

## **Part II**

# **The Role of Spirituality in Human Development and Identity: An Introduction**

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In this part we explore the role of spirituality in human development from several vantage points with a mix of perspectives, all based on a concern for the lack of consideration of the spiritual in existing developmental theory particularly in the lives of children and youth. As Glenn Cupit notes, “spirituality is generally ignored in human development texts and never treated as an essential component of development,” while Kimball, Mannes, and Hackel point out there is a vacuum in this “important and understudied domain of human development.” Aostre Johnson cites Roehlkepartain, King, Wagener, and Benson (2006) to suggest that:

Spiritual development may be at a “tipping point” for becoming a major theme in child and adolescent development. A growing number of scholars in various fields have invested themselves in this field. The public imagination appears to be ready in numerous cultures, traditions, and contexts, all of which are struggling with social changes that threaten to undermine the spiritual lives of young people (p. 11).

The lack of models and theories for addressing spirituality in human development, after decades of life span development theory that did not include the spiritual, has created a need to identify and describe what constitutes spiritual development. There are theoretical gaps to be filled. In this part, the concern to establish theories grounded in existing literature and research efforts represents perspectives on spirituality and spiritual development that include academics and researchers from several disciplines. As well there are practitioners who observe the spiritual emerging in their therapeutic and educational work with children and youth and try to give conceptual structures or interpretative forms to assist in understanding spirituality as it seems to be experienced and expressed. The authors have questions that are shaping their inquiries: What role does the spiritual play in human maturation? What are the possible ways to study spirituality? Are there recognizable patterns of development, significant milestones, or common experiences that could be identified as spiritual and might indicate a process of spiritual development? What might count as evidence of the spiritual? Do existing theories and approaches offer insights or structures that might give us glimpses of spiritual development or formation? And of course the persistent question of what is meant by spirituality remains problematic and central to the conversation.

How one understands spirituality depends very much on one's context and on recognizing Jacques Derrida's (1988) insight that there is nothing outside of context. One's understanding of spirituality is rooted in one's cultural, religious/non-religious, social and personal locations, traditions, and experiences. In this part we have authors whose specialized interests, professional location, and training serve as lenses for interpretation. Some like Reimer, Dueck, Adelechanow, and Muto are rooted in and explore from the perspective of religious traditions and others, such as Perkins, Hoffman, and Ortiz, write from secular, humanist perspectives. King, Painton, and Cupit each draw on different psychological and therapeutic literature and traditions to inform their chapters.

The definitions chosen to represent the spiritual reflect the author's various sites and traditions. Perkins offers a clearly non-religious definition of spirituality calling it: "the inner felt experience of a connection to something greater than our thoughts, feelings and material existence or even the people and creatures with which we relate. It is described as energy and is defined uniquely by each of us." His definition represents one kind of understanding. Another tradition that more overtly includes a religious possibility comes from Kimball et al. who use a definition of spiritual development formulated by the Center of Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence, an organization with strong Christian links who are striving to create a broad-based understanding of the spiritual rooted in religions:

The process of growing the intrinsic human capacity for self-transcendence, in which the self is embedded in something greater than the self, including the sacred. It is the developmental "engine" that propels the search for connectedness, meaning, purpose and contribution. It is shaped both within and outside of religious traditions, beliefs, and practices (Benson, Roehlkepartain, & Rude, 2003, pp. 205–206).

This broader definition, which could encompass Perkins' definition, includes the religious and collective dimensions of spirituality. Similarly, in spite of his reluctance to define spirituality and to keep it an open concept, David Tacey comes to define spirituality as "an innate human capacity to experience transcendent reality."

Paul King recognizes that "spirituality is a concept that evades simplistic definition" but points out that the spiritual "as a natural dimension of the human person" is now recognized in educational aims in Irish legislation that in turn echoes the language of UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which acknowledges that spiritual development is one of the areas of development to which children and youth have an inherent right. King cites Rolheiser (1998) saying that: "Spirituality is about what we do with the fire inside us, about how we channel our eros" (p. 10) and then insists that spirituality not "something we *have*. . . it is something we *are*." Charlene Tan acknowledges the contextual shaping of spirituality by distinguishing between religiously "'tethered' and 'untethered' conceptions of spirituality," while Scott insists that "being human is being spiritual in the same way that being human is being physical or emotional. . . ." What the authors hold in common is an insistence that the spiritual is part of human growth and development and that spirituality must be part of our understanding of human experience. The spirit as energy, as quest, as relationship, or as life force echoes throughout this part in a variety of ways.

As academics, researchers, educators, therapists, counselors, and practitioners attempt to evolve a field of study in spiritual development, they create theoretical models based on their research and/or professional experiences. Their perspectives contribute to a number of theoretical options for understanding the place and processes of spiritual formation or spiritual development in the lives of children and youth. Because they represent such different assumptions and contexts, their models do not fit neatly together. The rich variety of constructs proposed in this part immediately broadens the options, and therefore challenges those of us concerned with the spiritual development of the young to be thoughtful in making claims for definitive models of work with children and youth. We do not have a grand theory and need to respect the evolving diversity, resisting perhaps a singular definitive model. While each reader may have a preferred approach or a favorite theory, it may be important to keep concepts of spirituality and spiritual development open in recognition of its complexity, its cultural embeddedness, and its under-theorized state: it remains, in part, mysterious.

## **The Structure of the Part**

The chapters that follow are written by researchers and educators from university faculty in Australia, Hong Kong, the UK, and the Americas as well as by practitioners from psychology, education, child and youth care, and counseling. Some of the writers are giving shape to insights that grew out of their practice-based experiences with children and youth. Others are looking at theoretical models from psychology offering options for re-thinking the spiritual within existing concepts and approaches. In addition others are drawing on literary and historical material and, of course, some are reporting on insights from research they have been conducting.

This part is structured in four clusters with chapters that share a common approach or focus placed together. The first cluster has three chapters that draw on psychological literature and traditions to make space for including the spiritual. Existing developmental theory has deep roots in developmental psychology and so it is useful to begin by opening some space in that domain. The first chapter, from David Tacey, calls for a recognition of spirituality in mental health and care across the whole of the life span. Tacey draws on his Jungian roots, traditional medicine, and rites of passage practices to claim the spiritual as central to healing for physical and mental health and calls for the spiritual to be recognized as a long-standing component of human wisdom and care. It is followed by Chapter 15; C. Glenn Cupit's offering of Dynamic Systems Theory as a lens to understand and explore spiritual development in the lives of children that recognizes the dynamic and complex non-linear processes of spiritual formation. The next chapter (Chapter 16) in the cluster offers Paul King's view that positive psychology can provide a place of hope and a perspective to address human suffering that can include the spiritual in our understanding of human development. He is concerned to create an open dialogue between religion and psychology that moves beyond fear and exclusion.

Because many of this part's authors turn their attention to experience to identify the forms and expressions that the spiritual takes in the lives of children and youth, the next cluster of chapters turns to research and practice. It begins with a grounded theory research project authored by Elisabeth M. Kimball, Marc Mannes, and Angela Hackel (Chapter 17) that foregrounds the voices of young people to ascertain how they speak of and understand the spiritual and its meaning in their own lives. This international study is part of a larger study conducted by the American-based Search Institute and uses focus groups and grounded theory methodologies to identify emerging theoretical constructs from the collected data.

The next three chapters present three different American practitioners working with children and youth in quite different settings. Chapter 18 takes us into an early childhood education and care setting with educator Mindy Upton where spirituality is seen in the daily interactions of children with one another, where the creation of an imaginative and open environment fosters connection, care, and means to interpret the events of life. Next Mollie Painton, who works as a children's therapist focusing on grief and loss, presents a model to understand children's spiritual journeys through difficulty based on a tree of life model. Her theoretical structure emerges from her interpretation of the different ways and means young children use to address their own wounds and their own life struggles. She accepts their identification of angels and monsters, totemic struggles, and imaginative play to describe their inner journeys. In Chapter 20, Peter J. Perkins explores the transitions of adolescent development as "portals to the spirit self." Perkins offers a "*Five Dimensions of the Self*" holistic model based on his therapeutic individual and group work with adolescents. Both Painton and Perkins are suggesting an interpretative construct emerging from their experiences and observations in practice to describe spiritual processes in the lives of their young clients and patients.

The next cluster of chapters focuses primarily on a particular spiritual discipline, practice, or theme that might inform our view of child and adolescent spiritual development. The cluster begins with Charlene Tan (Chapter 21) who turns her attention to the adolescent capacity for reflection which she sees as a significant capacity for spiritual development. Tan, an Indonesian educator, is careful to distinguish between "religiously 'tethered' and 'untethered' conceptions of spirituality" but sees self-reflection as promoting spiritual development in both contexts. She examines several curricular approaches and suggests some specific ways to promote reflection in adolescent educational settings across religious and non-religious settings. Aostre Johnson, in Chapter 22, highlights contemplative aspects of spiritual development. She sees contemplative practice evident in a multitude of traditions as "at the core of all human capacities" and therefore a vital concern for our pedagogy with children and adolescents. Like Charlene Tan in the previous chapter, Johnson addresses both religious and secular perspectives on contemplative practices in developing the spiritual capacity of children and adolescents. She draws on a range of theorists in arguing that children have the capacity for contemplative experiences that will connect them beyond themselves to the wonder of life and the universe.

In Chapter 23, Douglas Magnuson reports a study that listened for "accounts of spirituality interpreted through the theological framework of the idea of vocation, a

calling” to see how adolescents might use a vocational sense to structure their lives. He embeds his argument in a comparison of four educational models to demonstrate “four ways of thinking about learning and growth, compared by organization of time, goals, values, data sources, methods and mechanisms of growth outcomes and metaphors.” He sees spirituality as an educational ideology that promotes reflexivity, discernment, service, meaning making, and a sense of purpose and vocation that leads to “self-transcendence, responsibility, and authenticity.”

The last chapter (Chapter 24) in this cluster is Scott’s on coming of age through rites of passage as a model of spiritual development. Using the forms and practices of traditional rites of passage as a guide, Scott points out key qualities and characteristics of spiritual formation that adolescents may need to accomplish in coming of age. He also points out that cultural context and social engagement were critical in rites of passage and may be essential in contemporary spiritual development for adolescents. He implies that the absence of cultural recognition support and engagement may be hindering adolescent spiritual formation and development.

The fourth cluster in the part that follows focuses on defining experiences in the lives of children and adults. The first chapter of the cluster (Chapter 25) is part of an international study on childhood peak experiences. Edward Hoffman and Fernando Ortiz build on Abraham Maslow’s (1959) concept of self-actualizing people and their capacity to “perceive reality more efficiently, fully, and with less motivational contamination than others do” (p. 64). Maslow (1970), just before his death, came to an interest in peak experiences and a recognition that “the great lesson from the true mystics. . . (is that) the sacred is in the ordinary, that is to be found in one’s daily life, in one’s neighbors, friends, and family, in one’s backyard” (p. x). Hoffman and Ortiz report in some detail current research being conducted internationally gathering incidence of peak experiences based on a simple questionnaire developed by Hoffman. They examine results from Mexico, Canada, Norway, Indonesia, Japan, and the United States to explore the kinds of peak experiences adults report from their younger years.

In Chapter 26, Ann M. Trousdale, a specialist in children and adolescent literature takes a different track in bringing attention to life shaping peak experiences by turning to children’s and young adolescent fiction. She identifies experiences based on the “relational consciousness” theories of Hay and Nye (1998) that she finds expressed in that fictional writing. Child–God consciousness, child–people consciousness, child–self consciousness, and child–world consciousness provide an interpretative map for a reading of children’s literature as demonstrating spiritual experience. A considerable volume of youth literature has peak experiences that are central to the stories of the protagonists. Both boys and girls are shown to be making connections beyond themselves, reaching mystical heights in moments of insight and understanding and being swept away by the power of their experiences. The popularity of this literature demonstrates in part how it resonates with young readers and gives them a fictional context to process their own experience and characters with whom they can identify.

To conclude this cluster and this part, the final chapter (Chapter 27) presents the research of Kevin Reimer, Alvin Dueck, Lauren Adelchanow, and Joseph Muto.

They approach the question of the nature of spirituality and its expression through a project in which they interviewed exemplars from three religious traditions: Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, who were identified as having “exceptional spiritual maturity.” For Reimer and his colleagues it is a way to demonstrate what spiritual life looks like as it is lived and practiced in the context of religious life. They claim that “spiritual experience is likely to incorporate categories of transcendent value reflecting a spectrum of relational influences”. They recognize the challenges of defining spiritual life and use a naturalistic approach to describe the spiritual as expressed by the lived experiences of religious exemplars. Their study identifies five themes in common across the three faith perspectives: relational consciousness, vocational identity, stewardship, tradition, and the divine as omnipotent and leads them to concluding reflections on spiritual identity.

Across the four clusters of chapters that follow the reader will engage considerations of the spiritual development of the young through multiple lenses that draw on both religious and secular traditions and scholarship. Theoretical models from psychology, education, and therapeutic practice and various combinations of the three as well as proposals for understanding spirituality and spiritual development from research projects are offered as ways to open further the discourse of spiritual development. As a number of chapters suggest the intensity of childhood and/or adolescent experience is significant in human life and calls for a better understanding of those experiences as part of human development. There are current and historical reports of the events, beliefs, and ethos that shape the lives of spiritual exemplars and religious leaders as well as the lives of ordinary unacknowledged people. Many questions will remain: What are the best theories to describe spiritual development? What existing psychological or cultural theory can be adapted to make spirituality and its experiences comprehensible? What are the implications for educational practice? For therapeutic work? For mental health and wellbeing? And for understanding spiritual development as it happens in the lives of children and youth?

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