SPIRITUALITY, FAITH AND EDUCATION: SOME REFLECTIONS FROM A UK PERSPECTIVE.

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The Context

The education system of any nation is inevitably both a reflection of recent and current policies and a vestige of bygone ages. Where a nation consists of more than one country - as is the case in the United Kingdom - regional variations and sub-cultural proclivities will add a further layer to what is already a complex historical and social artefact[i]. While educational provision in Wales has been closely tied to that of England, and parallels with developments in Northern Ireland and Scotland can be discerned, there are significant differences, especially in regard to Scotland which has long had its own Department of Education. The devolution of political power from the UK Government in Westminster to the Northern Ireland Executive in 1998 (after 27 years of direct rule from Westminster), and to the Scottish and Welsh Governments in the following year, made possible an increase to the regional variation which already existed[ii].

Under the current coalition Government, the situation in England and Wales is in a state of flux, with new categories of school being created and a number of other changes underway, often with little or no public consultation. The system had already seen a great deal of change in the previous 25 years. Following the 1988 Education Reform Act under Prime Minister Thatcher, the introduction of a statutory National Curriculum for England and Wales, direct funding of schools under the heading of 'local management of schools' (LMS), and a radically reduced and reconfigured education brief for Local Education Authorities (LEAs) began a trend of 'reforms' which has gone on unabated ever since. Amongst these were the advent of a new and oppressive Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) to take over the bulk of the work of the old (and more benign) Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI), and substantial changes in the structure and control of higher education, including the education and training of teachers. The return of a ('New') Labour government in 1997, led by Prime Minister Blair (who famously listed his top three priorities as 'Education, Education, Education'), brought with it relatively little that was new; by and large, the changes made in the previous 18 years were retained and, if anything, extended.

In England and Wales there is now a daunting array of different kinds of 'state' school, from the remnants of the post-WW2 tripartite system of secondary grammar, technical and 'modern' schools and the neighbourhood comprehensives with which many such schools were replaced, through city technology colleges to quasi-independent 'academies' and 'free schools'. Differences in funding and control are reflected in categories such as 'community-', 'foundation-' and 'trust-schools', and there are further distinctions according to the age-ranges of their students, subject

specialisms and faith-group affiliation. With regard to the last of these, many schools in the state sector are church schools voluntarily aided or controlled by the state, and many of the independent schools which provide for 7% of children are faith schools[iii]. The matter of faith schooling is discussed later in this chapter, but it is pertinent here to note that, in all the countries of the UK, but particularly in Northern Ireland and Scotland, religion is a major and enduring dimension in the organisation of state schooling.

Generalizations about the place of spiritual education within such complex systems should be treated with caution, but one generalization which is permissible, is that the meaning and place of the *spiritual* in education in the UK is, and has long been, ambiguous.

If one were to equate 'spiritual education' with 'religious education' (an unwise but tacit assumption for many people, and for most schools until at least the 1980s[iv]), then spirituality has been a feature of UK schooling since the Middle Ages. With the social and economic pressures of the Industrial Revolution, the Christian churches, and philanthropists guided by Christian principles, became the providers and patrons of most elementary and secondary schooling. The Government's first financial intervention, in 1833, involved a grant from the taxpayer of £20,000 towards the establishment and running of schools, to be distributed via the National Society for the Promotion of the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church (Anglican), and the non-conformist British and Foreign Schools Society (Lawson and Silver 1973; Holness 2005, 209-10). Herein lie the beginnings of the English 'dual system' of state and voluntary schools developed through the second half of the 19th Century, formalised in the incorporation of (some) Anglican and Roman Catholic schools into the state system in the 1902 (Balfour) Education Act, and untouched by the otherwise sweeping revisions of the 1944 Act (Holness 2005, 211)[v].

In Northern Ireland, schooling was organised along denominational lines from 1921 onwards, with the Protestant Churches accepting absorption into the state system as 'controlled' schools, but the Catholic schools refusing to do so. Today, almost all of the Region's schools are fully state-funded, but provision remains most accurately described as a 'dual' system of Catholic and Protestant schools with a small 'integrated sector' (Armstrong 2012, 33). In Scotland, attempts to construct a centralised system can be traced at least as far back as the 1872 Education (Scotland) Act which followed the 1867-8 reports of the Argyle Commission set up to investigate what was perceived to be a fragmentary and incomplete system of schooling in crisis (McKinney 2008a, 46). A key moment in this development was the 1918 Education (Scotland) Act which led to Catholic schools, which had declined to lose their independence after the 1872 Act (Nixon 2008, 259), eventually being "fully incorporated into the Scottish state educational system and …. inextricably bound to the post-1918 history of schooling in Scotland" (McKinney 2008a, 47).

Under the 1980 Education (Scotland) Act "the right of children to receive 'religious instruction' and to take part in 'religious observance' is guaranteed by law" (Hartshorn 2008, 375). In England and Wales, the 1944 Act had required that Religious Education (RE) be taught in all state schools, and that there should be a daily act of collective worship, which as Adrian Thatcher (Thatcher1999b, 35) points out, is a "uniquely British phenomenon". The place of both RE and the act of worship

was confirmed in the 1988 Education Act, and despite the increasingly multi-cultural character of British society, they continue to be expected to be broadly Christian. The 1944 Act also required of LEAs, that they "contribute towards the spiritual, moral, mental and physical development of the community" (cited in Keast 2003, 157), a requirement also endorsed by the 1988 Act. In Scotland, the influential Millar Report of 1972 (*Moral & Religious Education in Scottish Schools*) reviewed the provision of RE in the so-called 'non-denominational' (i.e not Catholic) schools informed subsequent legislation and curriculum development, not least with what became known as Religious and Moral Education (RME).

In the early 1990s it soon became clear that the assumption that RE and the act of collective worship in England and Wales could alone deliver what quickly became known as the 'spiritual, moral, social and cultural' (SMSC), was dubious, with the equivalent provision under RME in Scotland also coming under scrutiny. In Northern Ireland, there seems to have been rather less concern, with Religious Education remaining the main context for spiritual development, but here, too, the stated values underpinning the wider curriculum which eventually came to include "each individual's unique capacity for spiritual, moral, emotional, physical and intellectual growth" (CCEA 2007). In England and Wales, this part of the curriculum remains contentious, especially in a post-modern society in which there now exist, alongside the Anglican schools, what Halstead calls the 'old' religious schools of the non-conformist ('free') churches and the Jewish community, and the 'new' which include those established by evangelical Christian groups as well as Muslim, Jewish, Seikh, Greek Orthodox, Seventh Day Adventist and secular schools (Halstead 2002, 2009).

Against this background, planning for SMSC became a pressing concern for those responsible for designing the curriculum for state schools, with the precise meanings of 'spiritual development' and 'spiritual education' being particularly elusive (Keast 2003; Best 2005; Bigger 1999).

Faith schools

Perhaps the most animated debate with relevance to spiritual education in the UK in recent years has been that surrounding faith schools (e.g. Humanist Philosophers Group 2001; Gardner *et al* 2005; Parker-Jenkins *et al* 2005; McKinney 2008b). One reason for this is that the concept of 'faith schools' is itself, complex and unclear. Schools founded by religious groups in the UK go back a long way, and as noted above, many of them have been absorbed to greater or lesser degrees, into the state systems of all parts of the UK. As a consequence of on-going immigration and contemporaneous demographic changes involving industrial growth and decline and associated geographic mobility, the majority of children attending such schools today may not, even nominally, belong to the faith of their founders. For this reason, some commentators prefer to talk about faith-*based* schools rather than faith schools *per se* (Parker-Jenkins *et al* 2005, chapter 3).

Such schools vary greatly in the degree to which they promote and celebrate a particular faith. A school which is nominally Anglican, for example, but serves a zone of inward migration of non-Christian groups, may judge it inappropriate to make much of its religious roots. Even schools serving communities broadly of the faith of

their founders, vary in the degree to which their curricula, assemblies and observances are transparently religious, and the number of their staff who actively practise the faith. In regard to the desirability or otherwise of faith schools, the distinction between more or less *religious* schools may be more pertinent than that between faith and non-faith schools.

In fact, the debate about the desirability or otherwise of faith schools is not so much one debate but many (Best 2003, 4; Halstead 2009), including debates about the disputed compatibility between the concepts of education and religious nurture, parental rights in choosing children's education (Marples, 2005), the divisive effect of separate schools for different faiths, and state funding for faith schools. Broadly similar issues have been identified as characterizing the debate in Scotland (McKinney 2008a, 2008b, 2008c) and Northern Ireland (Gallagher, 2005), where the populations are less heterogeneous but sectarianism more visible.

A substantial body of literature surrounding the faith schools debate has been written from a primarily philosophical perspective. Most influential is that of the late Terence McLaughlin. In a series of papers (including McLaughlin 2003, 2008a, 2008b; McLaughlin and Halstead 2005; Alexander and McLaughlin 2003), he pursued, amongst other things, a number of related questions concerning common and separate schools and their justifications in modern societies. McLaughlin's influence has continued since his tragically early death in 2006, not least in the publication of a selection of his papers in 2008 entitled *Liberalism, Education and Schooling* (Carr *et al* 2008) and a book of essays in his memory entitled *Faith in Education* (Haydon 2009). The second of these seems to me to represent very well the current state of debate and the issues around which it revolves.

In terms of the implications for spiritual development, the predominant issue in *Faith in Education* is that of indoctrination (Grace, 2009; Callan, 2009; Alexander, 2009). If faith schools exist to promote initiation into a faith, however broadly conceived, whether one sees them as desirable or repugnant will greatly depend upon whether one sees it as *indoctrination* (the enemy of autonomy), or as necessary if the individual is to flourish as a 'whole person' (i.e as *education*). That said, in neither the debate about faith in education nor the debate about faith *schools*, is much attention given to the concept of the spiritual *per se*.

Spirituality and the Curriculum

In the 1990s, this concept became a thorn in the side of those responsible for the design and assessment of the National Curriculum in England and Wales, and those responsible for inspecting schools to ensure its delivery.

John Keast (2003, 157) notes that the promotion of the spiritual development of the community was required explicitly in the preamble to the 1944 Education Act, and that the word 'spiritual' did appear in some official documents in the 1970s and 1980s, but it became a focus of particular attention after the 1988 Act. With the increased emphasis placed on the spiritual, moral, social and cultural following the

introduction of the National Curriculum in England and Wales in 1989 and its Northern Ireland equivalent a year later (O'Callaghan and Lundy 2002, 21-23), the precise meaning of the 'spiritual' could no longer be taken for granted. Even then, as Keast (2003, 158) records, "no real attention was paid to the promotion of spiritual development until the National Curriculum Council (NCC) published an NCC Discussion paper in 1993".

Discussion papers and other guidance documents were published by the Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA) which had replaced the NCC, and by Ofsted, in which attempts were made to specify how spiritual development might be promoted via the curriculum. None of these seems to have been particularly successful, primarily because an acceptable and coherent definition of the spiritual was so elusive. A review of the content of the 1993 Ofsted *Framework for Inspection*, and the SCAA and Ofsted discussion papers of 1994 and 1996, and the 1998 *Draft Guidance for Schools* produced by SCAA's successor, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) revealed an astonishing array of nebulous, inconsistent and sometimes seemingly incompatible descriptions of spirituality (Best 2005). These include (amongst many others), that it is:

> " An inclination to believe in God, the 'other' or 'the ultimate'….
>
> A powerful force that determines what we are, our self-understanding, our outlook on life, others and the world, and consequently shapes our behaviour….
>
> …that aspect of inner life through which pupils acquire insights into their personal experiences which are of enduring worth…
>
> A unique personal characteristic [whose] development for many individuals, depends in part … upon human interaction…" (Quoted in Best 2005, 71-72)

In light of these attempts at a definition, knowing how to inspect schools' provision for spiritual development was going to be as difficult as teaching it. As OFSTED commented in the 1994 Discussion Paper: "If spiritual development is about a unique inner life, it is not easy to inspect" (quoted in Best 2005, 72).

It was the lacuna of the spiritual in the National Curriculum and the manifest difficulties in agreeing a definition that prompted me, together with colleagues[vi] at (what was then) Roehampton Institute in London, to hold a conference on the theme "Education, Spirituality and the Whole Child" in 1994. The success of this venture testified to the felt need amongst teachers and educationalists for the definitional gap to be filled. A selection of the papers was subsequently published under the same title, and the interest aroused by the event resulted in an annual international conference on this theme being held at Roehampton until 2003. Elsewhere, interest in the place of children's spirituality in education was also growing. Notable here was the appearance of the *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* in 1997 and the international conferences associated with it ever since[vii].

What these developments had in common was a concern with three fundamental questions:

What do we mean by the 'spiritual'?
What is 'spiritual development'?
What can schools do to 'spiritually develop' their pupils?

In a liberal pluralist society, where respect for differences in values, beliefs and practices and the principles of multi-culturalism, democratic rights and individual liberty are enshrined, finding answers to these questions that are acceptable to all, and offensive to none, is pretty well impossible.

In 1996-7, SCAA attempted to resolve this problem by establishing a *National Forum on Values in Education* in the hope that some set of universal values could be identified as a basis for curriculum planning. The statement which emerged was not entirely unhelpful, in that it identified four aspects of life towards which our values may be oriented - our selves, our relationships, our society and the environment - but precisely *what* values in respect of these ought to be taught remained contentious. In any event, it can be argued that the spiritual is 'lost' amidst the social, moral and cultural within such a range of values.

The work of the Forum was one inspiration for an attempt by the QCA to produce a framework for planning SMSC across the curriculum. The fields of self, relationships, society and environment were cross-related with the spiritual, moral, social and cultural and learning outcomes, producing an unwieldy matrix of 64 cells to be filled (16 of which were 'spiritual')[viii]. Not surprisingly, the scheme was criticized , most powerfully by Paul Yates (Yates 1999, 2000) as both a bureaucratic nightmare and as powerfully constraining the content of SMSC while creating the illusion of freedom for schools to determine this for themselves. It is perhaps as well that, despite being piloted in 150 schools, the framework was never implemented (Keast 2003, 160). With regard to the spiritual dimension of the framework, the project was dogged by the enduring difficulty of finding an adequate definition of spiritual development.

To focus on attempts by government and quasi-governmental agencies to define or describe spiritual development as a pre-requisite for curriculum planning is, however, to beg the question of whether such involvement is either desirable or has any chance of success. Keast, who was himself the senior officer at the QCA with responsibility for religious education, argues that

> "[t]he work of agencies such as the QCA … has not so much described spiritual development as such as marked out the 'space' that spiritual development might occupy in school life and the curriculum…" (Keast 2003, 163)

before conceding that it

> "is possible to argue that in all the descriptions, definitions, statements of values, what is missing is that which only particular and real institutions can provide - the actual values, beliefs and their applications of them, where the source, nature, authority and prescription of values is articulated and practised". (Ibid).

In other words: perhaps only schools and the communities they serve can answer the question of what should be taught under this heading, although this runs counter to the 'top-down' direction of centralised planning and inspection which seems to have been presumed by those who conceived of a *national* curriculum.

Religion and the Meaning of 'Spirituality'

In the academic debate - no less than the political one - the fundamental question of the meaning of the 'spiritual' has been stubbornly resistant to all attempts at a succinct and coherent definition. The following is not unrepresentative:

> "Spirituality is an expression of human longing to approach a supreme entity or power situated beyond human control and grasp…. [It] is realised in abstract aspects of human life that constitute part of one's secular or religious being. The definition of spirituality consists of two basic constructs: transcendence and an encounter with a supreme being or deity… [but] An examination of research on spirituality yields three distinct approaches to the relationship between spirituality and religiosity .... [of which one] identified nine non-religious components that constitute what they define as humanistic spirituality which are distinct from religious forms of spirituality … [Moreover] Spirituality is not a natural stance… The way individuals conceptualise spirituality is highly correlated with the special circumstances they encounter and experience, which affect how they internalise, manifest and interpret it…" (Gross 2010, 199-200).

Such approaches seem not to get us any nearer the 'Holy Grail' of a clear definition acceptable to all, but they do indicate the key issues in the field, including whether the spiritual is intrinsically linked with religion and belief in God.

Gross's reference to a 'humanistic spirituality' invites the question: Is a concept of spirituality unconnected with religion sensible or viable? This was a question McLaughlin visited on more than one occasion, as he distinguished between what he called 'tethered' and 'un-tethered' spiritualities:

> "Religiously 'tethered' spirituality takes its shape from various aspects of the religion with which it is associated and which makes it possible to identify the nature and shape of 'spirituality' within that context, including criteria for spiritual development"(McLaughlin 2003, 191).

In contrast, "Religiously 'un-tethered' spirituality involves beliefs and practices that are disconnected from, and may even be discomforting to, religions" (ibid, 192).

Given the requirement to provide for religious education and spiritual development in a multi-faith society where the majority of the population are probably *de facto* agnostic and many are atheists, the attraction of a spirituality un-tethered from any specific religion is great. Thus meditation (Erricker and Erricker 2001) and other experiences such as 'stilling' and 'silent sitting' as sometimes used in Circle Time and in curricular schemes such as that of the Human Values Foundation[ix], are considered

to facilitate, if not actively promote, spirituality without risking offence to any specific religion or the charge of indoctrination[x].

However, as McLaughlin (2003, 192) puts it, in contrast to the 'tethered' variety, such 'spirituality'

> "may lack a definite shape and structure and may be unconnected to any wider tradition of belief, practice and value, thereby making it difficult to specify criteria for spiritual development in relation to them".

Thus unconnected, the very concept may lose its meaning, as Adrian Thatcher asserts: "Once wrenched from its religious meaning, it has to be *assigned* a meaning by its advocates, and there is lack of agreement about what it signifies" (Thatcher 1999, 3). And the more the meanings which are assigned to the term, the more human experience it seems to touch (if not include), and the less precise its meaning actually becomes.

A superfluous concept?

It is arguable that much of the frustration and confusion about spiritual education could be avoided if we simply stopped using such words altogether. There are two perspectives here. One is that, unlike the cognitive, physical, social and moral development of the child which *at least in principle* are possible to observe and measure, the lack of consensus about what constitutes spiritual development means that it cannot easily be operationalized for observation and measurement, not to mention the fact that in some conceptions of the Spirit, it *defies* observation. If we can't 'see' it (if you like), what's the point of talking about it? The second is that we do not *need* a concept of the spiritual, because that which it is used to describe is at least as well (if not better) described in other terms, notably those relating to the emotions.

Of the first of these perspectives, suffice to say that an inability physically to observe or measure something is poor grounds for not referring to it, and even poorer grounds for not providing opportunities for it to be experienced in schools. After all, aesthetic experience is both culturally and personally relative and no more observable than the spiritual, but teaching the appreciation of art does not seem to raise anything like the controversy surrounding the spiritual. It does, however, share with it a strong affective component or accompaniment.

The emotional impact of 'spiritual' experiences leads some commentators to wonder whether there is anything more to it than that. For example, Roger Marples (2006) argues that the idea of spirituality as a search for meaning or 'spiritual quest' is highly problematic, even within a religious context. Such formulations (he asserts) seem to lack a grounding in the kind of clear, shared and rule-governed language necessary for them to be viably meaningful. It is in any case unclear why such a 'quest' would not be quite properly described as 'philosophical' rather than spiritual. Interestingly, such a view seems to underlie a key component of the Scottish Curriculum in Religious and Moral Education (RME) entitled *Personal Search,* which is defined as "a process by which pupils can discover and develop their own beliefs and values. It involves

them in making up their minds on religious and moral issues by developing skills associated with critical thinking and evaluation" (quoted in Hartshorn 2008, 376). So much of the language of spirituality (Marples argues), and so many of the 'manifestations of spirituality in life' are either so vague as to be meaningless, or may be understood as experiences of other kinds (e.g. emotional, aesthetic), or as character traits or virtues, or predispositions to act in certain ways. There is nothing he can see which justifies the label 'spiritual' as essential to their adequate description. 'Un-tethering' the concept from religion is no escape from these problems; if anything, the word only becomes even more superfluous.

I have argued elsewhere (Best 2008), that Marples's thesis is open to a number of serious objections, not least that 'spiritual' fits comfortably within one particular discourse and that Marples's disinclination to accord that discourse parity with those of (say) philosophy and psychology is not enough to rule it out of court. A second objection is that his argument simply ignores the kinds of experience which people are talking about when they use the word 'spiritual', and that no other words (such as 'emotional' or 'aesthetic') *on their own* can do justice to describing them.

Despite the weaknesses (which I think are considerable) in Marples's thesis, the question he poses as to whether the concept of the spiritual is either necessary or viable in regard to education is a serious one. Lambourn (1996) warns against using it merely to fill whatever 'gaps' are left by other concepts, and suggests that there may be no remainder if the 'personal' and 'social' are fully understood.

Examining 'spiritual' experience

I see two main ways of approaching the examination of spiritual experience: (a) we may look at *the way we use* the *word* 'spiritual' in relation to experiences; (b) we may examine *the subjective perceptions and apprehensions of those personal experiences which we describe as 'spiritual'* (a phenomenological approach). While these may appear to be two sides of the same coin, the outcomes suggest otherwise. The first was the path taken (in a philosophically unsophisticated way) by Ofsted, SCAA and others in the 1990s, and we have noted already how this obfuscates rather than illuminates. The second may lead to the identification of experiences for which no other description seems satisfactory, and this is helpful provided we are not 'smuggling in something which should perhaps be examined more explicitly'(Lambourn 1996, 157).

Researchers in the UK and elsewhere have empirically researched children's and adolescents' concepts of spirituality and their descriptions of experiences which might be described as 'spiritual' (e.g. McCreery 1996; Champagne 2001; Nesbitt 2001; Bosacki and Ota 2000; Adams 2001; Reimer and Furrow 2001; Engebretson 2004, 2006). Perhaps best known of these in the UK context is the research undertaken by Hay and Nye (1998) who interviewed 38 children between the ages of 6 and 11, using photographs and other means to get them to talk about spirituality. The authors concluded that children's descriptions of what might be called spiritual experiences were characterized by a single 'compound property' which they called *relational consciousness*; i.e. they were moments of exceptional consciousness of perceptiveness in contexts where the child related to something or someone, including God (Hay and Nye 1998, 113).

The descriptions reported in such research are often idiosyncratic and surprising, and our difficulty in grasping what children say in such contexts seems to demonstrate the impossibility of finding the right words to capture their distinctiveness and power. Adult descriptions of similar experiences are often like this, too. I have been struck by a number of examples amongst those for whom spirituality is a major interest, not least Professor John Hull's account of the discovery of an ancient altar in Iona Abbey (Hull 1997, 195-196)[xi], and the theologian Don Cupitt's description of a moment of insight which was

> "like the moment when a tightly-coiled spring begins to release its energy, and then a violent explosion of pure happiness which passed so rapidly that I became conscious of it and identified it only as something that was already fast receding and becoming forgotten. I found myself snatching at it as it slipped away, melting though my fingers". (Cupitt 1998, 8)

While it is possible to challenge the use of 'spiritual' to describe such experiences, it is not easy to see what other words can do them justice. The suggestion that these are no more than powerful emotional experiences won't do. They are strong in affect, it is true, but that is not the same thing.

In a recent paper (Best 2011b), I contrasted a moment of heightened relationship as I danced with my 4year-old granddaughter in my arms, with a period of emotional agony when she was born, to demonstrate that the dance episode lacked the dimensions of cognition (recognition or understanding) and desire (motivation or goal-directedness) which philosophers tell us are two other components of emotions (*ibid*, 364-5). I noted that the experience involved an unspoken but profound level of *trust* and a *letting-go of self* in order to allow the other to fill my world and bring a sense of whole-ness. It was also a *total* experience: physical or bodily as well as awareness and affect, and there was an element of play or *playfulness*. I do not suggest that all spiritual experiences are like this, but this one does, for me, epitomise a kind of experience for which 'spiritual' is the only descriptor which does it justice. It also implies something about the conditions under which certain kinds of experience may be facilitated (*ibid*, 366-367.

In conclusion

A comprehensive account of the place, purpose and meaning of children's spiritual development in the education systems of the countries of the United Kingdom would take a whole book. What I have tried to provide in this chapter is but an overview of some of the historical and political factors at work in multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-faith societies, together with a flavour of the on-going debates about the meaning of spirituality and how spiritual development might be included in the curriculum of such societies. It should be clear from the discussion that the big questions are by no means resolved to everyone's (*any*one's?) complete satisfaction, and that what we live with is inevitably a set of compromises and a continuing struggle for a better understanding.

I am aware that I have said little about the *pedagogy* of spiritual education, but it should be clear that for teachers charged with 'delivering' spiritual education - 'tethered' or 'un-tethered' to religion   -   the challenges are great. Given the difficulties of definition and the historic and problematic relationship between spirituality and religion, the option of simply ignoring spiritual development in curriculum planning is not unattractive. In my view, to do so would be a serious mistake. As for the elusive definition, it matters less what something is called, than what we do with it. If there is a sense of the person as a 'whole' in which certain sorts of experience are transcendent and enriching, and if there are genuine connections between such experiences and the moral and religious traditions of a society or a faith, an education which simply ignored these experiences and traditions would not be much of an education at all.

While there is great variety in the kinds of experiences which are labelled 'spiritual' by different groups, there are some (such as those which often happen between adults and children) which seem to me to epitomise what it is to be fully human, fully alive, and wholly at-one with another. It is what it is to love and be loved. To facilitate the development of a capacity for such experiences should surely be a fundamental purpose of education.

i   I am grateful for guidance received from Stephen McKinney and James Nelson regarding what I say about faith schools and religious education in Scotland and Northern Ireland respectively. Any errors which remain are mine alone.

ii Amongst these variations were the curriculum and assessment framework in Scotland, which already had "its own distinctive and flexible qualification framework that is separate for the National Curriculum based framework used in England, Wales and Northern Ireland", and the inclusion of Welsh as a core subject on the National Curriculum requirements for Wales. www.schoolswork.co.uk/media/files/Understanding_the_UK_education_system.pdf (accessed 31/1/2012).

iii For a description of some of these categories in respect of faith-based schools, see Parker-Jenkins, Hartas & Irving, 2005, chapter 2.

iv As Adrian Thatcher (1999a, p.9) comments: "A telling comparison between the lobbying groups which were responsible for the insertion of spiritual development in the 1944 and 1988 Education Acts concludes that each believed in the conflation of doctrinal Christianity , an ambiguous concept of 'spiritual', and the use of education to promote 'national moral virtue'".

v Which is not to say that the merger was achieved without heated debate between representatives of the established Church, non-conformists and non-believers. On the contrary: See Lawson & Silver, 1973; Holness, 2005, p. 211; Best, 2005, p. 69.

vi   David Rose and Elaine McCreery of the Religious Education section of the Faculty of Education.

vii Key movers in these developments were located in higher education Institutes at Chichester and Winchester, notably Clive Erricker, Jane Erricker and Cathy Ota.

viii I have to confess to having played a (very minor) role in the discussions which resulted in the matrix; I have regretted it ever since and am relieved that the scheme was eventually dropped.

ix To see their programme *Education in Human Values (EHV)*, for 5-12 year-olds, visit www.humanvakluesfoundation.com/ehv (accessed 24/5/2112).

x Not entirely successfully, however. I have heard evangelical Christian students argue that 'emptying the mind' in this way was an invitation to the Devil to move in.

xi John Hull is Emeritus Professor of Religious Education at the University of Birmingham. He is profoundly blind. In his book: *On sight and Insight - A Journey into the World of Blindness*, he recounts how he explores the ancient Abbey at dead of night when he has the place to himself and his blindness is irrelevant. His description, which makes no explicit reference to God or religion, of happening upon the ancient altar, measuring it with his body and examining its blemishes and surfaces with his fingers and his tongue, is an excellent example of what I have in mind as a 'spiritual' experience.

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