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To cite this article: Jo Fraser-Pearce (2022) Spiritual education as a subspecies of relational education?, *British Journal of Religious Education*, 44:1, 112-121, DOI: 10.1080/01416200.2021.1877613

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2021.1877613>



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Published online: 29 Jan 2021.



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Spiritual education as a subspecies of relational education?

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ABSTRACT

Though the promotion of spiritual ‘development’ is statutory in state-maintained schools in England and Wales, it is neither clear what spirituality is nor how schools might educate in this area. In the literature, one finds an array of divergent conceptions of spirituality and spiritual education. There is, indeed, lack of agreement regarding whether spiritual education has any place in schools other than those of a religious character. Some argue that spirituality is beyond definition. I reject the notion that spirituality, and hence spiritual education, is beyond definition. I defend and develop Michael Hand’s ‘education in a spiritual activity’. I argue that spirituality concerns connectivity, or relationship, with the transcendent. This relational understanding of spirituality resembles existing accounts of spirituality as relational and underpins an account of spiritual education as relational education – again resembling existing accounts. However, I distinguish between relational education which concerns a wide range of relationships and spiritual education as a subspecies of relational education which specifically concerns relationship with the transcendent. I argue that reserving the term ‘spiritual’ for relationship with the transcendent would enable teachers and pupils to make the kinds of distinctions which are important in both spiritual education and the wider relational education.

KEYWORDS

Spiritual education; spirituality; relational education; religious education

Introduction

Though the promotion of spiritual ‘development’ is a statutory requirement in state-maintained schools in England and Wales, it is neither clear what spirituality is nor how schools might educate in this area. In philosophical literature, one finds an array of divergent conceptions of spirituality and spiritual education (Moulin-Stozek 2020; Venkataraman and Konwar 2019). A sociological gaze finds a vast range of understandings and uses of the term ‘spirituality’ (Bruce 2017), as well as a wide range of people who self-define as ‘spiritual’ or as ‘spiritual but not religious’ (SBNR) (Parsons 2018). In discourse theory, ‘spirituality’ might reasonably be categorised as a floating signifier (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). There is a lack of agreement regarding whether or not spiritual education has any place in schools other than those of a religious character. Some argue that spirituality is beyond definition (Priestley 1985) or report abandoned attempts at definition:

One summer I organised a seminar made up of philosophers, theologians and other specialists to try to pin down a form of words. The experts were hopelessly at odds with each other and in the end we gave up.

(Hay 2007, 8)

Arguably, for an increasing number of Westerners, it is the lack of consensus on the meaning of ‘spirituality’ that attracts them to self-define as spiritual (Bruce 2017; Davie 2015). As for those self-

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defining as SBNR (a dual declaration that 'I am this, but I am not that'), perhaps it is the floating signifier categorisation of 'spirituality' that gives it currency – making an SBNR declaration more one of 'I am *something*, but I am not *that*'. It seems that for some of the self-defined spiritual, it is the absence of an agreed use of 'spirituality' that makes it a useful term. Undoubtedly, others find *only* a tightly defined 'spirituality' of use. Were schools' responsibilities confined to teaching children and young people *about* spirituality, decisions would need to be made relating to which disciplinary lens(es) should be adopted. However, the requirement to promote the spiritual development of pupils (Education Acts 1944, 1988, 2002) is not so confined. It is hard to see how schools could meet their statutory (or educational) obligations without taking a position on their approach to spiritual education. This requires schools to take a position on the nature of spirituality. Where schools and spirituality are concerned, it 'is important to be clear, if that is possible, though it is equally important to avoid oversimplifying what are deeply held and fully lived philosophies and ways of life' (Stern 2009, 2).

In what follows, I reject the notion that spirituality, and hence spiritual education, is beyond definition. By taking a philosophical approach, and discussing Hand's (2003) taxonomy of possible meanings of spiritual education, I demonstrate that both spirituality and spiritual education *can* be defined. One might argue that the prior question is whether they *should* be defined. As I have already articulated, where schools are concerned they should.

I defend and develop Hand's 'education in a spiritual activity' to present philosophical accounts of spirituality and spiritual education. These accounts are not intended as essentialist assertions or reifications. I have already acknowledged that there exists a range of accounts, and education about spirituality should certainly offer pupils an understanding of this. However, I have also asserted the importance of schools adopting clear positions for the purpose of promoting pupils' spiritual development. What I offer in this paper are clearly articulated accounts that schools (of a religious character or otherwise) could reasonably adopt. I present an account of spirituality which concerns connectivity, or relationship, with the transcendent. This understanding of spirituality resembles existing accounts of spirituality as relational (for example, Hay 2007; Stern 2009), and underpins an account of spiritual education as relational education – again resembling existing accounts (Hay with Nye 1998; Stern 2009). However, I distinguish between relational education which concerns a wide range of relationships and spiritual education as a subspecies of relational education which specifically concerns relationship with the transcendent. I argue that reserving the term 'spiritual' for relationship with the transcendent would enable teachers, pupils, parents and other interested parties to make the kinds of distinctions which are important in both spiritual education and the wider relational education. The intention of this paper is to make a philosophical case for spiritual education as a subspecies of relational education. A more practical account of how such a spiritual education might be realised in schools can be found in Pearce (2019).

Spirituality as beyond definition?

For Priestley (1985), attempts to define spirituality are 'futile' and 'counter-productive'. He enlists the help of Wordsworth in making his case:

Our meddling intellect
Mis-shapes the beauteous form of things.
We murder to dissect.
(Wordsworth 1995, 574)

Priestley points out that 'spirit' has its etymological roots in 'air' and 'wind' and argues that, herein, lays the problem:

To conceptualise the "spirit" is to catch the wind, and a static wind is as meaningless as a square circle. To know the wind is to have stood in it and experienced its effects. It must be felt before it can be conceptualised. Consequently any acknowledgement or portrayal of the spirit must be communicated in dynamic images or

models. Intellectual analysis requires static models, which is simply another way of saying that the spiritual dimension must first be removed.

(Priestley 1985, 114)

Priestley has not shown that spirituality is beyond definition. Indeed, in the same paper, he goes on to make some suggestions regarding the definition of spirituality. Even in the above citation, where he argues that spirituality cannot be defined, Priestley defines it as a dynamic entity that is analogous to the wind. It is through this analogy that Priestley attempts to demonstrate the elusiveness of spirituality, but he is unsuccessful. A static wind may be as meaningless as a square circle but wind itself is not beyond conceptualisation. It may be true to say that one has to stand in wind and experience its effects to 'know' it, but it is also true to say that one could gain a reasonable understanding of wind through seeing, or hearing descriptions of, its effects. And if Priestley is retaining the analogy, to say that 'intellectual analysis requires static models' is to suggest that wind cannot be understood on an intellectual level and this is simply not the case. Firstly, it is not clear why intellectual analysis requires static models. Secondly, wind can be experienced, its effects can be observed, *and* it can be understood on an intellectual level. Of course, there is a difference between understanding wind on an intellectual level and experiencing it, but the former is possible without the latter.

There is no murderous intention, as Wordsworth is employed to suggest, behind the desire to bring clarity to spirituality. Rather, assertions that spirituality is beyond definition are potentially deadly, as indicated by Carr: 'whereof we cannot speak it is not obvious that we can educate' (2003, 219). McLaughlin warns that lack of clarity can 'undermin[e] the prospect of intelligible educational practice' (2003, 189), and cites Copley who complains that schools 'neither know clearly what they are trying to do, how they are trying to do it, nor how they are going to evaluate their efforts' (Copley 2000, 136). It is only possible for educators to deal with spirituality, in the sense of promoting spiritual development, if they know what it is. In this sense, the intellect is far from murderous. We can reject the notion that spirituality and hence spiritual education are beyond definition.

Hand's taxonomy of spiritual education

In *The Meaning of 'Spiritual Education*, Hand explores the 'logically possible senses' of 'spiritual education' by constructing a 'logical taxonomy of the different ways in which the adjective "spiritual" might qualify the noun "education"' (2003, 396). Following Carr, and as articulated by McLaughlin, he attends to the 'central issue claiming attention [of] what can be said to be distinctive of the spiritual' (McLaughlin 2003, 187) as a descriptor of 'education'. He lays the foundation for the construction by establishing three broad distinctions:

First the adjective "spiritual" might qualify the noun "education" either by identifying a part or aspect of education, or by identifying an approach to education as a whole ...

Second, if the adjective "spiritual" identifies a part or aspect of education, there are two kinds of part or aspect it might identify. A part of education can be defined either by its content, ... or by its object, ... We distinguish between teaching mathematics and teaching English; but we also distinguish between educating hearts and educating minds. "Spiritual education" could mean education in some spiritual content or education of the human spirit.

And third, if the adjective "spiritual" identifies a part of education defined by its content, the content in question may be of two kinds. Pupils may be educated in either activities or dispositions. ... An item of educational content may be something pupils learn how to do or something they learn how to be.

(Hand 2003, 396-7)

According to Hand, these distinctions 'yield a logical taxonomy with four basic categories' (2003, 397). Thus, spiritual education could mean one of the following:

- (1) education based on spiritual principles
- (2) education of the human spirit
- (3) education in a spiritual activity
- (4) education in a spiritual disposition

(Hand 2003, 397)

In constructing this taxonomy, Hand does more than identify a range of possible meanings for the term 'spiritual education'. He demonstrates that 'spiritual education' can reasonably be defined in any of the divergent ways listed above. Hand's taxonomy, therefore, demonstrates that whilst it is not futile to attempt to define spiritual education it would be over-optimistic for any educational theorist to expect widespread agreement on the definition adopted. At the same time, it demonstrates the possibility of articulating an account of spiritual education with clarity.

Hand suggests that how far any of the above four possible meanings are appropriate for describing spiritual education will depend upon their usefulness, which can be measured by how far the category in question is '(1) compatible with the aims of the common school; and (2) distinct from the established curriculum subjects' (2003, 400). He notes that to identify a spiritual education which meets these criteria is not necessarily to promote it as 'desirable' for schools – this is for the educational community to decide. Nevertheless, the presentation of a definition of 'spiritual education' which is both clear and useful, at least makes 'the question of its desirability ... a live one' (Hand 2003, 400).

Where his first category ('education based on spiritual principles') is concerned, Hand contends that 'spiritual' is most often understood to be synonymous with 'religious':

It is true that there are some contexts in which we use [the] terms ["spiritual" and "religious"] to mark important distinctions; but there are many others in which they are interchangeable. To describe a principle as either "religious" or "spiritual" is ordinarily to indicate that it is derived from religious teaching, or makes implicit or explicit reference to a divine being or purpose.

... Where educational questions are approached in this way, we might plausibly speak of education based on spiritual principles.

(Hand 2003, 397)

It is in this sense that some schools of a religious character might be understood to be providing a spiritual education. Hand rules this category out for common schools.

For Hand, 'education of the human spirit' can be understood in a wide and narrow sense. In its widest sense, 'spirit' refers to all of the educable parts of a person and therefore 'all education is education of the spirit' (Hand 2003, 397). Hand rejects this, as to talk of spiritual education in this sense is simply to talk of education per se. As Carr asserts, 'we already have a term (education) for the totality of such development' (Carr 2001, 155). Hand opts for the narrower sense and points out that 'spirit' is commonly used in this narrow sense:

The parts of the soul [that "mind" and "spirit"] respectively identify can be brought to light by considering the difference between saying of someone that she has a good mind and saying that she has a good spirit. In ... the second, we are making an assessment of her character. A person with a good spirit is one who is honourable or decent, whose motives are sound, whose heart is in the right place ... On this interpretation, a call for spiritual education would be a call for educational attention to the heart as well as the head. It would be an assertion that our responsibilities as educators extend beyond the transmission of knowledge and understanding to the firing of passions and the shaping of character.

(Hand 2003, 398)

Few would reject the assertion that educational attention should be given to the heart. But a more appropriate term for what Hand describes is character education. Hand himself makes reference to character. To use the term 'spiritual education' as synonymous with 'character education' is not to

use it in a distinctive way – in this sense, the attribution of this meaning to the term would fail to satisfy Hand's criterion of usefulness.

Hand's 'education in a spiritual activity' includes education in activities like prayer, worship and some forms of meditation:

The activities we most naturally think of as spiritual ... are those devotional and meditative activities by which human beings seek fellowship, communion or personal relationship with the divine. We think of the various ways in which the believer reaches out to her god, or brings herself into his presence, or focuses her attention upon him.

(Hand 2003, 398)

For Haldane, at least within Christian religious thought, this is an obvious meaning of spiritual; thus, 'the spiritual life is that given to the search after an inner awareness of God, a condition pursued through prayer and meditation' (2003, 12). Hand explains that what makes such activities spiritual is that they are believed to be a way of connecting with the divine or transcendent. Although Hand does not define the transcendent or divine in explicit terms, it is clear he is using the terms synonymously. This understanding chimes with Carr who clarifies that 'transcendent' need not be confined to the concept of 'god' but can encompass a range of concepts of an other-worldly ultimate reality: 'whereas for Christians the main object of spiritual awareness is ... God, for Buddhists the goal is ... to achieve Enlightenment' (2003' 214). Elsewhere, Carr defines transcendence in terms of being 'beyond the material and mundane, ... what is immutable, eternal, infinite, invisible and immortal' (Carr 1995', 89). Hay refers to Hindu and Jain traditions which are 'either agnostic about God or deny God's existence ... [but] do not deny the reality of transcendence' (2007, 39). Haldane refers to 'transcendent realities outside of space and time' (2003, 21). Cottingham tells us that, regardless of the identity of the transcendent object in question, 'spirituality is ... a metaphysically freighted notion' (2003, 47). It is in this sense that I use the terms transcendent and divine, interchangeably. As with 'spirituality', this is not the only possible use of the terms (hence this brief clarification of what I mean to say when using them). Nevertheless, as I have attempted to show here, it is a reasonable use of them.

Hand's 'education in a spiritual activity' constitutes a relational understanding of spirituality. This bears similarity with other relational understandings of spirituality, notably those of Stern (2009) and Hay (2007). The latter could be described as emphasising spiritual experience over activity. Keast refers to practice as 'encapsulating a set of spiritual experiences' (2003, 159), pointing to the belief that people can connect, or be in a relationship, with the transcendent in a wider range of ways than through engaging in spiritual activity. Indeed, some believers describe their experiences of connectivity as being unexpected rather than as resulting from the intentional activity. Thus, it fits with believers' reported experiences to expand Hand's relational category of 'education in a spiritual activity' to incorporate any kind of experience or activity which is believed to bring human beings into relationship with the transcendent.

This fits with ordinary and historical usage of the word 'spirituality'. It also corresponds to Carr's definition of spirituality (Carr 1995). As Carr and Haldane note, 'Carr concludes that the traditional conception, despite its often religiously grounded nature, still promises to provide the most philosophically coherent and educationally viable account of spiritual experience and development (2003, 6). It is because of its religiously grounded nature that Carr rejects spiritual education for schools other than those of a religious character. So his argument goes, this would not cohere with the obligation to be neutral in matters of religious truth for sincere participation requires a commitment to some such truth. However, whilst it is the case that 'pupils who do not hold religious beliefs cannot sincerely participate in prayer, worship or religious contemplation' (Hand 2003, 398), as Hand points out, participation (sincere or otherwise) is not a necessary component of education in a spiritual activity. Without participation, pupils can 'learn what these activities are all about, how they are conducted and why they are important to religious believers' (2003, 399).

Nevertheless, Hand rejects 'education in a spiritual activity' as a useful definition of spiritual education because it does not meet the criterion of being 'distinct from the established curriculum subjects' (Hand 2003, 400) – education in a spiritual activity can be included in religious education. However, it is a distinctive aspect of religious education and therefore it is appropriate that it has its own title. This is already accepted practice in other subject areas, such as science and technology, and it is coherent to refer to different dimensions of religious education (for example, spiritual education, philosophy of religion, sociology of religion).

Hand's final category is 'education in a spiritual disposition'. In this sense, he argues, 'to describe a person as "spiritual" is to ascribe to her a [level of] serenity or equanimity' (2003, 399) that comes from the kind of belief in the transcendent that is accompanied by the certainty that all is and will be well. Hand goes on, 'a person in whom this quality has been deliberately cultivated could reasonably be described as "spiritually educated"' (2003, 399). He argues that, since such a disposition would be difficult to obtain other than through belief in a transcendent reality, spiritual education so defined is not appropriate for the common school. Yet his support for education in a spiritual activity might be read otherwise. Hand argues that pupils can come to an empathetic understanding of the feelings practitioners experience during spiritual activity. This empathetic understanding may in itself contribute to pupils developing a level of serenity beyond that they would develop otherwise. We need not reject the cultivation of disposition where it is not tied to the cultivation of belief (though this might be considered a side benefit).

In this section, I have presented a case for defining spiritual education as education in a spiritual activity, and for extending this definition to incorporate any kind of experience or activity which is believed to bring human beings into relationship with the transcendent. This is a relational account of spiritual education which encompasses an understanding of spirituality as religious. Next, I attend to the relational nature of my account of spiritual education, for it raises a question – why not simply adopt an existing relational account of spiritual education?

Spiritual education and relational education

... if there is one overarching theme in the literature on spirituality in education, it is that of connection. Spirituality is typically presented either as consisting of, or as leading to, experiences of connectedness ...

(Vokey 2003, 171)

I have argued for an expanded version of Hand's (2003) 'education in a spiritual activity', which incorporates spiritual experience, as spiritual education. This is a relational understanding of spirituality. With the existence of well-established accounts of both spirituality and spiritual education as relational, why I have not simply adopted one of these? The answer lies in the distinctive nature of the relationship in question, which can be distinguished from other kinds of relationship due to the transcendence, or divinity, of its object. Hand's (2003) taxonomy reminds us that the purpose of adjectives is to add information to nouns. Like Carr (1995, 2003), is concerned that 'spiritual' be applied in a distinctive sense if it is to be of use. Where relational education is concerned, we might amend a question Carr asks concerning values education: 'what light is likely to be shed on [relational education] by describing [it] as precisely "spiritual" [?]' (2003, 213). Not only would such a description fail to shed light, it would likely dim any existing light. McLaughlin describes one reaction (to the lack of 'clarity and coherence' of the term 'spiritual education') as 'a claim that defensible educational activities which may be conducted under the labels of "spirituality" and "spiritual development" would be better approached under labels which are more transparent and acceptable' (2003, 190). A more transparent term for education which concerns relationships is relational education. If Hay is right about the extent to which spirituality is 'difficult for Westerners' (2007) then relational education is also likely to be a more acceptable term. However, we *can* shed light on relational education by describing

particular kinds of relationship as ‘precisely “spiritual”’, because being able to delineate different kinds of relationships allows us to say more. This positions spiritual education within relational education.

Distinguishing between spiritual and other kinds of relationship, as I have done, invites the kind of concern described by Carr that ‘close association of spiritual experience with religious experience seems to deny spiritual experience to the non-religious’ (2003, 211). It is true that if spirituality is defined in terms of relationship with the transcendent, then those who do not accept the existence of the transcendent could not, according to this definition, be described as having a spiritual relationship or experience. The account of spirituality I present in this paper denies spirituality to those who do not accept the existence of the transcendent. This denial fully coheres with the non-acceptance of the transcendent and would cease upon acceptance of the transcendent. It would be disingenuous and incoherent to suggest the possibility of an atheist connecting to, or being in a relationship with, a being she does not believe to exist.

Where does this denial of spirituality leave people who do not accept the existence of the transcendent but do self-define as spiritual and/or consider themselves to have (had) spiritual relationships/experiences? The briefest of responses is a reiteration that the account of spirituality I present here is offered as *an* account not *the* account. A fuller response forms part of my brief critique of Hay’s understanding of spirituality or ‘relational consciousness’ (Hay 2007, 14); a critique intended to strengthen the case for spiritual education as a subspecies of relational education.

In presenting a personal account of spiritual experience, which he describes as an ‘experience of transcendence’ (Hay 2007, 6), Hay clarifies that he is using ‘transcendence’ as a synonym for ‘God’. He asserts that ‘the spiritual quest is authentic and [that] prayer is its living heart’ (Hay 2007, 7). This is more than an assertion of personal belief; Hay posits that humans are ‘born with an inbuilt spiritual awareness’:

I suggest that ... spiritual awareness is a human universal, part of our biological make up that has evolved through the process of natural selection because it has survival value.

(Hay 2007, 2)

Hay is not asserting that the existence of spiritual awareness as a human universal would constitute proof of the existence of the transcendent (although he argues it strongly evidences said existence¹). Hay cites anthropologist Boyer who ‘holds the view that religious beliefs can have a biological survival function even when they are entirely without rational or empirical foundation’ (Hay 2007, 25). In any case, a consideration of whether or not spiritual experience, or religious belief, reasonably evidences the existence of the transcendent is beyond the scope of this paper. I return to a discussion of Hay’s account of spirituality which has our ‘inbuilt spiritual awareness ... in normal circumstances [expressing] itself via the religious culture in which we are nurtured’ (2007, 2).

In the 1990s, with Nye (Hay with Nye, 1998), Hay set out to investigate the possibility of making a ‘general statement about the primordial nature of spirituality, based on what ordinary people said about their experience’ and indeed of finding out if ‘spiritual experience ... was a reality’ (2007, 8). Hay explains that the first steps they took were to identify which kinds of ‘contexts would likely be appropriate for the emergence of spiritual experience’ (2007, 8). These steps might be described as being confined to spirituality as I have defined it – as concerning relationship with, or experience of, the transcendent:

We began by reflecting on our own devotional lives, particularly recalling those circumstances which seemed to be associated with instances of spontaneous spiritual awareness. More help came from examining the practical instructions in technical manuals of prayer and meditation, and also from reading the archives of more than 5,000 accounts of firsthand experience collected by Alister Hardy’s Religious Experience Research Unit ...

(Hay 2007, 8-9)

Although the majority of these steps are confined to spirituality as I have defined it, it is important to note that many of the accounts of firsthand experience collected by the Religious Experience Research Centre are from people who consider themselves to have had a spiritual experience but who do not accept the existence of the transcendent. Such people, particularly those who have made the effort to submit accounts of their experiences to the research centre, are likely to object to my denial that they have a spirituality. This objection would find support in the work Hay and Nye conducted with children. After following the above steps, Hay and Nye came up with three categories of context that 'would likely be appropriate for the emergence of spiritual experience' (Hay 2007, 8) – awareness of the here-and-now, awareness of mystery, and awareness of value (Hay 2007). These categories were then drawn upon in their practical research with children (Hay and Nye 1998). Hay claims that 'all the children without exception were aware of a spiritual dimension to their experience' (2007, 13). Rather than presenting this as proof, or at least strong evidence, of a transcendent reality, Hay presents it as supporting his hypothesis that spirituality is 'a biologically inbuilt aspect of our psychology' (2007, 14). Although, Hay explains, this aspect does not always manifest as spiritual awareness of the transcendent, in the aforementioned research (Hay and Nye 1998) it emerged that it always does manifest as 'relational consciousness':

Relational consciousness has two components (a) an altered state of awareness as compared with other kinds of consciousness, more intense, more serious and more valued and (b) the experience of being in relationship – with other people, with the environment and with God, and in an important sense, in touch with oneself.

(Hay 2007, 14)

Although many of the discussions with children which Nye recounts (Hay and Nye 1998) do concern relationship with the transcendent, as opposed to other forms of relationship such as those specified by Hay above, Hay explains that the term 'relational consciousness' embraces a greater range of relationships than those with the transcendent. At the same time, he refers to relational consciousness as equivalent to spirituality:

The conclusion that relational consciousness is the common feature of all spiritual talk raises the question of whether it would be appropriate to say that the two terms are synonymous; that spirituality is equivalent to relational consciousness. To do so is to alter the traditional meaning drastically by extending the connotation well beyond religious belief since the criterion is 'relationship' and not religion. Nevertheless the expansion of meaning opens a way to bridge the gulf between religious and secular stances with regard to transcendence.

(Hay 2007, 14)

This lends support to, say, atheists, who think of themselves as having a spirituality. But Hay admits that his altering of the meaning of 'spiritual' is 'drastic'. The aforementioned atheist can, it follows, also be thought of as altering the traditional meaning of spirituality 'drastically'. For his part, Hay seems to suggest that this drastic alteration is justified in terms of bridging the gulf he describes. Two points can be made in response to this. Firstly, such a drastic departure from the traditional meaning is, surely, liable to introduce confusion and misunderstanding. This could be avoided by allowing 'spiritual' to retain its traditional meaning and introducing the term 'relational consciousness' for the wider concept Hay identifies. Secondly, I suggest the notion that relational consciousness includes the spiritual would do more to build Hay's desired bridge. As for the atheist who considers herself to have a spirituality, she is not obliged to justify her use of 'spirituality', regardless of the extent to which it is an alteration from the traditional meaning of the term. Indeed, as I hope I have shown in this paper, her use of the term is among reasonable uses. Nevertheless, I think I have also shown that 'spirituality' is the most appropriate term for referring to relationship with, or experience of, the transcendent.

What Hay and Nye (Hay and Nye 1998) have identified in relational consciousness is what different kinds of significant relationships have in common. This is most helpful if the identity of distinct kinds of relationships can be maintained, and reserving the term 'spiritual' for relationship with the

transcendent allows us to recognise how this kind of relationship is both similar to and different from other kinds of a significant relationship. In terms of education, this would enable pupils to make the kinds of distinctions which are important in both spiritual education and the wider relational education.

Closing words

Distinguishing spiritual education from other aspects of relational education will have two likely benefits, both underpinned by what Hay describes as the difficulty 'Westerners' have with spirituality (2007). The first benefit would be to relational education. Those who harbour 'suspicion of the spiritual' (Hay 1985) are more likely to feel favourably towards any form or aspect of education which is not preceded by the offending adjective. If spirituality is as difficult for as many people as Hay suggests (2007), and if an alternative adjective will do as well, it makes sense to use that alternative. As Yob says:

... the term spirituality does not entirely shake off an accumulation of religious glosses, which can serve as a powerful disincentive to state-run schools to engage in spiritual education.

(Yob 2003, 114)

Hay himself lends support to the use of an alternative adjective in his description of 'spirituality [as] equivalent to relational consciousness' (2007, 14). Of course, this would only apply where an alternative adjective would do as well – as I hope to have shown, an alternative would not apply as well to spiritual education as I have defined it. (Even if 'religious' were a possible contender, it would surely not help with this matter.) The second likely benefit would be to spiritual education, as teachers harbouring the aforementioned suspicion may not acknowledge the possibility of relationship with the transcendent if it is not highlighted as a distinctive aspect of relational education. This is not to say that reminding teachers of, or alerting them to, the possibility of relationship with the transcendent will guarantee that it is well attended to in relational education – in the end, that is up to the teachers.

Note

1. As in his assertion that what he observes as the current 'outburst of free-floating spirituality in the West' is 'the upsurge of the Holy Spirit' (Hay 2007, 92).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

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