

# Chapter 4

## Spirituality and Soul in Education

### Questions:

*What do we mean by soul?*

*What can we learn from the literature on spirituality?*

*In what ways can soul be present in education?*

*What do we mean by spiritual literacies?*

### Introduction

Spirituality and soul are not easy concepts to define and everyone will have their own meaning based on their culture, religion or spiritual beliefs. Spirituality and soul are now named as important aspects in the new Tasmanian curriculum frameworks (both K-10 and Years 11/12). What do they mean and what could they mean? They are certainly central to Holistic Education and therefore a key aspect in my own journey of moving towards being a holistic teacher.

My own ideas about soul and spirituality have changed so much in the last 20 years, moving from a search for a *body of knowledge* and *development of self practice* to a process of *stripping my spirituality bare*; questioning my underpinning assumptions and dogma. In this new place I began to perceive *universal essences*. This movement in spiritual perspective was an outcome of my trying to come to understand what it meant to be a holistic teacher; living the tension between science and spirituality and trying to find some reconciliation in my physics classroom.

So in this chapter, after a quick look at some definitions of soul, I review the spirituality literature using an imaginative dialogue between fictional curriculum planners who are interested in how it relates to their teaching and design of curriculum. This enables some playfulness in exploring the different literature. I am not claiming that this is a complete review – I am certainly missing philosophical and religious perspectives – rather focusing on where education and spirit intersect. This is my understanding based on where I am now

(2005) which I hope the reader can use as a lens in interpreting my journey in Part 2 (which starts back in 1990).

### Some definitions of soul (courtesy of Google):

- The immaterial part of a person; the actuating cause of an individual's life.
- The spiritual life force or essence, carrying an individual's personality and consciousness of actions
- An immortal and spiritual body of light
- The linking principle between spirit and matter
- The underlying foundation of human existence which is the true self as pure consciousness
- Personal identity; feelings, thoughts, memories, sense of self

How might you define it?

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## The Spiritual Landscape as a context for education

### A discussion by some curriculum planners

Welcome back everybody to our continuing exploration of educational perspectives which might inform the revisioning of our educational frameworks. How are you today? I hope you have been enjoying exploring Holistic Education and how it might inform our curriculum review process.

We are meeting today to look at the field of

**spirituality and soul in education.** Now

everyone has had borrowed some books over

the last few weeks and I hope that reading them with Wilber's Integral Theory quadrant model in mind has been helpful in terms of positioning the literature.

<p><b>I</b></p> <p>Meaning, values, heart, mind, transpersonal states, beauty</p>	<p><b>IT</b></p> <p>Body Behaviours Subtle energies</p>
<p><b>WE</b></p> <p>Community, caring, ethical frameworks</p>	<p><b>ITS</b></p> <p>Being part of a complex whole (nature, cosmos, Kosmos)</p>

Fig 4.1

Wilber would ask us to think about spirituality as more than just *qualities of being*, or as access to *transpersonal states*, but also as *development lines* requiring as much attention by educators as do the cognitive or ego development lines. He says that all our development lines move through similar stages or waves leading to transpersonal stages of being and consciousness. In helping develop the child we build the foundations which enable continued development of the adult. Activities which support the development of such consciousness are to be encouraged.

What does the literature say and what can we learn from it? Would you like to get into your groups, share what you have found and work out what you would like to present to the whole group? Great... would we like to do a group visualization first?

In anticipation....

Not knowing

Where it will go.

Does it matter?

Everyone has their own journey.

If I listen well and see theirs

And not to try too firmly to stick to mine,

I might be surprised,

Moved,

Perturbed,

Gain insight,

And just laugh

In the wholeness of it all.

I create a space in myself

To be ready.

“Our group found that the book *Thirst for Wholeness* (Grof 1993) is really useful in describing **general qualities of a spiritual person** – which is Wilber’s notion of *spirituality as an attitude or as a quality*. This book describes how we have a craving for wholeness which is often expressed through addictive behaviours, rather through an ongoing relationship with a vast inner source. We found it interesting that many of these are qualities which we are trying to promote in our curriculum... yet perhaps they need to come about from a sense of one’s own spirituality and place in the world, rather than being taught in isolated skill based ways.”

### Qualities of Spiritual Maturity

- Love and compassion
- Honesty and authenticity
- Physical, emotional, mental and spiritual clarity
- Serenity
- Responsibility and discipline
- Personal freedom
- Tolerance and patience
- Faith, trust and inner security
- Wisdom and understanding
- Gratitude, humility and willingness
- Hope, happiness, joy and humour
- Connection with earth and daily life
- The ability to live in the present moment
- Mystical worldview

Grof (1993)  
Fig 4.2

“Yes, we wondered how we are succeeding in helping students fulfill their need for wholeness, meaning and connection in our curriculum framework. Is this about the quality of the experience students have, the teaching pedagogies used or the very topics we teach?”

“Well maybe what we looked at can help. Books like *Essential Spirituality* (Walsh 1999), *Contemplative Practitioner* (Miller 1994), *Going Home* (Thich Nhat Hanh 1999) suggest ways which help in **developing the spiritual line** through many different types of contemplative, meditative or mindful practice... both secular and sectarian. These are suitable for various age groups and help connection with self, others, nature and a greater reality. These can :

- Help us gain access to non-ordinary or transcendent states
- Help us discover our passion and gifts
- Help us gain insight into relationships and the world we are in
- Develop love and compassion
- Help us gain detachment and develop frames of mind that enable us to be more in more control of our lives
- Help us in healing body and mind
- Help us reprogram attitudes, beliefs and expectations

- Help our souls be more fully present in the moment, enabling us to bring our whole selves to what we do and what we experience and to notice with wonder the universe around us
- Help foster creativity and soul expression
- Help us to understand our minds and uncover the wisdom within
- Help us discover our sense of unique place and purpose in the Kosmos
- Help us to see the spirit in everything and to experience profound gratitude

“So contemplation is not just a practice aiming for something beyond this world – it is also a way of assisting greater wellbeing and wise action in the world. As the Dalai Lama would say it is about creating a *warm heart and open mind* – that is the secret to happiness and wholeness... and perhaps that is what we should be helping our students experience.”

“And I guess coupled with the inner contemplative practice are the more reflective rational interpretations of those experiences. It is the practice of inner *being* coupled with that reflectivity which helps move us into *becoming*. *Being* is shining forth what is, and *becoming* is moving towards what is possible.”

“Yes, self understanding is a key aim in many of these practices, and contemplation and reflection are key tools in going deep into one’s own experience. So what does self understanding look like for different ages? Perhaps our encouraging students to be self aware learners (meta-cognition) is part of it, but are we missing the heart and spirit components of self understanding? Are we just emphasizing the rational?”

“I am also thinking about dream interpretation and how dream states are such an important part of our consciousness. How many students dream but don’t know what they mean and are concerned by them? Perhaps helping students understand dreams should be part of what we do? I would be interested to know what might be *all* the possibilities in our tool kit to promote self understanding!”

“Well our books (*Doorways to the Soul* (Pearmain 1998), *Spiritual Literacy* (Brussat 1996)) might assist students aspiring to a sense of wholeness and could help promote self understanding perhaps by resonance – allowing what is within them to be called forth. They are more **inspirational stories which speak deep into the soul**... they might invoke a sense of compassion, or perturb students into new understandings, or contain the highest ideals, or show what is possible despite

obstacles. I am sure we could find stories like these coming out of many cultures so students of all backgrounds could identify with them.”

“Yes, I am thinking about how other cultures have used oral traditions and their elders to pass on these type of stories. Do we have time and space for doing this in our curriculum? A passing of the baton of wisdom? Where are our wise elders and our stories?”

“Yes, and that reminds me how storying one’s autobiography in the grand context of the cosmos has been such a positive experience for students. So coupled with contemplative practice to *touch* the soul is the need for *telling the story* of the soul.”

“And in fact if we talk about what helps inspire students so their whole soul is present we could talk about singing, dance, creativity, being in nature, service to others... a more action based approach.”

“Yes I like the notion of what activities are *doorways to the soul*. It would be different for each student... our job might be to help them find those which work for them and to use them. *What is your door and where is the key?*”

“I think creativity is such an important part of spirituality. I think **creativity is where the soul can be expressed**. It is an outlet for all that growth and becoming, which I guess is the ultimate act of creativity – evolving oneself! There might be a door which opens *into* the soul like contemplation – and a door which opens *out* – like creativity. I guess the trick is to enable that flow to happen – to keep the doors fully open! Because then there is positive feedback.”

“And creativity is something that can be expressed in so many ways – individually, co-creatively, imaginally, artistically, practically, rationally. Perhaps creativity is a sign of a healthy soul?”

“So activities which allow students to be creative are perhaps an invitation to the soul? How does our curriculum provide opportunity and foster creativity? Do we give enough space or do we plan everything too much?”

“I can just see a creative curriculum. I feel it would be bubbling with laughter and joy. Yes please!”

“Well the books we looked at were far more theoretical. They try to explain the **nature of the soul and consciousness**. Wilber's (1995) *Sex, ecology and spirituality* describes the spectrum of consciousness including the shadow self. It looks at the emergence of different consciousness in our history and different cultures perspective's on consciousness. It also looks at where consciousness is moving to.... perhaps a world soul. This is a very complex subject and almost makes you afraid to do anything that could impact on a child's consciousness because we just don't know what we are doing!”

“*Consciousness Evolution* (Hubbard 1998) also looks at how consciousness is evolving and suggests that we are heading towards a more social collective consciousness. This ties in with the creativity aspect – it discusses co-creativity – beyond collaboration – people creating together in a way that flows interactively - going beyond the individual soul – a flowing and permeability into each other. That you become part of a bigger whole and one doesn't know quite who thought what or who did what... it is a product of the engaged community. This approach is very inspiring about what can be possible when we work together as a soul collective.”

“Our books look more at **transpersonal realities**. *Transpersonal Knowing* (Hart 2000) describes transpersonal experiences from a phenomenological point of view – contemplative practitioners share experiences of what it is like to experience reality from different transpersonal states. This is a good start in helping it be less mysterious and more researched and supported. We can then compare our own experiences to others.”

“*Spiritual Emergency* (Grof 1989) looks at peak spiritual experiences from a more 3<sup>rd</sup> person perspective... seeing patterns and common experiences. This describes experiences people have had in non-ordinary states which have been transformational - causing an emergence of the spiritual self. Typical experiences include seeing the creation of the universe, battling with good and evil and can involve visions.”

“And we were pretty concerned about this. These spiritual emergency experiences are very intense and not something that can be achieved in a healthy way without development of all aspects of the self. I would be horrified if contemplative practices that we did in the classroom caused a student to go into one of these states. It is

okay if the contemplation assists self understanding and improves creativity and wellbeing... but how could you ensure nothing further happened?"

"Yes we would agree with that. We looked at books which look at the **development of the subtle energies**. Barbara Brennan (1987, 1993) and Steiner have models which explain how the physical and energetic bodies differentiate and develop through stages. It is clear that a child's energy bodies and chakras are not developed enough to cope with flood of emotional energy in the early stages."

"Yes, Steiner (according to Child 1996) is very firm in recommending healthy development of every stage before trying to move to the next too soon. For the age group 7 to 14 he recommends an educational approach which builds the emotional self (empathy) and nurtures the spirit using aesthetic based teaching approaches. Aesthetics are critical in developing a sensitive soul; one more attuned to beauty than expediency. This develops a *warm heart* which then integrates with the later development of the rational abstract mind, so action of the young adult can be based on *heart-mind* (wisdom) rather than just mind."

"Yes, I think we could say that a general principle would be that any age you need to take into account the capacity and development of the person. You wouldn't try to push a particular line beyond all the others ... too fast development and health and mental problems occur."

"And underdeveloped lines could also be problems. Thomas More (1994) in *Care for the Soul* suggests that *depression* is in fact *suppression* of the soul... you could say an under-developed spiritual line."

"So we are treading a fine line here... we need to develop the emotional and spiritual lines as well as the cognitive and ego based ones which we have been happily doing, but we find ourselves with very little understanding of how to do it safely."

“We looked at Fowlers 6 *Stages of Faith* and *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams* (Parks 2000) which are more interested in understanding **the development of a person’s sense of meaning and faith**. Faith is meant as the central meaning we have that helps us understand our lives; it transcends mere thought and belief, and transcends and permeates existence. It is a motion in life which moves us on, determining our actions. It is stimulated by asking the big existential questions.”

“Faith, like cognition and ego development, moves from following the beliefs of others to greater self discernment and then plurality of faith. We undergo crises in faith where our previous meaning no longer enables us to make sense of the world around us. This engenders transformation to a new perspective which enables us to see and interpret our realities differently to before. This is similar to Kegan’s (1982) notion of ego development where the emerging stage interprets reality in a different way to the previous one.”

“What we found interesting is that this emphasis on spirituality is more about *meaning, construction of meaning and how that shapes our perceptions and actions*. The meaning might come from spiritual practice and reflection, but this development of spirituality is more how the mind perceives the world. Other spiritual development models coming out of the east are more associated with spiritual contemplative states which perhaps create a change in *being* or change in *state* and seem more transcendent.”

“Here is a comparison of different spiritual development lines from Wilber’s *Integral Psychology* (2000b):

### Fowler’s Stages of faith

1. **intuitive - projective** – follow the beliefs of parents and fantasize about religious figures in stories as characters in fairy tales.
2. **mythical- literal** – follow religious stories, rituals, rules literally. Beliefs based on an outside authority.
3. **synthetic- conventional** – conformist acceptance of beliefs with little self reflection.
4. **individuative – reflective** – radical shift from dependence on other’s views to development of their own. Choice of beliefs, values and relationships important to their self-fulfillment.
5. **conjunctive** – person relies on own views but now accepts others and consider serving others.
6. **universalizing** – search for universal values such as unconditional love and justice. Self preservation becomes irrelevant.

Fig 4.3

Average age of emergence	Wilber (spectrum of consciousness)	Aurobindo	Mahamudra (stages of meditation)	Daniel Brown (cross cultural stages of meditation)	Fowler
0 – 18 months	Matter Sensation Perception	Physical Sensation perception			
1 – 3 years	Exocept Impulse/emotion Image Symbol	Vital- emotional	<b>concepts</b>		1. Magical
3 – 6 years	Endocept Concept	Lower mind	And beliefs of gross mind		
7 – 10 years	Rule/role	Concrete mind			2. Mythic
11 – 21 years	Formal logic	Logical mind (reasoning)	Right beliefs	Preliminary practices	3. Conventional 4. Individual
21 – 28 years	Vision logic	Higher mind (systems)	<b>Foundations</b> Universal and ethical practice	Concentration with support	5. Conjunctive 6. Universalizing
28 – 35 years	psychic	Illumined mind	Meditation: <b>1. one pointedness</b>	Transcending gross perception	
35 -42 years	Subtle (archetype)	Intuitive mind	Gross union Subtle perception luminosity	Subtle perception Luminosity	
42 -49 years	Causal (formless)	Overmind	<b>2. simplicity</b> Cessation Emptiness	Insight cessation	
49 - years	Nondual	Supermind  Satchinanda	<b>3. one taste</b> Unity form/formlessness <b>4. non meditation</b>	Enlightenment	

Fig 4.4

“What Wilber is suggesting here is that the more advanced transpersonal states come way after we are concerned with student’s education. What is our role then in helping develop the spiritual and faith lines? Are we perhaps preparing the ground by assisting with students developing their reasoning, formation of their own ‘right beliefs’ and sense of faith and meaning? Should we be assisting students to construct and develop their faith and meaning *explicitly*... or should we just be aware that they are doing this and support them when needed? Is this our job, or is it something that happens in their families and communities?”

“Maybe we could help. We were looking at a series of books on Spirituality in Education coming from England (Wright 2000, Copely 2000) - they come from a more Religious Studies background with a key aim to **foster ethical behaviour, attitudes and values**. By exploring different faiths and hypothetical ethical dilemmas students can explore what they value and develop their own values and morals within a context of virtues and moral values valued by the community. It encourages ethical attitudes through reasoning and inquiry. This is similar to Character Education in the US. You could say that the emphasis of this type of spirituality is in the formation of knowledge and reasoning which helps you act better in the world, rather than engaging in inner practice.”

“And this development of morals is well researched by Kohlberg and others. It follows similar development ages as we saw in the stages of faith with a movement to more universal principles. Kohlberg suggests two approaches in assisting movement to the next stage; firstly, providing students with ethical dilemmas which perturb the student and force them to move and, secondly, creating a democratic participatory community where students are faced with ongoing ethical decisions in the way they relate to each other and what they do.”

“Hmmm. Well we were looking at literature coming from feminist perspectives and they see **spirituality as caring**; a result of caring relationships, love in action. Women tend not to develop beyond Stage 3 in Kohlberg’s scheme; not because they haven’t developed ethically but because they have developed in a different way. Nel Noddings (*The Challenge to care in*

### Kohlberg Stages of Moral Development

- **Stage 1 – Obedience and punishment** – do it because it is the rule and will get punished otherwise.
- **Stage 2 - Individualism and exchange** – Do it because it gives me an advantage – I’ll scratch your back, if you scratch mine.
- **Stage 3 – Good interpersonal relationships** – Do it because it is the good thing to do - love, empathy, trust, concern.
- **Stage 4 – Maintaining the social order** – do it because the laws are there to ensure society functions.
- **Stage 5 - Social contract and Individual rights** – questions underpinning values and laws of society and may work democratically to change to more just laws

Kegan (1982)

### Gilligan’s Stages of Caring (based on research of women)

1. *caring for self*
2. *caring for others* – often sacrificial
3. *including themselves into their caring.*
4. *universal and abstract care.*

Fig 4.5

*schools (1992)* and *Caring; an feminine approach to ethics and moral education (1984)*) work looks at how women express compassion, love and care and through that derive a 'present moment' personalized approach to dealing with complex ethical dilemmas in their lives. Actions come out of care first (whether it is *natural care* (e.g. Mother love) or an *ethic of care*), rather than rational abstractions, universal principles and values. There is a danger in developing a purely rational approach to values which leaves the heart behind."

"Yes, a spiritual approach to values should develop heart and mind together."

"So we have a gender distinction here. This book could help. *The Hero Within* (Pearson 1989) looks at the **journeys we make as spiritual beings** and how at different stages of our lives we adopt different archetypal roles – *wanderer* (searching for meaning and sense of self), *martyr* (caring and sacrifice) and *warrior* (fighting for truth and what we value). The book describes how these start off being unbalanced, naïve and problematic and move towards greater integration into a magician role. So a warrior might stick up for what he values while putting himself in the role of a hero, fighting for the victim against a villain. He could impose his values on others and leave his family behind in his quest. As he gains a better sense of self and can incorporate a more caring perspective his view of the situation changes as does his actions. He begins to see the hero in everyone – his approach becomes more pluralistic and more informed by heart-mind."

"It is also interesting that the adoption of the order of the roles is different for everyone, but women are more likely to take on a caring and sacrifice aspect and men a warrior role. Women can sacrifice too much and not learn to look after themselves... they also need to explore the warrior and the wanderer."

"Yes, that is what is coming out of the feminist research into caring by Gilligan – that women move from ego-centric *caring for self* into a *caring for others* stage where they tend to sacrifice themselves for others. The next stage is *including themselves into their caring*. Then they broaden that into more *universal and abstract care*. There needs to be a place where caring and principles can meet. The trap for adolescent girls is that they can get stuck into the sacrificial stage and not move on to the next stages."

“And the trap for boys is that they can move on too fast to the rational development of principles and values without exploring the care aspect. So integral development would foster both aspects – care *and* values.”

“Some authors in the *Heart of Learning* (Glazer 1999) see spiritual development as coming out of a *practice* of caring and compassion. It is not enough to care *about*... one has to be an *agent* in acting with care - and not just give it and run, but really be part of a whole relationship with another. Through our relationships with others we discover our wholeness and our humanity. Plurality – coming to know the ‘other’ - is our greatest teacher. By engaging in acts of service – creative expressions of generosity and open-heartedness - where we are faced with ‘otherness’, we find we have to go deep into our humanity, deep into ourselves, and find our **vocation to be fully human**. The key to growth is then based on the reflective capacities we can bring to this experience – being able to go deep into our own experience of humanity to discover or uncover who we are and who we are becoming.”

“So contemplation in this case could be a tool then to help reflectivity, but not necessarily as an end in itself to acquire transcendental knowledge?”

“Yes, it is interesting isn’t it how the emphasis changes according to different authors? But it is so reflexive... one thing affects and informs the other, and everything grows as a result. You wonder whether it doesn’t matter where you start... or what you emphasize...that all paths lead to Rome?”

“That is assuming there is a Rome to go to!”

“Yes, well the eastern perspective would say there is – a self realized being

### **REAL + I + sation**

... an awakened being.”

“What is that like then?”

“Hmmm. Let me get the book *Education for Awakening*. Nagakawa (2000) suggests that there could be considered 5 dimensions to reality:

1. **objective reality:** phenomenal, empirical world – BODY – *separation*
2. **social reality:** constructed by language and meaning – MIND – *inter-relation*
3. **cosmic reality:** everything dynamically and organically connected – fluid process of constant metamorphous, evolution, becoming, non-linear causes, emergent, systems, human being as microcosm of the macrocosm – SOUL – *inter-connection*
4. **infinite reality:** deepest dimension, one mind, absolute being, non-dual reality, enlightenment, awakening – SPIRIT – *oneness/nothingness*
5. **universal reality:** when enlightened consciousness sees *this* world – SPIRIT IN ACTION (manifest in body, mind, soul) – *inter-penetration*

There is a seeking and returning. The seeker is radically transformed when he experiences the infinite reality then returns and incorporates all dimensions. So the awakened being is someone living *in* the world and brings the spirit dimension and perception to it.... Not someone who is otherworldly.”

“So is that experience of *universal reality* an endpoint after years of contemplative practice? Can we experience the infinite reality momentarily and begin to bring that into our lives now?”

“I guess Wilber would call those momentary experiences *peak experiences* which can help us in transforming to new perspectives and higher consciousness, but we need to continue our spiritual practice in order to reach new levels of consciousness in a sustainable way.”

“Does an experience of the universal reality only come from contemplation? Can it come from holding a baby on your chest and feeling that non-separation, one experience of love? Or is that just an experience of the cosmic reality? Does care only get us so far?”

“But isn’t caring a sign of an enlightened being? Someone who cares for all things because it is their very nature... not because it is an ethic or a rule? I am so confused now!”

“And is this what we are really on about in education? Aiming for awakening? Isn't that something that one could only hope to attain after lifetimes? ”

“But what sort of education could prepare the way, which could *encourage* the seeking and returning? What might help build the skills, attitudes and inclination for the journey? Should we encourage a sense of the mystery of life and an urge to find out more...a sense of the quest of the soul ... or is all that innate and is expressed by the soul when it is ready? Or perhaps it is turned off by the dullness of school and life and computer games? And where does a job and family come into this big quest for enlightenment?”

“Isn't it interesting that spirituality is so often framed in journeys. Trying to find ourselves, following the mystery, being drawn to search for wholeness. A turning away from the world and our ties to it. Parks (2000) suggests that the **coming home** is as important.... the need to marry soul with the wisdom of the sages in the everyday relationships and living in the world. She describes spiritual development as both **venturing and dwelling**....

*“Becoming is not so much a matter of leaving home as it is undergoing a series of transformations in the meaning of home”*

... and as we progress through these cycles of separation and connection we become more visibly **at home in the universe.**”

“Well, maybe the *Universe Story* (Swimme & Berry 1992) has something to say here about helping people be more at home in the universe. How can we help our students have a **sense of place in the cosmos**? I guess this sense of place is not so much a connection with the *Infinite reality* as with the *cosmic reality*. Swimme suggests visualizations which help you orientate yourself on the earth, lying down, but feeling yourself suspended above the cosmos seeing into the possibilities. It is more than just connecting to the physical world or to the cosmic reality – it is also about giving students grand narratives. As we develop, our grand narratives might change but what is important is that we have them!”

“Yes, perhaps our job as teachers is to awaken students to the possibility that there are evolving grand narratives and to inspire them to seek them out... to look for meaning.”

"I am wondering how students of different ages might have different meanings of what it is like to *be at home in the universe*. What stories might speak to their souls?"

"Perhaps this is the difference between being and becoming – we need time to seek and time to be at home."

"Going back to the notion of care. Previously we talked about caring for others as a path for spiritual development. What about caring for the earth? Macey (1991) in *Earth as Lover, Earth as Self* talks about **spirituality as a connection with nature** which fosters care for the earth and through that develops caring compassion in self. But more than that; the concept of self enlarges to embrace the earth... perhaps even we could say our *sense of home* is the earth. We even see the earth as ourselves. Can spiritual evolution of the soul come from connection and reverence in nature?"

"Good question. This is a key issue with Wilber. He is really concerned with the easy danger of reducing everything to one point of view... he calls it flatland. He critiques the deep ecology movement for mistaking a deep connection to the earth as a way of experiencing the entire spectrum of consciousness ... he would say it stops too soon, not reaching the *causal* dimension of consciousness (the *infinite reality*). That many eco-spiritualists see GAIA as the Goddess and the ultimate reality to which they aspire to connect, which he believes is certainly not the case. He would also say that transpersonal states are something that come from inner contemplation practice and sustained in our waking life. However the eco-spiritual-feminists criticize the emphasis on the inner path as a masculine Hero journey to enlightenment. They would say that the '*embodied in community*' or '*embodied in nature*' journey also leads to sustained transformation and growth."

"Yes, it all gets a bit precious really and we are stuck in the middle, trying to find the middle road... which is too often one where spirituality is ignored because of the lack of common ground."

"But surely there is some common ground. Surely, despite the holes, dilemmas and disagreements we can make some generalizations about what spirituality is."

“Yes, and our challenge is then to enable the spirit to be nourished and brought into the classroom and school. And in a way that honors student’s cultures, stages and beliefs. Tricky!”

“Well we are not starting from scratch. We have found numerous books (e.g. Miller 2000, Miller & Nagakawa 2005, Kessler 2000) which look at the role of **soul in education** ... not just from theoretical perspectives, but practical ways teachers have tried to bring soul into what they do.... these seem to involve all the quadrants... soul in the environment, in service and caring communities, in the body and in self. The educational journal *Encounter* also has lots of articles about how teachers have taken on board different aspects... there is so much inspiration for trialing practical stuff in our schools or classes. We don’t have to try and incorporate everything at once. Although these programs might focus on one aspect such as developing heart through service, or storying, or developing a forest they result in integral development of the whole person. Because of their richness and depth other possibilities emerge.”

“And one thing we found out from it all; there is a lot of ambiguity in the use of the word *soul*... some people seeing it as what happens when you feel connected, or have a sense of wonder or awe, or in contact with your ‘higher-self’, while others are very pedantic with very precise definitions.”

“But we don’t mind that because it makes it more interesting... we had to spend quite a bit of time talking about how we thought about it... it really helps tease out for yourself what you have assumed and challenges you to critique those

## Key Themes of Spirituality?

- **Meaning** – significance of life, sense of purpose and faith
- **Thirst for wholeness** - motivator for growth and quality of experience
- **Creative expression** - individual and co-creative expression of the soul
- **Acts of caring** – finding one’s humanity in action
- **Values, principles & ethics**
- **Connection** – to self, nature, others, cosmos, bigger reality
- **Being** – being at home in the universe
- **Becoming** – going deep into experience in order to grow, transformation
- **Awakening / transcendence** – self realization, experience of a dimension beyond self

Fig 4.6

assumptions. So we decided ambiguity was a good thing! We found it really useful describing experiences about when we felt soul was present.”

“But we need to ensure that what we provide in our curriculum honors multiple perspectives on soul.”

“Now, we don’t think that everything an educator needs to know has been covered though... there is a real need to integrate this in a coherent way – there is so much learning out there and it would be useful to know in what respects each resource is partial, how the whole story ties together, what is missing and what needs to be further researched. We need to know a lot more about how student spiritual and integral development is influenced by educational activities so we can be much more intentional in what we do in helping to nurture and develop spirituality and soul. Where is the instruction manual?”

“Sorry, the soul doesn’t seem to come with one!”

“So hopefully that doesn’t mean you treat it like a video player, press every button and hope it will work!”

“Ummm. Well, I think the soul *does* come with instructions. It is called the inner teacher, or the wise self. We get clues from dreams and intuition. It is expressed in our passion.”

### **Soul in Education conference 2003 Australia - quotes on soul**

Soul is energy and process. Although soul is mysterious everyone can experience soul.

What does soul look like in a classroom?  
The light in a child's eyes.

Soul contains our deepest longings. It is part of our journey to discover the soul's work. Soul finds its way though deep listening.

Soul seeks love. Falling in love is seeing the angelic nature of the other person... a moving away from geocentricism. Love is kindness and compassion. Divine love is love of earth, cosmos and aligns us with ultimate energy.

The soul sings. We need to express the singing quality of the soul.

Soul is used as a word to explain what is missing in education... joy, excitement, spirituality, intuition. It is possible to have ensouled intelligence and ensouled skills. We do not need to be in an either/or situation.

The life with which people rejoice and are content in is their soul.

Soul is the process of relating. Happiness is beneficial relating. Beneficial relating is one of oneness. But how do I overcome separation from the other?

I find “no place” where everywhere is sacred and all are there with me.

Fig 4.7

“But how can you consciously access it?”

“Well for example, you can do guided visualizations which take you to a special place that you create for yourself. You then invite in your wise self and can ask them questions and get answers or receive objects or feelings which you can then interpret using dream symbols or the archetypal language of the subconscious. We have literacies for understanding number, art, and language. Perhaps there needs to be a spiritual literacy for understanding our inner selves.”

“A spiritual literacy – now what could that look like?”

**Interlude 1: a poem by Nicole (age 16) written after a guided visualization in my enrichment course *Visualizations and Dream Interpretation***

**Dreams**

The light  
Falling on my face  
Passing through me  
The energy  
Steady and strong  
My face warms  
As the warm water  
Runs into my soul  
Into my heart  
Refreshing me  
Pouring into me  
Mixed with the light  
The ever growing light  
There I stand  
Water rushing away from me  
In every direction  
And the light  
Falling on me  
I stand  
A statue of pure light  
Taking it in and breathing it out.

I walk away from it  
The dreamy water  
Ever falling waterfall  
Through the grass  
The land around me  
Every direction  
Beams of colored light  
Some strong,  
Some weak,  
But there...  
A pool far off  
Where silver laps  
Silver shining waves  
Ever so gently splash.

Each tranquil blue wave  
Has a sparkle  
A sparkle of silver

Silver in my eyes  
Catching my dreams  
Wrapping them up  
And hiding them away  
Deep in my heart.

A calm spot  
A rock pool  
I look in  
Look past the ripples  
And I see  
A familiar face  
He smiles and laughs  
And keeps my eyes with his.

I turn  
A tear in my eye  
A silver drop falls  
And then the sky cried  
As silver drops fall from me  
Onto my bleeding hands  
The burning, tearing feeling,  
Cooled by my silver tears.

I turn  
My vision blurred,  
There I see something  
Coming closer  
A voice  
Although not spoken  
I hear in my head  
"Believe,  
If not in yourself,  
In your dreams."

Suddenly  
Hearing that  
The sky opens  
Letting the light shine through  
Letting it warm me once again  
Feeling it.

I unfurl my hand  
And find a copper key  
Lying there  
On my palm  
Smiling in the sun  
Shyly smiling.

I go towards the waterfall again

There I feel safe  
Where I know  
My dreams are safe  
Dreams that are mine.

He is there also  
Written down  
Among the pages of my memory  
Holding my dreams  
And keeping them safe.

Reaching out  
He takes my hand  
Pulling me towards him  
Towards the cool water  
Towards my dreams  
Towards my future  
And the happiness passed  
And the light is still.

## **Interlude 2: Some student postings on a College Philosophy Forum (2002)**

**Welcome to a forum thread, where you have to rhyme or you'll be dead. What is it that you believe? Can you please share with me...**

### **Daniel**

Hey I want to post  
in this awesome thread  
because my muse  
is far from dead  
My views are different  
a tad askew  
but if you ask  
I'll give them to you

I believe in little things  
like bees that buzz  
and birds that sing

### **The Mighty Toenail:**

i believe in small things too  
but in all i think that me and you  
are also small in the great context  
a part of a bigger  
larger...vest [umm]

### **Joker:**

we are part of a cup of tea  
a chair leg, and a bumble bee  
some think they know

others have no claim  
that we are smarter  
and have a big brain  
though we can question and debate  
over if we choose or make our fate  
i rather think we have no clue  
if up is down or green is blue

**Daniel:**

just as we are forever small  
we are also forever tall  
forever thin forever fat  
forever large and that is that  
the little things of which I meant  
are the tiny ones inside your head  
simplicity's the way to go  
those things make you smile you know  
like summer rain or evening dew  
like when your girl says "I love you"  
like popcorn or fresh baked bread  
the endorphins running to your head  
are enough to make anyone smile  
so why not sit and think a while  
about why these things make you so glad  
and why their loss makes you so sad

**2006. What is my view of spirituality now?**

When I was 20 years old I asked my Hindu friend what Hinduism meant to her – what were her spiritual beliefs and practices. She looked at me, surprised.

"Hinduism is my culture; spiritual beliefs are not something separate that I have, spirituality *is* my life."

Back then I didn't understand. I was too busy trying to extract the essence of spirituality, applying a scientific process to looking at it, demarcating it into categories which have culminated in my artful description in this chapter. Have I tried to be so universalizing I have extruded something lifeless?

Because now I think I do understand what my friend meant. If you asked me now what my view of spirituality is, I think my answer would be similar to Daniel's; spirituality is in the everyday, small things as well as the grand and inspiring, the transpersonal and the mystic. It doesn't just *permeate* existence, it *is* life itself.

My husband and I read these student poems out at the Soul in Education Conference (Australia 2003) at the end of a session where people had got very disheartened about the limited opportunities to bring spirituality into education. We got a standing ovation and lots of hugs... because it reminded everyone that our students have innate wisdom and understanding about these things. They know. It is we perhaps who have forgotten.

So what is the benefit of demarcating spirituality in the way I have done in this chapter? Does it give us permission to remember and permission to include?



*Mary Louise Smith presents  
Botticelli's Primavera apasionado vistoso erótico, in D major.*

## Interlude 3: What does spiritual literacy look like and sound like in a classroom?

### Praise and Grace - 1998

My journalism class is busy working, typing in stories, talking in groups about ideas or advertising. One girl, Jamie, grabs a printout of her story from the printer and gives it to me. “What do you think?” She goes back to her computer as I read it. It is for the first parent newsletter of the year. “It’s good!” I say. The noise in the class stops and heads swivel around. Everyone looks at me. “But...?” says Kelly “There has to be a ‘but’.”

I look at her puzzled. “**But** nothing! It’s really good, good exactly as it is, exactly what is needed. Jamie has done a really good job in a difficult situation.”

“But teachers always, no matter how good something is, *always* give a ‘but’ – ‘*but* you could do this to improve it...’ ‘*But* you haven’t quite used these words in the best way’, I can’t believe you are happy with it as it is.”

Everyone is nodding. I have obviously broken a deeply entrenched rule of teaching. I think it really sad that these students have obviously not been recipients of unconditional and unstinting praise.

At the time I was reading a book by Rupert Sheldrake and Matthew Fox (1996) called *Natural Grace*. I had just got up to the chapter on *Grace and Praise*. *Grace* is about unconditional love, and *praise* is an expression of grace. I read how they believed we had forgotten how to praise, had replaced it with criticism and cynicism. Praise is an expression of joy within, a recognition of what and who is good, celebrating the gifts of nature, significant moments. It’s about changing your mindset so you can see the value in what surrounds you and what you experience, enabling you to express that. It really is a fundamental part of life, one that energizes, keeps the flow going, makes you feel that things are worthwhile. Are my students living lives in a praise-free zone? What can I do about it?

I had my half hour weekly pastoral care class coming up with a mixture of students from journalism and physics. We meet each week, sometimes I would choose particular themes which we would discuss or experience, other times we brought food to share, or had to deal with administrative needs of the school. We were gradually developing into a supportive group. I decided to do a session on praise and brought in my little bear.

We are in the big physics room and I ask them to sit in a circle on the floor at the front of the class. “We are going to talk about praise,” I say. I choose some snippets from the book to read and tell them about my journalism class and my concern that praise seems to be something of a novelty to them. I then ask them to think about how they feel about praise and what it means for them.

The bear is a talking bear – as each student goes to say something they hold the bear. Initially this draws nervous laughs, then it becomes something fun – what it does is change the mindset. As the students talk the discussion gets deeper and deeper, more anguished, then more hopeful and pro-active. I listen as Kelly explains that her experience of praise is of someone praising her, then asking her to do something - she now can’t listen to praise without asking “*what does the person want from me?*” She finds it really difficult to accept praise and has a severe distrust of it.

Ryan, says how everything he does is criticized, that he just wants someone to praise him, for himself, not to tie it to his achievements because he knows he never was going to be perfect or the best.

Julie says how important it is to understand when it is appropriate to praise and when it is important to criticize or suggest ways to improve – if everything she did was praised how could she ever learn? We discuss how teachers could tune into what students needed – how can you celebrate the person and the effort while still being helpful?

Aaron speaks about how he has nothing to praise in his life – it just is so drab and grey. Other students are horrified and we discuss the darkness within that causes us to see the world this way.

I then ask what might it mean and feel like to have a sense of grace and praise within ourselves? What can generate that sense of joy within, no matter how little? Perhaps we need to learn to praise ourselves and things we experience as well as other people. What might it be like to be active practitioners of praise?

Kelly asks for the bear and holds it tightly as she speaks. “I guess I have such scepticism towards praise that it would never occur to me to praise myself or someone else – it has never seemed like a meaningful thing to do. But now I wonder.... Maybe not seeing things as something to praise has affected the whole way I live my life, as if it is going to attack me!” Some students nod.

Ryan says, “Here I have been wanting praise, but thinking about it I haven’t really praised anyone else...” He looks thoughtful.

Ian says “The problem is it just isn’t cool to praise – people think you are weird or the teacher’s pet or something.”

Ryan says, “But why should we be confined by peer pressure, maybe we should be less cynical and sceptical and really say what we value.”

“Ooooh, too brave, too much emotion!” says Kelly.

“OK,” I say, “Who’s feeling brave then? How about actively thinking and acting praise in the next week and see what happens. To start, how about each of you think of something here and now that you could be glad about or feel joyful about. Could we go around the circle and each person say “I am glad that...”” My students look thoughtful. “Who would like to go first?” I ask.

“OK,” says Ryan, and takes the bear. He looks everyone straight in the eye and says he is glad that he has so many friends. Julie takes the bear, holds it and looks at, then very shyly starts to talk about what she would like to praise. And so it goes on, each person getting more confident, the energy and positivity in the room lifting with each turn.

Students are smiling as we leave. It is a start. I head down the corridor. Behind me I hear Ryan talking to a friend from another class. “We just had this really cool lesson on praise,” he says, “and I just wanted to tell you what a good friend you are.”

I smile.

I then begin to wonder about how much praise I am generating in my life. While I value and acknowledge some things, how many other things am I leaving unacknowledged? Although my classes are pleasant, cheerful and full of laughter I wonder if I am praising enough. How much is the notion of assessment restraining the way I praise or criticize students?

That night I have a wonderful conversation with a friend and he says to me “Thankyou for such a wonderful conversation... I feel so stimulated and full of energy.” I just look at him and say how wonderful I thought it was as well, and it usually is and how remarkable that I had never really seen it as something to be thankful and glad about – that it is wonderful to acknowledge the way someone makes you feel.

So now I am a lot more thoughtful about what I am doing, and in my classes I begin to watch what is happening more. I realize so much is happening that is worth celebrating. When someone asks a question I now say “That is such an interesting question, it has really challenged me...” Or, “That was such a good discussion, you guys are really thinking well today.” Or, “Gee, that was a great lesson, I really enjoy teaching you guys.” My whole attitude begins to change and it seems my whole life. In praising students or my peers I find that they became more energized and motivated, which energizes me and makes things easier to do.

Meanwhile my pastoral care students are practicing praise in my journalism and physics classes. It isn't just me doing it – they are acknowledging others, their experiences. It takes on a momentum of its own. In journalism one day a girl sits down a bit late and obviously really harried. “Hi Leah, it's good to see you,” I said, really meaning it. She just looks at me and bursts out laughing. “I really love this class, Sue,” she says, “just being here changes my mood from really really bad to feeling so good!”

Finally the journalism team are ready to assemble the many pages of the student magazine. We are armed with staplers, music and food brought in by the whole group. Everyone is busy folding, sorting and stapling over 300 copies. As we walked around the table, Kelly suddenly says, “You know I just feel so proud!” We all look at her, smiling. “Why, Kelly?” I ask.

“I just feel so proud of all of us, of our effort, of even myself, we have just done such a good job, we've really kicked ass!” She is highly emotional. I give her a hug, smiling. “We've all come a long long way in doing this,” I say, “Let's celebrate!”



*Dance of Life*