significantly to their spiritual growth, LDS seminary was the most cited free response, in 6 of the 25 comments. Most all who mentioned seminary talked about the specific challenge to read scriptures each day or complete reading an entire book of scripture before the end of a year. One person said, “Our seminary teacher, he challenged us to read the whole New Testament in the school year, and he gave us a layout of what chapters we [needed] to read.” Participants mentioned EFY three times as a setting where they were challenged to apply the gospel; those who did also referred to invitations to develop personal scripture study habits. The LDS Young Women’s Personal Progress program was mentioned three times, and the Young Men’s Duty to God program was mentioned once.

Programs with the Highest Spiritual Impact

We asked participants to rank a series of religious experiences according to the spiritual impact on their teenage years, with 1 being the most impactful and 6 being the least impactful. For females these activities were EFY (if applicable), girls’ camp, seminary, Sunday School, Young Women classes and activities, and youth conference. For males, these activities were EFY (if applicable), high adventure activities, seminary, Sunday School, Young Men classes and activities, and youth conference.

To compare responses, average scores for each religious experience were calculated by summing the scores of those applicable (for instance, only those

who attended girls' camp were included in finding the average for girls' camp), and then dividing that total by the number of applicable respondents. The results are presented in table 1.

Table 1	
Activity	Average Ranking
Seminary	2.8
EFY	2.81
Young Men	3.0
Girls Camp	3.13
Young Women	3.13
High Adventure Camp	3.43
Sunday School	4.03
Youth Conference	4.03

Table 1. Ranking of Spiritual Impact of Church Activities (lower number = higher impact)

We also analyzed, based on the potential number of respondents who had participated in those programs, how often certain programs were mentioned as either first or second most influential, or how many times a program was ranked as least influential in fifth or sixth. For example, EFY was rated as first or second most impactful with the highest possible frequency, with 57 percent of potential respondents ranking it thus (12 times mentioned out of 21 possible respondents who participated in it). Second highest was Young Men, with 50 percent (7 out of 14), and third was seminary at 47 percent (14 out of 30). The programs that were placed last, in fifth or sixth place most often as least spiritually impactful, were youth conference at 47 percent (14 out of 30), Sunday School at 43 percent (13 out of 30), and high adventure camp at 36 percent (5 out of 14). Programs like Young Women or girls' camp consistently were ranked in the mid-range, as neither the highest nor the least most spiritually impactful, although there were some participants who ranked these as having the largest influence on them.

Discussion

Limitations

Before discussing the results of this study, it is important to note that our design carries with it significant limitations. As a qualitative study, it has a relatively small sample size (as compared with larger-scale quantitative studies), and while there is a geographical diversity in our survey participants, we do not have reason to believe that they represent a wide swath of the population of LDS youth. Thus these results cannot and should not be extrapolated to a broad population. This study should be seen as a launching point for future research efforts, not as a definitive research piece. Notwithstanding this limitation, we believe it is fruitful to discuss the results of the 30 interviews in that doing so may shed light on directions for further research.

Spiritually Impactful Teachers

Particular teachers in the Church have a spiritual impact on learners. As mentioned in the results section of this paper, nearly every one of the 30 participants could recall from memory a teacher who influenced them spiritually while they were a teen. Most of the comments about spiritually impactful teachers related to teacher attributes, not necessarily teachings skills. Participants mentioned attributes and attitudes that reflected love of God and love of students, such as that the teacher cared, was well prepared, displayed Christ-like behavior, knew people's names, had a good relationship with students, was relatable, welcoming, easy to talk to, and approachable. Teachers with these types of attributes and attitudes seemed to have the most spiritual impact.

While these recommendations sound like conventional wisdom and are nothing new to most LDS teachers, what is new is data from our interviews that validates how teachers having sincere love for God and those they teach seems to affect spiritual growth and testimony in teenagers. While some may be blessed more than others with the spiritual gift to teach,⁹ all gospel teachers, regardless of their innate gifts or skills, can be well prepared, learn students' names, find ways to show students they appropriately love and care, be respectful and inviting, and reach out to students who may not be engaged in class or attending. The ability to love students is an attribute that can be acquired by all teachers.

Spiritually Impactful Pedagogy

While each of us can develop attitudes and attributes that are associated with spiritually impactful teachers, there are also skills related to spiritually impactful pedagogies to practice and implement. In our interview data, 7 times participants mentioned actively involving students (usually through class discussion) and not just “lecturing.” Six times they mentioned having the class be relatable or applicable. Four respondents mentioned teachers sharing personal experiences. Four people mentioned impactful teachers being straightforward, proving deeper knowledge, being direct, or not being afraid to tackle hard subjects or real questions. Based on this data we recommend that to be more spiritually impactful pedagogically, teachers of LDS youth (1) meaningfully involve students in the learning process, (2) help make the content relatable and applicable, perhaps by sharing personal experiences, and (3) be straightforward, direct, and real.

Additionally, we believe that these interviews indicate the need for a balanced pedagogy we call “Know, Feel, and Do.” The premise of this pedagogy is that, as Elder David A. Bednar taught, the type of learning that invites the Holy Ghost in the learning process “requires spiritual, mental, and physical exertion.”¹⁰ Or, as President Thomas S. Monson summarized, “The aim is to inspire individuals to think about, feel about, and then do something about living gospel principles.”¹¹ When participants were asked whether it was learning new information, experiencing certain affective feelings, or being challenged or invited to apply gospel teachings that contributed most to their spirituality, the results were fairly well balanced with each category getting about a third of the credit. Our point is that to develop spiritually, students need all three types of learning; therefore, teachers should avoid excessively emphasizing or excluding one of these aspects. Other research we have conducted supports that the most spiritually impactful LDS religion classes contain all three of these essential elements of spiritual learning: knowing, feeling, and doing.¹²

Spiritually Impactful Events

Our data suggests that important elements of spiritually efficacious LDS events for youth would include (1) testimony meetings; (2) alone time to write, ponder, and study scriptures; and (3) being outdoors in nature. One-third of participants specifically mentioned testimony meetings as being most spiritually impactful at LDS events. This is consistent with other

research, albeit limited, on events that elicit spiritual growth in teenagers. David Seastrand's previously mentioned 1996 dissertation describing the in-class seminary activities that elicited in-class spiritual experiences were often related to testimony bearing, such as comments like, "When . . . bore testimony," or "During testimonies by . . ." (107).¹³ The most frequently mentioned form of student participation that elicited student spirituality was student expressions of belief (testimony), with 26 (44 percent) of the written comments. In the conclusion of the study, Seastrand (1996) commented about the frequent mention of testimony sharing as an elicitor of perceived in-class spiritual experience: "The fact that so many journal entries referred to testimony sharing as the source of the spiritual elicitation did not mean that many class testimony sharing sessions took place. It simply indicated that the majority of students were spiritually touched during just a few sessions and made note of it in their journals."¹⁴

Seastrand concluded that "testimony sharing is obviously perceived by students as a powerful tool for the elicitation of the Spirit."¹⁵ We would recommend that adult and youth leaders planning LDS youth events specifically and purposely plan time for sharing of testimony, along with scheduled alone time to study and ponder scripture, and to be outdoors in nature when practicable.

Spiritually Impactful Programs

Based on our limited data of official Church programs, LDS seminary seems to have the most spiritual impact on LDS youth during their teenage years. It received the highest ranking (2.8) of all other programs, was cited as the program that contributed most to teenage students learning and applying the gospel, and when asked which teacher had the most spiritual impact on them seminary teachers were mentioned most often (12 out of the 28 participants who mentioned a teacher). This also seems consistent with other research that credits the seminary program as a powerful source of spiritual strength for LDS teens.¹⁶ The sheer quantity of time that students spend in seminary could account for this impact. It is notable that programs (such as camps for young men or young women) also have high spiritual impact with much less cost in terms of time. We again note that half of the people we interviewed took early-morning seminary and our study did not attempt to distinguish differences between students taught by full-time and volunteer teachers. It

was clear from our interviews that regular contact with devoted, believing teachers who showed love to students was an important key for students.

Similarly, while Especially for Youth is not run in conjunction with local Church units (rather, it is overseen by BYU's Department of Continuing Education) it also seems to be a very spiritually impactful program. Of the 21 participants who mentioned a spiritually impactful event in their teen years, 11 (over 50 percent) proactively mentioned EFY. EFY was also rated as the first or second most impactful program by the highest proportion of participants, with 57 percent of potential respondents ranking it thus, and overall rated second just behind seminary as the most spiritually impactful program. While EFY is cost prohibitive for many teens and their parents, we recommend to readers to help youth find ways to fund, attend, and participate in EFY due to its apparent high spiritual impact. Moreover, those planning large-scale events for youth might investigate and implement elements of the EFY program that may lead to spiritual impact.

Based on the interviews we held, the LDS Sunday School program seems to have had the least spiritual impact upon LDS youth sampled in this study. It tied for last in overall rating of spiritual impact of Church programs and was placed as the last two options, fifth or sixth place (13 out of 30 times), more than all other programs except youth conference (14 out of 30 times). When asked about spiritually impactful teachers during teen years, only 3 participants mentioned a Sunday School teacher, compared to 12 seminary teachers and 11 Young Men/Young Women teachers. It should be noted that most of the people interviewed for this study were too old to have participated in the Sunday School's new "Come, Follow Me" program, implemented in 2013. However, at least half of the respondents (16 of them) were of ages to receive at least one year of that program's outlines in their Sunday School classes. Further research remains to be done to measure the effectiveness of the "Come Follow Me" program, which was not the aim nor purpose of the present study.

It may be that in some cases Sunday School teachers not only need to adjust their approach pedagogically (as "Come Follow Me" is striving to do) in order to be consistent with the recommendations of this study but perhaps some Sunday school teachers need to adjust their perspectives culturally as well. As discussed previously, the teachers that had greatest spiritual impact upon the LDS teens in this study were ones that were well prepared, learn students' names, found ways to show students they appropriately loved and

cared, were respectful and inviting, and reached out to students who may not be engaged in class or attending. Sunday School teachers could do this by calling home when students aren't in class, reaching out to learners outside of class time (like attending extracurricular events), and being prepared for class. Sometimes in LDS American culture these ways of connecting with LDS youth are expected and left more to Young Men or Young Women leaders or seminary teachers; more may need to be encouraged and expected of LDS Sunday School teachers.¹⁷

Conclusion

As stated previously, the present study has many limitations and should not be utilized to make definitive statements about the spiritual value of any Church program. We hope that this study will prompt continuing and increasingly rigorous conversations and formal assessments regarding what religious educators can do to best help youth develop spiritually as they participate in Church programs. One overarching take-home message we learned from conducting this research is that LDS youth have a variety of needs and different approaches connect with different individuals. As one of our interviewees stated, "Everybody learns in a very different way, so that's why I think it's very important that in these events that we just don't do the exact same thing over and over again with one speaker standing up, one musical number, and they don't all speak in the exact same way. There needs to be more variety, and that's what I really think people get something more out of it." Religious educators in the Church can and should collectively strive to learn and act more on a variety of approaches, including the ones discussed herein, that will assist LDS youth in their spiritual development as they participate in Church classes, events, and programs.

Appendix

Interview Questions

1. As you look back on your religious experiences in high school (e.g., seminary, Young Men/Young Women, Sunday School) was there a particular class (meaning one class period) that you feel significantly increased your testimony or helped you grow spiritually? If so, please explain.

2. As you look back on your religious experiences in high school (e.g., seminary, Young Men/Young Women, Sunday School) was there a particular teacher that you feel significantly increased your testimony or helped you grow spiritually? If so, please explain.
3. Was there a particular “event” in your youth (e.g., girls’ camp, youth conference, EFY) that you felt was particularly beneficial in helping you grow spiritually or increasing your testimony? If so, explain.
4. Was there a particular teaching approach from a religious teacher in your youth that helped you grow spiritually? If so, please explain.
5. Was there a particular setting in your teenage years where you learned a gospel concept or truth that you feel significantly contributed to your spiritual growth? If so, please explain.
6. Was there a particular setting where you experienced divine feelings that you feel significantly contributed to your spiritual growth? If so, please explain.
7. Was there a particular setting where you were invited or challenged to apply or live a gospel truth that you feel significantly contributed to your spiritual growth? If so, please explain.
8. If you had to divide your spiritual growth into three parts, what percentage of your adolescent spiritual growth came from your “learning” gospel concepts or truths, what percentage came from divine “feelings” that you experienced in church education settings, and what percentage came from your efforts to “apply” or put into practice the truths you were encouraged to live in gospel classes?
9. Rank the following in order of which had the most spiritual impact on your teenage years, with 1 being the most impactful and 6 being the least impactful.
 - A. Especially for Youth (EFY)
 - B. Girls’ camp/high adventure camp
 - C. Seminary
 - D. Sunday School
 - E. Young Men/Young Women classes and activities
 - F. Youth conference
10. From what you ranked highest in the previous question, what was it about that setting that “worked” in helping you grow spiritually?

11. Is there anything else about how Church programs influenced your spiritual growth in high school that we haven't discussed? **RE**

Notes

1. *Handbook 2: Administering the Church 2010*, 10.1.1, <https://www.lds.org/handbook/handbook-2-administering-the-church/young-women?lang=eng/>.
2. "The Objective of Seminaries and Institutes of Religion," <https://www.lds.org/manual/gospel-teaching-and-learning-a-handbook-for-teachers-and-leaders-in-seminaries-and-institutes-of-religion/the-objective-of-seminaries-and-institutes-of-religion?lang=eng>.
3. *Handbook 2: Administering the Church 2010*, 12.1, <https://www.lds.org/handbook/handbook-2-administering-the-church/sunday-school?lang=eng>.
4. While the focus of our study is teaching and learning in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, it is important to note that these issues are part of a broader discussion. For example, Barbara Walvoord published an extensive study conducted with 12,463 students in introductory religion courses (along with their 533 instructors) representing 109 colleges and universities across the United States. Walvoord found a "great divide" between what the students hoped to gain from their religion courses compared with the teaching goals of religion faculty (6). She found that "Even in public and private non-sectarian institutions, more than half the students (51 percent) ranked . . . religious/spiritual development as 'essential' or 'very important' course goals" (21). This number jumped to 70 percent in religiously affiliated institutions. In contrast, approximately 15 percent of faculty at nonsectarian institutions and 60 percent of faculty in religious institutions listed religious and spiritual development as "essential" or "very important" course outcomes. Walvoord suggests that this gap between faculty and student perspectives on course goals indicates a need for faculty members to pay more careful attention to spiritual and religious outcomes. See Barbara Walvoord, *Teaching and Learning in College Introductory Religion Courses* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008). Another key book on increasing spirituality is *The Spiritual Child* by Lisa Miller (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2015). This book reviews the psychological impact of spirituality and proffers seven suggestions for helping children grow spiritually, some of which could be applied in the classroom.
5. In our review of the literature, nearly all studies that focused on helping students grow spiritually consisted of the author(s) sharing an idea and supporting this idea with a few pieces of anecdotal evidence (for example, see Larry W. Tippetts, "I Write the Things of My Soul," *Religious Educator* 6, no. 1 (2005): 93–105; Alan R. Maynes, "How to Ask Questions That Invite Revelation," in *Teach One Another Words of Wisdom*, ed. Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and David M. Whitchurch (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 2009): 111–21; Barbara E. Morgan, "Helping Our Students Become Spiritually Self-Reliant," *Religious Educator* 13, no. 2 (2012): 45–59; and John Hilton III, "The Silent Lesson," *Religious Educator* 14, no. 3 (2013): 111–19. We do not disparage these studies; indeed, we believe great value comes from sharing pedagogical approaches that appear to be fruitful. However, we do point out that very few studies exist in which researchers attempted to quantify whether some aspect of pedagogy made a difference in student spiritual growth, and even these have significant limitations. Two studies that do attempt to quantify spiritual impact of a particular approach are Anthony R. Sweat, "Student Oral Participation and Perceived Spiritual Experiences in Latter-Day Saint Seminary" (PhD diss., USU, 2011); and John

Hilton III, Anthony R. Sweat, and Kenneth Plummer, “Factors Related to In-Class Spiritual Experience: Relationship Between Pre-Class Scripture Reading, In-Class Note-Taking, and Perceived In-Class Spiritual Experiences,” *Journal of Research on Christian Education* 24, no. 3 (2015): 271–91.

6. David Seastrand’s 1996 unpublished dissertation, “A Study of Latter-day Saint High School Seminary Students’ Perceptions of Their Spirituality” is one applicable study that specifically explores what LDS students perceive, regarding pedagogy, helps develop student spirituality. Seastrand’s problem statement centered on the idea that the purposes of LDS seminary are spiritual in nature, yet S&I “religious educators have limited formal inquiry into what constitutes and elicits the spirituality of LDS [seminary students]” (7). One of Seastrand’s research questions specifically centered on which in-class events were perceived by students to elicit their spirituality. Seastrand’s study consisted of twenty LDS seminary students from the same seminary class, recording over three months in individual journals each time they perceived they were having a spiritual experience in their seminary class. Each time spiritual experiences were perceived and recorded, participating students were also asked to record what event they perceived caused the spiritual experiences to occur. In analyzing the summary of the “in-class activities which are perceived by students to elicit their spirituality” (107), 50 of the 58 written responses (86 percent) were connected to forms of student oral participation, such as testimony bearing, class discussions, and singing. Another article, by Eric Rackley, centered on LDS youth and scripture study: “We know that youth in the Church should read scripture and that many of them do, but we know next to nothing empirically about how they read scripture: What are their purposes for reading? What are their motivations? Are there certain ways they prefer to read scripture? Are these productive? If so, why? If not, why not? What struggles do they face while reading scripture? Do they overcome their struggles? If so, how? If not, why not? What value does scripture hold for them? What strategies do they use while they read? These are just a few of the key questions about our youths’ scripture reading that we have yet to develop a substantive body of research to address. Because we know so little empirically about the nature of our youths’ scripture reading practices, instructional and curricular decisions may be informed more by rhetoric than reality” (“How Young Latter-day Saints Read the Scriptures: Five Profiles,” *Religious Educator* 16, no. 2 (2015)). It appears that a similar empirical research void exists in terms of quantitative and qualitative measures exploring how LDS develop testimony and spirituality.

7. This led to our invitation being shared at some young single adult wards across the United States and in various other outlets. Participants were told that in exchange for participating in a 45-minute interview they would receive a 10-dollar gift card to Amazon.com.

8. See Arch Wong, Anthony Sweat, and Ryan Gardner, “Pedagogy of the Spirit: Comparing Evangelical and Latter-day Saint Youth Self-Reported In-Class Spiritual Experiences,” *Religious Education* 112, no. 5 (October–December 2017) [in press].

9. See Moroni 10:9–10.

10. David A. Bednar, “Seek Learning by Faith” (address to religious educators, 3 February 2006), 4.

11. Thomas S. Monson, “Learn of Me,” *Ensign*, March 2016, 4.

12. In a large-scale study of 2,621 students’ comments from BYU religion classes, we looked at the top 2 percent and bottom 2 percent of classes on the “spiritually inspiring” rating, looking for themes that emerged from the student comments to understand why the classes were rated so high or so low. Of the highest-rated spiritually inspiring classes, the top three free-response student comments were: 1) intellectually enlightening (24 percent of

comments), 2) applied religion to life (23 percent of comments), and 3) explicit mention of feeling the Spirit (21 percent of comments). These 3 codes were only 3 of 22 potential comment codes, yet they accounted for over two-thirds (68 percent) of the student comments in the highest rated spiritually inspiring BYU religion classes. See John Hilton III, Anthony Sweat, Tyler Griffin, and Casey Paul Griffiths, "Teaching with Spiritual Impact: An Analysis of Student Comments Regarding High- and Low-Rated Spiritually Inspiring Religion Classes," *Teaching Theology & Religion* 19, no. 4 (2016): 340–58.

13. Seastrand, "A Study of Latter-day Saint High School Seminary Students' Perceptions of Their Spirituality," 107.

14. Seastrand, "A Study of Latter-day Saint High School Seminary Students' Perceptions of Their Spirituality," 125.

15. Seastrand, "A Study of Latter-day Saint High School Seminary Students' Perceptions of Their Spirituality," 125.

16. The researchers for the National Study of Youth and Religion credited much of LDS youth's high marks in religious beliefs and behaviors to the LDS seminary program, saying, "It probably has to do with *daily religious training through high school [i.e. seminary]*. . . . Daily engagement with people of their own faith, that's an amazing corrective to tip the balance" ("LDS Teens Tops in Living Faith," *Deseret News*, 15 March 2005, A01). See also Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

17. We note that we are generalizing in this paragraph. Certainly there are Sunday School teachers who make these types of extra-mile efforts.