Preliminary Literature review: Spirituality of Children

Kathryn Kraft, 13 April 2017

Defining spirituality

Key points:
- Spirituality is difficult to define. While there are many reasons for this, two key reasons are that it is highly experiential and very personal.
- Spirituality usually entails a sense of transcendence, relationship, meaning and purpose expressed through a commitment to others.
- Spirituality may or may not be expressed within a religious framework.
- People's theological perspectives inform the way that they perceive spirituality. Amongst Christians, understandings of spirituality vary, but often refer to the understanding that people are created in the image of God, the relational nature of God and of humanity, and a belief in Good.

It is difficult to define spirituality, and there are almost as many definitions as there are people studying or writing about spirituality. Most definitions include either a concept of 'sacred' or 'transcendental' – that is, God or something else that one may associate with God; and a set of human qualities such as attitudes or awareness (Scales et al 2014: 1107). The relational nature of humanity is arguably the most important such human quality to highlight in a study of spirituality, which relates to how individuals seek and express meaning and purpose, and how they are connected to the moment, self, others, nature and the sacred.

Spirituality can, and often is, developed within a religious framework, but the traits of spirituality may be found outside of religion as well. One definition which captures this tension is, simply, "a search for the sacred" (King et al 2016:7). From a broader perspective, the word "spiritual" comes from the Latin *spiritus* which means "breath of life" (Vinueza 2017:87). The idea of "breath" captures well an important characteristic of spirituality: it is highly experiential. Spiritual experience "is holistic, involving our bodies and our senses as much as our emotions, and it occurs within personal relationships… in which the experience of two persons is not a means to an end but infinitely valued in itself" (Best 2011:366). Spiritual experiences are diverse and often highly personal (King et al 2016:4).

Indeed, one reason why defining spirituality is so difficult, is that it is a process of defining experiences which are experienced personally and may be expressed in different ways externally by different people. "Moreover, it leads to concept of the spiritual as including just about everything, and when that is true of a concept, the concept itself loses all

meaning" (Best 2011:364). Further complicating the process of defining spirituality, even within the bounds of Christian spirituality, is the fact that our understandings are "dependent on our theological assumptions. Theological criteria of interpretation and evaluation have already implicitly come into play" (Sheldrake 1998:21). Nonetheless, spirituality also includes actions, i.e. what one does, in addition to beliefs, i.e. why one does what one does (Nasir 2008:286).

A major study in the United States, which spoke with a wide diversity of people from different religious, racial, ethnic and age profiles, sought to define spirituality through the stories told by different people about their lives, experiences and quest for spirituality. They found that people most often understood spirituality to entail a religious tradition, a sense of morality, an understanding of God or deity, practices, mystery, a sense of meaning, beliefs, a transcendent sense of connection to others and the world, ritual, experience of awe and cultivating the self (Ammerman 2014:25). There were many for whom spirituality was about God and building a relationship with God; these people also generally saw spirituality as something to be pursued, and most were open to seeing a miraculous dimension in life. For them, spirituality was produced and sustained through participation in religious communities (Ammerman 2014:33). Others spoke "of a world of experiences that do not depend on the Christian (or any other) God but that nevertheless signal transcendence, a reaching beyond the ordinary" (Ammerman 2014:34). Their perspectives highlighted a sense of connection to others, awe inspired by the natural world and moments of beauty, life philosophies developed through a search for meaning, and an inner core of individual self-worth. These people also tended to value a sense of common humanity, interconnectedness, community and compassion. One thing that those whose spirituality was rooted in religious beliefs and God, and those whose spirituality was not, was that living a virtuous life in which one helps others, was an important aspect of spirituality (Ammerman 2014:45, Nasir 2008:286).

As Ammerman's study illustrates, transcendence is a key component of spirituality, and this is especially true for for adolescents: "Their connection to or sense of relatedness to a source of meaning that extends beyond the mundane of life. In some cases this was God or Allah, their religious community, their family, a sense of all of humanity, nature, or an absolute truth" (King et al 2016:7). Also very important to spirituality is fidelity, that is, a person's clarity and conviction about his/her beliefs, values, morals and that which is experienced as sacred; as well as a person's contribution to the benefit of others and the greater good.

Spirituality becomes particularly relevant when considering coping or suffering. A fair bit of research has suggested that a belief in a higher power, or for unbelievers a sense of awe for transcendence, helps many refugee people cope in difficult times (Vinueza 2017:89). Coping can be positive or negative, or both positive and negative, but has been found to be related to people's personal sense of self, social relationships, environmental engagement, and religiosity (Charzynska 2015:1633).

Within Christianity, there is a growing body of research into spirituality, and Christian development actors are exploring the role of spirituality in human development and well-being. In 2010, CAFOD, Tearfund and Theos proposed a framework for understanding

human flourishing which is based on the idea that we are all created in the image of God. Their framework had three dimensions: substantive, the idea that we are rational, creative, productive and generous; functional, with a role to fill, subdue and rule the earth; and relational, created to be in interpersonal communion (Wholly Living 2010).

These dimensions are also reflected in the Trinitarian principle: the idea of unity in diversity, which "implies that the persons do not merely exist in and through themselves, but through voluntary invitation, in relationship with others" (Klaasen 2013:187). This entails an idea that persons are neither individualistic nor societal, but always in relation to others. "Development of the person happens in relationships with other persons and the rest of creation, including structures, societal units or material resources" (Klaasen 2013:192). Christian spirituality is arguably more about relationships than doctrine, and more about experiences than abstract ideas (Sheldrake 1998:36).

For Christians, therefore, an awareness of spirituality entails a subjective understanding of traditional beliefs about God, humanity, creation and the interrelatedness between these things, and in turn how these beliefs are expressed in worship, values and lifestyle (Sheldrake 1998:34). Spirituality is holistic but framed in relationship to God, Christ, the Holy Spirit and the community of believers.

Because a Christian view of the world suggests that no part of the world is inherently profane though it has been profaned by sin and human actions, ethical-spiritual values emerge from a Christian worldview. These focus on what is "just, beautiful, creative, ecological, 'of easy contact', polycentric, diverse, memory, aspiration/desire, sense of sacred" and solidarity (Sheldrake 2007:254). Philip Sheldrake suggested that spirituality "invites theologians to take seriously the role of their own faith in their reflections and to realize that in general terms spiritual experience lies at the heart of the theological enterprise" (Sheldrake 1998:33).

Because spiritual experience is typically so rooted in one's religious faith, it is likely that "members of different faith traditions do not simply write about the nature of spiritual experience differently but actually have different experiences in crucial ways" (Sheldrake 1998:61). Religious experience varies from one religion to the next, and is contextualized to the expectations of a given religion. Not all mystical experience is necessarily similar (Thanissaro 2015:220). Context and the nature of a person's experiences affects spiritual development in a variety of ways; for example, hardship can lead people to turn to a 'higher source' for guidance/consolation (Nasir 2008:290).

Difference between spiritual and religious

Key points:
- Spirituality and religion are increasingly viewed as different concepts, though they are linked in various ways. For some people, most notably youth and adolescents, religion is increasingly seen as adverse to spirituality.
- Spirituality is more experiential, personal and universal than religion, which is more often linked to doctrine and institutions.

- While there is little evidence that religion contributes to spiritual well-being, religion does offer social capital, access to institutional support and contributes to other aspects of well-being.

Spirituality is often seen as a 'function' of religion, and most studies of spirituality have until recently actually been studies of religious practices (Scales et al 2014:1106). "And yet, we have found that the majority of youth in a global sample from eight countries pursued their spiritual development without recourse to deep engagement in religious or spiritual practices" (Scales et al 2014:1106).

In a world with greater mobility and globalization, societies and communities are becoming more multicultural and diverse. Therefore, when seeking to nurture spirituality, there is a growing need to accommodate a diversity of religious beliefs and practices, especially in schools (Best 2011:363). In a study with Buddhist teens in the United Kingdom, the researcher suggested that "while religious experiences reflect awareness of a benevolent non-physical power beyond and far greater than the individual self, spiritual experiences indicate an influence which is inexplicable in any down-to-earth way, independent of any specifically religious beliefs" (Thanissaro 2015:219). The study found that "a Buddhist who self-identifies as a 'spiritual person' is likely to be a Buddhist who has had a Religious Spiritual Experience (RSE). They will be someone who places importance on having a spiritual teacher... who has spent more time than their peers thinking about their aim in life and may have strong plans for a monastic vocation" (Thanissaro 2015:229). So, in that study, spirituality seemed to contribute a degree of authenticity to a Buddhist identity, rather than Buddhism being a form of institutionalized spirituality.

Some have suggested that spirituality is more broad and comprehensive than religiosity. It may be described as universal, holistic, not controlled by doctrines, and characterized by connectedness and interrelatedness with the self, others, world and universe (Ferreira and Schulze 2016:232). Spirituality covers both secular and religious worldviews and expressions. "Thus, spirituality could be expressed and formed through a wide range of religious and non-religious beliefs and practices in different contexts" (Westerlund 2016:217, see also Ferreira and Schulze 2016:232).

In many European and American countries, there is a growing movement of people who describe themselves as "spiritual-not-religious". For these, "the common practice is to contrast spirituality with religion, where religion is typically described as 'the creedal and ritual expressions of spirituality that is associated with institutional church organizations', and spirituality more simply as a 'personal affirmation of the transcendent'. The analytic paradox to be embraced is that spirituality is both religion and non-religion" (Chandler 2008:242). This perspective sees spirituality as more private than religion, and suggests while that religion cannot exist without spirituality, spirituality does not require a religious foundation. What organized religion offers to human flourishing, though, is social capital, civic influence, and often more effective governance (Chandler 2008:246). Religion may also be an important source of teaching values, in particular values of social responsibility which are a key aspect of spirituality; however, the evidence for this is limited (Chandler 2008:249). However, in a study of people who describe themselves a spiritual but religiously

unaffiliated, two-thirds believed that spirituality is lost in organized religion (Chandler 2008:242).

Among youth, there is evidence that being "religious" may have different types of impacts than being "spiritual". For adolescents, in particular in North American and European countries, religion is increasingly a source of dispiriting or disenchantment (Johnson 2008:34). A global study found that "religious" involvement among middle school students was more likely to have a positive effect on later alcohol, tobacco and illicit drug use, as well as helping others and value placed on diversity. Being "spiritual", on the other hand, was more linked to avoiding antisocial behavior, violence and gambling, as well as success in school later on (Scales et al 2014:1102).

Research suggests that religious beliefs should not be confused with a spirituality which is more experiential and, possibly, more personal. One study identified five religious orientations: fundamentalism, intrinsic, extrinsic-personal, extrinsic-social and quest; some of these were more linked to spirituality than others. "Whereas believing in the inerrant aspects of religious teachings (i.e. fundamentalism) was associated with decrements to well-being via drops in personal locus of control, an intrinsic religious orientation was positively associated with well-being through personal locus of control" (Osborne et al 2016:502). The researchers found that believing in an omnipotent God was not associated with well-being.

It is worth nothing, however, that there are other streams of research that view religiosity and spirituality as a "single multidimensional construct, spirituality/religiosity (S/R), to capture the dimensions of the institutional and personal" (Baring et al 2016:164).

Child Spirituality and Spiritual Development

Key points:
- Children have an inherent spirituality that may be difficult to explain or understand, but which they express and experience in various ways.
- Spiritual development takes place during childhood and is a key part of childhood development, and entails developing a sense of transcendence, faith, meaning and purpose, and moral behavior.
- Spiritual development in adolescence is a field of particular interest, because it is a season of life in which a child is searching for, or developing, meaning and identity.
- As is the case for spiritual education, arguably, measuring spiritual development needs to make space for recognizing the experiential and the personal, in addition to knowledge, awareness or actions.

Research with children demonstrates how spirituality is a universal trait, an innate aspect of humanity, which may be nurtured within religious traditions (Westerlund 2016:217). One scholar asks, "Are young children biologically prepared to discern the reality of spirit? Admittedly, spirit is a comparatively difficult reality to grasp. But, before knowing anything about the world, infants appear to be oriented to centers of organizing energy. The human spirit literally rises as an infant's whole being is energized, focused, and organized in dynamic relationship to the positive organizing energy of an Other" (Johnson 2008:27).

Indeed, arguably, children are perhaps more likely than adults to be aware of spiritual matters and have something to teach adults with regards to spirituality (Vinueza 2017:88). Therefore, spirituality is an integral aspect of human development.

There is a rising interest specifically in adolescent spirituality and religiosity, due to a "recognition that it is at this period of development when spirituality and religiosity become assets for positive development, and when most religious and spiritual doubts increase" (Baring et al 2016:164). This is also arguably the life season with the most changes in the spiritual domain for a person. Some important themes have emerged in extensive research about adolescents. Adolescence is a season in which many people build a faith in something greater than themselves, whether it be God or a nonreligious way of life. "Whatever form emerging faith may take, there is the sense that something transcends, even if what transcends is something within the self" (Scarlett 2008:42).

Spirituality has been found to be potentially linked to prosocial coping skills and lower likelihood of engaging in risky behaviours such as alcohol abuse among adolescents (Scales et al 2014:1104). During this season of looking for an identity, that allows young people to matter to themselves, families and society, "the search for an identity impels the young person to transcend a cognitive and emotional focus on the self and to seek to contribute in important, valued, and even noble ways to his or her world" (Lerner et al 2008:3). Therefore, generosity is an important aspect of adolescent spirituality, as are conviction and devotion.

Childhood development is intrinsically intertwined with spiritual development, so research into spiritual development often focuses on youth and children. As defined in the Handbook for Child Well-being, "spiritual development is the process of growing the intrinsic human capacity for self-transcendence, in which the self is embedded in something greater than the self, including the sacred. It is the developmental 'engine' that propels the search for connectedness, meaning, purpose and contribution. It is shaped both within and outside of religious traditions, beliefs and practices." Spiritual development is often described as developing a sense of what truly matters in life and orienting life towards these things (Johnson 2008:26). It also includes a sense of transcendence, growing capacity for more adaptive self-regulation, continued transaction between an individual and his/her sociocultural context, moral behavior resulting from social interactions, trust and a shared vision with others that is embedded in religiousness.

Key components for spiritual development include secure parental and other relationships, while peer attachment has been found to be less associated with religious participation (Baring et al 2016:164). "Giving expression to spiritual qualities and attributes, such as love, peace, purity and connectedness, is the key that unlocks adaptive mental capacities," enabling children to "solve problems, realise goals, and develop reasoning capacities and coping skills" (Ferreira and Schulze 2016:232). Factors which are likely to influence spiritual development include the institutional context in which a child is functioning, cultural activities, social interactions within practices, individual personal characteristics, and sense of meaning (Nasir 2008:291). In a study on Spirituality/Religiosity, nine variables were found to show higher possibilities for students spiritual and religious development: five of them

were about relational engagements, and four related to their identity or status as students (Baring et al 2016:172).

Spiritual education is a particularly tenuous field of practice, because of the highly experiential nature of spirituality. "Attempts to ground spiritual education on knowledge and reasoning alone quite obviously miss the mark" (Best 2011:363). One way of looking at this is "spiritual intelligence", which is about helping students to develop their spirituality, by inspiring motivation and curiosity to understand other viewpoints while holding strongly to their ow convictions, be more self-aware and less confined by personal paradigms and belief systems (Ferreira and Schulze 2016:231).

Sample Measures and Frameworks

Most scales that exist are specific to American Protestantism (Scales et al 2014:1107). However, even in cross-cultural research, certain themes emerge and are repeated. They are primarily framed in terms of relationships, to self, others, the environment one lives in, and God (or a sense of the Transcendent); and also entail a sense of meaning and purpose in life. Most measures of spirituality focus on the internal aspect (relationship to self) and on religiosity as expressed through beliefs about God, relationship to God and religious practices. However, as this literature review has found, research indicates that relationships with others in community, and in particular one's sense of identity in relation to others, is a key aspect of spirituality, especially for children and adolescents as they develop spiritually. Commitment to the environment in which one lives, most notably sense of altruism or doing things for others, is also an important dimension of spirituality for children and youth to develop. Finally, the importance of a sense of meaning and purpose may be incorporated in the various types of relationships, or may merit highlighting as its own dimension of spirituality, since relationships without a sense of purpose are likely not sufficient for a child's spiritual development.

The below table highlights a number of different spirituality scales, some of which were specifically developed for children and youth, and others which have been used widely across a broad population. The scales measure various things, and their themes are summarized according to the four types of relationships and the sense of meaning/purpose.

	SOI (Elkins)	SHALOM (SWBQ)	SSSC (Spiritual Sensitivity Scale)	DSES (Daily Spiritual Experiences)	RaSSY (Religiosity and Spirituality Scale for Youth)	SQ (Spiritual Intelligence)	MDAS (Measurement of Diverse Adolescent Spirituality)
Relationship to Self	Sacredness of Life Awareness of suffering	Personal: Sense of identity Self-awareness Joy in life Inner peace meaning in life	Awareness Sensing: Taking time to think Concentration Noticing new things Learning new things Awareness of tactile feeligs Value Sensing: Talking about feelings Existential questions Helping others Aspirations for future	How beliefs/ understandings are a part of life Spirituality Private Religious Practices Religious/ Spiritual Coping Mindfulness	Faith as a source of personal resilience Gratitude Personal comfort in faith	Meaning Consciousness Peaceful Surrender to Self	Awareness of self, mindfulness Fidelity to oneself
Relationship to Others	Idealism Connectedness	Communal: Love of other people Forgiveness toward others Trust between individuals Respect for others Kindness toward other people	Community Sensing: Value of time shared with others Feel loved by friends and family Helping the less fortunate Sense of belonging Showing love to others	Religious Identification Public Religious Practices	Interaction with, reliance on, and support to people who share one's religious beliefs		Generosity

Relationship to Environment	Altrusitic love and social justice No material values	Environmental: Connection with nature Awe at a breathtaking view Oneness with nature Harmony with the environment Sense of 'magic' in the environment	Mystery Sensing: Amazement at various things Pictures and stories to understand things in life Desire to learn about the world Imagination	Daily Spiritual Experiences	Donating money and time because of religious beliefs		Responsibility
Relationship to the Transcendent (God)	Transcendent	Transcendental: Personal relationship with the Divine/God Worship of the Creator Oneness with God Peace with God Prayer life		Awareness of the Divine/ transcendent Relation with the Divine/ transcendent Religious Beliefs	Relationship with God Beliefs about God Prayer Trust in God	Grace Transcendence Truth	Connection to God, ultimate truth, and/or the supernatural
Meaning and Purpose in Life	Meaning and Purpose Mission in Life	Meaning in life (categorised under personal)				Inner-directed Freedom	Contribution

Reference							
	Elkins, D., L. J. Hedstrom, L. Hughes, J. A. Leaf, and C. Saunders. 1988. "Toward a Humanistic-phenomenological Spirituality: De nition, Description, and Measurement." *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 28 (4): 5–18. doi:10.1177/00221678882840 02. *Tool in zip file	Fisher, J. 2010. "Development and Application of a Spiritual Well-Being Questionnaire Called SHALOM" *Religions* 1:105-121. *Article in zip file	Stoyles, GJ, B. Stanford, P. Caputi, A.L. Keating, and B. Hyde. 2012. "A measure of spiritual sensitivity for children." *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 17(3), 203-215. *Tool in zip file	Einolf, C. J. 2013. "Daily Spiritual Experiences and Prosocial Behavior" *Social Indicator Research* 110:71-87. *Tool in zip file, see http://www.dsescale.org/	Hernandez, B.C. 2011. *The Religiosity and Spirituality Scale for Youth: Development and Initial Validation*. PhD Dissertation, Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College. http://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3205&context=gradschool_dissertations *Tool in zip file	Ferreira, C. and S Schulze. 2016. "Cultivating spiritual intelligence in adolescence in a divisive religious education classroom: a bridge over troubled waters." *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 21(3-4), 230-242. *See qualitative tools in Annex of Ferreira thesis at http://uir.unisa.ac.za/handle/10500/21136	King, P.E., S.H. Kim, J. L. Furrow & C.E. Clardy 2016. Preliminary exploration of the Measurement of Diverse Adolescent Spirituality (MDAS) among Mexican youth, *Applied Developmental Science*, DOI: 10.1080/10888691.2016.1203789 *SAMPLE tool in zip file

Proposed WV Measurement Tool

Because of the highly experiential nature of spirituality, the best studies of spirituality take a narrative approach, in which people tell their stories. Their stories can then be interpreted or analysed within a framework, and/or a framework can be developed on the basis of these stories.

A gap in the literature is the cross-cultural nature of spirituality. Research consistently highlights the diversity of spiritual experiences, and has noted the influence of life experience, religious background and contextual factors on how a person might develop spirituality. Therefore, there needs to be flexibility within the monitoring framework for different people to experience spirituality in different ways.

Nonetheless, key themes have emerged in the study, as outlined in the above table. There are various ways of labelling the themes, but one proposal is to measure spirituality according to five categories:
1. Relationship to self (personal sense of spirituality)
2. Relationship to others (spirituality expressed in community)
3. Relationship to the environment (care for nature and for others)
4. Relationship to God (expressions of awe for Transcendence)
5. Meaning and Purpose in life (spirituality as not only experience but also as a motivator)

A tool can be developed to ask children participating in World Vision programmes to tell stories about how World Vision's activities have impacted their lives. This tool should be used to encourage them to reflect and tell their **stories**. Then, once they have shared their stories they can be guided through a process of considering whether their experience contributed to one, or some, of the above 5 categories. This can therefore be an inductive means of gleaning quantitative data about how children are developing spiritually and the role World Vision is playing in their spiritual development.

Within each category, more specific detail can be given, such as sample manifestations of each. Then, in each context (National Office, Area Programme, or Community), the list can be modified to what emerges as key characteristics of spiritual experience within that community. This would then be a means of developing standard indicators but which are context-adaptable.

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