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Empty Wells: how well are we doing at spiritual well-being?

SALLY ELTON-CHALCRAFT

St. Martins College, Lancaster LA1 3JD, UK. E-mail: dchalcraft@aol.com

ABSTRACT *This paper presents ten teachers' perceptions of spirituality and considers how these can be categorized. A small research project, recently undertaken, is described. Teachers' stories are contextualised with biographical details, and are presented within a framework of four dimensions of Spirituality (the inner, the social and moral, the environmental and the transcendental) and Spirituality is defined metaphorically as a hologram with four dimensions. I argue that by viewing spirituality in four broad dimensions the bland consensus definition can be avoided resulting in rich fulfilling opportunities for developing children's own unique and varied spiritualities.*

Introduction

The introduction of *Curriculum 2000* in Britain (with its emphasis on 'values') and the governments' interest in 'the magic ingredient' of church/religious schools, together with the high profile of 'citizenship' and SMSC (social, moral, spiritual and cultural development) have all contributed towards a burst of interest, within schools, in non-academic areas such as Spirituality.

Despite this during visits to schools (as a University Link Tutor) talking with both trainees and their mentors, and when lecturing back at college, it became apparent that there is still a great deal of confusion concerning what 'Spirituality' actually is and how children's spiritual development is to be supported in schools. I was interested in the extent of knowledge and the nature of perceptions held by teachers and trainees. Therefore I set out to discover chalk face perceptions. This research was carried out in 2000 for my Oxford Brookes University MA dissertation (Elton-Chalcraft, 2000). In what follows I present some of the stories teachers told which convey their perceptions of spirituality, how they support children's spiritual well-being and the influence they consider parents have. Jenny Mosely (1996, p. 24) refers to five energy giving wells—one of which is the spiritual well. I wanted to explore the state of these spiritual wells in schools.

As I re-listened to their stories about Spirituality on the tapes I became aware of similarities between the respondents' comments and I categorised these into four dimensions—firstly the *inner*, secondly the *social and moral*, next the *environmental*

Table 1. Background information

| Respondent | Experience | Relationship to me | Definition—spirituality |
|--|--|---|---|
| B: Acting Headteacher four days teaching 4–7 year olds small rural primary | 24 years: variety of schools Courses: <i>Living values, A peaceful classroom</i> | I taught 1 day a week (in B’s class) for 3 months | Spirituality—a higher level of thinking beyond the everyday a sense of awe/wonder |
| C: Retired primary teacher | 29 years: variety of schools Courses: <i>Human relationships/Values clarification</i> | I have never met C before, he is a friend and ex colleague of B | An awareness of a fourth dimension |
| D: Headteacher four days teaching 7–11 year olds in small rural primary | 22 years: variety of schools Courses: none | I work with D in her school in my role as university tutor for trainee teachers | Something more than meets the eye. Something beyond the physical |
| E: Headteacher four days teaching 7–11 year olds in a small rural primary | 33 years: variety of schools Courses: none | I work with E in her school in my role as university tutor for trainee teachers | An awareness that there is something beyond the physical. The soul |
| F: Trainee teacher final year teaching 9–11 year olds in a medium sized rural primary | 3 teaching practices Courses: none | I am F’s university tutor as she works in G and H’s school with G’s class | What makes the child an individual |
| G: Part time teacher 9–11 year olds in a medium sized primary | 26 years experience in a variety of schools Courses: PSE and Drama | I work with G in her school in my role as university tutor for F | Inner well-being |

| | | | |
|--|---|---|--|
| H: Part time teacher 7–9 year olds in a medium sized primary | 22 years: variety of school (plus Middle East) Courses: PSE and Spirituality | I work with G in her school as University tutor for trainee teachers | An overall awareness of oneself and one’s environment/world |
| J: Deputy Head, Early Years manager teaching 4–5 year olds in a large Church of England First school (4–9 year olds) | 10 years: 1 urban 1 city (before teaching J worked in counselling) Courses: none | I work with J in my role as University tutor for trainee teachers | It is the unseen and often non-understood aspect of personhood—that which makes us who we are as human beings. It pervades the behaviour, thought and actions of individuals colouring our perceptions of life and others |
| K: Teaches 6–7 year olds in a large Church of England first school | 14 years: variety of schools Courses: none | I had not met K before she was encouraged to participate by J | Spirituality. Feeling inside of not being alone |
| M: R.E co-ordinator and teaches 7–9 year olds in a large Church of England First school | 18 years: variety of schools Courses: Spirituality and PSE | I had not met M before she was encouraged to participate by J | Spirituality- becoming aware of an inner need to question and wonder about God, self and the world around Relationships |

Table 2. Prompt questions used as basis for discussion during interview

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1. How would you define Spirituality?
 2. Could you describe any examples of your childrens' spiritual experiences/spiritual development/spiritual well being?
 3. How do you go about supporting children's spiritual development/spiritual well being, (through R.E, PSHE, other curriculum areas). Is it integral to all parts of the curriculum?
 4. Have you found any resources/strategies particularly useful in supporting spiritual development?
 5. What personal qualities might help teachers in their support of children's spiritual development/spiritual well being?
 6. What role do parents play in their child's spiritual development? (Have you any examples of the family's influence on a child's spiritual development/spiritual well being?)
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and fourthly the *transcendental*. These four categories originated in part from the literature (Hay & Nye 1998; Par, 1999) but also from the data itself. It must be acknowledged that what is presented here are teachers' *perceptions* of how they support spirituality and their present definitions of spirituality. These teachers are not intended to represent teachers in general. Furthermore I did not undertake classroom observation and so evidence is not available to compare what is claimed with actual pedagogy. However the teachers' comments and the episodes they chose to relate to me present rich data in terms of their understanding of this area.

Like Cole (1990) I frequently present quotations from the respondents—I have endeavoured to let their voices be heard. Perhaps I give more coherence to the teachers' ideas and identify more distinctions between them than they themselves do, since I am able to compare the stories of each of the ten respondents.

Methodology

I approached headteachers in the Midlands who were known to me either personally or professionally to recruit for volunteers. In Table 1, I outline relevant background information concerning each respondent. All respondents are white, nine are female, C is male. Respondents were only asked to relate details of courses they had attended which related specifically to spirituality.

The research was based on semi-structured interviews and beforehand respondents were asked to consider six questions (Table 2) which provided prompts during the semi structured, tape recorded interview which I wanted to be respondent-led rather than researcher-led. (Ribbens, 1989). Teachers were asked to identify which of the governmental definitions they agreed or disagreed with (SCAA, 1996). Results are presented in Table 3 and referred to in the sections on the Four Dimensions.

Differing Definitions and Perceptions

As I familiarised myself with the data I realised that different teachers were sometimes referring to the same aspects of spirituality, albeit in different ways (which I outline in detail below). I categorised these into four dimensions the *inner*,

Table 3. Teachers' responses to SCAA's definitions (1996:6)

| Spirituality is: | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree |
|---|-------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|
| ~ The essence of being human, involving the ability to surpass the boundaries of the physical and material | | | | 7 | 3 |
| ~ Development of the inner life, insight and vision | | | | 3 | 7 |
| ~ A response to God, the 'other' or the 'ultimate' | | 1 | 1 | 3 | 5 |
| ~ An inclination to believe in ideals and possibilities that transcend our experience of the world | | | 1 | 3 | 6 |
| ~ A propensity to foster human attributes, such as love, faithfulness and goodness, that could not be classed as 'physical' | | 2 | 1 | 1 | 6 |
| ~ The inner world of creativity and imagination | | 1 | 1 | 5 | 3 |
| ~ The quest for meaning in life, for truth and ultimate values | | | | 5 | 5 |
| ~ The sense of identity and self-worth which enables us to value others | | 2 | | 3 | 5 |

the social and moral, the environmental and the transcendental. In this paper I map the teachers' stories within these four dimensions. This does not mean that I believe a 'holistic' spirituality will incorporate all four dimensions in equal measure, as I hinted at in earlier work (Chalcraft, 2000) rather I consider it to be the best way of capturing teachers' perceptions, and descriptions of episodes concerning spirituality, thus offering a framework which can inform future practice.

The categorisation of different aspects of spirituality has been used in previous research for example—there are similarities between my dimensions and Fisher's *domains* (1999, p. 32), Nye's *categories* (1998, p. 120), and terms used by Lealman (1996, p. 24) and Armstrong (1985, p. 114). However my dimensions are unique—as I demonstrate in the following sections. I mapped the data into four dimensions which can inter relate to varying degrees. In an attempt to capture the nature of four dimensional spirituality I coined the metaphor of the hologram.

Hologram Metaphor

Spirituality can be likened to a hologram which is also intangible but has dimensions—height, breadth, depth and hue. The hologram cannot be felt in the physical

sense, its existence is reliant on the observation of the multi-dimensional image. At the beginning of 2000 I took my young daughter to a hologram exhibition and realised that she did not have a holistic image from her low vantage point. Unless I lifted her to an ideal position she could see only one dimension or another but not the complete image. So to experience *all* the dimensions of the hologram in full a person has to position them self carefully and then move around at that level to experience all the dimensions of the image. Similarly with spirituality there needs to be an awareness of the existence of spirituality (as opposed to spiritual blindness) and a realisation that there are four dimensions. But just as there are limitless hologram images—a bird, a machine, a piece of jewellery, a forest, so too are there infinite possible spiritualities.

The Four Dimensions

Inner Dimension

Deliberately chosen as the first dimension to be described (as opposed to Nye's first category Child-God) the *inner* dimension begins with the essence and awareness of the person. Some respondents defined spirituality in terms of some kind of inner perception, which is distinct and summed up by respondent E as 'beyond the everyday mundane life'. The following extracts are taken from respondents' written definitions:

A higher level of thinking beyond the everyday. (B)

An awareness of a fourth dimension to life. (C)

An awareness that there is something beyond the physical. The soul. (E)

Inner well being. (G)

An overall awareness of oneself. (H)

Becoming aware of an inner need to question and wonder about self. (M)

It is the unseen and often non-understood aspect of personhood. (J)

'Inner' as Distinct from 'Outer'

Whether inner life is seen as being distinct or bound up with the physical body, these respondents certainly believed in its existence. (For further discussion of the thorny issue of dualism see Thatcher, 1991, p. 24; Hay & Hammond, 1992, p. 145; Chalcraft, 2000, p. 9 & Ryle, 1949.)

For respondent E, however, there were different types of spirituality. She thought that some of the saints may well have had experiences which were not related to the body. Armstrong uses the term 'supra-personal (higher dimensions of consciousness e.g. visions)' to refer to such an idea, (1985, p. 114). Respondent E refers to some of the saints as *narrow* or *focused*. However she also believed that everyone was

entitled to their own opinion and if one chose to consider spiritual things at the expense of material ones they had a right to do so. Yet she felt children ought to be made aware ‘that there is more to life than the material, the most important thing in life is not to have a new pair of trainers’. However E did not think children under 10 would necessarily have an inner life, she believed they were at ‘the concrete stage—I did Piaget at college’.

Respondent H offered many examples of inner life, she used an experiential approach (Hammond *et al.*, 1990 and Stone, 1995) including breathing and visualisation exercises to help children to ‘go inside themselves ... and listen to themselves breathing’.

In this situation the children were being guided sensitively in their inner exploration. Here was a teacher who was aware of the powerful nature of introspection and she ensured the children were guided through the exercises carefully: ‘They have to be trained into relaxing and getting comfortable and breathing’.

H’s strong personal beliefs gave her a firm foundation from which she could guide her children in their exploration of *their* inner selves. She felt strongly that one had to be ‘spiritual’ oneself in order to support children’s spirituality, ‘Whether you actually fed the information in a quality way would be dependent on whether you believed it or not’. She concluded the interview by emphasising her conviction (similar to E), ‘Does it really matter what you are wearing? That doesn’t make you the person you are. You are the person within yourself’.

H wanted the richness she experienced to be experienced by the children. Rather than being spiritually illiterate and motivated merely by external pressures, she was keen for them to enter into the fulfilment of inner peace and calm achieved by a knowledge and love of one’s inner self. She described a spiritual person as being happy.

G expressed this sentiment too, ‘A feeling of calmness. Feeling at one with oneself. Knowing oneself and knowing what you like’, and a similar theme can be seen in M’s comments, ‘You have to get them to love themselves before they can love anyone else’. Eight respondents agreed, or strongly agreed with SCAA’s eighth definition of spirituality, ‘The sense of identity and self worth which enables us to value others’ (see Table 3). This also relates to my second dimension, the social and moral.

Another aspect characterising the inner dimension is that of the inner quest for meaning. All respondents agreed with SCAA’s definition, ‘The quest for meaning in life, for truth and ultimate values’ (see Table 3). For M in particular this was definitely a reality, ‘Life is a journey I think and, you’re always learning, and you are learning spirituality I think’. When asked if people progress along this journey at the same rate M replied, ‘I think even the same person can have a different rate ... you can have spurts and still times to think—it depends on the situation’.

For M the inner life develops during this quest but for her there is an ultimate goal—God. E thought this too, ‘*You’re searching for it even if you haven’t got the belief*’. Whether there is a goal for the inner quest or not (several respondents said this was not a pre requisite—B, C, D, F, G and H) all the teachers agreed with the dynamic nature of the inner dimension of spirituality.

Peak Experiences

Respondent D preferred the term inner feeling to 'inner life', she gave two examples of this, 'One year 5 child in R.E. described ... walking in to Notre Dame, lit by candles. She was aware of it being such a special place. She was impressed by the atmosphere. It made her feel calm and that it was a special place to be ... it was something to remember ... Wow! ... I felt a similar sort of feeling when I visited the Sacra Coeur. It's a tangible feeling. I 'took a breath'!

Here then the respondent identifies both her own and the child's feelings as being spiritual. There are certain similarities with 'transpersonal,' Lealman (1996) and Armstrong (1985). These experiences could be described as, "peak experiences" (Armstrong, 1985, p. 114). Their experiences were perceived through the senses—*looking* at the candles, *feeling* the atmosphere, it is a *tangible* feeling. Here there is an implicit acknowledgement of the soul and body as one.

Creativity

Respondents differed about SCAA's sixth definition, 'the inner world of creativity and imagination' (see Table 3). Some respondents thought creativity and imagination were outcomes of an inner spirituality. H talks of the high quality of work after stilling sessions, 'From their drawings and the writing they've done they are definitely not just making it up'. M also believed this, 'When we're doing a creative piece of art work or imaginative piece of work—it can be spiritual'. Other respondents felt this was important but it was not part of spirituality (E).

Documentation

The inner (or personal as it is often termed) dimension is often cited in school documentation. In all the documentation I received there was mention in some form or other of the need to support the child in achieving his or her full potential. For example one of D's school's aims is for 'children: To be able to value themselves and others and to have an awareness of the spiritual dimension of life.'

This category relates to Fisher's *personal domain* (1999, p. 32) and Nye's *Child-self consciousness* (1998, p. 120). Many teachers perceived the existence of a spiritual side which encourages self-awareness and is closely bound up with self esteem and identity (1999, p. 31). Already it can be seen that there is a variety of responses but enough similarities exist to categorise them in this dimension.

Social and Moral Dimension

Some teachers referred to spirituality interchangeably with PSE (personal and social education), and a few believed it had close links with our behaviour towards other people, as illustrated in M and J's written definitions of spirituality.

M: Relationships.

J: It pervades the behaviour thought and actions of individuals colouring our perceptions of life and others.

There were mixed responses to SCAA's definition 'a propensity to foster human attributes, such as love, faithfulness and goodness, that could not be classed as 'physical''. (See Table 3).

This social and moral dimension relates to Fisher's *communal domain* (1999, p. 32) and Nye's *Child- others consciousness* (1998, p. 120). Also Lambourn (1996, p. 157) emphasises the personal and social side saying that this is spirituality and he implicitly denies any 'transcendental dimension', however given the responses presented from my data I would disagree. The personal (inner) and the social and moral dimensions are very important aspects of spirituality for many teachers but I would argue that they are not the *only* dimensions of spirituality. But for some people they are the most important.

Spirituality and PSHE: communal and social

G emphasised this dimension, 'What we do in our life does affect other people'. She describes at length strategies for discussing anti social behaviour, and there seemed to be a strong link between spirituality and being a good moral citizen. H too emphasises the importance of the communal side to spirituality, 'I mean to the simple thing of eating a meal together. I'm amazed at how few people sit together and eat a meal and talk about what they've done during the day ... I think a lot of it is communal, learning to communicate, share ideas, experiences'. H uses PSE and spirituality interchangeably. She felt, as many other respondents did, that spirituality is integral to the whole curriculum and children's spiritual development can be supported through R.E, PSE, and other subjects together with assemblies and play times. J talks about this social and moral side too, 'When there are arguments on the playground—you reason with the children, "How would you feel if someone had done that to you, what would you want to do? Do you understand why?" And I think that's all part of getting them to see that we can do damage to someone else'.

D argues that the moral side of spirituality is, in fact, the more appealing dimension for teachers who are not religious. SCAA certainly saw this link as they present both concepts in the same document (1996). Watson's interviewees certainly viewed this as the only plausible way of presenting spirituality in school (2000). However E felt there was a distinction between spirituality and morality, 'I think I'd put that more with ethics ... There is a distinction, definitely a distinction I feel'. Thus not all teachers see this as a necessary dimension of spirituality.

Moral: nature/nurture debate

It may be noted here that no respondent made reference to Lealman or Armstrong's categories of prepersonal (experiences relating to the submergence of the child in a material/bodily connection with the mother/unconsciousness) or supra personal (higher dimension of consciousness e.g. visions); but the personal category was

referred to (the child's movement towards enculturation, socialization). This implies that the child's *natural* morality may well be altered during enculturation or socialization as they are *nurtured* out of their prepersonal and supra personal state. There is not space to enter into the 'nature/nurture' debate here (Coleman 1987; Nutbrown 1994; Tizard & Hughes 1984), only to say that some respondents believed the moral behaviour of children needed to be nurtured while others thought children were born with an inbuilt understanding of morality. A classic story about this is told by J who was discussing the limited influence teachers have on children compared with that of parents. Throughout my research all participants had referred to the huge influence of parents—the *nurture* into the parental mind-set. However J related a story which exemplifies the child's *nature* as being the stronger influence in terms of social and moral behaviour.

Just something to counter what has been said I think it's absolutely right that the family have a huge influence but sometimes the opposite can be true. When I was in counseling I heard about this young girl (and I know its true—it was from someone who had worked with the family). The family she came from was dreadful. The worst you could possibly come from—brothers and sisters who were off the rails, incest, complete deprivation. And there was this one child who was different—she was just not one of them—it was fascinating. And speaking to her she said 'I remember as a child—and I didn't know it was God but there was somebody there looking after me' ... She was so afraid of the family she used to go out and cut the grass on the front lawn with a pair of scissors. She wanted the house to look a bit better for all her friends. So where did it come from? So yes, parents do have a great influence but ... its like children who come from homes where there is smoking—they begin or they are completely anti. There is a spirituality that is just there. (J)

This child's strength, her nature, helped her overcome the arguably negative nurture of her parents.

Some respondents believed morality is by nature fluid, as E and J point out,

J: I think there's morality included in it [spirituality]—some of that is cultural.

E: Things change, ideas change, morals change. It was once thought a good idea to burn people alive for the good of their souls!

However, E relates the story of the man who was prompted to serve his neighbours abroad, 'He has done so much work and has gone out to Romania ... [he is] so earnest ... he knows he's got to help and he goes and helps. And its that sort of example, and I don't know if its spiritual but he's a strong Christian and he tries to live according to the basic precepts'.

G talked about the selfless nature of a Sri Lankan girl,

Then there is this episode which just summed up for me the absolute selflessness of those people and their desire to help with no thought as to what they would get out of it. I was asking what the difference was between

a lotus flower and a lotus pod (they talk a lot about lotus flowers and pods and I didn't know the difference). Suddenly a fifteen year old girl leapt fully clothed into the water to fetch a flower and pod to show me and explain the difference between them. I was so impressed that this girl had got wet through just to help me understand something ... If we could get to that stage with *our* children—they *wanting* ... doing something for someone else without counting the cost'.

In M, J and K's school there are examples of this altruism. The lighting of candles during assemblies where children focused on other people, the charity work including the Shoebox appeal (in aid of underprivileged Eastern European children) and the Big Breakfast (in aid of cancer research). For these teachers spirituality meant developing the inner side and expressing this through social and moral action.

Documentation

A recurring theme throughout the documentation is the encouragement of the moral and social aspects of children's development. For example B's school's Mission statement reads, 'Our pupils are encouraged to think and work co-operatively'.

In M, J and K's school policy for behaviour and discipline, the philosophy section states, 'Behaviour should reflect the value placed on the whole school approach which encourages children to develop self control, a respect for self, each other, adults and their environment'. Similarly extracts from M, J and K's school Ethos statement include,

As a school we strive to provide:-

- a link between the concerns of Christ's Gospel and the life of the school by making the link an integral part of worship, developing levels of spirituality for all in the school community.
- an environment where mutual care and concern between staff and pupils is encouraged. Where all are encouraged to grow in self-awareness and have no need to be defensive.
- a community which develops a sensitivity to differences and acknowledges the variety of cultures and beliefs.
- a link between the church and the community so that spirituality is not seen as separate from everyday life.

Thus children (and staff too) are encouraged to consider citizenship issues. It could be argued that the last ethos statement above links the moral teachings of the church with 'good' behaviour. This may be the kind of faith-based school Britain's Prime Minister Tony Blair is referring to when he praised such schools for the 'magic ingredient' which was the foundation of their success.

The social and moral dimension includes *all* positive social and moral activities since it is not bound by one culture. There is of course a wider debate about

Morality and how it is to be approached in the classroom (SCAA 1996) which cannot be entered into here. But again a variety of approaches can be found under the umbrella of this one dimension.

Environmental Dimension

Many respondents referred to children's responses to their environment as being spiritual. Surprisingly SCAA(1996) does not explicitly mention a spiritual response to the natural world but a few respondents referred to this dimension in their written definitions:

B: A sense of awe and wonder.

H: An overall awareness of ... one's environment/world.

M: Becoming aware of an inner need to question and wonder about ... [the] world around.

Care and Stewardship

For many respondents this is an important part of spirituality. J for example describes reception childrens' responses to the natural world,

With the little ones we looked at how things grow and change ... We went on a walk and someone had swung on a tree and [broken off a branch] it was quite a large branch, and so we decided to bring it back and see if it would grow. We had planted bulbs and set seeds and they had been fascinated to see it. And the bulbs grew and they had roots—the branch didn't and we compared them. What would happen if someone tore your arm off? Would you grow another one? Your hair would grow—parts of you grow—they were so fascinated ha ha ... And they were able to transfer that to when the bulbs began to grow outside. They linked it back—this will grow but this won't. It's just the sense ... in their voices and in their eyes as they are looking and talking about it.

Here then the children are responding to the environment trying to understand it and experiencing what OFSTED describe as Awe and Wonder.

B mentions an experiment where carnations were left standing in blue ink (to demonstrate that plants suck up water). She believed two childrens' responses denoted a deep spirituality and sensitivity, 'They were very concerned that the flowers might die'.

C talks about spirituality as a relationship with the environment and the ability to: '... work with the world of nature in a sense; although nature makes demands on us as users of creation and as human beings we're making a bit of a mess of it at the moment aren't we, in our relationship with the natural created world, in the way we are abusing it? ... I mean for the humanist they define it [relationship with the natural world] as spirituality or maybe some may. I'm not sure.'

Implications of Denied Access to the Countryside

H discusses the environment at length: ‘I don’t feel they are looking at their world as much ... people don’t go for walks anymore ... I think we’ve lost a lot of natural observation ... going back to my childhood my grandfather had the most amazing sort of love of nature which he definitely passed on to me because I absolutely love the natural world. I mean the worst thing for me would be if everybody took the earth and the trees and the grass and everything away ... he was just the most amazing person and they are *so clear* in my mind and I feel they really are a part of me’. Obviously it is a very significant part of spirituality for H and she is keen for children to participate in the spiritual joy the natural world offers her. To have access denied to parts of the countryside, owing to the Foot and Mouth outbreak in Britain in 2001 may have a profound effect on the spirituality of these sorts of people—something not measurable in economic terms.

All these examples demonstrate the important place the environment can play in the development of some people’s spirituality. This bears resemblance to Fisher’s *environmental domain* (1999, p. 31) and Nye’s *Child-world consciousness*. (1998, p. 122). Fisher discusses the connection with nature, care, nurture and stewardship and ‘for some the notion of unity with the environment’.

Documentation

Only one school’s documentation refers to this dimension. Namely M, J and K’s school’s Ethos Statement number 6 where they aim to provide:

Varied opportunities for experiencing awe and wonder and in joining in celebration and thankfulness.

M, J and K schools’ behaviour policy also encourages children to: ‘... develop ... a respect for self, each other, adults and the environment’. Thus there is a call to delight in the wonder of the world coupled with a responsibility to respect and care for it. J mentioned awe and wonder in her story (above) of the children’s response to the environment. It is not disputed that children are being encouraged to think *about* the environment but some would question the degree to which this will lead to pro environmental behaviour (Ashley 2000, p. 131).

Transcendental Dimension

Most respondents agreed with SCAA’s (1996) definition ‘a response to God the ‘other’ or the ‘ultimate’ (See Table 3). Many respondents referred implicitly to another non-physical dimension to life and a few explicitly referred to God in their written definitions.

C: An awareness of a fourth dimension to life.

D: Beyond the physical.

E: An awareness that there is something beyond the physical.

M: Becoming aware of an inner need to question and wonder about God.

K: Feeling inside of being not alone ... feeling of not alone in despair.

In many cases, owing to the religious background of the respondents who cited this dimension, God meant God of the Christian faith. In the following two sub-sections respondents' views are categorised into those who consider the transcendental dimension to be a *necessary* aspect of spirituality and those who believe it is an *optional* aspect of spiritual development.

The Transcendental Dimension as an Optional Aspect

Many teachers who agreed with SCAA's 'response to God, the 'other' or the 'ultimate' definition stressed that this should not be confined to the Christian God. C ticked this definition but qualified this by saying 'whatever we mean by God'. I asked C if he believed there could be a variety of spiritualities (Watson, 2000) according to different people's different understandings of how the world is: 'Yes ...Which I wouldn't try and convince them against. I'm quite happy for them to see things in a different way, whatever's meaningful to them.'

Thus there is a liberal attitude of acceptance of any transcendental stance which can be contrasted with a conservative view of Christianity described by C. He told of a strict Christian who got 'quite cross with me because I didn't make disciples of the children in that class in a church' school. Although C is a self confessed Christian, he did not feel it appropriate to convert children in an attempt to support them spiritually. The wider debate which discusses the link between religion and spirituality is outside the scope of this paper (Watson 1993; Lambourn 1996; McIntyre 1978; Cole 1992).

D too admits to the importance of her own faith, she cites God as a powerful influence in the development of her own children's spirituality. But she too recognised that not everyone shares this viewpoint: 'I am aware of my own and my husband's influence on our children and the influence of parents in the church family to which we belong. They offer opportunities to develop their children's well being, their feelings. Although we obviously have strong Christian convictions so may give a one sided view'.

There are other respondents who admitted to not being religious but who nevertheless acknowledged the importance of this dimension for other people's spirituality. G acknowledged a transcendental dimension which she intimated *could* be spirituality but did not have to be.

G: its sort of a sixth sense which I believe in but I don't think its spirituality, I think that's something else. But I couldn't say I disagreed with it—it might be. F felt spirituality: did not have to be a response to God ... I envy people who are religious because they have something to hang on to—I suppose the natural world has a big influence on me.

Thus these respondents believe in the existence of some sort of transcendental dimension to spirituality but consider it to be optional.

The Transcendental Dimension as a Necessary Aspect

Other teachers however consider God to be essential to spirituality. Although E thought SCAA's definition 'a response to God the other or the ultimate' need not be confined to God, she considered some form of transcendental belief necessary: 'I mean it could be someone who's convinced that there are spirits above our astral plane and so on ... and people do genuinely believe in this and it is an aspect of what you could call spirituality I suppose'. E also considered inner life to be a spiritual search for God. When I asked E if she thought there was an inner life which is distinct and separate from the material she replied 'Yes, which is what's different between people with a religious belief and people without. Without God its more an extension of the same thing ... And if you have a religious belief then its more a development of something that's beyond the physical'. I asked if you could be spiritual without having a belief in the ultimate. E replied that 'it would be difficult, because you either have it or you are searching for the belief ... [E refers to SCAA's definition the quest for meaning in life] ... You're searching for it even if you haven't got the belief. Which is why you get so much of the hippies in the sixties searching for something (Buddhism or whatever) ... It's all because people need something beyond ... I mean if there wasn't a God people would invent one because there is a need to believe in something. It's a human need.'

Other respondents were equally emphatic about their belief in God, and gave an explanation of non-belief as a searching for God. M confessed a deep Christian conviction and believed that inside everyone is the Holy Spirit: 'Again the children can see it as something inside them, it's not your heart it's a soul. As you journey through life you realise, it comes to be the Holy Spirit, somewhere in here, inside'.

I asked M, J and K if they thought it was possible to be spiritual without having a relationship with God. J replied: 'I would find it difficult to, this is purely personal, to understand spirituality without an entity a something else. For me spirituality is looking towards something greater; and it's that little part within us that develops our spirituality'. K agreed. M proceeded to state she felt all religions were striving for the same thing but for her: 'my God is *the* God'. M describes her personal faith as a powerful force in her life which underlies, I would argue, her understanding of the transcendental dimension as being a necessary part of spirituality. She describes the difference in her teaching before and after conversion to Christianity: 'There seems to be a difference between when I made a commitment, when I believed in God myself; before I was just teaching as you did ... It's not that I actually trick them in any way, but its still different because you can say things and you can believe in them and if you haven't got that you're giving it to them cold ... you actually want to share what you've got and want them to grow to this feeling themselves. I've noticed a difference in my teaching—before I was told 'you have got to give them this so that one day they can make up their own minds'... I'm not saying some teachers can't do it without it. But it helps me be responsive to the Holy Spirit and be responsive to the children's feelings'. Thus M's belief in the Christian God (which she refers to on several occasions), underpins her outlook and so it was inevitable that she should emphasise the transcendental dimension. I asked

M, J and K if they thought there were some people who could be described as spiritual but who did not have this Entity as the end of the Quest or as a goal. J and M replied that these people would be searching out God, 'moving towards God' (M). J replied, 'humanists are looking towards an ideal'.

M proceeded to identify this 'searching': 'in the early stages with a child it's the inner conscience'.

Thus these respondents believe the transcendental dimension (which covers belief in God, the possibly unrecognised quest for God, the beginnings of belief—the inner conscience and other non physical phenomenon) to be a necessary part of spirituality. Fisher's *Global domain* (1999:31) and Nye's *Child-God consciousness* (1998, p. 119) relate to the transcendental category. I would argue however that there may not be such a stark line drawn between the *rationalists* and *globalists* where the former group, Fisher states, (1999, p. 31) consider *only* personal (inner), environmental, and communal (social and moral) are necessary for spiritual well being. My data suggests the non-believers accept the possibility of a transcendental dimension as optional to spirituality, but the religious respondents are stricter in their belief in the necessity of a transcendental dimension which they interpret, on the whole, as an affiliation to God. This may be because the majority of the non religiously inclined respondents were working in Church schools where religion tends to enjoy higher status.

Nye states that spirituality of the transcendental dimension *Child-God consciousness*, (1998, p. 121) does not have to be confined to those 'in' a relationship with God,' but can 'be explored in the ponderings of atheists and agnostics as they consider how their views shape their denial of, or uncertainty about, the possibility of relating in this way' (Ibid, p. 121). I would argue that my use of the term transcendental dimension ensures that both religious people and atheists or agnostics are given equal status thus I avoid the bias which Nye seems to present in the naming of her category which is God centred.

Documentation

The transcendental dimension can only be detected in M, J and K schools' documentation. Their ethos statement begins with a quotation:

If God is everywhere and only has to be looked for, then we must help children to look. If God dwells wherever man [sic] lets Him in, then our task is to help children find God in every part of life so that they can, if they wish, let Him in.

This explicitly religious statement underpins the school ethos and here a transcendental dimension, in this case a response to the Christian God, is called for. Many of the policy statements refer to spirituality but there *is* an acknowledgement of other belief systems. The statement says that as a school they strive to provide 'a community which develops a sensitivity to differences and acknowledges the variety of cultures and beliefs'. Even in this explicitly Christian church school there

is an acknowledgement of the transcendental dimension which is not limited to Christianity. Thus the transcendental dimension is characterised by the intensity and variety of accepted beliefs.

Concluding Remarks

The strength of the framework of four dimensions is that no teacher's understanding of spirituality is discarded or considered irrelevant and there is an acknowledgement of the variety of different spiritualities. Watson (2000) looked at non educationalists' variety of rich lived spiritualities which, she argued, were difficult to translate into school practice. She discusses the confusion over the place of spirituality in schools which, as many of her interviewees (from a variety of cultures) suggest, render spirituality as a bland concept reduced to mere ethics (2000, p. 49). She also refrained from using researcher-led models of spirituality considering them inappropriate for describing the variety of lived spiritualities (2000, p. 49). I would argue that her own interviewees' stories *could* be mapped into the four dimensions without losing any of their individuality. And the model of the four dimensions, if adopted in schools, *would* ensure that opportunities for rich spiritualities were offered. However I would argue that in some cases spirituality *may* at the moment be reduced to the social and moral dimension (ethics/morality) and this is because some teachers view it as such. How can teachers develop children's spiritualities if they are spiritually impoverished themselves? The respondents in my study suggested various reasons for this 'malaise', the main one being lack of time. Spiritual well being demands quality time—as Stone (1995) aptly titled her book *Don't just do something Sit There!* But when do teachers have time to sit there? I agree with Watson—we do not want to do a disservice to the richness of lived spiritualities (2000, p. 48) by offering consensus models of spirituality which she interprets as cutting out (or cutting to size) the transcendent. What I argue is that there is not some 'right' or 'consensus' spirituality which we hope our children will develop but rather teachers can offer opportunities for all kinds of different spiritualities but for ease of organisation these experiences can be broadly grouped under the headings of *inner, social and moral, environmental and transcendental*.

Thus the teacher's role is crucial—not so much as spiritual guru (Miller, 1999) but rather in the Vygotskian sense of a guide providing 'scaffolding' for the child (Cole 1978, Elton Chalcraft 2000, p. 12,13, 87). The teacher can offer the following opportunities, for example 'stilling' times (Stone, 1995) for reflection and to enhance creativity (developing the *inner dimension*); Circle time (Moseley, 1996) for exploration of ethical and citizenship issues (developing the *social and moral dimension*); outdoor activities to 'wonder' at the world and appreciate our relationship within it (developing the *environmental dimension*); And contemplation of ultimate questions (developing the *transcendental dimension*).

At present teachers' understandings of spirituality seem to be too diverse and confused—in my small sample some schools were only addressing one or two of the dimensions whereas in other schools all four dimensions were being developed. As was suggested by the hologram image there is a need to have all four dimensions in

evidence so as to see the image (whatever that may be). Similarly with spirituality I would argue that there needs to be an awareness of all four dimensions. For example, firstly, we are humans in individual bodies, thus we need to develop the *inner dimension* which includes creativity and self awareness; secondly most of us live in societies, thus we need to develop the *social and moral dimension* which includes appropriate ways of relating to other people; thirdly we are all dependent on the world in which we live, *the environmental dimension* thus has an impact on our lives in terms of the weather and the terrain so we need to be aware of our relationship with the environment; fourthly, whether religious or not we all ask questions and seek answers in a variety of ways about ultimate questions such as where we came from, the purpose of life etc and this *transcendental dimension* of spirituality has to be addressed too. My argument both resonates with and is in dissonance to particular aspects of Wright's (2000) and Watson's (2000) work. I would agree with Andrew Wright (2000) that the diversity of understandings of spirituality can lead to confusion but my aim is to make sense of the confusing array of different types of spirituality by using the four dimensions categories. But I disagree with Wright when he states "the truth is indeed out there" (2000, p. 173) and he goes on to suggest that a good school 'will unashamedly induct children into the spiritual values and world view which it considers to be of greatest worth, as well as insisting that children explore alternative possibilities' (2000 p. 176). I would suggest this is too confining. My model solves the concerns of both Watson's impossibility of finding a consensus spirituality given the variety of diverse 'lived spiritualities' (2000, p. 49) and Wright's desire to nurture children in one type of spirituality (depending on the nature of the school), while recognising the diversity of other types of spiritualities. My model offers a framework which allows for diversity without confusion.

However I would not advocate spirituality having an eight level scale and attainment targets but rather the whole area of spirituality needs to be made more concrete for teachers—I would argue an awareness of the *four dimensions* would facilitate this whilst at the same time allowing for the diversity of different spiritualities. Thus from governmental level, Initial teacher Training Institutions down to the grass roots of in service teachers there needs to be prioritising of Spiritual well being and offering children opportunities for development in the four dimensions of spirituality would contribute significantly to their spiritual well being.

Let the children gently soak up whatever is appropriate for them from a sea of opportunities (the broad four dimensions) rather than having bucketfuls of water (narrow moral values or bland consensus spirituality) thrown indiscriminately at them!

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