Spiritual Development and Religious Education

in the Early Years:

A Review of the Literature

A Project conducted for the

Queensland Catholic Education Commission

Dr Jan Grajczonek
School of Religious Education
Australian Catholic University
McAuley Campus, Brisbane

Table of Contents

Introduction

The notions of spirituality and spiritual development from both secular and religious perspectives have received considerable attention in research and scholarly writing. A significant amount of this research and literature has been concerned with adults and adolescents, but more recently focused attention has been given to young children's spirituality and spiritual development. Indeed, young children's spiritual development is increasingly recognised and acknowledged to be as an equally important aspect of their wellbeing, as are their personal, physical, intellectual, social, and emotional developments (Crompton, 1998).

Within a religious context, such as a Catholic or Christian school or Child Care Centre, young children's spiritual development is integral to their religious development. This raises significant implications for the design, development and implementation of religious education programs in those centres. Although they are related, spirituality and religiosity are not synonymous and it is important to distinguish between the two, as well as to explicate the nature of their relationship with each other. Contemporary Catholic school student populations are increasingly diverse reflecting Australia's multicultural and multi-religious society. No longer can teachers presume that all students are Catholic, or even that those who are, belong to local parish communities, or further, that students might have any prior religious experiences or understandings (Liddy, 2007; Ryan, 2006, 2007a). Whilst it is accepted that all children are innately spiritual, it does not necessarily follow that they are religious (Hay & Nye, 1998, 2006; Tacey, 2000). Nye and Hay (1996) argue that teachers might first consider young children's spirituality and spiritual development ahead of their religious development. In other words, young children's innate spirituality is a more appropriate and relevant starting point for the religious education program.

Three key themes of particular relevance and significance to this project were notable in the surveyed literature:
1. The nature of spirituality and its relationship to religion or religiosity;
2. The nature of young children's spirituality, and spiritual and religious development; and
3. The nurturing of young children's spiritual and religious development.

Significant insights of each of these themes are explained in Sections 1-3 of this report. Section 4 then elucidates key implications such insights have for the design and development of a religious education framework that seeks to nurture young children's spiritual and religious development within the specific context of Christian early childhood settings.

1. The nature of spirituality and its relationship to religion or religiosity

In the first instance, it is important to understand the nature of spirituality and its relationship to religion or religiosity. Given that spirituality has traditionally been inextricably linked with religion and religiosity, it would be helpful for the sake of clarity to begin this review by understanding the term religiosity. Most simply religiosity is understood as religious spirituality as defined by Rossiter (2010a), "religiosity is a spirituality that is clearly referenced to religion" (p. 7), and also religiosity can be understood as a "measure of religious behaviour such as attendance at church/synagogue etc., frequency of prayer, engagement in a local community of faith" (Rossiter, 2010b). However, there is a widespread lack of consensus regarding a clearly articulated definition or description for spirituality (Eaude, 2003, 2005; Harris, 2007; Hyde, 2007; Liddy, 2007; Roehlkepartain, King, Wagener, & Benson, 2006; Tacey, 2004). Some place emphasis on people's relationship with the Divine or Ultimate, others on their relationship with themselves, others and nature, while others emphasise the notion of transcendence. Overall though, all agree that spirituality cannot be explicitly defined as such, but rather tends to be described in terms of its attributes or characteristics (Best, 1995; Eaude, 2003; Hart, 2003; McCreery, 1994; Watson, 2006). One aspect of this lack of consensus is linked to the nature of the relationship between spirituality and religiosity or religion. For the purpose of this review, one way of perceiving the many diverse descriptions and definitions for spirituality is to place them between two ends of a continuum. At one end, spirituality is described within humanist or secular phenomena that do not include a religious aspect, such as belief in God or an Ultimate. At the other end, spirituality is more closely aligned with, or wholly described within, religion.

At the humanist or secular end of the continuum, spirituality is described inclusively, that is not synonymous with religion and understood to be able to find expression outside of, as well as within religion (Rossiter, 2010a, 2010b; Ryan, 2006; Tacey, 2000). Within this space all people are understood to be spiritual but not necessarily religious (Hay & Nye, 2006; Nye & Hay, 1996; O'Murchu, 1997). One example of a humanist approach to describing spirituality is that offered by the British Humanist Association (1993, as cited in White, 1996):

> Religious believers and Humanists, theists on the one hand, agnostics and atheists on the other, agree on the importance of spirituality, but they interpret it differently. Despite these different interpretations, however, all can agree that the 'spiritual' dimension comes from our deepest humanity. It finds expression in aspirations, moral sensibility, creativity, love and friendship, response to natural and human beauty, scientific and artistic endeavour, appreciation and wonder at the natural world, intellectual achievement and physical activity, surmounting suffering and persecution, selfless love, the quest for meaning and for values by which to live. (p. 34)

Put in another perhaps more succinct way, Meehan (2002) describes spirituality at this end of the continuum, "secular spirituality' seeks to find meaning and purpose in *universal human* experience rather than religious experience *per se*" (p. 292). Also within this space, spirituality is understood to be concerned with wholeness, connectedness or relationship with oneself, with others, with nature or the world, but not necessarily with God or an Ultimate (Eaude, 2005; Hay & Nye, 2006; Tacey, 2000).

At the other end of the spectrum, spirituality is described more exclusively, that is, within a religious understanding. Within this space spirituality includes not only all those characteristics associated with a humanist or secular description, but also at the heart of a person's spirituality is his/her relationship with the Divine or Ultimate. Indeed some such as Carr (1996, as cited in Eaude, 2005) suggest that spirituality is so intimately rooted in religion that to separate it from religion makes little or no sense. This sentiment is also expressed by Thatcher (1996) who claims that spirituality can only be taught within a faith context. Others, such as Fisher (2007, 2010) argue that one cannot be spiritual unless they have a relationship or connectedness with God. Within this understanding of spirituality there are those such as Lambourn (1996, as cited in Eaude, 2005) who reject outright the

more inclusive humanist understanding of spirituality arguing that such inclusive descriptions of spiritual development "become so vague that they really constitute no more than good personal and social education" (p. 240).

These two understandings of spirituality - that is religious and secular - have also been distinguished as either 'religiously tethered' or 'religiously untethered' and when linked to education in spirituality are described as education 'from the inside' meaning from within a specifically religious context, and education 'from the outside' which refers to spiritual education outside of an exclusivist religious context (Alexander & McLaughlin, 2003 as cited in Best, 2008).

Sagberg (2008) suggests that within all accepted descriptions of spirituality there are two common elements. The first is our ability to transcend and urge towards transcending the immediate, transcending the present time, and transcending the actual place in a search for meaning and coherence in life. The second is a moral sense of what it is to be truly human. This sense may be expressed in religious as well as in humanistic terms. Others also emphasise the aspect of transcendence within spirituality (Tacey, 2000; Wong, 2006). Hay (1998) argues that spirituality by definition is always concerned with self-transcendence, which "requires us to go beyond egocentricity to take account of our relatedness to other people, the environment and, for religious believers, God" (p. 172). Another significant characteristic is described as an eternal yearning for something more or beyond ourselves (Tacey, 2000) or to be connected with something larger than our own egos (Palmer, 2003, as cited in Harris, 2007), which McCreery (1994) refers to as "spirituality as 'something other' " (pp. 96-97).

The universal search for meaning and identity are also attributed to spirituality (Adams, 2009; Tacey, 2000). The spiritual aspect of identity pays attention to who an individual really is, and their place and purpose in the world (Eaude, 2006, as cited in Adams, 2009). Fundamental to spirituality is the notion of relationship (Adams, Hyde, & Woolley, 2008; Hay & Nye, 2006; Nye, 1998; Nye & Hay, 1996) which Hay and Nye (1998, 2006) refer to as 'relational consciousness' while others use the term 'connectedness' (Tacey, 2000). According to Hart (2003, as cited in Moriarty, 2009) contributing to this dimension of relationality (as well as to sensitivity) are five capacities of spirituality which

he names as "listening to wisdom, wonder, wondering, between you and me, and seeing the invisible" (p.48).

Whilst Bradford (1999) differentiates between secular and religious understandings, he adds a third facet of spirituality which he names 'practical spirituality'. His three facets of spirituality include:

1. Human spirituality: aspects which relate to the meeting of our human needs, that is, for love, security, reflection, praise and responsibility;

2. Devotional spirituality: our propensity for religious response and involvement;

3. Practical spirituality: a combination of human and devotional spirituality which represents the engagement of our combined spirituality with day-to-day living and being, including our contribution to the society in which we live. (p. 3)

Bradford links his first aspect, human spirituality to the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (United Nations, 1989) summarising the spiritual rights as set out in this document: love and affection; security and serenity; new experiences and wonder; encouragement and support; and responsibility and participation. Of particular significance within Bradford's three-faceted description of spirituality is his explanation of the relationship between human spirituality and devotional spirituality which he displays in the following ways:

SPIRITUAL		RELIGIOUS
i. being loved	becomes	identity as a member
ii. feeling secure	becomes	nurtured in tradition
iii. responding in wonder	becomes	framework for worship
iv. being affirmed	becomes	empowerment for service
v. symbolic sharing	becomes	experience of community. (p. 6)

Bradford sees the relationship between the religious and humanist understandings of spirituality as, "religion as transforming, giving order to and endorsing human spirituality" and says that "the factors listed as spiritual (in the above table) are fundamental to religious identity of all kinds" (p. 6). For Bradford, "a religion makes the invaluable contribution of

providing a language, culture and tradition within which the significance of personal and ultimate issues can be articulated, shared and reflected upon" (p 6).

> For Bradford spiritual development is:
>> the process by which our human spirituality is (i) established, (ii) grows in relationship with and concern for others, (iii) is extended into devotional spirituality, (iv) responds to questions and is supported by membership of a faith community, and (v) becomes integrated within a human-spirituality/devotional spirituality profile of a practical spirituality – or day-by-day inter-personal engagement – in a world for which one is both thankful and committed to contribute towards the struggle for good. (p. 15)

This understanding is a significant insight with implications for the nurturing of young children's spiritual and religious development particularly in steps (i) and (ii) wherein spirituality is established and grows. Such implications will be discussed more fully in *Section 3: The nurturing of young children's spiritual development*, of this review.

Another way of describing the relationship between spirituality and religion is offered by Tacey (2000):
> Religion and spirituality thus face each other as paradoxical twins. Without religion, we have no organised way of communicating or expressing truth, no sacred rituals to bind individuals into living community. Yet without spirituality, we have no truth to celebrate and no contact with the living and no ongoing nature of divine revelation. We need both – form and substance – but each can attack and cancel out the other if the conditions are not propitious. (p. 28)

In this understanding of the relationship between spirituality and religion, Tacey seems to reflect the Latin origin of the two words. The word spiritual comes from the Latin word *spirare* meaning to breathe whilst the word religious comes from the Latin word *religare* meaning to bind together (Ryan, 2006, pp. 68-69). Ryan (2006) explains that the connection between breathing and spirituality "is the idea of both being vital or essential aspects of life: breathing is the thing which gives life to the individual" (p. 69). The notion or characteristic of spirituality being vital was emphasised by McCreery (1994) linking the spiritual with "being active, energetic, vibrant, vigorous and vital" (p. 97). Grey (2006)

emphasises the breathing notion of spirit connecting it to the Hebrew word *ruah* as it is used in Genesis 1:1. In Grey's understanding *ruah*,

> brings the sense of the elemental, creative, formless energy, the energy of connection breathing life into all creatures (Gen. 1:1). This breath of life emerges from chaos and formless void, the *tehom*, or watery chaos/womb and the moist, watery depths. (p. 19)

Grey then connects this understanding with children's play, "children need order and structure, but their need for messy, creative play, reawakens us to the often swept-aside creative potential of relating to nature" (p. 19).

The Latin word *religare* meaning to bind connotes a more formalised or organised understanding than *spirare* and Ryan (2006) explains that the word came to refer to oaths made which would bind humans to the gods, "to be religious meant to bind oneself to a community of people by swearing oaths and making commitments" (p. 68).

It is important to both distinguish between the two terms spiritual and religious, and understand the nature of their relationship with each other. Ryan (2006) suggests that "whereas spirituality is a characteristic of all humans, religious means that the person's spirituality has been defined by the language and practices of a particular religion" (p. 60). Trousdale (2005) suggests that spiritual development can occur independently of religion but many find religion a path toward developing spirituality.

The understanding of the distinction and relationship between these two dimensions has implications for any framework that will inform religious education in settings such as Catholic child care centres and early years settings. These implications will be elaborated in Section 4 of this review. The following section summarises the key insights arising from the literature concerning the various understandings of spirituality, religiosity and their relationship with each other.

1.1   The nature of spirituality and its relationship to religion or religiosity: A summary

The notion of spirituality has been shown in the literature to be innate to all humans; something that comes or arises from our deepest humanity (Hay & Nye, 1998, 2006; Tacey, 2000). Further, although the literature shows a wide and varying range of descriptions for spirituality (Best, 1995; Eaude, 2003; Grey, 2006; Liddy, 2007; Sagberg, 2008; Tacey, 2000;

White, 1996) and its relationship to religion or religiosity (Rossiter, 2010a, 2010b; Ryan, 2007b; Tacey, 2000; Trousdale, 2005), a number of key common characteristics or attributes are suggested (Adams et al., 2008; Bradford, 1999; Eaude, 2009; Hart, 2003; Hay & Nye, 1998, 2006; McCreery, 1994). These include: relationship or connectedness; wholeness or becoming whole; an appreciation of the wonder and beauty of nature as well as of human accomplishment, including creative, intellectual and physical achievement; moral sensitivity; quest for meaning and purpose; and transcendence.

Whilst spirituality is linked to religion or a person's religiosity, it can be said that the majority of descriptions of spirituality accept that spirituality is universal and that it need not include a religious aspect. It is important though, to understand the nature of the relationship between the two and perhaps this can be most succinctly understood in terms of how people express their spirituality and how they respond to life. Religious people express their spirituality in a community, that is, in relationship with others of like mind within a particular religion's language and practices (Ryan, 2006). It can also be said that religious people respond to life in a way that reflects a particular religion's beliefs and values (Bradford, 1999; Trousdale, 2005).

In concluding this section Rossiter's (2010a) overview of the four terms or constructs spiritual, religious, spirituality and religiosity is helpful in capturing and crystallising both their distinctiveness as well as how they are related:

Spiritual: The spiritual is the natural dimension to life that includes: thinking and feelings about transcendence; ideas about a creator or creative force in the cosmos; human values; sense of meaning and purpose in life; love and care for self and others; sense of stewardship for the earth and its flora and fauna; the aesthetic.

Spirituality: Spirituality is the way in which a spiritual/moral dimension enters into, or is implied in, the thinking and behaviour of individuals.

Religious: Being religious means being spiritual in a particular way as informed by the beliefs, practices and traditions of a religious group. It usually includes a sense of personal relationship with god, belief in an afterlife and identification with, and participation in a local religious community. The religious is usually

informed by a theology; and it participates in a ritual life and prayer, as well as relating to religious symbols, art and music.

Religiosity (or religious spirituality): Religiosity is a religious spirituality with engagement in religious activities and thinking; personal and communal prayer and participation in religious rituals in a community of faith are prominent. Religiosity is a spirituality that is clearly referenced to religion. (p. 7)

This section has presented an overview of the nature of spirituality and its relationship with religion and religiosity. The following section pays attention to the literature that specifically focuses on children's spirituality, and their spiritual and religious development.

2. Young children's spirituality, spiritual and religious development

First, in Section 2.1, initial research into children's spirituality is considered, followed by in Section 2.2, an overview of research that investigated children's religious development. Following such research, the interest again centred on children's spirituality and their spiritual development and this research is reviewed in Section 2.3. Finally Section 2.4 summarises the key insights of this section of the review.

2.1 Early research into children's spirituality

Research into children's spirituality is an emerging field that "has developed from two prior streams of thought: the idea of an inherent spirituality, primarily reflected in research with adults, and religious concept development research" (Ratcliff & Nye, 2006, p. 473). Ratcliff and Nye go on to explain that the former idea of inherent spirituality, informed by earlier research studies investigating adult recollections of childhood spiritual experiences, refers to the understanding that spirituality is a biological aspect of the human person. Religious concept development research however, "studied actual children...emphasising children's thinking about religion rather than their spiritual experiences" (p. 473).

The earliest studies exploring children's spiritual and/or religious experiences came out of the Religious Experience Research Unit from Sir Alister Hardy (1965) who claimed that religious experience was a central feature of people's lives. Respondents to Hardy's research described experiences from their childhood that had significance on their lives.

Hardy found that people's spiritual experiences were often 'triggered' by something such as natural beauty, creative arts, or sacred places. Edward Robinson (1977) continued this research probing the nature of these reported experiences and described such experiences as having the sense of "something more" (pp. 144-148). From his research, Robinson concluded that rather than being something rare and extraordinary, that people's religious or spiritual experiences are ordinary and commonplace. Others including Rolheiser (1999, as cited in Liddy, 2007) concurred with Robinson arguing that not only are spiritual experiences ordinary but also completely natural, and Eaude (2009) who suggested that children's spirituality although "inherently mysterious...it is not just about extra-ordinary or exotic experience"; and "spirituality is often – and most obviously for young children – manifested, and enhanced, within everyday experience" (p. 191).

2.2   Research into children's religious development

Later studies focused more directly on young children's religious development. Goldman (1964, 1965) and Fowler (1981) both conducted studies that reflected Piagetian research (with its emphasis on cognitive development) into young children's religious development. As a result of their studies, both imposed restrictions on what children could be taught, particularly Goldman's (1964) conclusions to limit young children's exposure to the Bible. He claimed that young children's inability to think abstractly placed limitations on their religious thinking, that is, their ability to understand religious concepts, metaphors and analogies. In later research Goldman (1965) proposed the term *religious readiness* and argued that religious education for young children should focus more on real-life experiences rather than complex religious concepts, which he concluded should be omitted from religious education curricula.

Such "developmental stages" significantly influenced religious education discourse, as well as religious education programs, in Europe and North America (Csanyi, 1982). However, Goldman's models particularly were criticised for having ignored or misrepresented the affective and existential aspects of religious thinking (Francis, 1979; Priestley, 1981). Priestley (1981) rejected Goldman's emphasis on the cognitive domain, arguing that the place of story and imagination is critical to religious understanding and insight, "the basic ideas of any religion are first communicated through its story and those ideas are interpreted not by the cognitive mind but by the faculty of imagination" (p. 17).

Fowler's (1981) research which relied upon the work of the developmental psychologists Piaget, Erickson and Kohlberg sought to unlock children's faith/religious/spiritual development. He proposed that faith develops in stages but the term faith is broader than religious faith; it is more about the *what* rather than the *how*. All people have faith in the sense that people can admit a trust or loyalty to a cause or causes beyond themselves. The two stages of Fowler's theory that are pertinent to early childhood are Stage 1 - Primal Faith and Stage 2 – Intuitive Faith.

During Stage 1, Fowler claims that significant aspects for our lives of faith "occur *in utero* and in the very first months of our lives" (p. 102). He goes on to explain that this primal faith forms ahead of language through the ritual of care and it is a pivotal time when trust is established and a "rudimentary faith" enables infants to overcome separation anxiety. This is a critical stage during an infant's development as it establishes the foundation on which later faith is built.

Stage 2 emerges with the acquisition of language and it is a significant stage when imagination, stimulated by stories, gestures and symbols, combined with perception and feelings, creates long-lasting faith images. During this stage, young children copy and reproduce behaviour of closely related adults and their representations of God are formed by the children's experiences of parents and significant adults. It is a time when young children, although unable to reason, yearn for meaning and tend to make meaning by intuition and imitation. They are unable to differentiate fact and fantasy and their images are influenced by the media and family experiences.

According to Gottlieb (2006) both Goldman and Fowler posited a three-stage developmental model, two of which are directly related to early childhood:

1. Children pass through an intuitive stage in which they see religious identity as being bestowed by God or parents; prayers are conceptualised as recipes for gratifying personal desires; and interpretations of Bible are unsystematic, fragmentary and often inconsistent.

2. At around the age of seven religious thinking enters a concrete stage; children associate religious identity with particular forms of behaviour, kinship or dress, and prayer with specific concrete activities. They also

interpret Bible stories concretely depicting God as a man or a power threatening specific action, often in response to specific transgression. (p. 244)

Such approaches based on Piaget have been criticised by Eaude (2003) who argues that we need to attend to our understanding of the term spiritual *development*. This notion with its strong links to the Piagetian notion of development leans towards 'unfolding' with its connotations of gradient of improvement, value and end-product (Priestly cited in Eaude, 2003).

Contemporary early childhood scholarship also criticises developmental psychology because of its emphasis on (i) the *universal* child, that is the *one* child as representing *all* children (James & James, 2004); and (ii) the child as *becoming* rather than *being* (Qvortrup, 1994) which in turn produces a poor or deficit image of child (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999, 2007). Dillen (2007) criticises such developmental stage theory for its construct of the child as the not-yet-adult.

Religious traditions also tend to criticise a developmental approach and assert that "children have specific qualities, which may be lost, or hard to re-gain, as adults, and that children provide models for adults to aspire to" (Eaude, 2003, p. 152). We need to understand children's spirituality as worthwhile in its own right, rather than as an immature or embryonic version of adult spirituality by adopting a range of metaphors including health and journey, as much as development and growth (Eaude, 2003). Despite such misgivings however, such research has provided some important insights into young children's religious development.

2.3   Recent research into children's spirituality and spiritual development

Recent research has focused more intentionally on children's spirituality rather than their religious development or religiosity. The impetus for such interest was initiated by Coles (1990) whose study conducted with children themselves, led him to conclude that children are interested in the meaning of life, understand life as a journey and are able to ask questions of ultimate meaning.

Research which followed on from Robinson's (1977) earlier work regarding children's spirituality, was conducted by Hay and Nye (1998). Hay and Nye's research into children's

spirituality has perhaps been the most influential as it has initiated much scholarly interest and response throughout the world. After many interviews with children themselves Hay and Nye claimed that all children have an innate spirituality; a spirituality that they are born with which is not dependent on any religious affiliation. They paid less attention to cognitive awareness and argued that the 'knowing' out of which religion grows is more akin to sensory or affective awareness (p. 144).

It was with this notion of sensory awareness that led Hay and Nye (1998, 2006; Nye & Hay, 1996) to propose that young children's spiritual sensitivity comprises three categories: (i) awareness sensing; (ii) mystery sensing; and (iii) value sensing. They claim that these categories are made available or visible through observing children closely as they go about their daily activities. Awareness sensing refers to those times when young children are completely attending to, or absorbed in, whatever they are doing and includes such aspects as here and now, tuning, flow and focusing. Mystery sensing includes children's sense of awe and wonder, as well as their imagination, as they try to respond to various complex issues or events, or phenomena. The place of imagination within children's spirituality is pivotal and according to Myers (1997) is linked inextricably with children's play as, "it is through play that children become adept at imagining. It is through imagination that we, as adults, can consider new possibilities and transcend our present reality" (p. 20). Value sensing can be observed in children as they respond to events, stories, experiences and so on of which they try to make sense or meaning in ways that Hay and Nye name as delight and despair, ultimate goodness and meaning.

A further significant aspect of Hay and Nye's research is the identification of another level or characteristic of spirituality which Nye (1998) named 'relational consciousness'. This relational consciousness was observed during those times when children spoke about their awareness of all sorts of things but always in relation to someone or something:

> 'I-Others', 'I-Self', 'I-World' and 'I-God'...the child's awareness of being in relationship with something or someone was demonstrated by what they said and, crucially, this was a special sense that added value to their ordinary or everyday experience....In this 'relational consciousness' seems to lie the rudimentary core of children's spirituality, out of which can arise meaningful

aesthetic experience, religious experience, personal and traditional responses to mystery and being, and mystical and moral insight. (p. 114)

A critical insight made by For Hay and Nye is the significant place that the notion of relationship occupies within children's spirituality.

Adams (2009) explains the difference between the social and spiritual aspects of children's relationships: whilst the social aspect is concerned with children's social skills required to facilitate their friendships, the spiritual aspect is at a deeper significant level wherein relationships are "considered in the context of how the child finds their place in the world which in turn shapes their identity" (p. 116). Myers (1997) places emphasis on children's relationships with significant adults in their lives claiming that children's development as whole human beings is dependent upon their relationships with people who love, listen, respond to and guide them.

Hart's (2003, 2006) research identified four types of experiences and capacities which he refers to as "ways of being in the world": wonder, wondering, relational spirituality, and wisdom. Hart (2006) suggests that these capacities "may help provide a multifaceted definition of spiritual life, demonstrating the diverse ways in which spirituality manifests" (p. 165). Hart goes on to suggest that not all four characteristics are necessarily present in any one child who can express his/her spirituality in an individualised way, "for example, one child's way of being may be especially emphatic or compassionate, whereas another may be more philosophical – asking big questions of life and meaning" (p. 165). Such an understanding resonates with Hay and Nye's (1998, 2006) notion of personal 'signature'.

Wonder according to Hart includes a "constellation of experiences that can involve feelings of awe, connection, joy, insight, and a deep sense of reverence and love" (p. 165). An interesting insight revealed in Hart's data was that the reports of wonder from children were "often indistinguishable from those of the great mystics of the world for whom wondrous moments provided a touchstone and a beacon for the spiritual life that was to come" (p. 165). Hart claims that childhood wonder can shape a worldview and even the course of one's life (p. 168).

Wondering for Hart is the asking of the big questions about life and meaning, knowing and knowledge, truth and justice, reality and death. He aligns this wondering with the notion

of spiritual quest, that is, a way of entering dialogue with mystery, and in Fowler's (1981, as cited in Hart, 2006) terms "striving for the sacred". Hart contends that for far too long children's wonderings have not been taken seriously and remained unappreciated (p. 168).

Wisdom is displayed by children in the way they "often show a remarkable capacity for cutting to the heart of a matter, for accessing profound insight and wise guidance" (Hart, 2006, p. 170). He goes on to suggest that wisdom in this sense is not the amassing of information, an *entity*, but rather,

> it is an activity of knowing, perhaps most simply named as a shift in a state of consciousness or awareness. In some moments children find remarkable insight as they access this contemplative knowing that complements the rational and sensory. (p. 171)

This understanding is similar to the 'knowing' to which Hay and Nye (1998) refer to as essential to religious development. Hart cautions us that when unacknowledged, children's wisdom can lead to a sense of alienation.

Relational spirituality is referred to by Hart as "between you and me" as he explains that "spirituality is often lived out in the intersection of our lives" (p. 172) and is recognised as love or compassion that begins as an experience of empathy and can lead to deep understanding. Relational spirituality argues Hart is "about communion – a profound sense of interconnection with the cosmos; connection – a sense of intimacy with someone or something; community – a sense of belonging to a group; and compassion – the drive to help others" (p. 174).

For Hart the foremost concern regarding enhancing children's spiritual life is to respect each child's innate spiritual capacities.

Significant research conducted with primary school students in Australia by Hyde (2008) built on Hay and Nye's earlier studies, and identified four characteristics of children's spirituality:

i.   *The felt sense*, which Hyde describes as attending to the "here-and-now of experience" and refers to the "intensity and immediacy of awareness of the present moment" (p. 120). This description closely aligns with Hay and Nye's (2006) awareness sensing category. Within this felt sense characteristic, Hyde

emphasises the relevance of a person's bodily awareness of situations, persons, or events.

ii.   *Integrating awareness* which relates to a person's ability to consciously attend to different levels of an activity or activities at once in ways that pay attention to everything in which they are involved (pp. 121-122).

iii. *Weaving the threads of meaning* is a characteristic that Hyde describes as children's ability to "draw on sense of wonder to make meaning of events and to piece together a worldview based around their attempts at meaning making" (pp. 122-123). This characteristic has close parallels to several theories that identify wonder and imagination as essential characteristics of spirituality including Hay and Nye's (2006) mystery sensing category.

iv.   *Spiritual questing* which Hyde describes as involving "a genuine searching for authentic ways of being in the world, and of relating to others" (p. 125).

Eaude (2009) claims that three characteristics essential to children's happiness, well-being and mental health include: (i) the search which is aligned with Hyde's notion of 'spiritual questing' and related to children's sense of identity, (ii) meaning and (iii) connectedness. First, the sense of search Eaude argues is linked to those existential questions children ask, "Who am I?, Where do I fit in?, Why am I here? – related to identity, place and purpose" (p. 189). The second aspect is that this search is a search for meaning which Eaude explains is always in retrospect because, "we understand events, if at all, only with hindsight" (p. 190). In other words the sense of reflection is essential to our meaning-making. An interesting aspect of Eaude's insights is his argument that a search for meaning necessarily involves trying to make sense of difficult issues such as suffering, pain and loss, and that too often this is the one aspect of children's spirituality that adults avoid perhaps in their overriding desire to protect children. However, Eaude argues that it is as important for children to try to make sense of such issues as it is for adults. The third aspect of children's spirituality emphasised by Eaude is connectedness, identified and categorised into four elements by Hay and Nye (1998, 2006) as awareness of self, awareness of others, awareness of the environment, and (for some people) awareness of a Transcendent Other. Eaude goes on to claim that this aspect of children's spirituality involves them "recognising both their independence and interdependence" (p. 190). Eaude's argument is that children's resilience

and sense of agency are reinforced and indeed children will flourish if given the chance to explore, to search, and to reflect on, all aspects of their spirituality.

Perhaps the most succinct list of characteristics that children who are developing spiritually would be likely to exhibit has been offered by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) (2004, as cited in Ruddock & Cameron (Sean), 2010) which is responsible for the implementation of religious education in all schools in the United Kingdom:

- a set of values, principles and beliefs, which may or may not be religious, which inform their perspective on life and their patterns of behaviour;
- an awareness and understanding of their own and others' beliefs;
- a respect for themselves and others;
- a sense of empathy with others, concern and compassion;
- an increasing ability to reflect and learn from this reflection;
- an ability to show courage and persistence in defence of their aims, values, principles and beliefs;
- a readiness to challenge all that would constrain the human spirit: for example, poverty of aspiration, lack of self-confidence and belief, moral neutrality or indifference, force, fanaticism, aggression, greed, injustice, narrowness of vision, self-interest, sexism, racism and other forms of discrimination;
- an appreciation of the intangible – for example, beauty, truth, love, goodness, order – as well as for mystery, paradox and ambiguity;
- a respect for insight as well as for knowledge and reason;
- an expressive and/or creative impulse;
- an ability to think in terms of the "whole" – for example, concepts such as harmony, interdependence, scale, perspective;
- an understanding of feelings and emotions, and their likely impact. (p. 29)

2.4 Young children's spirituality, spiritual and religious development: A summary

Although research into children's spirituality has lagged that of similar studies with adults and adolescents, it nevertheless has highlighted some key insights. The literature has identified several key characteristics or attributes of young children's spirituality, as well as their spiritual and religious developments. A core attribute of children's spirituality is relationship or connectedness (Adams, 2009; Adams et al., 2008; Hart, 2003, 2006; Hay & Nye, 1998, 2006; Nye, 1998) referred to as 'relational consciousness' by Hay and Nye (1998, 2006; Nye, 1998). This relational characteristic involves a child's relationship with self, others, the world or nature, and for some with God or an Ultimate.

Identity and a sense of belonging have also been identified as fundamental attributes of children's spirituality and their spiritual and religious developments, as children seek to come to know themselves in relationship with others, and as they come to find their place and purpose in the world and with others (Adams, 2009; Adams et al., 2008; Coles, 1990; Eaude, 2003, 2005; Fowler, 1981). This characteristic is closely associated and aligned with meaning and searching, as children seek to find meaning in the many experiences they encounter both joyful and painful (Eaude, 2009; Fowler, 1981; Hay & Nye, 1998, 2006; Hyde, 2005, 2008). Other attributes significant to children's spirituality and spiritual and religious development highlighted in the literature include their senses of awe and wonder, (Hart, 2003, 2006; Hay & Nye, 1998, 2006; Hyde, 2008) as well as their imagination (Fowler, 1981; Nye & Hay, 1996; Priestley, 1981) and wisdom (Hart, 2003, 2006).

This section has brought together the key insights raised by the literature regarding children's spirituality, and spiritual and religious developments. The following section presents an overview of the literature regarding the explicit nurturing of children's spiritual and religious developments.

3.   Nurturing young children's spiritual and religious development

It is helpful to understand both the distinct natures of children's spiritual development and their religious development, as well as the nature of how they relate to each other. The first part, Section 3.1, elucidates the key research and findings concerned with the development of young children's spirituality, while Section 3.2 overviews research related specifically to the development of their religiosity. Finally Section 3.3 presents a summary of the key insights highlighted in the literature concerning the nurturing of young children's spiritual and religious development.

3.1   Nurturing young children's spiritual development

The intentional nurturing of young children's spiritual development is argued to be of the highest and most significant importance with many claiming that if young children's spirituality is not intentionally nurtured it will fade and be lost (Crompton, 1998; Eaude, 2003). In the context of early childhood Christian settings, many advocate that the starting point for religious education for young children should begin with, and seek to develop, their spirituality ahead of a more formal religious education (Hyde, 2007; Liddy, 2007; Nye & Hay, 1996).   This argument is premised on two contemporary realities: first, young children entering early childhood settings reflect our increasingly multi-cultural and multi-religious society; and second, that an increasing number who are not practising members of their own faith communities, lack or have limited knowledge and language to engage with specific complex religious concepts. Indeed, although referring to the rich diversity of students who attend Catholic schools, nevertheless the following claim by Liddy (2007) also applies to young children entering all Christian early childhood settings, "...it leaves me asking if we can really undertake contemporary religious education unless we have a much richer understanding of the worldviews and meaning-making of the students in Catholic schools" (p. 6). In other words, as in other Key Learning Areas, teachers' starting points in religious education need to be with children's own experiences and understandings of life and relationships, their spirituality. Following is an overview of approaches that seek to nurture children's spiritual development that can be implemented in various contexts including child care centres and educational settings. Such approaches provide a number of practical ideas, strategies, and activities that could contribute significantly to the design and development of a religious education framework that seeks to nurture young children's spiritual and religious development.

Bradford (1999) proposes by nurturing and satisfying children's fundamental needs - that is nurturing the "human spirituality" - can lead to the development of a more "religious (devotional) spirituality". The fundamental human-spiritual aspects of the essential needs of children according to Bradford include the need for:

i. the experience of a profound quality of love;
ii. a sense of ultimate security;
iii. play, exploration, humour, hope and wonder;
iv. affirmation of others; and;
v. encouragement to participate in and contribute to the spiritual and social well-being of their family, friends and community. (pp. 3-4)

These aspects can be simplified as love, peace, wonder, joy and relatedness. As noted in Section 1 (see p. 6) of this review, Bradford argues that these five essential needs or categories are fundamental to religious identity of all kinds. In other words, if a child's fundamental human-spiritual needs are not met or indeed not nurtured, they then have no way or means of establishing a religious identity. A critical implication that arises from Bradford's insights is that in the nurturing of these essential needs (which are fundamental to establishing a religious identity of all kinds) a pluralist approach that would acknowledge and respect all children's religious backgrounds or their diverse religiosities, would be enabled.

Bradford argues further that, "religious practice most certainly can help a child in his or her spiritual development by providing a framework of a common code, creed and pattern of worship which values and gives space to spiritual experience" (p. 8) and suggests the following as guidelines of what membership to a healthy faith community should offer:

i. a network of kind and respectful relationships – a community of friends;
ii. membership in a community, which has a sense of awareness about its place in the wider scheme of things;
iii. an involvement with others who are reverently and thoughtfully open to 'signals of transcendence';
iv. participation in a community which is mutually affirming in experiencing the qualities of love, trust, wonder, and so on;
v. roles for contributing to shared symbolic actions expressing the values of community. (p. 8)

Whilst a church affiliated child care or early childhood centre could not be considered as a faith community as such (given the diverse and pluralist nature of the children and their families in such settings), Bradford's guidelines nevertheless provide some practical and effective actions that would nurture young children's spiritual development.

From the research conducted by Hay and Nye (1998, 2006), Hay (1998) claims that spiritual education is the reverse of indoctrination and suggests that teachers have four major responsibilities: (i) helping children to keep an open mind; (ii) exploring ways of seeing; (iii) encouraging personal awareness; and (iv) becoming personally aware of social and political dimensions of spirituality.

(i) Helping children to keep an open mind as explained by Hay begins by gently encouraging or reawakening children's natural disposition to spiritual awareness. This involves teachers creating an environment that enables children's personal freedom and self-confidence. Hay argues that matters which can be closed off in the classroom or schoolyard but need to be openly addressed include: discovering a purpose in life, understanding their dependency on the community in which they find themselves, what it means to be just, facing the reality of their own death, the need for meaning, what it is to be a free human being and how to stand alone (pp. 163-165).

(ii) Exploring ways of seeing involves encouraging children to take different perspectives on issues and not feel pressured to conform to a particular way of seeing or illegitimating different interpretations. This would entail open discussion that seeks to counter narrow views (pp. 165-168).

(iii) Encouraging personal awareness which is related to relationship, relatedness or connectedness with one self. Time is needed to enable children to come to know themselves deeply, to be conscious of who each is: their gifts, likes, dislikes, responses to certain stimuli and so on; and how they do things, such as eat an apple (pp. 168-172).

(iv) Becoming personally aware of social and political dimensions of spirituality requires teachers' own consciousness of all that is the realm of spiritual education. Spirituality is expressed in and through a range of stories, rituals, symbols, art, architecture and so on and can be revealed in all subjects. A critical aspect of this awareness argues Hay, is to acknowledge that spirituality is not the preserve of religious education and indeed

needs to be integrated in and across all disciplines and school life which in turn has both social and political implications for the school curriculum (pp. 163-175).

This same point has also been highlighted by Ryan (2007b),

> being religious is a condition known to children inclusively, regardless of religion, culture or social background. Adults need not be concerned with instructing children in the beliefs, narratives and practices of a particular tradition. In early childhood, the child's education and religious education are not distinguishable; whatever is education for the young child is religious education. (p. 39)

Both Hay and Ryan's insights suggest that given the natural and ordinary nature of children's religious or spiritual experiences in the early years, as well as the varied ways through which spirituality is expressed, an integrated approach which included all aspects of the curriculum would be an effective means of developing young children's spirituality.

Children have a range of ways in which they express their spiritual experiences or thoughts. Some simply describe the experience (Hart, 2003 as cited in Adams, 2009), others express through questions (Hyde, 2008 as cited in Adams, 2009), whilst others may be observed being absorbed in moments of awe and wonder (Champagne, 2001 as cited in Adams, 2009). Many such experiences are significant or profound and are carried into adulthood (Robinson, 1991; Scott, 2004 as cited in Adams, 2009). However, many remain silent about their experiences or thoughts for fear of ridicule, dismissal or embarrassment (Adams, 2009).

An important aspect in relation to enabling children's personal freedom in expressing their thoughts and experiences is their sense of feeling safe which in turn can contribute to "increased self-confidence and self-esteem which play an important part in shaping identity; identity being a key factor in spirituality" (Adams, 2009, p. 118). Therefore the learning and teaching environment not only needs to be open so that children feel safe to express their thoughts and experiences, but it also needs to be sensitive to the spiritual. Further, according to Adams teachers and adults need to reflect on their own spirituality and be attentive to the spiritual.

Teachers' roles are also key at the planning stage of a curriculum that seeks to nurture children's spirituality and are urged to not only attend to the cognitive domain in their

planning, but also to both the affective (the felt sense) and spiritual domains (De Souza, 2004; Hyde, 2006). De Souza and Hyde (2007) argue that teachers need to go beyond the cognitive domain as it pays little attention to the development of spiritual qualities and characteristics, "in other words, do they (teachers) provide time and, perhaps, silence for inner reflection, for creative, imaginative and intuitive responses, and for transformed action?" (p. 100). Such a stance finds alignment with Francis (1979) and Priestley (1981) both of whom advocated for an inclusion of the affective and sensory domains.

Hyde's (2008) own research conducted in Catholic primary schools in Australia, led him to make the following suggestions for nurturing children's spirituality in the classroom:

i.   Include the use of tactile and sensory or "hands on" activities in religious education which can engage children physically;

ii.   Begin with students' personally created frameworks of meaning. In other words begin by asking them what they think; the chance to wonder and imagine about events and happenings; and

iii. Create space to nurture spirituality which might entail teachers removing themselves from the activity or space to allow students freedom of expression and authentic wondering. (pp.125-126)

A comprehensive and integrated approach which reflects and adds to several aspects noted in previous research (Bradford, 1999; Coles, 1990; Hay & Nye, 1998) is offered by Hart (2003) who describes his spiritual curriculum as one that is meant to:

> provide touchstones for parents and friends in the midst of a teachable moment with a child or even with ourselves. Instead of providing answers, these ideas tend to ask questions...that help to activate and open our life to the sacred. (p.174)

Hart's (2003) research into children's spiritual development led him to design a series of steps or what he calls the "Ten Sources *of* Power *and* Perspective" (pp. 171-209) which rather than being about following rules or commandments, offers instead, "ways of empowering that deeply felt impulse that is the innate spirituality of children" (p. 173). The essential elements of each source follow:

- "Who Am I?" The first step or source (as Hart calls it) seeks to pay attention to the notion of "Know thyself". Hart emphasises that it is as important to invite

children to explore their *inner* landscape as it is to teach them about the outer world. He suggests that teachers, parents or friends should have children focus on their bodies as that is where they feel, by asking questions such as "What is happening in your body when you're angry (happy, tired, sad)? What do you hear (taste, touch, and so on)?" For Hart, it is through the inward reflection and then the outward articulation that we reinforce connection (p. 178).

- "To Thine Own Self Be True." For Hart, "to *know* who we are creates an obligation to *be* who we are" (p. 178). In this second source Hart emphasises that spiritual characteristic of 'wholeness', as he argues that children must "bear themselves" (p. 180). In other words, we must embrace all parts of ourselves, including those that cause us pain for it is in this way that we bring all parts together; a point emphasised also by Eaude (2009).

- "What Am I Here to Give?" This third source seeks to draw out our particular purpose or "calling". For Hart, it is not only important that we come to know who we are, but "also to find (and create) what we are to do, what we have to offer" (p. 181). Parents and teachers then need to help children to listen to themselves, to articulate their own desires and choices so that they might come to discover their purpose and calling.

- "What Am I Here to Learn?" Hart argues that a shift in perspective is required for us to learn the big lessons. He suggests that rather than see life as "in competition with others that leads towards to success or failure, or as divine punishment or reward from the gods," that we should instead see life "as an opportunity for learning" (p. 186). It is important to give children the space to fail and to feel and ask such questions as, "If you could teach someone about this, what would you tell him or her?" Hart claims that the lull after anguish "is among the most teachable moments in a life" (p. 187).

- "Finding My Voice". This next source follows on from the previous ones as Hart asserts that we must help children find their voice to express their purpose, to bring the vision to form. By voice Hart means, "the confidence, skill, and power of creative expression" (p. 190). The lesson entails teachers to encourage, to provide constructive feedback and to have children practise a certain skill, or to

find colourful words, learn to read and write. Or in Vygotsky's (1967) words to 'scaffold'. Hart also cautions us that sometimes we might also need to help children "adjust the vision itself...to help them be strategic in their approach and holographic in their understanding" (p. 192). We must however, never stifle the creative expression and silence the voice.

- "Mastering Myself." Hart argues that inner freedom wherein we need to control our impulses rather than be controlled by them is the hallmark of spiritual development (p. 194). Hart argues that we must help children to take that deep breath and work through the initial frustration or discomfort, to persist rather than to give up. In other words, assist children to build resilience, self-efficacy, self-confidence and so on. For Hart, spiritual work is in everyday struggles; working through those is spiritual growth.

- "Seeing Our Future." This step in the spiritual curriculum is about "manifestation;...the power of the mind to create the future...being crystal clear and bringing it to life first in our mind" (pp. 196-197). This step seems to align with and harness Hay and Nye's (1998, 2006) spiritual sensitivity category of 'awareness sensing' which involves tuning, the here and now, flow and focusing. Hart argues that we need to link children's "ability for *absorption*" to their "*intention*" as "intention means maintaining a clear focus" (p. 197). We need to assist children to visualise and rehearse their intentions in their minds, "clearly, simply, and positively", in other words to "focus consciousness" (p. 198).

- "Where Am I Now?" The goal of this source is to "witness the contents of our consciousness" (p. 200), which is a lifelong skill we can nurture in children by simply asking them to notice the flow of their feelings, sensations, and thoughts, "What does that feeling (or thought or headache or whatever) look like in your body? What is its colour, shape, texture, hardness, sound, movement?" (p. 202). Hart contends that by asking such questions we can help "children develop their witness consciousness through recognising, for example, that they *have* a feeling but they are *not* the feeling" (p. 202).

- "Hearing the Inner Voice." This source centres on intuition; on listening to the inner voice. Hart describes two primary internal human voices: the first is the

ego's voice which chatters constantly offering commentary and judgement about all sorts of things including self-criticism, fear, judgement of others; the second less obvious voice is what Hart calls the "inner voice" which "lives deeper down" and "recognised throughout wisdom traditions as the still, small voice, inner teacher, Holy Spirit, inner light, genius, or guardian spirit" (p. 205). Hart goes on to suggest three general dimensions of the inner voice: focus, opening, and discernment.

o Focus involves articulating, voicing, imagining a clear question or *focus* on an issue for which we seek clarity. As teachers we can help children find that focus and articulate it.

o Then, according to Hart, we need to let go, to stop and be still in order to *open* to the inner voice. This might involve the previous step's question, "Where am I now?" and help children find a place of silence or reflection to ponder. Hart goes so far as to suggest that we should, even once a week for fifteen minutes enable a time and space for "wise silence" which can help reinforce the inner voice (p. 206).

o And finally then, we need to discern and that requires determining the difference between the ego-generated voice and the inner voice. Hart suggests that the inner voice generally feels more generous and limitless working from abundance, rather than feel self-interested, and limited working from lack. If we practise and become more aware or conscious, we are better placed to recognise the differences between the two voices. He adds that the inner voice can arrive in unexpected ways: through a dream, a gut feeling, or a flash of an idea. Teachers need to inform children about these different ways.

• "Listen With Your Heart." In this final source Hart focuses especially on the preposition 'with' arguing that it calls for listening *with* the heart rather than *to* the heart. Listening *to* the heart involves "paying attention to our feelings and sensations about something", which "is important for staying in touch with the flow or our feelings and sensations." Listening *with* the heart on the other hand, "turns the focus outward, toward others" wherein "we listen in order to

understand, to appreciate, and to love" (pp. 208-209). In this step we are to assist children to become empathetic, compassionate, and loving.

In the British educational context children and young people's spiritual development is a specific aspect of the religious education curriculum. The Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) (2004, as cited in Ruddock & Cameron (Sean), 2010) has included a list of activities that schools encouraging students' spiritual development would be likely to exhibit:

- giving pupils the opportunity to explore values and beliefs, including religious beliefs, and the way in which they affect peoples' lives;
- where pupils already have religious beliefs, supporting and developing these beliefs in ways which are personal and relevant to them;
- encouraging pupils to explore and develop what animates themselves and others;
- encouraging pupils to reflect and learn from reflection;
- giving pupils the opportunity to understand human feelings and emotions, the way they affect people and how an understanding of them can be helpful;
- developing a climate or ethos within which all pupils can grow and flourish, respect others and be respected;
- accommodating difference and respecting the integrity of individuals;
- promoting teaching styles which:
  - o Value pupils' questions and give them space for their own thoughts, ideas and concerns;
  - o Enable pupils to make connections between aspects of their learning
  - o Encourage pupils to relate their learning to a wider frame of reference – for example, asking "why?", "how?" and "where?" as well as "what?"
- monitoring, in simple, pragmatic ways, the success of what is provided.
  (p. 29)

Baumgartner and Buchanan (2010) also offer some practical strategies for the early years educator that support the young child's spirit. These resonate with many aspects

already explored through the literature. They contend in similar ways to Hart's (2003) idea of capturing the teachable moment, that like all good early childhood practice, "practices that address spirituality should be grounded in learning opportunities that arise naturally during the children's day" (p. 91). Baumgartner and Buchanan's (2010) understanding of, and approach to, spirituality includes three elements:

i. A sense of belonging - nurtured when children are given opportunities to contribute and given important things to do or thanked when they have shared, helped, cooperated so that they experience their value as members of the classroom community.

ii. Respect for self and others – nurtured when children are encouraged to manage conflict peacefully; when their opinions, likes and dislikes are asked for; setting open-ended art projects.

iii. An awareness and appreciation of the unknown – nurtured when curiosity is encouraged; organising mini spiritual retreats; noticing and appreciating the beauty and mystery of nature; allowing children to question; not overemphasising facts. (pp. 91-93)

This section has overviewed some of the practical approaches taken by researchers and teachers alike that seek to nurture young children's spiritual development in a variety of settings. Such approaches do not depend on children's religiosity, but rather their starting points are with children's innate spirituality. The following section investigates those approaches that seek to nurture children's religious development.

3.2 Nurturing young children's religious development

The following approaches seek specifically to nurture young children's religious development and are specific to Christian faith sharing communities. It is important to bear in mind that such approaches are catechetical in nature as they seek to specifically develop children's Christian faith. These approaches presume that the child is a believer and therefore have limited relevance in settings that reflect more diverse child populations. Having noted this though, some might lend themselves to being adapted for wider contexts.

An influential person in the area of children's religious development was Maria Montessori (as cited in Berryman, 1992) who argued that children are not blank slates but

rather are born with unique potential to be revealed. Her approach paid much attention to the actual environment which she saw as having significant influence on children. She advocated the use of sensory materials with which children play as a means of engaging them with others and with God.

Cavalletti (1992) a student of Montessori developed the program *Catechesis of the Good Shepherd*, which incorporates the use of three-dimensional materials (such as wooden figures) to tell the gospel parables to young children. Children then can play with the figures retelling the parables to themselves. In this way children are not only becoming familiar with the stories but also developing their inner religious language, an essential aspect argued by Bradford (1999) and Tacey (2000) to be an important feature that enable children to express their spirituality.

Berryman (1992), influenced by Montessori and Cavalletti, suggests the way of learning religion is through language. He developed the *Godly Play* program the goal of which is to teach children religious language, parable, sacred story, silence and liturgical action all of which would make them more aware of God's presence in their lives. A key feature of Berryman's *Godly Play* is the time given to wondering with children as they are invited and encouraged to wonder about many aspects of the scripture story at the end of its sharing. Berryman (1991, as cited in Ryan, 2007b) emphasised the importance for children coming to know and believe in God as loving and benevolent and in doing this they would be better able to face the existential issues such as death, freedom, aloneness and meaninglessness (p. 34).

Yust (2003) proposes that faith development must be in line with human development and offers Bruggemann's framework which emphasises the imagination as one way forward with toddlers' spiritual development. Again, along similar lines as Bradford (1999) and Tacey (2000), Yust claims that spiritual formation requires language acquisition of religious information but even more so, the stirring of the imagination. For him, the imagination helps toddlers conceive of the world and of life as being potentially different from the way it is.

Eaude (2005) discusses aspects or elements of spirituality that teachers can include in their classroom programs which include time and space for reflection, wonder and awe, and prayer. According to Bellous and Csinos (2009) four important aspects which religious educators might create within their educational setting to enable children to express their

spirituality include an explicit education of four styles of expression: words, emotions, symbols and actions. They argue that these four styles characterise the expression of spirituality and further that they convey how people try to make the world a better place.

Each of these approaches pays attention to young children's religiosity as they seek to provide children with a language to articulate and express this religiosity. Many aspects within these approaches call upon and develop those spiritual characteristics or attributes previously explored including imagination, wonder and awe, creativity, and relationship.

3.3   Nurturing young children's spiritual and religious development: A summary

A number of suggestions that might serve to nurture both young children's spiritual and religious development have been brought to light in the literature. A significant aspect of children's spiritual and religious development raised in the literature is concerned with the starting point of such intentional development. Nye and Hay (1996) argue that the starting point should be with children's innate spirituality or, as described by Bradford (1999), their human spirituality, rather than with their religiosity. In other words, if teachers nurtured those features or characteristics common to both spirituality and religiosity, such as relationship, imagination, wonder and awe, and so on, they would, in the first instance, be nurturing children's spiritual development, which could then lead to their religious development. Certainly, by commencing with their innate spirituality, children's diverse religious backgrounds are acknowledged and respected, a point made explicit both by the Catholic Church and the United Nations.

The Congregation for Catholic Education (1988) stated in its document *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*:

> Not all students in Catholic schools are members of the Catholic Church; not all are Catholic....The religious freedom or the personal conscience of individual students and their families must be respected, and this freedom is explicitly recognised by the Church. On the other hand, a Catholic school cannot relinquish its own freedom to proclaim the Gospel and to offer a formation based on the values to be found in a Christian education; this is its right and its duty. To proclaim or to offer is not to impose, however; the latter suggests a moral

violence which is strictly forbidden, both by the Gospel and by Church law. (para. 6)

The United Nations (1989) placed emphasis on children's participation rights including their right to participate in their own religious traditions and that these religious beliefs are respected, as explicitly stated in Articles 1, 14 and 29 in the *Convention on the Rights of the Child.* Article 1 requires that children's religious rights be respected without discrimination; Article 14.1 requires that "State Parties shall respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion"; and Article 29 concerns the role of education in ensuring that it be directed to the "development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms" (Article 29, para 1.[b]), and further, that the preparation of the child as a responsible citizen, is done "in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin" (Article 29.1.[d]). The values expressed in this final Article are aligned with the key characteristics of spirituality as revealed in Sections 1 and 2 of this review.

The essential common areas of focus for nurturing both children's spiritual and religious development include approaches, strategies and activities that pay attention to and activate: their imagination and creativity; their senses of wonder and awe, of mystery, of identity and belonging, of connectedness to themselves, others, nature and for some to God or an Ultimate, of security and serenity; their participation in, and contribution to, community and to the wellbeing of family, friends and community members (Adams, 2009; Adams et al., 2008; Baumgartner & Buchanan, 2010; Bellous & Csinos, 2009; Berryman, 1992; Bradford, 1999; Eaude, 2005, 2009; Hyde, 2008; Yust, 2003). Also emphasised in the literature was the critical nature of the creation of a safe and secure environment in which children would feel free to share their spiritual experiences (Adams, 2009; Hay, 1998) as well as the inclusion of the spiritual and affective domains in the curriculum (De Souza & Hyde, 2007). The use of sensory and tactile materials integrated with story, symbol, ritual and action that would stimulate children's imagination and enable their acquisition of a language to express their spirituality also featured throughout the literature (Bellous & Csinos, 2009; Berryman, 1991; Bradford, 1999; Cavalletti, 1992; Hyde, 2008).

This section has presented an overview of the literature that explored specific approaches to nurturing children's spiritual and religious developments. Finally, the

following section presents the implications that the literature has for the development and design of a religious education framework for young children's spiritual development in Catholic early years settings including child care centres.

4. Implications for the design and development of a religious education framework

Each of the three key themes of children's spirituality and their spiritual and religious development surveyed in Sections 1, 2 and 3 of this review, have implications for the design and development of a religious education framework for the Catholic child care centre and early years setting. These implications are outlined in the following sections.

4.1 Implications of the nature of spirituality and its relationship to religiosity or religion for a religious education framework

The literature regarding spirituality and its relationship with religiosity or religion has suggested two significant findings. First, that it is not possible to articulate either a clear singular definition for spirituality or the nature of spirituality's relationship with religion or religiosity as many describe both aspects in a variety of ways. Two immediate implications for the design of a religious education framework can be drawn from the literature regarding the description of spirituality and its relationship with religiosity:

First, it is important for the purpose of designing a relevant and appropriate religious education framework that seeks to develop young children's spirituality within a religious context in the early years, that a shared understanding or description is articulated for the *particular* or *specific context* of that religious education framework. In other words, what understanding of spirituality does the framework use as its starting point and how does such a framework understand the relationship between spirituality and religiosity?

Second, it is not only important that the framework be responsive to, and relevant for, the development of young children's spirituality as articulated for that particular context, but also that the framework captures and reflects that context's philosophy, ethos and mission. In other words, for a religious education framework to be authentic it must be aligned with and reflect the organisation's *aspired*, *articulated* and *lived* mission or value system.

4.2 Implications of young children's spiritual and religious development for a religious education framework

Significant implications raised in the literature concerning young children's spiritual and religious development directly concern the Christian context of the early years settings. These implications insist that a religious education framework pays attention to how young children's spirituality is recognised and acknowledged. Explicit time and space need to be created in ways that facilitate, enable and activate children's freedom of expression. To what do we attend: the cognitive only, or do we include the affective and sensory awareness dimensions? Also the relationship between children's spiritual development and their religious development needs to be articulated clearly so that all children's diverse and pluralist backgrounds are acknowledged and respected in accordance with Church authority (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988) as well as with the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (United Nations, 1989).

4.3 Implications of nurturing children's spiritual and religious development for a religious education framework

The literature focuses on two aspects of nurturing children's spirituality:

The first is set within a secularist, almost neutral, view of young children's spirituality that seeks to nurture/develop those spiritual elements such as identity, belonging, relationship, wholeness, wonder and awe.

The second is to work within a religious framework to nurture/develop all of the above aspects of young children's spirituality within a Christian religious tradition/context which at the same time seeks to pay attention to, and respects, the other.

The development of a religious education framework within a particular religious tradition would need to consider the above two aspects carefully as the subsequent choice taken raises implications for the nature and purpose of such a framework. In other words, the aims or outcomes, as well as the elaborations and suggested pedagogies that seek to develop those aims and outcomes, need to align with the setting's focus.

5. Conclusion

Children's spirituality and their spiritual and religious development have been shown in the literature to be of central relevance and importance to who they are and who they will become. Their identity, sense of belonging and sense of meaning, as well as purpose in life are all linked to, and affected by, their spirituality and the ways through which that spirituality might be nurtured. Therefore, a religious education framework that pays attention to, and implicitly and explicitly seeks to nurture, all aspects and characteristics of children's spiritual and religious development within the Catholic child care and/or early childhood centre occupies a significant place across all aspects of, and within, that centre.

It has been shown in this review that a fundamental function of such a framework would be to consider and incorporate the three themes highlighted in the literature. First, it would be necessary to articulate a clear and concise understanding of the notions of spirituality and religiosity and their relationship with each other relevant to the specific context, and that such an articulation would inform all aspects of the framework. Second, the framework would need to consider the characteristics attributed to children's spirituality, highlighting those that are of specific relevance to its context. And finally, the framework needs to incorporate an approach that encompasses appropriate pedagogical and environmental elements to develop those noted characteristics in ways that nurture and contribute to young children's spiritual and religious development.

All children are born with an innate spirituality and as they grow and develop it is vital that they are educated in the ways and means to not only express that spirituality, but also provided with the ways and means that will nurture and activate their spiritual and religious development thus enabling them to become whole persons.

References

Adams, K. (2009). The rise of the child's voice: The silencing of the spiritual voice. *Journal of Beliefs & Values, 30*(2), 113-122.

Adams, K., Hyde, B., & Woolley, R. (2008). *The spiritual dimension of childhood*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Baumgartner, J. J., & Buchanan, T. (2010). Supporting each child's spirit. *Young Children, 65*(2), 90-95.

Bellous, J. E., & Csinos, D. M. (2009). Spiritual styles creating an environment to nurture spiritual wholeness. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality, 14*(3), 213-224.

Berryman, J. W. (1991). *Godly play: An imaginative approach to religious education*. Minneapolis: Augsburg.

Berryman, J. W. (1992). Children and spirituality. *Montessori Life, 4*(4), 37-42.

Best, R. (2008). In defence of the concept of 'spiritual education': A reply to Roger Marples. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality, 13*(4), 321-329.

Best, R. (Ed.). (1995). *Education, spirituality, and the whole child*. New York: Cassell.

Bradford, J. (1999). The spiritual needs and potential of the child and young person: A rationale for discussion. *Muslim Education Quarterly, 16*(4), 3-14.

Cavalletti, S. (1992). *The religious potential of the child: Experiencing scripture and liturgy with young children* (P. M. Coulter & J. M. Coulter, Trans.). Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications.

Coles, R. (1990). *The spiritual life of children*. London: HarperCollins.

Congregation for Catholic Education. (1988). *The religious dimension of education in a Catholic school*. Homebush: St Paul Publications.

Crompton, M. (1998). *Children, spirituality, religion and social work*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd.

Csanyi, D. A. (1982). Faith development and the age of readiness for the Bible. *Religious Education, 77*, 518-524.

Dahlberg, G., Moss, P., & Pence, A. (1999). *Beyond quality in early childhood education and care*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Dahlberg, G., Moss, P., & Pence, A. (2007). *Beyond quality in early childhood education and care: Languages of evaluation* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.

De Souza, M. (2004). Teaching for effective learning in religious education: A discussion of the perceiving, thinking, feeling and intuitive elements in the learning process. *Journal of Religious Education, 53*(3), 22-30.

De Souza, M., & Hyde, B. (2007). Editorial: Spirituality of children and young people: A consideration of some perspectives and implications from research contextualised by Australia. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality, 12*(2), 97-104.

Dillen, A. (2007). Religious participation of children as active subjects: Toward a hermeneutical-communicative model of religious education in families with young children. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality, 12*(1), 37-49.

Eaude, T. (2003). Shining lights in unexpected corners: New angles on young children's spiritual development. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality, 8*(2), 151-162.

Eaude, T. (2005). Strangely familiar? Teachers making sense of young children's spiritual development. *Early Years, 25*(3), 237-248.

Eaude, T. (2009). Happiness, emotional well-being and mental health: What has children's spirituality to offer? *International Journal of Children's Spirituality, 14*(3), 185-196.

Fisher, J. W. (2007). It's time to wake up and stem the decline in spiritual well-being in Victorian schools. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality, 12*(2), 165-177.

Fisher, J. W. (2010). *Students' views on relating with God for spiritual wellbeing.* Paper presented at the International Symposium on Religious Education and Values, Session XVII, 25-30 July, 2010, Ottawa, Canada.

Fowler, J. (1981). *Stages of faith: The psychology of human development and the quest for meaning*. Blackburn: Dove Communications.

Francis, L. (1979). Research and the development of religious thinking. *Educational Studies, 5*(2), 109-115.

Goldman, R. (1964). *Religious thinking from childhood to adolescence*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Goldman, R. (1965). *Readiness for religion: A basis for developmental religious education*. New York: Seabury Press.

Gottlieb, E. (2006). Development of religious thinking. *Religious Education, 101*(2), 242-260.

Grey, M. (2006). The disenchantment and re-enchantment of childhood in an age of globalization. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality, 11*(1), 11-21.

Hardy, A. (1965). *The living stream: A restatement of evolution theory and its relation to the spirit of man.* London: Collins.

Harris, K. I. (2007). Re-conceptualizing spirituality in the light of educating young children. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality, 12*(3), 263-275.

Hart, T. (2003). *The secret spiritual world of children*. Maui: Inner Ocean.

Hart, T. (2006). Spiritual experiences and capacities of children and youth. In E. Roehlkepartain, P. E. King, L. Wagener & P. L. Benson (Eds.), *The handbook of spiritual development in childhood and adolescence* (pp. 163-177). London: SAGE Publications.

Hay, D. (1998). Nurturing the spirit of the child. In D. Hay with R. Nye, *The spirit of the child* (pp. 159-175). London: HarperCollins.

Hay, D., with Nye, R. (1998). *The spirit of the child*. London: Harper Collins.

Hay, D., with Nye, R. (2006). *The spirit of the child* (Rev. ed.). London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Hyde, B. (2005). Integrating awareness: A characteristic of children's spirituality in Australian Catholic primary schools. *Journal of Religious Education, 53*(4), 54-62.

Hyde, B. (2006). Nurturing the spirit in primary religious education classrooms. In M. de Souza, G. Durka, K. Engebretson, R. Jackson & A. McGrady (Eds.), *International handbook of the religious, moral and spiritual dimensions in education* (pp. 1179-1192). Dordrecht: Springer.

Hyde, B. (2007). A pedagogy of spirit. In J. Grajczonek & M. Ryan (Eds.), *Religious education in early childhood: A reader* (pp. 18-31). Brisbane: Lumino Press.

Hyde, B. (2008). The identification of four characteristics of children's spirituality in Australian Catholic Primary schools. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality, 13*(2), 117-127.

James, A., & James, A. L. (2004). *Constructing childhood: Theory, policy and social practice*. Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan.

Liddy, S. (2007). Spirituality and the young child. In J. Grajczonek & M. Ryan (Eds.), *Religious education in early childhood: A reader.* (pp. 5-17). Brisbane: Lumino Press.

McCreery, E. (1994). Towards an understanding of the notion of the spiritual in education. *Early Child Development and Care, 100*(1), 93-99.

Meehan, C. (2002). Resolving the confusion in the spiritual development debate. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*.

Moriarty, M. W. (2009). Evaluating children's use of symbol in some recent research. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality, 14*(1), 47-61.

Myers, B. K. (1997). *Young children and spirituality*. New York: Routledge.

Nye, R. (1998). Identifying the core of children's spirituality. In D. Hay with R. Nye, *The spirit of the child* (pp. 112-137). London: HarperCollins.

Nye, R., & Hay, D. (1996). Identifying children's spirituality: How do you start without a starting point? *British Journal of Religious Education, 18*(3), 144-154.

O'Murchu, D. (1997). *Reclaiming spirituality: A new spiritual framework for today's world*. Dublin: Gill & Macmillan.

Priestley, J. G. (1981). Religious story and the literary imagination. *British Journal of Religious Education, 4*(1), 17-24.

Qvortrup, J. (1994). *Childhood matters: Social theory, practice, and politics.* Aldershot: Avebury.

Ratcliff, D., & Nye, R. (2006). Childhood spirituality: Strengthening the research foundation. In E. C. Roehlkepartain, P. E. King, L. Wagener & P. L. Benson (Eds.), *The handbook of spiritual development in childhood and adolescence* (pp. 473-483). London: SAGE Publications.

Robinson, D. (1977). *The original vision: A study of the religious experience of childhood*. Oxford: Manchester College.

Roehlkepartain, E., King, P. E., Wagener, L., & Benson, P. L. (Eds.). (2006). *The handbook of spiritual development in childhood and adolescence*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE Publications.

Rossiter, G. (2010a). A case for a 'big picture' re-orientation of K-12 Australian Catholic school religious education in the light of contemporary spirituality. *Journal of Religious Education, 58*(3), 5-18.

Rossiter, G. (2010b). Religious education and the changing landscape of spirituality: Through the lens of change in cultural meanings. *Journal of Religious Education, 58*(2), 25-36.

Ruddock, B., & Cameron (Sean), R. J. (2010). Spirituality in children and young people: A suitable topic for educational and child psychologists? *Educational Psychology in Practice, 26*(1), 25-34.

Ryan, M. (2006). *Religious education in Catholic schools: An introduction for Australian students.* Melbourne: David Lovell Publishing.

Ryan, M. (2007a). *A common search: The history and forms of religious education in Catholic schools.* Brisbane: Lumino Press.

Ryan, M. (2007b). Theorists informing early years religious education. In J. Grajczonek & M. Ryan (Eds.), *Religious education in early childhood: A reader* (pp. 32-43). Brisbane: Lumino Press.

Sagberg, S. (2008). Children's spirituality with particular reference to a Norwegian context: Some hermeneutical reflections. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality, 13*(4), 355-370.

Tacey, D. (2000). *ReEnchantment: The new Australian spirituality.* Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited.

Tacey, D. (2004). The spirituality revolution: The emergence of contemporary spirituality, Available from http://www.netlibrary.com/Reader/

Thatcher, A. (1996). "Policing the sublime": A wholly (holy?) ironic approach to the spiritual development of children. In J. Astley & L. Francis (Eds.), *Christian theology and religious education: Connections and contradictions* (pp. 117-139). London: SPCK.

Trousdale, A. (2005). Intersections of spirituality, religion and gender in children's literature. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality, 10*, 61-79.

United Nations. (1989). United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Retrieved 14 October, 2010, from http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/pdf/crc.pdf

Vygotsky, L. (1967). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes.* Cambridge: Harvard University press.

Watson, J. (2006). *Every Child Matters* and children's spiritual rights: Does the new holistic approach to children's care address children's well-being? *International Journal of Children's Spirituality, 11*(2), 251-263.

White, J. (1996). Education, spirituality and the whole child: A humanist perspective. In R. Best (Ed.), *Education, spirituality and the whole child* (pp. 30-42). London: Cassell.

Wong, P. H. (2006). A conceptual investigation into the possibility of spiritual education. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality, 11*(1), 73-85.

Yust, K. M. (2003). Toddler spiritual formation and the faith community. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality, 8*(2), 133-149.