

**AN EXPLORATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHILDREN'S
SPIRITUALITY AND THE CURRICULUM**

by

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I argue that childhood is a spiritually sensitive period of one's life and that childhood spirituality should be recognized in elementary curriculum. Young children typically ponder the great spiritual questions of life. Yet, childhood spirituality, as expressed in young children through wonder, awe, imagination, and contemplation about the meaning and possibilities of life, is sorely neglected in education research. This thesis is an attempt to bring childhood spirituality into discussion, to recognize that children do ponder the great spiritual questions of life, and to explore how childhood spirituality might play out in B.C.'s elementary classrooms. Specifically, the purpose of this work is fourfold: to examine general concepts of childhood spirituality; to recognize the emergence of spiritual principles throughout the history of education; to consider the value and ways in which the spiritual nature of young children can be engaged in the classroom; and finally, to recommend the placement of spirituality in B.C.'s elementary curriculum.

Chapter One provides a brief introduction and outline of the thesis. Chapter Two explores references to and definitions of childhood spirituality as expressed in religious scripture and by various poets, psychologists, educators, and philosophers. Chapter Three examines principles of childhood spirituality as addressed throughout the history of education including a brief look at current legislation in B.C. regarding the teaching of religious and spiritual ideas in the classroom and an historical look at the aims of education with regard to the development of the soul. Chapter Four explores ways in which childhood spirituality can be addressed and incorporated into elementary curriculum and Chapter Five concludes with recommendations as to the placement of spirituality in B.C.'s elementary school curriculum.

To Jeff with love

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Chapter One

OVERVIEW

INTRODUCTION

Walking along the streets of Paris one evening, I bought a postcard of a young girl who is gazing deeply at a feather that she holds in her hands. When I began teaching eight years ago, I taped the postcard on my classroom filing cabinet. The picture struck me in some way, but only as I have been writing this thesis have I stopped to think about why I like it so much. The image is about wonder, the child's capacity for wonder which so often eludes us in adulthood. As a primary teacher, I feel fortunate to spend my day with young children and share in their incredible sense of wonder and in the sense of mystery that they have about the world.

The children I have known in both my personal life and in my professional life all share an innate sense of wonder. Even the youngest child will ponder the grandeur of the stars or spend time absorbed in minutiae of life (insects, animals, sticks, pebbles, feathers, etc.). Where there is a sense of wonder, there is spirituality. I do not have a complete definition of spirituality, for the idea of spirituality is at once both very abstract and personal, but I will begin this study with the idea that spirituality concerns the wholeness of a person, and the search for meaning in life, not just in terms of reason and logic, but in wonderment, imagination, and soul.

Focus of the Study

Children are capable of experiencing and of perceiving '*the farthest reaches of human nature*', as Abraham Maslow puts it. Yet childhood is often thought of as a time when consciousness is less developed, less evolved and more primitive than in adulthood. Several psychological and educational theories support this idea. The most drastic of these theories is that of the newborn as a 'blank slate' onto which culture and knowledge inscribe social and behavioural modifications. Though the 'blank slate' theory of childhood is no longer currently accepted in educational

discourse, children are still considered in terms of what they lack in comparison to the adult. For example, cognitive psychologists see the infant as a bundle of primitive sensorimotor structures that by adulthood will mature into abstract thinking. Stage-related theories such as Lawrence Kohlberg's pre-conventional stage of moral development imply that children lack a sophisticated moral life and that they are unable to make difficult moral decisions. In my experience, this is not always true. Children have, and can act on, the same capacities of love and kindness as do adults. And although they do not always articulate inner experiences, young children ponder spiritual questions.

Models of childhood, such as those mentioned above, view children as developing from *less* into *more*. Education has come to mean acculturation, and in turn, neglects aspects of the child's inner or spiritual life. In article twenty-seven of the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child, signatories "recognize the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, *spiritual*, moral and social development." But how does one define, let alone nurture, a child's spiritual development?

This study will explore childhood spirituality. It is not an examination of children as students of religion, rather it is an exploration of the capacity children have to express themselves in a spiritual manner. This study will examine what childhood spirituality is and how this often neglected aspect of childhood has been addressed both in religious scripture, and by various poets, psychologists, philosophers, and educators. This study will also examine the emergence of childhood spirituality in the history of education, and how childhood spirituality might be nurtured and addressed in British Columbia's current elementary school curricula. This study is an exploration of childhood spirituality, rather than an attempt at some kind of definitive analysis. Unfortunately, there are few education resources, let alone religious resources, available on childhood spirituality. To add to the problem, it is

difficult to analyse spirituality because spirituality is of a transcendent nature and eludes definition.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to gain a more complete understanding of young children's spiritual nature. Specifically, the purpose of this thesis is four-fold: to explore references to and definitions of childhood spirituality; to review childhood spirituality in the history of education; to examine how spirituality might be addressed and nurtured in B.C.'s elementary classrooms; and to propose recommendations for the development and expression of spirituality in B.C.'s new elementary school curriculum.

Procedure

The first part of this study (Chapter Two) explores references to and definitions of childhood spirituality as expressed in religious scripture and by various poets, psychologists, educators, and philosophers such as Thomas Traherne, Henry Vaughan, William Wordsworth, Carl Jung, Maria Montessori, Robert Coles, and Garath Matthews.

Chapter Three examines principles of childhood spirituality as addressed throughout the history of education. This third chapter begins with a brief look at current legislation in B.C. regarding the teaching of religious and spiritual ideas in the classroom. It is then divided into three parts: one, an historical look at the aims of education with regards to the development of the soul; two, a detailed analysis of spiritual principles as they appear in the works of Plato, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Johann Pestalozzi, Friedrich Froebel, William Wordsworth, Maria Montessori, Rabindranath Tagore, John Dewey, and Robert Coles; and three, an examination of spiritual growth as an aim of education, individuality and freedom in education, and child-centredness in the educative process.

Chapter Four explores ways in which childhood spirituality can be addressed and incorporated into elementary curriculum. Subject areas include: Fine Arts, Language Arts, Science, Mathematics, and Social Studies. Specific areas explored within the Fine Arts section include: art as a spiritual journey, art as language of the spirit, and art as spiritual expression. The Language Arts section examines spirituality in language, literacy, storytelling, texts, literature, and poetry. The Language Arts section will also examine children's books that contain elements of spirituality.

Chapter Five will address the implications of developing childhood spirituality in education and conclude with recommendations as to the placement of spirituality in B.C.'s elementary school curriculum.

Chapter Two

NOTIONS OF CHILDHOOD SPIRITUALITY

INTRODUCTION

There is at this time little research on this subject with regard to education; therefore, I will look to religious scripture, then to poets, psychologists, philosophers, and educators, such as Maria Montessori, to discover ideas written about childhood spirituality. This chapter is neither a critique nor an argument; it is an exploration. I will conclude by moving in the direction of a definition of childhood spirituality and how the notions of childhood spirituality might play out in the classroom.

RELIGIOUS NOTIONS OF CHILDHOOD SPIRITUALITY

The idea that childhood is a spiritually sensitive period of life is found in many of the world's religions. In the New English Bible, Psalm 8 tells us "How glorious is thy name in all the earth! Thy majesty is praised high as the heavens. Out of the mouth of babes, of infants at the breast thou hast founded the mighty." Isaiah 11:6 predicts an age of earthly harmony where "the wolf shall live with the sheep, the leopard lie down with the kid; the calf and young lion shall grow up together, and a little child shall lead them." In the Gospels, Matthew 19:14, Jesus says "Let the children come to me, do not try to stop them; for the kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these." And when asked by a disciple "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?", he sets a child before the disciple and says "Unless you turn and become like children you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." With the exception of St. Paul, who seems to express a pejorative view of childhood, (1Corinthians 13:10 and 14:20), it would seem that childhood was seen in a positive light in early Christianity.

In the tradition of Christian mysticism, spiritual insights occur at the centre of the soul when mental activity is stilled. "For much of the Western intellectual tradition,

rational thought marks the highest form of consciousness, yet for the mystics, mental activity must be quieted before the important experiences become possible. Mystics do not reject reason, but they do not regard it as ultimate" (Dictionary of World Religions, p. 511). St. Teresa of Avila (1515- 1582), a Christian mystic and a woman of acute practical and political acumen, was known for her belief in the power of prayer to attain union with God. In her autobiography, *The Life of Teresa of Jesus*, written at the command of her confessors, she describes her spiritual calling in childhood. She praises her parents for their love of virtue which "awakened in her good desires" when she was six or seven years old (Life, 1960, p. 64). She describes her childhood games such as playing nun, or building convents as the beginnings of her search for God. She then tells how these childhood virtues were gradually lost when she came to her adolescence or in her words, the "age of reason".

In the Kabbalistic tradition during the Middle Ages, children were used as tools of divination. It was believed that, in their innocence, young children were able to tell the future simply by looking at mirrors or crystals, using their imaginations to describe what they saw (Hoffman, 1991, p. 3). Jewish mystics also believed that during our fetal existence "we are exposed to the secrets of the universe, but at the moment of birth we are made to forget such knowledge in order to fulfill our purpose here on earth" (Hoffman, 1992, p. 3). In their opinion, children have access to and are closer to their heavenly origins than are adults.

In the Buddhist tradition of Tibet, the monks set out to relocate the reincarnated soul following the death of a Lama, the spiritual leader. With guidance through dreams or revelations, the monks look for an infant child. If the child is able to correctly identify objects belonging to his predecessor, his selection is verified and the child is brought back to the palace in Lhasa for spiritual, intellectual, moral, and

leadership training. This young child takes the highest official rank among the Tibetan Buddhists.

Discussing the religious notions of childhood is not to say that religious institutions have consistently practised a positive attitude towards children, they have not. However, these notions, especially those of Jesus in the New Testament, do challenge the Platonic idea that childhood is period of one's life, a period of confusion, illusion, and ignorance. Rather, there is, in these religious viewpoints, the recognition that in childhood one has an innate right or capacity for closeness to and knowledge of the divine. Childhood for many of the saints is an important, if not essential, period of one's spiritual life.

POETS' NOTIONS OF CHILDHOOD SPIRITUALITY

Poets, such as Thomas Traherne, Henry Vaughan, William Blake, William Wordsworth, and Rabindranath Tagore, continue to express the idea that children are spiritual beings who have an ability for higher awareness or relationship with God. Their work is important because their poems are concerned with the transcendent quality of childhood.

Thomas Traherne was born in England around 1633. He studied at Oxford and wrote poetry. For Traherne, the child sees things with an innocence that is touched by God. The child's response to what he or she sees in nature, such as in the majesty of the sea or the snail feather, is that of delight and wonderment. Traherne's child is curious and speculative, wrestling with concepts of eternity and infinity as illustrated in this poem:

No Walls confine! Can nothing hold my Mind?
Can I no Rest or Satisfaction find?
Must I behold Eternity
And see
What things above the Heav'ns bee?
Will nothing serv the Turn?

Nor earth, nor Seas, nor Skies?
Till I what lies
In Time's beginning find;
Must I till then for ever burn? (Traherne, in White, 1962, p.

304)

He felt that children's infant perceptions of their world are pure and innocent. The child's earthly life is still strongly connected to the divine and the eternal life. Traherne writes:

How like an Angel came I down!
How Bright are all Things here!
When first among his Works I did appear
O how their GLORY me did Crown?
The World resembled his *Eternitie*
In which my soul did walk;
And evry Thing that I did see,
Did with me talk. (Traherne, in White, 1962, p. 306)

The young child's response to the world in which she finds herself is a sense of wonder and delight as expressed in the words "How bright are all Things here!" Unfortunately, almost as soon as children have taken stock of their wonderment and joy, the process of formal education begins whereby, so often it seems, children's spirituality is suppressed and they are gradually "weaned away from their true felicity to the noisy distraction and absorption of a completely misguided world" (White, 1962, p. 309).

Henry Vaughan was also a seventeenth century English poet. He was born in 1622, the elder of twins. It is believed that the years from 1647 to 1650 were critical in the history of Henry Vaughan because something of importance for his spiritual development, such as a religious conversion, occurred (White, 1962, p. 244). Regardless of whatever the experience was, Vaughan wrote exquisite poetry that glorifies the spiritual experience of childhood. His poem, *The Retreat*, begins:

Happy those early days! when I
Shined in my angel infancy,
Before I understood this place

Appointed for my second race,
or taught my soul to fancy aught
But a white, celestial thought;
When yet I had not walked above
A mile, or two, from my first love,
And looking back (at that short space)
Could see a glimpse of His bright face;
When on some gilded cloud or flower
My gazing soul would dwell an hour,
And in those weaker glories spy
Some shadows of eternity;
Before I taught my tongue to wound
My conscious with a sinful sound,
Or had the black art to dispense
A several sin to every sense,
But felt through all this fleshy dress
Bright shoots of everlastingness. (Vaughan, in *Beginning with*

Poems, 1966, p. 64)

Vaughan implies as does Traherne, that an infant comes down to earth "like an angel" and that childhood is a period where one "shines". Vaughan would say that in early childhood, one has a capacity for joy and divine sensitivity that is somehow lost with the coming of logic and reason, a transition marked in his poem by the words "before I taught my tongue to wound".

With the coming of the Industrial Age, notions of spirituality and the idea of childhood being a sacred part of one's life weakened. Many young children slaved in London factories. Paradoxically, during this same era, two remarkable English poets lived who, in quite different ways, venerated childhood as the most exalted period of human life (Hoffman, 1994, p. 6). These poets are William Blake and William Wordsworth. Blake wrote *Songs of Innocence* in 1789. The book begins with this introduction:

Piping down the valleys wild,
Piping songs of pleasant glee,
On a cloud I saw a child,
And he laughing said to me:
"Pipe a song about a lamb!"
So I piped with merry cheer.

"Piper, pipe that song again";
So I piped: he wept to hear.

Blake celebrates the delight of early childhood. He saw childhood as a magical period of life, where the inner life is bathed in joy and eternity. The child lives in the moment and in this way has a closer kinship with the natural world. Time seems to stop or have little meaning for children. For Blake, heaven is all about us in our infancy.

Born in 1770, William Wordsworth also portrays an exalted view of childhood. In *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*, he views children as oracles of divinity, capable of seeing truths that adults have difficulty in discerning. For Wordsworth, childhood was the most sacred time of life's experience. He also believed, as did Blake, that the child comes from a divine place and that our very young years are the ones which are closest to heaven. He writes:

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The Soul that rises from us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar:
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come:
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
Shades of the prison-house begin to close
Upon the growing Boy,
But he beholds the light, and whence it flows,
He sees it in his joy;
The youth, who daily farther from the East
Must travel, still is Nature's priest,
And by the vision splendid
Is on his way attended;
At length the Man perceives it die away
And fade into the light of common day. (Wordsworth, in Moffett,

1994, p. 278)

Theories of education often view children as "less" and being educated into "more".

Childhood was considered a time of unreason and, therefore, of weakness.

Wordsworth turns the picture around--the child is born with 'more' and turns into

'less'. By adulthood, the "prison-house" closes in and the capacity to experience the world with wonder and awe is lost.

Rabindranath Tagore was an Indian poet who wrote *Gitanjali* also known as *Song Offerings*, for which he won a Nobel Prize in the early 1900s. Tagore writes, "A child is in his natural setting amidst the flowers and the songbirds. There he may more easily express the hidden wealth of his individual endowment. True education is not pumped and crammed in from outward sources, but aids in bringing to the surface the infinite hoard of wisdom within" (R. Tagore, in *Autobiography of a Yogi*, 1971, p. 269). He describes his own early educational experiences as a struggle to work in the confines of a dreary and disciplinary atmosphere. For Tagore, one is born with wisdom and an innate capacity for understanding the spiritual world; therefore, the classroom should be a place where the intuitive sensitivities of the child are engaged not dampened. Tagore founded a village school with his prize winnings. In this school he stressed expression of children's creative spirits through literature and poetry, music and song. Other features of Tagore's school included outdoor instruction, simplicity, and time for silence and contemplation. In Tagore's opinion, there is infinite inner wisdom in young children which certain conditions, such as time spent in nature, will help to unfold.

These poets show great respect for childhood. It is a period of sacred knowledge and should be venerated. It is a time in one's life where moments of eternity and transcendence are most easily experienced. There is also a caution not to lose this sense of spirituality, lest in the words of Wordsworth, "it die away and fade into the light of common day".

PSYCHOLOGISTS' NOTIONS OF CHILDHOOD SPIRITUALITY

Where poets contemplate childhood spiritual experience, psychologists give us an idea of the importance of these inner experiences and their influences on later development in adulthood.

Sigmund Freud, born in 1856, is considered to be the "father" of modern psychology even though his theories of self-gratification as the guiding force of human actions have lost much practical regard today. Freud disclaimed religion and spiritual matters as a waste of time and as a crutch. For him, childhood was a time where our lowest most animalistic impulses were strongest. The child was only interested in satisfying his or her own wishes and pleasures. The spiritual life was simply an illusion.

Carl Jung, Freud's "disciple" was born in 1875. Jung was more sympathetic than Freud towards questions of a mystical nature and they parted company in this regard. In his autobiography, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, Jung talks about the wealth and depth of the inner life. His book is a reflection of his own childhood experiences, dreams, and visions. In the chapter devoted to his first years, Jung describes a philosophical wonderment that occurred in his childhood. He writes,

I am sitting on top of this stone and it is underneath. But the stone could also say ' I ' and think: 'I am lying here on this slope and he is sitting on top of me.' The question then arose 'Am I the one who is sitting on the stone, or am I the stone on which *he* is sitting?

Jung reflects on that childhood puzzlement as a thirty year old with a family, a house, and a place in the world and thinks,

. . . suddenly I was again the child who had kindled a fire full of secret significance and sat down on a stone without knowing whether it was I or I was it . . . This was frightening, he writes, for the world of my childhood in which I had just become absorbed was eternal, and I had been wrenched

away from it and had fallen into a time that continued to roll onward, moving farther and farther away . . . I have never forgotten that moment, for it illuminated in a flash of lightening the quality of eternity in my childhood. (Jung, 1961, p. 20)

According to Jung, inner experiences of childhood exist and influence the adult life.

Abraham Maslow, born in 1908, seems to be among the first of the psychologists to formally recognize that children have transcendent moments, or as he coined them, "peak experiences". Borrowing the idea of self-actualization from Jung, Maslow describes peak experiences as moments in our lives when we feel the most inspired, awake, fulfilled, and exalted. He speculates that some children are perhaps more disposed than others to such visionary episodes. Unfortunately, he died before conducting research on childhood spirituality.

In the 1970s, Dr. Anna -Maria Rizzuto, an American psychologist and author of *The Birth of the Living God*, writes that psychoanalysis is optimally suited to study the spiritual life because it attends to the development of the mind. The task of the mind according to Rizzuto is to create an exclusive and unique sense of personal self. For her, play is a key characteristic of the human mind. "In Rizzuto's view, it is in the nature of human beings, from early childhood until the last breath, to sift and sort, and to play, first with toys and games and teddy bears and animals, then with ideas and words and images and sounds and notions" (Coles, 1990, p. 6). Rizzuto connects the type of exploratory play and thinking that children do with religious thinking implying that at the bottom of it all is the desire to answer the question: What is the meaning of life? (Coles, 1990, p. 8).

Robert Coles, physician, psychologist, and author, is one of the first people to observe and record children's spiritual experiences from the child's point of view. In his book, *The Spiritual Life of Children*, he recounts several conversations, encounters, and friendships with children of a multiplicity of backgrounds. His work is a rich and diverse reflection of what children believe and how they come to express

their spiritual nature. For Coles, young children do wonder about, sift, and sort through spiritual matters, though it is often difficult for adults to see.

Often, for instance, we are told, on the basis of questions given to children in a school or a social scientist's office, that young people can or cannot understand one or another line of reasoning. No doubt those claims are true - but what a child may not show comprehension of in a formal, academic setting, in choosing among multiple choice alternatives, that child may well think about and talk about in his or her own manner and time. . . . So often our notions of what a child is able to understand are based on the capacity the child has displayed in a structured situation. (Coles, 1990, p. 23)

Spiritual revelations, reflections, and experiences are often fleeting in duration though they are no less meaningful or important. And as stated previously, the transcendent and personal nature of spirituality limits somewhat the discussion of spiritual ideas, especially, as Coles reports, in structured situations. Nevertheless, it is his opinion that spirituality in childhood expresses itself through moments of intense visionary experience as well as through the ordinary moments of living.

EDUCATORS' NOTIONS OF CHILDHOOD SPIRITUALITY

Alfred North Whitehead, mathematician and educator said in 1922, "The claim for freedom in education carries with it the corollary that the development of the whole personality must be attended to" (Whitehead, 1949, p. 51). Personalized holistic learning has been advocated by many people since the 18th Century starting with Jean Jacques Rousseau, Johann Pestalozzi and Friedrich Froebel. The child centred approach to education was reworked later in different ways by other educators such as Maria Montessori, Rudolph Steiner, and John Dewey. These educators were concerned with the growth of all aspects of the child: intellectual, physical, emotional, social, and spiritual. I would like to focus on only one educator in this chapter, namely, Maria Montessori, because she specifically addresses the spirituality of children. A more complete review of childhood spirituality in education will be addressed in Chapter Three.

Dr. Montessori was an Italian doctor and a university lecturer. She successfully entered the world of medicine at a time when women were discouraged from doing so. Montessori held many roles in her life: university lecturer, feminist, political activist, and family person. She worked both with the mentally challenged and with underprivileged children. Her discoveries working with children led her to articulate a child centred theory of teaching and this idea lay the groundwork for some meaningful changes to the school system. She also outlined specific recommendations for adults to help foster a child's spiritual development.

According to her son Mario Montessori, Italian psychologists and educators in the early 1900s attributed negative characteristics to childhood; children were irresponsible, inattentive, slovenly, dirty, greedy, and disorderly. It was with this negative view of childhood that Dr. Montessori began her work in 1907 with a group of underprivileged children from a poor Italian community. She set up a learning environment for these "savage" youngsters and her work with these children profoundly changed her life. To her amazement, the children were not savage at all, they were cooperative, curious, and caring individuals.

Following her experience with these children, Montessori left her medical practice, university position, and family to devote herself to her own spiritual development. The school became a centre of pilgrimage. "People came, crossing the oceans, crossing the continents, to see the discovery of the human soul. Her school made such an impact that by 1912 the Communist party at a congress in Geneva, declared it one of the human rights to be educated by the Montessori method, while Christian people were speaking with praise about the 'converted children' because it looked as though they had been converted" (Mario Montessori, 1961, p. 51).

What surprised Dr. Montessori was that these children had not been converted at all; they were by nature the essence of spirituality. She believed that

adults only need to create the proper atmosphere and children's higher nature will unfold and express itself. She felt that by giving children learning materials and opportunities to explore, they will work studiously, independently, and calmly in peace and with empathy for one another. She believed that spirituality cannot be taught. Spirituality is there, but to keep it, just as to keep the body, you must continue to feed it from birth. She believed that children are influenced at certain right ages or moments in life. She suggests that:

Children up to three or four years need protection. Practice in prayer is recommended for this stage. At seven or eight years of age, children feel the need to distinguish between what is good and what is bad. This is the time to teach Commandments, religion, and things like that. At puberty, society makes an impact of the heart therefore opportunities for social work is recommended. As an adult, one no longer feels concerned with one little part of society; you feel a responsible member of the world. Then you have the possibility of doing your part for the whole of humanity, not for one little part of it. So these are the phases, and how to keep the child's spirituality alive is by giving them the possibility to practise it. (Montessori, 1961, p. 62)

Montessori is an important person to discuss regarding childhood spirituality because she emphasizes the important role that adults can play to support and to guide the spiritual nature of the child.

PHILOSOPHICAL NOTIONS OF CHILDHOOD SPIRITUALITY

Gareth Matthews is an American philosopher interested in philosophical thinking in childhood. For Matthews, young children are natural philosophers. In his view, childhood wonder and philosophy are connected in the playful pursuit of understanding the mysterious.

In his newest book, *The Philosophy of Childhood*, he suggests that the current theories of childhood development limit our notions of childhood, so much so that one is *surprised* that children think philosophically. Matthews challenges Jean Piaget who believed that logical reasoning in young children was not quite developed

until age eleven or twelve. Matthews believes that many current maturational and stage related theories of development do not leave room for the child philosopher. He notes "there is no reason whatsoever to suppose that, simply by virtue of growing up in some standard way, adults naturally achieve an appropriate level of maturity in handling philosophical questions" (Matthews, 1994, p. 17).

He says that it is the child, more so than the adult, who is capable of fresh and insightful comments and questions, qualities which are much to be prized in philosophy. "Children are often fresh and inventive thinkers. All too often, maturity brings with it staleness and uninventiveness. This is another reason for rejecting the stage/maturational model of child development" (Matthews, 1994, p.18). Matthews does not outline a new theory of childhood, he simply points out that the conventional views of development through a sequence of age-related stages are perhaps distorted and limiting. His work in childhood philosophy is important because he shows not only that children ponder spiritual and philosophical puzzlements, but also that philosophy provides a natural centre of interest for some young children which is an essential precursor to the development of reason.

DEFINITIONS OF CHILDHOOD SPIRITUALITY

It is difficult to define spirituality, for it does not lend itself well to be captured by language. Spirituality can be a 'red light' issue, especially in the classroom, because there is often assumed to be a very close association between religion and spirituality; however, where religions are culturally formed and instituted, the spiritual life is personal. A spiritual life does not depend on formal religion, but spirituality may be what all religions share. Nevertheless, they both share the same idea of connectedness. In French, religion or 're - lier', means to re-tie, re-connect, or bind. I remember a poster where T.S. Eliot was quoted as saying "Hell is a place where

nothing connects". Heaven, then, is a sense of unity, belonging, and connectedness.

Spirit is also an ambiguous term with a wealth of meanings. In French, the term for spirit is 'esprit' meaning either spirit, ghost, or mind. The word "spirit" is also associated with the idea of breath; *inspiration* is breathing in, *aspiration* is breathing out, and *conspiration* is breathing together. With the idea of breath is the idea of life, for one cannot live if one cannot breathe. Spirit can refer to alcoholic beverages or can mean courage, liveliness, or the predominant attitude in a social group. The term is also used in relation to the idea of God such as in Holy Spirit for example. Spirituality can be thought of as one's essential or true self. Spirituality can also be seen in psychological terms of increased awareness, relatedness, openness, and transcendence. In children, one sees many of these qualities. As Maria Montessori believed, children in their innocence and wonder, are the very essence of spirituality.

When Jesus says "Unless you turn and become like children you will never enter the kingdom of heaven", I believe he was not referring to infantile or irresponsible behaviour, but rather to the child's sense of innocence and wonder. Young children show this sense of wonder as a heightened aliveness, interest, openness, and awareness, which is a spirituality of sorts. The capacity for and experience of wonder is a quality shared by humanity's greatest artists and scientists such as Mozart and Einstein, and, as Goethe has said, "The highest to which man can ever attain is wonder." If one talks of spirituality as awareness and aliveness, teachers can help to foster spirituality by keeping alive in children the sense of wonder, magic, and imagination in the classroom.

IN THE CLASSROOM

On the cover of British Columbia's 1990 Primary Program pamphlet is the caption *Children in the Primary Years . . . A Time of Wonder*. However, the main

focus in British Columbian elementary schools over the past two years has been on mundane skills. The engagement of wonder, imagination, and spirituality is difficult to address within the confines of a skills-driven classroom. Children's intuitive knowledge is somehow dismissed in the rush to acquire formal and disciplinary knowledge. When educators focus primarily on skills without deep understanding or engagement of the child's nature and interests, the results can be disastrous. To be loaded up with knowledge and not to understand the meaning and place of that knowledge is fractured learning. To disregard young children's sense of wonder and intuitive sensitivities in the early grades by immersing them too quickly into the adult's world of logic, reason, and literacy, seems wrong. Taking children farther away from their 'essential self' in the often disconnected rush to acquire academic skill may risk creating Wordsworth's "prison house".

Howard Gardner supports this argument:

Human beings have a tremendous capacity to learn and develop, as can easily be seen if one watches a child actively exploring his environment during the first years of life. . . . The problem is less a difficulty in school learning per se and more a problem in integrating the notational and conceptual knowledge featured in school with the robust forms of intuitive knowledge that have evolved spontaneously during the opening years of life. If we can find ways in which to help students synthesize their several forms of knowing, we should be in a position to educate students for understanding. (Gardner, 1991, p. 250)

If one interprets Gardner's idea of intuitive knowledge to mean inner or spiritual knowledge, it is clear that he is also not in favour of a purely skills - driven education. Educators might think of how to integrate the child's sense of wonder and intuitive reasoning with the adult's ability to reason logically and in this way preserve the "most remarkable features of the young mind - its adventurousness, its generativity, its resourcefulness, and its flashes of flexibility and creativity" (Gardner, 1991, p.111).

Teachers can try to impart clearer understanding of the curriculum subjects they teach by engaging the child's sense of magic and mystery as outlined by Kieran

Egan in *Teaching as Story Telling*. Egan says "The development of literacy, and of knowledge in general, must take place in such a way that its forms and conventions do not obliterate the child's earliest sense of his or her unique consciousness. Rather, accumulating knowledge and capacities must become agencies for articulation and expression of that sense of consciousness" (Egan, 1988, p.192). Allowing children time to ponder, to reflect, and to immerse themselves in their interests with the guidance and respect of sensitive and caring teachers is critical to education.

The religious scripture and poetry, as well as the stories of the psychologists, philosophers, and educators briefly discussed in this chapter support the notion that early childhood is a spiritually sensitive period of one's life; unfortunately, the splendor of the young child's inner reality risks being lost in the acquisition of rational thought. In order not to lose this sense of spirituality, educators might, in the teaching of disciplinary knowledge, engage the child's sense of wonder with the skills of reason more often in the classroom. When I look back at the postcard of the young girl gazing at the feather, I reflect on the scripture, poems, and ideas of those who have pondered spiritual qualities of childhood and think about the delicate relationship between wonder and rationality in one's search for understanding the meaning of life.

Chapter Three

CHILDHOOD SPIRITUALITY IN THE HISTORY OF EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

Plato believed that society depends on the character of those who compose and govern it. Characters are not born, he would say, but made. One is “made” through education. For Plato, the true purpose of education should lead to a spiritual knowledge or vision of the Divine, or, in his words, the “Idea of the Good”. With the development of spirituality comes the enlightenment of one’s soul and the creation of a just society.

Spiritual development in children is not a recognized component of the current education system. Public schools in British Columbia today focus primarily on acquiring knowledge and learning skills which lead to practical vocation. It is true that without skills and knowledge civilization cannot exist as we know it. However, one’s inner or spiritual life--what Plato calls the knowledge of good and evil--is mostly ignored. Students are provided with the tools of civilization but are given little guidance for their use or sense of their purposes beyond the mundane.

In this chapter, I will look at the history of spirituality in education. I shall use the definition of spirituality given in Chapter Two. Briefly, spirituality is defined as that which reveals the soul. Soul is that element of God within oneself that is eternal and unchanging. Soul bridges the split between mind and body, material and spiritual. Spirituality can be seen in psychological terms of increased awareness, relatedness, openness, and transcendence. Spirituality can give depth, meaning, and beauty in one’s life. A spiritual life does not depend on formal religion, but spirituality may be what all religions share. Dewey identified spirituality as experiences that have a

profound unifying effect on the self and on the self in relation to its world. He wrote that a true conception of the spiritual ideal would include both the western ethical ideal of service and concern for social progress on the one hand, and the eastern ideal of aesthetic appreciation and meditation on the other (Dewey, "Some Factors in Mutual National Understanding", in Rockefeller, 1991, p. 49).

Connection of self and world, freedom, harmony, peace, attentiveness, and moral faith are components of the spiritual life. The language of the spiritual life is poetry, image, and wonder which may be fostered by such things as philosophical insight, natural piety, mystical intuition, and appreciation of nature and of art (Rockefeller, 1991, p.491). Christ says in the New Testament "Unless you turn and become like children you will never enter the kingdom of heaven". He seems to suggest that childhood innocence and the capacity of wonder is the very essence of spirituality.

I begin by looking at current legislation in B.C. regarding the teaching of religious and spiritual ideas in the classroom. I then divide this chapter into two parts: one, a brief historical review of the aims of education with regard to spirituality; and two, a more detailed examination of childhood spirituality in the history of education as addressed by Plato, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Johann Pestalozzi, Friedrich Froebel, William Wordsworth, Maria Montessori, Rabindranath Tagore, John Dewey, and Robert Coles.

CURRENT LEGISLATION

In 1967, I was a Grade One student at Maple Grove Elementary School in Vancouver, British Columbia. The class began each day with the Lord's prayer;

however, in respect for a growing multicultural society, classroom prayer in this school ended in 1968. In 1989, British Columbia officially adopted the Supreme Court Ruling forbidding religious teachings or influences. The classroom is not the appropriate place to promote one religion over another; however, with the dismissal of religious observations in the public school system went the recognition of the child's inner or spiritual nature. The mission statement of the British Columbia school system in 1989 was the acquisition of "knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to contribute to a healthy society and a prosperous and sustainable economy." In 1995, the focus is primarily on skills and applicable vocation. The *Skills Now!* curriculum is single-minded in its determination to develop skills for future vocation in the work force, leaving little recognition of a child's spiritual life.

AIMS OF EDUCATION - THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOUL

Plato believed that with the development of one's mind, comes the development of one's soul. He felt that the purification of one's reasoning powers would allow one to perceive the realm of the gods, or as he would call it, "the World of Ideas". Plato's fifty year curriculum was designed to develop the soul, which in turn would develop a good and just society.

Plato believed that the soul is a fallen deity caught in a physical body and doomed to cycles of rebirth. In *The Myth of Er*, he writes that each person had at one time beheld their divine nature--this being a condition of the soul passing into the form of a human being (*The Republic*, trans. Cornford, 1968, p. 348). But not everyone recalls their memory of the eternal realm; "they have lost the memory of the holy things which they once saw. Few only retain an adequate remembrance of them;

and they, when they behold here (on earth) any image of that other world, are rapt in amazement; but they are ignorant of what this rapture means, because they do not clearly perceive" (*Phaedrus*, trans. Jowett, 1968, p. 165). Humans, in their ignorance, are "imprisoned in their body, like an oyster in his shell."

His curriculum was designed to sharpen one's intellect, and in his opinion, the purification of the mind would develop the soul at the same time. Plato's pupils study and memorize the works of the great poets so that they may see what human greatness is and try to imitate it. Children learn music so that it may mold their soul to rhythm and harmony. Children learn math, not for immediate practical value, but so that they accustom the mind, through their abstract forms, to look beyond the corporeal world to that of the eternal. Games and physical training are not for mere sport, but for tuning the body and mind to a perfect spiritual harmony. Children study astronomy and harmonics because they lead to knowledge of beauty and goodness. The ultimate goal behind each of Plato's subject areas is the development of the soul.

For Plato, the true purpose of education was the enlightenment of the human being. With an enlightened populous would come the added bonus of a good and just society. He was interested in the happiness and freedom of the individual. He was devoted to this goal, although the good and just society he wished for would not materialize during his lifetime. Plato leaves educators a legacy stressing the importance of the acquisition of knowledge, but he also leaves educators with the idea that the ultimate aim of education is the spiritual development of the individual. Sadly, the latter is currently neglected if reflected upon at all.

In 529 A.D., following the fall of the Roman empire, the Christian church closed Plato's Academy in Athens. Also in 529 A.D., the Benedictine order--the first of the great monastic orders--was founded. The Christian church would challenge Greek philosophy. Monasteries would have a near monopoly on education. Formal education was very largely religious in nature. During the Middle Ages, Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225 -1274) argued that one can reach truths through both Christian faith *and* through reason and senses. In this way, Aquinas married Christian doctrine with Platonic and, more particularly, Aristotelian beliefs on the nature of divine reality.

The development of one's soul was an important component of educational philosophy during the Middle Ages; however, by the time of Descartes in the early sixteenth century, religious beliefs would be challenged by growing acceptance and enthusiasm for empirical study. The new scientific paradigm would demote the soul as a critical and powerful component of human nature; less emphasis would be placed on the development of soul as a main goal of education. Educators and poets of the seventeenth century such as Thomas Traherne would be the next to discuss the child's spiritual life and to align the child's inner life with education.

CHILDHOOD SPIRITUALITY IN THE HISTORY OF EDUCATION

John Locke was born in 1632 in England. He studied humanities, and later, medicine at Oxford University. Locke wrote his ideas on education in a series of informal letters intended to help his friend, Edward Clarke, with the upbringing of his son. These letters were published in a book called *Thoughts Concerning Education*. The book was published in 1693; it is Locke's only book dealing expressly with education.

Locke's work is important because he argues that the *individual* should be the educator's main concern. Locke looked at scholastic questions through the eyes of a physician; children were individual cases to be taught by a method most suited to their temper and conditions. Previously, educators worked on the assumption that education is a more or less uniform process in which the same subjects taught in the same way would produce the same effect. However, Locke understood that there can be no true education which does not adapt itself to the nature of the learner (Boyd, 1914, p.27).

Locke describes children as "travellers newly arrived in a strange country of which they know nothing; we should therefore make conscience not to mislead them" (Locke, in Garforth, p. 173). Teachers should treat children respectfully and remember that "though their questions seem sometimes not very material, they should be seriously answered" (Locke, in Garforth, 1964, p.173). Locke's wish was to teach students with love and respect rather than under fear and oppression. He says, ". . . if their spirits be abased and broken much by too strict a hand over them, they lose all their vigour and industry . . . keep up a child's spirit easy, active and free, and yet at the same time restrain him from many things he has a mind to and to draw him to things that are uneasy to him . . . For all their innocent folly, playing and childish actions are to be left perfectly free and unrestrained, as far as they can consist with the respect due to those that are present, and that with the greatest allowance" (Locke, in Garforth, 1964, p. 64, 65). Locke also suggests that if children are allowed time to "ripen," they would escape a great deal of misapplied and useless correction. Locke felt that educators should treat children with respect and associate study with pleasure.

Like Plato, Locke is also concerned about good and evil, saying, "All the plays and diversions of children should be directed towards good and useful habits. . . . Whatever they do leaves some impression on that tender age, and from thence they receive a tendency to good or evil" (Locke, in Garforth, 1964, p. 49). As a physician and as a Christian, Locke was bound to the idea that knowledge was possible through both reason and intuitive revelation. With regard to the spirit, he writes:

Natural philosophy being the knowledge of the principles, properties and operations of things as they are in themselves, I imagine there are two parts of it, one comprehending spirits, with their nature and qualities, and the other bodies. The first of these is usually referred to as metaphysics; but under what title soever the consideration of spirits comes, I think it ought to go before the study of matter and body, not as a science that can be methodized into a system and treated of upon principles of knowledge, but as an enlargement of our minds towards a truer and fuller comprehension of the intellectual world to which we are led by reason and revelation. (Locke, in Garforth, 1964, p. 213)

For Locke, the study of spirit leads to an enlargement of mind and therefore to a greater understanding of the intellectual world.

Locke believed, as did Plato, in dividing society into classes each of which had "different" educational needs. Locke also subscribed to the notion of the child as a blank slate; however, his child-centred belief--that each child was valuable and unique--became an important democratic principle which recognizes childhood spirituality as defined by individuality, uniqueness, and freedom of spirit.

The idea of child-centred learning is reintroduced by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his novel *Emile*, published in 1762. Rousseau built on Locke's ideas by incorporating the principle of individuality into his philosophy of education. For Rousseau, all learning should begin with an understanding of the child. If learning was to be meaningful, one must consult the child's individual nature, disposition, and interests. Rousseau transfers attention away from the *educator* and the *acquisition of*

knowledge to that of the *learner* and the *process of knowing*. According to Rousseau, it is neither curriculum nor the method of instruction that should be an educator's central interest, but rather the nature of the learner's mind and the manner of its reaction to what is taught (Boyd, 1914, p. 46).

Rousseau writes in the preface to *Emile* "Childhood is unknown. Starting from the false idea one has of it, the farther one goes, the more one loses one's way. The wisest men concentrate on what it is important for men to know without considering what children are in a condition to learn. They are always seeking the man in the child without thinking of what he is before a man" (Rousseau, in Bloom, 1979, p. 33). Like Locke, Rousseau tries to understand the child whom he proposes to teach. With a change of focus towards child-centred teaching, it became necessary to understand the nature of childhood.

Rousseau turned the Christian doctrine of original sin on its head because he believed children were born "good" and were corrupted by the evils of society. Rousseau's idea of self-love is a critical component of his education philosophy. Everything his pupil, Emile, learns will be built upon self-love, i.e., the desire for self preservation and the fear of death. The natural operation of self-love is an affair of the heart. One of Rousseau's primary goals for Emile's education was that he live fully; he is encouraged to live in accordance with his nature, undaunted by the conflict and evil of society. Reason in the development of the human being is not as important for Rousseau as it was for Plato. Reason, Rousseau argued, understands only objects in the worlds of things and alienates people from their true self.

With regards to teachers, Rousseau says in Book IV "I see only one good means of preserving children in their innocence; it is for all those who surround them

to respect and to love it. Without that, all the restraint one tries to use with them is sooner or later belied” (Rousseau, *Emile*, trans. by Bloom, 1979, p. 217). The educator’s role is to honour and build upon the “natural goodness” of the pupils they teach. Rousseau believed that children develop in stages. Teachers should be sensitive to the different stages of childhood and allow the child’s nature to guide the learning process.

In sum, Rousseau’s goal was to develop Emile’s true self, untarnished by the influence of society. With the freedom to follow his true nature, Rousseau’s pupil is someone who “does not let himself get carried away by either the passions or opinions of men . . .” Rousseau ensures that Emile “sees with his eyes, that he feel with his heart, that no authority govern him beyond that of his own reason” (Rousseau, *Emile*, trans. by Bloom, 1979, p. 255). Rousseau believed that a child’s nature is essentially good; one is “born free” and should follow the dictates of nature to develop fully as a human being.

Johann Pestalozzi was born in Switzerland in 1764. He became interested in politics and social reform as a young man. He was influenced by Rousseau’s *Emile* and the *Social Contract*. He was also influenced by his grandfather who was a pastor and educator of poor village children. After several failed attempts at an agricultural career and as a social worker, he became a successful writer. Pestalozzi would become interested in education as a result of his deep social consciousness. Towards the end of his life, he brought his theory of education to life and establish schools in Stans, Burgdorf, and Yverdon. His most famous work on education is *Gertrude Teaches her Children*, published in 1801. In this book, Pestalozzi outlines his basic principles of education.

Pestalozzi saw the newborn child as a seed which already contained the essence of one's personality and intelligence. He did not see the child as a stone onto which parents and educators could carve their desired image. Pestalozzi wanted to introduce a new system of education which would take into account the child's potential to develop mentally, physically, and spiritually (Heafford, 1967, p. 41). His method was more a philosophical concept rather than a practical methodology. He writes "People are completely mistaken in assuming without good reason that my aims are limited to facilitating the elementary skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic. They are not! My purpose does not stop here but probes deeply into the very essence of higher education and into the most thorough investigation of human nature itself" (Pestalozzi, *Samtliche Briefe*, in Heafford, 1967, p. 41).

He was opposed to rote learning and memorization. He spoke out against the cruelty and severe disciplinary methods of Switzerland schoolmasters. Rousseau's ideas on nature echo throughout Pestalozzi's work. "Suddenly the whole of nature around them is made to vanish from their sight, the attractive expression of their spontaneity and their freedom is tyrannically stopped; shoved into groups they are thrown like sheep into a stinking room, they are chained mercilessly for hours, days, weeks, months, and years, and forced to look at miserable, unattractive, and monotonous letters and to follow a whole way of life capable of driving them mad, so different is it from their previous existence" (Pestalozzi, *Samtliche Werke*, in Heafford, 1967, p.41). Pestalozzi believed education must harmonize with the natural instincts and desires of children. Schools seem to stunt originality and imagination, instead of acting with nature and encouraging the child. According to Pestalozzi, formal

education became a form of punishment for the young child; school was harsh contrast to one's first five carefree years of life.

Like Plato, Pestalozzi believed that education was not simply a matter of teaching children skills and vocations but of improving society and enabling individuals to live a full and harmonious life (Heafford, 1967, p.16). Children lived in a conceptual and emotional world different from adulthood. The more one could understand about a child's inner life, the more effective one would be at creating teaching methods designed to guide the natural processes of growth. Pestalozzi is important not only because he recognized the inner life of the child, but also for his methodologies which reflected this realization. His principles of education were acknowledged throughout Europe.

Influenced by Johann Pestalozzi is the German educator Friedrich Froebel. Froebel was born in 1782. He is commonly known as the founder of the Kindergarten. Froebel writes with a passionate love of childhood and of humanity in general. He was influenced not only by the great eighteenth century German thinkers of the time such as Goethe, Kant, and Hegel, but also by his own childhood memories.

His childhood was unhappy. His mother died when he was nine months old. His overworked father remarried a woman whom the young Froebel disliked. He writes in *Leben*, his autobiography, "Early was I plunged into the painful and oppressive struggle of life; and an unnatural life and a defective education exercised their influence upon me" (Froebel, *Leben*, in Fletcher, 1912, p. 2). Froebel devoted himself to save other children from similar depressing experiences. Froebel, like Rousseau, idealized nature. Nature was deified as the manifestation of the Divine.

This romantic view of nature marked another rebellion of the human spirit against the formal and artificial conventionalities of the eighteenth century, it gave another form of expression to the new demand for human freedom (Froebel, *Leben*, in Fletcher, 1912, p. 5).

Froebel's spiritual beliefs were pantheistic. Contrary to the orthodox Christian idea that God was 'high above all nations' Froebel believed that God is in everything and everything is God. His theory of education is based on this belief. Froebel believed that the educative process is a continual reaction of the individual on his or her surroundings, "a making of the outer inner, and the inner outer" (Froebel, in Fletcher, 1912, p. 10). His philosophy of education was condemned by the Lutheran church. In 1851, the Prussian government prohibited his Kindergarten schools.

Froebel outlines his theory of education in both *Leben* and the unfinished *The Education of Human Nature*, published in 1826. Primary in his work is the idea that all true development, and thus all true education, is a self-directed process; instruction should be passive and protective not directive and interfering. He says "Education must be passive and protective rather than directive, otherwise the free and conscious revelation of the divine spirit in man--which is the free development of the human race--is lost" (Froebel, in Fletcher, 1912, p.18). Froebel felt that formal education should not hinder the child's divine spirit.

Froebel outlines in specific terms a spiritual goal of education. His theory of education is built upon the idea that an eternal law or divine unity pervades and governs all things. This eternal unity is God whose divine spirit is found everywhere including in nature and in humankind. It is the function of human beings to reveal and exercise one's divine spirit. For Froebel, the true purpose of education is the

“realization of a faithful, inviolate, and therefore holy life.” In *The Education of Human Nature*, he writes, “Education, then, must develop the divine spirit in man and make him conscious of it, so that his life may become a free expression of that spirit” (Froebel, in Fletcher, 1912, p. 32). According to Froebel, the goal of education is unity with God. He would reject the notion that one’s education and labours were only to gain in material wealth. Froebel strongly believed in spiritual enlightenment as a goal of education.

Froebel recognized the potential of the child’s spiritual life which he believed one must develop in infancy. Like Locke, Froebel offers a detailed recommendation of child care including ideas on clothing, food, room temperatures, discipline, and development of the senses and body, everything of which was designed to foster the spiritual growth of the child. For example, the child’s spiritual nature should be allowed full expression in play. Formal education should begin only after the child has identified with his divine nature.

Froebel, like Rousseau, discusses childhood growth in terms of stages; however, each stage in the child’s life is important unto itself; “It is not the reaching a conventional age which makes him boy or youth or man, but the having so lived through childhood, and subsequently through boyhood and youth, that in each stage he has truly satisfied the needs of his whole being, whether they be intellectual, emotional, or physical” (Froebel, in Fletcher, 1912, p.41) Neglect in any stage would show its consequences in adult life.

Though Froebel’s ideas were often seen as overly sentimental and in confrontation with the official Christian doctrine of the time, his goals of education were noble and his treatment of children was respectful and kind.

William Wordsworth, born in 1770, also viewed childhood as a hallowed period of one's life. Wordsworth's ode *Intimations of Immortality From Recollections of Early Childhood* provides a rare and beautiful vision of childhood:

There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,
The earth, and every common sight,
To me did seem
Appareled in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream.
It is not now as it hath been of yore-
Turn whereso'er I may,
By night or day,
The things which I have seen I now can see no more.
(Wordsworth, in *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, 1983, p. 551)

Children have not yet forgotten their heavenly roots and are able to experience the realm of the eternal easily, most especially in nature.

For Wordsworth, childhood is a time when perceptions are full of wonder. Everything is vivid and alive in childhood. In many ways, the child possesses the beginner's mind of Zen as defined by openness and heightened awareness. Unfortunately, the heaven that surrounds us in our infancy disappears in adulthood. In time, the child loses the brightness in which they see the world and the "prison-house" closes in. The capacity to experience the world with wonder and awe is lost. Wordsworth is one of few people to offer this exalted view of childhood. For Wordsworth, one must keep alive the faculty of imagination if one is to live an enriched life and keep alive the capacity of wonder and awe.

Almost one hundred years later, Maria Montessori would apply a child-centred philosophy in her teaching methodologies. Montessori, like Locke, was a physician. Beginning in 1898, she would observe and work with both mentally disabled and healthy children. Her work with the mentally disabled children led her to study and

employ teaching strategies developed by Jean Marc Itard and Eduard Seguin. Sensory and muscular training, she believed, would help her to educate mentally disabled students. She would later use these same successful teaching methodologies to educate "normal children."

While working with children, she discovered the importance of giving them freedom to explore their world. "In trying to educate in accordance with the observed characters of her pupils she saw that it was best both for her as experimental educator and for the children with whom she was dealing that there should be the utmost possible liberty, and she set herself to devise means of training which would fulfill this condition" (Boyd, 1914, p. 139).

Montessori would first define freedom as "biological". Like Rousseau, Pestalozzi, and Froebel, she saw the child as a being who grows by means of an inner impulse. The child's inner nature should be left to unfold in proper succession and with minimal intrusion on the part of the adult. Montessori then aligned freedom with independence. "No one," she says, "can be free unless he is independent; therefore the child's individual liberty must be guided that through this activity he may arrive at independence" (Boyd, 1914, p. 142).

Based on this idea of independence, she replaced fixed benches with lightweight furniture in order that children could manipulate and organize their environment themselves. Her definition of freedom grew to encompass the idea of independence; freedom would now have a more sociological meaning. Children were encouraged to make decisions for themselves. Freedom in learning was commended; coercion was unacceptable. Each child would work at his or her own

pace and level of understanding. Freedom and independence became essential concepts in Montessori's education philosophy.

John Dewey was also a proponent of child-centred teaching and experiential learning. Dewey was born in Vermont in 1859. He combines the romantic theories of education with pragmatic and socially progressive ideals. For Dewey, all education is a social process: "the only true education comes through the stimulation of the child's powers by the demands of the social situation in which he finds himself" (Dewey, *My Pedagogic Creed*, in Rockefeller, 1991, p. 250). Unlike Rousseau, who sought to educate Emile in an environment void of social relationships, Dewey felt that social relationships were paramount. Dewey's school was set up as a simplified version of real life, a democratic and social environment in which one learns through experience. He says "the school should be a place in which the child should really live, and get a life-experience in which he should really delight and find meaning for its own sake" (Dewey, *My Pedagogic Creed*, in Rockefeller, 1991, p. 251). School curriculum should unite the learning process with the child's present needs.

Dewey recommended that children experience a learning environment in which they could make significant and meaningful connections to their own lives. Education is a development "within, by, and for experience". The child's own experience is a learning resource. He rejected authoritarian methods of teaching and punishment based on fear as undemocratic in spirit (Rockefeller, 1991, p. 255). Teachers should guide groups of children in their discoveries and experiences, rather than impose impersonal objectives to which the children must attain. Unlike traditional education where the focus is on objective knowledge, children are free to construct knowledge that is personally meaningful. Dewey challenged students to

solve practical problems arising from their daily experience. His goal for children was to develop an authentic understanding of their world. Dewey was neither traditional nor romantic. He stressed the importance of both child *and* experience--experience which would lead to further growth, to further experiencing, and enriched living.

For Dewey, growth is a characteristic of life. He elaborates "Since growth is the characteristic of life, education is all one with growing; it has no end beyond itself" (Dewey, 1916, p. 53). He views growth as that which expands and enriches living. For him, growth is a move toward intelligent living where one learns from past experience in order to live and continue learning in the present. In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey points out that with children emphasis on the future fails to awaken interest and to generate motivation (Rockefeller, 1991, p. 428). "Children proverbially live in the present . . . that is not only a fact to be evaded but an excellence" (Dewey, "Self-Realization as the Moral Ideal", in Rockefeller, 1991, p. 428). Dewey recognized that the spiritual principle of living in the here and now had its greatest expression in childhood.

Dewey was also interested in the education of the whole child. His concern was the development not only of a child's intellect, but also of a child's character, attitude, and emotions. In *Democracy and Education* he writes "We may say that the kind of experience to which the work of the schools should contribute is one marked by executive competency in the management of resources and obstacles encountered (efficiency); by sociability, or interest in the direct companionship of others; by aesthetic taste or capacity to appreciate artistic excellence in at least some of its classic forms; by trained intellectual method, or interest in some mode of scientific achievement; and by sensitiveness to the rights and claims of others--

conscientiousness" (Dewey, 1916, p. 243). For Dewey, the child's intellectual development, social-emotional development, and aesthetic and artistic development were of equal importance.

Dewey spoke about children's spiritual growth at a conference for the Religious Education Association. His address was entitled "The Relation of Modern Psychology to Religious Education." Dewey did not write extensively on religious education; however, in 1908, he did write an article entitled "Religion and Our Schools" which was published in a New York journal. He wrote that a child's religious life should not be measured in adult terms. He says, the child is treated as "an abbreviated adult, a little man or a little woman." Dewey did not adopt the viewpoint of the child as a miniature adult even though Christian religious instruction of his time believed "that the spiritual and emotional experiences of the adult are the proper measure of all religious life; so that, if the child is to have any religious life at all, he must have it in terms of the same consciousness of sin, repentance, redemption, etc., which are familiar to the adult" (Dewey, "The Relation of Modern Psychology to Religious Education", in Rockefeller, 1991, p. 260). He believed that children did not yet have the experience and foundation upon which to place formal religious ideas.

Dewey felt that children should not be coerced to adopt adult religious beliefs. He argues that "children should not become familiar with the forms of the soul's great experiences of sin and reconciliation and peace, of discord and harmony of the individual with the deepest forces of the universe, before there is anything in his own needs or relationship in life which makes it possible for him to interpret or to realize them" (Ibid., p. 260). He believed the child should appreciate the "truly religious aspect of his own growing life, not one of inoculating him externally with beliefs and

emotions which adults happen to have found serviceable to themselves" (Ibid., p. 260). Dewey honours childhood religious experience as valid in itself.

To conclude, Dewey did not support the teaching of traditional religion in the school system because doing so would have meant using formally dogmatic methods of instruction rather than experimental methods of inquiry. He did not want children to passively accept religious ideas outside of their own understanding. He felt that without personal significance one might be thrown into a crisis of doubt regarding the reality of spiritual truth and "the very worth of life itself" (Dewey, in Rockefeller 1991, p. 26).

Perhaps the most noted person to discuss childhood spirituality is Robert Coles. Coles was born in Boston, 1929. He wrote many books about children including: *Children of Crisis*, *The Moral Life of Children*, and *The Political Life of Children*. *The Spiritual Life of Children*, which reached the *New York Times* bestseller list in 1990, is the eighth and final volume in his series on children. Influenced by his mentor William Carlos Williams, Coles trained as medical doctor. In 1955, he worked with many sick children stricken with polio during the last major epidemic before the Salk vaccine. Coles began to take note of the existential questions posed by these seriously ill children. Perhaps his interest in childhood spirituality began during his work with these young polio patients.

Coles did not enjoy being a physician and became a child psychiatrist in 1960. He worked with many children throughout his career. In 1967, his first book *Children of Crisis--A Study of Courage and Fear*, was published. His work demonstrates that children have great psychological strength. He shows that even young children are

able to extract from their environment what they need, even under terrible circumstances (Coles, 1992, in Woodruff, p. 183).

In *The Spiritual Life of Children*, Coles interviews hundreds of children from various backgrounds. He asks them about their spiritual beliefs. The information and stories he collects weaves a tapestry of childhood that challenges many of the stereotypes of childhood. For example, he demonstrates that young children are surprisingly deep in their thinking and are able to ponder complex moral issues. In a 1990 radio interview, Coles discusses childhood spirituality: "Its a big part of their lives. They're human beings, they want to know where they came from. They want to know where they're going, if any place. They look up at the sky, at the stars, at the moon. And they say what is this all about?" (Coles, in Woodruff, 1992, p. 188). Coles goes on to describe some of the questions that children have asked him over the years such as "Is there anyone behind the sun or the moon watching us?" or "How does God choose who's going to be born and who isn't?" Coles believes that these sorts of questions define our humanity. He remarks "We're the creatures of language and awareness who want to know answers to the great puzzling questions of origin and destiny" (Coles, in Woodruff, 1992, p.188).

Coles describes children as pilgrims. He says,

There is a quest. I think children are like the rest of us. They want to know what their destiny is, they want to know where they are going. They're looking ahead. They're visionary in that sense. They're asking what will happen. In a sense they are moving themselves in their minds through space, through time, toward what they know will be the end of a life. We all know life ends, and so they have a sense of themselves as being in motion, not only physical motion but moral motion, even spiritual motion, as they try to figure out, not only the concreteness of specifically what they're going to end up doing and where they are going to live, but what kind of people they're going to be and what kind of life they're going to live. (Coles, in Woodruff, 1992, p. 196)

Children grapple with the same type of spiritual questions as do adults. In this sense, Coles regards children as young pilgrims.

With regard to teaching spirituality in the classroom, Coles says lack of doing so is one of the great problems in American public schooling. He notes that teachers are afraid to bring up moral, let alone spiritual questions for fear that they are going to violate the constitution. He comments: "It's a tragedy, intellectually as well as morally and spiritually" (Coles, in Woodruff, 1992, p. 198). He goes on to say that a lack of spiritual focus in schools ". . . might relate to the educational problems among some children. A large number of the school's assumptions are basically materialistic and agnostic. There's a kind of culture conflict between the families and the schools. That conflict may have some bearing on what children learn and what they don't learn, and on how children behave in school" (Coles, in Woodruff, 1992, p. 198). He also describes what forms a spiritual development might take in an elementary classroom. Spirituality in the elementary curriculum will be addressed in the following chapter. In conclusion, Coles' contributions to the topic of childhood spirituality are invaluable not only because he has covered the topic so thoroughly, but also because children themselves participated in his research.

CONCLUSION

There are common spiritual ideas uniting the work of each educator mentioned in this paper. Firstly, in Plato and Froebel is the idea of spiritual growth as an aim of education. Secondly, beginning with Locke, there is the idea of the child's individuality in the process of education. Thirdly, there is the idea of child-centredness whereby childhood is seen as a stage of perfection unto itself. The

relationship between child-centred education and spirituality is expressed in the work of Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel, Montessori, Dewey, and Coles.

Spiritual Growth as an Aim of Education

Plato's curriculum was concerned not only with the creation of a just society but also with the enlightenment of the human being. His pupils study astronomy, harmonics, math, music, and poetry in order to impress upon their minds a knowledge of beauty and goodness. By purifying the mind one develops the soul. His ultimate concern is for the happiness and enlightenment of humankind.

Plato writes: "the soul of every man has the power of learning the truth and the organ to see it with." The job of the educator is to ensure that the soul is "turned the way it ought to be" so that "the eye should see light instead of darkness . . ." he goes on to say that ". . . the entire soul must be turned away from this changing world, until its eye can bear to contemplate reality and that supreme splendour which we have called the Good" (*The Republic*, trans., Cornford, 1978, p. 232). Education is not merely a matter of covering subject content or vocational training. Educators should instill courage, goodness, and wisdom. The ignorance most fatal to society and to individuals is not ignorance in the field of technology or of the professions, but spiritual ignorance (*Laws* 689, in Livingstone, 1944, p. 12).

Educators should be concerned with the development of the soul; they should honour and build upon the child's inner nature. Human progress depends both on knowledge and skills as well as the development of the spiritual life. The education system today concentrates mainly on the first, but the second is far more important. Spiritual beliefs and values are important in the development of the young child and

of society. For Plato and Froebel, the true purpose of education should connect one's soul to a knowledge of the Divine or God.

Individuality and Freedom in the Process of Education

The ideal which lies at the heart of spiritual endeavor is freedom. Mind and spirit grow dull in the constant pursuit of immediate material needs. Plato would say that to discover freedom, one must soar into the upper realm of abstraction. Concepts of individuality and freedom are found in each of the educators mentioned in this chapter. Most of them, especially Rousseau, believed that, as individuals, each of us is unique. Dewey would say that as social beings, we are part of humanity. Tagore would say that as spiritual beings, we belong to a reality which he describes as "Amantam or The Infinite" and "Shivam or Goodness." Both Rousseau and Plato hint at this spiritual reality of inner "Goodness" in their work.

Rousseau believed that all living organisms have their own need and faculty for self-preservation. He called this inner impulse of self-preservation self-love. With respect to Rousseau's idea of self-love, Tagore says "The education process should allow freedom for a training in the perfect maintenance of one's individual life. Otherwise not only does he become helpless, but this faculty of self-preservation the exercise of which gives him true enjoyment of life, can atrophy altogether" (Tagore, 1961, p. 91). Rousseau says "Before prejudices and human institutions have corrupted our natural inclinations, the happiness of children, like that of men consists in the use of their freedom" (Rousseau, *Emile*, trans. by Bloom, 1979, p. 85). Freedom is critical to the happiness and spiritual growth of the individual.

The idea of freedom in the education process has its genesis in Locke. He acknowledges the individuality of children and the need to keep a child's spirit "easy,

active, and free.” Montessori classrooms were designed to give the child freedom to explore. Dewey’s schools also embraced discovery learning of which freedom is a critical component. In giving the child freedom to explore, create, and discover, one recognizes the child’s inner nature as a guide not only in the learning process, but also as an expression of the soul.

Tagore writes,

It is only through the fullest development of all his capacities that man is likely to achieve his real freedom . . . Any scheme which fails to present to the child the opportunity to make these discoveries for itself, is seriously at fault. Education is sometimes called a tool and is thought of as a factory process. . . . But education implies growth and therefore life, and school-time should be a phase of life where the child begins to achieve freedom through experience. . . . If we are honest in our desire to give the child freedom to grow we shall be very likely not to superimpose our own rules, creeds and regulations. The spirit of childhood, like its gift of imagination, bloweth where it listeth, and like the wind it comes and goes, and knows no man-made law . . . Complete freedom then the child must have. (Tagore, 1961, p. 83)

He goes on to say that children must have freedom to adventure in the realm of song, music, poetry, drama, dance, line, colour, solitary thought, and meditation, all “in touch with the still small voice within” (Tagore, 1961, p. 84).

Child-Centred Education

The idea that childhood ought to be regarded as a valuable stage of life unto itself goes against the idea of schools as preparation for adult life. The notion that educators should understand and concentrate their attention on the child begins with Locke but has its fullest expression in Rousseau. He writes “Childhood has its own way of thinking, seeing, feeling which are proper to it”(Rousseau, *Emile*, trans. by Bloom, 1979, p. 96). Child-centred learning was reworked by many of the educators discussed in this paper, including Pestalozzi, Froebel, Montessori, Dewey, and Coles.

Rousseau's idea of putting the child at the centre of the learning experience was revolutionary. His advice to educators was to "waste time" encouraging teachers to dwell on those experiences which enrich childhood itself. It is the opinion of several of the educators that I have discussed in this paper that childhood is not a condition of life in need of remedy. Childhood has its own perfection. Childhood is intrinsically valuable; it is a mistake to think of children as candidates on the waiting list for adulthood.

Not surprisingly, the child-centred movement in education has been historically concurrent with the human rights movement. Harold Entwistle writes in *Child-Centred Education*,

Educationists who made a plea for consideration of the rights and interests of childhood were not merely contending against exploitation of children for economic gain by employers, parents, and Dickensian schoolmasters. Their protest was essentially against the sacrifice of childhood in preparing for a child's own future as an adult. A proper respect for children as persons prevents their being regarded as raw material, even for the making of their own manhood. (Entwistle, 1970, p. 79)

Rousseau makes a rather dramatic point in regard to childhood as worthwhile in its own right:

If the fatal scythe comes to harvest the flower of our hopes in him, we shall not have to lament his life and his death at the same time. We shall not embitter our sorrows with the memory of those we caused him. We shall say to ourselves, 'At least he enjoyed his childhood. We did not make him lose anything that nature had given him'. (Rousseau, *Emile*, trans. by Bloom, 1979, p. 162)

Rousseau demonstrates the importance of a joyful childhood, the development of which should be guided by nature.

In conclusion, concepts such as individuality, freedom, and learner-centredness in the process of education potentially support the development of childhood spirituality. Development of spirituality gives one a sense of freedom in all

departments of life. Tagore says that the aim of education " . . . should lie in the imparting life-breath to the complete man, who is intellectual as well as economic: bound by social bonds, but aspiring towards spiritual freedom and final perfection" (Tagore, 1961, p. 95). Only when the mind and heart are sensitive to one's soul, can one develop a connection to the realm of the Divine.

The development of the spiritual life supports many things: social responsibility, interdependence with nature, connection of self with the world, and a shared faith in, as Dewey would say, "a democratic way of living and growing together." The recognition of the spiritual life is important and should be nurtured in the development of young children. The educators I have discussed in this chapter each offer an understanding of young children's spiritual nature. Teachers in elementary schools today should take the best ideas of these educators in order to better understand and develop the spiritual life of the children in their classrooms. Chapter Four will consider how spirituality can be integrated into the subject areas of the elementary curriculum.

Chapter Four

SPIRITUALITY IN CURRICULUM

INTRODUCTION

Robert Coles says, "I have found in elementary schools a good deal of spiritual curiosity that does not reflect mere indoctrination. This is an interesting capacity children have, and I think we ought to pay attention to it" (Coles, in Woodruff, 1992, p. 199). He argues that the lack of spirituality in the curriculum is an oversight in public school system and describes the neglect of spirituality in the curriculum as a "tragedy, intellectually as well as morally and spiritually." Spirituality is disregarded in B.C. public schools because of the belief that spiritual principles may conflict with various religious dogmas. Although the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms is founded upon "principles that recognize the supremacy of God," teachers rarely address spiritual issues in fear of what might be construed as influencing a child's freedom of religion. Spirituality is an important part of a child's experience, but it is not recognized as an important component of a child's development in B.C. elementary schools.

In British Columbia, job creation is a primary goal of the current *Skills Now!* curriculum. Obviously, skills are important in the education of our children; however, without developing their spiritual nature the education ministry risks creating skilled individuals without inner wisdom. Any reasonable conception of human progress depends on a double advance--increase in knowledge and the wider attainment of higher values. Increases in knowledge and technology without accompanying moral and spiritual development can lead to disaster, as our own age has shown. The materialistic goal of the *Skills Now!* curriculum carries with it the message that economic gain is the reward of education and of a life well lived. Sir Richard Livingstone, in *Plato and Modern Education*, says "The applied science and technology of which we are always demanding more will give us comfort and even

luxury, but if we want a great civilization we must look elsewhere. The ultimate importance of any nation is estimated not by its conquests, commerce or comfort, but by the values which it has brought into the world and the degree to which they are embodied in its life. Take any people of the past, the Jews, the Greeks, the Romans: what matters in their history is essentially a progress to higher values: it is by this standard that we judge them and, when our time comes, that we shall be judged (Livingstone, 1944, p. 33). Material well-being is an important component of human life; however, spirituality is also an important component of individual life and societal welfare.

With regard to spiritual education, Paramahansa Yogananda in his book, *Man's Eternal Quest*, comments "The boy who belongs intellectually to Class A, or who is a great baseball or football player, often attracts notice and is encouraged by the teacher, but very few observe or warn him rightly if he is leading a dark Class D moral or spiritual life" (Yogananda, 1976, p. 351). He discusses the result of a curriculum where students receive intellectual, physical, *and* spiritual training. "After a thorough training, the students of such a school should undergo ceaseless introspective examination throughout life; and the various diplomas won will be health, fame, efficiency, wealth, and happiness" (Yogananda, 1976, p. 351). He writes, "The results of the final examination at the end of this earthly sojourn will be determined by the sum total of achievements and mental and spiritual diplomas won at the various examinations throughout life. Those totally successful in this last great examination will receive a diploma of divine self-sufficiency, a free and joyous conscience, and blessings, engraved eternally on the parchment of the soul. This rare reward is incorruptible by moths, beyond the reach of thieves and the eraser of time, and is awarded for honourable entry into Truth" (Yogananda, 1976, p. 351).

Plato also wanted a curriculum that taught principles of beauty, truth, and goodness. How would today's curriculum look if the development of a child's inner

life was viewed as equally important as the training of basic skills? This chapter will look at how spirituality might be addressed and incorporated into elementary curricula. Specifically, I will explore spirituality in Fine Arts, Language Arts, Science and Mathematics, and Social Studies.

SPIRITUALITY IN THE FINE ARTS

In this section, I will look at the value of meaningful art experiences in a young child's life and how the Arts Program in the primary classroom can contribute in a fundamental way not only to the spiritual, but also to the emotional, and intellectual growth of the child. To begin, I will discuss some perspectives on art, and within each perspective, explore the potential spiritual benefit of the aesthetic experience for the elementary school student. I will conclude by summarizing the importance of the Primary Arts Program, not only with regard to the spiritual development of the child, but also with regard to the child as seen in the context of the highly technological and business-orientated society in which we are currently entangled.

Perspectives on Art

Maxine Greene points out in her article *Aesthetic Literacy*, "There is considerable doubt whether 'art' can ever be finally or conclusively defined" (Greene, in Smith & Simpson, 1991, p. 149). Like the words in a well-written poem which can only point towards the notion they wish to express, art is elusive and lives outside the limiting confines of strict definition. However, for the sake of my purposes here, i.e., exploring the spiritual value of the Arts in the Primary Program, I will work through three perspectives on art; art as a spiritual journey, art as a language of spirit, and art as expression of spirit.

Art as a Spiritual Journey

Art is a creative act, a spiritual journey of sorts. Art is an expression of the soul. We say, "*I am inspired*" or, in other words, there is *spirit* within. In John

Grande's book, *Balance: Art and Nature*, he discusses the sacred role and spiritual power of art. He talks about art, and in particular the artwork of Third World artists, as having a "basic connection to the universe in general and to nature in particular" (Grande, 1994, p. 43). Grande cites examples of the South American Indian sand painters, but there are many others, such as the cave painters of France, or the mandala sand artists of Tibet. Historically, art in many cultures was holistic in that it was valued for its spiritual power, not for the decorative or monetary value that seems so important in Western culture today.

Empowerment, wisdom, and wholeness are intrinsic qualities in the spiritual perspective of art. In the spiritual perspective, the arts serve to alter consciousness such as in the Mevlevi Sufi whirling dervishes who enter into a trance by revolving to music with the hopes of reintegrating with spirit. Joseph Zinker, an artist and therapist, in his book *Creative Process in Gestalt Therapy*, says this: "Art is prayer--not the vulgarized notations handed down to us in the scriptures, but a fresh vital discovery of one's own special presence in the world" (Zinker, 1978, p. 16). He goes on to say that in the process of making something, a person not only illuminates and illustrates his or her inner life, but moves beyond personal expression to make something which stands by itself, such as Michaelangelo's *David* or Van Gogh's *Starry Night*. The creator contacts a reality outside the subjective life and moves into the realm of the transcendent. Marc Chagall was once asked if he attended a synagogue; he answered that for him, work *is* prayer (Zinker, 1978, p. 16).

John Dewey comments on the idea of a mystical connection with the aesthetic in his book *Art as Experience*:

A work of art elicits and accentuates this quality of being whole and of belonging to the larger, all-inclusive whole which is the universe in which we live. This fact, I think, is the explanation of that feeling of exquisite intelligibility intensity. It explains also the religious feeling that accompanies intense esthetic perception. We are, as it were, introduced into a world beyond the world which is nevertheless the deeper reality of the world in which we live our

ordinary experiences. We are carried out beyond ourselves to find ourselves.
(Dewey, 1934, p. 195)

For him, there is a “deeper reality” behind the mundane day-to-day world. He saw possibilities in art that reveal a “world beyond” and enliven human consciousness. As opposed to anesthetic, aesthetic means alive and formed. If we regard the arts as works not only to be admired and analyzed, but also as experiences to be undergone, then the spectator can benefit from them in a similar way that their creators do, and in this way Dewey says, “art illuminates ordinary experience”.

The ancient yogis of India believed that all forms of creation, from the invisible energy of sunlight to the gross matter of a table, are composed of one creative energy called Prakrti. The *Dictionary of World Religions* defines Prakrti as “the original or natural form or condition of anything; the principle of nature or materiality in classical yoga philosophy which is juxtaposed to a second eternal principle, consciousness” (Dictionary of World Religions, 1981, p. 575). In accordance with the three modes of creation--birth, growth, and dissolution--creative energy manifests itself and ultimately dissolves back into its original creative source, which one could call the “Absolute”, the “Divine Creator,” or “God” (Naiman, 1995, p. 28). It is possible that by immersing oneself in a creative activity, be it gardening, dance, painting, or preparing a meal, artists may tap into, connect with, and become a part of this original source of divine creativity. In both the creation of art and in the experience of the aesthetic lies the possibility for one's creative energy to express and reveal itself. One feels joy in the presence of and in the making of art, as well as an intuitive connection to this universal source of creativity. It is this sense of universal belonging, as well as a connection and experience of one's creative self that makes art a spiritual journey.

Rudolph Steiner, the founder of the Waldorf schools, makes the arts a fundamental component of curriculum. His schools attempt to nurture all dimensions

of the human being physical, emotional, intellectual, moral, and spiritual. Core subjects are taught using various art forms, which are considered to possess an "intrinsic wisdom" (*B.C. Parent*, May 1995, p. 10). The grade twelve students at Waldorf schools must complete a comprehensive project comprising four elements: research, a written component, a public presentation, and an artistic component. The students are able to investigate a specific topic more fully than in the regular high school system by integrating and uniting the academic disciplines with the arts. Waldorf schools recognize and incorporate the arts as a valuable and meaningful component of the learning process. Through sculpture, painting, and dance for example, students can explore their chosen theme in ways that include, but go beyond logic, rationality, and intellect. Here, the arts are not seen merely as an elective frill, but as a serious part of the child's education.

Herbert Read, author of *Education Through Art*, has similar comprehensive views as those of Rudolph Steiner. For Read, education is analogous to art. If Read were to design a curriculum, it too would favour creative activities such as drama, design, dance, and craft, under which the conventional subjects would be subsumed. Read believes that all activities must have a broadly aesthetic form or character. He sees this type of curriculum as "the most natural, balanced mode of education, free from arbitrary and restrictive systems that, in his view, inhibit development of the individual as a whole" (Simpson, 1991, p. 173). Read, Steiner, and Dewey, believe in the necessity of educating the whole child. None of them, obviously, would recommend ignoring reading, writing, and math skills; but they would, no doubt, be distressed by an exclusive emphasis on basic skills and computer technology.

Joseph Chilton Pearce, elaborating on the work of Jean Piaget, makes a convincing case that active fantasy play is an essential developmental phase for children (Pearce, 1980, p. 162-171). When a child takes a leaf and imagines it as a boat, the child is participating in creation, bending the sensory reality to meet his or

her inner world. Pre-made colouring activities and mass-produced highly fabricated toys leave little to engage the imagination of the young child. Television cartoon series and films such as *Batman Forever* or *Independence Day* market toys that may hinder children's own imaginative ability. With this type of promoted play, the child is drawn into a fantasy world not of their own invention, but into one that is programmed by commercial designers. This type of pre-fabricated and directed fantasy play may limit children's imaginative potential.

In the classroom, art allows children freedom to express and explore their inner creativity. Primary children derive a great deal of joy and satisfaction in building, painting, singing, dancing, and drawing. For children, art is play. Art class is probably the closest moment of the school day, aside from recess, that satisfies the young child's desire to play. Creative art activities allow children to tap into the source of divine creativity similar to that which children experience in play. The arts play an important role in the spiritual development of the young child; they allow time in the classroom for joyful transcendent experience and permit a familiarity with or knowledge of one's self and of one's inner creativity which we so often lose or forget as adults.

Art as Language of the Spirit

Young children begin to draw and to create images long before they learn to express themselves fluently with the spoken word or print. Children use drawings to express feelings, thoughts, perceptions, and understandings. One definition of language in the Oxford dictionary is a "method of expression." To communicate and express oneself through visual images is a type of language. In this way, creating art contributes to the intellectual and cognitive growth of the young children by exercising their understanding and perception of the world.

Art activities such as music, sculpture, dance, painting, etc., extend and expand the ways in which we know and experience the world. Music, for example,

can touch the heart and enliven our emotional capacity. The aesthetic response attunes one to detail, senses, intuition, and meaning. The arts are distinctive in that they offer a way of knowing the world, different from the realm of reason and intellect. For example, an adequate understanding of the archetypal images of the bull, the lion, the angel, and the eagle found on *The Christ of the Apocalypse*, a relief on the front portal of the Chartres cathedral in France, calls upon both an analytical and an emotional response. The language of symbol appeals not only to the intellect, but also to the heart.

Kieran Egan, in *Primary Understanding: Education in Early Childhood*, says it is the arts which help us to hear and to see afresh. For Egan, the rush for early literacy that we see in the current basic skills movement often neglects and sometimes extinguishes the capacity to relate to the world in an aesthetic manner. He says, "One educational foundation of the arts is to minimize the losses that can easily accompany our development of literal forms of thought. For one thing, they keep alive metaphoric thinking" (Egan, 1991, p. 227). Of metaphor and imagination, Egan writes "There is evident in metaphor a logic that eludes our analytic grasp. Metaphor does not reflect the world but generates novelty" (Egan, 1991, p. 83). "The poetic or imaginative world . . . is what gives rationality life, colour, and meaning" (Egan, 1991, p. 86). He argues that in the rush to train young children in disciplined forms of knowledge, the sense of wonder and use of the imagination can become stifled (Egan, 1991, p. 227). The arts can promote not only fluency in image and symbol, but can sharpened perception and exercise metaphoric thinking.

For Egan, the arts can serve as a remembrance of the lost childhood ability to perceive the world in non-utilitarian terms. In the classroom however, "the task is not to recover the sensations so much as to become immersed in them; during early childhood the *stoniness* of stones has not yet been smothered under layers of perceiving them only in utilitarian terms" (Egan, 1991, p. 227). For example,

someone who sees a tree and can only think of lumber rather than appreciating the beauty of the tree itself is experiencing the world in an impoverished way. For children, the task of art education is to become immersed in the senses. Egan outlines a Primary Art Curriculum which is less concerned with the skill of music, painting, dance, etc., as with exploring the range of possible sensations to ear, eye, taste, touch, movement, and so on (Egan, 1991, p. 228). He gives examples of how one may explore sound by listening to a variety of sound and their shapes--Mozart, Kalahari bushmen, whale's song, and bird's song for example, which should be listened to carefully with an emphasis on the shaping and exploration of sound while hearing the range developed in various traditions. Skills, convention, and structure are introduced at a later age, but as a means for providing and enhancing a child's expression. He cautions that one must not squelch the "metaphoric exuberance" which is so naturally present in the child. Egan outlines a type of language, i.e., a language of the senses and of metaphor, which art activities foster in the development of the young child.

In her article on aesthetic literacy, Maxine Greene (in Smith & Simpson, 1991, p. 155) echoes similar ideas and beliefs. She says, "Not only ought young persons (in association with their teachers) be provided a range of experiences in perceiving and noticing. They ought to have opportunities in every classroom to pay heed to color and glimmer and sound, to attend to the appearances of things from an aesthetic point of view." She argues, if they do not, ". . . they are unlikely to be in a position to be challenged by what they see or hear; and one of the great powers associated with the arts is the power to challenge expectations, to break stereotypes, to change the ways in which persons apprehend the world." Simply put, painting, music, and dance increase our range of perception and experience by exploring life beyond the utilitarian.

Greene also discusses the importance of the imagination. Without imagination there could be no image creation on the part of the beholder. She suggests that students be exposed to metaphor such as experienced in storytelling and poetry. She writes "To perceive, to imagine new possibilities of being and action is to enlarge the scope of *freedom* for the individual; and, when people work to open new perspectives together, they may even discover ways of transforming their lived worlds" (Greene in Smith & Simpson, 1991, p. 158). The practical implications here are evident, for self-knowledge is critical not only for enjoying and enhancing one's personal life, but also for fostering an enlightened electorate which a democracy requires. In addition, social responsibility and productive employment also depend on the maturation and self-realization of individuals.

Art as Expression

Rabindranath Tagore describes art as an inner necessity for spiritual and emotional expression. Drawing, painting, sculpture, drama, and dance can provide a means and context for helping children learn and connect with emotions. The ability to recognize and express emotion not only contributes to a richer quality of life, but also contributes to the development of emotionally healthy and well-balanced people. In this way, art as expression is important for a child's mental and emotional health. Art is an instrument of self-expression and self-expression is freedom, freedom to imagine possibilities beyond what the media and our technological culture presents as valuable and important in life.

Tagore writes,

Our relations to this great world are manifold. One of these is the necessity to live, to till the soil, to gather food, to clothe ourselves, to get materials from nature. Then there is the mind, or the intellect. It must find out reason in things. There is another world which is real to us, that is the emotional world. We see it, feel it, we deal with it with all our emotions. Its mystery is endless because we cannot analyze or measure it. This is the world from which Science turns away and in which Art takes its place. Art is not a mundane, but a strange, inner necessity, of a creative personality. (Tagore, 1978, p. 28)

Conclusion

Young children are in a perpetual state of learning from everything that surrounds them. But what are they learning in the modern culture of North America? They learn from the media that appearance and money seem to be the two greatest forces in the universe. There is a risk that children adopt the false values promoted in this confusing world of power-related fantasy and materialistic illusion. Imaginative art activities call out to the soul. They allow children to play, to discover and to enjoy their inner creative energy. Creating art allows young children not only to sharpen perceptions and to imagine new possibilities, but also to express their thoughts, discoveries, knowledge, and emotions. Meaningful art experiences nurture a child's spiritual life in the joy and satisfaction that come with the pleasure of creating something new.

SPIRITUALITY IN LANGUAGE ARTS

This autumn, the principal of my elementary school welcomed the Kindergarten children to their new school. While in the classroom, she leaned over the shoulder of one boy, and glancing at his name written on a paper in front of him, said "Hi Jeff." The child was astounded, "How did she know my name?" The principal explained that letters told her how to say his name aloud. This student's amazement expresses the magical power of the written word. "At first acquaintance, literacy appears as sheer magic" (Bettelheim, 1987, p. 252).

Originally, reading and writing had religious connotations as reflected in the Biblical statement, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." God, the maker of all things, was the Word. Literacy was the domain of the Gods, not of humankind. Ancient civilizations, such as that of ancient Greece, relied primarily on oral traditions where memory, not literacy, was the main tool of communication. Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were likely composed as oral

epics. Bruno Bettelheim writes with regard to Homer, "It simply did not occur to him that the writing about which he had heard some vague talk could be used for utilitarian purposes. He describes the processes of making meaningful signs of tablets and deciphering them as essentially magical acts." When Homer thought about writing, he thought about it as actually conveying secret power, not merely information (Bettelheim, 1987, p. 253).

For centuries, the power associated with the ability to read and write remained a privilege of a select few. Bettelheim notes, "Witness the long debate about whether the common man should be permitted to read Scriptures. Witness, too, the fact that when literacy became more prevalent, its primary exercise was in reading the Bible" (Bettelheim, 1987, p. 253). Reading was used primarily to decipher the wisdom of scripture. If one could read, one could discover Biblical secrets and thus attain knowledge about eternal life and salvation. Reading ability was directly related to religious mysteries and spiritual growth.

According to Bettelheim, children's primers were initially religious and spiritual in nature. The first European primers began: "In Adam's Fall / We sinned all. / Thy life to mend / This book attend." Bettelheim explains "The real value of reading for our ancestors lay in its unique--near-magical--power to help those who mastered it gain salvation" (Bettelheim, 1987, p. 253). Reading ability was useful in that it might unlock the mysteries of the Divine. However, he concludes, "The time is long gone when learning to read was directly related to learning about the supernatural and magic, about the dangers of sin and the hope of salvation" (Bettelheim, 1987, p. 253).

Bettelheim argues that a disproportionate number of children in North America have reading problems because reading materials are often emotionally empty and unappealing. For Bettelheim, reading must stimulate the child's imagination. Reading material should respect what to children are pressing and urgent issues. He notes, "If reading is too soon and too radically deprived--or never was imbued--with magical

meaning, it will not be strongly invested.” (Bettelheim, 1987, p. 254). He believes that stories, such as those which contain rich fantasy, satisfy the young child’s imagination and are a step towards understanding that inner growth can be a primary value of reading.

Language and literature can nurture the spiritual life of children. Through language and literature children build a relationship between their inner life and the world around them. For example, playing with language i.e., sounds, words, thoughts, and ideas, helps children create order in their relationship with their inner life and their environment. Literature provides a foundation of shared experiences, helping children toward greater self-understanding. Language activities that engage a child’s inner life is soulful learning. This section will explore language arts and the relationship with childhood spirituality. It will be divided into three parts: spirituality in language and literacy; nurturing the spiritual life through storytelling and literature, and spirituality in poetry.

Spirituality in Language and Literacy

Language is spiritual not only in its relationship with self-expression, but also in its potential to unite humanity in shared understanding. Montessori views language is an instrument of collective thought. She writes,

Language lies at the root of that transformation of the environment that we call civilization . . . it encloses a given human company, and separates it from all others. And this, perhaps, is why ‘the word’ has always had a mystical value for man’s mind; it is something that unites men even more closely than nationality. Words are bonds between men, and the language they use develops and ramifies according to the needs of their minds. Language, we may say, grows with human thought. (Montessori, 1967, p. 109)

The study of language covers four major areas: listening, talking, reading, and writing. Language skills help young children to express themselves and understand their world. Listening is the first language ability to develop. As if by magic, children then learn to speak within the first two years of life. Maria Montessori in *The*

Absorbent Mind, discusses the mind-set of young children in acquiring language.

She asks,

How does it happen that a child learns to speak? She answers, We say that he is blessed with hearing and listens to human voices. But, even admitting this, we must still ask how it is that, among the thousands of sounds and noises that surround him, he hears, and reproduces, only those of the human voice? If it be true that he hears, and if it be true that he only learns the language of human beings, then it must be that the sounds of human speech make on him a deeper impression than any other sounds. These impressions must be so strong, and cause such an intensity of emotion--so deep an enthusiasm as to set in motion invisible fibers of his body, fibers which start vibrating in the effort to reproduce those sounds. She concludes, The child *absorbs* these impressions not with his mind but with his life itself. (Montessori, 1967, p. 24)

The acquisition of language is a process not only of the mind, but also of the heart and soul.

Montessori discusses the continuous inner growth that takes place in the young child with regard to acquiring language. For children, she writes, "language begins and unfolds in the darkest depths of the unconscious, and when it emerges it is as a fixed acquisition." She describes the growth of language acquisition as "explosions of the inner life." She writes,

Firstly, there is the use of syllables, words, sentences simple and complex, verbs in their tenses and moods, co-ordinate and subordinate clauses . . . and so become established the mental structures and the language mechanisms of expression, particular to the race, or social class, to which the child belongs. This is a treasure prepared in the unconscious, which is then handed over to the consciousness, and the child, in full possession of his new power, talks and talks without cessation. (Montessori, 1967, p. 114)

Anna Kealoha, author of *Trust the Children*, writes with regard to listening ability, "When we make a conscious effort to hear the sounds around us, we give heed to the ever-present now. The secret of good listening is attending closely to what is happening now" (Kealoha, 1995, p. 55). Living fully in the here and now is a basic spiritual principle. Good listeners connect with their spiritual nature: they must

attend to the message of the speaker, they must show genuine interest in other people, they must practise patience in hearing the viewpoint of others, and they must respect the opinions of others and show interest in broadening a viewpoint rather than defending a position. Good listening skills involve the ear, the voice, the mind, and the heart (Kealoha, 1995, p. 56).

Most young children come to school able to listen and to speak their mother tongue. Reading and writing are much more difficult for children to learn. John Locke writes in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* that children learn more readily when their work is linked with interest and pleasure. He also writes that a child's work should be assimilated to play (Locke, in Garforth, 1964, p. 165). Locke writes "None of the things they are to learn should ever be made a burden to them or imposed on them as a task" (Locke, in Garforth, 1964, p. 166). For Locke, reading and writing skills should not be burdensome for the young child rather, their learning "might be made a play and recreation . . . that they might be brought to desire to be taught, if it were proposed to them as a thing of honour, credit, delight and recreation" (Locke, in Garforth, 1964, p. 187).

Locke's child-centred approach conflicts with the notion of conventional literacy where children are simply taught the mechanics of decoding sounds. Conventional literacy training methods focus primarily on skills rather than on meaning and knowledge. The child is seen as more of a decoding machine, rather than a person with an inner life from which to draw and learn. From the mid 1970s basic assumptions of the conventional view have been challenged by the emergent view of literacy learning (Egan, 1990, p. 42). In the emergent and comprehensive views of literacy, skills and knowledge in reading and writing are connected. The skills are not acquired but "emerge" as a result of sense-making in a literate environment. The emergent and comprehensive conceptions of literacy engage the

child's everyday sense-making abilities; reading and writing then become meaningful activities for children.

In addition, knowledge is most readily engaged when children can get an affective grasp on it. Knowledge must be taught in such a way that it is "meaningful to students and enhances their capacities to make sense of the world and of experience and to deal effectively with them" (Egan, 1990, p. 47). Teaching literacy not only requires one to unite knowledge with skills, but also to unite knowledge and skills with *meaning*. The making of meaning is ultimately related to the spiritual growth of an individual.

The ability to read and write is a magical and powerful skill. Bettelheim, in his book *On Learning to Read*, writes "By now several generations of American primary-grade children have been cheated out of discovering that reading is the most stimulating, rewarding, and meaningful experience school has to offer them" (Bettelheim, 1981, p. 265). He believes beginning readers with controlled, simple, and repetitive vocabularies, are often empty of meaning and value; children not only suffer boredom but also struggle to learn reading skills. The downfall of using primers or basal readers is that the necessary reading skills take more importance than the purpose for which these skills are taught (Bettelheim, 1981, p. 262). He argues, "What are needed are beginning texts that fascinate children, and convince them that reading both is delightful and help one to gain a better understanding of oneself and others—in short, of the world we live in, and of how to live in it" (Bettelheim, 1981, p. 263). Bettelheim argues that textbooks which stimulate, enrich, and which are meaningful to a child's imaginative, inner, or spiritual life is what school should be all about.

Nurturing Childhood Spirituality through Storytelling, Texts and Literature

Storytelling

How can educators teach literacy skills to young children in a meaningful way? The teacher's concern is not only how to teach the skills needed to read and write, but also how to impart the enthusiasm and reasons to do so. When the focus of education is primarily on skills, sub-skills, and procedures, the joy of reading risks being left out or lost altogether. Reading and writing hold creative power and imaginative magic; the teacher's task is to engage the creative, spiritual, and playful energy of the child in order to impart the value of reading along with the skills. Teaching through the story format is one technique which attends to both of these concerns.

"It is the task of stories, by the harmony of their vision, to help us find our own connections within and without. They should provide us occasions to judge ourselves, and they should nourish us that we may grow even more human" (Paterson, 1993, p. 68). In Native American culture, the storyteller is "magician, artist, and creator . . . above all, a holy man" (Bruchac, 1991, p. vii). Native American stories are used as a teaching tool. Bruchac, author of *Native Stories from Keepers of the Earth*, writes "If a child misbehaved, that child would not be struck or humiliated; instead a story would be told. Striking a child breaks that child's spirit, serves as a bad example and seldom teaches the right lesson. But a story goes into a person and stays there" (Bruchac, 1991, p. vii). He concludes, "The primary object of the story is the realization of wonder and delight." Stories can be important not only for the moral and spiritual lessons they can teach, but also for the wonder they can instill and the common bonds they can honour among people.

Stories can capture the imagination, heart, and mind of children throughout the world. People everywhere enjoy stories. When a child's intellect and heart are engaged, knowledge and understanding seem to sink deeper. Stories that engage

the intellect and the heart nurture the imagination. Teaching practices and curricula which neglect children's imaginations fail to recognize and develop children's spiritual capacities. Stories have the potential to include children in an active learning process by engaging the imagination and therefore the inner life; the concept of education becomes an exciting journey rather than a boring and meaningless task.

Kieran Egan in *Teaching as Story Telling* outlines an alternative approach to teaching and curriculum in the elementary classroom which tries to direct the child's imaginative energy towards learning by using some features of the story format. In the story telling format, curriculum is taught within a story framework that places meaning centre-stage. The focus of teaching through the story format becomes a matter of what is important and meaningful to learn rather than a list of easily assessed skills and objectives to be mastered (Egan, 1986, p. 92). Curriculum that is embedded within a story structure, rather than as a prescribed list of objectives to be mastered, can make learning more meaningful to children.

Egan asks the following questions when planning a unit: "What matters most about this topic?", "Why should it matter to children?", and "What is affectively engaging about it?" These questions place the interest of children at the centre of curriculum planning. Educators then look for binary opposites such as survival and destruction, security and danger, i.e., tensions that best catch the importance of the topic and to which children can relate both cognitively and affectively.

Stories are more than mere amusements of entertainment; they have the potential to promote insight into human behaviour and ultimately provide us with a better understanding of ourselves (Alasdair MacIntyre, in Egan, 1992, p. 55). The value of story lies not only its universal appeal but also in its ability to communicate insights into common human experiences. Stories make sense to children; they engage the inner life, allow children to learn about themselves and others by appealing to both the intellect and the heart.

Text and Literature

In *Learning to Read*, Bruno Bettelheim examines and compares titles, cover pictures, and stories used in Austrian primers with American readers. The differences he outlines are striking. For example, in the Austrian reader *Joyous Learning*, stories and poems including "Little Brother", "Blossoms in All Gardens", and "It Got to Be Evening" honour children's interests. The first story in the Austrian primer relates the changes of a new baby in the house, another includes animals that might be found in a garden such as birds and cats and their actual relationships and concerns--food, safety, etc. The latter story tells of two children who have been sledding but have to stop because it gets to be dark, then they look up at the sky and admire the beauty of the stars. This story is followed by "The Children Want to Stay Up," a dilemma familiar to many young children. The Austrian primers to which Bettelheim refers catch children's interests by addressing their major concerns.

The stories in Austrian readers deal with actual problems that children encounter in life. The Austrian texts that Bettelheim describes not only help children discover solutions to their problems, but also validate the concerns with which children struggle, providing a true purpose and value of reading. Similarly, in a Swiss primer called *We Are All Here*, the first page begins simply "I am"--a strong spiritual self-assertion. Bettelheim comments "Such a beginning lets the child know that through learning to read he will not only be able to assert himself better, he will also not be expected to adjust to, or otherwise have to cope with, alien ego images. On the contrary, being able to read will, if anything, permit him to be more definitely himself" (Bettelheim, 1981, p. 291).

Bettelheim upbraids American readers where "fun" and silliness are often a focus; animals do stupid and unrealistic things, vocabularies are thin, and texts are repetitive to the point of absurdity, not to mention a lack of literary merit. Bettelheim discovered that nonreaders and children suffering from severe reading retardation

are much rarer in Austrian grade schools than those of the United States due to the way in which children are taught to read (Bettelheim, 1981, p. 289). He concludes "If we wish to open the world of literacy to our children, what they are asked to read should from the very beginning help them to understand themselves and their world." (Bettelheim, 1981, p. 306). There are teachers who do not use basal readers to teach the language arts curriculum, rather, they use literature, or a blend of both. It is true that not all North American readers are poorly written; however, the point remains that by appealing to the child's concerns, fears, emotions, and other real life situations, literacy is more easily and meaningfully attained. And young children's spirits are honoured in the process of developing basic literacy skills.

Aside from the emotional appeal of stories, there are many children's books that directly encompass principles of spirituality such as love, kindness, and wonderment. For example, in *Horton Hears a Who*, a lengthy rhyme written by Theodore Geisel in 1954, many spiritual principles are addressed. In this story, an elephant hears an anxious voice coming from a small dust speck. Geisel writes,

So Horton stopped splashing. He looked toward the sound.
'That's funny,' thought Horton. 'There's no one around.'
Then he heard it again! Just a very faint yelp
As if some tiny person were calling for help.
'I'll help you,' said Horton. 'But *who* are you? *Where*?'
He looked and he looked. He could see nothing there
But a small speck of dust blowing past through the air.

Horton rescues the dust speck and protects it from great adversity in respect for the idea that "A person's a person, no matter how small." The dust speck world is saved by the townspeople communally chanting "We are here, we are here, etc."

Ultimately, it takes the effort of the youngest villager to be heard by Horton's adversaries. This story is especially beautiful not only for the empathy, kindness, and self-realization which it embraces, but also for the notion of worlds within worlds--for

just as the world of this minute speck is forever protected, a distress call from a similar speck is heard within the rescued dust speck, and on and on infinitely. Stories that introduce a conception of infinity and respect for life, however minute, call upon or can open up a spiritual dimension in children.

Other stories that share an element of the eternal with regard to the cycle of birth, life, and death include *The Always Prayer Shawl* by Sheldon Oberman, written in 1994. This story is about a young Russian Jewish boy named Adam and his relationship with his grandfather. The young boy emigrates to America and takes with him a gift from his grandfather, his own childhood prayer shawl. Young Adam grows and one day has a family of his own. Oberman writes,

Adam said, 'This prayer shawl belonged to my grandfather. Before that, it belonged to his grandfather whose name was also Adam. Now it is mine. And someday I will give it to you. It has changed many times. The fringes are changed. The collar changed. The cloth changed. Everything about it has changed. But it is still my Always Prayer Shawl. It is just like me. I have changed and changed and changed. But I am still Adam.'

This story shows not only love between family members, but also the unchanging and eternal quality of the inner self.

Spiritual elements of wonder, love, and magic are found in many children's books such as in *The Velveteen Rabbit*, written by Margery Williams in 1985. This story is the tale of a stuffed rabbit becoming "real" through the love of a little boy. Love is perhaps the deepest experience available with regard to spiritual connection with God and with others. Love also plays a transformative role in a young girl named Mary in *The Secret Garden*, written by Francis Hodgson Burnett in 1911. The young child in this story wanders the grounds of her uncle's manor house and

discovers a secret garden, locked and abandoned. The discovery of the garden leads her to discover her uncle's crippled child, and through their friendship, to discover her true self. Chris Van Allsburg's *The Polar Express*, written in 1985 also tells a tale of magic and wonder. In this story, a young boy boards a mythic train for the North Pole on Christmas Eve and returns with a small silver sleigh-bell offered to him as the first gift of Christmas by Santa Claus. As the years go by he is the only member of his family able to hear the sound of the sleigh-bell. His gift is a life-long appreciation of wonderment. The transcendent experience of magic remains in this boy through to his adulthood, allowing him greater understanding of the spiritual life as reflected in the experience of wonder.

Aside from biblical stories, there are a few children's books that deal directly with the subject of God. These include, *What is God* by Eatan Boritzer, *Mother Earth* by Nancy Luenn, *Old Turtle* by Douglas Wood, *Forest of Dreams* by Rosemary Wells, and *The Dreamer* by Cynthia Rylant and Barry Moser. *The Dreamer*, is the story of God as artist and creator:

There once was a young artist who lived all alone, quietly, and so spent his days as most young artists do: daydreaming. It was a lovely way of living. He would simply lie about, thinking, wondering, perhaps making small wishes. And as he dreamed in his mind, he would see something he hadn't seen before. Something beautiful. Something new. Then one day--as often happens with young artists--he decided he would make what he saw in his mind. So he made a star.... and as often happens with young artists--he worked all night long making stars and by morning he was surrounded by heavens. (Rylant, 1993, p. 1)

However, the story *What is God* is the only one to analyze the subject of God. It begins:

What is God? You are asking a very big question! Boys and girls, grown ups and old people. Everyone wants to know 'What is God?' . . . Maybe God is what you feel when you stand on a very high mountain and see a big beautiful view all around you. Or maybe God is what you feel when you hear beautiful music, sometimes soft, sometimes loud. Or maybe God is what you

feel when you see a million stars at night and you feel very small looking up at them. (Boritzer 1990, p. 1)

This story also discusses religion, prayer, meditation, and spiritual leaders including Buddha and Christ. Stories such as *The Dreamer* and *What is God* can be a starting point for philosophical discussions about God and reflections on the spiritual life. Myths, folktales, legends and fairy tales also often capture the hearts and minds of children. Bettelheim observes “fairy tales are like a deep quiet pool which at first seems to reflect only our own image but behind it we discover the inner turmoil of our soul—its depths, and ways to gain peace within ourselves and with the world” (Bettelheim, in Fitzpatrick, 1991, p. 218).

Stories can allow children to draw on their spiritual life and share common understandings. Children take from all that is offered whatever makes sense in terms of their current understanding. Great literature, past or present, is the expression of great knowledge of the human heart (Hamilton, in Kealoha, 1995, p. 71). Stories nurture the spiritual life of children not only through the common bonds of understanding they create, but also through their exploration of the spiritual life. Alexander Solzhenitsyn describes literature as a “kind of collective body and a common spirit, a living unity of the heart which reflects the growing spiritual unity of mankind” (Solzhenitsyn, in Kealoha, 1995, p. 72). Good stories appeal to both the heart, soul, and mind; stories that are meaningful to children not only teach children how to read, but teach them what reading is.

Spirituality in Poetry

“The child like the artist or mystic has a faculty for seeing all things abiding eternally in their proper places, but with the child the gift is instinctive and unconscious, and, as soon as it is lost, entirely forgotten” says Gladys E. Willett, author of *Traherne—An Essay*. Poets such as Thomas Traherne, William Blake, Henry Vaughan, and William Wordsworth capture childhood wonder in their poems

and each lament, in some manner, the loss of transcendent vision upon reaching adulthood.

Traherne, in particular, had a vivid imagination and an endless capacity for wonder. As a young child he ponders, "Sometimes I should soar above the stars, and inquire how the Heavens ended, and what was beyond them? . . . Sometimes my thoughts would carry me to the Creation, for I had heard now that the world, which at first I thought was eternal, had a beginning; how, therefore, that beginning was, and why it was, why it was no sooner, and what was before, I mightily desire to know" (Traherne, *Centuries of Meditations*, ed. Dobell, 1908, p. 170). Traherne's adult philosophy was largely dependent on his memories of childhood. He writes:

Those thoughts His goodness long before
Prepared as precious and celestial store
With curious art in me inlaid,
That childhood might itself alone be said
My tutor, teacher, guide to be,
Instructed then even by the Deity. (Traherne in Willet, 1919, p. 21)

It is clear that Traherne believes in the importance of childhood for the development of one's spiritual life. It is not a foolish period of life that one should rush through. On the contrary, Traherne felt that childhood intuitions and recollections would support the adult in understanding the mysteries of life; reason was not adequate on its own to give the answers. He says, "I was a little stranger which at my entrance into the world was saluted and surrounded with innumerable joys. My knowledge was divine: I knew by intuition those things which since my apostasy I collected again by the highest reason." He continues, "My very ignorance was advantageous. I seemed as one brought into the estate of innocence. All things were spotless and pure and glorious; yea, and infinitely mine, and joyful and precious" (Traherne, *Centuries of Meditations*, ed. Dobell, 1908, p. 157). In these reflections, Traherne recalls the joy of his childhood vision and the intuitive knowledge of the

world which he calls divine. Reason takes a second step to this divine knowledge and is used only to "regain" as an adult that which was lost in childhood.

There is a direct link between poetry and the spiritual life. Poems give expression to our spiritual life by connecting the elusive world of the divine with the world of rationality. There are many types of poems that children can explore in the classroom including two-word poems, window poems, poems about oneself, colour poems, sensory poems, haiku, cinquain, diamante or diamond poems, couplets or two line poems, echo poems, comparison poems using similes and metaphors, playing-with-sound poems, alliteration poems, etc. Anna Kealoha defines poetry using three Native American words: "*Leippya*, which means 'messenger of the imagination,' *Qaartisluni*, which means 'to wait in silence and stillness for creativity,' and *Nierrka*, which expresses the idea of 'a passageway between two worlds' (Kealoha, 1995, p. 92).

Kieran Egan discusses poetry within the concept of recapitulation in his book *Primary Understanding*. He writes ". . . individually, we begin as poets . . . the first layer of the educational process should be primarily concerned with evoking, stimulating, and developing poetic techniques. These vivify the imagination, stimulate metaphoric fluency, and expand sensitivity and sympathy" (Egan, 1988, p. 258). He suggests that "literacy and rationality can be achieved in a formal, dessicated sense, and that they can be socially and individually destructive if their development comes at the expense of the poet within us" (Egan, 1988, p. 258). He notes that education systems seem imbalanced in the degrees of emphasis they place on reproducing the formal conventions of literacy, concluding that the "best and fullest development of 'skills' and techniques comes through the development of the 'poet' in each child" (Egan, 1988, p. 259).

Everyone begins life in the--hopefully--secure haven of childhood. It is the “source of our sense of home and of our sense of our true selves, and much of our wandering journey is made up of trying to recapture that security, that true self that is always somewhere within but so hard to keep contact with” (Egan, 1991, p. 89).

Educators must respect childhood intuition and wonder as they integrate the world of reason and logic into the young mind. Traherne’s prose shows the sensitivities of the young child’s mind and heart which teachers must honour by planning meaningful language arts activities. Teachers should not deny students the literacy skills they will need to work in society; however, the price of doing so should not squelch the child’s spirit, sense of self, intuition, and creativity.

SPIRITUALITY IN MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE

Plato’s educational goal was to impress spiritual values of beauty, truth, and goodness upon humankind. In the discipline of science there is beauty; in the discipline of mathematics, there is truth. Aristotle writes, “The mathematical sciences particularly exhibit order, symmetry, and limitations; and these are the greatest forms of beauty” (Aristotle, in Kealoha, 1995, p. 135). This section will look at spirituality in math and science in the learning experience of the young child.

Mathematics

Numbers are much more than useful tools--they represent wondrous mystery. “Numbers display infinite kaleidoscopic interweavings and beautiful yet logical arrangements” (Kealoha, 1995, p. 122). Mathematics has often been called the language of God. It is the study of quantity and space. Math includes the study of pattern, and everything in the cosmos is a kind of pattern. Galileo elaborates on the

magical quality of mathematics. He says, "Philosophy is written in this grand book--I mean the universe--which stands continually open to our gaze, but it cannot be understood unless one first learns to comprehend the language and interpret the characters in which it is written. It is written in the language of mathematics, and its characters are triangles, circles, and other geometrical figures without which it is humanly impossible to understand a single word of it; without these, one is wandering about in a dark labyrinth" (Galileo, in Kealoha, 1995, p. 153).

Math has a history of mysticism as does literacy: "Historically the first abstract counting systems and other mathematical inventions and discoveries were considered magical, tied in with mystery religions and peculiar sects, such as that of the golden-thighed Pythagorus" (Egan, 1985, p. 226). The Greeks searched for the secrets of nature through the study of geometry. With regard to algebra, from the Arabic word *Al-jabara* meaning "binding things together", Rudy Rucker, author of *Mind Tools* writes, "Algebra provides a way for logic to connect the continuous and the discrete . . . Knowing algebra is like knowing some magical language of sorcery-- a language in which a few well-chosen words can give one mastery over the snakiest of curves" (Rucker, in Kealoha, 1995, p. 153). The task in formal education is to keep the mystical quality of numbers alive in the learning of "skills". Egan writes, ". . . it is the sense of magic that mathematics once evoked and can evoke for each child that is to be the focus for our primary curriculum. It is the peculiar, magical way in which numbers work and spin patterns and structure out of their essence that we must try first to show to children. It is too easy to see mathematics as a set of 'skills' that have to be learned mechanically. This approach simply obliterates the nature, and fun and magic, of the subject" (Egan, 1991, p. 226). This magical quality of mathematics,

which delights the spirit of young children, should be taken into account in the mathematics curriculum of the primary child.

There are several ways in which teachers can draw on children's sense of wonder in the mathematics curriculum. For example, in the primary classroom, math instruction comprises most of its time manipulating numbers such as in addition, subtraction, multiplication, and place value, rather than on exploring the meaning and magic of numbers. Basic number qualities are both subjective *and* universal. The symbolism of numbers features prominently in religious creeds and doctrines throughout the world. Julia Line, author of *Discover Numerology--Understanding and Using the Power of Numbers* writes, "Pythagorus thought that numbers are much more than just a medium of measurement--they represent qualities--it is figures which represent quantities. The principal single numbers from 1 - 9 have been ascribed with specific characteristics which together encompass all the experiences of life" (Line, 1991, p. 30). Plato also accepted that numbers have certain eternal qualities that stand apart from objects themselves. "Numbers influence the character of things that are ordered by them, thus, the number becomes a mediator between the Divine and this created world." "In this way" writes Line, "every number develops a special character, a mystique of its own, and a special metaphysical meaning" (Line, 1991, p. 16).

Numerological meanings might include: one as the number of God, unity, a starting point, an expectation; two as duality, night/day, mother/father; three as a triad - Father, Son, Holy Ghost, mother, father, child; four as the number of stability as in a table with four legs, a square, a foundation, and the number of the elements (earth, fire, air, water). Five can be thought of as the last of the earthly numbers, it is

the human shape, the five senses, a pentagon; six enters the celestial sphere, it is the star of David. Seven is often considered a lucky number, a seventh heaven, it is also the number of days in the week. Eight, is an octagon, a balance of two fours. Nine is known as a mysterious number. Herb Kohl in *Mathematical Puzzlements* writes "Nine generates some unexpected and interesting number patterns . . . Nine always returns to itself, which is why it was regarded as the symbol for indestructible matter in ancient times" (Kohl, in Kealoha, 1995, p. 127). Ten is one standing beside the great invention of zero. It is the number of human fingers and toes, and completes the cycle of numbers. Children can discover and create their own ideas on the meaning of numbers. Perhaps children would learn number skills more meaningfully if they began with an understanding of numbers themselves.

Science

Science is children's exploration. It is born of wonder and sustained in curiosity. Viewed in this way, science reflects the spiritual nature of children. Einstein comments on the mystical quality of science. He says, "The cosmic religious experience is the strongest and noblest mainspring of scientific research" (Einstein, in Barnett, 1948, p. 109). "My religion" he continues "consists of a humble admiration of the illimitable superior spirit who reveals himself in the slight details we are able to perceive with our frail and feeble minds. That deeply emotional conviction of the presence of superior reasoning power, which is revealed in the incomprehensible universe, forms my idea of God." A child's sense of wonder should be supported and encouraged in the classroom in order to nurture the spiritual life. "If a child is to keep alive his inborn sense of wonder . . . he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement and mystery of the

world we live in" (Carson, in Sheehan, 1991, p. 9). It is the "admiration" of nature that educators should instill in the science curriculum. In young children this admiration is rooted in wonder.

Joseph Cornell, in *Sharing the Joy of Nature*, outlines a four step learning chart which helps adults to nurture children's spiritual energy by exploring nature. He calls the four stage process "Flow Learning". Stage one includes awakening the child's enthusiasm. Cornell writes "I am not talking about wild-eyed, jumping-up-and-down excitement, but a calm, intense flow of personal interest and keen alertness. Without this kind of enthusiasm, we learn very little" (Cornell, 1989, p. 18). Stage two is focusing attention through play. For example, in a game called "Sounds Game," the group finds a comfortable spot and sits down, not too far apart, the children close their eyes and hold up their fists. Every time they hear a sound, they raise a finger. They listen for about two minutes, then take turns describing the sounds they've heard. The game brings the children's minds into a fresh awareness of nature's sounds.

Stage three involves direct experience. Cornell describes stage three "As we gradually focus our attention, we become more aware of what we're seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, and receiving through intuition. With calm attention, we can enter more sensitively into the rhythm and flow of nature all around us." This focused attention quietens the mind which helps the child to "absorb" nature as opposed to 'analyzing' it. Stage four is called 'sharing inspiration' which he describes in a game called "Still Hunting" where the player remains very, very still while nature returns to its normal routine. He writes, "Imagine that you're 'still hunting' and birds land very close in a tree overhead. By remaining still, you begin to feel a kind of breathless

oneness with life all around you, almost as if you were blending into the scene and experiencing life through the birds, the grass, and the waving branches of the trees. In that stillness, you can sometimes feel a great, bursting joy or a deep, calm happiness, or an overwhelming sense of the beauty or power of creation. Nature is always inspiring, and it's only our restless minds that keep us from being more often joyfully aware of this" (Cornell, 1989, p. 19). This experience of the transcendent is parallel to that described by others such as Teresa of Avila or Buddha in prayer and meditation.

Egan in *Primary Understanding*, shares many ideas with Cornell regarding nature. He writes, "We can know *about* nature--about trees and spiders and stars--but there is also a sense in which we can **know** them more directly. That is, we can be sensitive to our shared existence and sensitive to the uniqueness of each thing" (Egan, 1988, p. 218). Egan recommends sensitive observation of some individual thing in nature. The observation is not intended to lead to a written report or to answering questions, rather, it is to lead to a reverence for the uniqueness of nature. He comments, "I suspect rather that much of the distressing disregard of nature that we see in many young children is caused by the fact that the human potential for feeling a part of--rather than set off from--nature is too rarely evoked, stimulated, and developed in children" (Egan, 1988, p. 219). Egan does not propose a sentimental engagement with nature, rather, he proposes an absorbed understanding of nature where self intertwines and connects with what is being observed (Egan, 1988, p. 220).

Robert Coles also comments on the connection between science and childhood spirituality. He talks about the Hopi children: "They've always had

enormous respect for the land and the water and the sky. And in a sense the notion of God is what we would call the naturalist notion of God: that God lives in the world around us and indeed is the world around us. If we treasure whatever we call God, we have to treasure the world which is God” (Coles, in Woodruff, 1992, p. 190).

In this same vein, Einstein writes, “The most beautiful and most profound emotion we can experience is the sensation of the mystical. It is the sower of all true science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer wonder and stand in awe, is as good as dead. To know that what is impenetrable to us really exists, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty which our dull faculties can comprehend only in their most primitive forms--this knowledge, this feeling is at the centre of true religiousness” (Einstein, in Barnett, 1948, p. 108). Nurturing children’s spirituality as expressed by wonder is a basis for a meaningful science curriculum. Children may have deeper learning experiences if their capacity for wonder is addressed and nurtured in the classroom.

SPIRITUALITY IN SOCIAL STUDIES

Social studies is the story of human experience. It is humankind’s collective history on the planet including struggles, achievements, and beliefs about life and the world in which we live. When asked how the spiritual interests of children could be addressed in the classroom, Robert Coles suggests that “. . . children could be taught history that connects with their actual history, namely the history of the great religions, what those religions have been about, culturally, aesthetically, morally and spiritually.” He adds, “Children aren’t being taught what religious life stands for and

what these various traditions *have to offer us, even as they are being taught what Freud or Darwin stands for*" (Coles, in Woodruff, 1992, p. 199).

The social studies curriculum, as outlined in B.C.'s Primary Program foundation document of 1991, is divided into three goals: acquiring attitudes which promote responsible citizenship, gaining knowledge of social units, and learning skills such as interpreting maps and locating information (Primary Program Foundation Document, 1991, p. 237). Spiritual and religious study is omitted entirely in B.C.'s primary social studies curriculum. Nevertheless, if one wished to nurture, what Coles calls children's "spiritual capacity", social studies might lend itself well as a point of departure. For example, a social studies curriculum that teaches humankind's cultural history could introduce not only the stories of religious beliefs, but also help children to understand more clearly *their* point of entry and place in the world.

Egan describes a curriculum in which young children learn history through the great stories of human cultures. He suggests, "We can do this by telling children the dramatic stories of human cultures, and in particular, the one of which students are a part and partial product. We can begin with the cosmological context for those cultures, as recounted in a source such as Virginia Lee Burton's *Life Story* (1962). Within that context history is made up of the great stories of human struggles for freedom against oppression, for security against danger, for knowledge against ignorance, for hope against despair, and so on" (Egan, 1988, p. 208). In Egan's curriculum, children would be told the great stories of history in the primary grades. History would be taught as a true but simplified "story" where themes of freedom against oppression, security against fear and danger become the teaching units.

Egan describes a possible grade two history curriculum: "For the second year we might tell the story of the struggle for security against fear and danger. This would likely include such topics as the needs for food and shelter in early times and the threats against these, the importance of family, aggression as one response to a lack of security, the first villages and towns, the cooperation and mutual benefits of trade in early times, the beginnings of massive empires and their armies, the Roman army and its engineers, building a Roman town, the medieval castle and its village . . . etc." In Egan's curriculum, children have the opportunity to learn not only about world history through the power of storytelling but also the opportunity to place themselves in the context of history through their own experience. He notes, "If the world is represented through the order of local routines, children may be led to conclude that the storms of their psyches are anomalous wild elements in the play of dramatic forces. And this is not so; their world has gone through struggles and accommodations that are comprehensible in terms that can also help to make sense of their own struggles . . . The historical dimension of these struggles (security against danger) can provide a valuable context for making sense of one's own struggles, and for enlarging the sense one can make of them" (Egan, 1988, p. 211).

In sum, including elements of history into the social studies curriculum might provide more meaningful learning in that children's lives can connect to the story of humankind. The history curriculum that Egan outlines seems more interesting and important than what has been regularly taught in primary social studies curriculum, namely, self, family, and community. Also, if spirituality is seen in terms of reverence and bonding, of respect for being and of finding deeply felt grounds for unity with others, then a social studies curriculum that encompasses history might provide

greater possibilities for understanding and dialogue between cultures. As well, the teachings of great spiritual leaders such as Krishna, Lao-Tzu, Buddha, Confucius, Moses, Jesus, and Mohammed could be explored within an historically oriented social studies curriculum. One could also include in B.C.'s social studies curriculum the teachings of Native American spirituality. Native American beliefs and values that could be explored might include the inter-relatedness of mankind and nature, and for older students, the vision quest.

CONCLUSION

When asked if children are really interested in spiritual questions, Robert Coles answers "They're interested, out of their humanity, because they know to ask what (Paul) Gaughin asked in his 1897 Tahitian painting: *Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?* Those are the great existential questions of artists, philosophers, novelists, historians, psychologists, and the question of children and of all human beings" (Coles, in Woodruff, 1992, p. 199). This chapter has tried to look at the ways in which spirituality could be explored in the primary curriculum.

In many subject areas including Fine Arts, Language Arts, Mathematics, and Social Studies, there are ways in which the spiritual life of a child can be nurtured. Spirituality can be addressed in all subject areas. For example, spirituality as seen in terms of creativity, imagination, and wonder, can be nurtured in the Fine Arts curriculum. Spirituality, seen in terms of expression, self-realization, empathy, and shared common ground among people, can be fostered through meaningful Language Arts activities. Spirituality, as expressed in truth, beauty, magic, reverence, and wonder, can be explored in Science and Mathematics. Spirituality,

defined as shared experience, common understandings, knowing oneself and one's place in the world, can be explored in Social Studies.

Spirituality is not mentioned in the current 1995 *Skills Now!* curriculum; however, it was referred to in the 1990 curriculum Learning for Living component. This now defunct curriculum recognized that the educated person's development was influenced by a number of different factors including family, community, spiritual and cultural environment, as well as the formal education provided by the school system. (*Learning for Living Primary--Graduation Curriculum Guide*, 1990, p. 12). The spiritual dimension of human development referred to "... one's principles and ethics, to a sense of purpose in life, and to a sense of belonging to a greater whole. It includes, for many, a commitment to some higher process or being(s)" (*Learning for Living Curriculum Guide*, 1990, p. 112).

Spirituality contributes to the making of an educated person. "An educated person, first and foremost, understands that one's way of knowing, thinking, and doing flow from who one is. Such a person knows that an authentic person is no mere individual, an island unto himself or herself, but is a being in relation with others, and hence, at core, an ethical being . . . Moreover, the educated person speaks and acts from a deep sense of humility, conscious of the limits set by human finitude and mortality . . . to be educated is to be ever open to the call of what it is to be deeply human" (Aoki, in *Teaching and Thinking About Curriculum*, ed. Sears & Marshall, 1990, p. 114). Spirituality is a foundation upon which one builds meaning and purpose in life. It is an important part of a young child's nature and experience. Unfortunately, spirituality is neglected in curriculum, and for many, its importance fades or is forgotten in adult years.

Chapter Five CHILDHOOD SPIRITUALITY IN EDUCATION TODAY

INTRODUCTION

Should educators be concerned with the development of young children's spirituality? Is the recognition of spirituality in the educative process worthwhile? And where would spirituality be placed in B.C.'s elementary curriculum? This chapter will attempt to answer these questions.

CHILDHOOD SPIRITUALITY: A BRIEF REVIEW

Before answering the question as to whether educators should be concerned with children's spiritual development, it may be worthwhile to review notions of childhood spirituality as discussed in previous chapters.

That children are already the essence of spirituality not only in their innocence, but also in their capacity for wonder, imagination, and awe is a main idea expressed by the scholars discussed in this paper. Wordsworth writes that a child's soul recollects its immortality with "visionary gleam". The metaphysical poets concur with this sentiment of childhood as a time of divinity. Schopenhauer, echoing Plato's theory of Ideal Forms, has said that things appear to children so "bathed in splendour and of such a paradisaical nature because they experience naively in each particular thing the idea of type (species). This splendour of inner reality is entirely lost for man who has attained to the maturity of rational thought, when he comes out of the 'childlike state' of animated and living perception and is given over to laws of pure abstraction. Thus, each time we are in the state of experiencing the idea in form, we are--like the child--within Nature" (Dacque, in *Meditations on the Tarot*, 1985, p. 627). Jesus introduced this idea in the New Testament when he said "Unless you turn and

become like children you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” He implies that the spiritual life has its fullest expression in childhood. Unfortunately, with the passage of time, spiritual awareness is, for many, lost.

Many of these scholars also believe that one is born with a “memory” of one’s sempiternal pre-birth existence. This holy remembrance, not yet forgotten in childhood, enables young children to perceive the world “bathed in splendour”. Children are not tabulae rasae, but enter life with inherent wisdom and insight. If it is true that in childhood there is greater ability to perceive divinity than in adulthood, should we not recognize and nurture this quality in the children we teach? Several aspects of education including what we teach and how we teach might well be revisited including important curriculum questions, such as, “What knowledge is of most worth?”

SPIRITUALITY IN EDUCATION

Parents send children to school with the primary expectation that children’s intellectual potentials will be developed. Often, future employment is the desired end goal of this expectation. It is true that the B.C. curriculum has other objectives including children’s physical, social/emotional, and artistic development; however, the primary concern in education is intellectual development. Educators give information, students receive information; children are tested on their knowledge, and the cycle is repeated. This is a simplistic scenario; however, it seems the soul is often considered irrelevant in the educative process. Education should concern itself with the spiritual development of children; when the connection to the spiritual life is neglected, so is a connection of education to the meaningfulness of life.

Several educators from Plato to Dewey have recognized the importance of spirituality in education. Although Plato's curriculum emphasized intellectual development, it was with the idea that with the purification of the mind comes the purification of the soul. Friedrich Froebel also believed that spiritual growth should be the goal of education. He believed that the purpose of education was the realization of a "faithful, inviolate, and holy life." For him, the true purpose of education was unity with God, not a means to economic security. Although John Dewey would not object to education as a preparation for future vocation, he would oppose economic gain as the *ultimate* goal of education. In "Self-Realization as the Moral Ideal", he writes: "If I were asked to name the most needed of all reforms in the spirit of education I should say: Cease conceiving of education as mere preparation for later life, and make of it the full meaning of the present life" (Dewey, in Rockefeller, 1991, p. 247). Dewey honours the child's right to live in the present where spirituality is best nurtured.

The educative process would be remiss without recognizing the spiritual nature of young children. Richard Wilkins, general secretary of the Association of Christian Teaching, argues in his article "Education for Spiritual Development" that the most compelling reason for being in favour of a spiritual component in education is that it happens regardless of official inclusion. Education is essentially personal and people are spiritual beings. "If not," he contends, "we are merely biological machines with feelings tacked on" ("Education for Spiritual Development", in *Act Now*, 1995, p. 36). He believes children are spiritually affected by the curriculum to which they are exposed. "Not only does learning impact our spirits and slightly change their shape; we teach about spirituality for knowledge of life, the universe, and everything according to our feelings." Essentially, Wilkins points out that whether officially

recognized or not, education impacts the spiritual development of children because one's spirit changes and grows in the learning process.

Current curriculum trends in British Columbia as outlined in the *Skills Now!* curriculum focus heavily on skills for future economic utility; skills now, for jobs later. It is true that society today needs skilled workers. It is also true that educators today must impart a large body of knowledge to their students. But do educators teach with respect to the soul of the child? And is it important to do so?

Livingstone, author of *Plato and Modern Education*, writes "civilization is compounded of two elements: the machine, continually growing more efficient and complicated, and the human being" (Livingstone, 1944, p. 20). Today's skills orientated curriculum asks "What is most useful for the machine of society? We neglect to ask "What makes the good human being?" Knowledge without clear values and beliefs lacks balance and ". . . drifts on the tide of the moment and in political or economic collapse is the ready victim of Hitler or Mussolini or anyone with real beliefs, however absurd" (Livingstone, 1944, p. 23). I do not mean to imply that B.C.'s elementary curriculum is unacceptable; however, the recognition of spirituality in childhood might contribute to a better understanding of the children we teach. The spiritual life of children in B. C. public schools is important and should be addressed as a component of education in the primary years.

SPIRITUALITY IN B.C.'s ELEMENTARY CURRICULUM

If spiritual awareness has its fullest expression in childhood, educators do not to "teach" spirituality, but rather nurture the sense of spirituality that already exists in young children. This is most sensibly done by integrating elements of spirituality into

curriculum subject such as Fine Arts, Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies as addressed in Chapter Four. The following section will, nevertheless, attempt to place spirituality into the 1995 Integrated Resource Package currently designed for the elementary education.

Placing Spirituality into the 1995 Integrated Resource Package

It is difficult to slot spiritual development into official curriculum for a variety of reasons. Not only is spirituality difficult to classify as a subject, spiritual experiences and insights occur in children at different moments and in different ways. Also, children may have more spiritual awareness than their teachers. Thus, educators should not attempt to “teach”, but rather nurture and maintain the sense of spirituality that exists in young children. Nevertheless, there are spiritual principles worth acknowledging and presenting in the official curriculum. This section will try to place spirituality into the structure outlined in the Integrated Resource Package curriculum guides.

A new component of B.C.'s curriculum is Personal Planning. The Personal Planning curriculum is based on the *Learning For Living Primary to Graduation Curriculum Guide* of 1990 and is designed to contribute to the development of students as “well-rounded, balanced individuals”. The rationale of the Personal Planning component addresses children’s emotional and social development in so far as they compliment intellectual and physical development. The aim of the Personal Planning component is to “enable students to become thoughtful, caring individuals who plan and reflect, make informed choices, and take responsibility for their own personal and career development.” Although much of the Personal Planning

curriculum concentrates on career development, it is the most likely place for a spiritual component in education because of its focus on personal growth.

There are three divisions in the Personal Planning curriculum. They include: the planning process, career development, and personal development. Personal development includes the following sub-strands: healthy living, mental well-being, family life education, child and substance abuse prevention, and safety prevention. Curriculum information is presented in four divisions: learning outcomes, suggested instructional strategies, suggested assessment strategies, and recommend learning resources. The following is an example of how spirituality might look in B.C. Integrated Resource Package curriculum guide. The first section will explore possible learning outcomes for the development of spirituality in the Primary Grades K-3, and will then address instructional strategies, assessment strategies, and learning resources. The suggestions will follow the Personal Planning curriculum format.

Learning Outcomes of Spiritual Development

Goal: To recognize and nurture childhood spirituality.

It is expected that students will:

Grades K to 1

- listen to and discuss children's stories which address elements of spirituality
- have the opportunity to engage in philosophical discussion
- be introduced to, practise, and discuss universal spiritual maxims such as the Golden Rule
- explore guided imagery meditation
- nurture spirituality as experienced through play in Nature

Grades 2 to 3

- be given opportunity to engage in philosophical discussion
- demonstrate a willingness to engage in philosophical discussion
- nurture spirituality as experienced through Nature, and as expressed in and Children's Literature
- discuss and present information from children's stories which address elements of spirituality
- demonstrate skills required for journal writing with a focus on spirituality: poems, reflections, wonderings, experiences, and beliefs

- demonstrate a willingness to participate in guided imagery meditation and games of awareness and concentration

Suggested Instructional Activities

Grades K to 3

Examples of instructional activities might include:

- Language Arts activities such as composition of poetry, short stories, lists, reader response journal entries, etc. following the sharing of children's books which capture the essence of spirituality such as *Horton Hears a Who* or *Old Turtle*
- calendar time exploration and discussion of words or quotations which capture the spiritual life such as Joy, Courage, Acceptance, or "The best way to have a friend is to be one."
- creating a guided imagery meditation individually or in pairs
- engaging students in whole and small group philosophical discussions following stories such as *What is God?*, or *The Velveteen Rabbit* guided either by student questions or teacher-directed questions

Suggested Assessment Strategies

Grades K to 3

Collect evidence of student's ability to:

- express and share spiritual inquiries, feelings, and beliefs through discussion, written compositions, and artwork
- describe and demonstrate attributes of the spiritual life (e.g. love, acceptance, sharing, compassion, wonder)
- use imagination and creativity in schoolwork

Recommended Learning Resources

Grades K to 3

- Deborah Rozman. (1983). *Meditating with Children and Meditations for Children* Boulder Creek, California: University of the Trees Press.
- Goelitz, Jeffrey. (1986). *The Ultimate Kid*. Boulder Creek, California: University of the Trees Press.
- Hill, Christopher. (1978). *Exploring Inner Space*. Boulder Creek, California: University of the Trees Press.
- Baba Hari Dass. (1989). *A Child's Garden of Yoga*. Santa Cruz, California.: Sri Rama Publishing.

- Henkins, Peggy. (1989). *The Joyful Child*. Tuscan, Arizona: Harbinger House, Inc.
- Kealoha, Anna. (1995). *Trust The Children*. Berkeley, California: Celestial Arts.
- Wyatt, Isabel. (1978). *Seven-Year-Old Wonder-Book*. San Rafael, California: Dawne-Leigh Publications.

Children's Literature including:

- Allsburg, Van Chris. (1985). *The Polar Express*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.
- Boritzer, Etan. (1990). *What is God?* Willowdale, Ontario: Firefly Publishing.
- Burnett, F.H. (1911). *The Secret Garden*. New York: Dell Publishing.
- Luenn, Nancy. (1992). *Mother Earth*. New York: Antheneum, Macmillan Publishing Company.
- Oberman, Sheldon. (1994). *The Always Prayer Shawl*. Pennsylvania: Caroline House.
- Rylant, Cynthia. (1993). *The Dreamer*. New York: Blue Sky Press.
- Seuss, Dr. (1954). *Horton Hears a Who*. New York: Random House.
- Williams, M. (1986). *The Velveteen Rabbit*. New York: Knopf.
- Wood, D. (1992). *Old Turtle*. Duluth, M.N.: Pfeifer--Hamilton Publishers.

A spiritual component in curriculum for the intermediate and high school years might include: comparative analysis of spiritual beliefs of various religious traditions, study of the lives of saints, mantra meditation, recognition of meditation as a way to deal with stress in life, analytical philosophical inquiry, fostering and practicing universal spiritual maxims by helping others in the community, and study of personal values.

CONCLUSION

All children should be allowed permission to ask the big questions about life. Nurturing the spiritual life has rewards both personally and collectively. We are far from creating a good and just society. Violent Crime is commonplace. Many children are potential victims of crime, abuse, and neglect. And, unbelievably, a small minority of children have become perpetrators of horrific crimes themselves. Statistics from the 1991 United States Children's Defense Fund report that each day 2,795

teenagers get pregnant, 135,000 children bring guns to school, 6 teenagers commit suicide, 211 children are arrested for drug abuse, and 1,1512 teenagers drop out of school (Howell, 1991, p. xxxiii). Alice Howell, author of *How Like An Angel Came I Down*, discusses these alarming statistics of childhood and their relationship to spirituality and meaningfulness. She writes "Separation of church and state may be the law of the land, but the soul or psyche remains. It cannot be legislated out of existence. Since even a moment of silence is proscribed, we have left no time whatsoever in public school for introspection, for even reminding a child that he or she is a precious point of unique identity, a center, from which can be viewed the circumference of external events on any given day. Human consciousness, the prize of our planetary evolution has taken eons to develop, yet daily, it is being thrown away by those wishing to escape a meaningless existence. Drugs, alcohol, sex (often the search for love and human contact), are substitutes for the search for inner meaning and self-worth" (Howell, 1991, p. xxxiv). Tragically, some young children fall victim to society's worst ills.

Spiritual wisdom might help in one's search for inner meaning and self-worth. Tagore, India's poet, writes "When in our own deeper spiritual being we fail to find some deeper harmony or meaning in the universe, we lose faith in ourselves and proceed to sink all our resources in the pursuit of immediate self-interest" (Tagore, 1961, p. 92). Spirituality plays an important aspect of one's development. Children must have the opportunity to nurture and develop their spiritual life.

Crisis in education is a crisis of human spirit. B.C.'s *Skills Now!* curriculum places too much emphasis on economic gain. Education in B.C. fails to recognize the spiritual life not only as an important dimension in the growth of the young child,

but also as a factor in creating a good and just society. Education would do well to recognize and honour the spiritual dimension of childhood.

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