

Dedication

I take pleasure in dedicating this thesis to everyone in my family.

Each of them has helped to shape my own spirituality in a distinctive way.

*'A child's spirit is like a child, you can never catch it by running after it;
you must stand still, and, for love, it will soon itself come back'*

(Arthur Miller: The Crucible)

*'Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you,
That in heaven their angels behold the face of my father which is in heaven'*

(The New Testament, Matthew 18 v 10)

Cast all your thoughts or preconceptions about God

under a thick cloud of forgetting

and approach Him as he is'

(Anon: The Cloud of Unknowing)

Psychological Perspectives on Children's Spirituality

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Prefatory Note

The doctoral research reported in this thesis was conducted as part of an externally funded research project - the children's spirituality project - in the School of Education, Nottingham University (1994-1997) for which I was employed as the research fellow. The design, conduct and analysis of that project were primarily my responsibility. However, in terms of design, the decision to use a qualitative research methodology was adopted from the original research proposal. What particularly distinguishes this thesis from my project work is the emphasis here on the contribution psychological perspectives can make to this field.

Abstract

There have been very few attempts to understand the nature of children's spirituality which have undertaken a study of children themselves. More often this topic has been examined through the various perspectives provided by religious, moral, educational and generally adult agenda.

This thesis offers a study of children's spirituality drawing on perspectives from developmental psychology. Its intention is to make a distinctive theoretical contribution towards an understanding of children's nature. The methodological approach is that of an empirical, qualitative investigation and analysis. The main data presented are interviews conducted with six and ten year old children in which the opportunity to discuss potentially spiritual experiences, feelings, and issues was encouraged.

Chapter 1 explores the history of interest in spirituality reflected in education policy documents, as well as a selective review of the scholarly education literature this has increasingly inspired.

Chapter 2 explores the nature of a psychological contribution. Although the spiritual has rarely found an established place in psychology's research agenda, I offer a compilation of relevant exceptions to this neglect. These are drawn both from explicit attempts by psychologists to investigate discrete aspects of children's religious lives, as well as from psychological models of development in which the nature of children's spirituality is more implicitly suggested.

The development of a provisional conceptual framework specifically for children's spirituality (particularly the empirical study of it) is outlined in chapter 3. A variety of psychological scholarship is used to inform this framework, as is a discussion of the complexities affecting the definition of spirituality in a contemporary context.

Since few empirical studies have been conducted in this area, the methodological approach devised for this study is described in detail. Considerable

attention is given to the foundational issue of the researcher's perspective, as well as the procedural stages from piloting to data analysis.

Chapters 5 and 6 offer my interpretative analyses. I describe how repeated qualitative analysis was essential to uncovering layers of meaning in the data, and how this gradually gave way to an interpretative account of children's spirituality expressed in broadly psychological terms. I propose that much of the nature of children's spirituality may be described in terms of a demonstration of a particular kind of consciousness, referred to here as 'relational consciousness'. This core category is further explored in terms of its contributory dimensions, drawing on a coding paradigm suggested by grounded theory methodologists.

The final chapter considers additional psychological parallels which this new description of children's spirituality affords, and the more general implications of this work for children's education. It is suggested that the conduct of the study as a whole in terms of its literature research, method, data and analytical framework, demonstrates the potential of pursuing a psychologically informed approach in this area.

Chapter 1

Locating interest in spirituality in the educational context

Introduction - a personal view

This chapter outlines the general background which prompted the need for a better understanding of children's spirituality and thus inspired my research. Such a background is primarily the context provided by education in which spirituality has been identified as a core, if not *the* core, value characterising good education.

Psychology has been lamentably neglectful of the spiritual dimension to human nature, and my primary objective in this thesis as a whole will be to demonstrate the shortsightedness of such neglect in terms of a comprehensive understanding of children. Children's spirituality deserves psychology's attention.

Education, in contrast, has more often than not adopted a model of human nature that includes the spiritual. Therefore, an examination of education's understanding of the spiritual offers an important source of reference concerning the way in which this is seen to be part of human nature. Psychology might attend to education's treatment of spirituality.

As I am a research psychologist, I offer an outsider's reading of both the policy and the content of scholarly literature concerned with spirituality in education. This may therefore compound the sense of confusion that many within education have acknowledged (e.g. Best, 1996) about the nature of spirituality and its interaction with the child's development. However, since there is undoubtedly a need to clarify and characterize some of the inherent complexities which make children's spirituality such an intriguing area for both the psychologist and the educator, attempting a dialogue that draws out the insights (and assumptions) of each discipline may be mutually beneficial. Education might learn also from psychological perspectives in its attempt to understand children's spirituality.

1.1

Models of human nature

In 1988, the Education Reform Act (ERA) identified five key areas which a complete education should address. It stated that a balanced curriculum should:

‘(a) promote the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at school and of society; and

(b) prepare such pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life. (DES, 1989, p.7)

In so doing, this document encapsulated a view of human nature, in which spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical domains each vitally contribute to the final product: the capable, responsible and discerning adult. Education has a legitimate role in providing value-laden aspirations for how we would like human nature to be. However, whilst not seeking to interfere with education’s choice of values and ideals, psychology and other social sciences can offer methods and theoretical accounts that address how human nature may be in reality.

The potential for this kind of reciprocal scholarship has been seen in the dialogue between educational ideals and developmental psychology’s accounts of children’s mental development. Piagetian, and more recently Vygotskian inspired psychologies have both drawn from, but more especially had influence on, method and theory in education. Kelly (1987) has suggested that at a general level the changing philosophy of education, from a traditional, Platonic view towards a ‘progressive’ view, reflects a desire that education should attend much more to the natural course and form of human development, and by implication attend to the contributions of disciplines which study this.

However, according to Kelly’s analysis the Platonic model still dominates in many respects: education often being seen as a means by which an ideal blue-print of

human nature is implicitly or explicitly agreed and striven for, with proportionally less regard paid to the empirical validity of that blue-print. The confident statement in the ERA document of the requirement to address five particular areas would seem to be such an instance of this. The spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical represent the valued components of the adult 'end-product'. Children are assumed to be in need of education in these five areas and there is an assumption that they will be able to respond to attempts to promote their capacities in such domains.

The following review of the education policy and literature on spirituality catalogues the variety of influences on its interpretation including cultural, political and religious contexts. It also suggests that very few have resourced their interpretations with empirically grounded investigations of the actual nature of children's spirituality. Although in other areas education and developmental psychology have found mutual interests, psychology's provision of a reality-based account of the nature of children has not yet contributed in an explicit way to the educational discourse in the area of their spirituality. It might seem, indeed, as if the debate has become fixed in an older, more rhetorical model of values rehearsed and examined without sufficient reference to children themselves.

It may be, however, that an empiricist worldview has influenced the attention given to spirituality by both education and psychology, but more indirectly and negatively. The human-centred subjects of psychology and education have flourished as academic disciplines in a period otherwise dominated by intellectual focus on accounts of the natural world in terms of scientific statements of prediction and control. Indeed, their development as disciplines owes much to the conceptual framework espoused in the natural sciences whereby attempts are made to pursue objective, accurate study. However, this post-enlightenment shift may have framed not only how research is pursued, but also what is considered worthy of scholarly attention. The history of attention to spirituality in education suggests sporadic rather than substantial interest, and as the review in Chapter 2 demonstrates, psychology has all but ignored

this area altogether. Donaldson (1992) has suggested that such neglect of spirituality may be the result of a general wariness to engage with a complex and, popularly considered, irrational area in an age in which progress has tended to be evaluated in terms of reason and factual information. Consequently, in comparison with the intellectual or physical, the spiritual dimension is not highly valued in the cultural context even if it is cited as a guiding value for education. And, this contempt can be traced to the biasing influence of the empiricist worldview which psychology embraces. Therefore, the suggested promise contained in a partnership between education and psychology, in pursuit of human nature ‘model building’ that includes consideration of the spiritual, is a rather complex proposition requiring a critical study of psychology’s contribution rather than any obvious ‘cross-over’.

1.2

An historical review of education’s treatment of spirituality

It is possible to trace an interest in spirituality as an educational issue a considerable way back in history. Contemporary writers have sought elucidation of spirituality by revisiting philosophers of education such as Rousseau and Froebel (Schweitzer, 1991; McLaughlin, 1996). These explorations suggest that the education of spirituality has long been a matter for concern, and to some extent this is presented as underlying the whole basis of educational schools of thought.

Priestley (1985) accounts for this close relationship in terms of institutional links between theology and education that conditioned conceptions of the nature of education in the past, since it was most often the Church that sponsored the proliferation of educational establishments. Thus it might be said that education was fashioned on broadly spiritual values, and devised to achieve broadly spiritual ends. This contrasts with a view that pervades some of the more modern debates, in which the spiritual is perceived as an auxiliary or even newly added aspect of education (cited in Rossiter, 1996).

However, as this thesis focuses on a psychological exposition of children's spirituality rather than education per se, I shall deal only with the treatment of spirituality in education's recent history. An additional note of clarification is required at this point in terms of the referent 'children': in this review and in subsequent chapters I restrict my discussion to children between the ages of 4 and 11. Pre-school and adolescent spirituality are not addressed.

1.2.1

The 1944 Education Act: 'A vision of a brave new world for our children'¹

The 1988 Education Reform Act, with its reference to the fundamental importance of the spiritual, brought this area closer to the forefront of educational debate than it had perhaps ever been previously. This was demonstrated in a clear upsurge of interest in children's spirituality amongst educationalists, the development of an annual conference on spirituality ('Education, Spirituality and the Whole Child', Roehampton Institute 1994-7) and a number of well-funded research projects (e.g. Children's Spirituality Project, University of Nottingham 1994-7; Children's Worldviews Project, Chichester Institute 1994-6, Children, Spirituality and Bereavement Project, University of Plymouth 1993-6).

However, this recent interest underlines the previous neglect of spirituality as a matter for educational research or debate. The statement of the 1988 document about the spiritual aspect of education was a re-statement of the 1944 Education Act. Spirituality was far from a new addition to the formal educational model in England and Wales. The earlier act had also given it the primary place in its list of general developmental areas to be addressed:

"It shall be the duty of the local education authority for every

¹ As described by Copley, T., Priestley, J., Wadman, D. and Coddington, V. (1991) in *Forms of Assessment in Religious Education* The Fare Report p.8

area, as far as their powers extend, to contribute to the spiritual, moral, mental and physical development of the community by securing the efficient education throughout those [primary,secondary and tertiary] stages”(Education Act 1944, *my emphasis*) .

Some debate exists about the intended meaning of ‘spiritual’ in this earlier legislation. It has been assumed by some that in the culture of the day the ‘spiritual’ was an acceptable shorthand for the role which religious education and collective worship would play in the education process (Souper,1985; Souper and Kay, 1982):

“There is no doubting that the original intention behind the inclusion of the word [spiritual]..was that this dimension..should be provided for in the main by religious education,with its two components, religious instruction and school worship” (Souper,1985, p.7)

In contrast to our modern secular and pluralist context, the period in which this Act was written was considerably less self-conscious about the place of religion in society. It might be assumed therefore that the characterization of education as having a spiritual dimension was an unremarkable expression of a relatively confident Christian culture. If so, the 1944 reference to the spiritual might be assumed to have little bearing on the modern questions about spirituality, since the common references in 1944 and 1988 reflect nothing more than a coincidence of terms whose meanings have since changed.

However, Priestley (1985) and Gilliat (1996) have challenged the assumption that the authors of the 1944 Act merely used ‘spiritual’ as a narrow shorthand for the relatively specific roles of religious instruction and school worship. Returning to the debates which preceded the passing of the Act a more complex picture emerges. In sharp contrast to the certainty that in 1944 spirituality referred to the religious, Priestley writes:

“there can be no doubt when they used the word ‘spiritual’

the legislators back in 1944 were looking for something that would permeate the whole educational process' (Priestley, 1985 p. 28).

The intended meaning for spirituality in 1944, and its intended role in children's education over the last fifty years requires closer attention. It should be noted that when the Act was initially drafted it did not refer to the spiritual at all: the list began with the 'moral'. It was in the House of Lords that Viscount Bledisloe proposed an amendment by arguing that

"it is spirituality which we want to advance in every stage of our national education" (cited in Gilliat 1996.p. 162).

The amendment status of spirituality suggests in itself the complex history of how it has been understood, since on the one hand Bledisloe places spirituality at the heart of the educational process and yet on the other hand the writers of the earlier drafts of the act omitted it altogether.

In other historical accounts the breadth of this amendment intention can be discerned. That this was not merely a strategy of the Church to ensure education followed a suitably religious path is seen in the white paper *Educational Reconstruction*. This refers to a

"general wish not confined to representatives of the Churches....[concerning the] ...desire to revive the spiritual and personal values in our society and in our national tradition" (Board of Education 1943. p.36) (my emphasis).

Priestley's evidence is even more convincing. He recounts a personal conversation with Canon Hall who had shared responsibility for the choice of wording at the time the Act was re-drafted. This corrects a modern misconception that the religious was an uncontroversial, straightforwardly understood area at that time, and consequently that religious and spiritual were interchangeable referents to the same thing in education, as Souper and Kay's discussion suggested.

The Canon Hall evidence (Priestley, 1985 pp 28-9) reveals that the word ‘spiritual’ was used quite intentionally instead of the word religion. However it is quite hard to determine precisely the alternative intention of this substitution. In certain respects it would appear to have been a smoke screen behind which a religious agenda for education might hide:

‘The Churches.. thought if we used the word ‘spiritual’ they might agree to that because they didn’t know what it was’.

(Conversation with Canon Hall, quoted in Priestley 1985, p. 28)

This did not necessarily represent a crude desire to maintain a strong religious influence in schools. It is possible that there was hope that ‘spiritual’ might convey the notion that education should address considerably more than those aspects of religion attended to in the forms of religious instruction and school worship at that time.

To some extent, the precise differences between ‘spiritual’ and ‘religious’, then as now, merely reflect differences in the boundaries individuals have for the concept of religion. Presumably for Canon Hall and the other Churchmen involved the ‘religious’ was a very comprehensive and unrestrictive category in which education and all that is contained in children’s potential might be comfortably accommodated. However, there are hints in these exchanges that in avoiding controversy and misinterpretation which the term ‘religion’ might have caused, a distinctive character for spirituality as it related to children and their education was being gradually discerned. Specifically, the quality the particular words chosen sought to describe and promote was some kind of ‘uniting and cohering factor’, ‘something that bound it [education] all together’ (Priestley op.cit.).

1.2.2

1944-1977 : Deafening Silence

The important consequence of all this was its *lack* of consequence. Despite the careful attempts to identify a distinctive role for education in terms of the ‘spiritual’

suggested by an analysis of the 1944 Education Act's development, the parameters of 'spirituality' intended in these conversations and documents were not publicly set out. For a long time thereafter very little attention was given to determining its referents more precisely. Not surprisingly, questions about the nature of children's spirituality, their capacities and propensities to respond to education that was spiritual in the broad sense suggested by Canon Hall, were not asked either. This modern 'birth' of spirituality in education went largely unnoticed in terms of scholarly attention or research.

This is not necessarily to say it was overlooked in practice during this period (1944-77). By many accounts, actual teaching appears to have been inspired by a wider, though formally unarticulated and undefined, sense of spirituality as essential to education. Rossiter (1996) has argued that much of the recent debate about spirituality overlooks this, assuming that our new awareness of this area requires new practices and explicit additions to the timetable. In contrast he suggests the academic task of illuminating an understanding of spirituality need only concern 'articulating what good practice is already doing' (p 208).

The 'good practice' of famously successful teachers can reveal an undercurrent of spirituality both in what they were doing and what they appealed to in the children's own nature. For example, Lealman (1996) has traced the spiritual motivations of the creative emphases Maria Montessori gave to teaching. Montessori's writings comment on practices of traditional education as reflections of an oppressive interpretation of Christian growth: the Christ-like suffering of the child pinned behind a desk as Christ was fastened to the cross. In contrast, Montessori's own philosophy and educational methods (across all domains) reflected an application of her own spiritual insights, Christian nonetheless, of liberation, creativity, and individual potential.

Teaching in England during this period, Sybil Marshall is another example of 'good' practice in attention to the spiritual. Her account of her 'symphonic method' illustrates an integrative and creative approach that resulted in impressively 'spiritual' expressions amongst the children she taught, - in philosophical, poetic, artistic as well

as explicitly religious forms (Marshall, 1963).

However, the point of both Marshall's approach, and the more widely known Montessori approach, was their success as comprehensive educational methods. Their approaches were emphatically not to isolate the spiritual as the dimension of education addressed in religious instruction or school worship, but rather thrived on an attention to the spiritual across a range of educational experiences for children.

No doubt a theoretical language or even just a scholarly debate about spirituality might have been a valuable tool to support the dissemination of these examples of successful educational practice. Furthermore it might have helped to make explicit the spiritual characteristics of children which such methods nurtured, and to which individual teachers were at least implicitly attuned. The absence of such a language, still less a discourse, contributed to the prolonged dormancy of the spiritual in education in most quarters.

1.2.3

1977-87 : 'In Vogue' ²

In the mid-1970s spirituality began to appear more frequently for debate in the academic discourse. This was fuelled by the publication of two policy documents, *Curriculum 11-16* (HMI 1977) and *Supplementary Note* (HMI 1978). In the first of these it was revealed that eight areas of experience were now considered foundational to children's education, the aesthetic, the creative, the ethical, the linguistic, the mathematical, the physical, the scientific, the social and political - and lastly, (but apparently so placed simply on alphabetical grounds), the spiritual.

Priestley (1985) reports that there was some internal debate about whether the spiritual was required any longer, since the new term 'social' might suffice, but pressure from within education, namely on the part of inspectors, ensured its survival.

² This is how the decade was described by Derek Webster (1987) *Being Aflame: Spirituality in County and Church Schools Westminster Studies in Education* Vol. 10 p.3

However this list did little to clarify the meaning of the term or build on the sense implied in the original Act. In particular, Priestley noted that the proliferation of key areas had the effect of muddying the notion that the spiritual might be found in the uniting factors which permeated the whole process of education, because it implied it was a discrete area instead,

‘..another one of the things that go to make up the curriculum. So you might have it on Friday afternoons between two and half past three, or you might not’ (p.30).

The *Supplementary Note* (HMI 1978) superficially appears to attempt one of the first public clarifications of how educators were meant to interpret the requirement that education should address the spiritual. In fact this ‘clarification’ perpetuates a persistent confusion, namely the extent to which education’s spiritual dimension is equivalent to its religious obligations. In the same document, two contrasting views were presented. In the first of these the spiritual area is portrayed in broad and not inevitably religious terms as:

‘an awareness a person has of those elements in existence and experience which may be defined in terms of inner feelings and beliefs..the way they see themselves and throw light on the purpose and meaning of life itself’,

It goes on to suggest that this existential kind of spirituality may in some cases lead to a religious interpretation. The contrasting view firmly rejects any meaning for the spiritual in education that does not proceed from a religious starting point:

‘Spiritual is a meaningless adjective for the atheist and of dubious use to the agnostic’.

Such controversy may in fact have been catalyzed by the emergence of a more explicit debate and education’s attempt to identify its convictions about the spiritual in education and by extension drawn attention to the spirituality of children. A key question about the course of spiritual development was now embedded in the controversy of HMI

definitions: Did one require a concept of God to experience the spiritual, or did a concept of God require a basic spirituality? This question not only suggested a challenge to long held views of religious nurture (for example, that children needed to be taught, catechised, in order that they might enjoy the spiritual life), but paved the way towards the need for evidence-based research, with children, that might yield answers about children's spiritual nature and nurture.

During this period, however, there was a tendency to pursue less practical, more visionary lines of argument in identifying the spiritual in education. With hindsight, many of the academic articles appearing at this time reflect a refreshingly creative latitude in the ways they attempted to depict spirituality. Such latitude has all but disappeared in more recent literature overshadowed by the pragmatism of testing, accountability and other innovations in the aftermath of the 1988 Education Reform Act.

Some clearly felt that the spiritual had emerged in its own right in educational discourse. For example, Starkings (1987) suggests the spiritual had been

‘long freed from unique association with religious values and practices’ (p. 55),

apparently ignoring the second of the two views in the HMI Supplementary Note. However, the interest shown in spirituality during this period was primarily the response of Christian teachers and scholars exploring ways in which their particular values for education might be articulated. This Christian impetus was demonstrated in the characteristics of those attracted to the *Spiritual Values and Education Conference Series* 1984-7. I do not want to suggest this invalidated the emerging discourse, rather simply to note the continued convolution of thoughts and values in a period when initial clarity was being sought in the field.

Three key articles appeared in this period and represent the development of thinking about children's spirituality in education at this time (Webster, 1987; Starkings, 1987; and Priestley, 1985). Whilst they share some common convictions, they demonstrate the divergences in the ways spirituality could be treated in educational

debates during this 'in vogue' period, 1977-87.

Webster (1987) offered a two-fold distinction to clarify the understanding of the spiritual dimension in education. This comprised a broad view of the spiritual as pertaining to everything that education involves, and a more specific contribution and task for spirituality as a Christian perspective. The latter was thought to be properly confined to education in Church schools, the former to all schools.

Having made this useful distinction, Webster focused attention on the spirituality contained in the educational processes, and in the actions of the teacher in particular. Consequently, children's own spirituality is merely implied by the assumption that they will respond in some way to the features he identifies in the teacher's behaviour and interpretation of their educational tasks. These features included the potential spirituality contained in the reflections teachers make about themselves as teachers - for example their perception of their role as motivated by a sense of an unending quest for meaning, the unfinished, open-ended quality of the teaching process.

Building on this, the second set of features he offered as central to the spiritual dimension in children's education considers the teacher's understanding of the teacher-pupil relationship. This illuminates the spiritual features in what appears to be a highly 'person centred' psychological interpretation of educative interactions which clearly pre-dates the introduction of the National Curriculum and its implied values and educational priorities. He writes:

"Teachers educate not as they transmit information, leaning down to the uninitiated with their wisdom, but as they stand with their pupils, one human being before another in creative tension. The persons of teachers, more than their knowledge, their being present more than their objectives and organization, education - for these confer dignity upon and confirm the value of students...Thus behind all education stands a meeting of persons, which meeting raises the

mystery of both. To forget this is to forfeit awe and to disregard the strangeness of the whole educational venture.”

(Webster, 1987 pp 4-5)

However, in this rich description there was still no direct consideration of what features are characteristic of the child's own spirituality and which these teacher features may be addressing. Similarly in the third set of features the child's spirituality is depicted obliquely and in terms of response to various methods the teacher models in the learning process. For example, he suggested that teachers may spark spirituality in children by modelling the processes of questioning, amazement, respect for the ordinary and a desire to know more, amongst other methods of enquiry. Equally he argued for the importance - that is to say, spiritual significance - of teacher's perception of children as individuals, recognising their potential and status as persons rather than merely their characterization as objects on which to focus the instruments of teaching.

In these respects Webster's analysis was largely an imaginative consideration of what might be spiritual in terms of adult's interactions with children, and only by implication what might resonate with children's spiritual capacities. Reading his nonetheless insightful account, it is almost as if the possibility of addressing the spiritual in education can only proceed from this adult perspective; the question of children's spiritual features is overlooked without apology.

In contrast, Starkings (1987) adopted an imaginative strategy to try to guess at features of children's spirituality in the context of their education. His educated guesses, informed by a knowledge and analysis of how children are likely to respond to religious education, are given in support of an approach to spirituality that is grounded in children's characteristics. He suggested such features may include the process of learning to tell one's own story, the child's personal legend. This reflects the child's emerging sense of selfhood and the potential spirituality this can include when encouraged. In particular, Starkings suggests the spiritual quality of a child's personal story telling is conditioned by the extent to which this is located within a greater story,

or set of stories “which might serve to enlarge and correct the child’s understanding of himself” which thereby avoids the trap of a “too particular response to situations by having some larger vision of the world and our place in it” (Starkings 1987 p.55).

Thus Starkings began to suggest a number of distinctive features and processes that may be involved in a child’s spirituality, though he emphasised these are unsubstantiated guesses rather than evidence-based conclusions, which he felt should also be sought. The proposed features suggest that children’s spirituality should be looked for in their selfhood narrative and in their ability to relate their immediate situation to other situations, other people and generally larger perspectives. If correct, this in itself draws on a number of more basic psychological features subject to developmental change (such as the ability to construct and recall a personal narrative, the capacity to make comparisons and to ‘decentre’ from one perspective in order to relate it to another) which deserve consideration in the process of setting the parameters of children’s spirituality and pursuing a more detailed understanding of it.

Starkings, like Webster, put considerable emphasis on the responsibility of others, namely adults, to provide the incentive and material that constructs the bigger picture that may constitute a spiritual perception. The role of these others fits quite literally that of the educator, leading the child out from his or her own immediate experiences and helping to link those with a much wider range of experiences and possibilities, learning ‘something of the breadth of human horizons’ (Starkings, 1987,p. 57). More specifically, Starkings’ paper concurred with Webster’s on the point that spirituality is less about any particular formal content and more about personal qualities and interpersonal encounters that situations such as teaching encounters can support.

Although Starkings’ suggestions were speculative, they represented an important early move towards addressing children’s spirituality in education more directly. In addition, his ideas can claim a degree of psychological credibility by association. His suggestion that attention to personal narrative will reveal a degree of spirituality in childhood resonates with Fowler’s approach to the study of faith development

(Fowler,1981), particularly in the middle childhood period (mythic-literal stage) when the appropriation of a culturally convenient story or myth often serves to express a child's broad faith perspective. More than one psychologist has argued that a distinctive feature of spiritual insight, at least in adults, involves an oscillation between the kind of smaller and bigger pictures Starkings suggests are crucial. Watts and Williams (1988) describe this as narrow and wide band perceptual shifts, and Donaldson (1992) refers to processing in four different 'modes' in each of which a different 'locus of concern' is addressed, the two broadest of these accommodating what she refers to as 'value-sensing', which she equates in many ways with spirituality. Thus, whilst speculative, Starkings account of children's spirituality could claim theoretical, if not empirical, support from psychological debates about adult spirituality.

By far the most extensive analysis of spirituality in education in this period was that of Priestley (1985). He proposed a six fold description of spirituality, which, like Webster and Starkings, made no exclusive claims to a religious category. His exploration of the nature of spirituality locates each point in an example of childhood experience, but would appear to originate in a more abstract level of reflection, in contrast for example to Starking's guiding focus on the child or Webster's exclusive focus on the teacher. On the whole, Priestley's concern might be more broadly described as dealing with the spirituality of education (or 'spirituality in the curriculum' which is the title of the paper). However, his analysis has many implications specifically for an understanding of children's spirituality.

Inspired by the empirical work on adult spiritual experience reported by Hay (1982), Priestley drew a quite alternative position for children's spirituality than those suggested by other authors in this period. Hay's evidence suggested that spiritual awareness reflects something basic to human nature, that is experienced with or without the expressive vehicle of religious language and a faith commitment. Where others were concentrating on the role of education to instil spirituality in children, through teacher's example or adult provision of ever wider frameworks in which children might locate

their everyday experience, Priestley made the radical suggestion that children may inherently possess their own spiritual awareness, and be seeking through their education a language in which to express this. Hence in Priestley's conception of spirituality children have a far less passive role. Rather than spirituality being a kind of educational response or outcome, it was depicted as an integral and living characteristic of the child's constitution.

In recognition of this suggestion and in characterising the spiritual as primarily emotional rather than intellectual at source, Priestley (1985) raised the question of education's possibly negative role in the nurture of children's spirituality. Since if some element of spiritual awareness was fundamental to human nature, as Hay's adult research implied even in a secular culture, then the factual, intellectual emphasis of education might be effectively extinguishing, rather than promoting, children's spirituality. Such a suggestion represented possibly the first rationale in the modern context for recognising the need to make a study of children's spirituality as a natural phenomenon: the need to find out what children's spirituality in this raw, language-seeking form might look like.

Other features of spirituality identified in this analysis included its dynamic character, emphasising the need to examine spirituality in holistic terms. An existential quality was also referred to, highlighting the property of spirituality as concerned with 'being' rather than 'doing' or 'knowing'. In this sense spirituality was not represented by much of what education seemed to be about, at least on the surface. Instead it fell into the realm referred to as the 'hidden curriculum'. However, recent directions in child psychology that suggest processes of doing, knowing and the sense of being can be closely interdependent (e.g. see Astington, Olson and Harris 1988; Donaldson, 1992). Consequently the notion that these domains are separately experienced by the child or separately addressed by what he or she encounters may be misguided.

An often cited feature in Priestley's account has been his statement that the spiritual is amoral at root. Whilst a logical argument for this position is presented, the

support of empirical evidence for it might clarify more precisely how childhood spirituality is manifest in presumably three forms, moral, amoral and immoral, and how one transforms into another. In his discussion of this transformation of spirituality, (in particular the potential conflict facing educators striving to foster individual and institutional spiritualities), Priestley suggested a source of confusion that continued to plague many academic debates in the next decade. This was a reluctance to study the distinct characteristics of education's spiritual character, children's spiritual character, teacher's spiritual character and the school or system's spiritual character, and a pervasive assumption (e.g in subsequent OFSTED discussion reviewed below) that each had much the same properties and that to speak of one was to speak of the others also. Thus to identify a spirituality of the school's ethos or in the teacher's approach might be inferred to have a direct bearing on the qualities of the child's spirituality. Closer attention to the distinctions suggested in Priestley's article concerning the sometimes opposing demands of individual and corporate spiritualities might have averted this conceptual blurring. Moreover, coupled with his suggestion that children might have a spiritual awareness in their own right, this recognition of a need to discern the distinct qualities of individual and corporate spirituality supports the need for a dedicated study of children's spirituality.

The 1988 Education Reform Act has been the favourite landmark in recent literature about spirituality, as this is said to have instigated an unprecedented wave of interest in scholarly attempts to define or determine the proper nature of the spiritual dimension in children's education and development. However, as the review of the 'in vogue' period demonstrates, without the impetus of the ERA, scholarship had already foreshadowed many of the key issues which were to dominate the complex discussions that finally recognised that understanding the spiritual was a matter of widespread importance across education.

1.3

The significance of 1988 Education Reform Act

Although historical scrutiny reveals that the inclusion of the spiritual in earlier education policy documents was far from inevitable, the salience of its re-affirmation in the 1988 Education Reform Act undoubtedly provided a catalyst to more extensive debates.

1.3.1

The climate in which spirituality achieved recognition

Rossiter (1996) situates the Act's catalytic effect in more general moves in education, including the emerging interest displayed in the 'in vogue' period mostly amongst religious educators redefining their field. But he also cites developments in education worldwide that reclaimed some spiritual territory if only in school mission statements that sought to convey that education was about more than the materialistic values of the society it served - that is to say more than outcomes, results and appearances.

However, with the advantage of the outsider's perspective (Rossiter is Australian), the distinctive effect of the 1988 ERA on contemporary discussions about the understanding of spirituality can be identified in the English and Welsh educational context. In particular, Rossiter notices a unique concern with discerning explicit criteria for describing and defending the spiritual in education, which in turn has helped identify more of the complexities and information requirements necessary to achieve better understanding in this area.

Four features of the climate in which spirituality was re-affirmed in the ERA and which contributed to its salience amongst a more extensive range of educators and scholars may be identified. First, society in England and Wales was both more religiously diverse and more secular. The religious differences, between different faiths

and between those with and without faith, tended to be met with a climate that treated all things religious as a matter of private choice at best, or inconsequential altogether. That public education called for promotion of the spiritual, seemed contrary to the climate of indifference and religious privatisation. Thus the intended meaning of ‘spiritual’ (vis a vis religion) was brought into sharper focus.

The treatment of religious education in the ERA was a second influence on the climate at this time. Given the cultural changes, the decision to maintain compulsory religious education and collective worship in schools surprised and upset many people. In the debates about what possible role religious education might have in such a secular and religiously diverse context, the value of the more abstract aspects of religions (rather than their distinctive content) was often cited, and in this way thinking about ‘spirituality’ was developed as part of these discussions.

The introduction of the National Curriculum and a greater emphasis on school’s accountability created the third effect for the climate in which spirituality began to thrive in educational scholarship. The requirement to refer to national criteria for each subject’s content (except religious education), and to justify teaching practice on these grounds, fostered a sense of fragmentation and pragmatism in education. The extensive demands of the National Curriculum were felt by many teachers to undermine their own abilities to judge and balance a suitably broad and balanced education for their pupils. The profession seemed to entail being a ‘deliverer of a curriculum’ at the expense of some of the wider ideals by which teachers defined themselves (Jeffery and Woods, 1996). In consequence, attention was drawn to those aspects of education which in some sense represented ‘more than’ reaching attainment targets and levels of achievement in the various curriculum areas. The value of the ‘whole child’ as a developing person became a clearer focus (Best, 1996). In this way, spirituality seemed one suitable way of describing and defending the nature of education in response to the constricting effects perceived to result from the introduction of a National Curriculum.

The fourth, and possibly most direct effect on the need to develop the

understanding of spirituality more explicitly, was the climate of school inspection. Spirituality could no longer be simply alluded to or aspired to in rather general terms. Teachers needed to know what it was that was to be inspected under this term, and inspectors needed to be clearer about what they were called to inspect. The changing verbs associated with the school's role in regard to spirituality also suggested that a more demonstrable effect was expected. In 1944 education was to be directed in such a way that spirituality was 'contributed' to; a rather vague task. In 1977 teachers were charged with 'introducing' the spiritual, which assumes that anything done in this regard might be attributed to the educator's influence. However in the 1988 ERA, education was to 'promote' spirituality, in other words it ought to be able to demonstrate ongoing development.

In this climate spirituality therefore emerged as something of a 'hot topic', of concern not only to the relatively small number of religious education scholars but also to OFSTED inspectors and policy authors as well as teachers and head teachers accountable for seeing that spirituality was addressed in their practice. Given the multiple influences on the climate it was not surprising that with the more widespread recognition of a role of spirituality in education came the realization of the extent of the term's confusing complexity.

1.3.2

Spirituality's context of ambiguity

Rossiter (1996) noted at least four ways in which ambiguity plagued the development of education's understanding of spirituality following the 1988 ERA. First, teachers were unclear about the community expectations of their responsibilities, since the requirement to promote spirituality suggested a particular kind of obligation to attend to children's personal growth. In itself, the educator's responsibility for personal growth was a source of controversy, some teachers sensing this was extraneous to their task and others viewing it as essential.

Further ambiguity was conveyed by the generality of spirituality, as it became clearer that this was not merely a matter of concern in religious education. Many teachers trained to teach specific subjects did not feel equipped to recognise the spiritual dimension of these, and interestingly a number of authors (e.g. Starkings, 1987 and Rossiter, 1996) recognise that the general teaching skills of infant teachers are often reflected in the most successful attempts to promote the spiritual. (However, this advantage might be set against the paucity of religious education specialists in infant and junior schools, since they might have a degree of particular understanding of the breadth of spirituality and thus a framework in which it might be recognised more generally across the curriculum).

Lastly, Rossiter detected that for some teachers spirituality was regarded with suspicion, a context in which clarification of its meaning for school, child or curriculum was inauspicious. This suspicion was fostered in some cases by the view that addressing the spiritual entailed an additional expectation for education in each subject, rather than being, as Canon Hall seemed to intend, an underlying feature of the whole. In other cases, the suspicion focused on the government's intentions at the time the Act was passed. Using education to promote spirituality was either seen as a covert means of promoting the religious values of the establishment, or seen in terms of the economic rationalist government philosophy as a means of achieving more efficient national progress. For this latter group, the ERA's commitment to promoting spirituality in education was perceived as not so much inspired by a genuine concern for personal development, but as merely a reflection of the desire to influence the moral and social character of the potential workforce.

Consequently, whilst the climate interacting with the ERA statement about spirituality elevated its salience, the contexts of ambiguity and suspicion were in danger of compromising scholarly and practical progress towards a better understanding of the term in education.

1.3.3

An unhelpful division?

An effect of this confusion alongside the recognition of a need to clarify the term seems to have been an implicit attempt to establish separate areas to which spirituality had relevance (not dissimilar to the divergent portrayal of spirituality in the HMI Supplementary Note 1978) Thus, it appears at least to an outsider to education such as myself, attempts were made to develop two separate discourses about spirituality.

The first appeared to address ‘spirituality in education’ in general, particularly drawing interest from educators of Personal and Social Education (PSE) and the arts (e.g. Best, 1996). This view was especially representative of critics of RE who argued that compulsory religion was too likely to follow a prescriptive course (even if many different religious traditions are covered), and will tend to detract attention from the underlying spiritual values inherent to humanity which in their view are more legitimate to nurture given the secular, pluralist context of contemporary education (e.g White, 1990; Newby, 1996).

The second discourse developed in discussion about the nature of religious education that was not only taking far greater interest in the less content based aspects into which spirituality fitted (e.g. Hammond and Hay, 1990), but also sought to justify its compulsory position in education by demonstrating its essential and potential far reaching influence on the developing individual (e.g. Watson, 1993). For example, Watson maintained that religious teaching was an essential tool that could provide a means of nourishing the spirituality of children regardless of their faith. Religions provided dedicated languages and practices that expressed experiences of human spirituality over thousands of years, and these offered the obvious ‘way in’ to an education that attended to the spiritual.

However, this implicit sense of division, noted for example in the repeated and lengthy statements of disassociation from matters religious in the contributions to Best’s

Education, Spirituality and the Whole Child (1996), failed to clarify very much or even further confused our understanding, at least in my experience as a developmental psychologist trying to identify the central issues from education to which psychological scholarship might contribute. Rather than being a natural response to conceptual divergences, this division may have been a reaction of appeasement to political pressures. This is to say, it may have been driven on the one hand by insecurities arising from association with the religious in a secular education climate and therefore the need to argue for spirituality that is distinct from this. On the other hand, it may have been driven by a defensiveness within religious education to show that it had a distinctive subject matter in spirituality that could not be subsumed in cross curricular activities.

Finally, if evidence of a need for a clarification of spirituality during this period were not enough, RE teachers referred to in the FARE report (1991) (concerned with the development of methods of assessment for RE) seemed so wary of what ‘spirituality’ might mean that they recommended that this be omitted from consideration, at least in terms of their responsibilities to assess the education they were providing for their pupils (Copley, Priestley, Wadman and Coddington, 1991).

Catalyzed by the reference to the spiritual in ERA (1988), and interacting with the climate in which this appeared and kindled by various forms of ambiguity and division, spirituality could no longer remain a feature of educational ideals alone. It deserved and received more serious attention through debate and research, which the last part of this chapter will review. However an important contribution towards thinking and research amongst education scholars was the publication of two key documents that sought to clarify the ERA’s reference to spirituality.

1.3.4

‘Clarification’ documents

The formal response to the need for clarification of spirituality was the publication of both a National Curriculum Council discussion paper, *Spiritual and Moral*

Development (NCC, 1993) and an OFSTED discussion paper, *Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development* (OFSTED, 1994). These attempted to specify more clearly what, amongst other things, ‘the spiritual’ in education might refer to.

In the NCC document, spirituality is asserted to be an area open to all regardless of religious belief. This implies it is a potential, if not actual, universal feature of human nature. As has been discussed earlier in this chapter, psychology’s neglect of the spiritual means that support for this proposition, especially its implications concerning the nature of childhood spirituality, cannot be easily established in terms of empirical psychological inquiry. The survey studies of adult spiritual experience generally support such an assumption, since as many as 60% of the adult population report having had a specific spiritual encounter at some point in their lives (Hay, 1982). However, whilst many reasons may be suggested for failure to report this kind of spirituality, even this impressive evidence cannot establish for certain that spirituality is indeed:

‘applicable to all pupils, open to everyone and not confined to the development of religious beliefs or conversion to a particular faith..seen as something fundamental in the human condition’ (NCC, 1993, p.2., my emphasis)

Assuming this character for spirituality, the NCC authors were able to speculate about the features of the ‘something fundamental’ that spirituality constitutes in human nature. They outlined a number of possible aspects involved in spiritual development, which included:

- beliefs: the development of personal beliefs, religious or otherwise,
- a sense of awe, wonder and mystery
- experiencing feelings of transcendence
- a search for meaning and purpose
- self knowledge
- relationships: that is, recognising the worth of individuals and building relationships with others

- creativity: expressing one's innermost thoughts through the arts and exercising the imagination
- feelings: a sense of being moved

In addition to these speculative building blocks on which spirituality is founded, the NCC document outlines important processes which could serve to activate the suggested aspects in which spirituality is manifest:

1. recognising the existence of others
2. becoming aware of and reflecting on experience
3. questioning and exploring the meaning of existence
4. understanding and evaluating a range of possible responses and interpretations
5. developing personal views and insights.

The OFSTED paper adopted a similar stance, reiterating most of these points, and emphasising particularly the importance of a capacity to reflect, to be curious and question and to value.

In these attempts to unpack the meanings intended by educationalists referring to spirituality, a long list of conventional psychological areas and well researched psychological processes appear to be important. And yet it would appear that no explicit attempt has been made to build on psychology's understanding of the character of these features and processes in childhood as a means of further clarifying the nature of children's spirituality. Neither is it clear whether the production of these guidelines was informed in the light of the rich, but in places diverse, psychological theories about children's capacities in these areas.

For example, whilst it is no doubt a commendable and necessary ability to be able to 'understand and evaluate a range of possible responses and interpretations' (4 above), younger children's profound difficulty with such a task in terms of the cognitive

psychological processes involved specifically in reasoning about beliefs and feelings has been a subject of considerable research over the last decade (e.g. Astington, Olson and Harris, 1988). Admittedly, such research has commonly looked at rather mundane instances of meta-representational understanding, rather than examples within the realm of spiritual discourse, but it may still have transferrable relevance.

Recent psychological research has touched on further areas included in the NCC ‘aspects’ list above, such as beliefs (Perner 1988, 1991), self-knowledge and emotion (Harris, 1989). If these aspects and processes do prove to be the building blocks of children’s spirituality as a result of empirical inquiry (as opposed to policy statements), then the task for expounding the parallels between each aspect of children’s spirituality and their psychological capacities could be massive, but worthwhile.

The persistent blurring of referents to which various characterisations of spirituality might pertain (the school, the child, or the curriculum) was also evident in these documents and their influence. Rossiter (1996) comments that the OFSTED and NCC general definitions seem to point towards an ‘environmental’ characterization of spirituality. This is to say, their intention (as guides primarily for school inspection and accountability) was to address the spirituality of school-wide structures and practices such as the often mentioned ‘ethos’ of school inspections. Quite legitimately such inspection is not intended to assess the spirituality of individual pupils, indeed this was made explicit in by OFSTED (1993):

‘some families and cultures would regard detailed discussion
of such matters [personal spirituality] as offensive.’

However, although the inspection emphasis (on the school) directs attention away from the need to investigate the spirituality of the child as an individual, (and might absolve this wing of education from the need to seek an understanding of spirituality on children’s own terms), the aspects and processes set out in the clarification documents cited here appear to refer quite specifically to individual characteristics in which spirituality may be manifest. In this way these documents may have supported the

ongoing confusion about what kind of spirituality is being clarified in different places in the academic debates and research in this period: the child's, the teacher's, the school's or the curriculum. As in these "clarification" discussion documents, a tacit assumption is being made that the description of the spirituality of one of these is directly valid to the elucidation of the other. To do so ignores the possibility that children's spirituality might have a character distinct from the adult formulations of spirituality from which these guidelines were produced.

1.4

A selective review of education literature on 'children's spirituality' following the 1988 Education Reform Act

1.4.1

Neglecting psychology; neglecting empirical study

The considerable interest in spirituality following the 1988 ERA (and the discussion documents that followed it) inspired a new wave of scholarly writing amongst educationalists. Much of this reflected the struggles to define spirituality appropriately (discussed further in chapter 3) with reference to educational practice and teachers' experiences, philosophical and sociological considerations and the particular interpretations of spirituality for different curriculum subjects (-such a range is reflected in Best's edition of conference papers, Best, 1996).

However, in these writings almost no explicit reference is made to general child psychology literature to support the assertions made about the capacities said to contribute to spirituality³. Furthermore, very few writers make use of the small

³ I must concede throughout my argument that psychological scholarship has been under-used as a tool in education's pursuit of an understanding of spirituality that this neglect is only in evidence at an explicit level. Scholars of education may be justified in challenging my assertions by proposing that their contributions are implicitly informed by psychological perspectives. Nevertheless, I suggest that both the relevance of a psychology-education dialogue and further clarity of children's spirituality itself might have been afforded had an explicit approach been pursued in such literature.

psychology literature of empirical studies of children's spirituality nor other potentially associated aspects such as the psychology of children's religious development (reviewed in Chapter 2). For example in Best's (1996) edition of papers from a conference about children's spirituality, excepting my own contribution, there are only single passing references to Fowler's work (on the psychology of faith development) and the implications in developmental models of Freud and Erikson. Only four (out of twenty five) authors referred to the pioneering and extensive empirical research Coles' (1990) conducted with the explicit aim of documenting children's spirituality. The theoretical and empirical contributions of psychologists such as Winnicott (1971), Jung (e.g. as interpreted by E. Neumann, 1973), Rizzuto (1979), Tamminen (1991), and Oser (Oser and Scarlett, 1991) were not discussed at all in this context.

The neglect of psychological theory and evidence as a resource in developing an understanding of spirituality in education has been compounded by a tendency to overlook the promise of empirical methods of research also. The most of the literature published in this period pursued the illuminations of spirituality in a variety of theoretical perspectives including the philosophical, sociological and educational. A selective review of these is found in the concluding section of this chapter.

There were some notable exceptions in this literature in which an empirical basis was sought, and it these which are reviewed first.

1.4.2

Empirical studies

a). Edward Robinson's (1983) empirical study of adults recollecting spiritual experiences from childhood provided a source of influence on some researchers in education. In his work at the Religious Experience Research Unit in Oxford, Robinson was struck by the frequency (15%) with which reports of general spiritual experience referred to a childhood memory. This prompted him to make a special study of the character of these reports which suggested that, in the recollections of these adults, the

spirituality of childhood could be a rich and diverse contribution to experience. Indeed, he took this evidence to suggest that children had a spiritual capacity that mirrored profound mystical encounters experienced by adults. There seemed to be no striking differences in the features of these experiences compared with spiritual experiences of adulthood in terms of their contexts, duration, emotion or sense of lasting personal significance.

This inevitably challenged the prevailing conception of children's capacities as inferior to those of adults, and which education was concerned to develop accordingly. Robinson's data implied that in the spiritual domain, it was possible that children were not restricted by their obvious intellectual limitations, but rather that their experience of the world particularly lent itself to a profound sense of knowledge or vision.

However, the retrospective character of this data left many unanswered questions. Most crucially, to what extent do these memories reflect the adult language, interpretation and intervening experiences of those reporting them and therefore what part of this evidence can be taken to demonstrate children's spirituality itself? Robinson suggested that these experiences may be difficult for children to retain hold of consciously, thus implying that childhood spirituality might be represented in largely unconscious or inarticulate forms. Nevertheless a presence in these forms at least provides, Robinson argued, an important inner foundation upon which more conscious or explicit explorations of the spiritual might be built. Education therefore would do well to attend to this layer of noetic experience as its basis for developing children's spirituality.

b). The promise and shortcomings of Robinson's study made clearer the need to attempt the direct study of children in pursuit of the educational foundations for the 'promotion of the spiritual'. McCreery (1996) undertook an empirical study of spirituality in the very youngest schoolchildren, aged four and five years, primarily in response to the increasing rhetoric about spiritual education and the proliferation of

materials apparently capable of developing spirituality. She sensed a need to investigate the underlying nature of spirituality in advance of adopting means to develop it.

McCreery's aim was as much to develop a method which might facilitate a study of children's spirituality as to report on its nature amongst the children she studied. To this extent her empirical 'findings' offer most in terms of the discovery of successful approaches that can elicit the spiritual in young children. Her investigations found that this required apparently rather natural approaches, that is to say, those which exploited experiences and conditions with which children at this age were familiar. She deliberately avoided using religious language or lines of questioning that might too easily direct the child to more conventional 'knowledge-based' answers, in order that children's spiritual talk accessed their personal frameworks rather than merely theoretical talk about the spiritual. In this way it seemed possible to learn about spirituality on children's own terms: the terms it had been impossible for Robinson's study to identify.

The method advocated by McCreery, and which the limited reports of her data suggest was effective, involved small groups or pairs of children in discussions of their own experiences and responses to the world around them, triggered by activities the researcher provided. In particular, McCreery exploited the use of story and an 'imagine a really difficult question' activities in which children's encounters in three key spheres, the home, school and television, could be probed for any indications of 'an awareness that there is something other, greater than the course of everyday events' (McCreery's research definition of the spiritual, 1996, p.197).

The emphasis on conducting such investigations within as normal and natural a context, language and set of activities as possible in fact disguised McCreery's careful modifications of the research situation in the light of successive attempts. She found that encouraging children at this age to discuss the spiritual was far from a casual event, though it was important that it appeared to emerge in a relatively normal way that allowed the children to be themselves. For example, she noted the benefits of conducting the discussions in a quiet space in which the children were settled (seated),

were prompted with sufficiently attention-grabbing and attention-maintaining material, and could be stimulated by other children's comments.

The data thus collected was, in McCreery's opinion, good evidence that children at this age had their own spiritual awareness of which education needed to be aware in order that teachers 'address the spiritual in a way which has meaning to young children' (p.205). Beyond this positive affirmation, she offers little analysis of the precise nature of children's spirituality. It would seem from the data she cites that her evidence suggests children are at ease exploring many aspects of 'spiritual knowledge', such as concepts of life and death, infinity and mystery. Thus her focus reveals an empirical foundation for children's conceptual spiritual capacities, if not the more emotional characteristics and significance of this domain.

c). The Children's Worldviews Project⁴ directed by Clive Erricker attempted an empirical study of slightly older children's spirituality (ages eight to ten years). The guiding motivation in this research was similarly child-centred, seeking an understanding of the particular views, understanding, attitudes and concerns of young children as a basis for beginning dialogue in which education might hope the spiritual is promoted. Moreover, this basis in data about children's lives and language is argued as being especially necessary given the absence, suppression or repression of traditional religious and spiritual language in contemporary, scientific, secular culture (Erricker, Sullivan, Erricker, Logan and Ota, 1994).

Their empirical approach therefore sought to enter as far as possible into children's lives and culture, not only chatting with them but also accompanying them in some of the significant contexts of their lives such as their play dens. By accessing children's own metaphorical frameworks, that is identifying where they encounter meaning, they suggest it is possible to discern how children draw on this in their attempt

⁴ This project ran concurrently with my own research.

to grapple with existential issues of personal significance, such as loss and conflict, joy and kinship.

More specifically, their initial data indicated that there may be set 'genres', or packages of ideas and attitudes, in which children's spirituality (as existential meaning-making) typically finds expression today. Thus they identified a number of children's culture-inspired forms that evince their spirituality, and so not only offer suggestion concerning a method of accessing children's spirituality but also initiate a modern taxonomy of its nature. In a paper by Erricker and Erricker (1996) reporting an early stage of their research they list four of these genres: 'My Little Pony', a Disneyesque approach concentrating on the welfare of animals; 'All American Kid', theme parks, McDonald's and consumerism; Family Centred; and 'The Hard Man'. Although these forms spirituality which can take are not described in great detail, from the generic labels alone it would seem that the findings of this empirical research support Priestley's (1985) observation that children's spirituality is essentially amoral, and thus can take both positive (e.g. family centred or animal welfare) or negative forms (e.g. consumeristic or 'Hard Man').

d) Whilst not seeking to investigate children's spirituality, the FARE report on assessment in religious education (Copley, Priestley, Wadman and Coddington, 1991) represented an empirically grounded exploration of many of the issues with which other writers have identified spirituality. Since this has had considerable influence on the changing conception and practice of religious education, and consequently on the understanding of the child's capacity to respond to broadly spiritual material, the empirical findings mentioned in this report may augment the otherwise limited data available on this topic.

The report drew on the contributions of more than 100 teachers in the pursuit of a means of understanding the processes of development to be aimed for in the course of religious education, and as such involved 'more people than any previous enquiry into

this subject area' (FARE p.4). The teacher's contributions reflected observations of the children they were teaching and the teacher's experiences of trying different ways to assess their response. In this way, the FARE findings offer indirect, but nonetheless empirically informed, evidence about children's capabilities which is based on a far larger sample than any of the research reviewed above.

It is apparent that many of the features identified in both the empirical and theoretical education literature on children's spirituality resonate with issues addressed in FARE, particularly its analysis of Attainment Target 1: Reflection on Meaning. For example, at Key Stage 2, children were able to ask questions showing insight and interest, were open to wonder, showed a growing awareness of the feelings of others and made links between religious education and their own experience, amongst other things. Furthermore, in the general characterization of RE the authors note a new emphasis on metaphysical concerns (p.10) and that RE should attend to both content and process issues. This recognition was to reflect the subject's significance not only in teaching about how others have sought meaning in the world, but also its potential role in supporting the quests for meaning that children themselves are inevitably involved in as they grow up.

However, there was an explicit aversion to claiming that spirituality was being commented on through this work. The authors state:

'This does not attempt to measure pupils' spirituality or to make merely external judgements on their personal responses to issues which may be seen as 'private' or not the business of the teacher. It deals with development which can reasonably be expected to be in the public domain" (FARE 1991, p.23)

The disinclination to intrude into some kind of private area if spirituality were addressed directly may reflect an appropriate hesitation given the purpose to devise assessment criteria for the subject matter of RE as a whole. Yet teachers often reported the

importance of grounding their assessments in a knowledge of more personal aspects of the child's life thus revealing the impossibility of maintaining rigid boundaries in this area. A child-centred approach needs inevitably to be informed by a sense of the child's personal responses. The distinction drawn in the quotation above obscures the interest the teacher may need to have in 'sensing' the child's spirituality as a basis for more public discussion of spiritual matters, whilst not seeking to analyze explicitly that personal spirituality in the course of their teaching objectives. This suggests a need for further detailed investigations into the nature of children's spirituality, its forms and functions (e.g. its function in supporting a child's religious education), but which are not distracted by a need to justify the educational significance of that spirituality itself.

The teacher's observations, and the levels of development which were derived from these as well as what is referred to as 'theoretical work in the affective and cognitive domains' (p.23), suggest a number of features that may characterize children's basic spirituality. For example, it is reported that teachers of R.E at Key Stage 1 sensed that much of the religious education at this stage arose in the natural, everyday experiences of caring and sharing. At this stage also teachers commented that children's response to religious education was most effectively discerned in observation and talking, and imaginative work such as drama. They noted that their interpretive observations were also informed by their knowledge of each child's personal background, such as their home circumstances and specific life experiences. Many commented on the need to circumvent the tendency children had to give answers they imagined to be the desired response, rather than a genuinely personal response. To this extent all of these aspects resonate with the empirical findings concerning the methodology for discerning spirituality also.

A key finding reported in FARE concerns the erratic nature of children's responses to their religious education. It was noted that

'pupil's experiences may lead to some exceptional insights,
while in other areas there is an apparent lack of

understanding' (p.23),

but also that children often did not maintain a previously noted level of understanding, especially in the younger age range. Such shifting suggested the need for rich, detailed individual accounts when attempting to portray children's characteristics in this domain. FARE is cautious, for example, about the potential abuse of its condensed system of just two attainment targets and ten associated levels of development. These are not meant to be used in isolation or as an aggregate to represent a child's status since it is recognised that this area seems particularly susceptible to unexpected complexities and dynamic shifts. The approach to empirical study followed by all the researchers reviewed thus far has benefitted from the avoidance of any such reductionist empiricism that could have been adopted by way of characterising spirituality more crudely - for example, numerically. Even the Errickers' approach notes that individual children may switch between genres; thus a child's spirituality is not restrictively defined by his or her genre.

However, the erratic nature of children's responses and understanding in religious education (and by association the erratic character of some aspects of their spirituality) presents a particular challenge to developmental psychology. Theories of development have typically discerned the ordered sequence of children's psychological growth, thus the apparently inherent irregularities and jumps demonstrated in the spiritual domain require their own account and interpretation. This evidence drawn from the teacher's observations in FARE raises the question of what kind of experience the child has when such an insight strikes, beyond the predicted level of his or her other understanding. It is possible that such moments are similar to Robinson's 'original visions', and are identified with a noetic quality. If so, the identification of these in the course of religious education assessment may represent an important validation of the child's spirituality and thereby a further point of growth in itself.

Finally, it is interesting to note that some teachers sensed there may be possible interactions between children's capacity to respond to religious education and a variety of more typically psychological criteria. For example reflecting on the assessment

portraits of her pupils one teacher was led to wonder about the relationship between aspects of the children's level of development in RE and their gender, their self confidence, their self awareness and their awareness of and sensitivity towards others (FARE, p.310). This presents an interesting hypothesis, the detail of which is uncharacteristic of the existing theoretical or empirical scholarship. As such it is a speculation that might suggest a direction for interdisciplinary research of child-based research on the nature of spirituality in the future.

1.4.3

The Non-empirical literature

By far the majority of the burgeoning education literature⁵ addressing children's spirituality has adopted a non-empirical approach. However, within such scholarship, statements may be found about the nature of children's spirituality which suggest a role for empirical validation. Whilst it may be non-sensical to describe this educational scholarship as 'non-psychological', it has been suggested that explicitly psychological perspectives have been generally overlooked. Yet, it is apparent in many cases that arguments in this section of the literature have implicitly referred to psychological properties involved in children's spirituality and have in some cases built-in psychological assumptions to their theories as I shall review below. Given the inherently 'psychological' nature of any discussion of education, it may prove worthwhile to subject the underlying psychological assumptions and bases to explicit critical examination.

This literature represents an attempt to focus directly on the conceptual issues associated with the understanding of children's spirituality. In this way it benefits from a latitude of exploration that the practicalities of empirical research cannot support, as

⁵ Evidence of extent and character of the growth in this area is reflected in the launch of two journals concerned that particularly focus on children's spirituality: The International Journal of Children's Spirituality and SPES ('for the study of spiritual, moral and cultural values in education').

evident for example in the necessity to adopt an undefended, simple operational definition of spirituality in McCreery's research (McCreery 1996 p.197, and quoted in this thesis p.31).

In addition, education's particular identification of a concern with 'spirituality' distinguishes this literature's contribution from almost all of the psychological literature. This is because psychologists have generally dealt only tangentially with children's spiritual nature under the auspices of determining a psychology of their religious development or a broad characterization of their personality development. For these reasons the non-empirical developments in the recent education literature offer an important reference for the psychologist seeking ways to approach children's spirituality.

Some of the different approaches to the definition of children's spirituality arising in this literature are discussed in Chapter 3 in the context of my own determination of a working definition for this research. The following and final subsection of this chapter considers three broadly psychological themes that appear in the non-empirical education literature about children's spirituality. These themes, (1) spirituality as psychological well being, (2) the emotional versus cognitive constitution of spirituality, and (3) spirituality's inner versus social nature, have generally not been identified by authors as indicative of a psychological frame of reference. Rather, they have been implicitly suggested by their arguments and might therefore benefit from a more explicit dialogue with the psychological ideas with which they are associated.

Three Broad Psychological Themes

1) Psychological Well-Being

A number of authors have conceptualised children's spirituality in terms of a model of psychological health (Bradford 1995, Kirkland 1996, Rodger 1996). The

child's well being is said to be determined, in part, by the opportunity and capacity to explore and develop spirituality. The health metaphor affords particular consideration of the issue of disease and neglect. Thus rather than fulfilling a role that introduces spirituality to children, education is conceived as a kind of curator responsible for the healthy maintenance of spirituality, and as playing a role in healing where this may be damaged. There is a further implication here that evidence of a particularly well-nourished spirituality in children might be taken as an indicator of superior health. References to the 'whole child' in this context reflect this assertion that optimal health, or wholeness, in childhood includes an active, affirmative spirituality.

In linking spirituality to psychological well-being and normal functioning these authors may be implicitly drawing on versions of Jungian or Object Relations theoretical accounts of the psyche. As will be described in detail in chapter 2, these situate spirituality amongst the vital processes of mature psychological functioning and well-being. At an empirical level, the majority of evidence does support a positive relationship between adult mental health and having a serious personal religious commitment which presumably entails attention to personal spirituality (Lowenthal 1995). Also, Hay and Heald (1987) noted an empirical relationship between better than average mental health and those who reported spiritual experiences.

However, adopting such a model of spirituality as indicative of optimal health may not be automatically appropriate in the case of children. As an analysis of the implication of Jungian and Object-Relations theories for children's psychological development will demonstrate (in chapter 2), a spiritual focus is prescribed for healthy adult life but there may be reasons why in normal healthy childhood development the spiritual should be generally unattended to allow the establishment of other aspects of psychological development (e.g. ego consciousness).

The well-being conception of children's spirituality has been especially useful in developing further an understanding that this area may be fundamentally amoral (Priestley 1985), at least in terms of speculation about spiritualities which might either

enhance or detract from the child's quality of life and capacity to function healthily. A more detailed understanding of the ways in which and degree to which children's spirituality is expressed in the natural course of events may help to identify forms of damaged spiritualities. In the light of the conflicting suggestions in psychological theories about spirituality and well-being in child- and adulthood, such an understanding is also warranted to guide actions designed to promote spirituality in children, ensuring that this really is in the best interests of general psychological well-being.

2) Emotional versus Cognitive Processes

The roles of psychological processes commonly grouped as 'cognitive' or 'emotional' processes have been referred to in opposing ways by Furlong (1994) and Rodger (1996). Furlong attempted to create a taxonomy of spiritual capacities available to the child through education, in which she has emphasized the importance of promoting the child's emotional processing and explicitly set this against the development of cognitive abilities. Her approach characterises children's spirituality as evidenced in emotional sensitivity, and suggests therefore that it is promoted in experiences or exercises that focus intently on the child's emotional dimension.

This kind of perspective about spirituality has often appeared in the literature, partly in reaction to the perception of an imbalance in favour of intellectual knowledge accumulation as education which demotes the significance of other kinds of development referred to as emotional, personal and now 'spiritual'. Donaldson (1992) has made an especially thoughtful study of this bias and its possible consequences on our desensitization of 'value-sensing', which she defines in a context of many references to spiritual sensitivity.

However, the exclusive identification of the spiritual with emotional processes that authors such as Furlong want to promote, may be too simplistic in the light of current psychological understanding of the interactions of emotion and cognition, especially in childhood (Dunn 1991). A repeated theme in recent developmental literature

has been the discovery of emotional contributions to our understanding of cognitive phenomena and cognitive contributions to emotional phenomena (e.g. Miens, 1997). For example, areas previously understood in distinctly cognitive terms (such as the child's acquisition of a theory of mind) are in the process of being redefined according to a much more integrative model of emotional and cognitive function. For this reason, identifying children's spirituality too closely with emotional processes alone is likely to prove a vulnerable basis for the development of a more comprehensive understanding of it and the ways it might be addressed in education.

In contrast, (though not in such an extreme way) Rodger (1996) has portrayed children's spirituality as manifested in a special form of awareness or knowing, thus drawing primarily on cognitive processes to account for spirituality. Similarly, Rossiter (1996) wishes to argue for a distinctively cognitive understanding of how children's spirituality may be promoted. He challenges an assumption that spirituality is addressable by 'personalising lessons' and 'personal sharing' exercises (Rossiter, 1996, p.207) which focus on making the pupils' emotional lives more explicit or even manipulate their emotions to evoke a fresh response. He suggests that pupils' development is much more complex and unpredictable than the classroom can hope to direct through such emotionally-focused practices. Instead he states that a focus on 'knowledge, understanding and skill development' (p.208) is required since these can serve spirituality and by attending to these cognitive tools spirituality may also be enhanced.

This cognitive emphasis is yet more noticeable in many of the criteria suggested in OFSTED's discussion document (1994) pertinent to children's spiritual development:

“knowledge of the central beliefs, ideas and practices of the major world religions and philosophies; an understanding of how people have sought to explain the universe through various myths and stories, including religious, historical and scientific interpretations; beliefs which are held personally

and the ability to give some account of these and to derive values from them, behaviour and attitudes which derive from such knowledge and understanding and from personal conviction, and which show awareness of the relationship between belief and action; and personal response to questions about the purpose of life, and to the experience of e.g., beauty and love or pain and suffering” (OFSTED 1994 pp9-10, my emphasis).

The cognitive character of this would seem to demand rather more emotional balance, and attention to the perspective offered by Furlong and others.

In general this indicates the need for a more careful, less polarised, examination of cognitive and emotional contributions to spiritual processes. And it further indicates that such an examination might profitably draw on explorative attempts in psychology to address the interplay of emotion and cognition in many aspects of development.

In terms of an understanding of children’s spirituality, this issue might find resolution in a better deal for meta-cognition, that can serve both emotional and intellectual functions. Meta-cognition has been identified as pivotal in theoretical analyses of religious knowing (Watts and Williams, 1988) and in more broadly spiritual awareness (Donaldson, 1992). These authors have made explicit the possible roles played by cognitive features in the service of the otherwise apparently emotion-based quality of experience which people generally report as ‘religious’ or ‘spiritual’. It would appear that many of the criteria for spirituality listed above draw on meta-cognitive skills (ability to think about the processes and products of mental life), and therefore a careful appreciation of how this domain develops could help an understanding of the nature of children’s spirituality at different stages. Without reference to psychological evidence about children’s meta-cognitive development, some children might be at risk of being assessed as failing to exhibit spirituality whereas in fact the more basic limitation arises from their cognitive immaturity (Nye 1996). Furthermore, if more detailed analysis of

the psychological processes serving spirituality were undertaken, it might be possible conceptually to 'partial out' the contribution made by such meta-cognitive and other processes and identify what elements characterize the specifically 'spiritual'. This might point to areas in which even children as yet unable to master meta-cognitive skills were nevertheless directing their interest as early spirituality.

3) *Spirituality : An Inner or Social Dimension*

A recurring issue for scholars attempting to understand how best to characterize spirituality, particularly for children, has been a tension between models that suggest spirituality is an inner dimension concerning the intimate private depths of the individual's sense of being and those that portray it as an expression between people that arises in a sense of relatedness and in action towards others (Wright 1996, Mott-Thornton 1996, Hull 1995, 1996b, Bradford 1994). For example, Hull (1995, 1996b) has suggested a tentative developmental model in which such individual features (including experiences of significant spiritual moments) are simply precursors to 'real' spirituality expressed broadly as social action (and not inner reflection). He defines the education of spirituality (and by implication spirituality itself) as involving being inspired to live for others.

This tension has been explored by Thatcher (1991) in a critique of what seemed to be Hammond and Hay's (1990) inwardly focussed perspective on the spiritual in religious education. However, Hay rejects the charge of an exclusive inwardness in spirituality whilst being cautious about a characterization that downplays this in favour of spirituality's characterization as socially manifest (Hay and Hammond, 1992).

Either position, inner or social, might be enriched by psychological scholarship, though depending on which position was deemed to be the better analogy for spirituality, different theoretical approaches might be particularly relevant. For example, the psychodynamic analyses of the nature of children's relationships with others (most notably parents) might offer a framework for identifying qualities of the spiritual if the

social characterization of the individual's spirituality was favoured.

The issue of spirituality's identification with the individual has also been questioned at a more abstract level, and in a way that resonates with certain philosophical questions in psychology too. Wright (1996) describes how spirituality came to be viewed traditionally as the expression of the inner-most dimension of the private self. He traces the development of the concept through patterns of philosophical thought about human nature dating back as far as St. Augustine (distinctions between body and soul), through Descartes and the Enlightenment (dualism: the self is promoted but then objectified) to modernism where spirituality has represented for some the last bastion of permissible, indeed necessary, subjectivity, and the current confusion such a solution presents to postmodernist thought. His analysis of these changing concepts suggests we have only a rather arbitrary basis for thinking about spirituality as an intra-individual characteristic.

In contrast, Hay's position maintains the evidence supports a fundamentally individual basis of spirituality, that is, basic to each person's human nature - indeed their biological inheritance. Whilst accepting that its manifold expressions may be conditioned by social constructions and the changing features thereof, Hay asserts that spirituality itself is at root an *unchanging* feature of the *individual* human constitution. (Hay 1994).

In psychology one can identify some parallels with this question of the proper nature of its subject matter. Most of psychology has conducted an examination of the individual as the key unit to be explained, and this has been especially true of developmental psychology in which the course of individual psychological growth has been charted in its various dimensions, intellectual, emotional, moral, social and so forth. However, there is a movement within psychology that questions this narrow focus on the individual and suggests that comprehensive psychological explanations must be sought in a more dynamic framework (Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn and Walkerdine, 1984) that does not inevitably take the individual as the start and end point

of psychological accounts. In developmental psychology this can be demonstrated in the greater recognition of the socio-cultural psychological account of development offered in Vygotsky's writings (1978, 1986) in which children's development is portrayed as a reflection of much wider contexts of their social groups and cultural heritage. In Vygotsky's psychology, a pure psychology of individual processes that did not draw from the surrounding dynamics of social and cultural forms would be meaningless.

The parallel between what Wright (1996) identifies as the possibly biased conception of spirituality in terms of a person's inner self, and psychology's questions about its possibly biased treatment of the individual suggests there may be opportunity for mutual illumination between those addressing philosophical issues relevant to spiritual education and those concerned with psychology's philosophical underpinnings. Furthermore, if the understanding of spirituality amongst educationalists were to shift radically away from an identification with the individual (in response to philosophical criteria that show this to be merely an historical accident rather than the most accurate characterization of spirituality itself), collaboration with psychological approaches would still be possible given the alternative, non-individual, stance called for by Henriques et al. (1984).

The general implication of this debate about the inner or social character of children's spirituality for empirical research is relatively clear. It should not foreclose its attention to either as a vehicle for spirituality. Not only should research 'look both ways', to the inner and social, but also attend to the possibly defining dynamic that relates one to the other.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have described the educational context in which the research reported in this thesis was set, since it has been in education, not psychology, that spirituality has arisen as a domain of interest.

I argued that education normally operates with reference to more or less explicit models of human nature, and that for a considerable period spirituality has been characterised as integral to that nature. Since psychology undertakes to study directly the features and processes of the human constitution, a psychological approach to spirituality would seem to be a valuable contribution to education's understanding of its task.

An historical account of the formal introduction of spirituality through education legislation has been presented, and the waves of response and scholarship this inspired. A key moment in this history was the 1988 Education Reform Act and I offered some reasons for the impact this had since these help to understand the direction thinking about spirituality has taken in the education literature.

Finally, I reviewed the empirical and non-empirical scholarly literature concerned with children's spirituality focussing on the writings of educationalists and some of the psychological themes suggested in their work.

This review identified a number of ways in which the education literature could have, or could in the future, benefit from a partnership with psychological scholarship. However, this thesis does not attempt to undertake to explore all these suggestions for interdisciplinary research. Indeed, such is the basic need for empirical work on the character of contemporary children's spirituality, that more involved questions (such as the relationship between spirituality and self confidence or a more precise conception of the interaction of emotional and cognitive processes in spirituality), must await further research.

Chapter 2

Searching for Children's Spirituality in Psychological Literature

Introduction

This chapter has two broad sections. The first (2.1) explores the general nature of psychological scholarship's contribution to an understanding of children's spirituality. This is characterised by a widespread neglect of the spiritual as a potential dimension of human nature to be studied, and also by the unsatisfactory development of the psychology of religion. The implications of this context for the psychological literature which may contribute to an understanding of children's spirituality are discussed.

In the second broad section of the chapter (2.2) specific contributions by psychologists are reviewed, beginning with a survey of the implications of children's spirituality found in the general theoretical accounts offered by psychology's 'grand theorists', such as Freud and Jung. This is followed by a discussion of the points of significance that may be gleaned from accounts that, whilst not directly addressing children's spirituality, have studied potentially related aspects of the child's development such as the child's religious thinking and faith. Finally the very few psychological studies of children that might be thought to be more closely associated with the objective of understanding their spiritual nature are reviewed in terms of their methods, their conclusions and their implications for further explicit study and understanding of children's spirituality.

2.1

Section 1: The scholarly context of the psychological literature and its implications for a psychology of children's spirituality

2.1.1

Accounting for psychology's general neglect of the spiritual

Psychology has given the spiritual very little attention in comparison to other fields of study such as the mental, social and moral domains. The psychology of religion in particular, which might have been assumed as a natural home for the study of spirituality, has suffered itself from considerable neglect despite the interest shown by early psychologists like William James. Consequently even those within the field agree that its scholarship lacks the sophistication of other areas of psychology (Batson, 1997).

In short, three things have contributed to psychology's history of neglect of spirituality. These are its interpretations of the implications of its philosophical, methodological and cultural contexts.

Initially the cultural context was a catalyst in creating psychological interest in matters spiritual, in both adults and children (e.g. James, 1902, Hall, 1900). In these early days of psychology as a discipline, a growing knowledge of comparative religion and a context of religious fervour (particularly in New England where psychologists were a growing presence in the academy) suggested a promising basis for the empirical, psychological study of spirituality.

However, exploration of the spiritual domain became taboo as the discipline struggled to define itself as separate from its roots in philosophy and sought to embrace a scientific epistemology, as well as the scientific method. As a perspective, the scientific approach to inquiry was (and often still is) assumed to be incompatible with religious ways of thinking. This tension between science and religion was carried over

to the domain of psychology and spirituality, in which psychology sought to be scientific whilst the study of the spiritual aspects of human nature was equated with explicitly religious issues. During the discipline's formative years, psychology's particular interpretation of its scientific commitment can be seen to account for its neglect of the spiritual as a core research area in a number of ways.

The early difficulties encountered using introspection as a psychological method of enquiry appeared surmountable as the scientific method of objective observation of external behaviour alone became the only valid means for collecting data for psychology for many in the discipline. Through the behaviourist approach (which is still the preferred method in psychology though the philosophy of Behaviourism has given way to Cognitivism) the discipline found itself able to enter scientific discourse (Gross 1997).

The shift in methodological focus set spirituality very clearly outside the 'proper' area of psychological study, as it became increasingly synonymous with unverifiable references to inner experience, private knowledge and 'irrational' truth claims. The scientific solution to psychology's methodological problems brought with it a tight philosophical context of positivist epistemology (Kolakowski, 1993). Thus, the study of areas potentially concerned with human spirituality was discouraged and, when it was pursued, lacked the coherence of empirical fields of study in other branches of psychology. The early promise of the psychology of religion was unfulfilled because other areas were able to attract better authorization under the new philosophical framework the discipline had adopted. The remnant of psychology of religion that lingered on did so largely on a basis of treating religion as a behavioural, and later a cognitive-behavioural, index, consequently neglecting direct exploration of spirituality (Wulff, 1991).

Other fields of psychology, committed methods other than the scientific experiment (such as the psycho-analytic schools), also suffered academic marginalisation (Frosh, 1989). Their wider methodological and epistemological licence

did allow exploration of more and less explicitly spiritual territory as part of general psychological accounts of personality, well-being and development. However in addition to lacking cross-fertilising debate with other areas of psychological knowledge in general, the periodic interests of psychoanalytic schools in the more spiritual areas of human psychology were especially subject to the disparaging disdain of 'mainstream' psychologists. Consequently, contributions from psychoanalytic schools of thought (e.g. Jungian, Object Relations, and Transpersonal psychologies) towards an understanding of spirituality tend to be limited by a theoretical insularity and conservative orthodoxy amongst the proponents of each approach (Wulff, 1991).

This restricts the accessibility and validity of these approaches as models from which education might draw in pursuit of an illumination of a psychology of spirituality. There is an inherent danger of uncritically transferring the more esoteric general assumptions of these theories in the process of mining their specific suggestions about a psychology of spirituality. In some cases it may be particularly important to consider the general theoretical context from which such insights might be drawn. Although a theory may locate a spiritual dimension in its conception of human psychology, its characterization of development, i.e. the child's psychology, may conflict with its characterization of the spiritual. For example, Lealman's (1996) account of children's spirituality draws on the psychological treatment of spirituality found in transpersonal psychology¹ (Maslow, 1968; Wilber, 1977). However she does not consider this theory's account of development which would seem to locate spiritual consciousness as a pinnacle of adult development and rather exclude a spirituality of the child. Furthermore, it is not clear whether Lealman appreciated the esoteric character of the 'psychology' proposed by Wilber, which it has been suggested represents an attempt to integrate Western psychology *with* Eastern religion and hence

¹ A. Maslow's humanistic psychology, typified by self-actualization and peak experiences, was the foundation on which transpersonal psychology was built. Maslow is described as transpersonal psychology's 'philosophical father' (Wulff, 1991, p.612) and Maslow himself identified humanistic psychology as the transitional science in the movement towards the establishment of a transpersonal psychology (Maslow, 1968).

a kind of religious position in itself, rather than a psychology *of* the spiritual (Wulff,1991). The partiality of such a basis would seem an unwise foundation to incorporate into the general educational framework for understanding the nature of spirituality. It would appear necessary that a strategy of employing psychology for the purposes of illuminating children's spirituality should adopt an eclectic awareness of a number of perspectives and the nature of their contribution to the whole discipline.

A further methodological complication deterred researchers who might have been bold enough to overlook the strict, spirituality-excluding, conceptual boundaries of what kind of knowledge and material psychologists should pursue. This was the potential interference of the religious commitment of researchers in a discipline which raised up objectivity and neutrality as essentials of good practice. Unlike the natural sciences which it was trying to emulate, psychology as a whole was plagued by the problem of reflexive subjectivity, as both subjects and researchers shared the phenomena it sought to study 'objectively'. It was considered feasible that researchers could be encouraged to observe a neutral stance in many domains, but neutrality and religious stance represented an insurmountable conundrum. Early attempts, including William James' (1902) classic, were seen as examples of psychology in the service of religious apologetics (Wulff 1991). Recent contributions to the psychology of religion literature have continued to meet with this criticism, for example Bittner (1992) writes:

“..Fowler as well as Oser wants to find religious answers.
To me, it seems that psychology of religion is pursued here
not only as a descriptive and interpretive branch, but with a
theological and educational perspective...and it functions as a
hidden justification of religion” (Bittner,1992 p. 182).

These contexts offer some account of psychology's failure to develop an empirical psychology of human spiritual nature from which education might have drawn. (This failure therefore accounts, to some extent, for the education literature's

neglect of psychological levels of explanation noted in chapter 1.) However, it is possible to detect some ways in which psychology's adverse position towards the study of human spirituality can be circumvented.

First, a behavioural measure of notable psychologists' research interests demonstrates that, in the period spanning its inception until 1969, one in four presidents of the prestigious American Psychological Association have at some time studied an aspect of religious psychology (Dittes, 1969). Although this is not reflected in the proportion of academic publications throughout the ranks of the discipline, this unexpected but distinguished level of interest suggests psychologists can be inspired to recognise and address the broadly spiritual character of human nature in addition to other domains.

Secondly, there may be important, but implicit, psychological foundations that can inform an understanding of spirituality. Wilson (1978) argues that it is from amongst the accounts of elementary processes that higher order human processes and experiences are best approached. A developmental account of such a progression from more basic psychological elements to the emergence of higher psychological processes such as human consciousness, imagination and the capacity for representation is found in Vygotsky (1978). Thus, although apparently eschewing spirituality as a subject for study, existing and future psychology may be capable of providing accounts of important contributory processes (e.g. language, thought, and memory processes) from which an understanding of spirituality might be derived, as a higher order combination of elementary psychological elements.

The third suggestion of hope in the otherwise inhospitable context for spirituality that psychology has provided can be found in contemporary changes in the way the discipline defines its relationship to science. The short history of psychology can be likened to that of a developing person, the early years characterised by frustrating teething troubles (e.g. introspectionism versus behaviourism versus psychoanalysis) followed by a drive to establish a very fixed sense of identity. This

identity, as with children, was sought in terms of the views of others, their values and their traditions. In psychology's case the protective 'family' identity was provided by scientific method and a positivist epistemology. However, there are signs that the discipline is now confident enough to grow away from this and pursue more of its own interests, in its own ways (Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn and Walkerdine, 1984). In an increasing number of areas of psychological research, new relationships are being pursued outside the traditional scientific framework, which take advantage of the general relaxation of positivism fostered by post-modernist thought. Qualitative methods and 'alternative' qualitative methodologies (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994) are becoming increasingly acceptable in psychological research. This is reflected in a liberation of what, as well as how, psychologists pursue in their study of human nature, and has created enthusiasms in a number of non-traditional areas (The Psychologist, March 1995). Acknowledgement of the imperfections of the philosophical and methodological context psychology adopted for itself in the past, which significantly contributed to the neglect of spiritual research, therefore presents a new opportunity for future study.

However, few mainstream psychologists have been seen to rush to reclaim the study of human spirituality as central territory in the map of human nature including that of childhood. The cultural conditions, namely religious cultural context, which made this topic so salient at the turn of the last century are now powerfully reversed. In fact it seems increasing secularism and post-modern deconstructionist attitudes make spirituality, with its religious undertones and in turn an association with an implied absolutist worldview, an anathema amongst many modern academics.

The survey research conducted by Hay (1987,1990) has challenged the secular misapprehension that as adherence to religion in society has declined so also has the sense of spiritual reality contributing to a person's psychological make-up. It would appear that psychology is still burdened by this misapprehension, continuing to neglect spirituality despite the 'lifting' of some of the methodological and philosophical

obstacles discouraging inquiry in the recent past.

The various strands in the historical and intellectual development of psychology identified in this section, when considered together may help to account for the disappointing incoherence and underdevelopment of an area of the discipline one might otherwise have sought to provide a ‘psychology of spirituality’. It is apparent, even in such a brief review of the strands contributing to this context, that these arise from profound questions at the philosophical and epistemological heart of psychology. As such, and for the purpose of this chapter, it is not appropriate to deviate into a more in depth examination of these themes. Rather, the points identified here serve merely to depict the general character of the context in which psychology came to neglect, for the most part, the study of the spiritual dimension in its overall study of human nature. However, as well as noting key reasons which seem to account for this neglect, it has been possible to identify certain points of ‘hope’ in the developing self-consciousness of the discipline that suggest that such neglect is not entirely excusable nor inevitable.

2.1.2

Implications for deriving a psychology of children’s spirituality

With only one exception (Coles’ (1990) The Spiritual Life of Children) psychologists have not conducted intentionally designed studies of children’s ‘spirituality’ nor developed any explicit theoretical accounts of the spiritual in childhood. As a result, a psychological consideration of children’s spirituality is dependent on an analysis of more and less associated psychological areas of inquiry. To this end one may draw on theories and empirical findings in the psychology of religion and, in particular, the developmental psychology of religion, but also on those general theories of human development which have in some way suggested a place for a spiritual dimension in human nature and functioning.

This strategy of attempting to derive the psychological contribution to an understanding of children’s spirituality from such a diverse body of knowledge reveals

a number of significant issues and problems.

First, it has been noted that the developmental psychology of religion itself suffers from a lack of theoretical cohesion, fostered by the divergent ways in which this aspect of children's psychology has been considered and explained by psychologists. In a recent paper, Reich (1997) set out the daunting range of material and theory which a developmental psychology of religion 'grand theory' would need to incorporate. This made clear how far the field was from having such a unifying framework.

Secondly, the incoherent nature of the contributory areas of psychology also reveals its incompleteness. In an earlier attempt to discern a pattern of consensus among the variety of empirical studies and theories in the developmental psychology of religion, Reich (1992) concluded this could be summarised as

“development from a magical, fantasy-filled anthropomorphous, disjointed and capricious religiousness..to a more realistic, concrete religiousness, still largely determined by socialisation, to a critical revision in adolescence and, ideally on to a more personal religiousness in young adulthood” (Reich, 1992, p.174-5) .

However, this essentially Piagetian worldview omits consideration of the childlike ways in which a religious or spiritual type of awareness might reflect or shape the personal quality of a child. A personally-based response to this area is characterised as an adolescent feature, usually measured in terms of adaptive processes of the individual to the conventional views of religious adults, in other words the emergence of a conventional spirituality. Children's spirituality, as a psychological feature potentially independent from the content of adult religion but perhaps served by similar processes and serving a similar function to the 'personal religiousness' of young adults, is absent in Reich's depiction of the developmental psychology of religion field at least.

A third difficulty arises in the lack of shared objectives which the incoherence

and incompleteness of the field has imposed on scholars. In the reviews in section 2 below, it must be emphasised that these psychologists did not attempt to study a commonly agreed topic, let alone 'spirituality'. It is only by extrapolation that implications for a psychology of spirituality might be derived from the mixture of theory based and more theory-independent studies and surveys of areas of development that may share some relation to the spiritual.

Lastly, a broad division of theoretical allegiances can be identified in the psychological literature. This division, between mainly psychodynamic perspectives and cognitive developmental approaches, has significant implications for the way in which such literature suggests an illumination of spirituality. The first of these implications concerns the undertones contained in the conceptions of childhood each perspective adheres to.

The psychodynamic conception portrays childhood as a rich psychological period. It is characterised by rather more naked and direct interplay between conscious and unconscious processes than necessarily found in adult life when the rationalising functions of the ego normally establish dominance. This seems to afford patterns of behaviour in childhood that include a greater facility for non-literal cognition, playful and fanciful excursions of the mind, and the emerging awareness of self through the exploration of relationships between the child and significant others, especially in search of authority figures and idealised role models (Freud, 1923a, 1924). These rich features of childhood identified in psychodynamic accounts therefore suggest this period represents fertile ground for certain religious conceptions to flourish (such as the conception of God resulting from a projection of the child's psychological need for an idealised father figure), and by implication equally fertile ground for more broadly spiritual concerns.

In contrast, the undertones of the cognitive-developmental perspective tend to characterize childhood in a way that would indicate little place for the profound encounters and significant personal experiences associated with spirituality. The

cognitive approach to development depicts the deficiencies in the child's psychological structure (such as egocentrism and failure to conserve) as contrasted with the adult norms of mental functioning. This emphasizes the child's immaturity and relatively impoverished state. Consequently accounts which adopt the cognitive perspective might be regarded as less well placed to perceive the spiritual functioning of the child, bearing in mind that in some quarters it is argued that children's spirituality may have a quality that suggests it is adults who may be the more impoverished (e.g. Robinson, 1983).

The second implication of the broad theoretical division apparent in the following review of the literature concerns the different emphases on emotion and cognition in psychodynamic and cognitive developmental accounts. The psychodynamic perspective's emphasis on emotion affords a more significant place for the effects of individual biography, subjective experience and the effects of cultural differences. In contrast, the cognitive developmental approach favours an account of development that identifies cognitive universals and a description of how the developing function of relatively standard templates (such as account for distinctive thinking styles at different stages) are responsible for psychological growth. This has implications for searching for a psychology of children's spirituality in the existing literature since it raises questions about how that spirituality might be conceived: in terms of a response to experience or an in-built piece of human machinery. The sensible 'answer' to the intractable questions about nature and nurture which arise for every aspect of psychological function would seem an appropriate strategy to adopt in the case of spirituality also, namely that both natural and nurtured aspects are assumed to contribute and thus neither are excluded from study. Given the biased emphases of cognitive and psychodynamic accounts in this respect, a theory of children's spirituality may need to avoid too exclusive an association with either, but rather to attempt the difficult task of theoretical integration.

2.2

Section 2: A review of specific contributions from the psychological literature that may illuminate the nature of children's spirituality

A note about the use of the terms 'religious' and 'spiritual' in this literature review

The intractable problem of finding, yet alone imposing, a definition of 'spirituality' is explored a number of times in this thesis and is a particular focus of chapter 3. One of the few matters of consensus in this area is that meaning of 'spirituality' is very difficult to agree, and thus one must accept that a degree of subjectivity characterises the interpretation and use of this word more so than most others. This characteristic in itself does not recommend itself to psychologists, and might be added to the list of reasons for psychology's neglect of direct research in this area. For a discussion of the possible meanings of spirituality that pertain to a study of children, the reader is directed to chapter 3 of this thesis. Here also can be found a statement of my own boundaries for this word's general (i.e. not yet qualified in terms of childhood) meaning. An acknowledgement of the particular subjective framework that I bring to the interpretation and use of the word can be found in chapter 4.

For the purposes of the literature review in the rest of this chapter, one specific issue concerning meaning briefly requires earlier attention here. This is the issue of how the word spirituality relates to the meanings conventionally referred to under the umbrella of 'religion' and 'religiousness'. This is important in the ensuing reviews because both 'spiritual', but more often, 'religious' have been interpreted and used in different ways by different psychologists. It may be helpful to set out my own sense of how these words are related and how they seem to have been variously used in the literature. It is hoped that this clarification will inform my subsequent comments, demonstrating in particular that 'religious' in some authors' hands can refer to the psychological features of activity that is tied to religious tradition. For others however, it is clear a more relaxed meaning is intended, one that transcends any tradition, an a

priori ‘psychological’ dimension in itself (cf Smith’s suggestion that ‘religion’ as a term is surrendered in deference to a two part package of ‘cumulative tradition’ and ‘faith’ - the latter representing a personal, psychological element, Smith 1963). Assured of my own stance regarding the use and meanings of these words, it will be possible to report the contributions of different psychologists in a way that is faithful to their use of these words, yet avoid the impression that undue semantic slippage contaminates the whole exercise.

My general appreciation of the relation between ‘spirituality’ and ‘religion’ is that ‘spirituality’ refers to the broadest features of a religious attitude, thus at times may be synonymous with religious features and yet at other times it can be represented without the framework of religion. In my own life I have found it helpful to employ the perspective and language of a particular religious tradition (Christianity) as a tool to encapsulate my experience of the spiritual. However, my sense of this does not rely on an inevitable link between the broadly ‘spiritual’ and the particularity of the religious and the theistic.

In tandem with this is another generalised sense, namely that the ‘religious’ pertains mainly to particular and shared constructions and cultures, whereas the ‘spiritual’ pertains more directly to the less ‘customised’ , apparently natural, responses of the individual psyche. Their link, in my mind, is broadly that at the essence of ‘being religious’ there is a need to draw on the domain or processes that might be categorised as ‘spiritual’. However, exercising one’s spirituality does not necessarily lead directly to an identifiably religious perception, though such a connection would not be illogical. Spirituality, is located at the level of being a foundational characteristic of the human constitution: necessary for religion, but religion is not necessary for spirituality.

It was a feature of the scholarship represented by the education literature reviewed in the last chapter that the exact relation of the spiritual to the religious is invariably obscured by the variety of interpretations of both terms. This applies in a

similar way to the literature from which one might draw psychological perspectives to illuminate children's spirituality. Few psychologists refer to 'spirituality' beyond passing references, consequently the psychological literature is less clouded by variety of interpretation of this term at least. It is the use of the term 'religious' that presents problems here. However, although it is never entirely possible to identify the sense intended by another author, it is usually possible to infer using a measure of common sense the boundaries set by different psychologists.

Some psychologists (e.g. Goldman) have used the referent 'religious' in a way which follows the general consensus (see Hammond and Hay 1990²) : namely that the term suggests a narrower, restrictive sense of reference than the word 'spiritual'. These kinds of psychologists offer studies of the psychological processes, feelings and experiences directly arising from a religious perspective or practice. In such cases, and with some effort, underlying spiritual psychology might be discerned operating at a more general level albeit in these specific contexts. Other psychologists (e.g. Jung) however have not interpreted the boundaries of the 'religious' so precisely, and have used the term to refer to the underlying psychology in the first instance. In such a case, 'religious' and 'spiritual' appear closer synonyms when applied at the psychological level, and one can extrapolate from their psychology of the religious more directly. Bearing these differences in mind, it is in some cases more appropriate to stay with a theorist own terms, and refer to 'religious' in lieu of 'spiritual', whereas in other cases this is much less appropriate and one needs to first unearth the underlying spirituality in their psychology of religion and consequently re-define that aspect of their findings for the purposes of this research³.

² Hammond and Hay report an exercise in which participants brainstorm associations with both 'religious' and 'spiritual' in separate groups. Typically, associations with 'religious' suggest a restrictive, less positive tone of a quality of authority imposed from without.

³ I have also attempted to clarify these meanings in the subsequent reviews through references to theoretical insights that denote at times 'broadly' or 'narrowly' religious aspects. Similarly, it is possible at times to identify features in the literature that illuminate 'religious spirituality', that is spirituality qualified

In attempting to draw material for greater understanding of children's spirituality from the psychological literature, one further consideration needed to be borne in mind. This is that, unfortunate though it may seem for this research agenda, the different contributions I review below were not explicitly designed to illuminate the psychological character of children's spirituality. The ease with which one may critique their limitations must therefore be balanced by a sensitivity for their various different research agendas.

With these caveats in mind, I shall review the potential (for understanding children's spirituality) of a range of psychological literature in reverse order of its explicit relevance to the focus of study presented in this thesis.

2.2.1

Implied spirituality : Psychological theories of human nature

2.2.1.1

Freud

Two phenomena can be identified in the Freudian account of human psychology which have a potential bearing on children's spirituality. These are his discussion of the oedipal crisis and 'oceanic feeling'.

In general, Freud's interpretation of the psychology of religion was a negative one. He regarded religiousness as a neurotic symptom expressed in psychological development of personality that had sought its basis in illusion, rather than being more stably rooted in reality (Freud, 1927, 1930). The desire to seek (and the sense of finding) meaning in religion reflected, in his view, a distortion of psychological development, since it merely shifted the burden of unresolved personal neurotic conflicts originating in the human infant's experience of helplessness and consequent

through its dependence on its expression through traditional religion. This may be contrasted, for semantic convenience with 'broader spirituality'.

craving for protective love. Whilst in childhood it was normal to relieve these feelings through relationships with parents, the later transferral of such emotional needs onto a Godly father and the reliance on an externally based moral code (religion) represented a failure to address and accept the reality of personal emotions and impulses, and therefore a failure to develop maturely in Freud's view.

In this way the Freudian account locates the universe of religious feeling, perception and thoughts in the processes associated with the Oedipal crisis. He writes:

“religiousness is to be traced to the small human child's long drawn out helplessness and need of help; and when at a later date he perceives how truly forlorn and weak he is when confronted with the great forces of life, he feels his condition as he did in childhood, and attempts to deny his own despondency by a regressive revival of the forces which protected his infancy” (Freud, 1910 p. 123).

The ‘forces’ to which he refers are the psychological characteristics accompanying the Oedipal complex and its attempted resolution, in particular the difficult combination of emotions experienced in relation to the father and which normally end in positive identification with the father as an ideal role model. Freud was quite adamant that this psychological feature of development (through which the superego, and consequentially morality, is formed via identification with the father) was ‘the germ from which all religions have evolved’ (Freud, 1923a p.37). By using the unconscious investment of psychic energy in a father image, or at least in the search for a suitable such figure, to account for religious feeling and thoughts the Freudian account implies that some forms of adult spirituality may also be explained in terms of Oedipal psychology ⁴.

⁴ The Oedipal complex (and the quest for and identification with the father figure) characterises male development only. Asserting that men have taken the lead in religion and morality, (as a byproduct of their oedipal concerns) Freud accounted for female religiousness as merely something ‘transmitted by cross-inheritance’ from men (The Ego and the Id, 1923a p.37). Clearly such a gender imbalanced (and historically

This is clearly a reductive and negative explanation of the significance of adult religious feeling and thought, and by implication adult spirituality. However, this aspect of Freud's theory at least identifies the fact that childhood (and the Oedipal struggle) represents an important period for a similar kind of activity to that seen in the expression of human religious nature. Indeed, rather than characterising the dimension in which religious feeling and thought are manifest as beyond what the child's psychology can hope to appreciate, Freud describes it as 'patently infantile' (1930, p.74). Furthermore, by identifying the broadly religious with these Oedipal conflicts, (the longing for powerful protection in the face of personal helplessness and the need for an external source of moral direction), Freudian treatment of these generically 'spiritual' aspects asserts their place amongst the basic essentials of the child's psychological development. It is not characterised as some kind of final, and rare, property of a few specially enlightened 'spiritual' people, but as a reflection of experiences common to almost everyone.

The explanation of religious psychology founded on Freud's Oedipal theory appears to respond particularly to his conception of institutional religion and its effects on disturbed people he treated (Wulff, 1991). However, his discussion of 'oceanic feeling' reveals his passing interest in a broader conception of potentially religious, implicitly spiritual, experience, which later Freudian theorists have recognised as playing a positive role in development: 'regression in the service of the ego' (Fingarette, 1963).

'Oceanic feeling' was a term used to refer to the speculated experience of the infant, before the ego has become distinguished from the external world. Without this sense of separation from its contexts, the ego of an infant was thought to experience a rather paradisiacal state of oneness. It is possible to see parallels between the phenomenology of this state and that of mystical experience reported by adults (e.g. Stace, 1960). Whilst the sensation of mystical oneness by no means exhausts the range

chauvinistic) account is insufficient basis for a theory of children's spirituality today.

of spiritual experiences reported in the adult empirical literature (Hay,1990), and for which a theory of children's spirituality might need to account, this aspect of Freud's psychological analysis does suggest further implications for childhood spirituality.

First, as was suggested in the association Freud proposed between religious feeling and Oedipal feelings, his speculations about Oceanic feeling's mystical resonances imply that adult spirituality is just like a childhood, (in fact an infant) experience. On these grounds, it is possible to assume that children are capable of experiencing spirituality rather than it being a feature of adult experience alone.

Secondly, Freud's understanding of oceanic feeling may have implications for the wisdom of seeking to nurture similar experiences in developing children. The adult experience of this ego state (i.e. the mystics' experience) is explained by Freud as a form of regression to the infant like state. Though arguments have been made that such regression may be a relatively healthy and necessary 'regression in the service of the ego' (Neuman, 1973) in the case of adult spiritual experience, this characterization of spiritual experience may raise a contra-indication for children's spirituality.

This is because healthy childhood psychological development, according to Freudian theory, requires unstinting emphasis on the establishment of ego, therefore the regressive processes involved in pursuing spiritual experiences in childhood may undermine this establishment. Furthermore, Freud suggests an association between the regressive blurring of ego boundaries (and thus Oceanic feeling) and potential psychopathology in adult life at least in cases where the ego is not sufficiently well established to withstand and re-emerge from such blurring experience. In the gradual process of children's ego development children are unlikely to have firm boundaries capable of withstanding this kind of regressive 'blurring' very well. Therefore, this aspect of spirituality does not recommend itself as a particularly desirable or healthy pursuit of childhood psychology.

Thus, whilst the first implication suggests that children may indeed have memories of such ('spiritual') experiences, from infancy onwards, this second

implication questions the extent to which these should be actively nurtured in children. McCreery (1995) has voiced concerns about the assumed wisdom of hoping to elicit spiritual feelings from or relive such memories amongst children. Her intuitive suspicions about the possible ill effects of ‘spiritual exercises’ (such as found in Hammond and Hay, 1990 or Beazley, 1990) when used with younger children find a rationale in this kind of analysis of Freudian psychology’s contribution to an understanding of children’s spirituality.

In summary, Freud’s negative analysis of adult spirituality as largely pathological (either as the universal neurosis religious faith represents, or as the precariously regressed ego state mystical experiences can represent) detracts from its potential as a key foundation in understanding children’s spirituality from a psychological point of view. It has been interesting to note, however, that this theory is able to support and expand on a relatively optimistic prognosis in terms of uncovering some spirituality in childhood. (Similarly ‘positive’ uses of Freudian ideas have been possible in the development of adult psychology of religion e.g. Pruyser 1991)

2.2.1.2

Jung

Jung developed and elaborated Freud’s ideas about an unconscious dimension underlying mental life, but importantly extended the characterization of this beyond that of a receptacle for repressed and irrational material. Jung also held more positive views (than Freud) about the role of religion in normal psychological functioning, indeed he identified a religious aspect as a fundamental, if not central, part of the psyche.

In Jungian theory, an important component of the psyche responsible for religious and broader spiritual issues is the archetype of the Self (Jung, 1969). This feature represents the psychological centre of an individual, bridging both conscious

and unconscious domains. As such it is impossible for a person's conscious ego ever to entirely encompass the Self, and thus it is experienced and related to as something inherently greater than the ego. Jung claimed to have discovered that there is a common set of symbols across cultures from which an individual finds a symbol (or many symbols at different times) to express this experience (Jung, 1969). Very often (but not necessarily) the Self symbol coincides with that of a deity, the God image, since this also naturally refers to an unknowable wholeness on which the individual is dependent. The dependency in the case of the psychological constitution comes about through the emergence of a person's conscious ego from the Self as a small part of the person's whole psychology. Crucial elements of psychological development and ongoing psychological well-being are dictated by the relation of the conscious ego to the Self, and thereby to an individual's unconscious. In other words, the Jungian psychological perspective suggests that relating to some centre of meaning and wholeness which represents that which is greater and more mysterious than our everyday selves is a basic feature of human psychology. Amongst his patient caseload, Jung noted this was frequently represented as an explicitly religious struggle, but even when this was not apparent, Jung's characterization of the psyche and its processes in terms of the ego's relation to the Self located a broad spirituality at the heart of human nature.

Though Jung frequently refers in his autobiographical writings to the significance of spiritual questions and experiences arising in his own childhood, his theory of psychological development characterises childhood and the first part of adulthood as more normally focused on 'worldly', external concerns that establish a firm standpoint for ego consciousness (in a similar way to Freud as described above). Those tasks more traditionally associated with the spiritual quest, such as an emphatic concern with the inner life, with meaning and wisdom and self-realization, are reserved for the psychological development that normally occurs in the 'second half of life' (Jung, 1931c)

Therefore the potential of Jungian perspectives for developing an understanding of children's spirituality is somewhat ambiguous, since on the one hand spirituality is understood as a common psychological inheritance and yet on the other hand the description of child (and early adult) development suggests that spirituality is likely to be a remote feature, playing little part in the important developmental tasks and processes of that period.

Other writers however have extrapolated and developed a more specifically child psychology based on Jung's analytical psychology. A key contribution from the Jungian school is that of Neumann (1973) who suggests in many places how a child might come to experience and express spirituality, despite Jung's general view that, on the whole, the child's psychological focus was extraverted as the ego developed outwards and upwards away from its unconscious roots in the Self and into external reality.

Neumann concurs with Jung that in childhood the ego has to develop 'over against the particular demands of the inner world' and so in the first half of life 'the psychology of the ego and consciousness dominate' (Neumann, 1973, p.9). The period before (and during which) the ego emerges from general unconsciousness - normally infancy - is a special case, and the account of this in the theory is very suggestive of spirituality. Not only may this earliest sense of spirituality still resonate in an older child's otherwise 'worldly' existence, an appreciation of the characteristics of the infancy period is also necessary in order to understand Neumann's more detailed exposition of childhood Jungian psychology

Infancy - Primary Unitary Reality In Neumann's account infancy is characterised by a peculiar psychological state not dissimilar from Freud's 'Oceanic feeling'. This is the experience of a primary unitary reality in which the child's primitive sense of self is 'as large and undelimited as the cosmos' (p.12) , and is defined as 'participation mystique'. This is further described as a period when

‘outside reality has not yet been split off from the inner reality of soul and spirit :both are still experienced as a unity’
(p.54).

Neumann suggests that it is this same sense that occasionally “breaks through or replaces everyday conscious reality with its polarisation of subject and object” in adult experiences, reminiscent of the sense of an altered state of consciousness in many reports of spiritual experience (Hay,1990).

This implies that the infant child is in some sense permanently in this realm prior to ego development and the emergence of self in early childhood. Thus rather than spirituality being an essentially and exclusively adult phenomenon, this account suggests that adult reports of spirituality in the form of cosmic, transpersonal feelings may be in fact harking back to a similar sense in earliest childhood. Such an argument might support the conception of childhood as a time especially rich in spirituality (e.g. Robinson,1983). Of course, the psychological map has many different additional features in adulthood, not least ego consciousness. It may be that this (and the accompanying mental reflexivity) is essential to appreciate the spiritual qualities of the human psychological core as such, making the adult and infant experiences actually quite different.

I-Thou self dynamic A further feature of Jungian theory explored by Neumann which could have a bearing on developing spirituality is the two-fold process by which the sense of self⁵ becomes established in the child as the infancy period draws to a close. It is thought that the self emerges from both the child’s experience of its own body (a body self) and through the mother in a sense acting as the child’s self, offering the child a kind of ‘proxy self’ in advance of the child fully establishing his or her own unique self . Thus, the resultant sense of self experienced by the child’s newly

⁵ Note this ‘sense of self’ refers to the more commonly understood experience of ego self, and is not equivalent to the psychological material Jung refers to as the Self, which is always denoted by a capital.

emerging ego has qualities of both 'I'(my body) and 'thou' (self via mum). According to Jungian theory therefore, the self is made up of two complementary qualities, being both our most intimate personal sense but also reaching out to a sense of 'thou', inherently seeking relations with others. This intrinsic psychological dynamic of 'I and thou' relations finds a natural echo in characterisations of spirituality in terms of an awareness of fundamental connectedness between the individual and other 'thous' and a more general, collective sense of 'Thou' (e.g. Martin Buber's theology, see Buber, 1958). Though he does not comment on the possible spirituality afforded by these constituents, Vygotsky's (1986) experimental evidence of the dialogical nature of the developing mind would seem to substantiate this general understanding of the child's psychology proposed by Neumann.

Early Consciousness

As the earliest forms of consciousness able to emerge as a consequence of this two-part development of self are likely to be a sense of bodily knowing and interpersonal knowing, it is possible that these will be the vehicles for any early sense of spiritual consciousness too because they emerge so directly from the previous proto-spiritual state of primary unitary reality. In a theory of the psychology of religious knowing developed by Watts and Williams (1988)⁶, forms of bodily and interpersonal knowing were important analogues for spiritual experience. This was because they characterised the infrequently considered (by psychologists that is) kind of cognition which is not (necessarily) rational, logical or manipulable, but rather is unsolicited, creative, and inspirational. The implication for children's spirituality here is therefore not only, as with adults, that attention to bodily and interpersonal forms of cognition is more likely to reveal spiritual experiences, but also that children may be especially comfortable with such forms of knowing - in a sense potentially more spiritually fluent - as they have yet to master more logical forms of cognition.

⁶ And which makes explicit reference to Jungian ideas.

Childhood: Self-ego axis Once the child's Self takes shape and the ego begins to emerge as consciousness, psychological birth has really taken place. Describing the childhood period, Neumann (1973) refers to the Self - ego axis, representing the relationship between these two components of the psyche. Although in the first half of life the ego tends to move away from the Self out into reality, Neumann is clear that throughout life the metaphorical distance between Self and ego along this axis is constantly changing, most notably in sleep and dreams when the two come closer together.

This flexibility seems to suggest that, even in childhood, there is a possibility for the ego to retract into contact with the Self, facilitating the special experiences associated with that. Such experiences might include being able to experience oneself in a new way, as viewed by the ego ; moments of transformation and insight. Neumann explicitly comments on such ego-Self axis shifts as reminiscent both of the child's early experience of unitary reality and of the religious experience of ecstasy. Indeed as the child's ego emerges, moving between the transpersonal sphere of primary unitary reality and a sense of objectified reality, it is likely , says Neumann, that this will be experienced as special moments of consciousness akin to those experienced by an adult moving into the transpersonal sphere as part of his or her individuation process - the psychological task attended to in later life which Jung maintained was, in a broad sense, a religious task of personal transformation and discovery.

Fantasy Whilst the child is characterised as being mostly 'reality' orientated, the ego projecting into reality and working to establish a firm standpoint in consciousness, fantasy is acknowledged as an important means by which the child is kept in touch with his or her inner world. Neumann (1973) describes fantasy as the inner sense organ that perceives and expresses inner worlds in an analogous way to our ordinary

sense organs' functions in the outside world.

This may suggest that fantasy in some way offers the child an important a bridge to the inner world at a time in development when, as has been already described, the psychological path being followed leads him or her in another direction, away from the inner self. As spiritual experiences of insight, transformation and religious experience in adulthood are accounted for as products of moments when the ego 'revisits' and reunites with the self as a common feature of psychological interest and function in the second half of life, the child's use of fantasy as a bridge to the inner world (of unconsciousness and self) may serve a similar function, facilitating the experience and expression of spirituality. In the same way, Neumann explains the important function of symbolic childhood structures - rituals, secrets, special significant objects (e.g. toys), - as a means by which the child is able to retain some contact with an inner world. Thus each of these is potentially infused with a spiritual colouring, since in Jungian theory the inner world is identified as a spiritual centre. The implications of this understanding of the child's psychology for understanding their spirituality are that these childish rituals and symbols may function in the same way as religious ritual and symbol function for the adult - offering a useful point of entry to an inner dimension, to a spiritual reality. Accordingly, Neumann's understanding of Jungian psychology indicates that children's spirituality may be sought amongst their own 'childish' activities rather than exclusively in (often more overtly religious) activities and conceptions that serve adult spirituality.

Psychopathology The Jungian perspective does allow for any slippage back to the sense of primary unitary reality to be, on occasion, a positive step in psychological development (cf. 'regression in the service of the ego'). But there is also a clear link in the theory to psychopathological outcomes for some individuals who regress to this state, as was also seen in Freudian accounts. This is because it represents the stage when the ego was precariously undifferentiated; therefore such a vulnerability can only

be fruitfully re-approached when there is a stable grasp of reality - that is to say, a firm standpoint in consciousness. The implication of this for an understanding of children's spirituality is the same as that derived from Freud's comments on psychopathological aspects of the psychology of spiritual experiences. In other words, it may be important to exercise caution if attempting to deliberately foster 'inward' journeys with children, since they are still in the process of developing a firm ego apprehension against the spiritual and other priorities of their inner psychological centre.

Gender In his discussion of explicitly spiritual experiences, Neumann (1973) uses Jungian principles to suggest that because of naturally differing psychological constitutions, men and women (and by implication boys and girls, to some extent) have different experiences of the spiritual. The spiritual 'numinosum' experience is characterised as masculine. This finds women open and receptive to it, and to be wholly enveloped by it. Men however tend to maintain a distance, their ego consciousness is less overwhelmed and they often convert such experience into creative products and the like.⁷ Such an argument makes sense of survey findings in which men report less spiritual experience as such. It also broadens further the area (particularly amongst men) in which spirituality might be found. However, this gender difference may be an important factor in understanding how children express and experience spirituality, particularly in the approach to puberty as separate gender identity becomes more salient in the child's self image (Gross, 1987). The Jungian account offers a natural psychological basis for the gender difference, which may underlie more obvious socially constructed factors (highlighted by other kinds of psychological theory) mediating girls' and boys' reactions to and perceptions of spiritual matters.

Assessing the Jungian Contribution

The Jungian account of psychological development is particularly rich as a source from which to extrapolate how spirituality can be understood in terms of human psychology. Its message for children's spirituality is somewhat ambiguous, though Neumann (1973) is helpful in making a case on the basis of Jungian ideas for a more active spiritual life in children than might otherwise be deduced from the theory at first sight. Not only does this theory offer a description of the psychological processes which could support spirituality in an individual, it also suggests particular mechanisms and areas of importance through which spirituality may naturally come to light, such as in children's fantasy and play, in children's less rationally dictated cognitive style and in different forms according as a function of gender.

As a foundation for a theory of children's spirituality however, Jungian scholarship suffers from an isolated status in psychological discourse. Adopting the Jungian account of the psyche involves accepting a wide ranging and controversial set of internally validated premises, not always established in the normal empirical manner, making it difficult to combine aspects of this psychology with other approaches. If one can disregard this, Jungian theory has impressive internal consistency and explanatory power once a 'step of faith' is taken. The further pursuit of a Jungian account of children's spirituality would appear to offer an account that could be comprehensive, descriptive and explanatory, developmental, and profound. However it would necessarily be a 'Jungian' account, lending the result an possibly undesirable exclusivity in general discourse. The need to understand children's spirituality as illuminated by psychological perspectives should perhaps be first met in a more eclectic selection of psychological theories and research, than in a single powerful account which could marginalise the interest in children's spirituality to those who appreciated that theory.

2.2.1.3.

Object Relations psychoanalytic accounts

The approach referred to as an ‘Object Relations’ account of psychological nature has its roots in Freudian insights. Its basic distinctiveness from Freud’s psychoanalytic account lies in the characterization of relationships as the primary foundation for the dynamics and structure of the psyche, as opposed to the drives and instincts postulated as central in Freud’s theory (or the archetypes of Jung’s theory).

Accordingly, object relations psychology argues for the importance of early interpersonal relations, since an ‘object’ in the psyche is said to be a person or thing in an individual’s external environment which becomes internally or psychologically significant. The object relations approach to the understanding of psychological nature proceeds through an analysis of the feelings and mental images which become associated with dealings with various personally significant objects in the individual’s life. St. Clair (1994) states this theoretical assumption succinctly:

‘To study human personality means studying the history of the person’s relationships with significant people’ (St. Clair, 1994, p.10).

The psychologists identified with an object relations account do not represent the kind of coherent ‘school’ of thought demonstrated in an identifiable object relations ‘orthodoxy’, to the same extent as orthodox Freudian and Jungian theories have developed. There has been rather more divergence in the ways different psychologists have explored this understanding of relationship as fundamental. Key figures in object relations, such as Fairbairn and Klein, did not address the religious or spiritual implications of the emphasis upon relationship.

However, others adopting the main aspects of this understanding did explore such implications, drawing on their perception that a person’s religion could often be characterised as a special form of relationship. Commenting on the religious interest such psychology evoked, St. Clair (1994) suggests the basis of this extrapolation of the

religious from an understanding of human nature as relational by arguing that

‘being religious represents the opportunity to extend the personal interpretation of experiences to the nth degree, to enhance both humans and their universe in one meaningful whole’ (St.Clair,1994. p.16)

Psychologists thus inspired by object relations included Guntrip, Winnicott, Rizzuto and Meissner. They each contributed a relatively distinct approach to understanding broadly religious aspects of human nature in these psychological terms (Guntrip,1969; Winnicott,1971; Rizzuto,1979; Meissner,1984).

Given the agreed significance of an individual’s history of relationships in general in object relations, those espousing this approach have invariably written about childhood and the foundational relationships of early experience. However, this has been largely with a view to furthering an understanding of adult religious psychology. None of these scholars offers an explicit study of what the nature of the child’s ‘ordinary’ relational psychology means for the experience of a religious dimension in childhood itself. Therefore the task of exploring this particular psychological approach in search of a better understanding of the possible nature of children’s spirituality remains an inferential one. Nonetheless, an analysis of object relations theory for this purpose does suggest a number of implications for children’s spirituality.

First, in identifying the nature and origins of adult religious psychology in childhood experiences of relationship, psychologists following an object relations approach have implied that childhood is at least a significant period for religion. Rizzuto’s (1979) study of how adults form and process their representations of God, and Meissner’s (1984) model of how adults experience the religious, have both traced these crucial constituents of personal religious constructions to childhood influences. The object relations account cannot support the dismissal of childhood as inconsequential for the religious domain, of which spirituality may be at least a part. Even though it is traditionally easier to identify spirituality and a religious character

amongst adults (e.g. in salient cases like saints and martyrs), this theoretical approach implies that such features cannot be fully confined to adulthood.

A second and subsequent implication for an understanding of children's spirituality is the recognition in object relations that the religious processes of adult psychology may share the same quality and structure as certain childhood processes. This is to say, religious psychology need not be seen as dependent on extraordinary psychological processes that specifically and exclusively respond to formal religion.

This notion is evident in Winnicott's contribution in particular, in the identification of the transitional space or realm and the significance of transitional objects (Winnicott, 1971). Transitional objects are thought to function as a bridge between inner (subjective) experience and outer (objective) reality, the fusion of which affords an encounter with new meaning that is rich both in a sense of personal significance and a sense of connection with the real world. When transitional objects are said to operate in this way they open up an intermediate area of experience, referred to as the transitional space or realm. Winnicott argued that this realm was the psychic location of both play and religious experience. To support this, he drew parallels between transitional objects in childhood, such as toys and comforters, that serve to extend the all important relational 'reality' of the mother in the child's mind, and the religious symbols and rituals of adults, that equally function by way of the special meaning captured in the fusion of inner significance and outer sign.

Winnicott's identification and analysis of this multi-purpose realm and its contents, that accounts for both the child's play and the adult's encounters with religious symbols (including the image of God) did not, like Freud, reduce all such activity to the illusion-seeking nature of the subjective psyche. The particularly important implication for children's spirituality lies, however, in the general breadth of experience which Winnicott suggests is served by the transitional realm. In this account he suggests the same psychological basis for not only traditionally conceived spiritual experience (i.e. conventionally adult, religious) but also for a broader range of

experiences, which children repeatedly and ordinarily encounter in their play, their creativity, their imaginative acts and their interpersonal relations. Thus it becomes psychologically plausible to look for spirituality in children amongst a wide range of their ordinary experiences as well as in specifically religious experiences, since the more narrowly defined religious experience or spirituality of adults is conceived as psychologically continuous with these everyday childhood activities.

A strong interpretation of Winnicott could therefore lead to the identification of the transitional realm as the realm of spirituality. In my opinion, this may be a helpful initial indicator of where potential spirituality may be found, as well as providing some account of the nature of psychological processing involved in spiritual experience. However, further distinctions would no doubt be required in order to distinguish the 'special' phenomenology reported in adults' subjective accounts of their spirituality (Hay, 1990) from the huge number of experiences children daily encounter in this realm. In other words, there would be a need to discern when play and creativity (or for that matter, religious ritual and use of symbol) crossed some kind of threshold of significance in an individual and conferred a sense of something special, something 'more than' ordinary play etc., being experienced through that encounter.

A third implication from object relations theory for children's spirituality is suggested in its identification of particular people in the child's life as having a significance for their religious feelings and understanding (Meissner, 1984; Rizzuto, 1979). For example this theory highlights the way people such as the mother or father can colour other relationships, particularly as a relationship with God. Rizzuto's thesis makes clear that the connections here are constantly evolving. As the child's relationship to the parents is itself far from static, so also its influence on their wider sense of relation to God or the universe is characterised as a process and not simply in terms of a snapshot of relation to one person as prototype 'object'. Again, the significance for children's spirituality lies in the extension of religious psychological explanation into the ordinary world of the child, i.e. their mum and dad,

and themselves. But the characterization of this activity as an evolving process is also important, since it suggests such spirituality has a dynamic quality. Children might be thought of less as ‘having’ this or that kind of spirituality, but rather as being involved in a process of continual review, reflected in the inevitable processes of review of significant relationships.

A fourth and highly relevant implication that has already been alluded to in this discussion is the primacy given to the child’s own personal sense of religion. For instance, Rizzuto gives precedence to the child’s original and private God-image onto which any formal religious conception may be grafted. She states:

‘No child arrives at the house of God without his pet God
under his arm’ (Rizzuto, 1979. p.10).

Therefore, whilst object relations accounts such as hers speak in terms of a psychology of religion, the primary place given to the personal and psychologically natural aspects of human religious nature distinguish these approaches from any too closely tied to giving account of the psychological response to any particular traditional religion. It would appear that a psychology of spirituality, rather than religion alone, could be extrapolated from Rizzuto’s account of the ‘first birth’ of the living God in the child’s mind, which concept draws on images reflecting relationships with the parents. The ‘second birth’ (when the child is challenged to integrate his or her private religion with conventional religious ideas and images), may be less closely synonymous with the intensely personal quality of spirituality that the ‘first birth’ period suggests.

What matters in terms of giving an account of children’s spirituality is that Rizzuto’s psychological analysis attests to the primary importance and temporal primacy of children’s personal religion, which is regarded as an inevitable (i.e.natural) response to their emerging awareness and curiosity (Rizzuto, 1979, p.44-5). However, as with the other implications we have noted, this is based more on psychological analysis of adults (in Rizzuto’s case, disturbed adults) than on empirically based facts about children. The increasingly secular nature of modern

British society begins to create the controlled environment in which this ‘inevitability’ of children’s personal religious constructions could be tested, since these conditions maintain far greater separation of the developing child and conventional religion than has been the case heretofore. In this way, this personal religion, or what might better be called spirituality, could be more easily examined in its own right, as the empirical work reported in chapters 4, 5, and 6 of this thesis attempts to do.

The final implication of object relations accounts for an understanding of children’s spirituality differs from the others I have noted since it has a more negative tone about such spirituality. This is due to the implication in many of these accounts that an individual’s religious sense is to a large extent the culmination of earlier developmental experiences, that is to say childhood provides the ‘preconditions’ for religious psychology but is perhaps therefore not able to support the conditions in which this can flourish during childhood. This is suggested in Guntrip’s close association of personal religiousness and mental health. His characterization of mental health clearly refers to the optimal mental health of the ‘mature’ and ‘integrated’ adult (Guntrip, 1969, p.324), and suggests that a meaningful sense of the spiritual is a necessary corollary of this mature development. In some senses this spiritual consciousness is suggested as the consequence of healthy mental development, in which an individual’s history of personal relationships has not only developed a well-balanced and positive relational facility with others, but also an integrated sense of self based on the internalisation of key external relationships the person has had. In Guntrip’s view, this secure relational foundation will seek an extended expression of relatedness in a religious form, perhaps to God or the universe, to humankind or to common principles that celebrate the interrelation of people and their world.

Similarly, Meissner’s object relations based theory of the developmentally linked stages to be discerned in the religious experience of adults locates the highest forms of spirituality at the end of the psychological developmental path. In total contrast to Freud’s psychological analysis that equates spiritual experience with an

infantile psychology, Meissner uses object relations theory to argue that it is only in the psychology of an individual 'stripped of infantile residues' (Meissner,1984, p. 112) that fully mature religious experience of the spiritual is encountered. St.Clair (1994) notes how this analysis has parallels with Maslow's hierarchy of needs model (Maslow,1968), which locates self actualization and peak experiences often identified with a sense of the spiritual, at the top of this developmental hierarchy, - that is, spirituality as an end point of development.

Whilst these suggestions place a question mark over the possible nature and indeed existence of children's spirituality, the characterization of spirituality in this way makes psychological sense of the apparent maturity of notably spiritual individuals such as holy men and women, saints and martyrs. The lives of such people have often suggested personal development that went beyond the ordinary range achieved by the common man or woman, rather than arrested or childlike characteristics.

As has been noted, object relations approaches to a psychology of religion have not directly addressed the question of children's religious psychology from which implications about their spirituality, as children, might be drawn. And, with this location of genuine religious experience and understanding as the consequence of earlier developmental milestones being passed, it is unclear, from the perspective of this psychological theory, to what extent it is reasonable to speak of children's own broadly religious or spiritual nature.

Meissner's (1984) description of developmentally associated levels of religious experience does perhaps leave open a solution to this problem. His analysis suggests the nature of religious experience (of adults stuck at different stages) of childhood development, and through this speculation identifies the kind of experience in this domain which children , at different stages, might be likely to have.

For example, according to Meissner the earliest, infancy stage may confer a sense of the religious characterised by feelings of protection and maternal warmth. Between the ages of about one and three years of age, this evolves into an experience

of power and magical impersonal qualities. Meissner's third stage of adult religious experience is said to reflect the sense children aged three to six years may have. This is characterised by feelings of the punitive, judgemental and formidable qualities of the spiritual reflecting the development of the superego and the emphasis on male, fatherly characteristics as a consequence of the Oedipal crisis. The intensity of feelings at this point, to the point of sexual intensity, can also find resonance then, though the experience of the spiritual is still far from securely distinguished from the child's experience of its parents. Such differentiation in later childhood affords a more abstract and universal perception of the spiritual served by the child's growing reflective and evaluative capacities.

In this way, Meissner's account gives details of the possible nature of children's experience, even though fully mature spiritual experience is reserved for those who have undergone all the stages of psychological development. Whilst for adults the kind of experience identified with earlier stages of development is characterised as second-rate, there is no reason to characterize such experience in children as less than genuine and significant for them at their given stage of psychological development. Meissner's analysis offers useful suggestions about the nature and developmental processes and limits which may shape the unfolding characteristics of childhood spirituality; however, only a more direct study of children's experience can confirm these and, importantly, explore whether they do indeed represent spiritual experiences as profound and genuine as those of psychologically mature adults.

Assessing the Object Relations Contribution

The object relations legacy is one that extends the general richness of psychoanalytic theoretical accounts found in Freud and Jung in the search for psychological foundations for children's spirituality. On balance, object relations accounts contain positive implications for such spirituality, though this is checked by a

pervasive sense that whilst religious sensibilities may be traced to childhood processes and encounters they are ultimately a characteristic of the psychological conditions of mature adulthood. However, this in itself may help to clarify the need to conceptualize children's spirituality on its own terms and take developmental considerations into account, rather than to seek a crude match of such experiences and interpretations between adults and children.

Subsection 2.2.1.Conclusion

This lengthy sub-section (2.2.1) has reviewed three 'grand theories' from the psychodynamic tradition in psychology, and shown that each has interesting implications for an understanding of children's spirituality and how research into this might proceed or be interpreted.

However the psychology of childhood has more often been addressed with reference to Piaget's grand theory of developmental psychology: cognitive-stage theory. It is this theory which is most widely known and used as a psychological basis in the education of children. This has directly inspired a number of researchers to look for cognitive-stage patterns in various aspects of children's religious development. Therefore, rather than needing to unearth the broad implications of Piaget's grand theory (as I have done for the psychodynamic theories), it is possible to examine the contributions these specific studies might make to an understanding of children's spirituality. The following sub-section therefore moves from an investigation of implied spirituality of the psychodynamic 'grand theories', to an examination of the contributions of research which has studied aspects that might be more or less closely related to the child's spirituality, with the acknowledgement that these are indebted to Piaget's general theoretical account ⁸.

⁸ For these reasons I shall not specially describe the features of Piaget's stages or the processes of development that serve them. They are well known in both psychological and educational scholarship.

2.2.2

Related to children's spirituality? : Research on religious development

2.2.2.1

Goldman and his legacy

The early 1960s witnessed an unprecedented wave of interest in children's religious development and how this might be a reflection of their cognitive growth, particularly as described by Piaget's stage theory. Ronald Goldman was a key figure in stirring up this interest (Goldman, 1964, 1965), as a result of his examination of the nature of children's understanding of religious concepts and stories. He concluded that their thinking in this domain was similar to that noted by Piaget in others, - that is to say, stage-like and subject to cognitive structuring that delimited their perception and conceptions in characteristically immature ways. In his view, these stages dictated the developmental path and capacity of the child to respond to features in the religious domain.

His conclusions, and his methods for arriving at them, have been widely criticised in subsequent years (Francis, 1976; Murphy, 1978a, 1980). His emphasis on specific ways of understanding religious material, and verbally accounting for that understanding, may suggest that his relevance only concerns the teaching, learning and assessment of religious information. However, implications for how the child's broader religious nature is conceived (which implications may impinge on their spirituality), can also be discerned in Goldman's work and in his influence.

A positive implication that the new interest that Goldman's work focused on children's religion created was that it demonstrated that religious development in children was not merely a function of accumulated information. Goldman's evidence provided a case for religious response as an integral, psychologically-mediated feature, not merely a question of external quantity of teaching or indoctrination.

However, for the most part the model of religious development promoted by

Goldman suggested a bleak outlook for children's spirituality. His analysis of the stages of religious understanding which conditioned children's capacity to think about religious matters led him to conclude that their cognitive handicaps precluded 'real' religious understanding or the experience and feeling which such understanding might support.

Additionally, the possibility that one might come upon religious insights or feelings through broader kinds of experience, not merely intellectual knowledge, was ruled out for children. An existentially based spirituality was thus denied on the basis of children's limited developmental history:

'In short, sin, death, frustration, enmity, lack of purpose, weakness, must have been known in some measure at first-hand if anyone is to feel the need to be saved from them. To put it another way, we need to have lived long enough to have experienced the real problems of the human condition before we see the point of what religion offers' (Goldman, 1965, p.49).

At a more general level, Goldman's account has negative implications for the purposes of a psychological foundation for spirituality because it reflects the general script of cognitive theory, namely that adult psychological function is the norm, and the child is relatively disabled by comparison. As a basis for spirituality, this underlying conception elevates adult spirituality and implies that children's spirituality can be assumed to be a weak or absent feature that fails to match the adult criteria. In terms of a capacity to have spiritual experiences, Goldman asserts such a view quite plainly, regarding these as rare instances of a particular kind of gifted adult - that is, mystics. Following a cognitive line, cognitively less-developed individuals can be presumed to be excluded from such experience, and therefore Goldman dismisses this source of spirituality as 'rarer in adolescence and practically unknown in childhood' (Goldman, 1964, p.14).

Empirical evidence suggests this interpretation was erroneous, since children report religious experiences with as high or higher frequency than adults (Tamminen,1991). Equally, rather than being developmentally inhibited from ‘seeing the point of religion’, Francis has presented evidence that personal interest in religion declines with age (Francis,1987). It would appear that Goldman’s purely cognitive psychological basis is prone to misrepresenting the nature of children’s religious psychology, at least in respect of the roles of an individual’s existentially- based interest in religion and such an individual’s propensity for religious experience.

Goldman’s largely negative characterization of the child’s personal religious capacity may have contributed to the desire to disassociate spirituality from the cognitive, as evident in some of the education literature on children’s spirituality (e.g. Furlong,1994). Indeed, education’s identification of developmental psychology in general with the Piagetian framework may be responsible for a view that psychology has little to offer the illumination of spirituality, as implied by the neglect of psychological ideas in the literature reviewed in chapter 1 of this thesis.

This retraction from the cognitive and the influence of mental structure, (that may in fact be ‘thanks to’ Goldman’s legacy), is also evident in Coles’ (1992) otherwise psychological analysis of children’s spirituality (reviewed below). However, it may prove to be a mistake to ignore cognitive aspects of spirituality altogether, since cognitive changes (and restrictions) are clearly fundamental to the nature of childhood in general. The value of preserving some measure of attention to the cognitive is suggested by three aspects of the other psychological literature in this area of ‘related’ studies on religious development: (i) Elkind’s (1970) more positive extrapolations about a religious spirituality based on Piagetian cognitive theory, (ii) Nye’s (1996a) argument that the cognitive significance of children’s spirituality is best sought in an understanding of their meta-cognitive abilities, and (iii) studies of aspects of religious development that have sought to integrate cognitive and other psychological theories (Fowler, 1981; Oser and Scarlett, 1991).

2.2.2.2

Elkind's Use of Cognitive Theory

David Elkind's theory of religious development in childhood is also based on Piaget's sequence of stages. However, in contrast to Goldman's rather prohibitive conclusions, Elkind's theory draws out the successively appearing strengths of each cognitive stage (Elkind, 1970). He argues that each new intellectual strength resulting from the major changes in mental structure Piaget identified, produces, in turn, a distinctively new kind of need in the child. And he explains how these needs can have special prompting or priming effects for religious awakening. Therefore Elkind's stages suggest a way of characterising some aspects of spirituality in terms of 'need' structures. Illustrations of these stages and needs may help to clarify his cognitively-based, but illuminating, contribution.

For example, in Elkind's theory the governing need structure at the first stage of religious development (approximately aged 0-2 years) is a need to search for conservation. As Piaget observed, during this period children begin to understand about the permanency of people and objects even when they disappear from sight. This is to say, their existence is 'conserved' in the child's mind. If a toy is hidden under a blanket the child attempts to recover it, and if dad leaves the room he is still thought to exist and may be called to. However, this insight into permanence must be qualified in due course by the recognition that life itself is not permanent.

This, Elkind argues, prompts the child to ascertain some way of mentally conserving life nevertheless. He suggests that this developmentally mediated need to search for conservation at this highest level has a specific priming effect on the child. Namely, from this point in development onwards, the 'search for conservation' structure primes the ability to acquire a concept of God. After all, in a sense God is the 'ultimate conservation' transcending bounds of space and time.

Similarly, for later stages he argues that each major cognitive skill that the child develops fosters a new need structure, which in turn primes the possibility of a

particular kind of religious development. Between the ages of 2 and 7 there is a stage when skills of mental representation are mastered, particularly demonstrated in the child's ability to symbolically represent the world in language and pretence. This prompts a widespread need to 'search for representation', which is the defining need structure for Elkind's second stage. The ability and need to search for representation raises the difficult question of how God may be represented for the first time along the developmental path. Elkind suggests that it is in this period of spiritual growth that the child will be particularly responsive to scripture and its representations.

The subsequent stage, between the ages of seven and eleven, is characterised by a revolution in the child's logical abilities, in particular his or her new capacity to make systematic comparisons. This prompts a new kind of need structure: the need to 'search for relations' across all domains, but again this has special implications for the religious domain. In an individual who has acquired both a concept and a representation of God in the earlier stages, a question about the nature of relationship between self and God becomes prominent in a new way. In Elkind's view, this development sensitises the child at this third stage to the practice of worship as a means of beginning the life-long exercise of working out their relationship with God. He notes that whilst many contemporary children might reject formal religious worship at this stage, the issue of relation to God often persists in forms of individual, private and sometimes untraditional worship.

Elkind's stated theme is the origin of religion in the child, and his references to 'God', 'scriptures' and 'worship' suggest a more narrowly theistic explanatory relevance. However, his stages and the identification of associated psychological needs lend themselves to a broad interpretation as well, one which might serve an understanding of spirituality also. In particular, his use of the nature of the child's cognitive psychology indicates a likely timetable of emerging personal needs and spiritual concerns (that may or may not adopt religious content) that children seem developmentally 'programmed' to encounter.

2.2.2.3

Meta-cognition Theories and Spirituality

In recent years developmental psychology has pursued a particular interest in children's capacities to think about thinking and other aspects of their mental life. This is referred to as children's 'meta-cognition' and research has revealed a number of important phenomena in the ways children develop in this area (Astington, Harris and Olson, 1988).

In this respect, the significance of the cognitive in an account of childhood is still upheld by such scholarship, but the new focus on the cognitive processes affecting the child's everyday understanding of his or her own psychology (and the mental life of others) means that 'meta-cognitive' issues have a more natural relationship to spiritual pursuits. For example, it has been suggested that such pursuits might include inner reflection, raised self awareness or developing empathy with the needs and perspectives of others (e.g. Hammond and Hay, 1990). Understanding the features of the development of meta-cognition may provide an important psychological key to understanding how children experience aspects of spirituality like these.

In an earlier paper (Nye, 1996a), I examined the insights for children's spirituality that might be drawn from aspects of contemporary meta-cognitive psychology. One of these was the child's development of a 'theory of mind'. I explained that research demonstrates the complexities involved in developing a basic understanding of the nature of mental life, since it draws on invisible and abstract processes (thoughts, beliefs, desires, feelings) yet requires that one learns to treat these as having predictive and explanatory power, - that is, as if these mental properties were causal 'objects'. Children only gradually master this complexity, and it seems that the basic unfolding of cognitive abilities for representation are crucial here (Perner, 1991).

Therefore children are only gradually found to be in control of their ability to direct their own mental life back on itself: to think about thought, for example, or, more complexly, to think about a feeling they have about another's belief. Moreover,

they are easily tripped up by more salient but conflicting clues in physical reality. This is to say, while they are often said to have fertile imaginations (Cohen and MacKeith, 1991), children's abilities to apply themselves to their 'inner life' as a discrete domain should not be over-estimated.

An example of this is found by unpacking the implications for spirituality of children's development of understanding of the appearance-reality distinction. Meta-cognitive research on this has shown that children may understand real and pretend objects have different features ('you can't taste an imagined ice-cream'), long before they understand other distinguishing features of the real and imagined domains (such as knowing an imagined cat can't become real) (Harris *et al.*, 1991). In adults, entertaining spiritual ideas and accommodating spiritual experiences can draw on nurturing a middle ground⁹ for the 'reality' or significance of otherwise non-material, subjective material. Even when capacities for mental reflection are in place, children may not be in a position to consciously appreciate such a middle ground, in advance of mastering the full range of distinctiveness of the land on either side. In the light of these aspects of meta-cognitive development, understanding children's spirituality again suggests that one not only needs to allow for developmental limitations in its expression, but also needs to look for ways in which children may encounter the spiritual that do not inevitably imitate the adult model, represented here by the reflective awareness of a rich middle ground between otherwise dichotomous poles: mental and physical realities.

This use of meta-cognitive scholarship is not intended to suggest a reduction of spirituality to a series of (meta)-cognitive processes. However, this offshoot of traditional cognitive-stage theory opens up the kinds of psychological processes which a cognitive approach can address and, as a result, shows more likely sources of direct influence on spirituality (such as the ability to reflect on thought or to empathize about

⁹ C.f. Winnicott's notion of the role played by the transitional space and transitional objects therein.

feelings). A detailed understanding of the mechanics of these processes reveals the extent to which children's spirituality cannot be assumed to be exactly like, or be nurtured to be like, that of adults.

2.2.2.4

Theory "Integrators" in Religious Development Research

Two psychologists, Fritz Oser and James Fowler, have each approached the study of children's religious development by integrating cognitive theory with other psychological aspects. These attempts suggest a recognition that though the cognitive is important to any account of childhood, in the case of religious nature more than this needs to be addressed. As a result, their rather richer characterisations of the specifically religious domain might be found to touch on aspects of spirituality also. At least in certain individuals, the religious judgement structures (Oser) and the character of their faith stage (Fowler) must contribute to the nature of their spirituality, though there is no attempt to suggest that either of these is synonymous with that.

Oser's interest has been in religious judgement, or the way an individual's religious nature finds expression in their decision making (Oser and Scarlett, 1991). His approach is an integration of Piagetian cognitive theory with Kohlberg's moral development theory (that also owes much to Piaget). It espouses a stage and structure approach.

Development is said to be revealed through the form of religious judgement an individual makes in response to key 'contingency situations'. These situations are hypothetical scenarios specially designed to elicit a response or 'judgement' that arises from the deep structure of the individual's religious nature, a structure which differs as a general function of age and maturity in a number of domains. The nature of the underlying structure is ascertained by reference to the position the individual's response occupies along up to 7 polar dimensions, such as freedom versus dependency and hope versus fear.

However, it is claimed that the structure identified represents a specific quality of the person's religious nature, and not merely a reflection of, or correspondence to, other structures (e.g. moral or cognitive) and knowledge stores (e.g. knowledge of a particular religion or theological position). Thus Oser's approach is dedicated to identifying a special psychological basis that can account for the aspect of religious nature which is essentially deeper than culture, socialisation and education - a core structure through which these other influences must be processed. In terms of its theoretical perspective, Oser's account of religious judgement structures appears promising material for a conception of spirituality as a construct beyond conventional 'religiousness'. In practice however, there is considerable emphasis on the character of the God-person relationship in the language used to assess position on the different dimensions through which the nature (stage) of the structure is revealed.

Oser identifies five stages, of which the first three account for the childhood period. In general, childhood stages are characterised by random and shifting positions along the seven polar dimensions. This conception has an important implication for the view of children's religious judgement 'structure' (i.e. an active psychological basis for broadly religious processing) since a central tenet of his theory is that the emerging pattern of positions taken up along the different dimensions "constitutes the cognitive religious deep structure of individuals: their meaning making system" (Reich, 1992 p.170). If children's positions are shifting and random, 'pattern' must be impossible to identify, implying that children more or less lack this kind of structure in his formal sense. Thus Oser's stage theory about religious judgement perhaps suggests that children's spirituality will not be easily or meaningfully captured as distinct stages or types.

Another potentially significant contribution in Oser's theory is the suggestion that a mechanism of development from one stage to the next is a consequence of the structure of religious judgement being activated in some way. This is in line with the cognitive accent of the theory adopting the (broadly Piagetian) idea that cognitive

conflict prompts cognitive transformation and development. If cognitive structures such as this contribute to a child's spirituality, then this theory suggests how the twin influences of individual cognition and external elements (such as life events and religious education) might interact in the production of spirituality.

If Oser's 'meaning-making' system derived from an integration of cognitive and moral components begins to point to a more broadly significant basis in human psychology that might share characteristics with spirituality, then Fowler's conceptualisation of faith goes even further in this direction.

Fowler attempts to integrate Piagetian ideas about cognitive development, with Kohlberg's theory of moral development (1981), Erikson's psycho-social theory (1959) and Kegan's (1982) personality development theory. His definition of 'faith' seems broad and personal enough to serve as a useful comparison for spirituality:

'the way of discerning and committing ourselves to centres
of value and power that exert ordering force in our lives'
(Fowler, 1981 p. 24).

Later he explains further that:

'faith understood generically as a human universal includes
but is not limited to or identical with religion' (Fowler, 1991
p.21).

Despite this attempt to tap underlying psychological feature of human religious nature, Fowler has been criticised for inadvertently supporting a particular kind of theological position, liberal theology, in the character of his hierarchical sequence of stages (Meissner, 1987). Fowler's (1991) response to such criticisms has been largely to admit to and celebrate his theological starting point, though such candidness is still unfamiliar amongst most psychologists as a research approach.

Fowler's integration of theory and original empirical research, based on in-depth interviews and life histories, led him to characterize faith as a sequence of six stages, each with distinctive features reflecting the individual's development in other

psychological domains. The first two of these stages are proposed as typical in children under twelve years of age. However, Fowler's emphasis and that of those who have been inspired by his approach has been on adult faith and psychology. In a recent review of 'post-Fowlerian' research, Slee comments:

“little research has been conducted investigating Fowler's account of childhood. This neglect may be accounted for by Fowler's own relative disinterest in childhood” (Slee, 1996 p. 76).

Consequently, his contribution to an understanding of children's faith psychology is relatively thin and may suggest an underlying view that faith, and perhaps by implication spirituality, is similarly lacking in significance.

What Fowler does say about the two key childhood stages may nonetheless suggest templates for spirituality. In Stage 1, intuitive-projective faith, imagination and the tendency to relate to symbols in a predominately emotional way, is characteristic. The self of the child's personality is assessed as 'impulsive', which though it enhances the direct and powerful nature of imaginative and emotional experience, also inhibits the child from a more systematic and intentional grasp of aspects constellating in their faith. This Fowler found was typical of a majority of children under seven years of age.

The second stage, mythical-literal faith, describes the majority of 7-12 year olds at which stage personal meanings, i.e. issues of 'faith', are constructed and expressed mainly as story, drama and myth. However, this constitutes an almost unconscious attraction to symbolic heroes and universal story forms, rather than a reflection of personal awareness of the meaning and roles of these vehicles for faith. Important cognitive changes during this period affect a move from literal (concrete) understandings towards more hypothetical kinds of reasoning, and the development of a 'reflexive' self towards the end of this stage creates conditions of more conscious revision of the child's perspective.

Fowler's suggestions about childhood faith clearly move beyond the religious-knowledge dependency of Goldman's account. Fowler's analysis of the aspects that characterize these stages begins to indicate areas in which the child's ordinary experience can nurture and express a level of spirituality, as faith.

The implications for adults of his staged approach have been criticised by a number of scholars (Parks, 1991), since any notion of a hierarchy suggests that lower stages are less valid than higher stages, particularly since the last stage is typified by saints and martyrs. A similar implication is suggested for children: because the later stages hinge on the revision and rejection of earlier forms of faith there is a hidden temptation to regard the child stages as shallow and inferior. However, if Fowler's roots in Erikson are taken seriously, then whilst development is depicted as revision, it is equally characterised by conservation of earlier psycho-social conflict resolutions. That is to say, the forms of child faith, such as the intense emotional attachment to symbols or the influence of a particular heroine or narrative, remain significant foundations for all subsequent development.

Fowler's contribution to an understanding of children's spirituality lies in his eclectic integration of developmental theory and his suggestions about the character of the child's 'worldview'. Research more specifically focused on discovering the nature of children's spirituality may find Fowlerian patterns in this also. However, he does not directly address the nature of spiritual experience and the child's sense or awareness of a spiritual dimension.

Assessing the Contribution of Studies of Religious Development

The studies reviewed in this section were not conceived by their authors as commentaries on children's spirituality. However I have tried to demonstrate that they may have implications for how children's spirituality is understood, albeit in some cases by identifying what it is not, such as in Goldman's narrow focus on children's intellectual understanding of religious ideas. In a broad sense therefore these studies

contribute to a sense of where the boundaries of spirituality might be drawn, suggesting that children's spirituality cannot be subsumed under any one of the aspects of childhood religion that have been described here. However, it would seem reasonable that all of these play some part in the whole picture, and that in some cases they may be particularly significant, for example in the spirituality of a religiously committed child.

All of the research reviewed here draws on the developmental model of staged maturation. In this respect, these studies provide a background context in which spirituality is set, giving evidence and explanations for children's strengths and weaknesses as a function of their relative immaturity. Whilst this tends to suggest a conception of childhood as relatively limited, especially in terms of well-established cognitive restrictions, a comprehensive account of children's spirituality will need to accommodate these defining childhood features at some stage. However, it may be a distraction to use stage structures, and their implications, as the initial framework in such an account, since it may itself restrict the nature of evidence gathered.

Finally, in contrast to the limited and clinical empirical basis on which the theories of the psychodynamic tradition were based, the studies in this section reflect a firmer methodological basis. All have been founded on empirical studies of ordinary children and have employed a variety of methods, notably in-depth interviews, naturalistic observation, test conditions/semi-clinical interviews. The implication for the empirical study of children's spirituality that can be drawn from this is that such study is feasible, if difficult, in a parallel domain (the religious), and an account need not be based on theoretical speculation nor adult recollections alone.

2.2.3 Spirituality studied: Isolated attempts

Though the title of this final sub-section implies that the following scholars have explicitly studied children's 'spirituality', in fact only one (Coles, 1990) of the four contributions described below uses that term. In my opinion, the other three,

Tamminen (1994), Ranwez (1964) and Berryman (1995) have made contributions that are at least closely related to a study of spirituality, and hence may be classified in this way. All three have eschewed any primary indebtedness to developmental stage theories, and all place an emphasis on personal experience and emotional aspects.

2.2.3.1

Focus on Childhood Religious Experience: Tamminen and Ranwez

Focusing on reports of religious ‘experience’, the Finnish scholar Kalevi Tamminen offers interesting descriptive statistics concerning spirituality in childhood in terms of frequency of such experience (Tamminen 1994). This focus has been a rare feature of research on children's religious development and utterly ignored as an aspect of general psychological development. Klingberg (1959) had conducted a somewhat similar investigation with older children (aged 9-13 years of age), documenting the types of situations in which children reported feeling prompted to ‘think about God’. He found these were, in descending order of frequency, in times of distress, experiences in nature, moral experiences and formal worship experiences.

Tamminen’s study included children as young as seven years of age, adapting the written question format (that Klingberg had also used) for the youngest children who were personally interviewed. All ages reported high frequencies of at least one personally significant religious experience. Tamminen’s research found children in fact report more spiritual experience than adolescents and adults. Explanations for this refer more directly to sociological and educational arguments than to intrinsic psychological criteria, reflecting perhaps the difficulty of inferring psychological implications from merely descriptive, quantitative data in such an area. One interpretation of the declining reports is that we are naturally conditioned for such experiences, but this psychological readiness becomes artificially ‘blotted out’ by secular influences and the processes of growing up (Hay, Nye and Murphy, 1996).

Tamminen’s approach is also clearly an account of Christian religious

experience rather than broader categories of experience, formally religious or otherwise. However, this contribution extends the research tradition on adult spirituality (Hay 1987, 1990), and offers a contemporary empirical basis for children's spiritual experience suggested in Robinson's (1983) retrospective study. Though bearing similarity to these adult studies, Tamminen's research focus (on discrete experiences as indicative of spirituality) implies quite a different perspective on what spirituality is to that suggested by Coles (1990). For Tamminen, it seems to be viewed as a special kind of psychological phenomenon, whereas for Coles we shall see it is a more like a general, permanent psychological feature.

Given Tamminen's impressive statistics on this relatively narrow defined area of spiritual experience, it would seem necessary for an account of children's spirituality to explore both the nature of their spiritual experiences as well as the character of their spiritual perspectives and 'meaning-making' psychology. However, if the clearer, narrow focus of religious experience is surrendered in pursuit of 'spiritual' experience, it will be much harder to elicit precise answers from children, and it may only be in the process of listening to their expressions reflecting a broader spiritual framework that such experiences come to light.

A promising, pioneering, but isolated study that was published over thirty years ago, ironically at the same time as Goldman's quite different characterization of children's religion was receiving attention, was Pierre Ranwez's theoretical piece on 'discerning children's religious experiences' (Ranwez 1964). This was motivated by the essentially Catholic concerns about how one might judge that a child is spiritually ready to partake of the sacraments, and consequently employs the language of one particular Christian religious tradition as well a now rather old fashioned expressive style - for example the reader is asked to consider the 'progress and workings of grace' in a child. However, if these cultural influences are laid to one side, this contribution foreshadows many of the themes suggested in the more recent literature and highlights the long overdue attention that this area now deserves.

Ranwez tackles his subject by first setting out the general features of adult spiritual experience. By this means he makes the simple, but important, point that 'the workings of grace' are not directly observable, but, in adults at least, depend on their own account of their experiences - the dimensions of personal meaningfulness are an essential tool in the assessment of spirituality. He proceeds to ask, and suggest answers to, a number of questions about the 'workings of grace' in children. On the question of whether children have any religious life or personal experience of the Divine, Ranwez notes that from a theological view point, the child is automatically spiritually alive ('impregnated with grace' p. 64) by virtue of his or her creation and God's gift of salvation. He balances this with the psychological distinction that although our 'being may be sanctified' in the first place, a significant shift occurs when the development of consciousness affords the opportunity to choose how we exercise our creaturehood. He suggests that a child who freely and consciously chooses a course of action (however mundane) and is motivated by his or her age appropriate sense of morality and respect for another, may be said to be acting 'religiously'. In this sense, the child's very first 'free act' - that which is not simply instinctive - is potentially a religious act in Ranwez's view. He suggests the simple example of the intentional smile of a very young child responding to their mother's love. In view of this identification of 'grace' in such a basic development, that of human consciousness, he notes that the particularities of a child's consciousness has its own limitations which are likely to colour that experience of grace. He suggests mastery of consciousness and the free will to act in a intentional manner is a gradually acquired skill, experienced initially in rather fleeting bursts. Furthermore, the child even once 'conscious' enough, motivated by good or bad intentions, is still 'imperfectly conscious' in the sense that reflection on those acts and motives is very limited. However, he suggests that whilst these limits may prevent the child from relating his experience easily to others or himself, 'the child is conscious in the depth of his soul, and *can express this in a certain way*' (Ranwez 1964 p 66, my italics).

This analysis illustrates the general stance Ranwez adopts. That is to say, finding within the child's natural experiences from the earliest age, indications of the spiritual that do not rely on the adult religious code nor even adult religious standards of 'ultimate' morality. Rather, he argues a case for judging children's spirituality on their own developmental psychological and spiritual terms.

He dismisses the misleading signs of piety that precocious religious language can produce, and is equally wary of religious knowledge as a criteria for discerning when a child is spiritually mature enough to take the sacraments. Instead he recommends a subtly detective-like approach, observing children in their natural interpersonal (e.g. family) settings over a period of time. He notes that authentic 'signs' in this area are usually 'fundamentally ambiguous' in isolation, and therefore their significance must be discerned through comparison with previous and subsequent events. By translating the traits of adult religious experience (a) attraction towards God in context of attentive recollection, b) turning from/detachment from what is contrary to God and c) a climate of peace and joy), he identifies ambiguous but portentous signs of these features in a child. These are, a taste for silence and interior attention (the prototype for contemplation), b) capacity for self-disinterest such as pleasure in giving and sharing and c) joy and interior 'gaiety'. He supports these signs with rich, closely observed accounts of children that include both conventional and more secular contexts in which these signs seemed to be manifest in children's lives. He also emphasises a conversion quality that often accompanies this combination, demonstrated in the child's sense of a new start being brokered through their experiences. Nevertheless, he struggles (no doubt under the yoke of his own restrictive sense of 'religious' as Christian Roman Catholicism) with the problem of 'parallel signs', by which he seems to mean those points in a child's natural development and experience of life that mimic these features but do not come to fruition as (Christian) religious awakening in the longer run. A psychologically-based spirituality seems warranted for the first stirrings in early childhood, but in his view this must go on to develop through the externals of

religious tradition.

Methodologically he advocates an approach that has much in common with more recent researchers (e.g. Coles, Erricker, McCreery and myself), though one might suppose was more radical thirty five years ago, particularly in the context of Church education. Specifically, he recommends primarily conducting a child-centred dialogue, that respects the degree to which a child feels comfortable to disclose themselves, adding also the use of drawing and picture prompts to the means by which one can elicit the child's awareness of the 'workings of grace' in their lives - that is, 'the certain way' in which we can glimpse this otherwise hidden dimension.

Although both Tamminen and Ranwez share an interest in children's religious experience, their approaches to and treatment of their subject are radically different. However, both seem significant contributions, (empirical in Tamminen's case, theoretical in Ranwez's) in a field that is otherwise under-represented by psychological scholarship and reflection.

2.2.3.2

The Language of Experience: Berryman

Berryman's approach (1995) is manifestly psychological. However he is not formally a psychologist, rather an innovative religious educator. Indeed, his theoretical standpoint (conclusions based on what one might term 'action research' built upon his experiences with children) is described as a 'theology of childhood', and yet there is probably rather more psychology than theology drawn upon to construct his account. He incorporates, but is not limited to an integration of, the ideas of Piaget, Fowler, and Winnicott. He also acknowledges the pedagogical influence of the Montessori religious educator, S.Cavalletti (1983).

The starting point for Berryman is the fact of children's experience of the existential, their awareness and potential to respond to the 'limits of life'. This refers to encounters at the edges of knowing and being, which he notes may be located in quite

different places for different individuals, particularly diverse in the case of adults versus children. His method of eliciting such experiences is referred to as 'Godly play', in which particular efforts are made to allow existential questions to be raised by the children, helping them consequently to identify, name and value these. This, he suggests, is children's personal, spiritual 'knowledge-base' (and the foundation for formal knowledge such as that of a religious tradition).

He exploits psychological scholarship to conduct an analysis of some of the processes involved in 'Godly play'; for example, referring to the different ways psychology has identified our use of knowledge. Whilst children may not be able to demonstrate knowledge based on conscious understanding of an analogy (requiring formal operations), he argues that spiritual knowledge more often takes another form in any case. This characteristic form of knowing is an implicit sensory and concentrated appreciation of analogy, that does not depend on formal operations. Similar arguments have been independently proposed by Watts and Williams (1988) concerning the nature of 'religious knowing' that likens this to the sense of insight experienced in a psychotherapeutic encounter: the felt sense of personal consciousness- raising moments (also identified by Gendlin, 1962).

Berryman discusses the role of language in experience of this kind, once again drawing on psychological ideas and scholarship. For example, he notes the positive and negative effects of language, that both allows a new level of religious awareness to flourish (by helping to label, fix ideas and derive new understanding by relating these), but also can serve to narrow perception and thought ('seeing' only that for which we have names for). He suggests the reflexivity that language affords distances us from a quality of direct experience, for example, 'seeing' becomes 'seeing that...', and 'experiencing' becomes 'experiencing that...'.

On the basis that language plays vital and diverse roles in our consciousness, he builds a four layered model of religious experience, which spans the range of response to encountering the 'limits of life' from speechless silence to the dedicated use

of language about God found in theology. In between, he locates a pre-linguistic quality that is ‘a primary kind of integration, identification and arousal of the imagination marked by exclamation’ (Berryman, 1995 p.153). This primitive layer is also suggested by reports of the ineffable quality of spiritual experiences (e.g. Hay, 1990). This is followed by a layer built in language, in which the language itself provides access to the experience as liturgy, story or parable. And beyond this (but before ‘theology’) the ‘limits of life’ are articulated as language about the language, that is the laws, codes and sayings (rubrics).

What is significant about Berryman’s contribution is the need to relate experience in each layer to more primitive layers in order to preserve the significance of the experience. Without this connection to the foundations of spiritual experience, liturgy may turn into ritualism or scripture can be idolised for itself. He states:

‘If the fundamental experience is not present to the person, then the reference point for the whole language system cannot be understood. Without the original vision [*the sense experienced in the silent, pre-linguistic, or simple linguistic narrative layers*] theology becomes mere words about words’.(p.153)

He is clear that these layers are developmentally related in as much as children are inevitably limited to a pre-linguistic level for a period, and at a later stage may grasp language but in an immediate non-reflexive sense and so on. In this way, these early layers describe the spiritual experience of childhood, firstly its initial silent intensity, then its language-less exclamatory perception of meaning and its subsequent immersion in narrative (cf Fowler’s mythic-literal stage). However, in Berryman’s analysis there is nothing embarrassingly immature about such childhood layers of experience. He suggests that each must be well-attended to at every stage of development to maintain contact with the heart of spiritual experience - that is, the child’s experience. Berryman concludes:

‘The theology of childhood is not just about children. It is about the experience of God and what develops from that’ (p.153).

As a potential contribution to the understanding of children’s spirituality, this seems an important and plausible psychological description, particularly of the interaction of knowledge, experience and language in the developing awareness of the spiritual. However, it arises from a specifically Christian (or at least theistic) perspective, and would therefore require some ‘translation’ in order to be appropriate for use in a more secular framework. If appropriate secular equivalents can be seen as analogous to liturgy, rubrics and theology, substitution in his model would be possible. This indicates the need for further research in a non-Church context to discover how children may create and use secular ‘liturgy’, ‘rubrics’ and ‘theology’ and thus encounter similar layers of experience. Reading between the lines of Berryman’s passionately expressed faith perspective, one senses he might regard these secular parallels as unconvincing matches and that only religious language, in its various forms, serves such experience.

2.2.3.3

Children’s Spiritual Lives: Coles

The work of the psychiatrist, Robert Coles (1990) is possibly the only explicit attempt in the psychological literature that seeks to study children’s spirituality, as distinct from ‘religious’ experience. Initially Coles was prompted to consider the reality of religious phenomena in disturbed children he worked with, but this lead him to perceive an important fusion between children’s religious psychology and their general psychological styles and difficulties. This fusion encouraged him to take a broader view of the domain inviting study, moving from the term ‘religious’ to ‘spiritual’.

He adopted an exploratory approach, repeatedly visiting children in their own homes (around the world) and emphasising the importance of discussing a wide range

of subjects, not only religious, in order to elucidate an understanding of what he identifies as a child's personal 'spiritual psychology'. His research with one cultural group, Hopi Indian children, highlighted the potential importance of research setting as these children felt it inappropriate to discuss spiritual matters in school (perceived as a place for factual learning) thus giving the impression they had nothing to say. However, when interviewed at home Coles found it possible to collect data that were rich and profound.

Coles general conclusions established that children's spirituality is characterised by a depth and diversity on a par with that of adults. This therefore suggested a contrast to the picture of children's understanding of 'religion' per se, identified by some as shallow and naive (e.g. Goldman), or at least as existing only in some kind of embryonic form (e.g. Fowler) .

Coles found children well aware, in their own ways, of the need to search for and create meaningful explanations that could frame their existence, and frequently found the theme of vulnerability (dependence, incompleteness, the need for community as support) either prompted or reflected in the children's expression. This perhaps echoes the suggestions of Oser concerning the role of 'contingency situations' activating spiritual structures, though Coles' evidence has the advantage of being impressively much more naturalistic. However, his apparently selective (not random) subject pool rather detracts a little from the otherwise convincing qualities of his rich data illustrating children's spirituality.

Coles described the focus of study as '*The Spiritual Life of Children*' and concluded from his intimate acquaintance with the children that the personal use of religious material in making sense of their lives constitutes their 'spiritual psychology'. However his approach fails to subject this 'spiritual psychology' to a deeper theoretical analysis or psychological explanation.

Instead he focuses on presenting a narrative account of the data, eschewing any attempt to account for developmental influence. His contribution therefore is valuable

in terms of its very broad approach to spirituality as an expression not confined to religious matters, and his non-reductive treatment of the data. However, having demonstrated empirically that children's spirituality can be accessed and understood in this way, a more analytical approach investigating the characteristics, conditioning influences and consequences of children's spirituality would seem necessary to claim this area as 'psychological'. Unfortunately Coles fails to propose the psychological dynamics of how the child's spirituality is related to the rest of their psychology.

Conclusion

This chapter began with a section accounting for psychology's neglect of spirituality not least in childhood. From this one might have predicted that the literature review that followed would be rather brief. It was not.

I have presented a substantial literature review for two main reasons. First, psychology appears to have been neglected as a resource amongst education scholars searching for a better understanding of children's spirituality. This review attempts to demonstrate that there is much within the psychological literature that has implications for understanding children's spirituality, showing how a range of literature, from general theory to partially related studies of religious development, can offer a rich resource of ideas and findings. Interpreting these for their implications for children's spirituality has therefore been a modest form of new research in itself. Table 2.1 summarises the implications for children's spirituality that I have argued might be drawn from existing psychological scholarship and visually demonstrates the variety and richness of seeking illumination from this field, its theories and its empirical research studies.

However (and secondly), later chapters of this thesis present new empirical research. The approach of this empirical work is to study children's spirituality unfettered by a restrictive methodology or any pre-conceived operational definition of the desired data. In this sense (described in detail in chapters 3 and 4), my motivation

is to allow a fresh exploration of children's spirituality, in which my analysis is

A summary of indications about children's spirituality that may be drawn from the psychological literature

Theory	Natural or learnt emphasis	Where and in what <u>might</u> spirituality be found?	Basis of ideas/ approach	Other details
Freud (p.60)	emerges from natural course of child and infant's psychology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *in inherent dependency of child -> drive for protection and love -> met in projection on parents, then God. *Also in infant quality of undifferentiated 'consciousness' (oceanic feeling) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Clinical observations of patients, mostly adults. •ideas consistent with Freudian theory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •These seemingly spiritual forms are normal for children, but in adults (in any form) are seen as a pathological failure to develop properly. •Caution - about attempts to promote spiritual experience (as 'oceanic feeling') in view of dangers of 'regression' for immature psyche
Jung /Neumann (p. 65)	spiritual is generally natural, though less for children = 'first half of life' psych.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *in basic desire to search for more than myself as 'ego' * infancy quality of undifferentiated 'consciousness' (participation mystique). later flexible ego-Self axis. * childhood dialogical process of ego developing out of both relation with 'other' and personal sense * bodily and interpersonal (non rational) consciousness * fantasy and play as universal routes to inner/'religious' core 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Clinical observations of patients, mostly adults. •Mythological comparisons •ideas consistent with Jungian theory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Gender distinctions for adults may predict increasing differentiation for girls' and boys' spirituality. Adult male sp. needs wider boundaries . •Ambivalence about 'naturalness' for children and spiritual in Jungian account, Neumann more positive. •Similar note of caution to Freud about deliberately seeking spiritual with childhood psyche.

Theory	Natural or learnt emphasis	Where and in what <u>might</u> spirituality be found?	Basis of ideas/ approach	Other details
Object Relations (p.74)	adult spirituality firmly based on child psychology processes, may imply that child's psychology is naturally spiritual too, may be only 'proto-spirituality'?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *the dynamic and tone of early relationships - family and self, spirituality as these processes rather than possession of special content * transitional objects and space - (some instances of) play and imagination * child's natural religion, private God of 'first birth' *in stages through protection/warmth; then power/magic; later moral/judgement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Clinical observations of children and adults. • Theory consistent ideas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Some ambivalence about genuine spiritual character of relevant childhood psychological material <u>during</u> childhood. • Moving towards need for differentiation of childhood features, in their own right, in Meissner.
Goldman (p.83)	requires learning and lived experience : not natural or inevitable in child's psychology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *(eventually) through sense made of religious knowledge * will be attendant on intellectual structures and their handicapping influence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Empirical, semi clinical research interviews with children (religious thinking) • Piagetian theory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional life of child is ignored, primacy of intellectual requirements. • highlights (negative) influence of child's in mind filtering material in their own way.
Elkind (p.86)	intellectual development naturally programmes the child to experience critical periods for different kinds of spiritual stirring.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * in search for ultimate conservation (need for concept of 'God') * in search for representation of the ultimate (need for story / framework for 'God') * in search of relation with the ultimate (need for communion with divine) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Empirical, semi clinical research interviews with children (religious thinking) • Piagetian theory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • positive use of Piagetian perspective of cognitive primacy, findings spiritual leads within the course of intellectual unfolding, but points to educative requirements also.

Theory	Natural or learnt emphasis	Where and in what <u>might</u> spirituality be found?	Basis of ideas/ approach	Other details
'Child's Theory of Mind' theories (p.88)	suggests continuities with natural development in meta-cognition.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * in capacity for understanding inner life, though qualified by child's distinctive struggles with this area * in unsophisticated understanding of imaginative and fantasy realm - though not equivalent to adult spiritual insight here 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •extrapolated from experimental study of children's interpersonal meta-cognition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • indicates role for more detailed psychological scholarship in related area • identifies need to examine psych. complexity of spiritual processes proposed or prescribed for children
Oser (p.90)	natural 'deep' structure governing a religious dimension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * in cognitive conflicts and growth * in interaction with moral and personal structures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Empirical, research interviews (religious reasoning) • Piaget/ Kohlberg theory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reports children are best described as shifting and random on his dimensions , implies stage type model will be unhelpful for depiction of child
Fowler (p.92)	Broadly natural response to a number of psychological developments, though a lot of emphasis on social and constructivist elements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * in younger children: unsystematic, glimpsed in symbolic, imaginative, emotional ways. direct quality to experience * in older children: in attraction to 'forms', story, myth, heroes which unconsciously 'hold' ideas and feelings. non-reflective. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Empirical research interviews (faith) with adults and some children •Piaget, Erikson, Kegan theories. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • highlights query about appropriateness of 'development' concept in this area • eclectic approach to 'faith' seems to move closer to the kind of holistic perspective necessary to inform an understanding of spirituality
Tamminen (p.96)	implication of maximum reporting of spiritual experiences in childhood suggests this as a natural phenomenon,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * in explicitly religious experiences of God's closeness or guidance * in experiences of distress, >nature, >morality and > worship * in younger more than older children *in girls more than boys 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • large scale questionnaire survey of children at different ages (religious experiences) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • impressively positive evidence of children's capacity for spiritual experience though may exclude some children unfamiliar with religious expression • query about validity of research method

Theory	Natural or learnt emphasis	Where and in what <u>might</u> spirituality be found?	Basis of ideas/ approach	Other details
Ranwez (p.97)	natural - on theological and psychological grounds. consequently important role for religious learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * in special quality of developing consciousness (freely willed) * in moments of inwardness, self giving, peace and joy and transformation /conversion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • adult comparison and case study observation of selected children, including archival research • theological consistency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • children's expression and reflection predicted as limited due to their cognitive psychology • special naturalistic method advocated: emphasis on re-interpreting 'ordinary' psych for spiritual meaning.
Berryman (p.100)	natural response to existential quality of being human. learning language for this is double edged sword.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * at edges of knowing and being: in play, creativity & experiment * in non-rational, implicit kinds of knowing * in accumulation (not completed stages) of diverse ways predicated on direct experience : expressed as silence, as inarticulate recognition, in narrative, and lastly in abstract and shared cultural discourse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'action research' of innovative approaches to religious education that fosters spiritual • Montessori philosophy • Christian theology • Winnicott 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • describes movement from singular kind of spiritual experience, accumulating many more in course of psych.development • emphasizes all kinds =essential/ valuable: outgrowing an earlier form unhelpfully disconnects spiritual from its basis in experience • developing language and knowledge effects addressed
Coles (p.103)	natural correlate and relation of personal psychology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * in child's inevitable state of vulnerability and dependence * in responses to/consciousness of that child is prompted to search for meaning and pattern 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • large scale, cross cultural naturalistic interview study with children • case study style reports • psycho-dynamic psychiatry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • natural context is critical for child's expression of spirituality • richly diverse childhood spirituality, often muted by cultural disdain for this domain: taboo curbs expression

grounded in new data. It is nonetheless to be a ‘psychological’ approach, rather than one motivated by educational objectives, and thus it is undertaken in the broad light of the psychological perspectives examined in this review, (although not directly related to any of them).

Whilst I have suggested a number of ways in which the extant psychological literature holds implications for children’s spirituality, it does not contribute in a direct way and further research is clearly warranted. Although some of the studies reviewed here can inform the practical ways one might approach data-collection in this area, the question of the conceptual boundaries or definition of ‘spirituality’ is not satisfactorily answered by any single approach described above. The resolution of this conceptual problem for the empirical research presented in this thesis is described in the next chapter (3), whilst the methodological structure of the research is outlined in chapter 4.

Chapter 3

Discerning a framework for a study of children's spirituality

This chapter has two main sections. The first (3.1.) addresses the general issues of definition in relation to spirituality. The second section (3.2) describes the specific approach taken in the empirical research reported in this thesis with regard to the definition of spirituality. This comprised a 'working map' of spiritual categories to serve as initial, but not limiting, guides for the data collection and analysis. The criteria on which these were based were not only informed by other attempts at definition in the literature, but also with reference to general psychological and specifically developmental plausibility. This section is based on an earlier paper (Nye and Hay 1996) published in the *British Journal of Religious Education*.

3.1

Section 1: Attempts to define spirituality

In Chapter 2 it was seen that very few psychologists have pursued an explicit study of human spirituality, and consequently have not been required to grapple with the question of its definition. In the education context described in Chapter 1, it was noted that questions about the precise meaning of spirituality have only recently become salient and this debate itself has significantly contributed to the interest in this area.

For the purposes of this thesis, as an empirical study, it was necessary to address directly the kind of definition that the data-gathering and analysis should be guided by. Empirical work imposes practical needs to know what one is looking for and how an encounter with such data might be facilitated (or impeded).

This echoes the practically driven need for definition arising from the formal inspection of spirituality in schools by OFSTED. However, as was reported in Chapter

1, agreeing on a operational definition of spirituality is particularly problematic since its practical focus more sharply suggests what is regarded as central and what may be excluded. In contrast, when merely theoretical definitions are proposed (which almost all of the definitions to be found in the literature are, with the notable exception of OFSTED's) the license for rhetorical expression affords a less restrictive conceptualisation¹.

The experience of education in recent years makes clear that defining spirituality for practical purposes is problematic. As attempts have been made to 'operationalize' definitions, such as in the suggestions for educational practice found in Hammond and Hay (1990), critics have been quick to respond to the perceived imbalance present in the sharpness of the focus in these practices (Thatcher 1991; McCreery 1995).

The typical approach of psychology, that of avoiding of the term altogether, may suggest this is the only viable alternative. In a recent comprehensive review of research on the psychology of religious behaviour, belief and experience, 'spirituality' does not feature in the index at all (Beit-Hallahmi and Argyle 1997). However, within education it has been recognised that 'spirituality' does stand for something distinctive, and we must persevere to understand this. Webster writes:

“Like the word “God”, “spiritual” carries with it such extensive baggage, such weight of historical and theological meaning that it may seem unsuitable [in the practical discourse of education]. Yet, like “God” there is no other that can be used. To abandon it is to deprive educational discourse of a word which conveys rich layers of understanding” (Webster 1987, p.3).

Wulff (1996) acknowledges the rising popularity of the term 'spirituality' in

¹ This is not unique to spirituality. For example compare the controversies affecting the definition of intelligence in psychology: operationally as 'IQ' and more broadly understood as in the theories of Gardner (1993) and Goleman (1995).

contemporary wider discourse, suggesting that it does indeed address a distinctive dimension for which this term is now increasingly adopted by the layman. Hay's (1987) success at eliciting responses to his survey question about experience of the spiritual also testifies to some kind of general recognised (if not explicitly describable) understanding of this term's reference. Bibby (1995) in fact made a study of the popular understanding of the words 'spirituality' and 'spiritual' amongst a large sample of Canadians. Approximately half of those who agreed that they had 'spiritual needs' explained this in deliberately non-religious terms such as a sense of wholeness or oneness, inner and outer awareness, the human spiritual and the practice of meditation and reflection. In using this term today, it would appear important to take these modern 'popular' understandings into account.

However, an equally illuminating picture can be built up from the linguistic history of this term. This is presented in Wulff (1996) and reveals the curious fluctuations in its meaning, many of which still seem resonant in today's complex use of the term:

"The word 'spirituality' derives from the Latin noun 'spiritus', breath, from 'spirare, to blow or breathe. In Latin translations of the New Testament, the 'spiritualis', or 'spiritual person', is one whose life is ordered or influenced by the Holy Spirit or the Spirit of God. The abstract word 'spiritualitas' (spirituality), used at least as early as the fifth century, retained this biblical meaning. By the twelfth century, however, spirituality began to acquire the connotations of a virtual psychological function that was contrasted with corporeality or materiality. Soon, yet another meaning emerged, according to which spirituality designated ecclesiastical persons or properties. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the word went into eclipse - perhaps

because Voltaire and other had used it disparagingly - only to reappear early in the twentieth century in its original or devotional sense. Revived chiefly by French Catholic writers, it has gradually come to be applied to a great diversity of particular forms. Now it is even used to designate a branch of study within theology and the history of religions” (Wulff 1996, p.5)

The twentieth century scholarship of education, and to a much lesser extent that of the psychology of religion, has therefore had to grapple with both this historical inheritance and the shifting popular usage of the term ‘spirituality’. Table 3.1 presents a selection of definitions demonstrating the many layers of spirituality suggested in scholarly literature. These are mainly definitions used by writers to inform their theoretical studies of spirituality (that is, they are not intended as ‘operational’ definitions).

These definitions clearly testify to the diversity of ways in which spirituality can be understood. Furthermore, this diversity extends to apparent dissension in certain dimensions. For example, the relation of spirituality to the person whose spirituality is being defined is variously an aspect essentially ‘in’ or ‘of’ the person (e.g. Erricker, 1996; May, 1993; Model Syllabuses Glossary 1994), ‘beyond’ the person (e.g. Donaldson 1992, Starkings 1987) and in some definitions about someone or something other than the person, such as a power or God (e.g. Hardy, 1979; Model Syllabuses Glossary 1994). If only one of these positions is chosen as representative, the psychology of spirituality is likely to be directly affected since the person is the subject matter of psychology.

The question of adjudication between definitions is therefore raised. However, it has been argued that ambiguity and heterogeneity are in themselves defining features of spirituality. Gascoyne (1988) defends vague and contradictory talk about spirituality as an attempt to remain honest to the subject matter. Similarly, Priestley (1985) cautions

against fixed conceptualisations of spirituality, likening these to the logical impossibility of ‘catching the wind’ (p.37). In other words, these authors suggest that only one thing can be ascertained about clear formulations on the defining properties of spirituality, and this is that these statements do not and cannot refer to the complexity and dynamism that is ‘spirituality’.

The necessity to have an understanding of spirituality that is not too neatly confined to defining boundaries is also suggested by Donaldson’s (1992) ‘expanding’ definition. She begins with a relatively clear focus on the nature of spirituality as experience of a kind of self-less interest, but sees a need to expand this to an interest in others and morality, and yet further still. Slee (1989) provides a monumental summary definition that also demonstrates the many dimensions that an understanding of spirituality would appear to require:

Table 3.1 : A selection of different ways in which spirituality has been defined

- ‘spirituality ranges from **sensing of divine presence** to the recognition of a heightened quality in an event or encounter and a response of **awe and wonder**’ (Dixon 1984)
- an **awareness, response or ability to reflect** on areas which are **beyond those of individual /ego interest**, that is not concerning the individual’s own survival or fortune. To this extent spiritual interests could be termed (apparent) ‘pointless’ ones. This awareness also extends beyond an interest in others, which comes under the area of morality, though that may have some overlap with our area. Therefore spirituality relates to **aspects of experience and existence** which are **beyond the personal** and is manifested as a transcendence of the personal’ (Donaldson 1992)
- ‘the **sense making activity** that both children and adults necessarily carry out as a result of the life experiences they encounter’ (Erricker 1996)
- ‘the **sense of sacred**, the numinous and the feelings of being in contact with some **power other than the self**’ (Hardy 1979)
- ‘a **belief** that there is an **unseen order**, and that our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves thereto’ (James 1902)
- ‘our **articulation and interpretation of events**..provoking a **sense of mystery** as mystery ..to experience myself within the perspective of transcendence, and so to perceive ordinary life in a new way, to **see the strange in the familiar**’ (Lealman 1986)
- ‘**living fully** with nothing excluded from our hearts’ (May 1989)
- ‘the **highest expression and activity of the human person** deriving from whatever source, [but also] sometimes used more selectively to refer only to what relates explicitly to **God**’ (Model Syllabuses for RE , Glossary 1994)
- ‘an **exploration of inwardness**, a grappling with **existential questions**, a **search for spiritual identity**, an encounter with mystery and transcendence’ (Slee 1989)
- ‘any **enhancement of personal powers and visionariness** which takes people **beyond their ordinary selves** and their attachment to the limited lessons of their immediate situations’ (Starkings 1987)
- ‘the **search for God** in response to God’s search for us’ (Taylor 1989)
- ‘signals of transcendence that are normal aspects of life but all at odds with a materialistic understanding of the world, they point to **something other - something more**..can lead people to an awareness of religion’ (Watson 1993)
- ‘**commitment, valuation and aspiration**’ (Webster 1987)
- ‘a quality or condition of being spiritual: attachment to or regard for things of the spirit as **opposed to material or worldly interests**. Form the Latin:spirare, to breathe: spirit -the animating or vital principle in man, the breath of life. (Oxford English Dictionary)

“a dynamic, all pervasive dimension of human existence..connected with personal identity, with the lived quality of a person, which transcends personal identity and suggests a mystery, an unseen reality, beyond the life of the individual, pervading the entire world order, with which human persons are invited to enter into relationship and communion..experienced and expressed in personal and impersonal terms, with or without the framework of a religious perspective, as transcendent or immanent ..but however it is construed, there is a common conviction that it is only by attending and responding to this mystery at the heart and root of existence that the earth with all its peoples can live in the fullness of justice, harmony and peace” (Slee 1989 p.31)

As it is clear that no simple consensus exists on the matter of definition, the task for the researcher must be to consider the individual properties different scholars have suggested, but also to examine the nature of these definitions. For example, in both Donaldson’s and Slee’s definitions, defining spirituality appears to thrive on a measure of inclusivity, rather than exclusivity. On the basis of such an examination an understanding of spirituality that can inform practical research may then be built. In other words, a successful working ‘definition’ will benefit from taking a broad enough perspective allowing as many as possible of the different suggestions in the definitions cited here may apply. Only then can such research examine the range of data necessary to support an analysis that seeks to capture the underlying properties and processes that characterize spirituality.

Some particular further features of spirituality definitions are given closer attention in the following subsections. These considerations helped to inform the

practical solution sought in the second section of this chapter, and how ‘spirituality’ was understood for the purposes of the work in this thesis.

3.1.1

The role of the general definition

Many of the definitions in table 3.1 suggest such general and vague features pertain to this area that one is effectively no nearer understanding its parameters or particular referents. This characteristic is a feature of attempts to define of spirituality in various disciplines, and not a criticism of the scholarship represented by those writers represented in table 3.1. For example, one can add to these Becker’s rather indeterminate definition:

‘spirituality is a code word for the depth dimension of
human experience’ (Becker, 1994, p.257),

or Phenix’s succinct but rather obtuse suggestion that spirituality is:

‘the property of limitless going beyond” (Phenix 1974, p. 118).

From this generality that characterises definitions of spirituality one can deduce an important feature: in abstract isolation, a discussion or decision about what spirituality refers to is of limited value since such broad, and usually benign², statements can be made. It would appear to behave as the sort of term that can only convey any distinctive meaning when qualified by its contingent types, for example, ‘feminist spirituality’, ‘Buddhist spirituality’, ‘Taize spirituality’ or ‘New Age spirituality’. This is a property familiar to psychology, since in a similar way the general question of what ‘personality’ is has proved to be an impossible, and arguably unfruitful, dimension to define in isolation from any particular context group. However, meaning can be conveyed in the contributions made through the identification

² This is to say, despite their variety and number, I rarely find myself actively disagreeing with any one definition, merely thinking that in some cases a particular emphasis overlooks the different emphases suggested by other, equally sensible, general perspectives.

of ‘extrovert’ and ‘introvert’ personality types, or Type A and B personalities, for example.

The point of this thesis is to collect and examine evidence that might inform how we understand one type of the general and vague area that in isolation is called ‘spirituality’, namely children’s spirituality. Since I did not want to unduly prejudice the contours which this would be allowed to show up, I perceived there were good reasons (see below) for avoiding the attempt to define ‘children’s spirituality’ in advance (adopting the approach detailed in the second half of this chapter instead). Nevertheless, one might ask what general definition of spirituality informed this work. However on the basis of the foregoing argument that general ‘spirituality’ definitions suggest a breadth that is semantically unsatisfying, I am not convinced that making an explicit statement about such a general conception of spirituality serves to clarify very much at all. For what it is worth, I will concur with many other writers in characterising spirituality at this general level as **a quality of human living that interfaces with and embraces the meanings and mysteries at the depths of our experience.**

Spirituality and the Religious

The question of relationship between spirituality and the religious is reflected in a number of definitions. Very few now argue for an understanding of spirituality that is either identical with the religious (without remainder) or utterly distinct from the religious. The consensus suggests a special kind of relationship between the two areas, in which spirituality is considered a broader category. However, the nature of the relationship is not precisely determined. Some imply it is a ‘co-dependency’, such that spirituality is only complete when it takes a religious form and likewise to be religious is only fully meaningful when allied to spirituality (Watson 1993, Berryman 1995). This is also implied in depictions of spirituality’s ‘range’, such as Dixon’s (1984) definition that suggested a ‘strong to weak’ continuum. Such implications are

particularly significant to discussions about spiritual development, since they suggest that spirituality is a precursor to religious awareness and consequently 'religious spirituality' is more 'developed' than a spirituality without a religious vehicle of expression. Thankfully, my research task did not seek to examine directly the difficult and controversial issue of spiritual development or nurture.

It is unclear how meaningful such distinctions (co-dependency, broader and narrower, weak and strong continuum) are, beyond accepting that spirituality and the religious share some related reference. Expressing this as a continuum, or even as broad and narrow territories, more likely reflects the changing use of language, the status of religion in society and different understandings and misunderstandings these things can cause. As was noted in chapter 1, even in 1944 the words 'religious' and 'spiritual' could convey a range of different meanings to different people. Hay (1982) reported that people were far more willing to talk about 'spiritual' rather than 'religious' experiences, and yet the kinds of experiences referred to in each case were very similar. Laski (1961) drew similar conclusions: much of the time the difference between religious and spiritual lies in how people respond to those words. This issue was also discussed in chapter 2 in relation to psychologist's varyingly broad and narrow use of the word 'religious', and the added confusion this can confer on the task of understanding child psychology's potential contribution to a clarification of children's spirituality.

However, in the sense that 'religious' is dependent on expression though traditional content of a religion, its beliefs and practices, one may cautiously extrapolate from the general sense suggested in these definitions that spirituality is 'broader' than that kind of religiousness alone.

Finally, in discussion of this perplexing linguistic relationship it is helpful to note the way in which psychologists of religion (e.g. Fowler 1981), as well as more general scholars of religious studies (e.g. Smith 1974), have defined the term 'faith'. This has often offered a closer than expected approximation to the broader, personal

qualities associated with ‘spirituality’. It is difficult to see much distinction between Smith’s definition of faith as

‘one’s orientation or total response to oneself, others and the universe..reflecting human capacity to see,feel and act in terms of, a transcendent dimension’ (Smith 1974, p.12),

and many of the definitions of spirituality in Table 3.1. Thus whilst we can look to definitions of faith for illumination, their choice of a term that is even more commonly associated with religion than ‘spirituality’ adds to the climate of confusion and lack of boundaries in this area. However in my opinion, this ‘confusing’ effect of referring ‘faith’ in this way is a positive one since it underlines the artificiality of attempts to divide too neatly what is ‘spiritual’ from what is ‘religious’. An open mind and an open border seems the most sensible option in this case.

3.1.2

Spirituality Definitions and Children

Following on from the questions about spirituality and the religious, for a consideration of children’s spirituality, it would seem prudent to adopt a broad or open approach to this aspect of definition given children’s limited exposure to formal religious content. One can assume that many contemporary children are not only limited by the brief time they have had to become religiously informed, but also limited by the predominance of the secular in their environment. To judge their spirituality only in terms of a ‘religious’ measure would risk the possibility of missing what might be there, albeit in an unexpected form.

A majority of the definitions of spirituality attempt to characterize the phenomenon independently of age or other variables. However, it was suggested by a review of the evidence in chapters 1 and 2 that children’s spirituality might present especially distinctive qualities, and in this respect, definitions that reflect an understanding of all-age adult ‘norms’ may not be sensitive to this. In seeking practical

guidance from existing scholarly definitions of spirituality, a plan for empirical study of this area requires that these are examined in the light of developmental plausibility. The ideas that spirituality involves special kinds of belief (James), or an exploration of inwardness, existential questions and identity (Slee), or sense-making (Erricker) and the interpretation and articulation of events (Lealman), are all generally reasonable ways of characterising this obscure area. However, from a developmental psychology perspective, a definition that reflects the nature of children's spirituality in particular may need to go further to identify the child-like forms of these and of which their spirituality may be comprised. The demands of empirical research help to highlight this need and cut through the poetical shrouds some of these definitions have.

3.1.3

Understanding spirituality as a compound term

One way in which this area has been subject to more incisive analysis in education has been to qualify the aspect of spirituality that is being addressed. For example, rather than 'spirituality' authors have redefined a more particular focus for their attention as 'spiritual education', 'spiritual development', or the 'spiritual ethos or curriculum'(e.g. Kibble, 1996; Rossiter 1996). Whilst this does in some ways clarify the interpretation of spirituality that is being sought, in other ways it masks the need to pursue an understanding of pupil's (and teacher's) spirituality from first principles in preparation for these compound domains.

A popular approach adopted by researchers of adult spirituality has been to focus on spiritual experience only. This is appealing since it refers to relatively more discrete and identifiable moments in time, and has yielded many interesting results (e.g. James, 1902; Hay 1990, Greeley 1975). In turn these have extended the understanding of spirituality, as a human experience, suggested in more philosophical and theological approaches (e.g. Stace, 1960; Otto 1950).

However, neither 'spiritual experience' (nor any of the other compounds

referred to above) convey an exactly equivalent sense of meaning to the term ‘spirituality’. Spirituality suggests a wider frame of reference in which the spiritual experience is but one indicator. Spirituality also suggests, to me at least, something more fundamentally psychological, a property of one’s nature through which a range of psychological events pass, not only experiences, but also feelings, thoughts, attitudes and actions. Again its sense resonates with the term ‘personality’, which represents a more complex construct than the mere accumulation of personal experiences.

It would appear in the variety of definitions represented in Table 3.1 that this broader understanding of spirituality was desired by most of those scholars, since they refer to ongoing processes of searching, exploration, and interpretation³. For these reasons, a definitive guide for empirical study of children’s spirituality has cause to pursue ‘spirituality’ rather than any more restrictive index of this. Moreover, as discussed further in chapter 4 of this thesis, in limiting oneself to data on children’s reports of spiritual experience one would be susceptible to further ‘false negatives’ (i.e. missing what is really there through methodological shortcomings). This is because recalling specific experiences on demand would be likely to unfairly over-tax children’s limited meta-cognitive control of their storage and retrieval processes (Flavell and Wellman 1977) : children’s recall of experience is not equivalent to that of adults. Thus in order to ensure as fair a picture of children’s spiritual lives as possible, ‘spirituality’ rather than ‘spiritual experience’ alone seems the recommended kind of definition to pursue in the construction of an empirical framework. However, spiritual experience would need to be accommodated as part of that framework.

A quite different, but rather helpful, way of looking at ‘compound’ character of spirituality and its definition is suggested in Wulff’s meta-analysis of how ‘spiritual’ is used in the literature (Wulff, 1996). He identifies no less than 129 nouns that have been

³ Admittedly, spiritual experience research also documents similar processes, but these are examined only as they arise as consequences of particular moments of spiritual experience (Hay 1990), and not as a study of an ‘aspect of existence’ (from Donaldson’s definition).

modified by the adjective ‘spiritual’ in contemporary scholarship on spirituality (Wulff 1996, p.6), including, for example, ‘spiritual hunger’, ‘spiritual bankruptcy’, ‘spiritual progress’, and ‘spiritual rebirth’.

He attempts to sort this vast list and in so doing discerns an important pattern underlying these various compounds. He suggests they can each be fitted into one of six categories: the initial intimation (e.g. spiritual hunger), the quest (e.g. spiritual goal), the goal sought (e.g. spiritual perfection), ways and means (e.g. spiritual guide), the goal attained (e.g. spiritual vision) and pitfalls (e.g. spiritual disillusionment). More importantly, Wulff points out that these categories form an essentially chronological sequence of categories. He proposes therefore that:

‘This array of expressions suggests that commentators on what is touted today as the ‘new spirituality’ employ an emergent model. They think of spirituality as a natural process akin to physical growth or development” (Wulff, p.6) (my emphasis)

Further general characteristics that he suggests can be inferred from this ‘emergent model’ include the idea that the basic and initial prompt appears to come from within, as some kind of psychological need. There is some degree of recognition and effort on the part of the individual involved in response to this, as well some anticipated sense of a goal to be aimed for. The role of cultural and interpersonal aids (‘ways and means’) in this individual process is clearly built into this ‘emergent model’, implying (as does the category labelled ‘pitfalls’) that although it would seem to be characterised as ‘natural’ and deeply personally motivated process (from within), it is also experienced as difficult and uncertain and the person will normally need to depend on some kind of external help. Lastly, Wulff infers from the characteristics of nouns making up the ‘goal attained’ category that this essentially describes a new or changed psychological state, such as spiritual joy or spiritual insight.

Wulff’s meta-analytic approach to the use of ‘spiritual’ in a broad range of

contemporary literature seems a useful contribution to the task of pursuing the kind of meaning it is appropriate to claim for this term. He notes, of course, that the idea of spirituality as a developmental process is a time-honoured one in religious traditions, and thus confirms the enduring connections between the contemporary understanding and use of spirituality and its former sponsor, religion. What he suggests is distinctive about this emergent model characterising the modern understanding of spirituality is a) the renewed emphasis on the inner attitude and processes involved, - the psychological features, and b) the de-emphasis on the necessity for an explicit transcendent object for this activity.

This analysis seems to draw together therefore a number of important strands in our discussion of spirituality's definition which, moreover, suggest implications for how it may be sensible to think about children's spirituality. From Wulff's identification of the fundamentally journey-like chronological process of transformation and change at the heart of how spirituality is understood, one can perceive a certain echo in the natural features of childhood experience. This is to say, at a general and ordinary level childhood itself is arguably the *sine qua non* of chronological change and personal transformation in the life span, implying that childhood is a period naturally designed to resonate with spirituality's characteristics. Similarly, Wulff's conclusions about the characterization of spirituality as primarily a process prompted and experienced as 'inner' is consonant with the inevitably partial grasp the developing infant and child has on the outer world, its practices and meanings. He or she is perhaps more 'at home' in an inner world, although that will not be equivalent with the adult sense of the inner world which is distinguished by a fuller knowledge of the alternative 'outer world' and its relation to that. However, Wulff's analysis also points out the important role of cultural and interpersonal 'ways and means' that support personal spirituality, thus implying that in their gradual process of enculturation of various kinds, one might expect children's spirituality to derive special sustenance (or deficiencies) through their learning and engagement with their social and cultural

context. All this would seem to recommend a balanced examination of sources and forms of children's spirituality that took into consideration both their natural psychology and nurturing influences, and crucially, the interplay between these two.

Conclusion

A number of tensions characterize the definition of spirituality, to which my need to derive a set of guidelines for empirically studying spirituality further contributed. In an earlier paper, written with David Hay, we described this situation thus:

‘Research is in the unenviable position of needing to make a start without having a clear starting point. (Nye and Hay, 1996 p. 145).

In addition, the paucity of directly similar previous research suggested that children's spirituality was in many ways uncharted territory, deserving open-minded exploration in the first instance rather than over-hasty and uninformed formalisation. The choice (described in chapter 4) of a broadly-conceived ‘grounded theory’ methodology (Strauss and Corbin 1990) also contributed to the difficulties of drawing coherent guidance from previous attempts to define spirituality, since it was intended that the data themselves would suggest a framework for understanding what children's spirituality was, rather than this being pre-determined by a fixed definition.

In this chapter's first section therefore, I have examined a range of definitions on which the boundaries of spirituality might be based. However, an analysis of these and the diversity and tensions they characterize, has demonstrated that a traditionally conceived ‘operational definition’ of spirituality, at least one that is based on any particular existing definition, would have been inappropriate for this study. A more flexible approach seemed justified, nonetheless one that was informed by the many features theoretical definitions contain and by those which this analysis suggests they have sometimes overlooked. The development of such an approach for the purposes of

the research described in this thesis is described in the next section.

3.2

Section 2: Categories in a “working map” of children’s spirituality⁴

The conceptual boundaries of spirituality as manifested in childhood is a matter that has not been adequately addressed by means of scholarship that is empirically well-founded. In the few empirical contributions that exist, there is still little to inform an understanding of these boundaries. Coles’ (1990) empirical study appears to comprise interesting data on children’s spiritual lives, but no attempt is made to clarify what this refers to, either a priori in his research design nor post hoc, on the basis of his data.

Other operational definitions for research purposes have tended to focus on what are, arguably, contingent manifestations of spirituality, for example those confined within the linguistic and cultural norms of specific framework. Thus, Tamminen’s research (1991) was limited to children’s responses within the Christian tradition - for example, experience of God’s closeness. Whilst yielding high percentages of positive responses (42% of nine year olds), such a focus may still underestimate the totality of spiritual experience possible to the child, particularly in children for whom religious language is opaque or devalued by secular presuppositions. In view of Hardy’s hypothesis (Hay 1994) which suggests that religious awareness may be a universal property of our nature ‘selected’ by evolution, it seemed prudent to assume that culturally limited definitions could be unnecessarily restrictive and prevent the identification of other manifestations of spirituality.

In view of these shortcomings identified in these contributions and in the various attempts to discern a definition of children’s spirituality reviewed in section 1, a new approach was determined as necessary for this research. This entailed, neither the

⁴ This section is based on my paper with David Hay : Nye and Hay (1996) Identifying Children’s spirituality: How do you start without a Starting Point? *British Journal of Religious Education* 18:3. Where I draw on Hay’s specific contributions to that paper these are separately acknowledged in this section.

adoption of an existing definition, nor the compromise of a more restricted focus, such as on children's religious experience, and yet it did not accept a Coles'-type approach of proceeding without any framework at all. Instead of definition, the approach used here was the identification and development of a number of central categories through which spirituality might be manifested.

This kind of exploration of conceptual boundaries of children's spirituality, informed both by scholarship on (largely adult) spirituality and in terms of psychological plausibility, has been lacking in previous research. This in itself might contribute a new form of understanding in this difficult area. However, its primary purpose was to serve as an heuristic device to guide the empirical part of the research procedures. In other words, to discern a working map of spiritual categories.

In short, the grounds on which this map was constructed included: 1) reference and relevance to children's psychology and life experiences; 2) consideration of breadth and specific features in existing attempts to define spirituality; 3) ability to accommodate many forms that spirituality might take, not only discrete experiences ; and 4) the insights based on the author's pilot research conducting different kinds of interviews with school children (described in chapter 4).

Three broad categories were proposed, each comprising further subcategories. However, it should be emphasised, this was not a model of spirituality to be 'tested against' new data. Rather, it was devised as a flexible exploratory guide, 'a starting point' (Nye and Hay 1996, p. 144) that would allow the potential discovery of new categories and themes, revised understanding of the proposed categories, or indeed a totally new framework of understanding.

A Description of the Categories

Table 3.2 Categories in a “working map” of children’s spirituality

AWARENESS SENSING	-Here and Now -Tuning -Flow -Focusing
MYSTERY SENSING	-Awe and Wonder -Imagination
VALUE SENSING	-Delight and Despair -Ultimate Goodness -Meaning-making and sensing

3.2.1

Awareness Sensing

The word ‘awareness’ comes from the Old English root *wær* to be wary or cautious, suggesting that the quality of consciousness referred to in this category is volitional. Psychologists more often use the term ‘attention’ to describe volitional consciousness, but this is usually limited to cases associated with a particular type of task-based cognition. The ‘awareness’ associated with spirituality typically refers to a reflexive or meta-cognitive process, that of being attentive towards one’s attention or being aware of a particular sensation of awareness.

In *New Methods in RE Teaching* (Hammond and Hay 1990) suggested several ways in which children could be deliberately helped to develop their awareness, or intentional consciousness. Hay has noted that these techniques are not intended to give children a ‘spiritual experience’, rather to alert them to the kind of consciousness which characteristically accompanies such experience (Nye and Hay 1996). From the research perspective it was important to establish whether moments of awareness thus defined

are part of children's spontaneous experience, and if so what children understood them to be.

As a broad meta-process, it was expected that this awareness of volitional consciousness would be very hard for children to put into words. For this reason, four sub-categories of awareness which resonate with experiences that children could be expected to describe were identified for inclusion in the working map.

i) Here and now

This sub-category identified the experience of being in the 'here and now', as distinct from the more usual wandering of awareness which not only takes in the present, but also contemplates the past and future. Donaldson (1992) indicates this as descriptive of what she refers to as the 'point mode', the most basic mode of the mind's operation and, as such, available to children. Observation of children easily confirms that children are frequently 'transfixed by the moment', and therefore how natural and universal the point mode is to childhood. Donaldson's original model of the human mind and its various 'modes' makes explicit how it is often (though not necessarily) via this 'point mode' that entry is gained to the spiritual dimension of adult experience. She also draws attention to the fact that education normally concentrates on developing the child's abilities outside this mode (extended sequences of thought and manipulation, i.e. facts and technical skills).

Donaldson does not mean to suggest that any child in this mode is necessarily on the brink of a spiritual experience. The role played by other factors mediates the extent to which the form of awareness is potentially spiritual.

In Nye and Hay (1996) and Nye (1996a), I went on to speculate that such factors may include the development of higher psychological functions identified by the Soviet psychologist, Lev Vygotsky (1978). There appears to be an overlap between the quality of consciousness referred to by the phrase 'here and now', and the nature of consciousness that emerges as a consequence of the synthesis of language and thought.

In Vygotsky's analysis, this core of our consciousness is characterised by the absence of 'marked' time (past and future), and the main currency is highly symbolic, the language of 'pure' meaning. This level is normally inaccessible since as we reconstruct it into language, time is 'marked' and the intense quality of the original meaning is diluted.

Hay has noted that religious interest in this area of human experience spreads across many cultures (Nye and Hay 1996). Within Western Christianity, probably its best known advocate is the Eighteenth Century French Jesuit, Jean Pierre de Caussade, who centred his spirituality on the 'sacrament of the present moment' (Caussade 1971). Yet at the same time as it is the object of sophisticated religious interest, it would seem that it also universally available in childhood, as argued for by Donaldson. Moreover, this assumption echoes the many indications of psychodynamic theories reviewed in chapter 2 of this thesis that suggested the quality of the child's earliest forms of consciousness shared characteristics with the spiritual (e.g. as Freudian 'oceanic feeling' or Jungian 'primary unitary reality').

ii) Tuning

The second sub-category of awareness to be included in the working map was 'tuning' as described by Alfred Schutz (1964). Schutz understands tuning as the kind of awareness which arises in heightened aesthetic experience, for example when listening to music. This has the sense of an intimate identification with the stimulus, such as the musical environment. By extension therefore, instances where awareness manifests itself as profound empathy or sensitivity to the ebb and flow of experience could also be termed 'tuning'.

Feeling 'at one' with nature, which is a commonly reported context for adult recollection of childhood spiritual experience, might be an illustration of this type of awareness (Robinson 1983). Apparently more ordinary events in a child's life could promote a similar sense of identification and unity, for example through an intense

sense of belonging, experienced at a family celebration. In contrast, experiences of alienation such as are precipitated through bullying, might be found to prompt spiritual crises. By trying to imagine the ways in which relatively familiar experiences in a child's life might present opportunities for spirituality, this subcategory makes evident that I was keen to accept the counsel of parts of the psychological literature's scholarship (reviewed in Chapter 2) which had indicated that children's spirituality could arise in commonplace, rather than exceptional, circumstances.

iii) Flow

A special type of awareness which was identified as potentially spiritual was what Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has termed 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi 1975). This refers to the experience of concentrated attention, giving way to a liberating sense of one's activity managing itself, or being managed by some outside influence, such that an operation which previously demanded a difficult combination of attentiveness transforms into a single flow. Csikszentmihalyi gives examples of subjective reports of skiers, rock-climbers and chess players experiencing this special form of awareness, and their subjective sense that it is special.

The factors essential to flow seem to be firstly, the preceding challenging nature of the activity contrasted with the release of the flow, and secondly that this is experienced as something transcending the self and valued for that quality. The flow quality of consciousness can therefore have more long-lasting spiritual meaning or significance. It has been suggested, for example, that the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola constitute a formal attempt to generate the experience of flow (Csikszentmihalyi 1988).

For children who are almost daily mastering new skills, this kind of awareness seemed potentially very familiar. It seemed implausible to expect that all moments of flow would contribute to a conscious spirituality, but this subcategory was included on the basis that some such moments might, and because nearly any activity (c.g. learning

to ride a bicycle, gaining insight into the decimal system) might be experienced by the child as special in this way.⁵

iv) Focusing

The fourth sub-category of awareness in the working map I constructed to guide research on children's spirituality was 'focusing'. This denotes the quality of insight Eugene Gendlin (1981) argues accompanies the 'felt sense' of a situation. It implies a recovery of respect for the physical body as a source of spiritual knowledge. Embodied knowing, from Gendlin's perspective, is the natural knowing of young children before they become inducted into the dualistic Cartesian intellectualism that is our cultural heritage. This also finds echo in the analysis of a Jungian contribution to children's spirituality I offered in Chapter 2, where in the section sub-titled 'I-thou self dynamic' it was argued that a significant aspect of the psychological emergence of consciousness was its origins in the child's physical sense of self. Focusing therefore suggested a plausible sub-category of experience that children of primary age might be more easily in touch with than adults. Indeed this might partly help to explain Tamminen's (1991) observation that spiritual experience appears to be more common among children than older people. Converging evidence to support this choice for a working map of spirituality can be sought in theological literature also. Hay (in Nye and Hay 1996) noted that focusing has a direct bearing on many forms of religious meditation and has been widely discussed in this context (Campbell and McMahon 1985).

⁵ The bearing of the theories of Schutz (Tuning) and Csikszentmihalyi (Flow) on adult spirituality are further discussed in, Mary Jo Neitz & James V. Spickard, 'Steps toward a Sociology of Religious Experience: the theories of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Alfred Schutz', *Sociological Analysis* 51(1), 1990, 15-33.

3.2.2

Mystery-Sensing

‘Mystery-Sensing’ was the second broad category in the working map, comprising two further sub-categories that suggested how this features might manifest itself in the actual experiences of children’s lives: ‘wonder and awe’ and ‘imagination’.

In general, transcendence is a feature common to definitions of spirituality, but this seemed hard to apply directly to a study of children’s lives. Mystery offered a way into this difficult area. Mystery-sensing involves awareness, already discussed, but in this case awareness of experience that is incomprehensible in principle. Since a central feature of intelligence is the ability to perceive pattern and order by categorising complex material into manageable chunks, the encounter with mystery, such as the mystery of existence, can be a jolt to the system. We learn about ourselves as limited at the same time that we bring into view whatever we perceive to transcend ourselves.

In this way these general features of mystery-sensing seem as relevant to children as they do to adults. Again, this resonates with ideas illuminated in the critical analyses of various psychological theories in Chapter 2, such as the Jungian account of the more conscious ego’s encounter with the unconscious archetype of Self (ego-Self axis), or the Object Relations account in which Winnicott referred to the transcendent quality of processing experienced in the transitional realm. Berryman’s (1995) characterization of the spiritual basis for children as response to the ‘limits of life’ is a further confirmation of this category’s relevance in this map-making exercise.

i) Wonder and Awe

Rudolf Otto (1950) identified two distinctive types of human experience of mystery: fascination or ‘wonder’, and fear or ‘awe’. Such experiences are familiar in contexts which may promote an awareness of mystery in adults, such as the moment of the consecration of the elements in the Catholic Mass, or considering the vastness of the universe. In both cases mystery is encountered as the extremes of what can be

understood are pushed to their furthest limits.

However, the basis on which this sub-category was included in the working map was that these instances of ultimate mystery are not likely to exhaust the circumstances which children's sense of mystery can include. It follows that although Otto's insightful identifications of wonder and awe refer to ultimate mystery, for young children the distinction may not yet have any meaning. Rather, the map required a more inclusive range of mystery because the awareness of things beyond one's current understanding is very familiar in childhood. For the youngest child, the slightest event, such as the operation of a tap to produce water, may be experienced as mystery, even though as adults we can appreciate this is not an instance of ultimate mystery.

It is clear from historical evidence, as well as more contemporary accounts of 'primitive' cultures, that 'explainable' events such as the rising and setting of the sun, or the twinkle twinkle of a little star, have been considered appropriate material for the consideration of ultimate mystery. It is perhaps only a contextualised and adult gloss which sets up criteria for 'proper' theological questions on which much of adult spirituality is based. Consequently, the possibility arises that some of children's own, eventually soluble, questions contribute to or arise from as profound an experience as those of the religious complete or theologian.

This suggested the need for an important discrimination. Whilst a young child initially senses that much of life is incomprehensible and therefore mysterious, for the older child, the explanations provided by education may imply that there are answers to everything, and displace or even repress the true mysteriousness of existence. Hence in the language of education, the realm of mystery has a cross-curricular application. This means, for example, considering how scientific explanations might be presented in terms of further questions or causes for wonder, or seeing the scientific hypothesis through Karl Popper's eyes as a conjecture which may at any time be refuted, rather than a thesis to be proved (Popper 1959). Thus the understanding of mystery is matured rather than dismissed as infantile thinking.

ii) Imagination

Another way in which mundane experience is transcended is through imagination, therefore this formed the second sub-category of mystery-sensing in the working map.

To experience mystery requires the imagination to conceive what is beyond the known and what is 'obvious'. Studies of children's ability to enter into fantasy show they have a powerful capacity for (and enjoyment of) letting go of material reality, or using it in a new way to discover meanings and values in response to their experience, especially experience for which their language is inadequate (Cohen and MacKeith 1991). The imaginative realm was also repeatedly highlighted in the analyses of potential psychological contributions to children's spirituality in Chapter 2 of this thesis, for example, in Neumann's Jungian account (1973) and stage 1 of Fowler's account of faith.

In more general terms it is clear that imagination is central to religious activity through the metaphors, symbols, stories and liturgies which respond to the otherwise unrepresentable experience of the sacred (Soskice 1985). In children's imagination, though their play, stories, art work and perhaps also their fears and hopes, it might also be possible to encounter a window on this aspect of their spirituality. Indeed the mystery-sensing created in some imaginative acts is perhaps as much or even more significant than children's responses to what 'adult' religion has defined as sacred.

3.2.3

Value-Sensing

'Value-sensing' was identified as the third broad category of the working map of children's spirituality that would serve as a framework for the planning and conduct of empirical research. The term 'value-sensing' in relation to feeling was coined by Donaldson (1992). Emphasising the role played by emotion in spirituality, she states that the degree of affect is a measure of value, reflecting a stance towards what is felt to

matter. There is a progression leading from self-centred emotion to an experience of value which transcends personal concerns. Clearly the conscience or moral sense of children is related to this idea, perhaps in a way that is prior to and more profound than Kohlberg's cognitive approach (Kohlberg 1981).

The substance of this category was suggested by identifying three further sub-categories.

i) Delight and Despair

The cluster of experience and emotion identified as value-sensing by Donaldson is commonly reported to be profound in its effects on the individual. For this reason the terms 'delight' and 'despair' were adopted in reference to this, intending to convey something of the purity and self-sufficiency of the emotion, transcending any particular context. Donaldson suggests spiritual enlightenment is an advanced outcome of the education of value-sensing and this has a link with the religious meaning of worship, as pertaining to worth, establishing a convergence of ideas that legitimate this sub-category for the map.

Children readily express their ideas of value and worth in the intensity of their everyday experience of delight or despair. The latter is particularly interesting. Children's, hopefully, modest experiences of personal despair contain the potential for the development of greater general sensitivity, which in turn may form a significant step on the path of spiritual enlightenment. In the pilot work, a common indicator of wider despair was evident in children's environmental concerns. These were often associated with the child's personal experiences of being taken for granted or used, supporting the notion of a linked progression between personal concerns and values and more general, and potentially ultimate, concerns.

It is possible that the particular attention given by children to environmental issues may in part derive from an animistic tendency to attribute or project their own emotions and thought on to animals and things, as noted by Piaget (1926). Thus a

childish phenomenon may in fact be a tool (rather than an obstacle) in advancing a shift from seeing things primarily from the perspective of personal gain and worth, to appreciating a wider perspective. In this respect, the informational context of more cognitive-based theories of children's religion (e.g. Goldman 1964; Elkind 1970) is also seen to make some contribution to this tentative characterization of children's spirituality for heuristic purposes at least.

ii) Ultimate Goodness

To have a sense of ultimate goodness may seem beyond the experience of young children. However, Peter Berger (1970) has suggested that such a sense is transmitted to children from the earliest age through the instinctively comforting language of parents, conveying a sense of ultimate order and pattern in the face of the child's fear of chaos and disharmony. As described in Chapter 2, psychoanalysts like Meissner (1984) and Rizzuto (1984) have pointed out that this may be interpreted by the child to relate to the omnipotency of the parent but in so doing contribute to their experience and processing of the spiritual. Thus one might expect to find empirical validation of the apparently sentimental claim that young children's lives are characterised by much more pure delight than those of more mature years, since delight is in some sense closer at hand, mediated by parents seen as the source of all-powerful goodness.

The basis on which this sub-category was to be understood in this working map was informed by the following observation. It is likely that an awareness of ultimate goodness may arise only when a broader range of experiences and less intensive protection by their carers reveals the limits of such ordinary goodness. Thus, ideally, gradual exposure to the limitations of human existence and experience of 'good enough' but not perfectly good carers, will give rise to moments of despair which force the extension of the notion of goodness beyond the child's immediate sphere, ultimately to an abstract understanding which transcends 'merely' moral good, in the direction of

unconditional love. It can be noted that the mainly Christian concept of God as Love is also echoed in this path to spirituality.

iii) Meaning

The final sub-category which defines ‘value-sensing’ was identified by the label ‘meaning’. This was to refer to meaning both as it is found in the irrepressible activity of meaning-making by children, and in the unsolicited experience of meaning-sensing as recurring characteristics of spiritual or religious experience. A number of researchers with predominantly cognitive interests have taken this as their guiding category, including Fowler (1981) on faith as a meaningful personal framework, Daniel Batson (1993), on the spiritual quest as a search for ultimate meaning, and even more recently suggested in Erricker’s (1996) definition of spirituality (see table 3.1. above).

It seemed important to endorse the centrality of ‘meaning’ amongst the collection of features to be identified as pertinent to the study of children’s spirituality, and hence its inclusion in this working map. However, as has been argued in this thesis and elsewhere (Hay, Nye and Murphy 1996) without the context of the other categories and sub-categories suggested here, the focus on ‘meaning’ alone as the core of children’s spirituality tends towards an unduly cognitive characterization. It was intended that the emotional and experiential basis of other categories described here would offer a significant modulation of this undesirable effect.

As the researchers for whom meaning-making is central have suggested, the search for and discovery of meaning may directly form an aspect of developing spirituality. For example as a sense of identity is sought for, established and deepened, questions which are essentially spiritual are likely to be raised by young children: Who am I? Where do I belong? What is my purpose? To whom or what am I connected or responsible?

However, it may be that these more cognitive signs of spiritual activity are in many cases the secondary products of spiritual stirrings found in awareness-, mystery-

and value-sensing. But it will be important to understand the foundational experiences (suggested by the categories outlined here) through which issues of meaning may become salient to the child.

Conclusion

The practical need to develop a guiding framework in which children's spirituality might be identified was set against a background of confusingly diverse attempts at definition found in the literature and a strong sense of reluctance to 'conceptualize' an area that might so easily be crushed beyond recognition in the unnatural process of 'fixing' its meaning. The working map approach was determined as a compromise solution to this dilemma, in which a series of categories and sub-categories was proposed, without assuming that any one of these merited a more prominent position than the others. These categories sought to identify the features and foundational areas of experience in the psychology of children's lives in which spirituality might be manifest. This was informed by a knowledge of selected definitions and other literature, especially my analysis of implicitly spiritual features of the psychology literature (Chapter 2), as well as converging indications from adult spirituality and religion's characterization of the spiritual domain.

It was made clear in this chapter that this working map was primarily intended as a guide for the planning and conduct of empirical research subsequently described in this thesis. In this sense I had a low expectation of its validity: the empirical research would provide a firmer basis for characterising children's spirituality. However, there were two surprising developments that indicated that this map might help to make an original contribution to the understanding of this area in its own right.

First, I discovered this map had considerable parallels in features of the FARE report (Copely, Priestley, Wadman, and Coddington, 1991) and its suggestions for Religious Education. This was particularly apparent in their characterization of Attainment Target 1: "reflection on meaning", for which the areas of study comprised

(amongst other things) “awareness of mystery, questions of meaning, values and commitments” (p.35) . During the early process of devising my own working map, I had been concerned with the broader literature and interest in spirituality as a core feature of education. As a result, I had tended to skirt round the particular characterisations of this in R.E., believing that my research angle was quite differently focussed. The subsequent discovery of the parallels between the categories of the working map, and the features of the FARE report (for the most part empirically based), is therefore a demonstration of independently achieved (and mutually reinforcing) consensus about some of the issues to be located at the heart of the broadly spiritual domain.

The second surprising result of this working map has been the adoption of these categories as a language of children’s spirituality in other parts of the literature. It would appear that the open-ended yet constructive approach represented by the identification of these categories has found favour with other scholars. It has been cited as a basis for Crompton’s (1996) manual for social workers seeking to understand spiritual and religious issues their work with children might entail. It has also been suggested as the basis on which Church schools might ‘design, implement and evaluate their provision for the spiritual development of pupils’ (Rolph 1997, p.11).

This suggests that amongst those in need of a understanding of children’s spirituality beyond the rhetoric of definition, some have recognised this tentative map in its own right as an original contribution, welcoming its practical intention as well as its psychological theoretically-based expression. This may be because the style of expression followed here helps to circumvent some of the confusion of values and religious language more usually found in education discourse on this subject, thereby offering a complementary (but not substitute) language for children’s spirituality.

Despite these encouraging signs and convergences, the map and categories that have been described and set in the context of the tensions and features of attempts to define spirituality in general were always regarded as a temporary solution in the search

for a better understanding of children's spirituality. The use to which it was put is described in the next chapter.

Chapter 4

An empirical study of children's spirituality:

My approach to research methodology and procedure

Introduction

Methodological approaches used by psychologists in the broad study of religious nature have included experiments, questionnaires, interviews, clinical case studies, naturalistic observation, projective techniques, personal documents, phenomenological-interpretive methods, experimental introspection and historical anthropology (Wulff, 1991). This means that different psychologists have explored the whole range of methods available to the discipline and, in contrast to many other areas of psychology¹, no single method has been identified as the most appropriate to this broad field of study.

This diversity presented a further complication for the research discussed in this thesis, since not only was there an absence of criteria on which to base an operational definition of the subject matter 'spirituality' (as discussed in chapter 3), but there was also no established methodological approach that immediately suggested itself to help frame the question about how to delineate 'spirituality' for empirical research purposes. This ambiguity itself suggested that the stricter and often epistemologically presumptive approaches of methodological behaviourism (adapting the approaches and epistemology of natural science to social science research) would not address the issue in a sufficiently broad and exploratory way.

In contrast to such broadly positivist approaches, methods advocated by the qualitative research perspective appeared well suited to the research problem in a

¹ For example, in studies of cognition the experiment is the method of choice; in studies of mental illness clinical case studies predominate; and in ethological psychology naturalistic observation has been the most frequently used approach.

number of ways. Exactly what constitutes the qualitative methodology is not always clear, and psychology has been selective and cautious in its uptake of alternative approaches that come under the qualitative umbrella (Henwood and Pidgeon, 1993). However, adopting a qualitative approach in this research implied more than a decision to work with non-numerical data. Henwood and Pidgeon (1993) have attempted to list the central features of a qualitative approach which include:

‘a commitment to constructivist epistemologies, an emphasis on description rather than explanation, the representation of reality through the eyes of participants, the importance of viewing the meaning of experience and behaviour in context and in its full complexity, a view of the scientific process as generating working hypotheses rather than immutable empirical facts’ (p. 16).

Furthermore, in their argument for psychology to consider more seriously the role that might be played by the alternative approach, Henwood and Pidgeon suggest that qualitative research methods are designed to attend to the

‘problem of inappropriately fixing meanings where these are variable and renegotiable in relation to their context of use, the neglect of the uniqueness and particularity of human experience and concern with the overwriting of internally structured subjectivities by externally imposed ‘objective’ systems of meaning’ (p. 16).

These features share many of the requirements for an approach to children’s spirituality as a topic ripe for investigation but as yet unclarified (requiring ‘description’) and well embedded in personal frameworks (that is, not easily demonstrated by specific behaviours that could be observed or manipulated). The caution of the qualitative approach to ‘overwriting’ with ‘objective systems of meaning’ further resonated with the need for a psychological approach to children’s spirituality in

particular, to be wary of imposing a specifically religious model onto the concept of spirituality. The attitude of openness to the variability and re-negotiability of meanings also suggested this was a well suited approach to a study of spirituality which would encounter children with a variety of faith positions. However, the need to embrace a constructivist epistemology implied a potential incompatibility at least in terms of my own faith position, and required further consideration.

The first section (4.1) of this chapter presents an account of the identification and nature of these aims (4.1.1), the character of the personal perspective I brought to this research (4.1.2), and a discussion of some additional issues implicated in choosing and employing a qualitative approach (4.1.3). The second section (4.2) deals with the practical working out of a method for conducting the research, including discussion of a piloting exercise, interview development, ethical guidelines, access and selection of participants and data collection. A third and final section (4.3) outlines the method of data analysis I developed.

4.1

Section one - Research aims, perspective and implicated research issues

4.1.1

Research aims

4.1.1.1

The Research Project's General Aims

The data on which this thesis is based was collected as part of a general research project about children's spirituality for which I was employed as the researcher. The aims of that project can be characterised as wide ranging and ambitious, emphasising the necessity of being responsive to data and the unfolding research experience. Indeed this openness and breadth of approach to the study of spirituality might be considered

one of the general research aims, developing an approach that avoided foreclosing on any single perspective about spirituality and the forms it could take. The original research proposal referred to this aim as

‘one of the major challenges of the proposed study .. to refine a methodology for eliciting a theoretically informative body of data.. in a sensitive area of the personal experience of children.’ (David Hay, Research Proposal for Children’s Spirituality Project 1993.)

The project’s research proposal also referred rather more specifically to its jointly ‘educationally practical’ and ‘theoretical’ objectives. The former referred to the aims of providing teachers with a basis (both in terms of the form of and approach to children’s spirituality) from which to engage with spirituality in the classroom as demanded by the recent Education Reform Act. (1988). The theoretical objective generally referred to the aim of developing a theoretical stance from the data to be collected with reference to related theoretical accounts (such as Fowler’s, 1981). (Dr. David Hay, the proposal’s author and project director, had a particular interest in examining how this emerging theoretical stance might relate to theories about adult religious experience suggested by Hardy (1979) and Otto (1950)).

4.1.1.2

My Specific Aims (This Thesis)

The project’s general aims described were sufficiently broad to allow me to explore some of my own particular aims. Initially, identifying these specific aims was made difficult given the importance of both fulfilling the general research agenda set by the project and the need to avoid foreclosure in the form of a narrow focus on just one area of spirituality. However, whilst hoping to address the broad issues of interest laid out in the project proposal in my role as research fellow, my simultaneous role of PhD student allowed me to develop specific interests within this. These interests were

characterised by the following aims.

1) I chose to focus on the aim of developing a theoretical perspective from contemporary, first hand accounts given by ordinary children. These would not be selected for their religious backgrounds, but rather would be representative of the range of positions, religious and secular, typical of state school classrooms in the mid 1990s .

In other words, my doctoral research was not directly aimed at eliciting any educational or practical implications that the empirical study of children's spirituality might suggest. Some implications for education and the application of my findings are offered in chapter 7, but for the most part in this thesis I have focused on the primary task of identifying some theoretical issues, leaving the application of my account to those more qualified to do so. It would appear that this focussed division of priorities has proved effective. In direct response to my theoretical perspective on the data (Nye, 1996b; Nye and Hay, 1996), many social workers are now trained about children's spirituality through a series of practical teaching activities devised by Crompton (1996) for the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work.

In choosing to focus on the theoretical aspects, I aimed to follow the general principles of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1990) in that the theory would be sought in the data, rather than designing the data collection to test specific aspects of a theory (since none about children's 'spirituality' in fact exists).

2) Just as David Hay expressed a particular interest in discovering how children's data and ideas derived from this might be usefully related to theories about adult religious experience (as a form of spirituality), I also had a personal concern in children's spirituality. This was to set children's spirituality in a context of general child psychology perspectives, with the aim of exploring how psychological perspectives could amplify the messages suggested by the data and thus inform the emerging conception of childhood spirituality itself. This was suggested in two further aims.

3) In reviewing the broadly relevant literature (chapters 1 and 2), it was suggested that Coles (1990) was at least the most explicit in his intention to investigate children's spirituality empirically from a psychological perspective. Indeed, Coles' study of children's spirituality refers to the identification of 'children's spiritual psychology'. However, since this construct was not defined or even described in detail, one of my general aims was to address this omission through experience with data of my own. Firstly exploring whether or not there was a discernible children's spiritual psychology, and if so, secondly examining how this was constituted in terms of primary spiritual characteristics and in terms of underlying general psychological characteristics.

4) Because I was aiming to use the data to move towards a theoretical position that would clarify the ambiguous referent of children's spirituality, an important personal aim was to ensure that any theoretical framework derived would be broad enough to accommodate the diverse ways in which spirituality can be manifest. I aimed to conduct research of children's spirituality that excluded neither specially unusual moments of spiritual experience (e.g. Hay 1990; Tamminen, 1994) nor more dispersed aspects that might characterise individual spirituality such as worldview, faith, attitude or feeling patterns.²

This aim developed from an initial lack of confidence in the feasibility of research such as this uncovering a fair measure of 'spiritual experience' amongst children. This caution reflected not only an awareness that even adult responses on this subject are adversely affected by individual's reticence to talk. My caution also reflected my expectation that children would have additional handicaps in recollecting specific experience due to their less proficient recall memory access strategies, which would be

² In a conversation with the theologian Michael Taylor spirituality's two-fold character was likened to the need for both wave and particle theory in physics. In this light perhaps my intention to create a unifying theory that can accommodate both aspects of spirituality is too ambitious.

further exacerbated by a likely failure to effectively store such memories. For example, child memory researchers have found children need to be specially cued to ‘remember this event’ and offered structures for doing this (e.g. note what you see, and hear, and ...), since their ‘meta-memory’ (their own understanding of how their memory works effectively) is very limited (Flavell and Wellman, 1977). Since a widespread ‘taboo’ concerning the discussion of spiritual experience has been noted (Hay 1990), it would be extremely unlikely that such meta-memory prompts would have been provided to children having spiritual experiences.

In addition, because of their difficulties remembering specific experiences, children have been noted for their tendency to confabulate, i.e. fill in by making up ‘memories’, which would weaken the interpretations I could safely make from the data. Finally, it was to be assumed that children’s expression of extraordinary forms of experience would be restrained as a result of their linguistic immaturity in general as a limited acquaintance with specialised vocabulary (such as a religious vocabulary) that might otherwise help to ‘fix’ these unusual and unrehearsed memories.

For these reasons, it seemed foolhardy to conduct a study of children’s spiritual ‘experiences’ alone, and thus I adopted a broader aim that included these, but was intended to address further reaches of spirituality also.

5) It has been suggested by H.Smith (1975) that researchers need also to examine their work for ‘covert aims’. He defines this as

‘an implicit if not explicit commitment either to change or to maintain the status quo’ (Smith 1975, p.15).

The general project proposal’s reference to practical educational implications of the research suggests how this work was intended to contribute to change. In my doctoral work, I detected a covert commitment to the promotion of children’s spirituality as both an active and valuable contribution to many children’s lives. In terms of influencing change, I hoped that my account of research would alter the perception of adults who

perhaps previously had regarded children as non-spiritual unless they exhibited precocious piety. I hoped that by effecting this change and through the contact with the individual children taking part, children's own perceptions of the activity and legitimacy of spirituality in their lives might become more salient.

6) Finally, an aim of this research was to investigate how effectively children's spirituality can be studied using a qualitative approach and an avoidance of theory testing approaches. The approach of grounding theory in data (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) is being adopted more or less strictly by researchers across the social sciences, however I was not able to find any published studies using this approach based on verbal data from children. It was a question therefore whether such a language-dependent form of research could prove worthwhile with children, and an additional aim was to demonstrate how this might be done as a model for other developmental psychologists seeking an alternative to approaches based in the positivist tradition.

4.1.2

My research perspective

Undertaking this research project represented a considerable diversion in my career path. Having been trained in the quantitative experimental approaches to psychological investigations and then practising as a child development researcher investigating mainstream aspects of cognitive development³, both the qualitative approach and the scholarly treatment of spirituality were new to me. Accepting the challenge to change focus in this way has not been as difficult as one might expect, suggesting that (as I'd hoped) my intellectual interests and perspective may be naturally

³ On reflection, the fact that the areas in which I had been researching (child's theory of mind, child's understanding of representation) were considered amongst the most prestigious and thus legitimate by the developmental research community was quite important to me at the time (Nye, Thomas and Robinson 1994; Thomas, Nye and Robinson 1994; Robinson, Nye and Thomas 1994; Robinson, Mitchell and Nye 1995). The sense of security this gave me ('I can do 'real' research') certainly allowed, if not prompted me, to accept the challenge of this more esoteric research.

better suited to this area and this methodology in the pursuit of psychological knowledge. The most difficult aspect has been a failure to find a like-minded psychologist (same methodology and subject) working in this area, exacerbating the natural sense of isolation a researcher often experiences.

The issue of perspective

One of the most novel aspects of conducting qualitative research has been the need to recognise and analyze the contribution made by my own perspective. In stark contrast to the research process espoused in quantitative, positivist approaches, the qualitative researcher has to understand that

‘values and the researcher’s experiences are not something to be bracketed away as if ashamed by their entry into the process...they are required for the foundations of good social research’ (May, 1993, p.48)

In a similar vein, Maykut and Morehouse (1994) refer to the human researcher as the methodological ‘instrument’ of qualitative research, and to the importance of properly understanding the workings of that instrument before employing it in the field. This element of self presentation not only reflects the broad view in qualitative methodology that all research (including positivist attempts to be ‘objective’) has a subjective factor (Lincoln and Guba 1985), but also represents a specific aspect of the research process. Jones (1992) argues that in order that the research product can be addressed in a ‘dialogue’ with those adopting other views of the data, there is

‘a need to reveal our own partiality, self consciously exposing the particular theoretical and cultural spectacles which determine our view and shape our accounts’ (Jones, 1992, p.6) .

Thus the qualitative research process is less about accepting or rejecting particular arguments, but rather framed as offering a perspective on the issues. Hence

the need to make clear the researcher's personal perspective as part of that process.

The following subsections (i-v) describe my perspective in terms of the struggles I had perceiving what this was and how my particular area of research exacerbated this difficult, but worthwhile, task.

i) Hiding my perspective

Exploring factors of personal motivation and identifying background assumptions feeding one's interest to conduct research is no doubt difficult in any area. It has been my experience that the dual tensions of seeking to avoid a closed approach methodologically (being open to allowing theory to emerge rather than setting research up to test specific hypotheses) and avoiding a narrowly religious conception of spirituality, have had at times a particularly powerful effect in suppressing awareness of my own perspective. In a desire to be 'open' I tended to deny that I had any fixed perspective.

This would appear to be a natural paradox in the qualitative research process which simultaneously promotes openness to emergent design and discovery⁴ rather than seeking specific proof (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994) whilst arguing in favour of the role played by subjective factors which necessarily take up positions, make assumptions and narrow expectations. Indeed, it was important for me to realise that seeking to adopt an open and superficially neutral position (in terms of a conception of spirituality that was neither exclusively Christian nor even exclusively religious) was a biased position in itself. At a conference about issues concerning children's spirituality convened by a Christian organization (CCN 1995) I was surprised to discover my research approach was perceived by many as representing an atheist agenda. This was

⁴ Henwood and Pidgeon (1993) reject the use of the term 'discovery' in qualitative research on epistemological grounds since this "assumes a model of the individual researcher dispassionately uncovering pre-existing objectively defined facts"(p.19). They suggest instead the notion of theory 'generation', locating the research process within the wider scientific endeavour of representation and re-representation of knowledge. I accept this attention to language, but find the term 'generation' unsatisfying in my main text here.

because, in the process of being ‘open’, my conception of children’s spirituality was considered unfavourable to the position that spirituality was primarily a function of God’s grace and the intervention of the Holy Spirit⁵. Thus in my attempt to be ‘open’, I was appearing to others as ‘closed’. The impossibility of neutrality seems to be particularly salient in the case of religious areas (see iii below).

ii) Surface perspective

This illustrated to me the depths to which one must go in order to genuinely address issues about research perspective. It is relatively easy to state the more superficial characteristics of my perspective. For example, I adopt an eclectic view of psychological theories, being neither an enthusiast exclusively in favour of psychodynamic, cognitive-developmental or social learning accounts of childhood, as each would seem to express something unique about different levels of developmental reality.

It has also been relatively easy to address my change of methodological commitment in favour of a qualitative approach for this research. My position can be seen to embrace a view of reality which accepts that knowledge sought in research necessarily reflects values and personal knowledge, and attempts to illuminate, rather than exhaustively explain, an area by studying qualities of data not considered in terms of frequency. Finally, I can explain that in more specific details this approach meant I intended to adopt an initially open position in terms of grounding emergent theoretical discoveries in the data, rather than seeking data to test prior theoretical assumptions (Glaser and Strauss 1967).

However, it would seem these researcher characteristics represent only superficial elements. A fuller account is required to allow other readers to assess and

⁵ Regarding this criticism, and the general sense on which I base this account of spirituality (i.e. primarily in terms of human psychology) I would argue that a researcher cannot comment on this area in any other way. I do not believe it is possible (or desirable) to research “God’s contribution” to this phenomenon of experience.

contribute to the interpretations offered, and this has to include some excavation of my religious position and my implicit view of children's spirituality. This process allowed implicit views of the relationships between spirituality, religion and psychology to emerge. Outlining these views is intended to represent the purely personal and hesitant conceptions with which I approached this research, in contrast to the theoretically and empirically based conceptions that are described in other chapters of this thesis.

However, before these views are outlined, it is also necessary to discuss the awkwardness of operating from within a religious perspective whilst embracing the alternative qualitative research methodology.

iii) Grappling with religious perspective: the impossibility of "ideal" perspective

The study of religion inevitably raises questions about the researcher's position in a way that other topics are less susceptible to. Whilst it can be interesting to know about the personality characteristics of psychologists who have developed personality theories, it is not a primary question for the reader of such research. In contrast, reading about theories of religious nature one immediately wants to know about the author's faith position, regardless of how they have researched religion in terms of methodology, sample, operational definitions or interpretative conclusions. This may stem from the general suspicion as to whether religious nature can possibly be a topic of academic study; as Wulff writes of American attitudes towards a social science approach to religious issues:

‘that religious traditions and faith can be approached with a scholarly attitude, sympathetically and without preconceptions or prejudgments, is a notion that is apparently foreign to academic minds, both conservative and liberal, who think of religion only as something that can be preached’ (Wulff, 1991, p. 36).

This issue appears repeatedly across the psychology of religion literature in the

form of an unanswerable question about who is best suited to conduct research of this kind. The ideals of both positivism, in the form of the avowedly objective researcher, and of the qualitative research approach, in the form of the openness to data-led discovery, contend equally with premises on which religious positions are constituted. All religious views (atheist, agnostic, and religious believer) take up some preconceived position about the value, reality, and function of religious aspects in a person's life, yet Wulff makes clear (above) that views that prejudice are not appropriate in this area. At the same time Wulff calls for sympathetic approaches, which would seem to insist on tolerance of a position of faith. Koepp (1920, cited in Wulff 1991) went further still in his suggestions of researcher prerequisites, calling for 'deep inner piety', alongside gifts of exceptionally accurate self observation and artistic sensitivity. Reich (1992) is more aware of a paradox, suggesting psychology of religion researchers require

“the motivation, sensitivity and theological knowledge of a religious believer together with the sceptical attitude of a non believer” (Reich, 1992, p. 149).

Such requirements and paradoxes are clearly daunting and may be sufficient to deter researchers from addressing the problem of their own perspectives at all, preferring instead to appear to embrace a superficially 'neutral' and 'open' position as I initially felt satisfied I had done in undertaking this research.

iv) Finding my perspective: A converging model

It appeared at times that for a study which could not ignore its religious connections, the general epistemology of the qualitative approach held as many problems as the traditional positivist approaches to research. The traditional quantitative research paradigm rejects non-observable, unprovable and subjective realities (Lincoln and Guba 1985), making concepts like 'spirituality' unsuitable for serious study. The qualitative approach, on the other hand, often championed by researchers inspired by a post-modern relativism, seems equally ill-suited to address an area that frequently is

expressed in forms that refer to matters of absolute truth. As a researcher and a religious believer, who at least in one sphere adheres to the view that religious truth, personified or characterised by God, is not merely a constructed form of knowledge, I found this constructivist epistemology of qualitative research initially problematic.

An important breakthrough came when, in questioning what my underlying perspective was, I identified a convergence between my fundamental psychological outlook and the broader principles of qualitative research (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), and to some extent my theological perspective also.

It was stated ‘simply’ above (section ii) that I regard myself as an eclectic in terms of developmental theory, finding value in the ideas of a number of very different kinds of theory that would appear to comment on different aspects on the same developmental reality. This view may be traced to my general psychological position concerning the human person, that of a ‘neutral monist’ as defined and used by Booth (1993). I take the view that human experience is defined by a single reality (monist), of which there are many aspects (physical, psychological, spiritual, social, cultural).

According to this position, no one aspect of reality is considered superior to another. Importantly in our present context, this position avoids dualistic concepts of reality (consequently prey to materialist reductionism that rejects the spiritual aspect), and avoids the need to import notions of a separate, metaphysical realm of reality to account for the spiritual. Indeed, Booth has argued that this unitary view of human nature is not only consistent with recent research evidence that demonstrates the interconnectedness of neural bases, cultural and social factors in consciousness, but is also consistent with an interpretation of the Biblical representation of human nature in which a person’s spiritual life is inseparable from the reality of their physical, social and psychological existence (Booth, in press).

Reflecting on the underlying features of the qualitative approach, (as identified by Lincoln and Guba, 1985, and discussed by Maykut and Morehouse, 1994), I was struck by the similar emphasis on a view of the world (including human nature) as

complex and interconnected rather than the positivist assumption that explanation lies in revealing simple causal chains of events.

Furthermore the qualitative position rejects a hierarchic view of reality, promoting a heterarchic view instead. This seemed to fit well with the psychological position I had identified for myself as a neutral monist. Viewing the relationships that govern the presenting characteristics of ‘whole’ phenomena as dynamic, and changes (i.e. development) as organic, the qualitative perspective embodies a naturally relational perspective. This contrasts with the mechanical view of relationships suggested by the positivist approach. As such, the qualitative perspective suggests a more appropriate , that is more ‘human’ , model in general for the study of human phenomenon, especially in the light of my psychological perspective on human nature. This realisation helped to qualify the earlier tensions.

My theological outlook is also reflected in many of these principles. The emphasis on the axiomatic quality of relationship and interconnectedness (in contrast with discrete isolation of parts, fragmentation and purely functional relatedness) in the qualitative perspective and the neutral monist psychological view of human nature is equally a basic characteristic of Christian theology. In personal terms, striving to understand, seek and develop relatedness at every level as an expression of a commitment to the whole (the whole person, the family, the community, the environment, God’s kingdom, creation) is how I seem to experience and interpret Christianity also⁶. Extrapolating further, the qualitative perspective’s rejection of the desire to acquire knowledge in order that, through prediction, phenomena might be controlled, is also a position which finds sympathy with my theological outlook. This is to say, my view of God is not as a source of control or determining influence, but rather my faith is experienced as a desire to explore a many layered relationship with the goal

⁶ The Christian revelation of God in the form of the Trinity, the whole being defined by the relatedness of the three persons in one, is a prime source of my theology in this regard (MacFadyen 1990). The similarity between my ‘relational’ theological perspective and the core category identified in the analysis of this research is discussed in chapter 7.

of continually deepening my understanding through the revelation of meaning.

Identifying these convergences helped me to discover the foundations of my perspective in terms of methodological principles, and psychological and theological outlook. They also helped me deepen my understanding of the qualitative approach and its requirements, attenuating my concerns about the problems of methodological openness alongside a personal commitment to a religious faith.

v) Statements of research perspective

The process of struggle involved in recognising my reluctance to accept that my ‘open-minded’ research strategy was in itself ‘a perspective’ (i & iii), and the subsequent excavation of the underlying characteristics of my worldview from which this arose (ii & iv), has already exposed the broad features of my research perspective for this study.

This includes the adoption of an ‘alternative’ qualitative methodology coupled with an awareness of areas in which this may present difficulties in terms of my personal commitments. My general psychological framework has been described, placing spirituality alongside other characteristics of human nature rather than outside it. This aspect of my research perspective is intimately bound up with my religious perspective, that of a Christian. It is emphasised that this was not used narrowly to delimit the scope of the research in terms of approach to the conception of spirituality, the research sample or the analysis. However, it is possible that my experience of a primarily religious conception of spirituality as a consequence of my faith helped me to identify wider instances outside a religious boundary, and that my particular form of theological outlook even lent support to a non-exclusive approach.

These basics suggest more precise aspects of my perspective. Firstly, that spirituality can be, but is not necessarily, expressed as a religious feature. Even where ‘religious’ is taken to refer to a general sense of God rather than to a formal commitment to a particular religion, my broader conception of spirituality still includes a potentially

non-religious aspect, and in so doing will always necessitate a fuzzy boundary definition regardless of my empirical findings. This is assumed to carry many of the features of religious forms of spirituality, hence the relevance of developmental models of different aspects of the psychology of religion and the need to address the methodological problems concerning religious research issues. Where 'religious' is used as a descriptor in this thesis, it is usually intended to refer to the broad character of religions and is not confined to any particular religion's formulae.

This leads to my conception of the relationship between spirituality and psychology. Clearly this is an extremely broad area (already discussed in chapters 1 and 2), about which it would be foolish to claim to have a fixed position. It has however become clear that as a function of the general aspects of my perspective I view spirituality as a deep seated aspect of a person's psychology. At times I have suspected that in as much as psychology is about issues of uniquely human experience, particularly our experience and creative use of consciousness in relating to ourselves, others and the world, this may also be called spirituality. The tendency to group similar forms of experience and, in so doing, create a new understanding and meaning for them as a whole, may be one way to account for the apparently distinctive and unitary area people experience as 'the spiritual', and more often as specifically religious. Thus spirituality, as a dynamic quality or character of human sentience⁷, is a psychological inevitability that is both common to all and highly individual.

Finally, given these personal perspectives, it is possible to identify my prior assumptions about children's spirituality. These included the belief that it is something that manifests itself in childhood in some form in as much as the child is psychologically alive. By implication, spiritual activity is a positive indication of a

⁷ The core category identified in chapter 6 is thus a direct reflection of this perspective, but supported by new empirical evidence. This parallel between my perspective and my analytical interpretation confirms my role as 'researcher as instrument' in this study. See chapter 7 for further discussion of this convergence.

child's ongoing psychological animation⁸. That is to say, I considered it to be something of value serving a function, rather than an incidental or expendable feature.

It was stated at the outset of this chapter that my methodological approach to this research has been to conduct as open an investigation of children's spirituality as possible, avoiding the imposition of theory in advance of consideration of evidence in the form of data gathered directly from children. The premises of qualitative research make clear, however, that it is unnatural to presume that the researcher can treat the data in this way unless she is first aware of her own personal viewpoint or perspective, and that a discussion of this is also an essential feature of the proper qualitative procedure for disseminating research findings (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) . It is emphasised therefore that whilst aspects of my perspective will have obliquely affected the design, conduct and analysis of this research, as far as possible these were not explicitly employed as if they were theoretical guidelines for the research process. On the contrary, they have been stated here in evidence of my conscientious attempt to engage with my perspective in order that I could sufficiently distance myself from it and engage more directly with the phenomenon as represented in the data, though at the same time make more conscious use of the theoretical sensitivity gained from a better awareness of my position.

4.1.3

Fundamental research issues

This section deals with some of the typically difficult issues arising when pursuing a qualitative approach in a context dominated by the quantitative research framework. Pioneers of qualitative research (e.g. Glaser and Strauss, 1967) have often found it

⁸ These references to spirituality as a quality of being 'alive' and 'animated' appear to trace my personal sense of the concept back to its etymological roots : from the Latin 'spirare', to breathe, 'spirit- the animating or vital principle in man, the breath of life' (Oxford English Dictionary).

necessary to devote a large portion of their attention to accounting for the different approaches qualitative research adopts in dealing with issues of researcher subjectivity, validation and generalisation of results. As the qualitative method becomes better recognised, it is hoped that fewer readers will need such accompanying explanations and justifications. In time, qualitative research accounts will be able to focus more immediately on the research questions, in the same way that quantitative research accounts can, assuming a shared understanding with readers about the aims and methods of qualitative research.

It is therefore not my intention to discuss the wider justifications for non-traditional approaches to these aspects of methodology (forgoing the use of control and the recognition of subjective factors), rather to discuss only how these were dealt with in designing my research in particular. Henwood and Pidgeon (1993) have suggested that, in theory, these issues (subjectivity, reliability, validity, generalisation) , even where they are adapted to serve a qualitative approach, are merely vestigial features inherited from the positivist research tradition and, as criteria for judging the quality of research they have no place in the alternative epistemology of qualitative research . However, they also admit that the consequence of taking such a strong stand in practice would be ‘methodological anarchy’. Therefore I shall address these issues and introduce further measures which were adopted to support the accountability of the research process.

4.1.3.1

Subjectivity and Validation

Qualitative researchers have challenged the claims of quantitative research as having successfully developed objective ways of conducting research, arguing that objectivity is always mediated by forms of researcher subjectivity (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994). In contrast, qualitative research embraces subjectivity as a research tool, which like any other tool can be more or less skilfully used. In this research, the

tool of subjectivity was consciously employed at all three stages of the method: design, data collection, and analysis.

Subjectivity in the first stage, that of research design, has been discussed already in the context of my perspective and aims. The particular difficulty with researcher claims of objectivity in an area related to the religious demonstrates why a traditional (quantitative) approach was not considered appropriate for a study of children's spirituality.

The second stage, data collection, in this research focussed on subject-led reports of issues and experiences relating to broadly spiritual areas. Psychological research in the quantitative tradition normally dismisses such evidence of a phenomenon as 'subjective', preferring instead to focus on objective measures (manipulated by the researcher or naturalistically by different presenting conditions) that the researcher defines prior to data collection. Given the paucity of knowledge about children's spirituality (and the research aim of extending such knowledge), the development of such a measure would have been unlikely to offer the intended protection of validity. In contrast, allowing the study to focus on subjective reports as data, the qualitative approach followed here permitted the exploration of a first level presentation of the area. As such this type of data benefits from an increased level of naturalism, in the relative absence of researcher manipulation to elicit 'readings' of particular 'measures' of spirituality, and thus can be argued to be a more valid form of data. The general research aim of seeking to develop further an understanding of spirituality in childhood (inductive) rather than aiming to test a pre-existing hypothesis (deductive) justifies this reliance on subjective data from children in the first instance.

The issue of validation being jeopardised by subjectivity is most salient in the third stage of the research process, data analysis, and therefore requires rather more detailed discussion. It would seem to be a natural desire of researchers, having carefully collected and examined empirical data, to find that their conclusions are readily shared by others. However, qualitative researchers accept that in embracing the value of

subjectivity in general, their contribution is emphatically an interpretation (not a definitive explanation) of the data. Nevertheless, the validity of that interpretation can be seen to reside in the degree to which others concur with it, or at least regard it as analytically generative of alternative ideas.

A natural response to this in both quantitative and qualitative fields has been to invite independent assessors to rate or judge the data in the light of the interpretative framework suggested by the researchers, to examine the degree of consensus that may be claimed. Where the data is specialised in some way (either through the nature of the participants or the subject area - in this research both these features were present), this is less straightforward. Specialist assessors may be required, in this case familiar with children's linguistic and comprehension abilities but also with a broad conception of spirituality, who then necessarily bring their own specialist perspectives to bear on the assessment. Furthermore, qualitative research such as that undertaken in the present study derives its meanings from rich and dense sections of data often necessitating reference to the whole from which a section is drawn. For this reason, the possibility for independent assessors to make judgements about the data and its interpretation would involve reading large amounts of text, and in combining requirements of time and expertise this approach to validating the results of subjective interpretation becomes a luxury rather than a viable research tactic. In dealing with this issue it was therefore necessary to consider other sources of validation in view of problems with subjective interpretation.

In a discussion of phenomenological approaches to the psychology of religion, Wulff (1991) proposes three means of validation available to researchers basing their conclusions on methods of subjective interpretation.

First, validation of a subjective interpretation may be found in verification from the scholarly community, though clearly more controversial or paradigm altering results might take some time to find this form of subjectivity-mitigating support (e.g. Galileo's difficulties). Secondly, Wulff suggests a role for a personal sense of insight

following an interpretation as an indication of validity. Where this confirming sense of insight is complemented by support from the scholarly community, this would seem to be an interesting use of subjectivity in the service of validation of interpretation, tapping an often anecdotally reported but methodologically neglected part of the research process.

Finally, Wulff and others (e.g. Lincoln and Guba 1985) suggest the potential weaknesses of subjective interpretation can be insured against by 'external appropriation' (Wulff) or 'member checks' (Lincoln and Guba). This involves inviting the research participants to identify (or state their objections) with the interpretations arising from their data.

These three approaches to subjectivity in relation to validation offer interesting possibilities for this and future research. Response from the scholarly community can be assessed more effectively over time, though early indications of this form of validation exist in the form of publications (Nye, 1996a; 1996b; Nye and Hay, 1996; Hay and Nye, 1996; Hay, Nye and Murphy, 1996). The frequent opportunities to discuss my research interpretations as part of the larger research project, primarily with Dr. David Hay, also served as an ongoing source of external validation check.

The difficulty of the second form of validation, a sense of personal insight, lies in its reliance on subjective reporting itself. Therefore to mitigate against this aspect of subjectivity as weakness and to raise the level of validity hoped to be gained from such a measure, I included a further form of security. This was the creation of an 'audit trail' (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) of the research process, consisting not only in the complete transcripts of all the interviews, but also letters to and from colleagues and dated memos created in the analyses of these as well as numerous dated memos, entered into a research journal detailing doubts, problems and insights about the research process as they occurred (in the later stages much of this was supported by the sophistication of the qualitative analysis package, NUD*IST). Inevitably, this wider body of data forms a 'big paper process' (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994) that cannot be reproduced in full

when reporting the findings. It did however offer me the resource of a systematic account of my interpretative path.

The final suggestion, that of ‘member checks’, was not a measure adopted in this research process. There are immediate difficulties with such an approach to ameliorating potential invalidating weaknesses of subjectivity in research with children. First, it would be difficult to present research interpretations to young children in a way they could understand. In addition, their linguistic immaturity might impair their ability to respond both in terms of articulation of ideas and social competence to reject an adult’s communication (Garbarino and Stott, 1992). Secondly, the relatively long period of time between data collection and final analytic conclusions coupled with rapid developmental advances made by young children would make it impossible to claim ‘the same’ children were commenting on their earlier, and probably forgotten, data. However, this raises a final possibility, which future research could consider if the first difficulty could be overcome, which would be to explore the conclusions with a new sample of similarly aged children. It may be noted however, that the loosely structured nature of the interviews to some extent followed such a pattern : an inductive search for pattern and clues to the nature of children’s spirituality led me to explore early interpretative hunches from one child to the next⁹.

Finally, consideration of the validity of the research method itself is important. The method of individually interviewing children and gathering information about their spirituality by subtle prompts, open-ended flexibility and above all a child-centred agenda contrasts with approaches taken by some other researchers (e.g. Tamminen, 1994; Bindl, 1965). Furthermore such a method diverges from more didactic, ‘question and answer’ and group approaches typical in some school and faith

⁹ Later in this chapter I state that I did not formally follow the procedure of theoretical sampling, i.e. reiteratively testing ideas against new data. However, the process described here indicates an informal commitment to this approach.

communities approaches to children's spirituality. In this case validation of the method can be sought in the degree to which it successfully elicited spiritual material from the children in this research, particularly in the light of comments made by the children suggesting they had not talked about such things before. Subsequent validation can be sought through an examination of the method's viability in the hands of other researchers. Since this study was completed, three further small-scale studies using this approach have been undertaken by theological students under my supervision which produced a very comparable quality of data.

A final, basic question about validation which can be raised concerns the character of the children's data itself. To what extent were these data a reflection of the children's genuine experience and thought rather than material invented for the perceived needs of the research interview situation and to impress the interviewer? It is reasonable to suppose that a certain degree of 'noise' entered the data in this way, as it does in all forms of communication to some extent. However, the openness of the research area (the avoidance of a definition and the desire for particular findings) in tandem with the open-ended approach to research interviewing had the combined effect of making it difficult for children make assumptions about what kind of answers they 'ought' to be giving. In many cases it was possible to inquire further, in the same or in later interviews, about the events and ideas the children spoke about, and this contributed to my sense of their validity (e.g. determining whether someone else had suggested an idea or image to them). However, this checking was not employed for every statement at the risk of disrupting the natural and friendly ethos of the interviewing. The issue of validity affected by the reality versus imagined qualities of the children's data seemed less vital to make disqualifying judgements about in this context. From a psychological point of view, the literature reviewed in chapter 2 of this thesis suggested that children's spirituality is likely to find expression in real and imagined domains, and that one should look to each for evidence. In many cases what the children said was richly impressive irrespective of whether it was based on 'actual

experience' or their own invention: either way their spirituality was being given a voice and deserved to be heard.

4.1.3.2

Generalisation

The degree of generalisation that can be claimed by a theory is often taken as evidence of the quality, indeed the validity, of that theory. In an area such as children's spirituality, in which many may be sceptical of the basic claim that children express spirituality in more than the shallowest forms, being able to generalize beyond the confines of the specific research process was an important consideration.

Qualitative research does not attempt to establish statistical generalisation in which probability of the same patterns being found in other populations is estimated. That is the approach to generalisation appropriate to quantitative research. Instead, in qualitative research generalisation is approached as 'analytic generalisation' (Yin 1984). This is to say, generalisability of the results is measured in terms of the extent to which the conclusions reached by the research can expand and generalize to other theoretical ideas.

In this research, a few measures (discussed in the next section) were adopted to avoid a particularly biased or small sample that could have been easily dismissed as unrepresentative of the wider population of contemporary children. To this extent, some consideration was given to the ideals of statistical generalisation.

However, the intended emphasis in this thesis was to demonstrate the extent to which analytic generalisation was effective. Thus one can ask to what extent the approach and interpretation offer a rich resource towards better understanding of the phenomenon, and in what ways the conclusions reached here illuminate, and are illuminated by, other kinds of theory. Finally, there is no reason why further research might not consider statistical generalisation guided by a tighter demarcation of the features of children's spirituality identified in these samples.

4.1.3.3

Committing to specific methods and techniques

A hallmark of quantitative research methodology in psychology has been the commitment to strict methodological procedures and the use of exacting statistical techniques requiring the researcher to follow a series of invariant steps or rules before a result can be claimed. These approaches have been widely successful in distinguishing psychology from the ‘armchair reflections’ of its philosophic origins through a systematic engagement with empirical data. Such is the devotion of psychologists to the group of methods endorsed by methodological behaviourism¹⁰, that the challenging alternative epistemology and principles that can guide social research proposed by the qualitative approach is undeniably impeded by a relative impoverishment in terms of an equivalently developed and esteemed set of methods and techniques.

This is not to say that qualitative research entirely lacks precise methods and techniques. Researchers committed to the qualitative paradigm and eager to present (or argue for funding for) conscientious research have been keen to align their work with predefined procedures. In the small body of qualitative research conducted in psychology, grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Strauss and Corbin, 1990) has been the most popular procedural framework (Henwood and Pidgeon, 1993), and was referred to in the proposal for the wider research project of which this doctoral thesis was a part.

However, unlike methods used in quantitative research, even the relatively explicit accounts of grounded theory procedures have been referred to as ‘rules of thumb’ rather than rigid rules for research (Strauss, 1987). It was my experience that this research oscillated between an attraction to the security and ambiguity-reducing qualities of strictly following the particular methods of grounded theory and a

¹⁰ These include the controlled experiment in a variety of well defined forms such as repeated measures, matched groups, independent groups, and associated statistical techniques.

dissatisfaction with the ‘inadequacy of fit’ of a strict methodological procedure with the reality of a creative research process. Thus Strauss’s own tolerance of less rigid adherence to his methods was reassuring.

As a result, in this research it was deemed to be more important to focus on the leads to methodological expediency suggested by the specific research process than doggedly to follow the criteria for a grounded theory approach. The research was characterised by a general influence of grounded theory techniques (set within the principles of the qualitative paradigm both in terms of inductive generation of theory and reliance on non-numerical data). This influence was particularly salient in the research design and data collection phases of the research process, though it was found to be less appropriate in the data analysis stages at least in its pure, textbook, forms (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). In particular the ‘essential features’ (Strauss, 1987) of the grounded theory method which were used in this investigation were experiential data (the use of both personal knowledge and newly gathered field data), coding procedures, memo writing, comparative methods (between pieces of coded data), and the more general approach of using the method as a ‘concept indicator model’ (Strauss, 1987). This latter feature was particularly appropriate for the study of children’s spirituality in the absence of a definition of what this might be, since it describes the process of moving from a vague, undefined sense of a concept suggested by the data towards a clarification and elaboration of that concept derived from repeatedly analysing the data, identifying patterns and divergences that define the previously undefined area or concept.

Two areas in which this study did not rigidly apply grounded theory techniques were theoretical sampling and the specific intricacies of coding procedures.

Time restrictions were one factor affecting the decision to omit theoretical sampling (the practice of returning to collect new data to investigate emerging theory with particular subsamples). However this was also a function of my relative lack of interest in focusing in on spirituality in terms of specific groups of children (such as one

faith group, one gender, or one age group), concentrating instead on investigating the broader picture of childhood spirituality (but see footnote 9).

The procedures for coding data are not uniformly described in the various accounts of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Strauss and Corbin, 1990), however they have the general aim of remaining true to the complexity of the phenomenon suggested by the data, focusing on the conceptual density that can be found in the data. I was unconvinced in reading about the steps of coding (and in pilot attempts at analysis) that the conscious movement from open, to axial to selective coding could really achieve this aim. Rather I found that whilst these methods did not reduce the data to numbers, it was in danger of reducing it to labels that amplified its complexity instead of working to reveal its conceptual density.

The methods of analysis I did find effective are described later in this chapter and in chapters 5 and 6, detailing the analytical stages from the more basic organisation of the data, through coding procedures to the final analytical framework.

4.2

Section Two - Research method: Piloting, sample and data collection

This section offers detailed descriptions of the development and implementation of my research method in terms of the pilot phase including development of ethical guidelines (4.2.1), the research sample (4.2.2) and the data collection (4.2.3). Accounts of these are supported by documents in the appendices.

It is important to note that whilst the perspective and analysis put forward in this thesis represent my individual doctoral research, the research method process coincided with that developed for the general research project on which I was simultaneously working. However, there were very few pre-arranged areas in the research project methodology (and these are identified in the following account) as a major aspect to my

role as researcher was to develop and conduct the research data collection process.

4.2.1

The derivation of a data collection methodology through piloting

A piloting process was particularly important to the design of the data collection methodology as the phenomenon being investigated was so under-specified and because even where theoretical suggestions could be gleaned from the literature there were few indications of the extent to which children could discuss this area on demand.

The general research proposal had suggested that the broad approach would be that of individual interviews with children at key stages one and two, that is approaching 7 and 11 years of age. These were arbitrary choices given the absence of any other criteria known to determine spirituality. However on consideration of the appropriateness of this suggestion, it was my opinion that in having two age groups a broader picture of childhood spirituality could be developed than a single age investigation might allow, but at the same time the focus on just two ages would allow more in depth comparisons between children of the same age, rather than having a smaller amount of data at yearly intervals in development.

Piloting involved interviewing 39 children (23 aged 10-11: 14 girls and 9 boys; 16 aged 6-7: 8 girls and 8 boys) at two schools in Nottinghamshire, one urban and one rural, which had pre-established research links with the School of Education. The rural school was a Church of England school, although the religious affiliation was unlikely to have determined the parent's choice of school (thus biasing the sample of children) in a rural setting where there were few alternative schools in any case. However the interaction of a religious culture in the rural school and the school-based nature of the research process may have acted as an influence on these children's interviews.

Pilot interviews allowed a range of different approaches and activities to put to trial in an attempt to discover which content areas and which styles of conversation and other activity most encouraged broadly spiritual discourse in as natural a manner as

possible. Piloting also enabled an informed decision about the length, frequency and interval between interviews to be made.

The basic variation in this process was between more and less formal approaches to interviewing and more and less explicit questioning or prompting about religious matters. It was always my expectation that spirituality would be more forthcoming in opportunities to respond in a more personal way, and not in response to structured or direct forms of questioning. However, as there was no simple way of explaining to children of this age that this was an opportunity to freely discuss what ‘spirituality’ meant to them, it was necessary to offer some structure at least as an initial focus or warm up activity from which discussion might grow. A number of tasks were piloted including:

- the invitation to draw ‘your world’, that is those things and people of most significance to the child,
- tell the ‘story of your life’,
- fill in some answers to a child personality questionnaire (‘What you do and what you think’) which included some questions about their perception of religion,
- reflect in drawings or words on the important characteristics of special people in the child’s life, both physical and non-physical features, and this distinction itself,
- comment on photos including those of children praying alone and of beautiful scenes in nature,
- respond to a number of set questions about the personal aspects of faith drawn from the central questions of research tasks used by Fowler (1981), Coles (1991) and Taylor (1989),
- discuss a series of particular topics including assembly, pets (often their experience of death), and personal crises such as starting a new school and illness.

Not all of these approaches suited both age groups. The older age group did not warm to the opportunity to draw, whereas the younger group found this very appealing and did not attempt the questionnaire approach or even follow a spoken version of its

questions. The younger group had great difficulty recalling events of significance in a story of their lives, an idea based on Fowler's (1981) of faith as a reflection of the construction of meaning expressed in the interpretation an individual gives to the events of his or her life.

Other particular difficulties included my unease about requesting information or interpreting responses to questions about special people in the child's life as this often revealed sensitive family relationships more normally the kind of material to be shared with a counsellor or therapist. (The rationale for trying this had been based in the many references to significant others, especially parents, in formative spiritual framework e.g. Rizzuto, 1979).

Whilst the questionnaire offered a medium many 11 year olds were familiar with through early teen magazines, the reading and comprehension skills required strained some of the children, and it was not a satisfactory way of nurturing initial dialogue and mutual trust as it required silent reading and suggested a form of test situation.

An 'interrogation' rather than dialogue effect was also a feature of attempts to ask a series of set questions of each child. Even though questions were framed as 'open' questions, that is as invitations to reflect on an issue rather than requests for information, children were rarely forthcoming with more personal material with this approach. It would seem that imbalance in linguistic competence between child interviewees and adult interviewer prevented children from recognising that open questions were not simply requests for the extent of their knowledge that might be further exacerbated by the school setting (Garbarino and Stott, 1992). Thus, even if children could have understood the terms of a question such as that used by Hay (1987) to initiate a response about personal experience of a broadly spiritual nature, they would probably find difficulty appreciating that this question indicated more than a 'yes, no, don't know' response.

Clearly an interview needs to involve questioning, however a structure that depended on standardised questioning for all children, in this area in particular in which

some meanings were likely to be constructed in situ, was not indicated as suitable by this pilot process. The primary and on-going task for the interviewer was to develop a sense of trusting dialogue with the child, in which the child found him or herself chattering away about personal matters, as opposed to factual knowledge, which the interviewer could then respond to with queries and encouragements relating to whether and how these matters suggested deeper, potentially spiritual, qualities to the child.

Explicitly religious foci, either through questions or photo prompts (what do you think s/he might be feeling/thinking), were sometimes very useful ways of directing the child away from the mundane. However, more often it seemed that ‘answers’ about religious matters tapped an impersonal store of knowledge¹¹. As spirituality suggests a highly personal quality, a primary focus on questions associated with an impersonal content area seemed unpromising for most children, whilst reflections on personal events, particularly their emotional associations, were relatively more promising sources of personal significance, meaning and value. I found that the difficulty younger children in particular had recalling such events could be mitigated by the use of photos of children used as projective prompts.

It became clear through the piloting process that whilst more formal and structured approaches to interviewing were unsuccessful, the progress of the interviews benefitted from a clear opening and orienting statement. Determining what this should include was problematic since in the first instance children would not understand the word ‘spirituality’. As a result a number of different statements were given trial in which it was ascertained that brevity was important, and that mentioning a general interest in children’s religious ideas, even in amongst a list of other interests for the interview, drew too much attention to a specific ‘esoteric’ subject.

I experimented with an approach in which I resolved not to mention religious issues at all in the interview. This had the advantage of lending a persuasive potency to

¹¹ Note however that the analysis found children’s religious ‘questions’ were more often personally formulated.

instances that naturally occurred in the child's talk. Such instances suggested a spontaneous spirituality in a religious form particularly remarkable amongst children who revealed themselves to be not formally religious and who were thus using a religious language for their personal expression. However, by leaving such a central area to chance, this informality risked interviews that unnecessarily overlooked the direction of a language which might point to spirituality, wasting the time of the interviewer and interviewee in talk about inconsequential matters. This was demonstrated in pilot interviews where a religiously based spiritual perspective was suggested only in the final moments of a final interview in which the previous material had suggested very little indication of that child's spiritual nature. The conclusion of this feature of the pilot process was therefore that whilst religion would not be referred to in the opening statement, a portion of the interview process (normally the final interview, or final part of a single interview) would gently suggest this area for discussion, often introduced by asking the child about school assembly.

It was apparent in the piloting that it would be difficult to maintain the same approach for the two age groups. However, in developing a general plan, I aimed to accommodate the needs of both groups. As a less structured, unstandardised approach worked best in any case, it was possible to create an interview guide which could be adapted for different age ranges and equally importantly, different children within each age group. This covered the content of an opening statement, and a plan of discussion areas found to encourage an, as yet undefined, kind of spiritual talk. These areas could be introduced by some A4 size colour photos (described in appendices) of young children in a variety of situations and some photos of nature scenes, or were followed up as they suggested themselves in the children's spontaneous chatter. The guide outlined three broad sections for the interviews: a section about the child's interests, biography and initial response to the opening statement, a section about 'spiritual issues' supported by the use of photos, and a section about 'spiritual experiences' (again supported by photos) including personal responses to religion if that had not

already arisen. The piloting established that the opportunity to draw put many (younger) children at their ease and often also helped them express or focus on a particular issue by depicting it whilst talking, therefore this feature was included as the guide was developed.

Pilot interviews took between 20 and 50 minutes, but it was found that approximately 30 minutes was optimal, allowing sufficient time for an in-depth discussion to develop whilst not unduly tiring the child as demonstrated in restlessness in the longer pilot interviews. In this respect there was surprisingly no difference between the needs of the two age groups.

It was planned to interview children more than once, especially where discussions had been terminated because of fatigue or school timetable restraints rather than the exhaustion of material. Piloting found a need to balance the requirement of re-interviewing the child within a relatively short period in order to pick up on earlier themes, and the time needed to obtain a transcript of the initial interview. Given these restrictions, and others imposed by the school's timetable and research access allowance, it was planned that children would be interviewed approximately monthly for up to 3 interviews.

There were additional factors beyond my control and beyond the reasonable limits of detailed investigation which the chosen approach to sampling (represented by: a reasonable pool of children, repeated interviewing on different occasions, samples from different schools and consequently in different environments) was intended to qualify. These factors, which it seems reasonable to expect could play some role in how a child spirituality was manifested and expressed, included the ethos of the school and particular classes from which the children were drawn. Equally, factors such as the character and influence of the teachers most directly involved with these children, the time of day and mood of the children when interviewed, and their perception of the interview room may each have impacted on the kinds of responses they gave in this research.

Ethics code development

The development of an ethical code (see appendix) to suit this research was an important task during the pilot phase. This section deals with both its development and how it affected the conduct of the main research process. In developing ethical guidelines, the advice of the members of staff at the pilot schools contributed as well as the experiences of pilot interviewing. Smith (1975) has defined research ethics as being essentially concerned with the protection of participants from harm resulting from the research process. An ethical code therefore has to consider all reasonable possibilities of such harm occurring, and build in measures to avoid or treat such effects. Fortunately, no significant ethical difficulties arose in the main research making many of the ethics clauses redundant.

Superficially, interviewing children about the content areas the pilot phase suggested were worthwhile appeared to hold few major ethical problems. However, the situation of one to one interviewing with children in a school context raised a number of ethical issues, including that of, 1) informed consent, 2) confidentiality, and the 3) possibility of carry-over effects resulting from discussions of unusual topics.

1) The schools regarded the research as ethically unproblematic. However I requested the opportunity to obtain parental permission for each child to take part (see 'access' section below) as 'informed consent' is a complex issue in child based research (this followed APA guidelines). Further to this, I individually invited children to be interviewed as and when they were required, rather than asking the teacher to 'send' the next child along. Some children deferred being interviewed until they had completed an enjoyable task (suggesting they understood the negotiable nature of the invitation), but none declined to take part. The pilot phase indicated to the contrary that more potential 'harm' was experienced by children who felt neglected because they were not able to take part in the research (such as those in the same class but of a different age). It was

explained to the child before each interview approximately how long it would last in terms they could understand (eg. until playtime), adding that they could leave whenever they liked before that time. Similarly their permission was sought to tape record the interviews, explaining they could switch off the recorder at any point. In the main research process no child asked to leave early, though I occasionally suggested they could if there appeared to be little left to say. A number of children, particularly the younger ones, exercised the right to turn the recorder off though this was always to listen to a playback of their voice before proceeding further with the interview.

2) Confidentiality clauses covered the basic protection of the children's privacy in terms of anonymity of published material and in the treatment of unpublished data. Three transcribers were employed who had no links to the schools involved in the research, and children's first names only were used on the tapes. Where possible, transcribers were employed who were not local to the cities where the main research took place.

3) More complicated confidentiality issues concerned information exchange within the school context. As an incentive to talk openly about potentially personal subjects, children were reassured that their tape or its contents would not be shared with other children or their teachers. This provision extended to their drawings also. However, given the opportunity to talk in the safety of a one to one situation, occasionally difficult issues were confided in the pilot interviews such as instances of bullying or grief resulting from bereavement or divorce. The development of an ethics code therefore addressed what procedure I would follow in dealing responsibly with such situations. The necessity to adopt a measure of flexibility regarding confidentiality in extreme situations is nonetheless an ethical feature itself. May (1993) characterised this as the distinction between deontology and consequentialism in research ethics. The former is a set a priori rules of good conduct, and the latter is a reactive approach to circumstances in which the researcher is not bound to follow rules at the expense of further possible harm to the participants.

More generally the pilot phase served to alert me to the wider ethical context of the research. Adopting a broad and open approach to the interview process meant there was a danger of violating Smith's command that

‘data gathering procedures should be limited to information
that is essential to the research project’ (Smith, 1975 p.14).

Piloting demonstrated the tendency for children to gossip about other friends or family issues by way of establishing a trusting rapport with me in my role as the interviewer. Even where this may have served the interview progress as a whole, I resolved to gently discourage such talk. Smith also notes that there is a temptation to employ a broader range of research techniques when discipline boundaries are crossed. The dangers inherent in untrained use of certain techniques therefore discouraged me from pursuing areas considered in the pilot phase which were drawn from psychodynamic approaches such as the interpretation of children's drawings.

Finally, I identified an ethical issue relating to the discussion of religious material from my perspective as a practising Christian. Piloting found that many children were eager to discuss religious questions but sometimes also sought ‘answers’ from me. Although on occasion these were more straightforward factual requests (e.g. “Do Muslims believe in Allah or Buddha?”), children also wanted to know my views and beliefs about more mysterious issues such as the nature of an afterlife. Answering both kinds of question posed potential problems, since it was not my purpose to influence the child's interview responses in any way either by revealing the extent of my religious knowledge (simply responding might suggest to them I must be ‘religious’) or by lending them my views on specific spiritual questions. The ethics code therefore included a resolution to avoid answering such questions wherever possible and to keep my religious position hidden. In practice during the main research data collection process, this worked sufficiently well.

However, there were occasions in which my research role and personal standpoint were challenged, since such avoidance clearly neglected opportunities for

gentle evangelism, not necessarily Christian but even just generally theistic. I was aware of having raised children's spiritual consciousness but failing to direct them towards any further source of extending this area, and to some extent felt my covert aim of helping children to recognise that this was a valued and valuable area was being thwarted by my adherence to a code of non-interference. Ethically I did not have a mandate either from the school or the parents to influence the form of children's spirituality, and this fact helped to resolve my personal misgivings about being reticent on religious matters.

4.2.2

Research sample

4.2.2.1

Selection criteria

The general aim directing the selection criteria of the research sample was to achieve a sample of 'ordinary' school children, rather than children specially selected for religious or general spiritual precocity. Initially this aim was anticipated to be met by ensuring that a number of different faith groups should be included in the sample, including those of no particular faith. It became clear however, that such a sample would involve considerable searching and isolated selection (i.e. potentially interviewing only the Sikh children at one school) that could undermine other aspects of the research process. For example, seeking an interview with a solitary child from a particular school might have undermined the opportunity to build up a trusting, friendly relationship with a whole class for whom I could become a familiar face and reinforce that my interest was not in 'testing' them in any way. It was also apparent that such a sample would not focus on the position of the majority of children today, represented by a largely secular group of individuals.

Children were therefore selected at random (excepting selection to include equal

numbers of girls and boys) from the age appropriate classes at two primary schools in the Midlands (Nottingham and Birmingham). Both schools were urban, though not inner city, had no religious affiliation and served a predominately lower middle class catchment area. In addition to offering these mainstream criteria, the schools were selected on the basis of previous contact in different areas of research and thus known to have adequate facilities for research interviews to take place.

4.2.2.2

Access

The schools' participation in previous research projects ensured there were no difficulties gaining initial access to conduct this research. Meetings were held with the headteachers explaining the general character of the research and the planned interviews. These included reference to the undefined nature of the topic (and the aim of the research to sharpen an understanding of this) as this affected the degree to which I was able to anticipate the exact nature of the interviews to which the schools were agreeing. Had there not been previous personal contact between the researcher and the schools, this element of ambiguity might have caused difficulties in gaining access. Headteachers were also given a copy of the ethical guidelines.

The schools did not insist on parental permission being sought for each child to take part in the research, however as the researcher I felt this was the maximally responsible procedure. It should be noted that after discussion with the head and class teachers it was agreed that the term 'spirituality' would not be used in these letters, since it was liable to be misinterpreted or require lengthy explanation of how it was not a narrow reference to religion. I provided the classteachers with letters for the parents explaining briefly the broad areas children would be invited to discuss and a simple form to return indicating whether or not they allowed their child to take part, whether or not they wanted a report on the general research conclusions, and offering a contact number if further information was required (see appendix). Approximately 90% of the

forms were returned and all gave permission for their child to participate. All requested the final report, and none contacted me for further information.

4.2.2.3

Sample characteristics

General characteristics

In total 40 children took part, though this included two who were dropped after the first interview (one boy age 11, one boy age 6), because of extreme shyness and inaudibility. The older group (aged between 10-11) were interviewed between October and February 1994-5. The younger group (aged between 6-7) were interviewed between May and July 1995.

Twenty 10-11 year olds and eighteen 6-7 year olds made up the total sample. There was an even split of gender age in the children participating from each school. All the children spoke fluent English and none had identified special educational needs.

Religious affiliations

The children's religious affiliations were not known to the researcher in advance of interviews. Nor was this directly investigated (either by asking the children outright or their teachers) in all cases. The children themselves could not always give a clear answer to this question, and their teachers were often even less aware of a child's religious affiliation. Asking directly was not always appropriate given the 'natural', open ended intention of the interviews and the desire to avoid suggesting talk 'should' be about religious matters. For this reason such a question was left till the end of the interviewing if possible. It was possible to surmise the following details.

26% (10/38) of the children in this study gave a clear indication of religious affiliation in terms of regular religious practice or attendance at worship. Table 4.1 shows a breakdown of religious affiliations in the sample.

Table 4.1: Religious Affiliations in the Research Sample

	6-7 year olds	10-11 year olds
Church of England	1 male 1 female	2 female
Muslim	1 female	2 male 1 female
Roman Catholic	1 male	1 male*
No Affiliation	7 male 7 female	7 male 7 female
TOTAL	18	20

(* The family of this boy was not practising, but he had attended church regularly with a neighbour until recently)

Within the 'no affiliation group' a couple made comments suggesting they very occasionally went to Church (e.g. at Christmas, or when visiting grandparents). Many more expressed a range of religious beliefs or commented on their changing beliefs, but were not actively affiliated to a particular faith community, either as individuals or through their family practices. This highlights the difficulties about making judgements about religious affiliation of children - deciding which criteria count - practice, belief, culture, family or extended family or individual child?

Approximately three quarters of the total sample were not active members of any faith community. Crudely extrapolating from the ethnicity in this sub sample (27/28 white, anglo-saxon, 1/28 afro-caribbean), it could be surmised that this group (and therefore the majority of the research sample) represented secular or lapsed 'Christians' (rather than non-practicing members of other faith groups). However, it is important to remember that this identification is more appropriate to describe the families than the children themselves, who had not lapsed or chosen secular positions per se. Equally children described as belonging to a faith group more accurately might be described as having families that practiced that faith.

A note about the relevance of information about the sample's religious affiliation

It has been emphasised that this research about spirituality was not designed to be a study of children's religious life, and therefore reporting results about religious affiliation requires some justification. First, though spirituality can be conceived of as something broader than religious life, it cannot ignore the contribution religious ideas, experiences and attitudes may make to spirituality. However, it is not assumed that an active religious life necessarily contributes in a positive way to the spiritual life of an individual, and so a 'secular' child, for example, might have a more fertile spiritual imagination unconstrained by the emphasis on a consensus of beliefs encouraged by religious faiths.

The information about the research sample's religious affiliation in general

serves as evidence of the cultural milieu in which children in the mid-nineties are growing up. This is a predominately secular culture both in terms of their schooling and their family life. This sample was drawn from ordinary state primary schools, and it might be predicted that a sample including children attending Church schools would contain a higher proportion of children with active religious affiliations nurtured at school and probably also at home. This relatively small research sample therefore cannot claim to represent the whole population of children currently at school in England. However, extrapolating from this sample it seems fair to state that a child who does have an active religious affiliation will discover that they are very much in a minority, 'different' from others. This in turn may have the effect of affecting the bond between that child and his faith community to which he must relate in order to mitigate any conscious or unconscious sense of isolation, experienced in the wider peer group. Therefore, knowing a particular child's religious affiliation may be important to making sense of how, for example, their spirituality is expressed not only through their specific religious faith and the language that uses but also as a sense of belonging or community.

The information about religious affiliation is not only relevant to the interpretation of the data from children with religious backgrounds. As the qualitative analysis shows, many 'secular' children expressed their spirituality in explicitly religious ways. When this happened it became important to the analysis to know the extent to which the children's comments reflected 'taught' frameworks (more likely in the case of children from 'religious' families) or 'caught' frameworks ('secular' children). The latter is a strong form of evidence that spirituality continues to have a special outlet in religious language. If such a language were to disappear entirely from the culture, then it would seem that even children classified as 'secular' would be impeded in some aspects of expressing spirituality. Being able to refer to a classification of a child as 'secular' or otherwise was indicative of the extent to which personal choice, rather than cultural reinforcement played a role in the language used to

expressed spiritual ideas. Secular children using religious language are doing so ‘against the tide’ of cultural reinforcement. (cf. chapter 3 of this thesis p.123-4, in discussion of Wulff’s analysis of spirituality and the role of ‘ways and means’).

4.2.3

Data collection

A half day was spent as a class helper in each class in each school before interviewing commenced in order that my face was not that of a total stranger, and I attended school assemblies on most research collection days. Approximately 4 children were interviewed each day. I collected and returned each child to his or her classroom allowing brief friendly chats that served as ‘warm ups’ and ‘wind downs’ around the main interview itself. Interviews were mostly held in a quiet separate room in the school, though some were held in a small school library which was empty and in which conversations could not be overheard. The child and researcher sat at right angles to one another at a table, on which were placed drawing materials, the photos and the tape recorder. Interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes and were taped using a small tape recorder and hand-held small microphone placed discreetly but not out of sight on the table. Brief notes were also made after each interview capturing the main points and any features the transcript might fail to pick up such as accompanying gestures and emotional tone.

I conducted all the interviews. ‘Role management’ in the data collection process has been referred to as the tactic of cultivating the impression of naïveté and humility, even taking on the role of an ‘acceptable incompetent’! (Fielding 1991). This was more difficult to present in the school context where, as an adult, I represented a person with more ‘knowledge’ than the children. I made efforts to distance myself from a teacher role however, for example by chatting to the children about which subjects I disliked and would have enjoyed ‘getting out of’ when removing them from their lessons to be interviewed. I also feigned gentle amazement (rather than displaying the pleased

confirmation of expectation) as children repeatedly raised issues about the mysteries of existence, questions about God, and constructed or revealed personal frameworks of explanation in these areas. The central task in my role management was to cultivate the stance of an interested friend.

The loosely structured format of these interviews has already been discussed at length in terms of the methodological stance and the pilot work. A copy of the general format around which interviews were planned can be found in the appendix, although few interviews followed this pattern exactly, preferring instead to

‘adapt the research focus to what proves available and interesting rather than imposing an outsider’s sense of what is going on’ (Fielding, 1981, p.155).

In general the interviews aimed to cover three areas, the child’s personal history and current interests, the child’s personal outlook and expression about a number of potentially spiritual issues, and an opportunity to discuss attitudes towards or even personal experience of religious and other highly valued or unusual events. When all of these areas had been addressed, with or without the aid of photo prompts, the interviewing of that child was considered complete. The photos used as prompts were A4 sized colour photocopies of pictures used to accompany poems in educational packs for primary children.

For the majority this process involved 2 or more interviews (32/38 children). All the older group and 4 of the younger group had three interviews each, a further 7 of the younger children had two interviews each. Summer timetable pressures had some bearing on the decision not to interview all of the younger children for a second and third time. However it was also the case that the effects of lesser articulacy and ability to expand on each area affected the degree to which some children in the younger group could be usefully re-interviewed. In contrast, even where an older child had been quite succinct or even reticent in an initial interview, it was possible to encourage further reflection and expansion in a subsequent interview.

4.3

Section Three - Research method - Data analysis

The data collection produced 92 interview transcripts of approximately 12 typed pages of discussion each. Everything that was said during the interview by the child and myself was transcribed. This volume of data required careful organisation and management in order that the insights about children's spirituality glimpsed during the data collection could be more formally documented and analysed. An initial attempt was made to begin analysis by hand. This proved unwieldy and it was decided to employ a computer programme that specialised in non-numerical unstructured data indexing, searching and theorising : QSR. NUD*IST.

4.3.1

A Computer assisted approach

In summary, NUD*IST facilitated the storage and simple retrieval of all the transcripts in one place, as well as other relevant documentation such as field notes. It also supported a method of coding (or indexing) the data by theme, by age, and by individual child. It was possible to perform a few of the coding tasks automatically (such as coding all the transcripts of interviews with boys under the index category 'male') by programming MACROS. However, by far the majority of coding was done interactively on screen by reading, selecting and labelling chunks of the data as I saw fit. This thematic (and other) coding was stored on computer, in the same programme, and as such was easily accessed and analysable in itself. In particular, the programme encouraged memo-writing about each index point, thus memos about each theme, about each script, and about each child could be written, stored and retrieved for comparison in the light of further analysis.

The benefits of using this computer programme in the analysis were incalculable, given the sheer volume of data, its inherent lack of pre-structure and the

consequent complexity of analytical products. The organisational, storage retrieval properties of a computer programme are vastly superior to the more error- and chaos-prone capacities of the human mind when handling complex or large amounts of information. For this reason, NUD*IST supported an on-going creativity in the analytical procedures and avoided the need to prematurely restrict the attention to meanings in the data to very specific issues. On the contrary, it was possible to code whole transcripts in the first instance, using this to inform more focussed analyses of key passages, each child (case studies), and key themes in later stages of the analysis.

The disadvantages of using a computer programme to aid qualitative analysis had initially deterred me from considering its use in this research. There is a general fear that computers necessarily transform material into a numerical form that is antithetical to the qualitative epistemological stance. Furthermore, certain purists argue¹² that computers inevitably distance researchers from their data, and thus forgo the benefits of researcher immersion in the data as a key to rich interpretation of the research experience. My experience of the analysis provided a little support for these reservations.

First, different codes are identified by numerical addresses in NUD*IST, and as a result initial line by line coding of different themes in the data involved an uncongenial degree of number tapping at least at the practical, if not the conceptual, level of thematic analysis. This characteristic contributed to the evolution of a second and third stage of analytical strategy based around a less exhaustive list of codes, and using analytical memos written during initial analysis of each child's data.

Secondly, the abortive attempt to code the transcripts by hand (which was abandoned after two transcripts) did allow a different kind of experience of the data and its interpretation, not least in the opportunities to rehearse and elaborate meanings in the act of repeatedly copying out chunks of data to be coded on index cards. And in the last

¹² Karen Henwood (tutor), personal communication ,ESRC qualitative research methods course, Windsor 1994.

stages of analysis I also found it beneficial to return to working with 'hard copies' of the data to explore the application of the analytical 'result', that is the framework described in chapter 6. However, by this stage my familiarity with the data had been greatly increased as a result of the easy manipulation, comparisons and retrieval processes of the computer programme. It would seem that familiarity with the data at as many levels as possible is essential to sensitive analysis in such research, and that this can be supported both by manual and computerised analysis procedures. Details of how both methods contributed to the analytical process affecting this data, including the aforementioned first, second and third stage analysis approaches, are given below.

4.3.2

How the interviews were analysed

This sub-section describes the key steps in terms of methodology by which the data were analysed. Chapters 5 and 6 address the question of analysis in terms of interpretation.

Initially, each transcript was read in its word processed hard copy form as it became available. Where the transcriber had been unable to hear any passages, I attempted to provide the missing material by listening to the tape again or from memory. This kind of familiarisation served to mitigate against any excessive 'computerisation' of the analytical method, as my first contact with the material and each 'child' following their interviews was in this more physically 'real' (paper and sometimes auditory) form. Then, all the transcripts were entered into the "NUD*IST" programme, where each script could be read on screen.

Stage 1

The first analysis phase involved a very fine grained line by line analysis of a limited number of the interviews (the first seven of the older group and the first four of

the younger group to be returned fully transcribed). This analysis considered the whole transcript in each case and resulted in a large set of themes being indexed in the data. At this stage the intention was to code anything that might prove interesting at a later date, thus this stage afforded a means of exploring the data in minute detail and familiarising myself with the diversity of themes within it. Coding was in some cases at a more superficial level during this phase, and some codes were later dropped as irrelevant or re-sited under more conceptual headings. For example, more than a dozen themes were identified that described ways children pictured God and a further set described their attitudes to religious education. In the later stages of analysis such detail was not essential to the developing ideas about children's spirituality, though it had been useful to explore the data in this depth in the first instance. In addition to the coding of themes, memos about recurring themes were written. These theme memos provided an account of the emerging significance and meanings represented by data indexed by this theme.

Stage 2

The second stage involved analysis of all the transcripts (in a separate NUD*IST file from stage 1), focusing on each child's interview series in turn and selecting a number of key passages that represented the most significant parts of their interviews. The data from the older group was analysed first, and for both groups the sequence of interview analysis was strictly alphabetical by first name. Procedurally, I first read through all the material pertaining to a single child (their interviews, my field notes and any drawings) and then read through a second time using the NUD*IST editor to select and code key passages from their interview texts. For each key passage selected I wrote an accompanying memo, providing a commentary about that passage, its themes (in the light of stage 1 analysis), and its justification for selection at this stage.

This exercise afforded a necessary reduction in the volume of data (from more than 1000 pages to approximately 300) and an initial interpretation concerning what was central to an account of spirituality (see detail in chapter 5). It should be noted that

selections at this stage were generous rather than conservative, and included material considered significant as much for its absence of references to spiritual issues as for its presence. For example, where a prompt which had cued a number of children to explore the spiritual dimension failed to do so in another child, this was selected as of interest to their case.

Finally, this stage involved the creation of case memos for each child. These contained all the key passages, the supporting individual memos about their selection, and summary comments about the story the key passages seemed to tell as a whole for that child.

Stage 3

In the third stage the case memos from stage 2 were entered as ‘data’ into a separate NUD*IST file. This made it possible to search for and compare commonly occurring features in the selection process of stage 2. Thus theoretical terms and ideas building up in the ongoing process of interpretation were examined across the sample in the context of their memos and their interview data references. For example, it was possible to search for and compare instances which had memos and passages associated with ‘embarrassment’, ‘relationship’, or ‘sensitivity’. The results of such searches and comparisons helped condense and clarify the central themes a stage further, and these were documented in conceptual memos.

Stage 4

This final stage in the analytical method concerned the integration of the analytical products (the emerging ideas) of stages 1, 2 and 3. Information from the previous stages was subjected to a reflective analysis (described in chapter 5) that gave rise to an interpretative account of the data based around a core category. This category was described in terms of a series of subsidiary elements or dimensions (its contexts, conditions, strategies, processes and consequences) by returning to the key passage

data set created in stage 2 (as described in chapter 6).

Conclusion

The methodology and methods used in qualitative research are characterised as belonging to an ‘alternative research paradigm’ (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994). This means qualitative research lacks the commonly understood and observed procedures and short hand espoused by quantitative researchers (such as experiment, control, and inferential statistics). For this reason accounts of such research require considerably greater detail and depth of attention to both the research and researcher characteristics than is normal in quantitative methodologies. This chapter has attempted to meet these requirements by way of a rigorous and honest accuracy in the description of my methodological perspective (section 4.1), the development of a data collection method (section 4.2) and the procedures following in the analytic method (section 4.3).

Chapter 5

Interpretative analysis : Reflecting on individual cases and classification of 'relevant' material

As has been stated in previous chapters, the empirical research process was designed to illuminate ways in which children's spirituality could be better understood and defined in the light of new data and with the aid of psychological language and concepts. This chapter describes the analytical processes which were ultimately to culminate in the interpretative framework of children's spirituality and the identification of a core descriptive category, that is presented in chapter 6. This chapter concerns the processes of reflection and analysis that preceded the identification of the framework itself. There are 2 main sections.

The first section (5.1) describes the qualities of the data at a general level, specifically in terms of the influence of individuality on the expression of a child's spirituality. The implications of this general finding are considered in terms of the options it held for further analysis. Two brief sketches are presented in this section both to suggest the flavour of the data collected by this study in general, and to illustrate the particular point about the individual character of spirituality amongst these children.

In the second section (5.2) the processes and interpretative findings which eventually contributed to the new understanding of children's spirituality are described at length. This section follows the analytical observations made in response to three different kinds of material: religious, implicitly spiritual and casual chatter. Inevitably, the subsection on the significance of religious material is particularly detailed.

5.1

Section 1: General features of the approach to interpretative representation of children's spirituality

5.1.1

The 'personality' of spirituality

Repeated readings, codings and memo writing for each of the transcripts failed to suggest a simple pattern for children's spirituality that could do justice to the variety and many levels of spiritual experience, response and attitude that the data contained. A simpler story, such as if a child has these interests or one type of religious faith then he or she will express a particular kind of spirituality, might have been desirable in terms of theoretical parsimony. This and the following chapter present a rather more complex interpretative account, expressed in terms of the properties of a core category. As such it is intended to be a more genuine attempt to draw coherence without losing sight of the inherent depth of the topic studied. Even so, the framework I shall describe and its associated properties, do not exhaustively capture the character of individual children's spirituality. Whilst certain features can be illustrated in selected examples, a great deal is lost by taking a cross-sectional approach to the data. In some respects the most representative way of reporting these results might be to introduce each of the thirty-eight children and their analysis individually. However, such an approach is clearly not suitable to address the aims of this thesis.

A desire to report the results in this way highlights the broadest and most important of the general findings, namely that spirituality amongst children, in so far as it was expressed to me in this research context, had a markedly individual character that seemed to reflect the unique disposition of each child. In other words, the primary influences on a child's spirituality appeared to emanate from his or her personality. When a child was judged to have expressed spirituality (see below, section 3, for details of this 'discernment' process) it almost always seemed both energised and

shaped by the particular personal interests, relationships and concerns of that child. This key feature of children's spirituality as an essentially individual expression has proved difficult to represent in the interpretative framework that follows¹.

In view of this aspect of the data and the researcher's dilemma concerning comprehensive representation of the phenomenon as studied, two individual brief sketches are set out below. These illustrate the different individuality emanating from children's constructions of spiritual areas, and (more generally) serve as initial demonstrations of the character of the empirical data. They were chosen for the contrasts they represent: younger and older age groups, a girl and a boy, a more religious and a more secular view.

5.1.2

Examples: Two Brief and Contrasting Sketches

Ruth

Ruth appeared to be a quietly happy, articulate six year old. She had younger twin sisters and lived with both parents. She attended the local Church of England Sunday school, though she did not recall this weekly activity spontaneously when asked about her weekend routine. Her comments about this Church experience indicated this was not a source of spiritual inspiration for her:

‘Somehow I never want to go, because it is so boring, and you never get to do pictures, and all it is is singing and talking.’

However, she had a pronounced sense of wonder and delight, and an active religious imagination (all elements within the ‘working map’ of spirituality set out in chapter 3). Her individual way of expressing this was primarily in terms of a multi-

¹ Although, one might infer at least a degree of individual heterogeneity from the large and varied number of contexts, conditions and processes etc. that are included in the framework in chapter 6.

sensory, aesthetic and nature inspired framework. For example, this was how she imagined heaven:

‘A mist of perfume, with gold walls, and a rainbow stretched over God’s throne...but a transparent mist, like a..I can’t explain it. Like a smell. A real cloud of smell, a lovely smell..like the smell that you get when you wake up on a dull winter morning, and then when you go to sleep, and you wake up, the birds are chirping , and the last drops of snow are melting away, and the treetops, shimmering in the breeze, and it’s a spring morning..(then added) I suppose it’s not a season at all, not really, because just a day in delight, every day.’

This kind of imaginative response drawing on nature, her senses, and an appreciation of the mysterious transformations that occur in life, pervaded a great many of her comments in other ‘non-religious’ contexts. Indeed this could be traced to the first comments of her first interview. When offered to choose to draw ‘anything at all’ while we chatted she replied:

‘I like nature..[why?].just because I like it. I don’t know.
And it’s so beautiful to be in the world.’

This demonstrates how her own individual signature, an aesthetic appreciation of the natural world, directed the form of her spiritual response which, in her case, was expressed often in explicitly religious contexts such as an image of heaven or receiving a blessing. Furthermore, she seemed to some extent to be conscious of this patterning of individual disposition and spiritual response. For example when considering the kinds of moments in her life which might lead her to think about God she suggested:

‘When I see um..the trees burst into life. In spring I like that.
But when I see the lambs in Wales, oh..it makes me
..oh...leap and jump too!’

The intensity of her responses suggested to her that she might have what she termed 'different senses' that allowed her to be attuned to such things: that spiritual perception was a precious gift. In fact her whole attitude seemed to be one of gratefulness, for nature, for beauty and for her abilities to appreciate these. Certainly the sensory connections she mentioned making, including 'hearing the sun', did suggest a kind of synaesthetic capacity, or at least a capacity to make meaningful connections very readily from this framework. In contrast, other people, in her everyday experience, sometimes seemed oblivious to this:

'It's so nice, the world, the environment, but people destroy the beauty of it..like once my mummy told me that she'd seen someone just dump some rubbish on the road'.

To conclude this sketch, it was noted that Ruth resembled many of her peers in terms of struggling with ideas about death and afterlife, a tendency to construe a sense of mystery through Disneyesque fantasy (e.g. a kind of 'Wynken, Blinken and Nod' image of the universe), and in exhibiting some selective reliance on authoritative world view conceptions (e.g.. see reference to 'mum' in previous quote). Such shared features were overshadowed however by her individual efforts to express her sense of the spiritual according to her own disposition.

Tim

Tim was 10 years old when interviewed. He rejected any religious affiliation, in line with his family of whom only his grandmother was perceived by him to be a Christian. Even this was thought to be simply because she was old and it was her 'last chance' to get to heaven. In such a case (and in contrast to Ruth's above) it was therefore less appropriate to probe the child's conception of traditionally religious spiritual notions such as heaven, blessings, and experiences of the presence of God. Despite this, much of Tim's conversation did touch on themes broadly connected to religious matters - such as animal reincarnation, polytheism, afterlife, morality and free

will.

The distinctive characteristic that coloured Tim's discussions was a sense of inner struggle. In stark contrast to Ruth's framework, for example, allusions to the spiritual were framed as conflicting hypotheses representing a special kind of mental work.

As with many of the other children, this individual 'signature' was present in some of his earliest responses concerning quite ordinary contexts. For example, when Tim looked at the first picture of a young girl sitting pensively by the fire he assumed she was lonely and worried, possibly thinking about her parent's divorce, struggling to make sense of some kind of problem which could not be talked about with others. This uncomfortable tone and 'struggle' framework also characterised Tim's sense of wonder, awe, meaningfulness and mystery.

The following excerpt illustrates some of Tim's spiritual dilemmas: is there a single true God and how can we cope with the mystery of infinity:

'I sometimes think about if there is one God and there is ...everybody well...most people believe in one God and um there's um different people believe in different gods. Which God's real? Um I just can't figure that out. And I sometimes think about after the universe, what's.. uh what's the universe um going on for ever. I just don't know.[what does that feel like?] Well when I'm thinking about the universe that gets me quite annoyed sometimes because I can never think about um...get the right answer or get even near it and um then well things you just wonder.'

His frustrated and struggling, rather than joyous, inspiration, was clear here. At another point he described having had an answer to prayer about which he felt equally undecided and frustrated. He weighed up the options of it being a real answer or a coincidence, concluding:

‘[It] Gets annoying trying to think about it...just cause you can't find the answer and you think your brains is gonna get all scrambled like.’

There were other alternatives that gave him cause to wrestle mentally with the spiritual. For example, he wondered whether religious behaviour was a genuine response or mere ‘habit’ (as prompted by a picture of a boy in need seeming to address the sky, or as he wondered, God). He attempted to define ‘spiritual’ as a feeling of being emotionally moved and recalled that he might have had ‘a lot’ of experiences when younger of something like God’s guiding, ‘shaping your life’ influence. He quite readily described unusual experiences and feelings he’d had when visiting churches, sacred sites, and when thinking his thoughts alone at night. However, these feelings were predominately negative, and he used words such as ‘spooky’, ‘shiver’, ‘cold’, in a manner consistent with his overall framework and disposition. Each time these special moments were balanced by a sense of struggle as to the underlying truth and meaning contained in such mysterious and thought-inspiring experiences. He suggested they all might have been ‘his eyes playing tricks on him’, ‘an illusion of the mind’, ‘coincidence’ or ‘chance’.

He described his perception of life’s qualities in terms of a wonderful feeling (‘I just love that feeling’) that humans have broken free from a bondage that would otherwise have trapped them in an endless routine of mere living. In this also there was a strong sense of difficult mental work involved. When I explored the originality of his perception he explained:

‘[I] Just um thinking about it. Kept on thinking and found it’, reiterating the primacy of mental effort in his approach to this and other areas.

And finally, he indirectly commented on the contrast between his ‘thinking and struggling’ spirituality and that of others which is more direct, emotional but potentially short lived. I had asked him to consider whether children of his age could have religious experiences such as a sense of the presence of God or something like that and

he replied:

‘I think they just look at it and think WOW and uh...forget about it really...Or just um...think about it , but don't think how they were made.’

In other words such children would not, in his view, pursue their thinking far enough for it to qualify as spiritually meaningful according to his individual framework of ‘inner struggle’, of asking the problematic questions.

5.1.3

General discussion of brief sketches

It is suggested that both of these brief sketches demonstrate a far from dormant childhood spirituality. These two cases were not untypical of the total sample; the quality and depth of the content they expressed was not unparalleled² . Importantly, though both children shared an active spiritual dynamic, they present markedly different kinds of childhood spirituality - even if spirituality itself is still loosely defined at this stage.

It is important to note that the kind of individuality illustrated in the spiritual expressions and responses in Ruth and Tim’s cases, (in terms of a sensory aesthetic approach and a mental struggle approach respectively), were not merely features associated with their age group or their gender. Ten year old boys and girls drew on sensory aesthetic and natural world spiritual inspiration, and six year old boys and girls expressed internal conflicts and struggles for meaning. However, for most children it was possible to discern a distinctively personal dominant overlay that filtered both their ordinary responses and their responses in more obviously spiritual dialogues.

Where Coles (1991) refers to children’s ‘spiritual psychology’ , it was perhaps

² I am loathe to talk about children being ‘more’ or ‘less’ spiritual than one another, but at an intuitive level I should suggest that there were others in the research sample, of both ages, who expressed more spirituality than the two children described here.

this general quality of uniqueness that he meant to communicate, akin to a person's unique psychology of personality. Similarly Fowler, in his more recent accounts of stages of faith (Fowler, 1987), has found it useful to explore the echoes of personality in the expression of faith, drawing on Kegan's somewhat speculative theory of self development (Kegan, 1982). However, his approach focuses more on what is common to expressions of personality at different developmental stages rather than the contribution made by individual differences that the data presented here suggested.

As an attempt to sharpen an understanding of children's spirituality, I would argue therefore for closer attention to the unique character of each individual as a starting point for understanding that spirituality. In consequence this suggests the need for rather less focus on the 'correctness' or adult-like nature of particular spiritual content, and on the mediations of age and cognitive stage in the first instance. Theologically, the notion that genuine spirituality is continuous with a person's individual character, rather than something artificial to it, is a time honoured one: grace is regarded as building on nature. Psychologically and pedagogically this insight would seem equally valuable as a rudimentary means of understanding and promoting children's spirituality.

Identifying the close relationship in children between an individual's general psychological tone and their spirituality is not however an easy answer to the issue of definition. Spirituality is drawn closer still under an umbrella of psychology rather than neatly labelled and distinguished from it. As this feature arose from study of the empirical data in case study form, it cannot be cursorily dismissed even if it appears largely to blur the issue of 'what children's spirituality is'. Rather, it would seem to demonstrate two things. First, a need for a particularly sensitive kind of approach that does justice to individual differences (see below: rejecting a 'types' approach). And secondly, an analysis of what spirituality is as something within the psychological domain - that is, which cluster of specific psychological features are represented in children's spiritual expressions (this is addressed by the core category below).

5.1.4

Rejecting a ‘types’ approach to children’s spirituality

Factors affecting spirituality that were more obviously common to different groups of children , such as secular influences, religious teachings and educational development, appeared to be secondary to the configurations of an individual’s psychology that produced spiritual discourse.

Such secondary influences were apparent, but whilst they often coloured the picture, they were not found to be leading the fundamental structure and expression of a child’s spirituality. For example, the subset of children who shared the feature of actively belonging to the Anglican Church did not all share in a particular approach to spirituality evidenced in either what (content) they said or how (style and motivation) they said it.

There were many other influences that groups of children were subject to that one might have considered as potential contributions to distinctive group spiritualities. These included being exposed to divorced or stable families, financial insecurity or prosperity, male or female gender identity and sex typing. If such patterns can in some instances shape spirituality, working with this data set they did not strike me as foundational elements that captured the key features of children’s spirituality. Doubtless groups of children differ from one another as a function of gender, family background and health, but such nomothetic differences did not shape the rudimentary nature of children’s spirituality. Thus I shall not argue for primary classifications of male and female, or stable and ‘broken home’ spiritualities amongst these children.

Should spirituality typed according to age?

Age differences are naturally the most common source of group differences amongst children. In this study, age and intellectual differences were clearly apparent between the two age groups. For example, older children tended to have more

extensive linguistic abilities, somewhat better recall and other memory strategies, and more information and experience on which to base their ideas and interpretations of experience. Without much difficulty therefore, a case could be made for distinguishing features of six year old and ten year old spiritualities. This is not the approach adopted here however, since again differentiating features associated with age and intellectual development held out the danger of reflecting merely those things, rather than the inherent properties of spirituality itself. Nevertheless, age-related differences will be discussed as they arise from discussion of more general properties, but not as a controlling variable.

For example, Tim's comment that other children might simply note an 'oh wow' experience, but not reflect on it 'enough' suggests that a developmental note might be made between an element of 'felt sense' (Gendlin, 1962) associated with an experience and the ability to work at interpreting that experience. Fortuitously Ruth's data appears awash with 'felt sensing' as a counterpoint to ten year old Tim's emphasis on interpretative effort.

That both these elements tend to combine in adult spiritual experience has been suggested by Watts and Williams (1988). Their two-part model recognises therefore the role played by language and thought in experience at every level, and particularly in meaning-making types of experiences such as those reported as spiritual. On developmental grounds however a strict adherence to this two part criterion might pose problems for the younger child, whose interpretative (linguistic and cognitive) capacities are immature (as discussed in chapter 4, p. 149).

On balance, one can note that Tim's suggestion that there is an important dimension of interpretation and mental work involved in spiritual experience, is a wise one, a further insight that perhaps reflects his age. However it would seem clear simply by virtue of their depth and intensity that Ruth's (and many other children's) rather less interpreted experiences cannot be disqualified as inferior. In other words the developmental difference helps to suggest some ways of understanding different

qualities in the data, but seems an unsuitable basis from which to explain it. Furthermore, as it has been noted above, there were frequent cross-over effects in age and gender in terms of the features demonstrated in Ruth and Tim's cases. Some ten year olds expressed primarily 'felt sense' aspects of experience, whilst some six year olds displayed more reflective, analytical approaches.

In addition there were two contra-indications to separating the analysis by age on methodological grounds. First, having data from just two age groups could not support much of a developmental model. And secondly, as Piagetian cognitive stage differences are likely to be the most reliable general source of qualitative differences in development, the age groups chosen for this study are not sufficiently wide to discriminate usefully between them. Further research might be warranted that addressed these issues by drawing data from more than two age groups and more predictably different stages of cognitive development. In the light of comments in chapter 7 about stages in the development of meta-cognition, consciousness and inter-personal understanding, future research might prefer to select age groups on the basis of these mediating psychological influences (for which I argue below) on childhood spirituality.

5.1.5

Conclusory remarks: Adopting idiographic (not nomothetic) organisation

My reluctance regarding the use of this data to draw nomothetic inferences may be partly due to methodological cautiousness. It seems prudent to resist drawing premature conclusions of causality from this data that might foreclose spirituality for certain groups (by age, gender, religion etc.) of children. Such secondary group influences, as I suggest they are, may interact with spiritual expression, but the kind of qualitative methodological approach adopted here should not comment on cause and effect relationships.

Moreover, as I worked with the data I sensed in myself a growing theological

and ethical uneasiness about drawing boundaries around groups of children that might be interpreted as suggestive of greater and lesser spirituality amongst preexisting sections of children's society. Talking with these children taught me that their spirituality could always confound fixed expectations, and my theoretical exposition therefore needed to respect this. The purpose of this first section, acknowledging the 'personality' of spirituality in tandem with the subsequent sections dealing with the development and presentation of a framework model, is an attempt to reflect this requirement.

5.2

Section 2: The discernment process

5.2.1

The need for a core category identified

From a relatively early point in the initial analysis, it was apparent that, in isolation, none of the categories from the 'working map' (Chapter 3) embodied the essence of the many very different instances of spirituality the children's talk suggested to me in explicit and implicit ways. This is not to say that each of those categories and their suggested sub-categories failed to be represented by at least one instance in the data, indeed most were highly represented. (However, some of these may have been cued responses given that this 'working map' was carried into the research setting, at least in my head, therefore an analysis that simply pursued these instances would in fact prevent any theory emerging from the data). The data demanded a different kind of core category. This needed to extend beyond these various instances, whilst including their qualities, if the 'story' of children's spirituality was to be told adequately and insightfully.

In the end, a core category emerged quite unequivocally as I reflected on the analytical and interpretative processes I had applied to reading and selecting key passages from the original mass of data, and as I subsequently re-examined these passages for their common ‘qualifying’ spiritual features. For this reason the following section describes in detail the reflective processes which the different kinds of data prompted in the pre-framework stage of analysis.

5.2.2

Discerning spirituality in different kinds of data

As expected, given the loosely structured nature of the interviews and the limited capacities of children to concentrate on any one topic at length, the unedited data transcripts had consisted of a haphazard mixture of material from which passages indicative of spirituality needed to be selected for further analysis. This process of sifting the total mass of interview material focussed the empirically grounded question of ‘what is children’s spirituality’ more than ever, and thus it was, at least in part, a function of this process to bring forth a definitive core category.

Three broad kinds of material made up the whole, with most children using all three at different times in each interview. These were:

1. religious discourse (5.2.2.1)
2. implicit or intuitively judged spiritual discourse (5.2.2.2)
(of which there were two types: associative and isolated)
3. casual chatter (5.2.2.3).

Illustrated descriptions of each type and the analytical processes involved in reasoning about their spiritual significance follow below.

5.2.2.1

Approaches to ‘explicit’ or traditionally ‘religious’ discourse

In many of the interviews there was material that was overtly religious. Some

of this might be classed as explicit spirituality, such as reports of children's own religious experiences, religious sentiments and personal constructions of faith. Two examples can illustrate this kind of material, from a younger boy and an older girl.

John (age 6) had been explaining his religious beliefs to me. These were clearly Christian and supported by his family though neither John nor his family attended church more than twice a year for Christmas and Easter. I asked how he came to hold his beliefs. In his response he described a religious experience:

'I worked about it and I received..one day..I was with my mum and I begged her..um..for me to go to um..some Church. And we did it and..I prayed..and after that praying..I knew that good was on my side. And I heard him in my mind say this "I am with you. Every step you go. The Lord is with you. May sins be forgiven.'

And later on he described his encounter with the Holy Spirit:

'Well once I went um..in the night and I saw this bishopy kind of alien. I said "how are you?" And he said "I am the Holy Spirit." I did think he was the Holy Spirit.'

Unfortunately, when in his shock he called out to his mum and explained what had just happened, John was told that the Holy Spirit looks like a ball of fire and had his version of events rejected³. He seemed to accept his mother's authority concerning this sighting but added:

'But I often felt the Holy Spirit in me.'

Maggie (10) mentioned moments of both intense doubt and belief in God. Belief was bolstered by explicitly religious experiences of God in special moments she could recall:

(R: What are those moments like?)

³ Many of the contributors to Robinson's adult recollective study of religious experience reported similar rejections of their interpretation of events as children (Robinson, 1983)

M: weird, because I think like he's talking to me. But I never know whether it's him or whether it's just what I want him to say and that's my conscience. I never know. (..R: what sort of times does that happen?) M: When I'm upset or worried about something..... it feels all comfortable and tingling, I don't know, it just, I can't describe it, it's just weird, it's nice.(R: does it last very long?) M: Well, I normally feel it like at night, I mean when I'm on my own and near the end of the day when I am tired, so next day it is all gone.(..R: and do some things that you see remind you of it?) M: No, but churches remind me and I feel all that when I go to the church, same feeling.'

Such material was likely to be central in the analysis for discerning the nature of children's spirituality. However, recollections of dramatic religious experiences such as John's were uncommon in this sample. Sometimes children couched their responses in terms of a recognition that experiences such as these could happen or had happened to them, but their memory was vague. They were also often able to imaginatively project themselves into what such an experience would be like, making use of religious language to express this sense of the spiritual. For example, they would often imagine their feelings on encountering God or an angel in ways that echoed the feelings adults associate with such experiences. Yasmin (6), an Algerian Muslim immigrant, imagined she would know if an angel were close to her because:

'they'd be so delicate, ..soft..you would be able to see them in your mind.'

Whilst Nicola (6) (in the pilot study) imagined how it might feel in a different way:

N: They'd just feel like there was someone behind them and they'd just be really still in their tracks and they'd feel all good at the back of them, and then they'd turn round and

there'd be nothing there, and they'd just stay really still in their tracks and then they'd just hear this flutter of wings and then they'd turn round and see a big golden thing going up in the sky. (R: wonderful eh?...but you've never felt quite like that?) N: No, they only visit you when, well.., when.. what's the word?...they only come down to visit you, if, you know, if you are arguing or if you are really really STEAM-ED UP! Or if you are at the top of your temper and going to burst into hot water and stuff like that, or if you are at the top of your happiness or the bottom of your sadness..(R: mmm, so do you think that might be the same as God being near you, or do you think that might be different?)N: God being near you..you'd feel really really scared and really, really, really good thing behind you..and you'd feel...REALLY, RE-A-LL-Y,..RE-A-LL-Y... something!! (rising intonation throughout; we both laugh in exasperation!) (R: It's difficult to know the right words!) N: No, I don't know the right words, really, really really, you know like, em like (gasp).. 'oh no I haven't done anything wrong'(trembly voice), like that..'

It is established by these examples that the range of feelings associated with adult spiritual experiences can be experienced, within a religious context, by some children too. It was apparent however that in many other instances overtly religious talk was merely religious 'information', reflecting the knowledge base rather than any spiritual basis in the child.

Even this distinction was sometimes complex, since it was important in some cases that a child chose to talk about their religious knowledge at all and which parts of that knowledge came first to their minds. So, whilst the actual discourse by itself might

have lacked a sense of personal or emotional involvement with the material, religious discussion such as this was still potentially significant and worthy of further analysis. This depended on the context of the particular case when it sometimes indirectly pointed to the child's personal orientation towards, and construction of, spiritual issues. For example, Henry (age 6) retold the story of David and Goliath heard in a recent assembly. In itself this was unrevealing, however the boy's preoccupation in drawing (in which he seemed unusually gifted) had for some time been to depict 'strong men', and he drew such a picture in the interview. In his case this connection was the only hint of nascent spirituality that he gave: a brief glimpse that suggested how a religious story might have unconsciously resonated with his psychological concerns about strength, masculinity and his own slight six year old physical frame.

The point illustrated here is that passages that seemed only to report a child's religious knowledge, in some cases echoed a deeper personal motivation. Whilst in this case it was apparently unconscious⁴, the process of drawing together a traditionally spiritual story or language with personal values and concerns is a process at the heart of traditional adult spirituality, in which the religious tradition is explored and mined for elements that resonate at a personal level (and vice versa).

Some further important observations about the explicitly religious material can be made, before moving on to describe the two other kinds of material (implicit and chatter) I distinguished in the analytical process that culminated in the identification of a core category. As I have made clear in previous chapters, this research did not aim to replicate studies of children's religious language, thought and understanding. However, it was particularly important for me to observe closely the characteristics of the religious discourse of these, mostly secular, children. This made it possible to understand the relation between conventionally religious spirituality and a more

⁴ It was not always an unconscious linking process, for example see Freddie's example later in this chapter.

comprehensive conception that could account for children's spirituality as a more natural kind of phenomenon that was not wholly determined by or dependent on religious teaching and understanding. The following four observations contributed to such an understanding: a) children's readiness to introduce religious terms, b) children's resistance to staying with religious discourse, c) children's implicit recognition that there are aspects of experience that call for a dedicated symbolic language, and lastly d) correspondences with the literature on the development of religious understanding.

5.2.2.1a) A majority readiness to use religious language in conversation

First, it was possible to establish that most children, including those outside any faith, were able to engage in religious discussion at some level for short periods in the conversational context of my interviews. Nearly all were easily prompted to make comments using religious language ('God talk') in advance of the interviewer introducing such language. And in some cases, this provided classic examples of spiritual experiences recognisably similar to experiences deemed to be adult spiritual experiences in the literature (Hay 1987).

Such a general facility to use religious discourse was rather unexpected given the predominately secular backgrounds of children in the sample and a high level of ignorance and incomprehension in this area of knowledge. For example, some children⁵ indicated they had no idea what Easter was about or what the inside of a church might look like. Nevertheless, they were often eager to introduce 'God talk' as a discourse of explanation regarding conscience, creation and outer space, amongst other things. Katie (age 6), for example, who had never been inside a church, told me she had recently become the owner of a Bible. I then asked what she thought about God, and she replied:

⁵ This kind of ignorance might have been acceptable amongst children from faiths other than Christianity, but refers here to nominally Christian children.

‘I don’t know yet, because I haven’t read it very long’ (Did you know about God before you got your Bible?) ‘No, not at all.’

This established that she had little coherent understanding of religion. However, earlier on, when discussing a picture of a starry sky she had commented that :

‘You [Rebecca] couldn’t even reach that high..no one can, except God’

and at another point, when discussing whether parts of a person might be entirely personal and private, Katie was asked ‘What sorts of things could somebody know about themselves that nobody else knew?’ and replied:

‘God knows everything.’

And in yet another moment reflecting on how we know things, she determined that her moral knowledge of when she’s being good or bad is God given. However she decided that other kinds of knowledge are beyond human understanding, but may be a special kind of knowledge available to God, such as the mystery of :

‘Like..how um..we get alive.’

It seemed that Katie, like many others, readily referred to religious conceptions in her meaning- making against a background of formal religious ignorance.

5.2.2.1 b) Resisting Religious Language

The second observation about the religious material was that children preferred not to talk about religious matters or use religious language at length. Even amongst children such as John (mentioned above) who relished expressing his theological ideas, there came a point when using a traditional religious discourse became overwhelming, and the subject was changed either by request or simply by default. In the following excerpt John (age 6) was in full flow describing how he ‘saw’ God but then suddenly changed the subject:

‘With my mind and with my eyes. Sometimes I feel

that..um..I am in um..a place with God in heaven and I'm talking to Him.....And um..there's room for us all in God. He..God's..well He is..in all of is...He's everything that's around us. He's that microphone..He's that book. He's even..He's sticks..He's paint..He's everything. Around us. Inside our heart. Heaven. By the way, have you seen Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom?'[a film that had been on television the previous night]

(The reader can imagine the challenge responding to this change of subject presented for me as the interviewer!)

It has been useful to speculate on the possible reasons for this uneasiness with religiously spiritual discourse, though my sense was that different reasons applied in different circumstances for different children. Nonetheless, documenting some of these here helped to add depth to the picture of children's struggles to express spirituality, particularly when limited to religious expression.

For some it may have been a crisis of confidence in using religious terms and concepts which they could not fully understand let alone articulate. Some of the older children were able to articulate their difficulties with this kind of language. For example, Jenny (10) commented on a hymn (religious language) she found meaningful, but when pressed to explain this said :

'you think it's quite easy [when singing it], but when you try to explain it..you don't know which words to use.'

Similarly a Muslim 10 year old girl (Huma) commented about her experience of prayer:

'Praying is the only time you are actually directly speaking to God and you know God is there and you all wait to say thank you to God when you pray..(R: Doesn't it feel

different?) It's one of those things you can't explain..say if someone asked you what this word means, you use it a lot and you know what it means but you can't explain it like the dictionary can..it doesn't really make any sense to the other person.'

Another influence may have been a realisation of embarrassment that in using religious language they had strayed away from the accepted secular discourse endorsed in modern British society (Hay 1990). Four of the older children⁶ referred to this sense of embarrassment. Lee felt that merely admitting to thinking about God was potentially awkward:

'they [people who talk about God] wouldn't want other people to know, because they're embarrassed.'

He even avoided using the first person so as to maintain a distance from this kind of embarrassment. Another boy commented that friends would 'probably laugh' if he admitted to them that he had had a sense of religious presence. Interestingly, two of the Muslim children seemed particularly aware of this dimension of embarrassing tension between religious and secular discourses, but in their cases this was not limited to the public contexts of school and, as one might have expected, a tension with the secular post-Christian world and their Islamic faith. Rather, they identified such discourse as embarrassing within their Muslim families. Huma's comment about being reluctant to admit to personal prayer to her family demonstrates this:

'like they'd do it themselves [family members], but they'd tease you'

and Altman (10) similarly commented that special religious feelings would be best kept to himself rather than shared with friends or family:

'just because they might think I'm stupid or

⁶ That this appeared especially amongst the older group may reflect their inevitably longer enculturation. It was not exclusive to this group however.

something..embarrassing.'

A further reason for apparently resisting the use of religious language for prolonged discussion may have been purely situational. The child's reticence may have been a response to my reticence, as interviewer, to unduly direct them or share my religious ideas with them, which in turn may have dampened the conversational dynamic between us whenever religious language was used by them.

In some cases, however, this ambivalent response (choosing, then abandoning, religious language) may have been a facet of their spiritual awareness itself. Otto (1950) identified the dual potential of spiritual experience to attract (*mysterium fascinans*) or to disturb (*mysterium tremendum*)⁷. It may be that for some children a desire to disengage with discourses that triggered memories in this area indicated something of their insight into their personal spiritual pasts. As Willimon states:

'the experience of coming face-to-face with the living God may be a pleasant or an unpleasant experience. It may provoke love or fear. One may wish to draw near or to run away.' (Willimon, 1987, p.97)

In the light of this too easily forgotten truth that spiritual experiences are not inevitably 'cosy' experiences, it seems important therefore to leave open the final interpretation of children's tendency to 'shut down' whilst talking in this way. But this also indicates that one should respect children's reticence (perhaps evidenced in some children by a disinclination to engage consciously in spiritually expressive discourse at all), as potentially spiritually informed, rather than as indicative of spiritual abeyance.

Whatever the root of this feature of children's spiritual talk, it was clear that explicitly religious language is not a language of choice in prolonged personal discussions amongst children. On the other hand, as the first observation indicated,

⁷ Recalling the introductory sketches of Ruth and Tim, one could suggest that Ruth's joyously grateful disposition was suggestive of Otto's '*mysterium fascinans*', whilst Tim's more negative, struggling approach suggested a '*mysterium tremendum*' kind of reaction. However, neither case would meet the criteria of intensity in Otto's original descriptions.

children easily felt drawn to engage in religious discourse at some level (not necessarily ‘spiritual’) even when they had a very patchy appreciation of its terms of reference.

5.2.2.1c) The sense of religious language’s dedicated role

It was noted that these children’s use of any religious terms was somewhat unexpected, given their secular backgrounds. For some children religious discourse seemed to express a distinctive area of experience and insight which they had some sense that religious language attempted to capture. In this regard their use of religious language sometimes suggested a boundary they wished to draw around experience, to identify what here might be recognised as spiritual qualities of experience. As such, using religious language was an implicit act of spiritual expression, although what they said may not have been obviously spiritual.

For example, many children referred to ‘God’ as an explanation in matters where they had exhausted their own chain of explanations, where Berryman (1995) might say they encountered the ‘limits of life’ - though I would add, in so far as they understood it. Thus God was introduced by them into conversations about the mysteries of creation, life and death subsequent to reflections on the existence and purpose of ‘ordinary’ things in their lives like pets, trees, rules and even themselves. In other words, despite widespread gaps in their religious knowledge and their resistance to talking at length in these terms, religious language had a dedicated role in many children’s expression of certain areas.

The following excerpts help to illustrate this point. Jenny (age 10) expressed how this recourse to religious language happened for her in the ‘ordinary’ context of thinking about who she is and why she is here. She referred back to a conversation we’d had about her memory of sitting in a tree reflecting on the nature of self-knowledge, prompted by her own thought on seeing a ladybird and wondering if it knew where it was in time and space.

‘Well there was the time I told you that I stop and think

“How did I get here and that?”, well that’s when I switch on to God. That’s when I start thinking about Him.’

Thus for her the area where the personal meets the existential is one which calls on a special language: religious language.

Some of the six year olds also found themselves readily drawn from ‘ordinary’ thoughts about features of the physical world, often the sky and or stars, to a religious line of expression. In so doing they seemed to access a mode of description that expressed a sense of ‘more than’ the physical features they had ordinarily perceived. In other words, using religious language represented a choice of words to convey their sense of response that was beyond their appreciation of the ordinary physical facts. Emma (age 6) was asked ‘What do you think about when you are looking up at the sky and the stars?’ (using a picture prompt of a boy looking out of his window), to which she replied:

‘I think about Jesus and things, and I think about little tiny stories about stars. And I think about the song Twinkle Twinkle Little Star and sometimes I sing it..and once there was I time when I imagined it [a story]. It was about when I went to the moon and I saw a star and I went on it, and I saw God under the sky...It was really nice.’

Similarly, Freddie (age 6) found ‘God’ language essential to his discussion of stars and other physical features. He indicated that in his understanding of the ‘ordinary’ physical world, there is a special role for God or the religious that he is in the process of getting to grips with:

‘(R: How do the stars get there do you think?)

Freddie: Well, everything got on earth by God, because he does everything for the earth, because he made all the planets in space, did God. But I don’t think that he makes...he may make some houses, but most houses, and schools and

buildings, I think are made by builders, just like my dad.'

And in the following excerpt, Jack (age 6) finds slipping into religious language (about God) is helpful when describing his experiences of everyday moral conflict and triumph. However, he uses this in a personal (rather than traditionally taught) manner, by expressing his experience in explicitly physical terms (tickles). Note that he ended by diverting the conversation away from such language to talk about swimming:

'(R: What do you think stops you doing a naughty thing?)

J: My brain. Cause if I do something naughty, I feel all funny inside..But God tickles you each time that you do something naughty. ...(R:What about if you do something really good, what does He do then?) J: Feels the same ...Feels the same but... except I feel good inside instead of bad. ... (R: Can you think of a time when you've had that tickly feeling?) J: Yep...Not particularly that I ever have done anything wrong, but I'm sure ...I'm sure at some time...I've had the tickly feeling badly. (R: Perhaps you had it once when it felt good? Can you remember a time like that?) J: Yeah.. ...Yep, yesterday. (R: What happened yesterday?) J: I did my 10 metres.'

Spirituality needs a symbolic language : whether or not it is religious

What is suggested in the preceding examples is that for some children religious language was chosen because it represented a source of suitably symbolic expression, despite the children's intellectual limitations, their predominately secular education and their lack of exposure to religion. In psychological terms religious language, as a symbolic style of expression, enables an individual to draw on a cultural history of shared and evolving meanings in which to contextualise his or her own evolving personal understandings. We repeatedly find meaning in and through symbols.

Jungian psychology in particular has demonstrated how real symbolism points beyond the individual to the other and includes within its reference the known, the unknown and the unknowable (Jung, 1969) . Thus to engage with symbolism, in this instance with religious language, is to make use of a kind of expanded thought capable of an emotional and semantic load that would otherwise remain inexpressible precisely because it is unthinkable (cf. Soskice, 1985) .

In terms of spirituality, symbolic language can seem the only way of expressing the mystery, insight, and values obliquely apprehended as personally meaningful. This function of symbolism is said to be true for adults, therefore how much more so for children who are even more likely to be struggling for words that capture their feeling and experiences. Therefore, understanding religious language as a symbolic code of expression goes some way towards explaining its presence and function in contemporary children's spiritual lives.

However, in the views of some children, religious language was no longer symbolic enough to express their experiences, perceptions and ideas. It did not meet these requirements of 'real' symbols. Maggie (age 10) put it clearly:

'Cos sometimes I wonder whether God is just like an answer to all the questions, like how did the war get there and how did the sun, and how are there days and nights and how did the first person get there...because it's an easy answer but I don't know whether it is true or not.'

Again, Jungian psychology might have predicted this, since it was clear even fifty years ago when Jung was writing that religious symbols were becoming implausible for many people. In this sample, amongst children who felt that the religious language was unhelpful, there was often an attempt to appropriate an alternative symbolic language explicitly as an improvement on the religious. For this reason the matter of a suitable language is mentioned here amongst discussion of religious material rather than in the subsequent section on 'implicitly spiritual' data

material.

Like Maggie above, Bill (10) stated that God was an implausibly simple explanation for creation and the unknown in general. He wanted something more mysterious and meaty. Thus discussions about ghosts and witches encapsulated more compelling questions about belief, meaning and value for him. Symbols of the supernatural were potentially 'real' symbols to his mind, but these were joined by indications that he needed a symbolic code that expressed the personal too. For example, when I probed his sense of mystery, hoping to elicit 'spiritual' talk about existential questions or even religiously framed issues of wonder, Bill responded with quite another kind of mystery that was personally relevant to him:

'murders, some of my family is in prison.'

Unfortunately, I failed to pick up on the significance of this for him and pressed on with prompts about the kinds of mystery that other children had mentioned. He was unable to respond. At a later point he dismissed the reality and mystery of God, implying that for him the greater questions concerned the mystery of people, and Adam as the first person. Perhaps if I had allowed him to explore his vision of mystery represented by the desire to make sense (meaning) of his family situation, he might have found a symbolic code to capture his sense of mystery as a person-centred thing.

For Bob (10), the language of a TV science fiction series, Red Dwarf, allowed him to think creatively about mysteries including a person's sense of identity, the afterlife, and self consciousness. Yet when in his second interview I tried to elicit whether the more traditional language of religion might also be a means for expressing these spiritual notions, he was uninspired. His sense that such symbols failed to capture the unknown seemed to contribute to this. In contrast, he had been struck by the religious practice of the ancient Greeks that formally acknowledged the limitations of human apperception of the divine:

' I mean the Greeks they have a god for everything. They have an unnamed God. Did you know that, [about] the

Greeks? Because they thought there must be a god we've missed out. So there was another one that they just prayed for everything.'

The same boy was extremely eager to tell me his dreams (in which he became a character in Red Dwarf for example), almost as if my kind of questions required answers that came from another realm of consciousness in which creativity and imagination were allowed a free rein. Pursuing this hunch about this being his strategy for broadly spiritual expression, I asked if he'd ever had any dreams about a church in the context of discussing a holiday trip to a historical graveyard. His 'dream' answer confirmed the negative sense this religious symbol held for him as an oppressive remnant of cultural rubble:

'It [the church] caved in on me..the spire fell through and then the rest caved in on top of it. All I could see was a little window in the..where there's like windows in the spire...I mean I wouldn't miss them if the . uh. if everyone knocked every single church in the whole world down. Wouldn't bother me that much.'

This seemed to be a boy craving (and to some extent finding for himself in fantasy and tv) 'real' symbols to express the complexity of life that he had perceived in terms of a vague sense of life's meaning

'sometimes they [his ideas] seem to all fit together in my head like a big puzzle, like a jigsaw puzzle, ..its's like one dream telling me thing.'

Drawing his comments together, one can suggest that Bob was indicating that he had a growing sense of himself in the context of eternity, and a religious impulse thwarted by religion's false sense of knowledge closure regarding these things.

5.2.2.1.d) Comparing and contrasting this data with theories of religious cognition

The third and final observation I made in the process of selecting material that was explicitly religious was that it accorded with many of the statements about the nature of children's explicitly religious understanding made by researchers like Goldman (1964) and Elkind (1970). These authors have reported that children's religious understanding follows the same developmental patterns of thinking described in Piaget's model of cognitive development. Characteristics of the concrete operational stage (age approx 7-11) were apparent in the explicitly religious material in the data reported here also.

For example, Elkind's study of children's understanding of religious identity (1965) showed that, until the stage of formal operations is mastered, children have difficulty understanding the quality of personal commitment that sponsors faith as a Christian or as a Muslim. Instead they adopt a characteristically 'concrete' view of religious identity in middle childhood. Religious identity is perceived as an arbitrary possession conferred to all in a specific set of people through the logic of family kinship (for example, in a Catholic family even the cat is considered a Catholic). Some children in this sample exhibited this style of understanding in relation to their familial secular stance, in certain cases regretting they had not been christened as babies like other children and therefore could not be Christians or believe in a Christian God.

In themselves these kinds of comments and their Piagetian interpretations do not constitute a model of children's spirituality, nor do they claim to. However, in order to discern the character of spirituality revealed by each child individually, such material and an awareness of its debt to cognitive developmental limitations, helped illuminate my analysis and comparison of the different kinds of material, which in turn produced the core category and framework of spirituality. For example, it was illuminating in one case to note how a boy (Andrew, age 6) concretely construed his secular, atheist identity as an inevitable consequence of his mother's atheism and his lack of baptism as an infant. He also firmly stated his rejection of theological accounts of creation and of theistic beliefs in general. Yet when he expressed his sense of ultimate values these

included the special person of Jesus - special in his relation to others such as the sick. And when reflecting on the mystery of death, whilst initially rejecting any positive view of afterlife suggested in religious traditions, he went on to describe his highly original conception of heaven and hell as circular and square respectively:

‘because God’s love never ends, but the Devil’s love does end. So it [Hell] is in a square, because a square has a start and an end, but a circle [Heaven] doesn’t...I believe in God’s love because God made us..didn’t it..God made us and gave us love..so we can love each other..and that’s it.’

The juxtaposition of his ‘concrete’ understanding of atheist identity expressed in some parts of his interviews with these other less dismissive passages of explicitly religious discourse served to focus my attention on what the core characteristics of his spirituality might be. Although his concrete operational style of thinking restricted his perspective in terms of his secular identity, and endorsed the ‘illogicality’ of unscientific theories of creation, he was able to draw meaning, value and wonder from reflections in the more abstract, emotionally structured area of personal relationships. This person-oriented domain of knowledge seemed to be less restricted by the literal logic of concrete thinking, and served as an area in which he could be much more creative and flexible in his musings. Interestingly in this case of apparent intellectual atheism, these reflections not only included, but were especially expressed as, religious insights as described above.

To summarise, it was a significant advantage to be able to identify patterns in the ways children talked about religious matters. This allowed me to discern where expression merely reflected cognitive development in the first instance, and where it surpassed, clashed with or was enriched by the different style of thinking associated with the middle childhood period. As Alex’s example suggests, this began to point towards a special role for expression in the domain of personal relationships, and

contributed to the required dimensions of a children's spirituality 'core category'. This process was also facilitated by identifying the patterns of eagerness and reluctance associated with the use of traditionally religious language by children. This established that such language still played a role in children's discourse, though more effectively when it was on their own terms to express personal ideas and feelings rather than when pursued as an intellectual body of knowledge or interest. At a general level, it was also important to the analytical process to be faced with decisions about 'religious material' that served to focus my sense of some distinction between spiritual and non-spiritual children's talk.

5.2.2.2

Implicitly spiritual discourse: Associative and isolated types

The second kind of material was data that suggested what I felt was spirituality at an implicit level. That is to say, it was data suggestive of spirituality in the absence of any traditional terminology such as the religious or the metaphysical. These passages required the most intuitive treatment. I already had the 'working map' categories as guides to how implicit forms of spirituality might plausibly be manifest amongst children on the grounds of psychological development and of what is known about forms of adult spirituality. However, just as with religious discussion, it was clear that there was nothing inevitable about discussion of values or of mystery, for example, that ensured that spirituality was being tapped. Furthermore, there were plenty of instances that seemed to fall outside the working map categories which nevertheless seemed (intuitively) significant to the child's spiritual make-up. I distinguish two forms of this: associative and isolated.

In a number of cases the analytical process for identifying these implicitly spiritual instances was helped by converging patterns in the data. This is to say when a child's discussion of what seemed to be an implicitly spiritual theme echoed or foreshadowed a more explicit articulation. The implicit spirituality could be discerned

through its association with more explicit or traditional spiritual language and ideas. For example, Freddie (6) repeatedly discussed issues about friendship and reconciliation in his own life and fantasies in a way that suggested these themes represented something profound that was both of personal and universal concern - that is, fundamental to his world view and by extension his 'spirituality'. This could be confirmed in a conventional sense in his case since on one occasion such implicitly spiritual discussion seemed to have been prompted by some thoughts about his view of creation and God's role (versus his Dad's, a builder - see above, p. 218) . Whilst on another occasion, the same child followed up a discussion about the value of friends, good relationships (and his difficulty maintaining these) that seemed implicitly spiritual in his case, with

'God's the kindest person I know, I think...because he never shouts or tells you off, because he never even speaks to you apart from perhaps when you're dead'.

In both instances converging or associative evidence suggested that his discussion of these aspects of his personal and social world were spiritually significant for him since they were associated in his mind with his personal faith. Thus, material was judged to be implicitly spiritual when such associations could be discerned.

There were many other instances where such convenient confirmation in the form of association with traditional spiritual language was not available. The implicit spirituality I felt in this kind of material had seemed awkwardly unqualifiable, at the pre-framework stage. This kind of 'isolated' extract often suggested a form of emotional sensitivity or philosophical reflection. Although the quality of such material might be impressive to find amongst children at the ages studied, there was no obvious rationale for labelling it as 'spirituality' per se⁸. It was specifically through a process of searching for a common thread underlying such passages that was also shared by

⁸ Such data had emerged from conversations guided along the themes identified by the working map, but did not always directly reflect any of the categories. In this sense it was very loosely connected to my broadly defined framework of spirituality that, as was stated in chapter 3, went beyond religiously expressed spirituality. However, in the form of real data, this idea of spirituality now demanded further clarification.

explicitly spiritual discourse (and by the ‘implicit associative’ passages) that this intuition ‘made sense’. This identification of a common thread corresponded to the emergence of a putative core category and its subsidiary dimensions, which could then be tested against further passages (see Chapter 6).

Examples of this isolated form of spirituality characterised Jackie’s (age 6) and Harriet’s (age 10) interviews. Jackie expressed an emotional and insightful sensitivity to experience. This was evident in her sense of values for example, since unlike some six year olds who were unable to suggest anything that was special to them or others who settled on such things as sweets, Jackie replied

‘it’s hard to choose because I’ve got so many things that are special’

and went on to list a precious china house she cherished, people, and her pet dog. In a similar vein, whilst she professed conscious indifference to formal religion encountered at school, she admitted to a vaguely ‘nice feeling’ during assembly prayers though she didn’t participate in them. She tried to explain this as

‘like it seems like..um..no unkindness’

and proceeded to describe how she’d become aware of her own unkindness to a friend and had been prompted to put a stop to that.

Harriet, a very matter-of-fact 10 year old, had said very little of interest in her first two interviews. I had been unable to spark off discussions with her that tapped enthusiasm or emotion in other areas, and she was clearly unimpressed with religion in so far as she had heard about it in school. In her final interview however, Harriet suddenly came alive with philosophical questions, though not traditionally spiritual questions. This flow of questions covered the nature of thought as never ending, leading her to wonder about the mind and brain relationship, immediately followed by questions about the nature of language (how did things come to have their names). In turn, this flow of unanswerable questioning (largely uninterrupted) led her to wonder about the origin of the universe and people (stopping to mention her rejection of the

Biblical version along the way). Finally she suggested that, faced with such mystery yet yearning for meaning,

‘perhaps we’ve got to like ask the clouds. The clouds have
been there millions and millions of years’

in a way that perhaps echoes American Indian forms of spirituality. I then asked if she felt there was some organising principle behind it all and she replied, again drawing on images from nature, saying:

‘well there must be somewhere, somehow, else how would
it keep reproducing. Like it [?] made a flower, a dandelion,
where did the wind come from to blow all the petals off to
make them fall on the floor to make more?....(whisper) It’s
puzzling.’

These two girls illustrate, therefore, how children sometimes expressed profound, personal, sensitive and, as in this last example, searching philosophical reflections concerning their existence, yet held back from anything one might confidently identify as traditionally spiritual. In determining a core category for children’s spirituality, I was determined that such ‘isolated’ kinds of implicitly or potentially spiritual material would find a place, just as the ‘associative’ kind of material would. The experience of interviewing a number of different children suggested a continuum existed between those who perceived things like this as questions or principles, those who made unconscious or conscious associations to religious attempts to express such questions and suggest meaningful ways of answering them, and at the far end of the continuum those who had experienced religious insights directly and personally. Thus the kind of comments made by a child like Harriet could not be dismissed as irrelevant to an emerging spirituality, since in others it was apparent that such questions had led them on to construct spiritual answers or meanings. Equally, in a small number of cases, there were children who seemed to avoid even these implicit kinds of expression in favour of exclusively pedestrian, materialistic discussion devoid

of such curiosity or indications of inspiration. Thus, to distinguish between these cases, children's spirituality required a description that included the merely implicit material.

5.2.2.3

Casual Chatter

The third kind of material was apparently insignificant chatter, such as accounts of the school lunch menu or about the gadgets on their new bicycle. For most children this kind of material was the main ingredient of their interviews, that served to build up and maintain a friendly trust with the interviewer, and thereby facilitated the expression of more intimate and spiritually sensitive material from time to time during the conversation.

Once again, it was not always a clear cut decision that all such material should be excluded from consideration as representative of children's spirituality. However banal the topic, it was evident that sometimes this chatter served a specific purpose in terms of their spiritual expression, beyond that of merely making dialogue of any kind possible. In the process of discerning which passages pointed to the nature of children's spirituality, it was evident, as we have already seen in discussion of explicitly spiritual material, that such chatter provided a much needed refuge for some of the children, and that this was sought at different points in the conversation by different children.

For some even the most implicit kind of spiritual expression, material that just hinted at rather than fully exposed the child's spirituality, was unappealing and difficult to stay with. In such cases, it seemed casual chatter helped the child avoid being drawn into dialogue of a deeper nature. For example, towards the end of the interviews I often asked a question about experiencing a very special feeling in a beautiful or special place, using the pictures of rainbows, waterfalls and fantastic skies as a reference. It was possible to sense when even this kind of question might be too personal and sensitive for children who had so far been reluctant to discuss emotional or intimate

perceptions , so I sometimes tentatively suggested that some other children occasionally had told me about such special or even spiritual feelings and asked them to comment on this as a phenomenon. For a number of children, this approach worked as a key to unlocking their previously guarded replies, and for a few moments at least they related to these ‘other children’s’ experiences. Bob (age 10), however, could not be shifted from his ‘casual chatter’ about his football fantasies, when I tried this in his last interview:

(R: Sometimes when I show people some of these pictures, they say that when they’ve been somewhere a bit like any of them, or they’ve been to some other place they thought was beautiful, some say they can feel like God is in those places..something like God, maybe not God exactly. Do you know what they mean, or do you think they’re mad?)

B: ‘Well I don’t know really, I had a couple more dreams, things like football ones and that. It was brilliant. I find that like I’ve got Brazilian connections and end up playing for Brazil, [that I’ve] got a Brazilian uncle...’

As has already been mentioned in the earlier section on explicitly religious discourse, for some children the refuge in casual chatter was more conscious, and might be interpreted in different ways to reflect characteristics of children’s spiritual nature. A number of the children commented that ‘it is hard to think about things like this’ as a transitional statement to casual chatter. What was ‘hard’ they perceived variously as their linguistic or knowledge limitations, although there was an indication in some cases that the child had achieved insight into the nature of the material - that spirituality specifically concerns those issues which are at the boundaries of what can be known, regardless of our vocabulary or knowledge. In such cases the child was sometimes able to feel encouraged by this insight and pursued the spiritual discourse a little longer, but at other times it was used as a rationale for changing back to casual

chatter.

Another important contribution that this casual chatter material made was in providing the background to each child's general abilities, not least their linguistic facility and their motivation to converse with me at all. Such information could then be examined in the context of what they did say of an explicitly or implicitly spiritual nature. For example, it was clear that a few children were feeling generally shy or reluctant to cooperate even when discussing what they'd had for lunch or what they liked doing at weekends. In such cases this was relevant not only to my approach to questioning about deeper matters, but also necessitated a different interpretation of reluctance to elaborate when prompted about spiritual and personal issues.

However, in terms of identifying a core category that could represent children's spirituality in the data as a whole, this third kind of material was most important in its function as 'control' material, since I was able to reflect on my analysis (key passage selection and memo writing processes) and ask what was it about this casual chatter material that distinguished it as 'non-spiritual' - and therefore, by implication, what did the other kinds of material have that positively suggested spirituality.

Summary

To summarise, following my pilot work, I had become convinced that children's spirituality was rarely contained within a single discourse (such as the religious) or prompted by a singular set of cues (such as recall of peak moments or anomalous experiences). This realisation guided my decision to conduct loosely structured, wide-ranging discussions with the children participating. Having broadened my sights in this respect at the data collection stage, it was essential at the analysis stage to examine systematically how spirituality suggested itself in different kinds of material. Identifying precisely how I was informed by these three kinds of material, explicitly spiritual, implicitly spiritual and casual chatter, was a significant step towards discerning the nature of children's spirituality and, in particular, a core category that

could represent this at a psychological level. This was achieved through a process of reflection on the total database, a process of distinguishing the three kinds of material and their different contributions to my emerging sense of children's spirituality from these interviews, and by a process of comparison between these three routes to insight.

The analytical 'result', that is the attempt to extract coherent and definitive properties from the case studies and different kinds of passage identified here, is presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 6

The Analytical results : A core category framework

Introduction

The analysis of and reflection on the data demonstrated many different kinds of significant expression which collectively suggested a measure of spirituality held in common. The framework presented in this chapter was derived to represent an identification of a specific range of psychological and other aspects that seem to constellate in these significant passages. In short, a conclusion was reached which stated that it was possible to describe much of the nature of children's spirituality in terms of a demonstration of a particular kind of consciousness, referred to here as 'relational consciousness'. Thus the framework suggests an original way of specifying or defining the necessarily expansive nature of children's spirituality.

This chapter has three main sections. The first (6.1) introduces the basic outline and idea of the framework. The second (6.2) illustrates what is meant by the core category in a general sense. The third section (6.3) however is the heart of this chapter, as it describes the elements of analytic framework in detail and with further illustrations. The subsequent chapter (7) will reflect on the implications of this analytical 'result' in terms of the developmental psychological literature on consciousness and inter-personal understanding.

6.1

Section 1: The nature of the framework

As has been described in the previous chapter, extensive analyses of the data were completed before any framework was applied. This included line by line analyses of themes in complete transcripts in an initial batch of interviews, and line by line

analyses of selected key passages¹ from each child's interviews. This resulted in the creation of case study style memos for each of the children, and the development of category memos for a number of recurring themes represented in a cross section of the data. The case study memos were subsequently thematically analysed in their own right as 'data'. From this it was possible to describe and examine three broad types of data contributing to an emerging characterization of children's spirituality. Following the practice of grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1990), the framework described below was suggested by the data (and my experience of analyzing it) rather than being imposed on the data a priori. Once a core category and framework began to be identified by these iterative analytical procedures, the key passages of data were reanalysed for the last time in the light of this framework.

It is not possible to test the 'goodness of fit' of a grounded theory framework, especially in this diffuse area, in any absolute sense, but it was my experience that using the framework to go back to the data again 'made sense' of that set of data. In particular it helped make explicit my earlier intuitive sense of those parts of the data that might be characterised as evidence of 'children's spirituality'. The validity of this framework (namely the core category and its many dimensions) is claimed therefore only in terms of its helpful organisational and descriptive features as an heuristic in my research process. However, it is offered here in the hope that others may also find this a helpful and novel way to capture the nature of children's spirituality. With this in mind, the framework is proposed in terms that seem broad enough to be applied to any similar data, and to uncover the common psychological dimensions and features of the phenomenon, with the caveat that these were mostly expressed in accordance with individual patterns in personality (see chapter 5.1, p. 195). To this extent the framework may have the potential to serve not only as a guide to understanding this research data, but also to identify the variety of directions that could be significant when

¹ Selected passages represented on average about one fifth of the whole transcript for each interview.

attending to children's spirituality in other contexts such as in the home, at school, or in the religious setting. As with many models, it does not claim to account exhaustively for every instance that might be indicative of spirituality. It does attempt, however, to abstract and consolidate the main features of children's spirituality which I determined the different kinds of data indicated.

6.1.1

Introducing the core category and model framework in outline

Following Strauss and Corbin's approach to grounded theory analysis (1990), the data and analytical products were interrogated to expose a core category that seemed to be 'telling the story' of the phenomenon being studied. In the framework of children's spirituality presented here, the core category which drew together all the different kinds of relevant data (see chapter 5.2, p. 206) was a compound property of 'relational consciousness'. In brief, children's spirituality was identified by a distinctive property of mental activity², profound and intricate enough to be termed 'consciousness', and remarkable for its confinement to a broadly relational, inter- and intrapersonal, domain. The ramifications of meaning denoted by this term will be extensively discussed later in this chapter. A skeletal outline only is presented here.

What is referred to as 'the framework' is in fact quite a simple arrangement of elements that function like satellites around the phenomenon-defining core category. The constituent parts of these elements further contributed to the understanding of that category. Five elements were considered in relation to spirituality in terms of 'relational consciousness': contexts, conditions, strategies, processes and consequences. These elements ensured a systematic interrogation of the core category from a variety of perspectives with the aim of providing as comprehensive a description and understanding of the core phenomenon as possible.

² The term 'mental' is not used to suggest this phenomenon is only an intellectual or cognitive quirk, but rather gathers together the psychological functions of cognition, emotion, action and sensation.

6.1.2

Brief Summary of Elements

'Contexts' referred to the main forms or types the core category took - that is to say, the contextual forms in which it was manifested. Examples of contexts included self-consciousness (a recursive consciousness of self in relation to personal identity), consciousness of self in relation to other people, consciousness of self in relation to God.

Consideration of 'Conditions' directed attention to the question of how the contexts were expressed, identifying any special conditions associated with the core category's presentation in the data. These included particular discourses, for example where the phenomenon was expressed in religious language, in biographical language, in story, in pretend play, or in particular topics of discussion such as expressions about place, time or values.

The core category was also examined in terms of any particular 'strategies' that seemed to maintain or mediate the phenomenon's presentation. Many strategies were identified, some of which were explicitly acknowledged by the children, others were made use of implicitly. Strategies of mental concentration, philosophising, imaginative activity and prayer were amongst examples of this element.

A related, but more generic, examination of the core category was considered under the heading of 'processes'. This ensured an exploration of patterns of change in the phenomenon; its dynamic or developmental history over time. Attention to the processes of spirituality as identified in 'relational consciousness' allowed consideration of two kinds of change: local and long term. Local changes monitored what happened to spirituality during a single instance in an interview, for example did it get elaborated, cut short, digress or gradually emerge. More long term changes, such as what course spirituality was seen to take over the child's life span, were noted in terms of whether children reported a diminishing or increasing sense of experiences contributing to the

core category.

Finally, 'consequences' took account of the apparent or reported effects of the phenomenon's manifestation in an individual. Again, in some cases the child was aware of these explicitly, but in others these consequences were ascertained through implicit references. Examples included feelings of calm, confusion, being moved, being amused and finding meaning.

6.1.3

How the analytical framework helped capture the essence of the data

In the detailed analysis phases of this research, two patterns seemed to appear repeatedly in the memo writing³ as I reflected on the different kinds of data. Neither of these patterns had been explicitly indicated by the categories of the working map. In general terms, these two patterns were that significant passages of data often indicated:

- 1) an unusual level of consciousness or perceptiveness relative to other passages for that child, and
- 2) this was often in the context of how the child related to things, especially people including themselves and God.

Taken together, the specification of 'relationship' as a feature qualified the kind of consciousness being identified.

In passages described as being in the 'implicitly spiritual' category, these patterns were especially noticeable (in the absence of more traditional features) as the distinguishing features that had hinted that spirituality was being expressed. Thus these were often the patterns which prompted a further investigation of such a passage for a rationale for understanding it as spiritually rich, such as an associative link to less obscurely (i.e. traditional in terms of religious content and emotion) spiritual material

³ Crude quantitative measures can suggest evidence of this. Text searches for the key terms 'conscious*' and 'relat*' in the case memos (that document the analysis of selected passages for each child) found that 71% and 82% of such memos, respectively, had a number of references to these emerging analytical themes.

elsewhere in the transcript. Having identified these distinguishing features in implicitly spiritual data, their presence was traced in passages of other kinds of data also. In this way a connecting link was found that could bring together all the contributions made by the data (as described in Chapter 5.2). In plain terms this involved returning to less obscure (or more adult-like) spiritual passages (such as accounts of religious experiences and personal religious insights), to find if these passages also contained elements of special consciousness and a theme of relationship.

It was clear that this would not only mean 'consciousness' or 'relationship' in their narrow senses. In the first instance, 'consciousness' here referred not only to more than being alert and mentally attentive, but also comprised more than had been described by the category of 'awareness' in the working map (chapter 3.2, p.127) which focused on discrete moments of unusual awareness. Very often the quality of consciousness described here suggested a distinctively reflective consciousness, or as it is termed in developmental psychology, meta-cognition. This entailed some degree of awareness on the part of the child of the remarkable nature of his or her own mental activity in certain contexts. It was often this apparently objective insight into their subjective response which fostered a new dimension of understanding, meaning and experience (of meta-consciousness) in itself. The apparent sense of objectivity of themselves as 'subject' seemed particularly important in the facilitation of an ability to perceive their world in relational terms. 'Relational' was not applied in a narrow sense either - that is, it was not limited to discussion of friends, family and foes. However, if extended to have various relational dimensions such as 'I -self consciousness', 'I - others consciousness', 'I - God consciousness' and 'I - world consciousness', the dual patterning did appear in a broad selection of the data. In each case the child's (explicit or implicit) sense of being in relationship with something was demonstrated by what they said, and crucially this sense was a special sense that extended and added value to their ordinary or everyday perspective. In this compound of 'relational consciousness' therefore there seemed to be a rudimentary core of children's spirituality, that could

account for religious experience, meaningful aesthetic experience, mystical and moral insights, personal and traditional responses to faith, mystery and being, in equivalent terms .

6.2

Section 2: 'Relational Consciousness' illustrated at a general level

It is possible to illustrate in a general way the dual patterns that comprise the core category by returning to some of the examples of data already presented in this thesis in Chapter 5⁴.

Ruth's (age 6) (p.196) brief sketch included her sensual description of heaven. In this she referred to 'waking up' and 'noticing' as key elements in her spiritual response, both of which seem to indicate the role of a different quality of consciousness as crucial to her experience. Her relational component in this was suggested as a strong sense of relation to the natural world as something which was full of gifts for her and deserved her respect and love in return. This sense of intimate relationship also had reverberations in her relationship with herself, as seen in her self-conscious insight of a symmetry in her own desire to leap for joy like the lambs.

In the other brief sketch, many of Tim's (age 10)(p.198) examples were direct comments about the different kind of consciousness the spiritual domain seemed to engender in him, for instance the uncomfortable awareness of his brains feeling 'scrambled'. The relational component in his case was represented mainly in terms of struggling to achieve a comfortable relationship within himself. Much of the content he pondered, such as about the eternity and creation of the universe or the existence of a single true God , was directed back to questions about and feelings of his own sense of identity. The central relational issue that appeared to colour his rather anxious,

⁴ As an aid to cross referencing, where I cite an example of a child already mentioned in chapter 5, I shall give the page number of that earlier reference in brackets. I do not offer page cross references within this chapter as this might have the effect of cluttering my expression.

struggling expression of spirituality was that of trust: were feelings and insights associated with these distinctive products of his own consciousness trustworthy partners with whom constructive relationships might be made or were they merely 'tricks of the mind'? In his classmate's example in section 5.2, Maggie (age 10) (p.208,220), similarly struggled over the nature of trust in her relationship with insights and feelings which might merely be the machinations of conscience, one form of consciousness, or something more divinely inspired. In her attempt to isolate features that might distinguish the more mundane consciousness from the other, she notes the 'comforting' quality of her putatively spiritual experiences. Such a property is a natural one exchanged between friends in relationship, thus suggesting her sense of a special defining relational quality to these forms of consciousness.

A number of further illustrations can be drawn from the brief excerpts already given from other children. As such examples were selected in the discussion of other matters in section 5.2, it would seem rather convincing evidence that data not specially selected to illustrate the core category can nevertheless lend support to this case.

In Jenny's (age 10) (p.214,217) example, that consciousness took on a different quality was indicated by her phrase 'switching on to God'. And the relational nature of this was evident in both its source in and application to questions about her sense of identity, her creation and her existence. Developing a knowledge of oneself would seem to be a foundational relationship from which basis relationships with others, the world and God can then be negotiated and valued in a new way. Interestingly, she described at another point in her interviews that this 'switching on to God' engendered a rather 'tense' feeling, suggesting that in her relationship with this area she remains intrigued but somewhat anxious. The same pattern seemed to characterise her own relationships with friends and family, not least in an account of how she called in prayer for God's help in mending a fractured relationship with a friend. The pattern was also apparent in another instance in which a less tense but equally profound, moving and 'different' feeling in her consciousness was consequent

upon appreciating her elder sister's engagement following a series of unhappy relationships.

John (age 6) (p.208,213-4)) was the precociously religious child who had described 'hearing God in my mind' when praying in church and seeing the Holy Spirit in bed one night. His explanatory language to describe his experiences favoured images of his conscious activity: God was 'in my mind', 'with my mind', 'felt in me'. One good reason for this might have been the recognition that, as such, others could not so easily tamper with his experiences as they did in the case of his Holy Spirit vision. He insisted that he had nevertheless 'felt the Holy Spirit in me', redefining the kind of consciousness this experience had prompted. In each of John's descriptions of religious experiences of spirituality a close personal presence was suggested, thus in his case 'relational consciousness' was manifested in the form of the child's sense of relationship to God. Jack (age 6)(p.219) was another example of this. His description of a moral experience as a 'tickly feeling' in the brain conveyed the special nature of consciousness he was aware of at such times. That this was attributed to coming from a source outside the ordinary confines of his consciousness, namely from God, illustrates the relational nature of his case.

Yasmin (age 6)(p.209) and Nicola (age 6)(p.209) spoke about angels. Yasmin made clear how a sense of these was achieved, namely 'seen in your mind', a special product of her consciousness. Nicola's example draws out the relational nature of such experiences, as angels are described as visitors befriending people only when the extremes of their personal emotional boundaries seem overly stretched. Possibly Nicola's rich description of such intense emotional experiences was an attempt to depict the nature of these as different from ordinary consciousness of emotion. Bob (age 10) (p.221,230) was memorable for his repeated references to dreams in his interviews. Where these other children had located the spiritual in the special activities (often relational) of their conscious minds, Bob seemed to suggest that a more radically different kind of consciousness represented his experience of spiritually associated

matters. Contemplating his sense of ultimate mystery and meaning he described the feeling as:

‘pictures going through my head, like dreams or something..they all seem to fit together like a big puzzle....like one dream in all, like telling me things.’

Once again this different sense of consciousness is credited with relational qualities, as a means of communication within and between himself and life’s mystery. Referring to dreams, as Bob did here, was a way many children (more than 1/3) used to express the unusual nature of their consciousness of the spiritual.

As has been stated above and illustrated amongst the examples here, defining the consciousness associated with spirituality as ‘relational’ is not limited to talk about relationships per se. However amongst the examples already given Freddie (age 6)(p.218, 226) , Andrew (age 6)(p.223) and Jackie (age 6) (p.227), such talk was a central feature of passages conveying clues to their spirituality. For Jackie ‘heaven’ conjured up the relational concept of ‘no unkindness’, and prompted self-conscious recognition of her own shortcomings with friends. The derivations of Andrew’s innovative mental pictures of heaven and hell as circles and squares respectively were given in terms of God’s unending love for us and the Devil’s inferior, finite ‘love’. This encapsulated not only his insight into the nature of God and His relationship with us, but also led him to reflect on the potentially sacred nature of relationships between people:

‘God made us and God gave us love, so we can love each other.’

The power of this relational property as central to Andrew’s spirituality can be appreciated by recalling that he otherwise had rejected belief and faith in God, yet at this closing stage of his final interview he prefaced his comments above by saying: ‘I believe in God’s love’. At the end of the interview he was asked to imagine he might have three wishes and to choose what these could be. All of these displayed a clear

relational ethic: 'nasty people would be good people', 'rich people give some money to the poor people' and whilst the final wish would be 'something for myself' he concluded he would 'share it with someone else'. It is suggested therefore that simply by identifying and examining his personally meaningful images, his special sense of the value of relationship was brought into consciousness and gave us access to his spiritual code.

Finally, also previously mentioned, Freddie (age 6)(p.218,226) epitomised how talk about relationships captured his spiritual consciousness. Having slipped into a religious language as a way of conveying his sense of the physical world's existence (i.e. God had made the world except for those parts his Dad had built), Freddie then effortlessly slipped into discussion about his own difficulty relating to others in a positive way (he was regularly attacking other children) as if religious discourse and relational insights were totally equivalent in his mind. This discussion included his recent conscious insight into himself in relation to others by means of an interpretative identification with Grumpy's transformation of self in the film version of Snow White and the Seven Dwarves:

'The earth's so good [that God made], but sometimes somebody feels really sad, and like on Snow White, you know, Grumpy like, he feels very sad and grumpy ..but when he gets into know about life, he thinks more better about it, about Snow White and things like that, because Snow White being in trouble by the Evil Queen, then he cares and when she dies, then he really cares, and when she comes back alive again, he cares even more. So I think Grumpy and Snow White learned about how clever and good life can be. At the start he doesn't know nothing about life, so he don't like life and the planet of God and really later on he finds out all about it...sometimes *I* get really

grumpy at school and then I thought about how life could be
and how happy I could be if I started to try and not to be
grumpy no more.'

Thus, when Freddie considered his religious views about creation, his personal conception of spiritual values was triggered. In this, his emerging and transformative self-consciousness was documented in the context of insights about human relationships in general, and also in the yet wider context of human-divine relations as subjects of the 'planet of God'⁵.

Summary Comment

By revisiting the examples of children already introduced in the previous chapter it has been possible to illustrate the diverse ways in which relational consciousness appeared as a common underlying thread in much of the data. It was for this reason that relational consciousness was identified as the core category in this analysis, and made subject to more detailed analysis in terms of its constituent elements and dimensions.

6.3

Section 3:

Relational Consciousness illustrated in specific terms : its elements

6.3.1

The Character and function of the elements of the framework

Using the framework of five elements contributing to the core category provided a method for systematically examining the distinctive properties of any excerpt of data,

⁵ At another level a link between the Disney story and the Christian beliefs he has just mentioned may be suggested. The dawning, transforming self-consciousness of Grumpy as a consequence of Snow White's unjust death at the hands of the evil witch and her subsequent 'resurrection', echo the Christian myth, at least in the way Freddie unconventionally retells the story. Such a link may have unconsciously resonated in him allowing the Disney account to stand alongside his account of his religious conceptions and sentiments. This also finds parallel in Fowler's account of the mythic-literal stage of faith.

and importantly, provided a means by which the core category (and therefore children's spirituality) could be more richly described. Thus for each example, one might ask which types of context, of condition, of strategies and consequences were demonstrated. And by locating the example in its interview context and in information about the child's background context, it was also often possible to ask what kinds of processes of change the key phenomenon of relational consciousness had been subject to.

With the exception of 'contexts' (for which just 4 main types were identified), each of the elements was represented by a long list of different types. This in itself represents the range of diversity within the common presentation of children's spirituality as 'relational consciousness'. However, this makes description of each element in isolation somewhat artificial, since for any particular example a particular type of context (e.g. I-God consciousness) might be given a distinctive character by very different conditions (e.g. a language of religious faith or a game), and yet further moulded by different strategies (e.g. imagining or reasoning). Thus it is little wonder that so many different consequences were also represented in this data.

Nevertheless, the contents of these 'types' lists (given below) are informative because they constitute a range of criteria from which children can draw to express spirituality. As a result, identifying these serves to locate more precisely than heretofore the different functions and roles played by the various manifestations of the spiritual in children's experience - for example, naming 'questioning' and 'emotional focusing' as strategies that mediate their spiritual expression. It is also significant that many, if not all, of the attributes within these lists are normal processes and conventional content in children's psychology (e.g. playing, imagining, concentrating; games, stories, autobiography), since this locates children's spirituality within an entirely accessible and

natural domain⁶ . This kind of framework description was imperative given the unforeseen richness of the empirical data gathered in this research amongst children not specially selected as spiritually precocious.

The types that gave form to examples of spirituality in this data are now described in terms of their function as an element of the core category. That is, as a type of context, condition, strategy, consequence or process.

⁶ It can also be argued as reasonable on theological grounds, since if God is believed to have created the natural world, including our natural psychological processes, then what need could he have to operate in some specially dedicated way outside of these to effect our sense of relationship with the divine. It makes more sense that his natural world, including our ordinary psychological processes, is the vehicle for spiritual encounter without resorting to special effects or tactics.

RELATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS

CONTEXTS

child-God consciousness
 child-people consciousness
 child-world consciousness
 child-self consciousness

CONDITIONS

religious language
 language of beliefs , incl. death
 autobiographical language
 language of fiction
 language of play and games
 language about time and place
 language about values and morals
 language of science and technology
 language of the natural world
 language about people and relationships

PROCESSES

avoidance
 sidetracking
 'third-personising'
 sliding between contexts
 forcing a conclusion
 magnification
 self identification
 interiorising
 forgetting
 changefulness

STRATEGIES

explicit:

mental/physical withdrawal
 focusing, concentration
 seeking relation or dialogue
 seeking/exploiting aesthetic/sensory
 stimulation

'philosophising'

implicit

meandering questions, puzzling
 imagining
 reasoning
 searching for meaning
 moralising
 staying with a mood
 dreaming
 playing, escaping reality
 concrete/abstract combining

CONSEQUENCES

calmness
 peacefulness
 holiness
 goodness
 oneness
 impressed
 wonder
 quest for understanding
 new clarity
 sense of worth
 thankfulness
 strangeness
 perplexed and frustrated
 inner conflict
 embarrassed
 ridiculed
 undermined
 search for supportive comparison

Figure 6.1 : The Elements of the Relational Consciousness framework for children's spirituality

6.3.2

Illustrating and Examining the elements of the core category

6.3.2.1

Contexts

This element attempts to account for the broad contextual forms in which the core category was manifested. Four main types were identified involving the child displaying or expressing relational consciousness in different relationship settings.

a) Child-God consciousness: In this context the material was framed in terms of the child's sense of relationship to God. This was naturally the closest to traditionally conceived notions of spirituality and could be applied as a descriptive label for the explicitly religious experiences a few of the children reported. Many more children were able to imagine what it would be like to have such an experience⁷ and this would also be an example of the child-God consciousness context. In a looser way, this type accounted for examples of the child simply talking about their particular concept of God and the meaning and emotion that prompted in them, since this also distinguished the context of the excerpt. An example of this type of context is Beth's (age 10) account of her prayer experiences following a period of religious doubt:

‘So I just half believed in God and half didn't, and then I had to pray extra hard to get his love back because I had been really mean to him, I had not prayed to him for ages, and so I was really mean to him so I had to give him extra love and I felt really good after that, but when I wasn't praying I felt really really bad.’

She went on to elaborate on the emotions she associated with this context of

⁷ Cf. My comments in chapter 4 (p.148) about children's recall memory limitations, and their ability to 'fill in' where this lets them down.

relationship with God, though these included a pleasant sense of peacefulness, she also said:

‘sometimes I feel very lonely when I am alone with God because I can’t see God and I can’t hear God, I just think about God, I feel really lonely, so I like being with people sometimes.’

b) Child - People Consciousness: In this context the material constellated around discussion of the child’s sense of relationship to other people. Beth’s example above is already moving in this direction at the end. Discussion about the child’s sense of relationship to others was a very natural topic for many children, and therefore often formed a bridge to and from the child-God context. This was noted in Andrew’s case described earlier, where discussion of his image of heaven and God’s love became a discussion about his wishes for interpersonal relations.

Some comments made by Natasha (age 6) also illustrate how this context framed relational consciousness. Her very first comment in the interview had been in response to the general question about what struck her as really special. For her ‘people’ headed this list. God came further down and was mentioned only after discussion of a number of other things. Once this religious context had been established in our discussion, she was invited to think of a time that she’d felt God’s special nature in some way. Unlike some children who might have responded in terms of their sense of relationship to God, Natasha replied in terms of an autobiographical anecdote about making a new friend with whom she shared her sweets, sandwiches and playtimes. Another way of describing this could be the spirituality of fellowship, and a Christian analogy to her example might be the shared bread of communion that expresses this for adults.

c) Child - ‘world’ consciousness: Examples of this type indicated that spirituality was experienced through the child’s sense of relationship to the natural world. Ruth (age

6)(p.196) was sometimes an example of this as indicated by her profound responses to beauty and sensation in nature, however this was often more in the context of her sense of relationship to God with characteristics of the natural world playing a more supporting role as a condition in which this context was shaped. A particular context (or any other particular element of the framework) did not represent the only way in which children expressed their spirituality: on different occasions different formulations were apparent.

However, a ten year old girl, Louise, was one of many for whom the relationship with the natural world itself repeatedly contextualised the special form of consciousness I have argued is typical of children's spirituality . At every turn, Louise's context was within the framework of the natural world. Her main source of amazement was the birth and growth process she had witnessed in small animals. She expressed profound wonder in contemplating the mystery of what clouds could be made of⁸. She conveyed an exhilarated sense of delight in the sound of autumn leaves and the 'greenness' (wondering 'what is green?') of grass. She had even identified friends with whom she could share this framework, and explained that whilst for her the sky was 'holy', for her classmates Kelly and Maggie (p.208,220), water and grass seemed to hold sacred properties. In this example, as in many others, one type of context leads to another: child-nature consciousness merges with Louise's desire to be conscious of her friend's perspectives in this area.

d) Child-Self Consciousness: Material of this type was expressed in the context of the child's sense of relationship with their own identity and their own mental life. As with the other contexts this was often an important bridge to and from traditionally religious spiritual experiences and expression, but also seemed to stand as a form of spirituality in its own right in some cases.

⁸ This was not wonder in the sense of wanting to know their physical constitution, but rather wonder inspired by her sense that such knowledge was impossible knowledge.

Many of the children talked about the mystery of death: a conundrum that has often given rise to spiritual ‘answers’ and thus provided a basis for religious traditions. The way in which a context of self-consciousness was suggested in relation to this was by way of comments about death offering a very different and yet unknowable kind of personal consciousness (e.g. will ‘I’ know that I’m dead, and in what sense?). A number of children, in both age groups, likened this to their own impossible experiments of trying to consciously observe themselves falling and being asleep.

10 year old Altman (p.215) had experienced wonder and meaning in a moment of unusual sense of relationship to his own body and thought. He described this as ‘popping out of it’ (‘it’ meaning his own consciousness), and could only account for such an experience as being ‘from God’. Similarly much of Jenny’s discussion (p.214,217) was inspired by existential questions about her sense of identity, ‘why am I here’, ‘how did I get here’, and where her guiding sense of morality came from. She too experienced this in a context of unusually vivid self-consciousness in which ‘she’ appeared to ‘pop out my body and blow somewhere else’. Together with the emotional descriptions of this experience as ‘shocking’, ‘a tingle starting from your head to your feet’, and her later explanation that such moments prompted her to ‘switch on to God’, there appears to be a good case for including certain kinds of self-conscious contexts as contexts in which children’s spirituality could be manifest.

It must be emphasised that none of these four types of context is claimed to be sufficient grounds for determining material as indicative of children’s spirituality by itself. Rather, they serve as one component amongst other elements in the framework, which in combination help to specify the properties of children’s spirituality as ‘relational consciousness’.

6.3.2.2

Conditions

This element of the framework governed the conditions or environments in which the core category, in whichever particular context, was expressed. Types of this element mostly registered the different ‘languages’ or linguistic ‘environments’ in which children found their spiritual articulation, and in some cases, suggested conditions in which spiritual expression seemed silenced. By using the term ‘language’ I mean that children expressed spirituality using a particular set of ‘vocabulary’ and often the ‘grammar’ associated with that also.

Many conditions were identified in this data, amongst the most common being:

- a). A specific religious language, eg. Christian
- b). Language about beliefs and theological issues, including afterlife/death
- c). Autobiographical language
- d). Language of Fiction, including story, T.V and imaginative fantasy
- e). Language of Play and Games
- f). Language about Time or Place
- g). Language about Values and Morals
- h). Language of Science and Technology
- i). Language of the Natural World
- j). Language about People and Relationships

Some of these conditions have already been illustrated by previous examples, however the following additional comments can be made.

Religious Language was mainly Christian, although very often unorthodox or inaccurate in its details when used by ‘non-religious’ children. The most common alternatives to Christian terms and ideas which the children referred to were Hindu concepts of polytheism and reincarnation. It was not immediately obvious why this

particular religious language was a resource for these children, since there were no Hindu children in their classes, very few in their schools, and this was not the only faith other than Christianity they studied in religious education. However, it seemed that the alternative beliefs of this religious philosophy were salient in a way the details of other faith traditions were not. It is possible that there is a more primitive appeal in a polytheistic framework, which appealed to these children's struggling minds in this area. Beth (age 10), for example, found solace in the opportunity to pray to a specially concerned 'God of Knowledge' as she prepared to sit the 11+ examination.

The source of the reincarnation discourses can be more easily accounted for as this topic was debated by characters in the popular television soap opera 'Neighbours' in the six months preceding the interviews, and some of the children attributed their ideas to this. As a potent source of social reference and information for young people, this television programme had legitimated such language for expressing a sense of the spiritual. Moreover, it seemed to suggest to these children a 'logical' way of grappling with the mystery of death and the expectation of some kind of identity transformation therein. A naive adherence to a Christian framework here might have seemed a more obvious option for young children (e.g. that in death a person simply goes to live in a different place, heaven, with Jesus and the angels). However, their comments suggested that this level of understanding was indeed too bland in many cases to capture their dual sense of the mysteries of transformation and continuity of personal identity in life and death.

In general terms (not necessarily religious), the theme of death and the language associated with this was a popular one in which children framed their sense of mystery, a perception of ultimate value in life beyond material achievements and comforts, and through which they experienced a sense of their own finite nature in a more infinite context of life before and after their own existence. It was almost never a language that instilled fear, but rather offered a positive resource in which to frame their experiences

and explorations.

Few children had close personal experiences of bereavement, though the death of pets sometimes suggested important model experiences for contemplating the spiritual aspects to life. However, it seemed that a materialist adult response to such deaths often prevailed (e.g. an adult had sought to avert their grief by suggesting that the pet was replaceable with another new pet) and thwarted more spiritual explorations that these experiences had prompted in the child's mind.

An almost medieval spirituality was suggested by children's sense of kinship between the living and the dead which further brought out the relational quality to this discourse (Brooke and Brooke 1984)⁹. This was not merely expressed in terms of 'grandma looks down on me and helps me when I'm in danger', but also in terms of a raised awareness of relationship for its own sake, expressed for example in the regret of never having known a grandparent who died before the child's birth, and a sense of natural connection with such a person nonetheless. A poignant instance of this use of death language as a condition for spirituality was illustrated in Daniel's case (age 10). In his opening remarks he had established that a key 'signature' language for him was that of death and the severing of relationships which such an event inevitably involved. For example, when invited to discuss what he thought 'really mattered' he had replied:

'like when you are gonna go on to a different land ...like
when you die or something like that...'

He frequently referred to his struggle in understanding his parent's marital breakdown, father's remarriage and the difference all this had made to his relationships with his mum, his dad and his new half brother. In his case, these conditions were sources of reflection that prompted 'bigger' questions and a greater awareness of his

⁹ The religious practices of the Middle Ages suggest that people had a greater sense of kinship that extended across the boundaries of generations living and dead. The poor depended in part on the financial support of the departed in the form of money to be paid to the poor to offer prayers and attend masses for the dead person. Equally, the dead were seen as dependent on the living in order that their souls could be sufficiently prayed for. This sense of interdependency fostered a kinship-based sense of spirituality.

own philosophy of life's values and meanings. These reflections were collectively symbolised in his profound sense of regret in regard to the grandfather he never met, but with whom a relationship ought naturally to have been formed (just as a 'natural' relationship ought to exist between parents, children and siblings, but didn't in his case). In this instance 'death' helped to articulate Daniel's understanding of interpersonal disconnection, his sadness and bewilderment that natural relationships could seem so undermined by physical separation. In so doing this language also helped identify a measure beyond this, of enduring relationship or kinship, and a consciousness of relating as an invaluable feeling and personal principle, and not just a matter of proximity between people.

Autobiographical Language could take the form of a child thinking or fantasising about his or her own life story. For example, Andrew (age 6)(p.223), Freddie (age 6) (p.226,218) and Louise (age 10) expressed wonder and an implicit sense of meaningfulness in their own (and others) development from infancy to the present, and in anticipation of their future development. A number of children mentioned their own birth as an example of an extraordinarily special 'memory', which presumably reflects confabulation of an event they have heard others recall. As Freddie had done using a mixture of autobiography and Walt Disney, Louise narrated an account of personal transformation and consequent consciousness-raising in autobiographical terms. In the following excerpt she describes a treasured moment in her development which turned upon a moral transgression and her sense of remorse. This in turn prompted a feeling that cannot be merely defined as moral, and suggests a shift into the emotional phenomenology of the spiritual experience. This was referred to as a 'magic' kind of change in her, a mysterious transformation that could not be accounted for in ordinary terms, nor in terms of her own actions, but suggested something more transcendent. She explained:

'When I was being rude to my mom and stuff I...I felt like I
was a new person...coming out of something like...like...I

don't know what's wrong with me though but I'm a new person from a flower or something. And like I've just grown like a flower or a tree or something. Because I'm going 'I'm a new person and I'm not going to be rude to my mom.' Makes you feel really, really good actually.'

Fowler's (1981) approach to understanding faith employs a focus on individuals' life histories, and the ways these are narrated. The identification of autobiographical language as one of the important conditions in which children expressed their spirituality is therefore convergent with Fowler's philosophy. However, this kind of language is only one of a number of conditions, and requires further description in terms of the other elements of the framework I identify. This demonstrates that Fowler's approach to faith, and the understanding of spirituality sought here are not interchangeable.

Languages of Fiction , as well as Languages of Play and Games , were significant ways in which children framed their spirituality for a number of reasons.

First, such conditions were necessarily personalised and creative expressions of the child's ideas and feelings. When a child told a story (such as Freddie and the Snow White story, p.243) or played or recalled playing a game that captured their attempt to explore a spiritual issue, the playful or fictitious expression was one of their choosing, not imposed by any particular tradition. In this sense one could be more certain that the sentiment being expressed was a genuine response, rather than a product of a learnt religious code of spirituality. Secondly, such languages were important because their nature afforded considerable flexibility, that is playfulness, with the material itself. Children who made use of such languages therefore seemed to have access to a powerful resource for such an area, because in contemplating matters of mystery, unintelligibility, or exceptional magnitude they had adopted a system of expression that allowed them to be silly, to be wrong and to be creative.

Finally, these types of language were significant for understanding the nature of children's spirituality because fiction and games are such a normal, everyday characteristic of children's lives. That is to say, using such language established that spirituality was perceived as something not to be excluded from the child's natural modes of expression, nor reliant on specialised religious knowledge or practices. Other writers have made strong cases against commonplace neglect of play in children's religious education and nurture (Berryman 1991, and Cavalletti 1983), arguing for far greater attention to this as a key to children's most serious 'work'. The three features of this identified here (play as an internalised and personal response, play's flexible properties and the instinctive property of play) ratify these languages as vital to children's spirituality.

The data contained many examples of these types of condition, including Beth's (age 10) imaginary garden which seemed to function like an inner sanctuary for all her spiritual values, namely peace, beauty, solitude and hope. Another example was the religiously precocious John's (age 6) (p.208,213-4) modification of the interview into a game in which he interviewed me in the manner of a chat show host (standing on a chair, holding the microphone as interviewer as well as clapping wildly as the audience). In this way he was able to articulate a number of his questions, namely 'is it [Christianity] good for everybody?' and what to feel about the spiritual state of 'people who don't believe in good [non- Christians]'. Since so much of his spirituality was characterised by his strong sense of Christian identity, personal encounters with God in prayer and vision, and a recognition of missionary imperative in response to this, these questions about the religious identity and response of others, in this game, were indeed close to his heart. Interestingly, these questions were largely left as questions and my role as responding interviewee in the game was not an onerous one, possibly indicating his awareness that these were issues for him to work out, rather than matters to which someone else's answers would be useful.

Languages of Time and Place often interacted with other conditions, but specially suggested a role for particular times or places that framed the child's spiritual encounters. These are almost natural spiritual 'kinds' in the conventional spiritual traditions as found in the functions of special times and places, both actual and psychological 'spaces', in which spirituality is given separate attention, for example in times and places dedicated to prayer. Children seemed also aware of the grammar these can offer spirituality, though in most cases places and times of traditional worship (e.g. church, assembly) were rejected as being least conducive to spirituality. Many had special trees or dens with which they associated important moments of insight, value or feeling. For example, Jenny (age 10) (p.214,217 & 251) 'switched on to God' when sitting up in her special tree.

Special times were commonly opportunities to be quite alone, through choice, or conversely, immersed in a social situation, such as a crowd at a football match, on a 'whole family' shopping trip, or the context, but not the content, of school assemblies¹⁰. The latter kind of experience seemed to represent an experience that highlighted the child's sense of connection with others and simultaneously raised their consciousness of their individual nature as a component in other's relatedness: they were synonymous with 'the football crowd' and were in the football crowd as an individual, 'Daniel'.¹¹ Whilst actual times and places were commonly mentioned in expression of this type of condition for spirituality, the notions of time set aside in

¹⁰ Many children were keen to reject assemblies' attempts to contribute to their personal religious education, referring to the confusing or boring content and format, as well as their perception that the religious area seemed to be a passionate interest of only one or two 'odd' teachers who were prepared to lead assemblies. However, children also found the opportunity to sit still, in a familiar setting, without any demands being made on them individually, a context in which their own reflections could be explored. One can speculate as to whether the religious content and music did in fact supply subliminal 'contextual effects' for these moments, but at a conscious level children indicated that these were more likely to have a irritant effect!

¹¹ Cf. Durkheim's theory of religious experience as social effervescence in similar situations. This may indeed be a part, but again not all, of what we can understand about children's spirituality. (Durkheim, 1915)

oneself and places located in oneself were also suggested by the data. For some children these times and places were characterised by special properties of clarity, 'openness', 'seeing further even though it's night', and the implication that the function of these languages was to help establish a focus amongst the distractions of more mundane living.

Language of Values and Morals sometimes helped clarify a child's sense of meaning or purpose and thus suggested a perception that went beyond mere expediency, rights and laws. Children readily spoke about both their own morality, their sense of conscience and also about their awareness of good and evil at large in the world. Where these interacted with other elements of this analytical paradigm, such as the contexts already described, their spirituality seemed to be also suggested by comments framed in this language. Most commonly, this was in terms of a sense of conscience as a guiding message from God, such that moral experiences and feelings were regarded by a number of children as the closest kind of 'religious' experience they could recall.

Values were also an important access point to spirituality as well as a vehicle for the kind of spirituality that has been particularly identified in this data. All the children were asked a question in the introductory part of their interviews about what 'really mattered' to them, and this was often an important clue to the prominence and nature of their sense of values. For example, some children replied in terms of 'money', 'sweets', or toys at Christmas. In contrast, most children perceived this as an opportunity to explore a different class of values such as 'people' or 'family', 'love', 'education' and fulfilment in various guises, and 'peace'. These individual differences in the salience of non-material values in children's initial responses often predicted how forthcoming they would be to other prompts to discuss a spiritual interpretation of experience. Children who demonstrated a type of less self-serving sensitivity in their values and morals language often suggested a spiritual awareness (a type of relational

consciousness) within this discourse. The example of Andrew's (age 6) (p.242-3) three wishes already described was one instance of his values suggesting his spirituality.

This can be seen to link to literature on adult reports of spiritual experiences in which people very often felt their experience had been a significant catalyst in their personal desire to pursue justice and morality in a new way (Hay 1990). Children did not typically express this language of morals and values in that manner, but the association between spirituality and these personal issues would appear to be taking root.

Language of the Natural World is another conventional framework noted amongst expressions of traditional, adult spirituality. Furthermore, authors and poets including Wordsworth, Traherne, and Blake, have suggested a particular association between such language and children's experiences of the spiritual and divine. Some of the children in this sample made impressively poetic use of such a language, finding that the natural world was indeed a prominent source of wonder, awe, meaning and mystery, which in some cases led them to specifically religious conclusions. For Louise (age 10), the blue expanse of sky was 'holy', the greenness of grass was an ontological mystery ('where does green come from?') and recalling her experience of gazing through her brother's telescope at the stars she explained:

'it all has a meaning but you can't think of the meaning..all of the um...like growing, flying and just imagining things, its all just fits into one and it's just like a big explosion in your mind and...you're thinking about things. Like...anything really. And then when someone speaks to you suddenly when you're sometimes you're just daydreaming and then someone goes "Louise!" and you're like that (gasps).'

Two conflicting influences may have interposed to affect the extent to which this

language of the natural world remains the accessible conditional set for children's spirituality first brought to our attention by the Romantics. On one hand, the children in this sample were sub-urban children, whose opportunities to interact with the natural world, in the course of their day to day activity, were restricted by the built-up environment and the modern dangers associated with that. In this respect, language about the natural world may therefore have been becoming a somewhat rarefied framework for many children. On the other hand, such language has the advantage of being more acceptable or legitimate within a secular youth (and adult) culture than any religious language is likely to be. Thus language about the natural world, even if accessed through imagination and literature rather than first-hand experience, still represented an important condition or mould for children's expression of spirituality.

In contrast to language about the natural world, Language of Science and Technology flouts the conventional expectations of conditions that give rise to spirituality. Science and Technology are more often equated with the material world and its values of efficiency, productivity and human-free mechanisation. However, this was well represented in the children's data. In this language children were able to find an especially legitimate way of expressing ideas and feelings, since this is experienced by children as an almost unquestioned powerful cultural explanatory framework in a way which the religious language might have been a century ago. In many cases scientific ideas and discoveries were a source of wonder and reverence in themselves. To appreciate the degree to which such feelings were synonymous with spiritual feelings of wonder, it was necessary to detach one's adult understanding of the technology in some cases. For example, it was clear that children who were moved to a point of ineffable wonder by the operation of a tap (such as Louise, age 10) or a huge satellite dish (Altman, age 10) were operating from a different perspective to that taken by a plumber or engineer. In a similar way, adult spiritual responses to works of art and other religious symbols are inevitably differentiated, to some extent, by the individual's

appreciation of the art form (e.g. the significance of different colours and media in icons to convey different spiritual messages). Children's use of scientific expressions and resources in the service of their spirituality may be accounted for in a similar way.

Some of the children made use of this language as a source of analogies for spiritual concepts they could not otherwise grasp. For example, holograms (of people) and parallel universes featured as attempts to explore how a person's soul might be represented. Interestingly, such analogies and the whole enterprise of science were frequently used to suggest the boundary at which the spiritual, as children perceived it, began. Thus holograms were not regarded as sufficient accounts of a human spiritual property. Though often the children gave examples of things science could account for, the ultimate mystery was that which science could not explain.

The use of this kind of language seemed especially fuelled by the popular legitimization conferred through science fiction fantasy and associated supernatural fiction and television. Children's (and adults') currently unprecedented appetite for this may in part reflect its function as a powerful contemporary language within which, and against which, spirituality can be framed given the relative demise of conventional spiritual languages.

The use of a language about people and relationships has been described in sufficient detail already as a form of the context type 'child-people consciousness' and in terms of the general description of 'relational consciousness'.

A further general point can be made about the ways in which children appeared to use these languages. Much has been said about religious language in this section and also in chapter 5.(see section 5.2), and children's unexpected use of this despite their secular environment. However, the range of languages reported in this section testifies to the fact that children often seized upon particular forms of expression as if they represented 'legitimate' ways of thinking and talking about an area that was otherwise rather suspect (see comments about 'taboo' below). In this way these languages of children's spirituality illustrate to some extent the interaction of this domain of the

child's psychology with the pervasive culture, both general secular culture and more particular forms of children's culture. This extends the thesis put forward by Erricker and Erricker (1996) that sought to identify a parallel between children's spirituality and genre. In that paper, a number of such genres were suggested as ways in which children's spirituality might be manifested, such as a 'My little pony' genre and an 'All American kid/theme park' genre. These were said to reflect the language and style of thought that characterised children's talk, and which clearly represent choices from the 'legitimated' elements of children's culture. The analysis (within the broader framework) of ten different languages of children's spirituality presented in this thesis offers a more precisely specified account of this general feature (of legitimated languages) which is firmly based on empirical evidence.

As with the other elements of the framework for children's spirituality that have been identified from this empirical exercise, the conditions described above were not sufficient grounds in themselves for spirituality to be present. Indeed, what was significant about all these 'languages' was that in isolation from the other contributing variables of the framework, a child might use such a language to express quite unexceptional material. That is, they seemed to require no separately special vocabulary to articulate spiritual feelings, experiences or ideas. However, by identifying a group of languages that conditioned the particular contexts in which children's spirituality (qua relational consciousness) was often manifest, a new insight is offered into the areas in which spirituality may be found, nurtured or extinguished. The following discussion of the 'strategies' and 'processes' elements of the framework documents some of the ways in which the data indicated how the material was dealt with in any of the listed 'contexts' and expressed as any of the suggested 'conditions' or languages.

6.3.2.3

Strategies

This element of the framework represents an attempt to summarise the activities pursued by children which served to encourage and maintain their sense of the spiritual. The vast majority of these were mental activities or strategies, rather than any particular behaviours associated with adult spiritual maintenance such as the physical disciplines of meditation, church-going, humanitarian acts or fasting. However, as these mental strategies are equally a part of adult spiritual maintenance this element has significant overlap with the nature of adult spirituality. In consequence, what was noticeable about children's spiritual 'strategies' was their diversity and range, and the sheer availability of many rather complex mental processes in the service of a phenomenon more usually regarded (but as this data suggests, wrongly assumed) to be a late, specialist development. As a rule, domains which are least developed are also the last in development to benefit from the most recently mastered mental processes. In Piagetian terms this developmental 'decalage' accounts for the later appearance of mental conservation processes - for example, in consideration of weight compared to the more practised and familiar domain of numbers. This makes the apparent proliferation of mental processes or strategies noted in the spiritual domain a remarkable feature. By implication, some children's abilities to make use of developmentally complex strategies in the service of spiritual expression and encounter would seem to suggest that the spiritual was indeed a familiar and well-acquainted domain for them at least.

The strategies can be divided according to whether their use was explicitly pursued or implicitly employed. The latter formed the larger group, a finding which is consistent with children's general lack of awareness, that is their meta-cognitive awareness, in regard to their use of specific mental strategies (e.g. Mitchell, Robinson, Nye, and Issacs 1996). Nonetheless, as recent developmental scholarship has demonstrated, the boundary between explicit and implicit strategy use is not absolute, and implicit abilities are functionally almost equivalent to their explicit counterparts

(Reddy 1991). In other words, knowing that one is using imagination to pursue a feeling or idea has similar consequences to simply being engrossed in an act of imagining.

Explicit strategies included the child's efforts to mentally and physically withdraw from mundane distractions, attempts to consciously focus or concentrate on a particular subject, seeking relation or communication through prayer, seeking and exploiting aesthetic and sensory experiences , and deliberately 'philosophising'. As would be expected, older children tended to mention using explicit strategies more often than younger children. Children's self-conscious notice of their use of these strategies and their consequences seemed to contribute significantly to their sense that something extraordinary had been experienced, moreover their more explicit awareness helped to clarify the balance between their role in facilitating the experience and their sense that something beyond them had also been involved. For example, Altman (age 10)(p.215) had described how he was intrigued by pursuing a mental state of absorbed single focus that created an altered state of awareness, then commented:

'yeh, and when you click out of it you just notice that you are there or when you're like concentrating on it, like you just don't know where you are. [Do you like that feeling?] Yeh, but like recently it just sort of comes when it needs to come. Like if you are upset, it just comes then. [Where do you think it comes from?] God.'

(It is noticeable that this is a good description of what Csikszentmihalyi (1975) called the 'flow' experience used as a guiding sub-category for the working map outlined in chapter 3. The re-characterisation of this as indicative of an explicit strategy of relational consciousness demonstrates how this working map was used and relinquished as new frameworks emerged).

Implicit strategies covered a wide range of mental processes, including implicit

versions of the explicit activities. For example, rather than comment on how they arrived at a spiritual insight or experience by consciously asking themselves increasingly philosophical questions, the children simply listed their chain of questions. A common pattern for this concerned the origin of the world and human life, often beginning as a simple question about their own identity or name, leading to questions about creation in general and their reactions to different accounts of that in myth and science, and ending in questions about the ontological nature of God himself and, crucially, their emotional and intellectual reaction to such ideas as these and their sense of created order.

Many other implicit strategies can be listed: imagining, puzzling, reasoning, searching for meaning, moralising, staying with and amplifying an emotional mood, dreaming, playing and temporarily eschewing reality constraints or reality testing. It was noted that in some cases an effective strategy concentrated attention on the emotional qualities of experience, and to this extent involved letting go of rational or intellectual moderation. However, to an equal extent children made use of rational, 'cognitive' strategies as a means of pursuing and getting as much as possible from a spiritual experience or idea. Thus a crude divide between emotional and cognitive domains cannot be applied to children's spirituality in terms of its supporting processes. To some extent this confirms Donaldson's (1992) thesis that the spiritual can be located within a unitary mental framework that characterises both thought and emotion, although her conclusions emphasised the role played by emotional insights, 'value-sensing', in such experiences.

In response to the ineffable nature of spiritual experience, evoking imagery and drawing analogies have been time-honoured strategies in spiritual traditions (e.g. the Ignatian exercises). Such activities were also in evidence in these children's data and represented particularly interesting strategies for two reasons.

First, most of the children interviewed would probably have been assessed as at the 'concrete operational' stage of cognitive development during which the physical and

literal properties of things are believed to captivate children's thinking. As a result, imagery used to represent ideas and feelings would be characterised by the particular potency of those images' literal properties. This is to say, amongst young children, a strategy based on imagery is likely to work especially well, although in some views, too well, leading the child to misconceptions that are difficult to redress (Goldman 1964). What was apparent in this data was not only the potency of imagery for children, but also their ability to combine literal and more abstract formulations to great effect. Significantly, their spirituality did not seem 'locked in' by their tendency to form rather 'literal' imagery, but rather served as a resource that fed other strategies. For example, recalling Andrew's (6) (p.223,242-3) concrete images of heaven and hell as a never-ending circle and a finite 'edged' square respectively, it is possible to trace how this image-making gave rise to a 'concrete and abstract' combining strategy with a more abstract level of reasoning concerning the nature of 'love' and the implications of this for human relations.

The second point of interest arising from such strategies concerns the related issue of whether or not children can understand analogy and metaphor at this stage in cognitive development, let alone use it as a strategy to maintain a sense of the spiritual. Earlier studies indicated that children had fundamental difficulties with the mental processing required to comprehend the nature of analogy and this was a central element in Goldman's argument about children's lack of 'readiness' for religion. More recent work however has established that even pre-school children can appreciate analogical relations (Goswami 1992) and can certainly draw on the emotional significance of an analogy, even when unable to express explicitly the nature of the analogical relation between the two components being compared. This more recent refinement in the theory of children's analogical processing powers helps to make sense of the frequent use of this strategy by children expressing spirituality, as a number of examples have already suggested: life's meaning as a 'jigsaw puzzle', the soul as a 'hologram' and as 'smoke on a misty day', and God as 'eternal love', 'kindness between people' and as amazing

places in nature but also an architecturally impressive shopping centre seen in the dark from a hill!¹³

Beyond these implicit processes, at yet another level of interpretation, it was possible to suppose that in some cases a child's strategy for pursuing the spiritual was to symbolise otherwise inexpressible material. For example as symbolised in the characters or themes of stories children told (see Freddie's (age 6) Snow White example, p. 243), or in the unusual choice of images used to convey their likes, dislikes, values and views. Jackie (age 6) (p.227) rarely commented in a direct way about spiritual matters nor recalled any spiritual kind of experience, but spoke enigmatically about her sense of feeling boxed in by the sky and clouds, yet set free by the expansive darkness of the night sky. One could interpret this as a symbolic code for her sense of the spiritual, as the infinite, unrestrictive but mysterious (dark) experience that contrasted with her frustration of more everyday gloomy (cloudy) monotony and limited 'vision'. Comments made by one of the older boys, Bill (age 10)(p.221), suggested a similar strategy of symbolising as he repeatedly referred to his sense of being able to 'see more clearly' in the dark to convey his sense of searching for a hidden meaning and his desire to 'discover another part of life'.

Inevitably children's abilities to access and employ different strategies will have been subject to other developmental and individual differences. These abilities were not routinely assessed as part of this research, partly to preserve the informal and non-judgemental character of relationship between interviewer and child. As there would appear to be a growing interest in developmental psychology to understand the connections between cognitive development and the consequences for children's social, personal and moral development, a correlational study of children's abilities to use the key strategies identified here with other indications of their spirituality could be a useful

¹³ Two children referred to experiences of profound awe in response to seeing the large Merry Hill Shopping Complex in Dudley, West Midlands, illuminated and attracting them inside on a dark winter's evening.

direction which further research might take.

6.3.2.4

Processes

The contribution to an understanding of the core category made by this element, processes, is in terms of an account of **local** and **longer term** changes in the appearance of the phenomenon. Much of the section in Chapter 5 concerning ways in which children ‘resisted religious language’ (5.2 p.213) suggested types of processes spiritual discourse was subject to in the interviews. For example, avoidance, sidetracking, and making ‘third-person’ were all processes that characterised the local or short-term dynamics of some children’s spirituality.

A notable local change in the appearance and experience of spirituality was a tendency to slide between contexts. This might take the form of a child initially talking about or recalling an experience concerning his or her consciousness of relationships with other people, but then sliding into more traditionally conceived spiritual discourse about his or her sense of relationship to God. In other examples the reverse pattern applied. In either case this might suggest a heightening or a diminishing intensity in the material. In some cases, slipping into the more explicitly religious context seemed to enforce a conclusion: what more could be said? Whereas moving from such a first base to other contexts afforded opportunities for extended elaboration of a theme in a variety of personally meaningful ways in relation to other people, oneself and the world.

In contrast to the evaporating local processes associated with resistance, there were also processes of magnification. Children sometimes accepted only a hypothetical notion of the spiritual at first, or could discuss it in terms of what ‘other children’ might experience, and then gradually or momentarily recognise such properties in their own experience (identification in self). Some children had commented about the effect of being invited to discuss unusual matters and express their convictions and experiences without prejudice. Such cases suggested that the interview process itself had prompted a

significant increase in the acknowledgement and value children were able to identify with their spirituality, which may or may not have continued to effect a more long term change.

Many children described a process of interiorising their spirituality rather than publicising it. For some this was thought to be an inherent requirement of 'private' material, whilst others saw this essentially as a protective reaction to avoid ridicule and embarrassment.

Local change in children's spirituality was also shown in the ease with which they could forget earlier important material. It was intriguing to ask them what they remembered of an earlier interview since often all the directly spiritual references seemed to have been forgotten (though more superficial details could be recalled), suggesting at best these had a only fleeting salience for children. Where a child did retain a memory of the discussion, a dynamic of changefulness was sometimes suggested even over a relatively short period. Jack (age 6)(p.219) had drawn an intriguingly non-human picture of Jesus in a previous interview which I speculated might indicate an aspect of his rather abstract spiritual perspective. However, when I attempted to make something of this, to 'fix' his intended meaning, Jack corrected my interpretation of his spirituality as being subject to any such constancy:

[R: So when you look at your picture, Jesus has a different face to ordinary people doesn't he? Why is that?] J: Goodness knows.[R: But he's not just like you and me?] J: No. Obviously not last time. Must have changed.'

And to demonstrate his point he immediately drew two quite different pictures of Jesus, and then one of me too.

Longer-term changes in children's spirituality were equally various. Many children mentioned being aware of some change over their lifetime in this regard. None referred to this as a static dimension. For some, change was associated with their

increasing knowledge - however, the effects of this were not uniform. A number described their growing knowledge base and mental abilities as instrumental in decreasing their engagement with the spiritual. For example, they referred to being more gullible when younger and likely to entertain all kinds of extraordinary ideas and readings of experience. Some mentioned the dilution of their spiritual position through exposure to other knowledge frameworks, including the diluting effects of learning about other religious traditions. Ruth (age 6)(p.196) for example described her struggle in response to learning about a creation story from an American Indian spiritual tradition:

‘They said “ooohh, a raven made the world, darling, not God”. Then you try not to believe in that, but you just can’t help it.’

In contrast, other children found increasing knowledge and experience had a concentrating effect on their spirituality. Beth (age 10) felt more equipped to pray and ‘properly love’ God now that she was older, and others also suggested a process of growing confidence in their spiritual position. Similarly, children made comments about their growing self-awareness with age and their developing understanding of the complexities of interpersonal relations, all of which would appear to contribute to manifestations of the core category : relational consciousness.

Changes associated with memory over time for the spiritual were particularly apparent in this data. Children referred to having had spiritual experiences a long time ago which they had since ‘forgotten’ , and generally tended to recognise, as opposed to recall, features of spiritual experience as memories of their distant past. Such comments suggested an overall diminution of spirituality characterised children’s perception of process in this domain, although together with the other processes outlined here, this may have not been the case in reality.

The question of process and the trajectory of development in spirituality has

exercised a number of scholars, amongst whom a proportion have argued against the assumption that spirituality is a pursuit of the matured soul, but rather is an inherent property of childhood that is often extinguished in the course of other developments (e.g. Robinson 1983, Hay 1990). The diverse properties of the processes suggested in this data cannot conclusively settle this debate. However by identifying a set of particular changes contemporary children have described, further research might pursue a longitudinal study of the dynamics of change affecting children's spiritual experience.

6.3.2.5

Consequences

The final element of the core category which was considered essential to developing a comprehensive account of children's spirituality concerned the consequences of the phenomenon's manifestations for individual children. These effects on the children were sometimes explicitly reported feelings, but in other cases were inferred effects based on other comments made by the children about their experiences.

In response to the difficulties surrounding the study of spirituality, it can be argued that the only reliable indicators are the various consequences reported by individuals claiming such experiences. Thus taxonomies of spiritual experience are often constituted by types within this element (e.g. Stark 1965): spirituality is classified in terms of its effects. In understanding the nature of children's spirituality therefore, attention to consequences is especially important, for both theoretical and practical reasons described below. However, it is hoped that locating these effects alongside the other elements in the framework and proposing an integrative core category to which these all contribute, offers a more penetrating account of children's spirituality than an 'effects-only' approach to spiritual experience would have yielded.

At a theoretical level, data concerning 'consequences' suggests one of the few ways in which data between individuals can be compared and, in a loose sense, validated. For example, children's descriptions of effects of their spirituality included

references to deep 'calm', a strange 'fear' with 'respect', or a feeling that 'it's all oneness'. These descriptions lent the preceding material, along with its context, condition and strategy, a degree of automatic validity because of their resemblance of the effects to well-established adult spiritual criteria (e.g. Hay 1987).

At a practical level, giving an account of consequences is equally important. Since if what has been exhaustively described in this framework is a feature of children's lives yet has few consequences for them, this in itself must be noted as a characteristic of children's spirituality. If no effects of 'relational consciousness' on the children had been suggested by this data, one might be required to conclude that spirituality in childhood need be regarded as little more than a half-developed, irrelevant feature anticipating realization in adulthood. However, this was not the case. The data show that children did experience a wide range of 'effects' or consequences as a result of thinking about and recalling spiritual moments and attitudes in the various ways described here, under the umbrella description of 'relational consciousness'. In addition, understanding the nature of these effects on children (are they positive or negative?) can provide information crucial at the practical level of educational or general adult response.

The consequences identified in this data fell into two broad categories: positive and negative consequences. In addition there was a special type of these which was characterised by its associations with the social domain.

Positive consequences were the most commonly mentioned, though more negative social consequences sometimes qualified these. The list of positive consequences was also the most varied, including feelings of calmness, peacefulness, holiness and a moral feeling of goodness (sometimes in the child and sometimes outside the child, in others, in the world or more abstractly). Other effects suggested particularly mystical characteristics: a sense of oneness, forgetting self, and feeling free. A number of effects indicated the nature of the consequences as a reaction to something,

not just in terms of a reaction in the child, for example being impressed, an interested wonder, a new desire to search for understanding or meaning, a noetic sense that new understanding had been acquired, a greater sense of clarity, and a reaction of perceiving value and feeling grateful.

Negative Consequences most often referred to fear or at least an uncomfortable strangeness. Although wonder was frequently a positive consequence, for others this took the form of frustration. Another common consequence cited was a feeling of inner conflict often as the experience or ideas were felt to be incompatible with other knowledge the child held.

Children often mentioned experiencing both positive and negative consequences, with one type spawning another in some cases (e.g. wonder turning sour with frustration, or a feeling of ‘goodness’ stimulating ‘fear’, see Nicola’s example, p.209). In the majority of cases consequences were combined with an awareness, and in some cases experience, of the social consequential dimension. This was perceived in almost exclusively negative terms since children felt either embarrassed, ridiculed (or in danger of this) or undermined as a consequence of their experience presented to a public domain. For the most part children had not shared their spirituality with others, and these consequences were their imagined predictions of how they would feel or how they would treat others who shared such material. Similarly many explained their reluctance as an anxiety about not being believed or taken seriously, and some had experiences of this. Given such sentiments it is perhaps remarkable and gratifying that they were forthcoming in the interviews at all. A number of children in both age groups expressed thanks as well as intrigue in my interest in the areas probed by the interviews, presumably because it contrasted with their expectations and experiences of the social consequences of exploring spirituality. A small minority indicated more positive perceptions of the social consequences, as in Louise’s (age 10) example when she had found a supportive comparison group amongst her peers to discuss what aspect of nature gave them a sense of the holy.

An important difference between the consequences reported in this data and the similar adult characteristics (Hay 1990) is that, with the possible exceptions of Freddie (age 6- Snow White)(p.218,226,243) and John (age 6 conversion-like sense of God in prayer)(p.208,213-4) none of the children suggested that any of these effects had been of life-changing significance.

Interpreting this difference is difficult. Possibly children's relatively shorter time span makes it hard for them to frame experiences in such a way: they tend to live more from moment to moment rather than in terms of sequentially and meaningfully ordered events. Alternatively, this difference is indicative of a distinctive quality in children's spirituality, namely that though perceived as special, it is regarded as altogether more 'ordinary' than most adults are accustomed to view it. In this way, children's spirituality would find support in contemporary theological thinking (e.g. Lash 1988) that has argued against the restriction of the religious (and by extension the 'spiritual') to more extraordinary experiences and interpretations. But the seemingly casual character of such spirituality also clarifies the theology of childhood suggested in the New Testament, Matthew 18:1-6, in which children's natural spirituality is held up as an example to adults who seem distracted by a concern to perform the necessary task, say the correct thing or make the dramatic gesture in order to mark their spiritual transformation. Children's apparent indifference to their spirituality's potentially 'life-changing' consequences may in this way represent an aspect of their distinctive maturity rather than their immaturity.

Chapter summary and conclusion

In this chapter an analytical framework which both helped to structure an interpretation of the data, and suggest a means for conceptualising the diverse strands in children's spirituality in general, has been presented and illustrated. The elements which have been discussed are summarised in figure 6.1 (p. 247). The organising idea in this framework was represented by the core category, relational consciousness, which had

emerged from analysis and reflection as a defining characteristic of children's spirituality. Exploration of the constituent elements of this core category, in terms of its contexts, conditions, strategies, processes and consequences, extended and qualified an understanding of the nature of children's spirituality as evidenced in this data. Specifically, a number of types of each constituent element have been identified, illustrated and discussed. The development of a more precise 'map' of children's spirituality in this way made it possible to address some of the speculations raised in the literature and to suggest directions for more focused further research.

However, I am painfully aware of the dangers inherent in the act of 'analysing' spirituality at all, and this was reflected in how difficult I found it to write and select material for this and the previous chapter. For some time I struggled with the feeling that the only way of conveying the nature of children's spirituality for which I had found empirical evidence was to demand that readers study the unedited richness of whole transcripts, some 1000 pages. The need to selectively extract and to offer an intellectual analysis of this seemed to challenge the very nature of what I had found. On this point Priestley (1985) quotes Wordsworth's cautionary lines:

Our meddling intellect
 ,
 Misshapes the beauteous forms of things: -
 We murder to dissect.

(*The Tables Turned*, W. Wordsworth).

I hope that my analysis does not 'murder' spirituality. In this respect, my emphasis on the significance of the different parts I have identified in the framework being understood as 'spiritual' *only as they relate to each other* is essential. Moreover, where spirituality appears to be 'dissected' in the inevitably academic reporting of my thesis research, the proposition of each part reflecting the core category of 'relational consciousness' is vital as a means of seeing the different parts as members of the whole, held in a dynamic tension with one another. I have deliberately not been explicit about the precise nature of this dynamic of interaction of the parts of the framework,

beyond asserting that it is necessary to how children's spirituality is understood. Perhaps further research, even further psychological research, will reach a point where these interactions can be clearly defined. On the other hand, perhaps this more holistic feature is that part of spirituality for which analytical accounts cannot be meaningfully offered.

The final chapter considers the implications of this analytical interpretation of children's spirituality in terms of contemporary theories in psychology pertaining to the development of consciousness and inter- and intrapersonal understanding. Some of the practical implications of my research for education are also discussed.

Chapter 7

Children's spirituality as relational consciousness :

Seeking psychological parallels and considering educational implications

This concluding chapter of my thesis draws together some of the intriguing connections which my characterization of children's spirituality begins to suggest. These discussions therefore serve as an initial evaluation of the theoretical potency of my empirical work and its analysis. I explore this in terms of parallels with the core category concept in scholarly literature and particularly in recent psychological research, but also in terms of some of the implications my thesis may have for education.

There are five sections to this chapter. First, some general reflections on the nature of 'relational consciousness' in the context of this thesis (7.1). Secondly, a section (7.2) briefly tracing back the qualities of the core category in parts of the literature reviewed in chapters 1 and 2. Thirdly, a discussion and exploration (7.3) of the further psychological insights and parallels that may help to extend an understanding of children's spirituality now that an empirically based, core category has been identified. The fourth and penultimate section (7.4) outlines my position regarding the educational implications of this work. The final section (7.5) reviews the accomplishment of my research aims, as stated in chapter 4.

7.1

Section 1: The "discovery" of relational consciousness

The 'discovery' of relational consciousness as a core category describing the character of children's spirituality may appear less than startling in two ways. First, I am aware that identifying the significance of relationship has been a recurring feature in the writings of a number of theologians and moral philosophers (e.g. MacMurray 1995,

McFadyen 1990, Moltmann 1993) The core category I am suggesting is therefore far from being an original revelation in a general sense. However, the resonance of the core category with relationship themes found in some recent theology suggests a measure of confirmation for the category proposed here (i.e. it is not an obscure characterization without parallel). Relational consciousness is nonetheless original in the sense of offering a way of specifically characterising children's spirituality. An exploration of theology that expounds the centrality of relationship might be a fruitful way in which further research towards an understanding of children's spirituality could be pursued from the perspective of another discipline, in the light of the perspective this psychological approach has lent to this subject.

The second point to be noted with regard to my 'discovery' of relational consciousness as the core category is its resemblance to the statements about my own theological perspective in chapter 4. In my reflections in that chapter I noted the significance I attached to relational themes in my approach to faith. In what way can the identification of children's spirituality as characterised by 'relational consciousness' be regarded as distinct from this personal tendency?

My defence of this is consilience three-fold. First, given my understanding of qualitative methodology's stance on 'researcher as instrument' (Maykut and Morehouse 1994), absolute separation of the researcher's perspectives and the analytic process could have been regarded as a failure on my part to engage sufficiently with the research. The parallel between my personal theological stance and the core category indicates this was not the case, but rather emphasises the point that qualitative findings of this sort are perspectival rather than 'absolute' contributions to the body of knowledge in any particular area. In addition, it is possible that the characterization offered here not only legitimately reflects my individual perspective, but also a gendered account of children's spirituality. Gilligan's (1982) important contribution to Kohlberg's understanding of moral development identified a broadly relational theme as a fundamental psychological characteristic of women's moral style, and others have

begun to explore the ramifications of this for women's faith style (e.g. Parks, 1991; Day 1994). The contribution made by this thesis towards an understanding of children's spirituality may therefore reflect my perspective as a female researcher, and might be usefully complemented by a male perspective and analysis.

The second point in defence of the 'too convenient' overlap between the core category and my stated perspective in chapter 4 addresses the unpremeditated nature of this outcome. The relational 'core' of children's spirituality emerged from the data without being specifically sought. None of the categories or subcategories outlined in the working map (chapter 3) had directly identified relation or relationship. This suggests that it was primarily the data, not merely my own predisposing attitudes, that were responsible for the shape that the analysis took and the features which emerged as central.

Lastly, I would argue that the detailed analysis given here to 'relational consciousness' (as the core category of children's spirituality) considerably expands and improves upon the rather vague significance of relationship I noted in my personal reflections about researcher perspective in chapter 4.

To summarize, I accept that the analytical conclusions reached on the basis of the empirical research can be contextualised as continuous with parts of the theological literature (which this thesis has not attempted to study) and as continuous with statements about the researcher's own perspective. However, this recognition helps to illuminate further the nature of the research contribution as well possible directions for future research.

7.2

Section 2: ‘Hindsight’ recognition of relational consciousness in children’s spirituality literature

In the reviews of educational and psychological literature in chapters 1 and 2 the diversity of ideas about children’s spirituality was very apparent. This was further noted in chapter 3 in terms of the many different ways that scholars had attempted to define the essence of children’s spiritual nature. This diversity suggested both the need for some measure of clarification, but also the requirement that such clarification could reflect the necessary breadth of this area that had caused such a variety of accounts to be written. The analysis of the children’s data in this thesis proposes a general clarification of children’s spirituality, arguing that it can be represented by a central category: relational consciousness. However, in the exposition of this category, a range of features are related to this organising core feature, thus accommodating the requirement of breadth also.

Having suggested a way of describing the essence of children’s spirituality (the core category) it now becomes possible to trace indications of this theme back to the rather disparate literature. Using the benefit of hindsight, it becomes apparent that aspects of relational consciousness were proposed by some scholars in both the education and psychology literature. Noting these points of agreement with my own conclusions suggests a measure of support for the characterization of children’s spirituality I have argued for in chapters 5, and more especially, 6.

In the education literature, a number of authors drew attention to ‘relationships’ as an important feature in their understanding of children’s spirituality. Erricker (1996), for example, mentions two ways in which children’s spirituality is contingent upon inter-personal relatedness. First, he refers to the child’s need to relate his or her experiences of spirituality to those of other children. And secondly, he suggests that supportive relationships with adults prepared to listen to children express their

spirituality are vital for the maintenance of this as a positive influence on their lives.

In a similar vein, Rossiter (1996) highlighted the spirituality implicit in relationships within the school, and in the relationships to the subject matter demonstrated by the teachers' style. For him, these 'relational' manifestations of spirituality were more significant than deliberate attempts to manipulate the expression or recognition of spirituality, such as in special 'personal sharing' exercises. The spirituality espoused through the teacher's relation to the pupils was also argued for by Webster (1987). However, Starkings (1987) was particularly explicit in this respect. He noted that, especially in the case of the infant school age child, the significant experiences that shaped a child's spiritual sensibilities were those in their world of everyday relationships, and not those primarily of a religious character.

These authors' emphasis on relationships is close, but not identical to, the characterization of relational consciousness I have outlined. However, they seem to be locating spirituality in these relationships, rather than seeing them as a property of spirituality. Consequently, they do not explore the wider character of children's spirituality in a relational way - such as the child's consciousness of relation to himself, to the natural world, or to whatever is identified as God. It was a teacher's comment reported in the FARE report (1991) that came closest to recognising a multi-directional relational consciousness as fundamental to children's spirituality, in which she wondered:

'Is there some significance [in my perception of a relationship] between gender, self confidence, awareness of self and sensitivity to others?'

In the psychological literature it was necessary to conduct a rather more speculative analysis of where implications for children's spirituality might be suggested, given a lack of direct study of this matter. However, despite the conclusions of this search being 'one step removed' from spirituality, the core category makes appearances, in various forms, in parts of that literature also.

For example, in his use of Jungian theory to develop a psychological study of the child, Neumann (1973) makes the suggestion that children's spiritual well-being is dependent in the first instance on a good relationship with the mother. This is because it is thought to be through the psychological connection with the mother that the child's sense of self is formed, and from this foundation that spirituality takes its shape. He writes:

‘The growth of the child's interest in life, itself and in its environment are fed by its interest in its mother, whose love, tenderness and care are the psychic milk and libido on which depend not only its physical but also its psychic and spiritual existence’ (Neumann, 1973, p.51)

Object relations theory was similarly explicit about the psychological foundation of childhood relationships for adult spirituality at least. This approach also gives an account of how these relationships are internalised and thus come to characterize the whole of a person's psychology in relational terms. On these grounds, this type of psychological theory would seem to presents a particularly suitable basis for an education-psychology dialogue about children's spirituality in the light of the conclusions reached in chapter 6 of this thesis. However, other theoretical approaches, quite different from this, can offer additional insight (see section 3 below). These insights suggest there may be benefits in forgoing the pursuit of single-track theoretical loyalties; though the latter may seem attractive on the basis of parsimony, a dialogue with a wider range of psychological theory will inevitably provide a broader foundation from which to build further understanding and practice.

Elkind's (1970) account of the origins of religion in the child noted that the concrete operational stage (approximately between the ages of 7 and 11) creates the conditions that prompt the child to ‘search for relations’, which more particularly can be expressed in the child's inclination to seek a relationship with God. Whilst the focus and examples Elkind gave to his analysis were specifically religious, his theory about

children of a similar age to those I studied is a close match to the characterization I have given to their general spirituality. A interesting implication of his theory is that relational consciousness may be the most effective way of describing children's spirituality for a short period equivalent to the period of concrete operations in their cognitive development. My evidence by itself can only state the nature of spirituality within the age range studied, and leaves open the question of whether 'relational consciousness' is a characterization of spirituality in childhood only, or more precisely this particular period of childhood alone. The identification of the 'search for relations' with the 7-11 age range in Elkind's theory indicates that further research with other age groups might identify other predominant forms of childhood spirituality, and indeed that such research might be guided by his map of the forms these could take.

Lastly, the absence of sufficient reference to relationship has been a source of criticism affecting the theories of Oser (Oser and Scarlett 1991) and Fowler (1981). Both relied on Kohlberg's analysis of moral development, which Gilligan (1982) has shown to reflect a rather male bias, notably in its oversight of a relational ethic. Parks (1992) has suggested that Fowler might usefully revise his account to accommodate such a perspective, and thus a more female cultural psychology. It might be in this way that Fowler's already broad characterization of faith could become a rather closer theoretical relation of spirituality.

7.3

Section 3: Extending the understanding of ‘relational consciousness’: Further psychological insights and parallels

Throughout this thesis there has been an interest in drawing parallels and insights wherever possible from psychological perspectives in an attempt to better understand children’s spirituality. Thus in the literature review in chapter 2, despite the lack of direct attention to spirituality shown by psychology, I drew together the strands of psychological theory from which psychological background clues about children’s spirituality might be gleaned. This approach was pursued further in chapter 3, where a working map of categories to guide an empirical exploration of children’s spirituality was created in the light of known psychological features that resembled some of the suggested defining characteristics of spirituality and also with reference to developmental psychological plausibility.

However, in possession of a new way of understanding children’s spirituality as a consequence of empirical data from which the core category of ‘relational consciousness’ emerged, a further and in some ways more precise psychological analysis of children’s spirituality becomes possible. It is possible that this could be the platform for extensive further scholarship. My intention here, therefore, is merely to suggest a few of the directions this might take.

7.3.1

The ‘consciousness’ analogy

It is reasonable to wonder how helpful a difficult term like this can be in clarifying the understanding of ‘spirituality’, another difficult term. In a number of academic frameworks (e.g. psychology, philosophy and neuro-science) consciousness is a problematic concept, and it might be suggested that identifying spirituality with this difficult concept would merely serve to perpetuate the definitional problems associated

with spirituality. However, it has been argued that spirituality is inherently a complex phenomenon. Consequently, the need to explore this through another complex concept reflects the fact that the approach proposed here has not abandoned its commitment to rich description in favour of a more simplistic account.

It is helpful to note that the use of ‘consciousness’ in the present context allows the setting aside of much of the contemporary philosophical and neuro-scientific debate that contributes to a sense that this is an impossibly problematic term (as debated in Dennett 1996, Chalmers 1996). The question of what consciousness ‘is’ exactly is properly a matter for philosophical debate and neuro-scientific research. This leaves the more relevant matters (at least in the context of this research) about how consciousness is experienced and what functions it serves¹.

7.3.2

Developmental psychology about becoming consciousness of the inner life of others and oneself

Leaving the philosophers’ questions about consciousness to one side, psychologists have identified distinctive interests in particular aspects of human consciousness. In child psychology this there has been interest in the development of inter- and intra-personal consciousness. This is to say, how we come to a common understanding of the causes and effects of thoughts and emotions on other people’s minds and in our own. This has been pursued in a number of ways through research on the development of ‘folk psychology’, ‘theory of mind’, ‘simulation psychology’ and ‘empathic’ understanding (Whiten 1991; Astington, Olson and Harris, 1988; Harris 1989; Hobson, 1989). As a core characteristic of children’s spirituality has been

¹ This distinction was first suggested by William James (1943) who argued that psychology can pursue an interest in consciousness because, whatever its final nature, it is a psychological fact of our experience and one can explore how this affects us. He uses the helpful analogy of a picture, stating that one need not be concerned about the properties of paper, pigment or oil in order to search for some understanding of what the picture is about.

identified in this thesis as ‘relational consciousness’, these areas of scholarship suggest a great many potential points of illumination through their insights concerning the child’s developing awareness of the interpersonal and intrapersonal mental worlds.

The general discovery through recent research on children’s understanding of ‘everyday’ psychology has been that, despite a number of obstacles, we develop an understanding of our own minds and those of others at a precociously young age. Psychological insightfulness, (e.g. ‘what was I feeling or thinking when x happened.’, ‘what (feeling or thought) will be in Dad’s mind if I tell him y’) is manifestly a powerful tool for understanding and predicting our own and others’ behaviour, a tool which would appear to distinguish humans uniquely from the rest of the living world. However, if one analyses what this involves, its complexity would suggest it would be an area in which we might expect later, rather than early, development. Our thoughts and feelings, and even more so the contents of other’s minds, represent a non-material layer of reality. For the child who is normally strongly led by features of the concrete world - what can be seen and touched - thoughts, beliefs and feelings would seem to be an impossible world of abstraction of which to develop a grasp.

Yet accumulating evidence suggests that children do demonstrate this psychological insightfulness in a number of ways. For example, pre-verbal toddlers engage in teasing games with their carers, indicating they have some sense of what mum will be thinking as they hold out their hand to offer her a biscuit (‘she thinks I’m going to give her this’), when all along their plan was to snatch it away at the last minute and laugh at the effect mum’s false belief created in her mind (Reddy 1991). Another example of these abilities is found in children’s early demonstrations of interpersonal emotional understanding. Harris (1989) reviews evidence showing that between the ages of 1 and 2 years children can be seen to actively comfort (and hurt) other people. He states the implication this suggests:

‘They no longer simply react to another’s current emotion;
they can anticipate the possibility of bringing about another

emotion' (Harris, 1989 p.48).

These complex and profoundly human abilities have attracted a number of further explanations of how this important form of consciousness operates. Three main kinds of account can be discerned in the literature: 1) via a hard wired capacity (see 7.3.2.1 below), 2) via the development of a theory of mind (see 7.3.2.2), and 3) via an imaginative (or experience 'simulating') mechanism (see 7.3.2.3). All three of these (but especially 3) can contribute some point of interest that may illuminate the particular form of consciousness I have described as distinctively implicated in children's spirituality. This follows since it seems likely that relational consciousness is at least logically related to, though not synonymous with, the broader psychological insightfulness developmental psychologists have been theorising about.

7.3.2.1

Hardwired Consciousness?

Fodor's (1983) ideas about modularity have been influential for those wishing to argue that a capacity for psychological insightfulness is in-built (e.g. Leslie 1988). It can be easily demonstrated that the complexities of adult's reflective consciousness are far from fully functional in young children. For this reason, authors following this line of argument are careful to suggest that though our consciousness of 'minds' may be a hard-wired capacity it is not necessarily 'switched on' from birth. (This is similar to line of the argument given in support of the hardwired characteristics of language). However, what is significant in the position here is that this kind of consciousness is identified as being a foundational property in our constitution. Fodor (1987) even seems to refer obliquely to God in his statement about this:

'Here's what I would have done if I had been faced with this problem in designing *Homo sapiens*. I would have made a knowledge of commonsense *Homo sapiens* psychology innate , that way nobody would have to spend time learning

it'. (Fodor, 1987, p.132-3)

In this way, the 'hard-wired' account of psychological insightfulness presents an intriguing parallel for a thesis that children's spirituality operates through a type of psychological insightfulness: consciousness about self, others and Other. It suggests that the capacity for relational consciousness might indeed be characterised as part of an innate human inheritance as Hardy (1979) and Hay (1994) have attempted to establish, and not constitute an artificially constructed phenomenon coerced by religious belief. It must be emphasised however, that Fodor's account of an in-built 'psychological understanding' has not been substantiated empirically, and that parallels drawn with spirituality and relational consciousness only amount to interesting speculations. Nevertheless, these demonstrate the kinds of intriguing psycho-philosophical discourse which discussants of children's spirituality might find it worthwhile to engage with as a result of identifying characteristics of children's spirituality from the perspective (and hence in the language) of developmental psychology.

7.3.2.2

Implications of the theory of mind account

The account that has attracted the greatest volume of research has been that which proposes children come to demonstrate such powerful psychological insightfulness by developing a 'theory of mind' (Astington, Olson and Harris, 1988). This is an unmistakably rational, cognitive account of how children acquire interpersonal consciousness, from which the spirituality of relational consciousness described in this thesis may appear very far removed. However, both in its details and in its general stance, this account suggests further parallels for our purposes.

The general stance of the theory of mind account is that children become lay psychological 'theorists', most obviously around the age of 4½ years. According to this body of research children can demonstrate an understanding of mental life even in counter-factual circumstances (the 'false belief' tasks, used by Perner, Leekham and

Wimmer, 1987). In other words, in this domain, children are characterised as able to organize experience and operate 'as theorists' many years before one might consider attributing theory-like powers to them in other domains such as scientific thinking. This represents a strong respect for children's capacities in terms of psychological insightfulness, as a domain which is already relatively well-organised and usefully engaged by the time a child begins school. In the course of general development, the precocity of 'theorising' in this domain indicates that the development of an understanding of their own and other's mental lives seems to be a matter of special importance, and that this importance may be sensed at a subjective level too. By implication one may speculate at the richness this source of material (i.e. children's 'advanced' inter- and intrapersonal understanding) must afford in their otherwise rather unsystematised perceptions of non-psychological features of the world. These attributes of worth and depth afforded by interpersonal understanding in general suggest some explanation of why spirituality might be identified as relational consciousness. It is in the realm of reflection about themselves and others that children may encounter their most rewarding experiences of consciousness.

The identification of different strands and features of meta-cognitive development has provided the detail on which theories of 'theory of mind' have been built. This research has therefore inspired much more subtle and comprehensive accounts of children's meta-cognitive development than were previously available. From these it is also possible to draw implications for an understanding of relational consciousness.

For example, in terms of pure 'theory of mind' reasoning about other's mental states, children's abilities are seen to advance progressively as they master meta-cognitive skills of mental representation, reflexive thinking and counter-factual reasoning. These skills aid their ability not only to 'compute' mentally what Mum might be thinking or feeling, but also second and third order psychological states: what Mum might be thinking that Dad is feeling, even when the child herself is thinking or feeling

something quite different to both of them². The developmental ‘story’ in these cases of psychological insight is therefore one in which the child’s abilities get better and better as they master more meta-cognitive skills.

However, the developmental ‘story’ for relational consciousness may not be so straightforwardly related to increased meta-cognitive skill use. This is because these skills make it easier for the child to perceive features of their psychological life as objects, and subject these to reality testing. Consequently, where a feeling or thought might previously have conveyed a sense of direct subjective potency, the child’s inner experience can now be more coolly examined. Similarly, the child’s better understanding of the meta-cognitive processes that serve her mental life means that these can be used to direct intentionally the conscious attention towards or away from experiences, depending on their perceived value and interest. Thus a closer knowledge of how children’s meta-cognition develops presents a scenario in which children’s sense of spirituality might in fact decline³ as their ability to interrogate their experiences more objectively increases.

Donaldson (1991) has argued that education, as well as modern culture in general, has traditionally contributed to this application of meta-cognitive skills in a way which rejects spiritual experience. The whole drift of the educational process tends, after all, to inculcate children with a general idea that the highest forms of knowledge are empirically verifiable, objective rather than subjective, and rational rather than emotional. Consequently, meta-cognitive development in association with education can demote, rather than promote children’s spirituality. However, this trajectory is not inevitable. In a milieu which did expressly value spiritual material, the development of an increasing meta-cognitive flexibility might also be applied to attending to the mind’s

² R.D.Laing’s ditty in *Knots* (1970) is a superb example of the complexities these can reach: ‘*Jack is more afraid of Jill, If Jack thinks that Jill thinks that Jack is afraid of Jill*’ !

³ As suggested by adults recollecting the greater potency of their spiritual experience as children (Robinson 1983)

spiritual contents. However, such a means of spiritual encounter would be probably not possible for the younger child in whom these developments had not yet taken place and been mastered.

7.3.2.3

Imaginative understanding of the inner life of oneself and others

The account of children's interpersonal psychological understanding, or insightful consciousness, that most closely parallels relational consciousness is Harris's (1989) account of imaginative understanding. In this account of children's 'mindreading' abilities, it is suggested that an 'imaginative understanding mechanism' allows them both to reflect on the content of their own mental life (relate to themselves) and to anticipate the thoughts and feelings of others (and thus relate to them also).

In short, it is suggested that rather than through reference to a 'theory' of the mind, psychological insight is achieved by simulating or imagining an alternative reality conditioned by the features of a given situation. For example, empathically imagining what it would feel like to be in Mum's shoes in a situation in which she was given a box of nutty chocolates but does not like nuts. Harris suggests the child runs a simulation of the scenario to work out what Mum will be feeling, imagining they are Mum, with her fussy tastes, and as recipient of the gift. In other words, the imaginative mechanism of interpersonal psychological understanding proposes that children 'escape' from the confines of their own immediate anchor in reality in order to allow the child

'to entertain *possible* realities, including the possible realities that other people entertain.' (Harris, 1989, p. 51-2)

The parallels with spirituality are already suggested by Harris's style of expression. For example, one is reminded of Starking's (1987) definition of spirituality cited in Chapter 3 (p.116) of this thesis as something which :

'takes people beyond their ordinary selves and their attachment to the limited lessons of their immediate

situations.'

Harris's theoretical 'cocktail', of emotional insight, interpersonal awareness, the roles of imagination and playfulness in the child's access to this kind of consciousness, suggests a number of ways in which his psychological analysis of these things may also help to illuminate the psychological roots of children's spirituality as identified by this thesis.

One way in which spirituality and interpersonal insightfulness in Harris's theory can be seen to share roots is in his characterization of play. For Harris, play is the means by which the child escapes from the reality of their immediate situation, but rather than being classed as merely 'fun', escapism, or a luxury of the child's leisure, play is viewed as having an important function. This purpose is to act as a tool in the exercise of interpersonal understanding, which includes insight not only into the minds of others, but also into the child's own emotions, thoughts and motivations.

Analysing play a bit further, more connections become apparent. Play provides the conditions in which the imaginative mechanism can be put to work. Entering into play 'brackets out' what is known and 'real', and affords a consideration of a far bigger picture than that dictated in the physical reality that confronts of the child. This bigger picture or psychological space (cf. Winnicott, 1971) offers the flexibility necessary to see things from another's point of view, and to imagine alternatives to one's own perspective also. In so doing, these creative manipulations are likely to light upon new meanings and connections. Spirituality has been variously represented by sensing new meanings, valuing a different quality of reality, or simply locating a much bigger landscape against which the everyday can be set. What Harris's account provides is an apparent psychological link between some phenomena found to characterise children's spirituality, something children do all the time (play) and the domain of interpersonal psychological understanding. This 'architectural' connection within the child's basic psychological constitution would seem to clarify, a little, why children's spirituality in this research clustered around a theme of relational consciousness.

Harris was not trying to describe anything more than the nature of children's rather everyday psychological understanding, it is therefore as if he suggests the foundations out of which a stronger form of psychological insight can emerge: relational consciousness. Cohen and MacKeith (1991) also discuss children's play and its role in interpersonal insight, but moving beyond the ordinary needs to understand oneself and others, their argument illustrates further the apparent continuum between play and psychological understanding and the 'deeper' stuff of spirituality. For example, they note that between the ages of 7 and 11 years, children like to indulge in a lot of animistic pretend play, for example pretending to be dogs or horses. However, like Harris, they point out this is not merely for fun nor impressive evidence of their imaginative flexibility. 'Disguised' as play, this can in fact serve an important function in the development of intense empathy with living things, which they suggest also peaks at this time. In turn, as my research suggests, this intense empathy can nurture a sense of relational consciousness: a spiritual consciousness.

Figure 7.1 (p.296) offers a visual representation of the significant combination of elements in Harris's account, and the possibility that their convergence will have a bearing on the nature and nurture of children's spirituality as I encountered it. What it suggests may be the psychological roots of children's spirituality, and by extension the psychological source of adult spirituality also. This hypothesised origin amounts to a basis in play and imagination which is primarily exercised through efforts to understand one's own and others psychological worlds: a relational origin.

To this, one can add other factors (marked with * in figure 7.1) identified as significant to development in this area, which further confirm that there is a parallel to be found in the psychology of children's consciousness in this literature and the psychology of children's relational consciousness or spirituality.

Meins (1997) presents evidence that suggests there is an even earlier key factor in children's development of the general psychological insightfulness Harris and the 'theory of mind' researchers have tried to understand. As was mentioned above, an

initial watershed in the organization of children's understanding of mental life has been observed to occur around the age of 4¹/₂. Naturally, passing this developmental milestone is subject to individual differences and Meins was interested to discover what distinguished 'advanced' children who demonstrated their psychological insight earlier than normal from those who were delayed in this respect. What she found to be important was the quality of attachment, i.e. relationship, the child had with his or her primary care-givers in the second year or so of life. Good foundational relationships would appear to feed into the overall equation of the development of these kinds of consciousness. There were also many suggestions in psychodynamic theories reviewed in chapter 2 that children's religious nature might be contingent on aspects of their relationships with parents. Meins' contribution to a creative interpretation of Harris's account of developing general psychological awareness (as something from which spirituality may emerge) appears to offer confirmation of this prediction from a quite independent angle⁴.

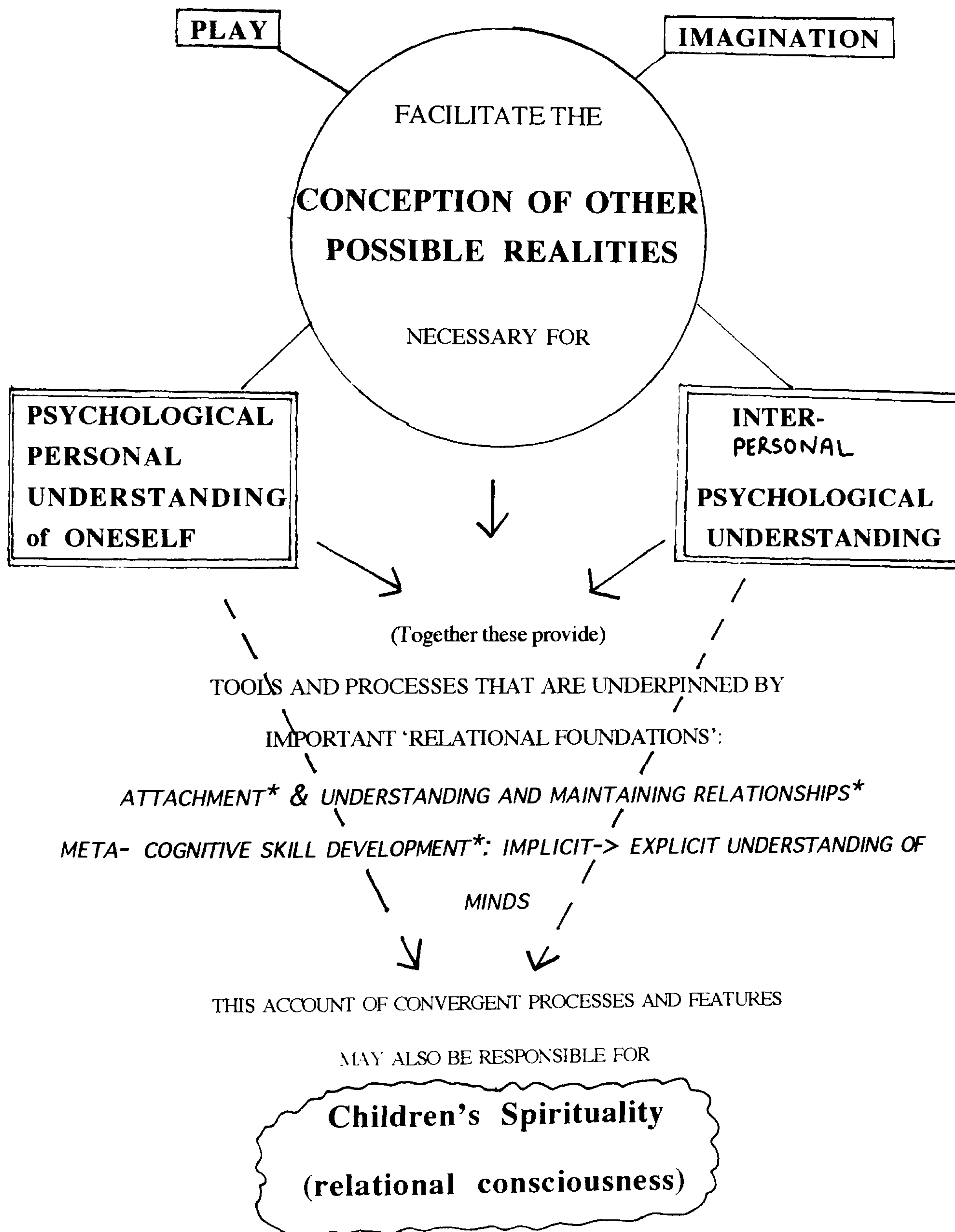
The other significant additional factor in these general accounts of children's developing consciousness is the overall character of meta-cognitive development that research has revealed. The scholarship of Reddy (1991) on toddlers' understanding of beliefs as demonstrated by teasing, and of Harris (1989) on very young children's understanding of emotion and empathy indicates that forms of psychological consciousness function from early

⁴ Kirkpatrick and Shaver (1990) have also proposed an attachment based account of children's religiosity that reinforces the web of connections suggested in this general analysis. They report that religiosity is best related to the quality of attachment between parent and child, and not as one might expect the religiosity of the parents or the religious education of the child.

Figure 7.1

Converging components in children's development of consciousness:

Relational foundations give rise to relational consciousness?



in life. However, there is equally convincing evidence that documents significant difficulties which children have in mastering and expressing their appreciation of these domains.

An example of this is the remarkable time lag between the emergence of children's capacity to intuit what counts as a moral rule and the development of moral reasoning. Around the age of three, children demonstrate insight into the abstract principles of moral rules (such as theft or violence being 'wrong'), Yet in their moral reasoning children typically do not refer to such moral principles (but rather only instrumental aspects) until the age of ten.

What this signifies is the changing character of meta-cognition, from intuition or vision, to limited insight to full blown consciousness. A fashionable way of describing these discrepancies between apparent and rigorously testable abilities is in terms of implicit and explicit knowledge⁵. It has been an important development in the characterization of children's meta-cognitive development that their implicit abilities are now recognised alongside the more 'testable' forms of explicit skill. As psychologists develop ways of understanding and identifying these features in their implicit forms, important lessons for relational consciousness may be learnt. In chapter 1, (section 1.4.4) I noted intriguing observations made by teachers in the FARE report (1991). These referred to the erratic or jumpy character of children's insights in some parts of religious education. Children could appear to have 'exceptional insights' at one moment and an 'apparent lack of understanding' the next . If one superimposes these characteristics of meta-cognitive development as a factor mediating the child's developing consciousness (and arguably their spirituality in turn), these irregularities becomes less perplexing. There are often indications that children enjoy rich spiritual (or emotional or moral or thinking) lives long before it seems reasonable for adults to expect, or children themselves can give reasonable account, that this is indeed the case.

⁵ This has antecedents in M.Polanyi's (1958) distinctions about kinds of knowledge, and in particular the role of tacit and personal forms of knowing in outwardly rational processing, such as the scientific.

If these 'indications' are interpreted as implicit forms of knowing as understood within the current framework endorsed in the field of meta-cognitive developmental theory, in the future it may become possible to trace the development of 'relational consciousness' in more detail⁶.

To summarize, in this section I have tried to explore the further dimensions of children's spirituality that may be suggested through its identification as a special instance of consciousness. For this purpose I turned to the recent scholarly interest in children's understanding of minds, itself a special form of consciousness of self and others.

Primarily this has relevance to 'relational consciousness' in its focus on knowing about persons and personal things, and in this way it may be continuous with spirituality as experienced by children. Interestingly, Watts and Williams (1988) make a similar general pitch for the understanding of adult's 'religious knowing' as a species of cognitive activity bearing close resemblances to personal self-knowing and empathic other-knowing, as well as aesthetic knowing. However, for their purposes they draw on the adult psychological literature about the mature function of psychological understanding. My concern has been to conduct a creative exploration of parallels in the literature that charts the first emergence of these forms of consciousness.

Secondary parallels were also examined through the features and processes which different theorists have identified in their accounts of children's general development of insightful consciousness about themselves and others. These also appeared to corroborate my account of children's spirituality as relational consciousness. I outlined a number of convergent features found in my research, various definitions others have given spirituality and the psychological accounts of

⁶ This model of more general psychological research might provide not only deepen our understanding of children's spirituality in terms of an account of how implicit knowing is translated (or not) into explicit knowing and awareness. But understanding the implicit forms in more detail might also be help to shed light on the spirituality of the very young and those with learning difficulties.

children's 'ordinary' consciousness.

The state of these explorations remains exactly that: exploratory. I do not wish to imply that relational consciousness is inevitably dependent on the prior development of these more mundane areas. To extrapolate such a precise developmental account at this stage seemed imprudent on the basis of what is really at present simply a plausible analogy and a series of resemblances. However, I have endeavoured to show that these parallels expose a potentially rewarding way of pursuing a psychological study of children's spirituality in greater detail in the future. In turn, children's spiritual consciousness might become recognised within developmental psychology as a legitimate strand of consciousness alongside the others that have attracted such interest over the last decade⁷.

7.4

Section 4: Implications for Education

It was made clear in chapter 4 that I set out to provide a theoretical rather than a practical contribution to this field. Nevertheless I hope that others more qualified to extract practical implications for education will find this research a valuable resource. I shall suggest just a few of my own here.

At a general level, an application of this thesis has been suggested through the

⁷ Carrithers (1991) comes closest to making such a connection, however he writes as an anthropologist commenting on the accumulating scholarship in developmental psychology in this field. Consequently, his suggestion that we need to identify and account for a further level or layer of interpersonal consciousness, which he characterises as 'narrative capacity', has been unfairly neglected. His thesis does suggest many closer parallels with spirituality than the mainstream 'everyday mindreading ability' or 'theory of mind' suggests at first glance. For Carrithers the interesting and uniquely human form of human consciousness to be addressed is indeed that on which our intrapersonal and interpersonal insights are based, but he suggests that this needs to be understood in terms of its very special characteristics of narrativity (which, as in story, means this mode allows one to follow many different strands, perspectives, and meanings at the same time). In his view this narrative capacity is the hallmark of human's special insightful consciousness into minds and its narrative like nature makes it possible to reach a new level of perspective, a much wider picture of our narrow personal existence. Moreover, he suggests that the distinctively human capacity for sociality is a result of this capacity, opening channels of analogy with virtues cherished by religion: community, altruism, brotherhood and peaceful cooperation. This potential bridge from psychology to spirituality has however not had any influence on developmental psychology to date.

demonstration of psychological language and theory as a rich and helpful language in which spirituality can be rephrased and seen afresh. The language difficulties that sometimes arise in discussion of spirituality (in terms of religion and values) might be sufficiently minimised where a more psychological discourse is adopted to allow more fruitful discussions of this area. There is without doubt a proportion of teachers who remain unconvinced that 'spirituality' relates to anything other than the concerns of religious education. Similarly Crompton (1996) reports an attitude amongst some social workers that consideration of a child's spirituality is irrelevant unless the child or family in question is known to pursue a particular faith. By offering a psychological context, locating spirituality in the literature or through a largely psychologically inspired framework to help identify empirical instances of children's spirituality, more practitioners may be helped to recognise their inclusion in this field.

The various elements of the analytic framework I have described in chapter 6 might provide the basis for a detailed yet clearer, empirically grounded understanding of children's spirituality as a curriculum wide-issue in education. For example, the conditions of the core category make clear not just that children's spirituality is expressed beyond the confines of religious language, but how it is so expressed. In this way, the framework could be used as a resource to guide curriculum subject specialists towards an appreciation of the content and activities of their subject that might, for some children, serve as vehicles for their spirituality. Whilst the need for this has already been made clear in some education documents (OFSTED, 1993,1994), there has perhaps been too wide a gulf between the suggested raw materials (OFSTED makes use of general terms such as 'reflection', 'feelings' and 'beliefs') and the ways these might qualify as spiritual in geography, maths or physical education. It has not been clear, for example, in what sense the child 'reflecting' on a mathematical problem might also be encountering a spiritual dimension. This gulf might be breached by referring to the various elements which my empirical work identified (or those aspects referred to OFSTED, see p. 25 chapter 1) in so far as they demonstrate the general determining

qualities of 'relational consciousness'. In other words, the raw materials of 'reflecting' or 'feeling' can be related to a specific understanding of the configuration of children's spirituality. It is proposed that relational consciousness offers the missing link that can confer a spiritual quality arising in otherwise mundane activities, thoughts or feelings⁸. Questions about the response teachers should make when such instances are recognised remain a matter for professional sensitivity and discretion.

The numerous strategies and conditions my analysis identified may help to advance the general 'status' of spirituality in the practice, and not just the rhetoric, of education. I have described a range of features serving spirituality more specifically than heretofore, and as a result it becomes possible to draw on parallel literature on these which attests to their educational value. Through this association, the instrumental value of promoting spirituality in education is highlighted.

For example, it was apparent that many of these strategies and conditions involved broadly imaginative mental processes: were a child to lack imaginative powers it would be difficult to envisage him or her engaging in the various manifestations of relational consciousness I have described⁹. In a psychological study of the educational correlates of children's imaginative skills, Tower and Singer (1980) reported that children adept at such skills also demonstrated better concentration and powers of reflection, more sensitivity to others, and a superior ability to organize information and integrate their experiences. Since these represent highly desirable attributes for pupils in the classroom, it is possible to argue that educational practice that supports and nurtures children's spirituality (and thereby some of their imaginative abilities) has general instrumental value.

A significant finding in my empirical research was that children already

⁸ I emphasize again that the many and various elements described in chapter 6 are not proposed as instances of children's spirituality in their own right, without a sense of relational consciousness.

⁹ For example, I regard children with autism as a particular challenge to the spirituality researcher.

possessed a diverse range of strategies that serviced their spirituality. These included some explicit strategies but with many more implicit strategies in reserve. This finding suggests that education's practical role in promoting children's spirituality lies in legitimating and celebrating the value of these existing strategies. This role may obviate the need to teach children specially designed new skills (e.g. 'stilling', 'creative visualisation') that some have recommended (Beazley, 1993, Hammond and Hay, 1990). With younger children, teaching such practices might have the unwelcome effect of undermining the child's existing, personal strategies. However, the evidence that the use of many of children's imaginative strategies is subject to rapid decline in later childhood and adolescence (Cohen and MacKeith, 1991) may warrant the rather more interventionist 'teaching' approaches which authors Beazley have recommended at least for secondary school age children¹⁰.

Each of the various elements in the analytical framework (and my commentary about these) has the potential for the development of diverse implications for practice. Just one of these concerns the prominence and character of the 'language of death' condition, (noted on page 251, chapter 6), as a means through which children explored their spirituality. There is a general cultural tendency to treat talk of death as taboo, and this is especially apparent in adults' reluctance to involve children in such discussions, and still less any rituals associated with death and dying. In contrast, Kubler-Ross (1983) has argued that, in the case of terminally ill children, talking about death is a very positive tool by which children make sense of their situation. Children in much less extreme circumstances with whom I spoke in this research also seemed to use this language positively, with few traces of fear or morbidity. The implication for education here, therefore, is that this language is an appropriate resource for children in their exploration of spiritual matters, and that adults might help pursue children's leads on

¹⁰ I am aware that the approaches of Beazley (1993) and Hammond and Hay (1990) were intended for use with secondary school age children, though have become more widely popular as a means of being seen to do something practical about children's spirituality (McCreery 1995).

this with rather less trepidation.

Finally, I have experienced a shift of interest in my own desire to see this research being put to practical use. Where initially the research was inspired by the school educational context, I am now particularly concerned with what implications my findings might have for the educational practice of the Churches. Though it may seem counter-intuitive, in Britain¹¹ the Church's discussion about children's spirituality is much less developed than that in education, and consequently this presents an area in which the implications of this research might make particular impact.

Many involved in ministry with children have expressed dissatisfaction with current Church practice, particularly the emphasis on teaching children religious knowledge (Cannon, 1996; White, 1997). Dissatisfaction is being expressed as a desire to revolutionise practice. For example, the Scripture Union is exploring how it might renegotiate its mission in view of the increasingly 'non-book' youth culture (Terry Dunnell, personal communication, May 1997). This has particularly highlighted the need to commence children's religious nurture from a basis that does not depend on factual knowledge or understanding. A basis in the broad kind of spirituality explored in this thesis provides the required alternative starting point; indeed theologically this is arguably the beginning and end of personal religion referred to by Jesus in the Christian tradition:

‘Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to
such belongs the kingdom of God’ (Mark 10, v.14)

and in Matthew's gospel

‘And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them,
and said, truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like

¹¹ In the Episcopalian and Lutheran Churches in the USA this has begun to be recognised already, and alternative approaches to 'catechesis' and Christian education of children are being developed that reflect this (Bruce, R. Episcopal Church Centre and Anderson, D. Augsburg Youth and Family Institute, personal communications 1997). Significantly, these developments are being deliberately guided by collaboration with child psychologists.

children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven'

(Matthew 18 v.2-3)

There is also a growing recognition, at least in isolated pockets of the Church, that traditional educational practices in Sunday Schools and children's Bible classes are potentially offensive to the understanding of children as participants in God's creation now, not just at some point in their future. In another very recently set up Scripture Union-backed enterprise, Children in Urban Situations (CURBS) the tendency to overlook children's current spiritual gifts and needs was tellingly expressed in a quote from a young child:

"When you come to Sunday School you learn things so that when you're grown up and go into the bigger Church and they all say things, you'll be able to understand them and understand what the minister's talking about" (Introducing CURBS, leaflet 1997)

The CURBS project is attempting to challenge this view, sometimes expressed as 'children are the Church of the future', and replace it with the understanding that children are equally valuable members of Church of the present and have their own spiritual contributions and needs¹². It is however proving difficult to dissuade those responsible for children's work to lay aside their dependence on bible study worksheets and scripture-related games and songs in favour of a what, in contrast, seems a rather nebulous, child-led and creative alternative approach.

For these reasons, a significant application of the research in this thesis may be to offer an academic, as well as empirically grounded, framework to those in the Church who seek to transform the practice of children's ministry. This research has documented the richness and significance of ordinary children's spiritual interests,

¹² In fact, this might be identified as a development in a slower process of change spear-headed (at least in the Anglican church) by the publication of Children in the Way in 1988 (National Society Church House Publishing)

experiences and their own construction of 'knowledge' in this domain. It has refuted the notion that children are in any sense empty vessels whose spirituality is contingent on being filled with religious information and the development of adult religious understanding. It is my hope that by exploiting the academic findings of this research in partnership with the practical concerns and expertise of those in children's ministry, children's spirituality might become better recognised and nurtured in its own right. Indeed, I hope to argue that spirituality's natural 'psychological' character, demonstrated in my sample of diverse and mostly non-church-going school children, suggests the foundation on which all Christian education can be built. This dialogue and the translation of theory in support of new practices has already begun, and offers potentially the most direct educational application of my thesis work¹³.

Some of the hallmarks of such an application would particularly include attention to the children's sense of relation to themselves, to one another (e.g. as member of the Junior Church), to adults and to their everyday world, on the basis that understanding their relational consciousness will give access to their spiritual world and sense of relation to the divine. This would seek to reflect the message at the heart of this thesis. Rather than cleverly thematically linked teaching content, the balance would be heavily in favour of listening to the children, in the kind of open and interested way in which the interviews in this research were conducted. This inevitably creates a new kind of expectation of the teacher's skills, not least a willingness to share (not necessarily explicitly) something of their own unfinished spirituality. It requires the teacher (or leader) to be non-directive more often than not, and to have a confident grasp of their own faith such that sessions might unpredictably flow on to touch topics for which they

¹³ This is being pursued through my current research for the Centre for Advanced Religious and Theological Studies, University of Cambridge as part of a research project on Psychology and Christianity.

had not specifically prepared¹⁴. Such a transformation of the teacher's role would at least necessitate its recognition as an expert form of ministry .

If the kind of approach followed in this research was adopted for the Church's work with children , the need for guidance in the identification of the ways children begin to express their spirituality would become paramount. The analytical framework, and its numerous elements and their descriptions in chapter 6, might provide the basis for such an informational resource. It would be a gratifying application of my research if, simply in general terms, the Church could be helped to see the message at the heart of this thesis, namely that psychological scholarship can contribute valuable perspectives on the understanding of children's spirituality.

7.5

Section 5 : A Review of this Thesis' Aims

In Chapter 4 I described six general aims that characterised this research (p.146-150). To conclude I shall evaluate the extent to which these have been addressed.

The first stated that I would focus on developing a theoretical, rather than a practically oriented, account of children's spirituality. Chapter 5 described how I moved towards the construction of a theoretical understanding of the data, and in chapter 6 an analytical framework was proposed. This is not claimed to possess the formal features of a 'theory'¹⁵, nor was this the aim stated in chapter 4. It does however offer a deliberate attempt to explore the nature of children's spirituality without the diversion of

¹⁴ J.Hull's God Talk with Young Children provides many examples of genuine conversation of this kind, and demonstrates the rich products that can flow in such exchanges in contrast to the sterility of many conscientiously planned discussions and activities.

¹⁵ For example, the defining features of theories described by Batson (1997) include '1. The theory should provide a conceptual structure that renders the phenomenon in question more understandable than before. 2. The theory should be testable - capable of being shown to be wrong if it is wrong 3. The theory should help one answer important questions about the phenomenon'. The account and treatment of children's spirituality as relational consciousness meets these requirements to some degree, and might be best described as moving 'towards a theory' of children's spirituality.

practical questions about how this should be promoted and or why this might be an educational priority. A few suggestions for the practical application of this framework have been outlined in this chapter, though these focus more on ‘theoretical’ applications rather than providing a particular practical resource.

The second aim was to suggest how children’s spirituality might be seen in the context of developmental psychology in general, since it has been an area of children’s lives that has gone unrecognised by psychologists in the past. It was important to me to identify how this area related to other parts of the discipline. This has been particularly explored through an examination of the parallels between the core category, relational consciousness, and recent literature of the psychology of children’s awareness of their own and others’ mental lives (in section 3 of this chapter). Throughout this thesis but especially in chapter 2.2, I have tried to locate aspects of children’s spirituality in the context of their general psychological constitution and development, as described by different theorists.

My third aim was to clarify my understanding of Coles’ reference to ‘children’s spiritual psychology’ (Coles 1990). This was primarily addressed in the analysis of the research data, from which I identified a core category around which my analytical reflections constellated. This category of ‘relational consciousness’ and its various elements suggested a quintessentially psychological character in children’s spirituality (as I perceived it), and allowed me to pursue further psychological dimensions which might contribute towards better understanding of it. Together with my remarks in chapter 5.1 concerning the sense of individuality that each child’s spirituality suggested in the earlier stages of the analytic process, this represents my attempt to give an account of children’s ‘spiritual psychology’.

The fourth aim was to ensure that the account given of children’s spirituality remained sufficiently broad to reflect the wide character of definitions that this term has attracted. It was also noted that breadth was important in view of the paucity of previous research of this kind, which suggested that the best approach for this research was an

exploratory one that made use of a generally inclusive policy. The working map guidelines for the conduct of this research (chapter 3.2) demonstrate the deliberate intention of seeking spirituality within and beyond the confines of religious language, and within and beyond the measure of adult spirituality, the spiritual experience, employed in other empirical research studies. The research conclusions (reflected in the structure of the analytical framework in chapter 6) preserve the inclusive nature of this approach. Spirituality as discrete experience or diffuse worldview, expressed in religious or secular terms, can be accommodated by this framework. Chapter 5 also offers particular discussion of the distinguishing (and common) characteristics of religious and more implicitly spiritual expression discerned in the data.

Amongst my aims I noted a methodological challenge this research presented, namely whether a qualitative approach, loosely based on the principles of grounded theory (i.e. not theory testing), would be an effective tool for my purposes. Using such an approach to gather and analyze verbal data from children does not have any obvious precedent. Theory building is described as drawing heavily from the verbal qualities of the data (Strauss and Corbin 1988). To achieve the aims in this research I would be required to respond creatively to the rather different character children's verbal data provides compared with adult discourse. I believe I accomplished this sufficiently well through a process of iterative analysis whereby I moved towards the analytical conclusions by combining the coded children's data with the analytic memos (also subsequently coded) which I had written about each case. In this way I was able to move between the children's own language and a somewhat richer language that interpreted their statements. This was, however, an original and unorthodox modification of the grounded theory method.

Lastly, but perhaps most importantly, I suggested that a covert aim underpinned my decision to conduct this research. This was identified as my interest in raising an awareness of the rich reality and worth of spirituality both amongst children and in those responsible for their nurture. This is not easily assessed, since it is of course more of

an idealistic ambition than an aim. However, two indications suggest that some advance was made in this respect.

First, the children participating in my research often stated enjoyment at having the opportunity to talk to me and be gently guided to consider areas in which spirituality might be manifest in their lives. There was a ground-swell of interest apparent in our meetings also. Moreover, many of the children expressed regret when they realised I would not be returning to interview them on yet further occasions. I endeavoured to suggest alternative people (parents, teachers) with whom they might raise similar issues, but it seemed they felt that something distinctive had been provided in the opportunity to hold these discussions, as well as in the particular things the discussions had addressed. Their comments indicated that other adults and friends were not in the habit of attending to them in these ways although the children sometimes wished they would.

Secondly, there have been promising signs of interest from adults involved in Church ministry in response to my research. In a seminar series on psychology for ordinands I taught over the last twelve months, six out of eight of these ministers in training selected (in their course evaluation) the sessions on children's spirituality as being especially likely to have a profound effect on their practice. Two ordinands described their raised awareness of this area, and my conversational method of exploring it, as having totally redefined their vocation.

It seems proper to conclude by acknowledging the essential role of the children who took part in this research. Their spirit of generous cooperation and exploration made it possible to begin to understand more about the spirituality of children. Their participation demonstrated that children themselves can and should be a resource in the ongoing search for the parameters of spirituality. The distinctive ways in which children's spirituality has been identified in this thesis offer a penetration of a broader understanding of children's nature than has heretofore been addressed by child psychology. It may also offer helpful insights about the probable developmental heritage of adult spirituality.

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Appendix : Ethics guidelines

Ethics

1. Parental permission will be given before interviewing each child
2. No child should be made to feel by me, or their teacher, that they 'have to' be interviewed. They will be asked to volunteer.
3. Each child will be informed about need to tape record their interviews, and their permission to do this will be sought each time.
(If they don't want anything to be taped at all, I'll interview them only briefly and move onto someone else, although if they seem particularly interesting, I might ask just once more about tape recording. I don't think this will be an issue)
4. The confidentiality of the what they say and the tapes (in terms of their friends and teachers) will be explained at the beginning. I'll add however, that if we happen talk about something they would like a teacher or another adult to know about, then we can arrange that together.
5. The child will have the right to ask for the tape recorder to be switched off at any point.
6. Because of the unusual opportunity of talking to someone confidentially, one to one, not about 'school' things, and therefore the potential these interviews have to resemble a therapeutic situation, if I am at all suspicious that a child may wish to continue discussion of an issue, I'll suggest a named teacher(s) who has agreed to act as a back up. These teachers will also be given my address and phone number.
7. In the unlikely event that a child discloses something I consider ought to be known to others caring for that child (teachers, parents), I'll encourage the child to tell someone else, and offer to be there with them. If this suggestion is not acceptable to the child, and the situation is sufficiently worrying, I'll consult the head teacher for advice, without necessarily disclosing the child's identity.
(In pilot work, I was often told about bullying. Usually the teacher was already aware of the situation. As it was such a common complaint, such instances could be directly discussed with the class teacher, in general terms, to check that he/she was aware of it.)
8. The child's real name will not be used in any publicly presented material.
9. In any discussion of religious matters, the interviewer's views and beliefs will not be in any way communicated to the child, though if the child directly ask questions of the interviewer, these will be answered honestly, but as far as possible, obliquely, so as to avoid influencing the child.

Appendix : Parental Permission Letter

Dear Parent,

***** Primary School has agreed to participate in an educational research project being conducted by Nottingham University in association with Westminster College, Oxford. We would like to ask your permission to include your child in this work.

The research is interested in how young children think and feel about the world they live in. We also want to find out how children express their ideas about the things that matter most to them. I'll be chatting with each child who takes part in the research for about thirty minutes at school, about three times over the term.

All the children I've spoken to at other schools have really enjoyed themselves, and appreciate the opportunity to have some individual attention in their busy school day. Please let the class teacher know if your child can take part by returning the attached slip.

If you have any further questions, please contact me directly at the address above. At the end of the research, a summary of the general research findings can be sent to parents of children who participate. Please indicate on the slip if you would like this report.

yours gratefully,

Rebecca Nye
(*Research Fellow*)

Appendix: Interview Format*

* This describes the general format I had prepared, but it was not followed rigidly. For example, the questions outlined here were not expressed necessarily exactly in these words but represent the kinds of prompts I often followed. The photos were used in a similarly laid back way, as prompts used more with some children than others, as necessary. For example, where a subject (e.g. life and death) had already arisen in conversation, I would not use the photo prompt which was hoped to suggest such a discussion.

Introduction

Explain about my wish to tape record, ask for child's consent.

Explain about confidentiality, in terms of teachers and other children, 'it's just for me and my work'.

Explain about interview length (30 mins) and chance to meet at a later date

1. Initial impression

'I've come to your school to chat with you because I'm very interested in what children think and feel about their lives, and what you think is important or special. I'd like to find out what you feel really matters in your life and in the world. *(pause to give chance to respond immediately)*

Do you think adults listen to children enough about that sort of thing?

(ask who they can talk to about such things)

Does anything come to mind right now ..about how you feel about life and what you think is important or special?

Well perhaps you could tell me something about yourself - what are you like?

- try to get a brief biography of life events (including first memories, school changes, family changes, house moves, major illnesses- what does the child think are the important events - perhaps none of these)

- what (and why) currently attracts the child's attention, what (and why) are they 'into'. hobbies, out of school activities, heroes and heroines. interests at school. dislikes/fears.

- ambitions, looking forward to growing up/ fears about growing up.

(This usually includes a number of references to group activities and the child's social circle. I acknowledge this, but contrast it with a question about the child alone)

You enjoy doing lots of things with other people, but do you ever like to spend some time on your own? *(what's that like, why, when, where, what is different about being alone etc)*

Perhaps we all need time to stop and think about life, some people have special places or special times when they do that.. do you?

2. Spiritual Issues

a) This is a picture of a girl who might be doing that (stopping to think about life). Take your time to look at it. Can you imagine sitting there, gazing into the fire?.....What could be going through your mind?...

later prompt if necessary : can you imagine something she might be thinking or feeling establish at a minimum that the child has some idea of the 'atmosphere' of the picture (calm, thoughtful)

[this is an opportunity for the child to express her own potentially spiritual concern or main 'issue'. I don't immediately suggest a context to direct attention to a particular issue]

Ultimate Questions

perhaps she's really wondering about something. Do you do that, ...sit and try to puzzle things out. What sorts of things seem like really big/important puzzles to you?

What does thinking about that make you feel. Do you like thinking about that kind of thing, why. Any other puzzles?

Have you got any ideas about the answer to your puzzle? (also trace source of this 'answer')

Do you think there is a sure answer to that puzzle of yours?

Do you reckon there are sure answers to everything, or do you think there are some things we just can never be sure about. Can we find out about everything or are some things mysteries?

How do you feel about that (frustrated/ inspired).

Where possible, ask child to describe physical and mental experiences when contemplating this issue)

Life and Death

(picture of dead pet)

We can imagine the story here....(allow child to fill in if possible) This girl really loved her hamster, she liked caring for it and playing with it every day. But when she came home from school one day and went to see her pet, she found that her hamster had died. She felt terribly sad. ...what could you say to her?

own experiences with deaths

what do you think about death?

in your opinion, what happens when we die?

The Universal Framework: Me and the Far and Beyond

(picture of boy and stars)

Look at this picture for a moment. Perhaps you can imagine doing what this boy is doing.

What do you think could be going through his/your mind?

What's he thinking/feeling.

What does the night sky make you think about

what does the sky in the daytime make you think about

The Point of Life

(picture of girl/town)

Look at this picture for a while. You can see this girl is really thinking deeply about something. Do you ever spend time doing that? What goes through your mind..what does that feel like to you.

Perhaps he was looking out of her window at all the people outside, doing their shopping, rushing about and driving their cars. Maybe that made her wonder 'is that all that life is about?'

What would you tell her if she asked you that question. Have you ever thought like this girl before. (why, where, when)

What do you think being alive is all about? (What's the best thing about being alive; what's the worst thing in life)

How we Relate and are Related/Connected

(picture of boy and baby; picture of boy alone in playground)

Have a good look at these 2 pictures. Take a moment to imagine what it's like being this boy and then imagine what it's like being this other boy. Is it difficult to imagine their feelings? Tell me about them.

Have you ever felt like that before (for both).

Good and Evil

(boy in dark, looking round)

I guess you know what this boy is feeling. Why could he be feeling like that.

Is that a bad thing he is scared of. Do you think there are lots of bad things like that ? Why are there these bad things? Can you think of some really good things too? Are there more good things or more bad things. What is the worst bad (thing) in the whole world? What is the best good (thing)?

The Transcendent?

(boy looking up with bus)

Think about this photo for a minute. What do you think it is about?

What is the boy doing/thinking/feeling..why

if necessary and appropriate, prompt: the boy might be thinking 'why is this happening to me today?' why is he looking up when he thinks that? Perhaps he has a feeling that there is something else which has some control of his life. did you ever feel that. what makes you feel that. Do you like that feeling or not?

3. Spiritual Experience

You told me quite a lot before about what you think and feel, and what really matters in life. I'd like to hear some more about the kinds of feelings you might sometimes get.

For example, if you are thinking about working out the answer to a maths problem, like 12 times 14. What sort of feeling would that give you? I reckon it would make me feel like my mind was really busy and working hard, perhaps I'd even feel my face all screwed up trying to concentrate. Would you feel like that too?

But there are lots of other kinds of feelings we can have, sometimes they can be really special feelings or really strange feelings. do you know what I mean?..

see this picture (rainbow picture)

When I showed this picture to a boy/girl at another school, I could almost see their feeling on their face - they looked like this (wow drawing), and they said 'wow! this photo takes my breath away. It's amazing, just wonderful.'

Have you ever had a feeling like that, a 'big wow'?..something that took your breath away..(give plenty of time to think and recall)

(why do you think that happened, where, when, other times, additional ways of describing it.)

ok. let's look at some other pictures, perhaps they will make you think or feel something, or remind you of a time you had a special feeling.

(clouds picture, calm sea picture, mist and stream, rough sea)

take your time, look right into the picture and let your mind wander a bit...

- what do you feel / can you say about that one? what does looking at it make you think about? remember how I said you might feel when you are thinking about a maths problem, what about thinking about this, does it make you feel the same way or different? in what way; where does it feel different?

have you felt like that before

have you seen something like this before?

(same for all 4 pictures, but not in as much depth with each one necessarily, reacting to the level of attraction each picture has for the child so as not to lose their interest)

which of the 4 do you think is your favourite? why

Do you think that sometimes small things can be special too? like?

Here are pictures of 2 small things , can you tell what they are?
pause to look at pictures) what do you think about those pictures?
when you look at these do you have the same kind of feeling as when you are doing hard
sums, or do you have a different kind of feeling? What kind of feeling? Have you got a
favourite tiny thing?

4. Spirituality in God talk

some people say they can feel or see God in things that are specially beautiful.
what do you think?
what do you think they mean when they say they 'can feel God'?
Have you ever felt that? Did you tell anyone else?
what do those people mean, I wonder, when they say they can see God in specially beautiful
things?
Did you ever think you saw God in something?
Imagine that you did feel God in something, how would you feel - amazed, calm, bored,
scared?. why.

what is God like in your opinion? Have you always thought God was like that. why did you
change your idea?
do you feel it's helpful in your life to know about God? why (not).
what is the hardest thing to understand about God.
what is the easiest thing to understand about God (if you were going to tell a younger child)

Did you ever have a feeling that God might be close, but you weren't sure if it was God or
something else like God?

