

**Young, gifted and spiritual—The case  
of Finnish sixth-grade pupils**

Martin Ubani

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Finnish sixth-grade pupils

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#### Abstract

The aim of this study was to explore the spirituality of Finnish academically gifted 12–13-year old pre-adolescents ( $N=101$ ). Their spirituality was investigated through the following three questions: (1) What is their relationship to religion? (2) How do they perceive transcendence? and (3) How does their search for meaning integrate into their lives? A total of 60 girls and 41 boys participated in the study. They attend a special school, Helsingin Suomalainen Yhteiskoulu, in Helsinki, Finland. The school includes classes from grade 3 to upper secondary school and has an entrance test. This study is part of a research project called “Actualizing Finnish Giftedness” which is funded by the Finnish Academy between 2000–2007 and is led by Professor Tiirri. The research project is based on Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences theory (Gardner 1993) and on Hay’s (1998) work on spirituality.

The data in this study was gathered in 2003 and 2004. It includes both qualitative and quantitative material. The emphasis is on data gathered with interviews. The mixed method approach was used as the methodological framework for connecting the qualitative content analysis, phenomenological approach and the quantitative tests of this study. The results of the sub-studies are represented in full in the four original articles.

First, the articles show that the pupils connect religion mainly with Christian institutions and do not consider religion and spirituality to overlap. Second, the articles show that the pupils believe in God and the interference of God in their lives and they think that reality includes a spiritual dimension. Third, the pupils had four kinds of existentially significant interests: personal, transcendental, cosmic and ethical. Cosmic interests were especially highlighted in the article concerning boys as nature and science were reported to be integral sources for their existential thinking. In addition, perceptions on God seemed to be connected to the individual’s perception on the meaning of life.

In RE, spiritual development has been a constant topic of interest since the late eighties. Likewise, recently in gifted education there have been discussions concerning spiritual intelligence (Gardner 1999) and spirituality of the gifted (Kerr & Cohn 2001). Based on the empirical results of the study, this study concludes that education wishing to promote spiritual development should aim at being existentially relevant to the pupils and use their existential search as an integrative framework for their individual talents and skills.

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*Keywords:* pre-adolescents, spirituality, existential search, giftedness

Martin Ubani

Suomalaisten akateemisesti lahjakkaiden kuudesluokkalaisten spiritualiteetti

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### Tiivistelmä

Tässä tutkimuksessa tarkastellaan millaista on suomalaisten akateemisesti lahjakkaiden 12–13 -vuotiaiden oppilaiden ( $N = 101$ ) spiritualiteetti. Tutkimukseen osallistui 61 tyttöä ja 40 poikaa. Osallistujat ovat Helsingin Suomalaisen Yhteiskoulun kuudesluokkalaista oppilaita. Koulu valitsee oppilaansa kolmannelle luokalle testin perusteella. Oppilaiden spiritualiteettia tutkittiin seuraavien tutkimuskysymysten avulla:

1. Millainen suhde oppilailla on uskontoon?
2. Millainen suhde heillä on tuonpuoleiseen ja Jumalaan?
3. Miten elämäntarkoitus integroitu oppilaiden elämään?

Väitöskirja perustuu neljään englanninkieliseen artikkeliin. Artikkelit osoittavat, että oppilaat yhdistävät uskonnon kristilliseen instituutioon sekä tekevät eron uskonnon ja spiritualiteetin välillä. Toiseksi artikkelit osoittavat, että oppilaat uskovat Jumalan ja tuonpuoleisuuden olemassaoloon ja niiden vaikutukseen elämässään. Kolmanneksi oppilailla on erilaisia eksistentiaalisesti merkittäviä kiinnostuksen kohteita: henkilökohtaisia, tuonpuoleisia, kosmisia ja eettisiä kysymyksiä. Lisäksi oppilaiden jumalakäsitykset näyttivät olevan yhteydessä heidän käsitykseensä elämäntarkoituksesta.

Tämä tutkimus on osa Suomen Akatemian vuosina 2000–2007 rahoittamaa tutkimusprojektia nimeltä 'Suomalaisen lahjakkuuden esiintyminen'. Projektia johtaa professori Kirsi Tirri. Tutkimusprojekti perustuu Gardnerin (1993) moniälykkysteoriaan ja Hayn (1998) spiritualiteettia koskevaan tutkimustyöhön. Tämä väitöskirja-tutkimus sisältää sekä kvalitatiivista että kvantitatiivista aineistoa. Väitöskirjaraportissa painottuu haastattelujen avulla kerätty aineisto. Koko aineisto kerättiin vuosina 2003–2004. Tutkimuksessa käytettiin mixed methods -lähestymistapaa metodologisena viitekehysenä.

Viimeisen kahdenkymmenen vuoden aikana uskontokasvatus on ottanut yksilön uskonnollisuuden tarkastelun kohteeksi uudestaan ja pohtinut yleisemmin yksilön spirituaalisen kehityksen tukemisen perusteita. Samoin lahjakkuustutkimuksessa on alettu pohtia spirituaalisen lahjakkuuden olemusta (Gardner 1999) sekä lahjakkaiden oppilaiden spiritualiteettia (Kerr & Cohn 2001). Tutkimuksen perusteella koulussa annettava spiritualiteettikasvatus voisi ottaa lähtökohdakseen oppilaan elämäntarkoituksen ja eksistentiaalisen elämän artikuloinnin tukemisen ja pyrkiä edistämään oppilaan lahjojen ja suuntautumisen jäsentymistä hänen elämänsomukseensa.

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*Avainsanat:* varhaisuoret, lahjakkuus, spiritualiteetti, elämäntarkoitus

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Anno Domini 2007,

Martin Ubani



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# 1 Introduction to the thesis

## 1.1 The purpose and structure of this thesis

The aim of this thesis is to explore the spirituality of Finnish academically gifted pre-adolescents. Their spirituality is investigated with following research questions: (1) What is their relationship to religion? (2) How do they perceive transcendence? and (3) How does their search for meaning integrate into their lives?

This summary thesis is divided into seven chapters. The first chapter introduces the thesis research. The introduction includes the research questions, the purpose of the study and describing the main research project ‘Actualizing Finnish giftedness’ which this thesis contributes to. After this the data of this thesis is described. The introduction ends with a summary of the main results of the four refereed articles and with a description of the alignment of the four articles with regards to the themes of religion, transcendence and existential search. The first original article in this study is entitled ‘How do Finnish pre-adolescents perceive religion and spirituality?’ (Ubani & Tirri 2006). The second article is entitled ‘Spiritual science. An empirical study of Finnish gifted boys.’ (Ubani 2006a). The third article is entitled ‘How do gifted girls perceive the meaning of life?’ (Tirri & Ubani 2005a). The fourth article is entitled “What makes life spiritual?” (Ubani 2006b). The original publications are found at the end of this manuscript.

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 discuss the results and issues that emerged in the four original articles. The issues highlighted in the articles are represented in relation to the themes of religion, especially in the institutional sense (Chapter 2), transcendence (Chapter 3) and existential search (Chapter 4).

The recent trends in the values, beliefs and lifestyle among the young in Finland are discussed mostly in relation to religion but also in the other two contexts. The theoretical portion in this thesis starts with exploring the spirituality of pre-adolescents in the context of religion. There are several reasons for this. Current research studies into spirituality build on the previous and various studies on religiousness conducted between the 1960’s and 1970’s (i.e., Glock & Stark 1965; Tamminen 1991). On the other hand, since those studies RE has increasingly started to acknowledge the need to cover spirituality which expresses itself outside of religious traditions (see Hay, Nye & Murphy 1996). However, in the Western culture, Christian religion has for centuries been an important source for the language and concepts used in describing our existential life. For

instance, religious metaphors have articulated experiences concerning the ultimate questions in life (i.e., Hay 2000a, 81). The role of religion in the conceptualisation of spirituality is exemplified in chapters 3 and 4 where both the question of transcendence and existential search begins by the explication of their respective relationship to religion.

The fifth chapter discusses the focuses on the methodology of the thesis. The case consisted of both qualitative and quantitative data and the data was gathered in 2003 and 2004. The mixed method approach has distinguished itself as a separate research paradigm over the last few decades (Teddlie & Tashakkori 2003). In this thesis, the mixed method approach is used as the methodological framework for connecting the qualitative approaches and the quantitative tests in the articles.

The conclusive reflections of the thesis are represented in the last two chapters. In chapter 6, the relevance of the thesis in gifted education is discussed. First, spirituality is explicated as one domain in the holistic viewpoint of humanity. Second, the ambivalent relationship between giftedness and spirituality is discussed. Third, the question of spiritual and existential intelligence is discussed in the context of Howard Gardner's (1993) MI theory. The report ends with the pedagogical implications of the thesis study (Chapter 7). The chapter suggests that in education, spirituality could be understood as an articulation of one's existential search in different contexts and with different means. Therefore, the end means of spiritual development would be becoming conscious of the personal ways for articulating the existential search. In other words, the aim of education should be nurturing the pupil so that the pupil can become conscious of him or herself as a spiritual subject (cf. Niemi 1991; 2006).

## **1.2 Actualizing Finnish giftedness**

This thesis is part of a research project funded by the Finnish Academy between 2000–2007. The research project is called “Actualizing Finnish Giftedness” and is led by Professor Kirsi Tirri. The research project bases its work on Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences theory (Gardner 1993). The project includes data ranging from mathematics Olympians to UN peacemaker troops and data from pupils of different age and giftedness profile. In addition to studying giftedness, the project has also been developing questionnaires, such as the Multiple Intelligence Profile Questionnaire (MIPG: Tirri & Komulainen 2002), the test of Spiritual Sensitivity, which is an extension to the MIPQ (Tirri 2004; Tirri, Nokelainen & Ubani 2006) and the Religious Judgment Test (RJT; Räsänen,

Tirri & Nokelainen 2004). The RJT test is based on Oser's (1991) five stages of religious thinking and includes a dilemma, open-ended questions and 5-point Likert arguments. The tests used in the four chosen articles of the thesis are described in Chapter 5.

The participants in this thesis study are 101 academically gifted 12–13-year old pupils. The 60 girls and 41 boys attend a special school, Helsingin Suomalainen Yhteiskoulu, in Helsinki, Finland. The school includes classes from grade 3 to upper secondary school. This study included all of the sixth-grade pupils in the school. The school has an entrance examination containing linguistic, logical and spatial tasks for the children wishing to apply. Basically, the term 'gifted' has been used to describe people with abilities that are different and higher than normal (Piiro 1994, 13). However, in general usage there is a family of concepts which can refer roughly to the same sphere of humanity as giftedness. Such terms are 'talent', 'skill', 'intelligence', and even 'creativity' and 'genius.' In this study, the concepts 'giftedness' and 'talent' are used interchangeably and 'intelligence' is reserved mostly to the discussion concerning multiple intelligences. This study uses giftedness in the meaning advocated by Piiro (1994) by referring to it as, exceptionality in a certain ability that is shown in academic achievement.

Generally, the Finnish educational system is not based on segregation with regards to the talents of the students. However, especially at upper secondary school there is a possibility for acceleration. In this sense, labelling pupils in a certain school as gifted raises some questions, namely, if they really are gifted and if they are, in what ways. When choosing a specific school in Helsinki as the sample school of gifted pupils, the following arguments were applied. First, pupils wishing to enrol in this school are chosen from a larger group with a test. The ability of the pupils in some skills, namely linguistic, logical, and spatial skills, is above those pupils who did not pass the test. The emphasis on these skills in gifted programs and special schools is quite common in Finland. Tirri (1997) has reported that when explored in terms of Gardner's MI theory, Finland invests in logical-mathematical and linguistic intelligences and that spatial intelligence is also well represented. On the other hand, she has found deficiencies in the nurture of inter-personal and intrapersonal intelligences (Tirri 1997, 220–221). The second argument for choosing this particular group is that the students of the school manage exceptionally well in national and international measurements and contests. For instance, in 2005 the students from this school had the highest mean in Finland in the matriculation exam ( $M = 35.2$ ). The average in Finland was less than 22 points. In other words, these students have abili-

ties that lead them to success and high achievement at school. They are academically gifted.

The research project has also produced studies and articles with the same participants than this study but which are not included in this dissertation. For instance, the RJT test revealed that the religious thinking of the gifted pre-adolescents ( $N = 95$ ) is more advanced than the religious thinking of average ability students ( $N = 73$ ) (Räsänen, Tirri & Nokelainen 2004). In addition to the RJT test, one study explored the gifted pupils' moral judgment with a defining issues test (DIT) by Rest (1986). The gifted students ( $N = 65$ ) in this study were from the same school but from the 9<sup>th</sup> grade (15–16 years old). The study showed no statistically significant difference in neither tests between gifted girls and boys. In the case of religiousness, the lack of a gender effect contrasts with previous studies on religious differences between sexes (Tamminen 1996). In addition, the gifted pupils' moral reasoning was reported to be high (Räsänen, Tirri & Nokelainen 2006). The study concluded that various studies show negative correlation between an increase in giftedness and gender differences in moral reasoning (ibid.; Narvaez 1993).

In addition, the pre-adolescents in this study participated in a cross-cultural qualitative study on pre-adolescents' moral, religious and spiritual questions (Tirri, Tallent-Runnels & Nokelainen 2005). The study included pupils from Finland, USA, Hong Kong and Bahrain ( $N = 975$ ). Their age varied between 9 and 12 years. The sample from each country included both above-average and average-ability pupils. The pre-adolescents were asked to form separate twenty questions concerning the future. The study had some general trends. First, the study revealed that the academically gifted girls and boys asked more scientific questions than their peers. Secondly, the average-ability pupils asked more everyday life questions than the gifted. Thirdly, the gifted pupils also asked more moral questions concerning life than the average children. However, the number of spiritual and religious questions did not differ significantly between the groups. The girls asked more religious and spiritual questions than the boys in all the samples.

### **1.3 The data of the thesis**

A total of 101 sixth-grade pupils participated in the study. They were 12–13 years of age. These pupils attend a special school in Helsinki, Finland, which includes grades from the third to upper secondary school. The school has its own curriculum. The applicants for the third grade are tested with an entrance

examination containing linguistic, logical and spatial tasks. The participants consisted of 60 girls and 41 boys. On a scale of 4–10 the grade point average of all the participants was 8.80. The grade point average among the girls was 8.88. It was slightly higher than the grade point average of the boys (8.71).

**Table 1.** Phases of data gathering.

<b>1# September 2003</b>		
<i>n=101 (40/61)</i>	<b>Test of spiritual sensitivity</b>	<i>Tirri et al. 2006; Nokelainen et al. 2004; 2006</i>
<b>2# November 2003a</b>		
<i>n=26 (12/14)</i>	<b>Interviews</b>	<i>Tirri &amp; Ubani 2005a; Ubani 2006a; 2006b</i>
<b>3# November 2003b</b>		
<i>n=101 (40/61)</i>	<b>Brainstorming task</b>	<i>Ubani &amp; Tirri 2006</i>
<b>4# February 2004</b>		
<i>n=95 (39/56)</i>	<b>Defining issues test</b>	<i>Tirri &amp; Ubani 2005a</i>

The data of this study was gathered during the winter of 2003–2004. The questionnaires were administered at the school. They were collected during the school hours and during the lessons. The quantitative tests and the brainstorming task were collected in the classroom in the presence of the classroom teachers. The interviews took place individually in a vacant classroom. The four phases of the data gathering are presented in Table 1. The mode of inquiry is stated in the middle column. On the left side of the mode of inquiry are the number of the participants and the ratio of boys to girls is in brackets. On the right side are the articles where each stage is reported. Only the reports written in italics are included in this thesis.

First, in September 2003 all the sixth-grade pupils ( $n = 101$ ) filled out a 20-item self-evaluation questionnaire measuring spiritual sensitivity (APPENDIX 1). The items used a Likert scale from 1 (Completely disagree) to 5 (Completely agree). The questionnaire has been developed by Tirri (2004) and is an exten-

sion of the Multiple Intelligence Profile Questionnaire (Tirri & Komulainen 2002). The gifted pre-adolescents of this thesis is one sub-group of a larger Finnish sample ( $N = 496$ ) (Tirri, Nokelainen & Ubani 2006).

During the second phase the twenty-six pupils were interviewed. They were chosen to be interviewed according to their score in the test of spiritual sensitivity. There were 17 pupils with girls ( $n = 9$ ) and boys ( $n = 8$ ) interviewed with a high-score in the questionnaire ( $M = 4.21$ ,  $SD = 0.27$ ). In addition to these, there were nine pupils interviewed with a low-score in the test ( $M = 2.27$ ,  $SD = 0.33$ ). This group consisted of five girls and four boys. The purpose was to obtain more diverse qualitative data. It also offered some feed-back for the evaluation of the test. Quantitative and qualitative results based on the discernment of the two groups will be reported in future studies. It should be noted that two girls, one from each group were interviewed in order to test the outline of the interview (APPENDIX 2). Their interviews are included in the data and are the reason for the higher number of girls ( $n = 14$ ) than boys ( $n = 12$ ) in the sample.

The interviews followed a qualitative semi-structured approach (e.g., Seidman, 1998, 9). The three themes were from the categories of spiritual sensitivity from Hay (1998). The questionnaire was used for opening the discussion concerning each theme. The test included claims such as 'I often ponder the meaning of life'. The pupils were shown their filled forms and the claim was presented. Then the pupils responded to the claim. Further depth was being pursued with the questions 'Why?' and 'What do you mean?' The session with each child took between 35 to 50 minutes. There have been various reports based on the results of this phase (Tirri & Ubani 2005a; Ubani 2006a; 2006b). The qualitative studies of the interviews included both the phenomenological inquiry and content analysis.

The third phase of the data gathering was a brainstorming task presented in a handbook of religious education (Hammond et al. 1990, 7). The pupils ( $n = 101$ ) formed 20 mixed groups with five students in each group. Sixty girls and 41 boys took part in this task. One group had six members. This task has been also been conducted with theology students majoring in RE (Tirri & Ubani 2005b).

The fourth phase of the inquiry was the Defining Issues Test (DIT) in February 2004. The DIT is a widely used measure of moral judgment. DIT consists of six moral dilemmas which are presented in paragraphs. The participants rate the importance of each situation and rank a list of concerns one might have in the given situation. The P-score is used for comparing the moral reasoning of the subjects. It is based on Kohlberg's moral judgment stages 5 and 6 (Rest 1986). The average score among the students was 27.9 ( $SD = 11.8$ ). There were 56 girls and 39 boys participating in this phase.



## 1.4 The main results of the original articles

### 1.4.1 Institutional religion and humanistic spirituality

The first article in this study is called ‘How do Finnish pre-adolescents perceive religion and spirituality?’ (Ubani & Tirri 2006). The concrete research questions in this article were: ‘What meanings do Finnish sixth-grade students give to the concepts of religion and spirituality?’, and ‘What is the difference between their perceptions of the two concepts?’ The participants ( $N = 101$ ) formed 20 groups and brainstormed the concepts of religion and spirituality. The data included over 700 written expressions on the two concepts.

The key result of the study was the three categories discerned in the analysis. These categories could be found from both the data concerning religion and the data concerning spirituality. The categories were called ‘the institutional dimension’, ‘the humanistic dimension’, and ‘the supernatural dimension’. The expressions in the institutional dimension referred to the established and specialised forms of religious and spiritual life. The institutional dimension included five sub-categories. They were called *religious traditions*, *religious settings*, *devotional life*, *history of religions*, and *literature and hymns*. The meanings in the supernatural dimension referred to transcendental religious and spiritual phenomena. The supernatural dimension had two sub-categories. The sub-categories were called *transcendence* and *supernatural actions*. The expressions in the humanistic dimension related to human life and culture in general. The humanistic dimension consisted of four subcategories which were called *human being*, *everyday life*, *human culture*, and *nature and geography*.

The other key result of the study was that the students emphasised institutional elements in religion but humanistic and everyday life aspects in the data concerning spirituality. In other words, while the same three categories were found from the data concerning religion and spirituality, the pupils emphasised different things. The difference was evident both in the frequencies of the categories and in the content of the three categories. The meanings given to religion were typically connected to Christianity. As a contrast, in general the meanings given to spirituality did not exclusively belong to the sphere of Christianity. In addition, most of the meanings given to religion belonged to the institutional dimension (68.2%) while the humanistic dimension included 22.9 percent of the meanings. In the data concerning spirituality most of the meanings belonged to the humanistic dimension (66.2%) and 17.7 percent of the meanings belonged to the institutional dimension. However, the pre-adolescents did not put much emphasis on the supernatural aspect of religion and spirituality. The supernatural

dimension included 16.1 percent of the meanings given to spirituality and 8.8 percent of the expressions given to religion.

### 1.4.2 Nature and science as sources of spirituality

The second article is called ‘Spiritual science. An empirical study of Finnish gifted boys.’ (Ubani 2006a.) The article explores how nature and science function as a source and catalyst for gifted boys’ spiritual lives. The research question was: ‘How is science and nature connected to the spiritual life of the academically gifted boys?’ The article examined how science contributed to the spiritual lives of the boys and what kind of existential thinking they have concerning nature and life. The data was based on interviews of twelve 12 and 13 year old boys.

Two key findings emerged in the study. First, the boys listed 58 topics that lacked sufficient scientific explanations and seemed mysterious to them. Nearly half of the topics focused on nature ( $n = 28$ ). In addition, the boys mentioned the *spiritual realm* ( $n = 11$ ), *origin of life* ( $n = 7$ ), *everyday life* ( $n = 6$ ), and *natural science* ( $n = 5$ ) as sources of mystery and existential reflection. The category ‘natural science’ referred to contemplation focusing on physics and chemistry.

Secondly, this study confirmed that nature and science serve them as sources for their existential thinking. For instance, there is a quote in the article in which a boy challenges the theory of the Big Bang with the fundamental questions of why, how, and to where is it progressing. He did not find the theory existentially satisfactory. On the other hand, there were also pupils who found evolution theory or the Big Bang theory sufficient. The need to relate their experiences and scientific knowledge with their existential search was also shown in their attempts to include God in their evolutionist explanations or in their descriptions of how does their existences relate to their theories of the origin of life.

### 1.4.3 Diversity in spirituality

The third article is called ‘How do gifted girls perceive the meaning of life?’ (Tirri & Ubani 2005a.) It includes a qualitative case study of two academically gifted girls. While both of them had a higher than above grade point average compared to their peers, the two girls had opposite results in the tests of spiritual sensitivity and moral reasoning (DIT). Jean’s score on the test of spiritual sensitivity was 4.5 on a scale of 1–5 ( $M = 3.3$ ,  $SD = 0.6$ ) and her DIT P-score was 32

( $M = 27.9$ ,  $SD = 11.8$ ). Susan's scores were 2.5 and 14, respectively. The research question of the study was: 'How gifted Finnish girls perceive the meaning of life?' The aim was first to study the pupils' perceptions on the meaning of life and then to proceed to a statement concerning their outlooks on life. The theoretical background of the study is what Hay (1998) has called 'relational consciousness'. According to Hay's study, we exist spiritually in the world. Relational consciousness is the core of our spirituality and expressed in the context of how we relate to things, other people, ourselves and God (p. 113).

The first result that this study confirmed was that the relational aspect was indeed a prominent framework for understanding the spirituality of the two girls. In addition, the search for meaning and the perceptions on the meaning of life was reflected in how the girls related to God, themselves, others, and the environment. In other words, the meaning of life is not a separate cognitive domain in our lives but rather imbedded into our living, behaving and thinking.

Secondly, this article shows that even in a quite homogenous sample of girls there can be significant differences in the nature of their spirituality. This difference in spirituality was evident in terms of the nature of relatedness and the perceptions concerning the meaning of life. Jean thought of life as an interplay of God's veiled guidance, our actions, and our conscious attempts of trying to understand our role in the world. As a contrast, Susan considered life as an outcome of separate individuals' actions affecting each other. She also denied the existence of God. The differences in their outlooks on life were also evident in their moral choices. For instance, Jean was concerned with the well being of others and wanted a professional career to fulfil her part in universal solidarity. Susan did not embrace a communal attitude towards others. Instead, she had a more self-sufficient view than Jean. Despite of these individual differences, it seems that the girls' spirituality can be properly understood in terms of relationships.

#### **1.4.4 Life as referential, relational and revelatory**

The fourth article is called "What makes life spiritual" (Ubani 2006b). It investigates the gifted pre-adolescents' perceptions on life. The research questions were: 'What makes life spiritual', and 'How does the meaning of life integrate into the lives of the pupils?' There were 26 participants in this study. Fourteen of the pupils were girls and twelve were boys. The pupils were interviewed. Elaine McCreery (1996) has described spirituality as an awareness of there being something more in the course of everyday life. This article takes a dynamic

stance that this 'more' is something that is encountered in life and manifest in the meanings and perceptions on life. In this study, the 'more' is placed in 'the lived experience' of the pre-adolescent pupils in a phenomenological sense (van Manen 1990).

The key result of this study was the three aspects discerned in the perceptions of life. The pupils sense that there is a referential, relational, and revelatory quality in life. These qualities become real when they encounter life and are trying to make sense of everyday events. As has been reported earlier, Hay (1998) places emphasis on the relational consciousness being the core of spirituality. This study, in contrast, adds two other characteristics to our way of being and perceiving (see Hay 2000b.) They were called the referential aspect and the revelatory aspect. These aspects are not exclusive but can be present in the same experience and perception.

The first aspect was called the *referential* aspect and emerged when the pupils used different sources of reference to aid their narrations concerning life and search for meaning. The pupils mentioned things such as tales, dreams, biblical teachings, and traditional sayings. However, the referential aspect was not present just in the reflective and interpretative meaning giving act but the article suggests that it was part of how they were attuned to the world and, thus, it was part of the act of experiencing. In short, they sense that the life they are living and encountering has got a referential quality.

The second quality in encountering life is the sense of *relationality*. The relational aspect refers to the awareness of the interconnectedness of different beings and things in reality. When the children are talking about different issues concerning their lives and purpose, they reflect on reality as a whole. The pupil's perceptions of life were connected to their understanding of their purpose and the explanation of the incidents in life. The children sense that in their encounters with life a referential quality is present.

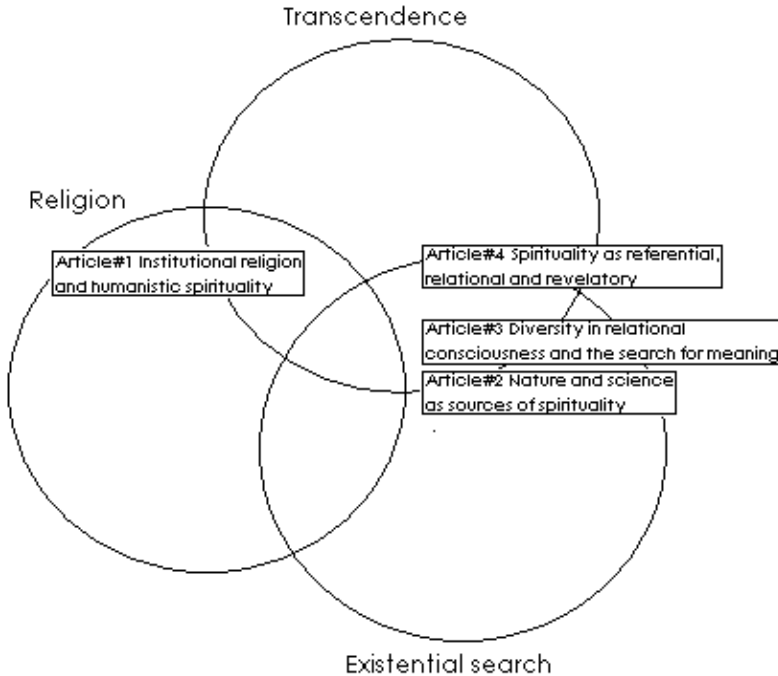
The third quality of the life that the pupils sensed was *revelatory*. The different encounters with life reveal something about the true nature of life. The children sense that they are realising some essential truths concerning life. The meaning of life was represented in the contexts such as experiencing life as mysterious, the sensing of the flow of life or to the realisation of our true being. This mysterious essence unfolds and reveals itself as the life that is encountered.

## 1.5 The themes of the discussion

The results of the four articles are being further discussed in Chapters 2–4. Each chapter discusses the results on the spirituality of the gifted pre-adolescents in one of the three themes: religion, transcendence and existential search. Figure 1 shows the three themes of the thesis and the alignment of the four articles in these themes. It should be noted that the figure is not intended to represent a comprehensive theory on spirituality as a phenomenon but its purpose is to illustrate how the themes and the content of each article relate to each other. In addition, as the figure shows, the three themes are not exclusive. Therefore, in the chapters focusing on each of the theme some reference to other themes can not be avoided.

The original articles and their results are discussed in relation to three themes. The themes are religion, transcendence and existential search. The content of the *first article* entitled ‘How do Finnish pre-adolescents perceive religion and spirituality?’ (Ubani & Tirri 2006) describes how gifted pre-adolescents view religion as institutional and spirituality as humanistic. While the emphasis in the first article is on *Religion* (Figure 1) it also includes references to *Transcendence*.

The *second article* is called ‘Spiritual science. An empirical study of Finnish gifted boys.’ (Ubani 2006a.) It describes how nature and science function as sources for the spirituality of the boys. The content of this article emphasises the *Existential search* of the boys. The views were also connected to *Transcendence* but this domain was not as strong a feature as the existential search.



**Figure 1.** The main themes of the discussion and the alignment of the articles.

The *third article* is called ‘How do gifted girls perceive the meaning of life?’ (Tirri & Ubani 2005a.) The article describes how there is diversity in the relational consciousness of girls and how the differences is reflected in the search for meaning. The content of this article touches both *Transcendence* and *Existential search*. Likewise, the issues in the *fourth article* belong both to the domain of *Transcendence* and *Existential search*.

The fourth article is called “What makes life spiritual’ (Ubani 2006b). The article describes how the perceptions of life include a referential, relational and revelatory quality. In this article, ‘spiritual’ is seen as an added quality to the surface of everyday life: as something that transcends everyday observations. For this reason this article is placed nearer to *Transcendence* than the previous article.

## 2 Religion in pupils' lives

### 2.1 The relationship between religion and spirituality

This chapter focuses on the role of religion in the pupil's life. In the articles there were two main results concerning religion and pre-adolescents (Article 1). These are: (1) the pupils connect religion with Christian institution, and (2) the pupils do not consider religion and spirituality to overlap. The discussion begins with an introduction to the conceptual context of religion and spirituality and the cultural particulars present in the Finnish discourse (Chapter 2.1). After that the focus is on the religious beliefs and conceptions of Finnish pre-adolescents in general and in this study (Chapter 2.2). This reflection includes the pupils' relationship to institutional aspects of religion. Finally, religion in Finnish comprehensive education is introduced and related to some of the results presented in Article 1 (Chapter 2.3).

The first focus is the relationship between religion and spirituality. In RE, the relationship between religion and spirituality has been a constant topic of interest since the late eighties. Traditionally, both concepts of religion and spirituality have been employed in a Judeo-Christian context. Originally the Latin word *spiritualitas* is a translation of the Greek word *pneumatikos*. According to Latin dictionary, it refers broadly to all animation of life that is connected to the spirit of God (Lewis & Short 1987). It can also refer to the immediate intuition of the transcendence. The word *religio* refers to a way of life that is marked by a fear and reverence of God. According to theologian Alister McGrath (1999), in the Christian context religion focuses on identifying the key beliefs and articulating the faith while spirituality has practical and experiential connotations. Thus, he describes spirituality as 'an outworking in real life' of the individual's religious faith. (McGrath 1999, 2.)

Historically, neither education nor humanistic psychology has distinguished spirituality from religion or religiousness (Zinnbauer et al.1997, 550). According to Pargament (1999, 6), religion has been defined as a broad construct that encompasses the individual, institutional (e.g., altar, doctrine), functional (ritual life) and the substantive (God, the Sacred). Until recently, there has not been much reason for the use of the term 'spirituality' in education as there was a consensus that it referred to the Christian heritage (Copley 1997; Hay 1998). The bond with the Christian tradition was so strong that the concept of spirituality was not enforced or defined in a more rigorous manner. Therefore, 'spirituality' also was for long being used in research either to add linguistic variety to

religion (Pargament 1999, 5) or in contrast to material (Goldman 1964, 88). Currently, there is in no consensus in education on the definition of spirituality. This problem has been illustrated by Nye and Hay (1996, 145) as they point out that: "...meanings of the term 'spirituality' extend between something like 'moral sensitivity' and 'mystical union with God.'" Much of the discussion in the field concerning spirituality and religion has focused on criticism of the definitions of the others (i.e., Thatcher 1991; Hay & Hammond 1992; Mott-Thornton 1996; Stifoss-Hanssen 1999; Emmons & Crumpler 1999).

The bond between religion and spirituality is exemplified as something that can be described as a conceptual symbiosis. In research, spirituality seems to be constantly defined in a connection with religion and its objectives and with religion's vocabulary (e.g., Emmons & Crumpler 1999). For example, in the literature there has been a viewpoint where spirituality is a sub-category of religion (i.e., Pargament 1999). Quite evidently, in this viewpoint spirituality is quite easily limited to the sphere of religious traditions, especially Christianity, and other institutional forms of religiosity, such as new religious movements. On other occasions religion has been considered more like a potential cultural-bound expression of spirituality, thus making spirituality a wider concept than religion (i.e., Stifoss-Hanssen 1999; Hay 1998, 10–11; Pargament 1999). To this second group fall also the definitions which consider moral behaviour as a universal expression of humanity and spirituality (Rodger 2000, 4). However, the claim that spirituality is non-dependant of religion (Pargament 1999; Hay 1998) seems to imply that in our thinking spirituality is automatically attributed to the sphere of religion.

In today's general usage the concepts of religion and spirituality are sometimes enforced almost as opponents to each other. Religion is described as distant, organisational, and ideological. At the same time spirituality is viewed as humane and personal. In brief, 'religion' is the 'outer' and 'other' while 'spirituality' is the 'inner'. (i.e., Pargament 1999, 6; Hay 1998.) The contrast between the two concepts is becoming standardised: religion is negative and spirituality is positive (Pargament 1999, 6; Hay 1998, 6). Hence, people are more likely to describe themselves as spiritual than religious (Pargament 1999).

The differences in the connotations of 'religion' and 'spirituality' in everyday discourse have been empirically verified, too. In the US, Zinnbauer et al. (1997) reported on the perceptions of 'religiousness' and 'spirituality' of 346 participants from different religious backgrounds and ages. The study confirmed that religiousness and spirituality as concepts share similarities but have also differences in content. Religiousness referred to organised activities, performance of rituals as well as to commitment to organisational or institutional activities or



dogma. In contrast, spirituality referred also to humane behaviour in everyday life, including integrating one's values and beliefs into daily life (p. 557). In the study by Zinnbauer et. al the transcendental quality of reality and belief in a Higher Power of some kind was the overlapping quality in religiousness and spirituality (ibid.).

However, it should be acknowledged that there are cultural differences in the use of the concept of religion and of spirituality in particular. Stifoss-Hanssen (1999) has pointed out, in the Nordic countries 'spirituality' as a phenomenon is 'not referred to in everyday usage language as spirituality' (Stifoss-Hanssen 1999, 26.). The Nordic people are more likely to claim that 'I am not a Christian, but I am religious.' In this sentence 'religious' means the same as 'spiritual': a belief that there something more to life than material. Moreover, in the Nordic countries 'religiosity, meaning-seeking, or view of life would be used instead' of spirituality (ibid., 26). Furthermore, 'spirituality' can be referred to with a family of concepts which share more or less the same root.

For instance, in Encyclopaedia Fennica there are three words in Finnish concerning spirituality. First, there are two words in Finnish that derive directly from the Finnish equivalent of 'spirit'. First there exists a concept, which could be translated something like 'religious spirituality', or 'spirituality connected with religion' and which would often refer to Christian individual or communal devotional life [hengellisyys]. The other word refers to 'non-religious spirituality' and increasingly to 'non-Christian spirituality' [henkisyys]. To this category would fall diverse traditions and actions such as theosophy, new religious movements, and sometimes even some aspects of psychology. In addition to these, the third concept is of course the exact Finnish equivalent of 'religiousness' [uskonnollisuus]. It is, naturally, of the four concepts most clearly connected with religious faith and religious practices. However, recently Finnish theology has been increasingly applying a fourth concept to refer to Christian devotional life [spiritualiteetti]. To make things more complex, at the same time RE has sometimes been applying the very same concept also with a broader universal connotation (e.g., Tirri 2004).

In Article 1 'How do Finnish pre-adolescents perceive religion and spirituality?' (Ubani & Tirri 2006), the perceptions of the gifted pre-adolescents of the two concepts were explored empirically. According the study, both perceptions on religion and spirituality included meanings that referred to the institutional dimension, the supernatural dimension and the humanistic dimension. While the meanings given to religion emphasised more the institutional elements and Christianity, the meanings given to spirituality emphasised the humanistic aspects and everyday life. A replica study was conducted on Finnish theology stu-

dents' ( $N = 40$ ) (Tirri & Ubani 2005b; Ubani 2005). In contrast to the pre-adolescents, there was more overlap in the perceptions of religion and spirituality. The theology students' perceptions of religion exceeded religious organisations and institutions and they also attributed spirituality to the traditional forms of religion and its institutions (Ubani 2005). Furthermore, while the pre-adolescents emphasised non-religious and non-Christian spirituality in their meanings given to spirituality, the perceptions of theology students covered elements of all four conceptions given in the encyclopaedia.

The strong overlap between religion, Christian practice and spirituality in the conceptions of theology students can be interpreted as a result of the emphasis of their studies, expertise and knowledge on the religious heritage and history in Finland and in the Nordic countries. It also shows the peculiarities of institutional religiousness in Finland. The mainstream religion in the Nordic countries is Lutheranism. Lutheranism was born out of the Reformation during the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It belongs to the evangelical tradition that stresses the authority of the Bible and has a strong theological emphasis. The recent theological research focusing on the characteristics of Finnish religious spirituality has taken an integrative stance between doctrine, practice and individual devotion (Toiviainen 2002; Vainio 2003; Häyrynen, Kotila & Vatanen 2003). Finnish spirituality has been described to being built on 'an ideal of pietistic-orthodox devoutness' having included since the 18<sup>th</sup> century elements of sanctification and continual repentance (Laine 2003, 170). These elements were added then to a church oriented and clergy guided communal and devotional life that had a special focus on the sacrament of the Eucharist. While many of the pietistic movements in Finland have accordingly embraced the pietistic element to spirituality, they have generally managed to stay inside the Lutheran church (Laine 2003, 168–170). Hence, Lutheran spirituality merges both institutional and orthodox elements to pietistic lifestyle characteristics (*ibid.*).

## **2.2 Religious conceptions, beliefs and affiliation of Finnish pre-adolescents**

Due to cultural and societal reasons, the relationship between Finnish pre-adolescents and religion is somewhat ambivalent. According to Helve (1996, 171), the sets of values of young people have been rapidly changing from the beginning of the nineties onward. Also, young people in the Nordic countries have been experiencing 'emerging postmodernism' (*ibid.*). Thus, the shift toward individualism has been reported to affect young people's relationships to

authorities, religion, ethics and consumption habits (see Helve 1996, 171). While discussing the effects of post-modernism in religion and society, Heelas (1998, 9) has emphasised the shift in an individual's search from grand narratives to freedom, individual choice and micro narratives. Grand narratives, such as of religious traditions, make certain truth-claims also concerning the meaning of life, what is valuable, and how life is to be interpreted. Today, instead of adopting one of the Grand narratives, different traditions are used in the formulation of synthesis and stance in the pre-adolescents' micro narratives. Perhaps this process explains partly why the trends on existential thinking concerning religion and the existential thinking concerning nature and universe are similar so that during pre-adolescence both trends are at their peak at the same time (Tamminen 1988, 22, 31).

In general, different reports show that the role of institutional religion has been on the decline in the Nordic countries (Davie 2000). For instance, about 84 percent of the Finnish population belongs to the Lutheran Church but the trend especially in the urban areas is toward a rapid decrease. In Helsinki in 2005 only 69 percent of the population belonged to the Lutheran Church. The largest religious minority is the Finnish Greek Orthodox Church with less than 60 000 members. Their membership is increasing but this is mostly due to immigration from East. In other words, instead of becoming members in another religious tradition, more and more people choose to stay unaffiliated. Allegedly, spirituality in Finland is becoming like that of Western culture in general in that it is deinstitutionalised, individualised and privatised (Hay 1998, 18; Pargament 1999, 7).

However, regardless of the decline in the Lutheran membership in general the parents' in Finland do not seem to have a problem with affiliating their children to institutionalised religion and religious education. Recent studies show that Finnish parents in general want their children to have some religious nurture both at Lutheran Church (Helander 2006) and at schools (Räsänen 2006, 199). The majority of the Finnish children get institutional religious instruction. While RE or its equivalent Ethics is compulsory for pupils in schools, the Church organises confirmation school for young people aged 14–15 years that reaches 90 percent of the age cohort (Helve 1993, 205).

On the other hand, from the viewpoint of Lutheran Church the situation of the pre-adolescents aged 12–13 years has been more problematic. They do not have a cultural and institutionalised setting for their spiritual life comparable to confirmation school. These pupils are too old for Sunday school but too young for confirmation school. Recently the Church has increased its activities for school children, including leisure clubs, camps and activities for off-school

hours. If added to the part-time day care provided by the Church, this has resulted in that since the late 1990's about 61 percent of children aged 5–9 have attended some activity of the Lutheran Church. Regardless of the investments in the activities for young children, there is still a gap in participation in Church activities among pre-adolescents. If confirmation school is not included, between the ages of 10–14 the number of children attending Church related activities decreases to 44 percent. (Helander 2006.)

Anyway, the participation of the Finnish children in Church activities may have contributed in maintaining a reasonably good familiarity with the institutional elements of the Church. Article 1: 'How do Finnish pre-adolescents perceive religion and spirituality?' describes the meanings given to religion by the participants in this thesis. In the article, over two-thirds of all the meanings given to religion referred to institutional elements of religion. The pre-adolescents emphasised religious (faith) traditions, religious settings, devotional life, the history of religions, and literature and hymns (Ubani & Tirri 2006).

However, this finding also implies that the decline in participation in Church related activities among youth is not only a question of familiarity. At least until the late eighties, the psychology of religion emphasis was dominant in the Finnish RE research field (Kallioniemi 2004; Holm 1987). This research branch has also covered the changes in religiousness and world views of Finnish pre-adolescents. Such a study was Tamminen's (1991) extensive and longitudinal empirical studies on Finnish children and adolescents' religious thinking, attitudes and religiousness in general that were based on cognitive developmental theory. In addition, Helve (1993) completed a longitudinal study on the world views of Finnish children, young children and young adults between 8–27 years of age in the Metropolitan Helsinki area. This study also included sociological aspects and elements of comparative study of religion.

According to Helve's study, among Finnish youth the belief in Christian truth-claims decreases despite of their participation in confirmation school (Helve 1993). Furthermore, it has been reported that as the pupils become older, they become in general more critical towards religion (Tamminen 1991). In addition, scientific thinking and explanations start to substitute religious explanations concerning life as the student's become older (Tamminen 1991, 302–303; Helve 1993). However, recent reports concerning RE and Finnish pre-adolescents claim that the majority of pre-adolescents actually do not consider religious knowledge and scientific knowledge as opposites (Rusama 2002, 88). In addition, in Helve's (1993, 111) study the division between the two orientations of religious and scientific world view proved to be problematic.

The study by Tamminen (1991) shows that the religious thinking of the pre-adolescents advances noticeably into a more abstract level and their knowledge on religion increases as they mature. Recent studies have confirmed that Finnish pre-adolescents have a decent general knowledge of their religion and of its key concepts. In 2001, the Finnish National Board of Education funded a survey evaluating learning and experiences on RE, Ethics and Social education (Rusama 2002) among the 14–15 year old students ( $N = 4022$ ). The structured portion of the study showed that over 90 percent the pre-adolescents in Lutheran RE ( $n = 3007$ ) knew the Christian interpretation and meaning of 'Holy Trinity', 'sin', 'Jerusalem' and the 'Apostolic Creed'. In addition, over 80 percent of the pupils identified the writers of the Gospels and important people of the Bible and their deeds. (Rusama 2002, 55.) The results in Article 1 concerning the pre-adolescents perceptions on religion and spirituality seem to confirm this finding. While the study was more open-ended than the survey, the students emphasised different Biblical characters and incidents to an extent that the sub-group *literature and hymns* from the institutional dimension was the largest sub-group in the study. Furthermore, the times 'Jesus' ( $n = 14$ ) was mentioned was second only to 'church' ( $n = 15$ ). Interestingly, according to the national curriculum (NCCBE 2004, 204), at the end of the fifth grade the pupils are supposed to know the main Bible stories and the gifted sixth-graders had a good knowledge in this area.

According to the national survey the pre-adolescents lacked knowledge of different Christian symbols and World religions, and had problems in identifying deacon and voluntary work of the Church (Rusama 2002, 55). As this present study echoed the lack of reference to World religion in the meanings given to religion, it seems that Finnish pre-adolescents view religion from a predominantly Christian, albeit institutional, viewpoint. However, according to the national curriculum (NCCBE 2004), the pupils are gradually familiarised with other faith traditions than their own from sixth grade onward. In addition, in history they learn about the Reformation and its effects on Finland. This may explain partly, why the pre-adolescents in this study mentioned the Pope ( $n = 12$ ), Roman Catholic ( $n = 8$ ), Martin Luther ( $n = 8$ ) and the Reformation ( $n = 8$ ) often in their meanings given to religion. The fact that the pupils had problems in identifying the work of the Church in Finnish society implies that the role of the Lutheran Church in their lives is restricted to Church institution and schools but the role of the Church outside the institution is not acknowledged.

### 2.3 Religion, spirituality and Finnish educational practice

As Article 1 and Chapter 2.2 show, Finnish pupils have generally a broad knowledge of the institutional elements of religion. In addition, the meanings the pupils gave to religion emphasised the Christian tradition (Ubani & Tirri 2006). The emphasis reflects the educational background of the pupils. In Finland, the religious education given in schools is quite uniform. Regardless of the rapid decrease of membership in Lutheran church, 95 percent of the children still attend Lutheran RE classes in their basic education (Kumpulainen 2005, 30). The Finnish Government Decree on the General National Objectives (GD: 1475) guided the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (NCCBE 2004). It states that the instruction in school must give pupils ‘stimuli for broadening and deepening their world views. This includes knowledge of human feelings and needs, religions and different world views...’ The recent curricula around Europe have included spirituality among the core themes in education (Carr 1995). As has been stated, in the Nordic countries, ‘world view’ or ‘view of life’ can broadly refer to spirituality (Stifoss-Hanssen 1999). In Finland, the National Core Curriculum includes a potential for a cross-curricular interpretation of spiritual education, too. As has been described, traditionally in Finland spirituality has been understood in relation to (Lutheran) religion. In parallel, in Finnish schools RE is considered to be the main source for developing spirituality. This explains partly why the spiritual development is not spread explicitly across the curriculum but rather compressed into the aims of RE. On the other hand, in Finland RE is a compulsory subject from early childhood education to upper secondary school. So even if the implementation of spiritual education in school practice is narrow access to it has been secured for all students at different levels.

At the time of data-gathering the pre-adolescents of this study had attended RE (or Ethics) classes for five years of basic education. In addition, they may have participated in RE classes equivalent to up to four years in their early childhood education. The Finnish school system includes four educational levels. The first level is the early childhood level which consists of day care and pre school education. The early childhood level includes children until the age of six. The second level is basic education that is Finnish comprehensive school for pupils aged 7–16 years. The third level is the secondary level which includes both upper secondary school and vocational education and training. The fourth level is the so-called higher level and it includes universities and vocational colleges. Religious Education is not given in vocational education and training and at the higher level. (Kallioniemi 2004, 145.) The curricula include a compulsory

subject for RE both in basic school education and upper secondary school. In basic education a minimum of one hour of RE is given to the pupils each week. The content of religious education at the primary level depends on the religious affiliation of the student. Religious Education at the secondary level is divided into periods. The students have one compulsory course and may then choose additional courses. The courses include world religions, ethics, church history and Lutheran dogmatics. Studies show that Finnish pupils like RE at schools (Tirri 1996), although during pre-adolescence they become more critical and dissatisfied (see Tamminen 1991; Niemi 1987).

The 2004 National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (NCCBE 2004) has given the guidelines and requirements for primary education in general as well as for each single subject. The curriculum states that the general objective in RE is to approach 'life's religious and ethical dimensions... from the standpoint of the pupil's own growth, and as a broader social phenomenon' (NCCBE 2004, 202). The only exception that explicitly cites the spiritual aspect to be part of the whole curriculum is the National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland from 2003. Early childhood education is given before primary school. Instead of having set subjects the nurture is given in terms of six thematic orientations. The core of the 'religious-philosophical orientation' is formed by 'the religious, spiritual and philosophical issues and phenomena', including becoming familiar with the child's religious tradition and its customs, the possibility for silence and wonder and promotion of religious and symbolic literacy (pp. 26–27).

The pre-adolescents started their basic education in the late nineties. During the 1990's RE in Finland started to acknowledge increasingly the changes in the Finnish religious landscape towards secularism, pluralism and heterogeneity (Tirri 1996). Regardless of the changes in RE, the nature of RE in schools has been a constantly debated subject in Finland. Often the criticism has been ideological and based on the earlier conception of 'learning (Lutheran) religion'. Perhaps it is due to historical and ideological reasons, the legitimating of RE in schools and the criticism towards the Lutheran Church and religion have been discussed together. For instance, among the questioned things has been the legitimate role of Lutheran heritage in society and schools. Hence, the opponents of having RE in schools have argued that it is a responsibility of the Church and not of the state to provide RE. In addition, there has been pressure to reorganise the subject and to change its 'weak' confessional status in favour of a common non-denominational RE that has been enforced in other Scandinavian countries. (Puolimatka & Tirri 2000; Kallioniemi 2004, 146; Räsänen 2006.)

The current educational orientation in RE in Finnish curriculum has been described to emphasise learning about and learning from religion but also to include some elements of learning religion (Kallioniemi 2004, 150). The traditional mono-religious ‘learning religion emphasis’ in Finland was dominant until the mid 80’s and influenced by Goldman’s (1964) work based on cognitive developmental theory (see Kallioniemi 2004). This approach was embodied in the traditional confessional Finnish RE. However, this approach has been gradually resolved towards learning about and learning from religion. ‘Learning about religion’ refers primarily to learning content and understanding interpretations and expressions of different religions from the ‘outside’ such as in religious studies and anthropology (Hull 2002b; Grimmitt 2000, 38, 39). ‘Learning from religion’ refers to RE which includes relating one’s autobiography through personal and impersonal evaluations to religious beliefs, values and practices (Grimmitt 2000, 35). In contrast to the previous approaches, in this view the focus is not religion but rather the learner: the aim for RE is the ‘humanisation of the pupil’ by contributing to the pupil’s spiritual and moral development (Hull 2002b). According to Hull (2002b), this view of humanisation in ‘learning from religion’ has been found to be agreeable and is becoming dominant in education. In the Finnish RE discourse, the ‘learning from religion’ emphasis has emerged as an independent viewpoint from the traditional ‘learning religion’ approach during the past decades, too (Niemi 1991; Puolimatka & Tirri 2000).

The results presented in Article 1 show that the pre-adolescents have a good knowledge of the institutional elements of religion but view religion mostly in a Christian context. However, there was almost no overlap in the conceptions of religion and spirituality among the pre-adolescents (Ubani & Tirri 2006). The lack of overlap between religion and spirituality in the conceptions of the pupils may be due to the neglect of the concept of spirituality or the other three similar concepts reported in Chapter 2.1 in the national curriculum for RE.

More importantly, the lack of connection between religion, spirituality and world religions would seem to nullify the ideal of learning from religion and acknowledging other traditions in RE. This is disturbing because previous studies on religious development point out that during this age the shift from concrete to abstract religious thinking occurs (Tamminen 1991). However, the reason for lack of different traditions in the meaning given to religion may in fact be connected to the curriculum. As has been stated, the participants of this study were from the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Coincidentally, the term ‘world religions’ is presented explicitly in the National curriculum from grade 6 onwards (NCCBE 2004, 205). In practice, the introduction of world religions in RE proceeds gradually from familiar to less familiar traditions. The relatively vast amount of meanings given



to religion by the pre-adolescents in Article 1 that referred to the Catholic tradition reflects the beginning of the introduction of other faith traditions at school.



### 3 Gifted pre-adolescents and transcendence

#### 3.1 The common spiritual experience

This chapter discusses the relationship of the gifted pupils and transcendence. The two main results from the articles that are focused on are (1) the pupils believe in God and God interferes in their lives (Article 4 & Article 1), and (2) they perceive that life includes a spiritual dimension (Article 4). First, the common spiritual experience is discussed (Chapter 3.1). This is followed by the description the manifestation of spiritual sensitivity in the everyday life of the gifted pupils (Chapter 3.2).

The first issue is the common spiritual experience. Since the late 19th century, religious experiences have formed a specific research field of psychology of religion (e.g., James 1902/1985; Holm 1987, 34). Furthermore, religion as a phenomenon has usually been described in relation to transcendence. For instance, William James described religion as: ‘the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine’ (James 1902/1985, 31). Many scholars in psychology and in sociology of religion are still echoing this view. For instance, in the sociology of religion, Stark and Bainbridge (1985, 5) claim that religion involves ‘some perception of a supernatural being, world, or force, and the notion that the supernatural is active, that events and conditions here on earth are influenced by the supernatural’. Stark and Bainbridge (1985, 3) insist that a belief system that lacks supernatural assumptions is no religion at all (cf. Yinger 1970, 13). For this reason they want to make a distinction between religion and naturalist faiths (p. 5), such as scientific humanism, Marxism, and other nonsupernatural philosophies. In contrast, ‘mysticism’ is used to refer to a form of religiousness that places particular emphasis on the ‘spiritual’ (i.e., non-material, supernatural and experiential) aspects opposed to theology (i.e., doctrine) but functions inside a (Christian) religious tradition (McGrath 1999, 6).

Subsequently, there have been many theories on the common religious and spiritual experience (Otto 1923/1950; Smart 1983). Basically, the assumption in this research has been that people in different cultures have similar kind of experiences that can be labelled as religious or spiritual (Pargament 1999; Hay 1998). The view of a common spiritual experience was also supported by Abraham Maslow (1964/1994), who claimed that mystical experiences were universal but were always interpreted in a particular cultural or personal belief system (Elkins 2001). Maslow (1964/1994) believed that the ‘core-religious experience

may be embedded in either a theistic, supernatural or a nontheistic context.’ (p. 28). People can interpret these kinds of distinctive encounters and experiences by using religious language, psychological vocabulary, neurological models or any means that they are comfortable using (Elkins 2001, 202.)

In addition, Rudolf Otto (1923/1950, 6) believed that all religions have something experienced as numen as the innermost core. ‘Numen’ and ‘Numinous’ were phrases coined by Otto to refer to the universal experiences of the Holy. Ninian Smart (1983, 64) went further to distinguish between the numinous and mysterious experiences in the heart of religions. According to Smart, while the numinous experiences are dual and include the person and what is perceived as holy, the mystical experiences are often non-dual in their nature (pp. 65–66). According to Smart (p. 67), the mystical experiences are ‘pure consciousness’ as there is no ‘other’ to experience. They are trance-like states. David Hay has continued in the framework set by Smart and emphasised a sense of mystery as one of the main characteristics of a spiritual experience (see Hyde 1990, 181). According to him, young children sense that much of life is incomprehensible and mysterious (Hay 1998, 68).

The distinctive nature of spiritual experiences was also of interest to the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber. Buber (1924/2004) based his religious existentialist philosophy on a distinction between I-Thou and I-It. Buber (1952/1998) viewed our whole existence as a twofold dialogue between I and the ultimate Other, or ‘Eternal Thou’ as he described God. Basically, according to Buber, I is in a relationship with self, others, natural environment, and God. Our relationships with these different aspects of the world could be described either as I-Thou relationship, or I-It relationship. However, God was only encountered in the I-Thou relationship (Buber 1924/2004). The I-Thou relationship can be described as entering into a deep, significant, and holistic encounter with the other. It refers to experiencing the other unconditionally as the other is. The Eternal Thou, God, is present in all I-Thou encounters thus signalling a connection that is transcendental in its nature. In contrast, an I-It relationship is more distant. The function of the I-It -relationship is the conceptualisation of the I-Thou encounter and of the world in general. (Buber 1952/1998, 61.)

There can be discerned two levels in Buber’s philosophy for depicting spirituality. First is the ontological level which claims that I-Thou and I-It are actually two modes of being (Buber 1952/1998). Buber sees human actualisation to be different in I-Thou than in I-It. It includes transcendental elements. The second application of Buber’s philosophy is approaching I-Thou and I-It as a description of two modes of experience. They can be viewed as ends to a continuum of a spiritual experience (Grimmitt 2000). The ends of the continuum can

be described as a spiritual encounter and spiritual consciousness. An actual *spiritual encounter* resembles what Buber calls an I-Thou relationship. It is an intense and holistic encounter with the other. In the other end of the continuum is *spiritual consciousness*, or an I-It -relationship in Buber's words, in which the person tries to make sense of the reality. This activity includes meaning giving to significant encounters and experiences. The shift between the spiritual encounter and spiritual consciousness is delicate and primarily a move to a linguistic mode (cf. Hay 1998, 14).

According to Buber (1924/2004, 83–84), all I-It encounters are potentially I-Thou encounters. Likewise an I-Thou relationship becomes an I-It relationship if the person starts to conceptualise the experience. This may occur when the other is identified as God or the person becomes conscious of him/herself as the subject in the encounter. In this case the other is related to as an object of thought. For instance, when the person articulates the experience as mysterious or valuable, the person has already shifted to spiritual consciousness and the intensity of the encounter decreases. On the other hand, it is the I-it relationship, where transcendental spiritual experiences and existential thinking make contact.

### 3.2 Spiritual sensitivity in the lives of the gifted pupils

In this section the spiritual sensitivity of pupils is discussed in terms of relation to God and in terms of as a quality in the perceptions of reality. First is the question on the role of God in the lives of the pupils. Traditionally, humanistic research on religiousness and spirituality has made a distinction between the (1) *substance* and the (2) *function* of spirituality. (Pargament 2002; Zinnbauer et al., 1997.) Generally, the *substantial* emphasis focuses on the beliefs, practices, emotions and relationships in relation to a higher being. The 'higher being' can also be what the individual perceives as the (s)Sacred' (Pargament 1997, 25). The *functional* approach shifts its focus to the process of dealing with fundamental problems of our existence (Pargament 1997, 27; Zinnbauer et al., 1997, 550) or the role of the substance has in the well-being of the person and in his/her life in general (Emmons 1999).

The studies on development of religiousness of Finnish 12–13 year old children have generally explored the substantial aspects of spirituality. For instance, Tamminen (1991) reported that the number of 12–13 year old children, who believe in God, say their evening prayers, and experience God, does not decrease significantly if compared to younger children. In addition, the prominent role of God in the life of the pre-adolescents is shown by the fact that half of the pre-

adolescents say their evening prayers regularly, their beliefs in God focus on Jesus as the Saviour and Son of God, God is still experienced as secure, guiding, and God's presence is sensed during solitude and contemplation (p. 302).

As a more recent example, Article 4 'What makes life spiritual' describes how the gifted pre-adolescents of this study have also experiences where God has revealed himself to them in dreams, as miraculous protection and as closeness in prayer (Ubani 2006b, 129). In addition, from the 26 pupils who were interviewed all but one girl, Susan, believed that God or a Higher Force existed. Furthermore, in Article 1 'How do Finnish pre-adolescents perceive religion and spirituality?' (Ubani & Tirri 2006) 'God' was the third most common meaning given to religion after 'Church' ( $n = 15$ ) and 'Jesus' ( $n = 14$ ). Moreover, 'God' ( $n = 13$ ) accumulated nearly one third of all the meanings given to religion that belonged to the supernatural dimension ( $n = 42$ ).

According to Davie (2000), it is the indicators concerning religious orthodoxy, ritual participation and institutional attachment that are declining in Western spirituality rather than the indicators touching with feelings, experiences and more numinous religious beliefs. Research has confirmed that not only spiritual experiences but belief in a higher force may actually increase regardless of the decrease of affiliation to institutional religion (Hay & Hunt 2000; Niemelä 2003). Hay and Hunt (2000) explored the spirituality of the adults who do not go to church. The study shows that while church attendance in Britain dropped more than 20 percent between 1987 and 2000, the frequency of report of some kind of religious or spiritual experience increased among the participants from 48 percent to 76 percent (Hay & Hunt 2000, 12). This is the case also in Finland. Recent studies show that between 1981 and 2000 the percentage of Finnish people who believe in God, Spirit, or some kind of life force has increased from 71% to 80% (Niemelä 2003, 202). However, Hay and Hunt (2000, 14) do not claim that the actual amount of such experiences has increased but they attribute this to the spiritualisation of the society and a rise in social permissiveness or in the ability to admit such an experience. It is also possible that these experiences are no longer interpreted and recognised in a Christian framework only.

The second issue concerning perceptions of reality begins with the empirical contributions on our spiritual 'being in the world'. Up until recently there has been a call for and a lack of evidence of an innate and 'natural presence of religious drive in the universal human predicament', as Bauman (1998, 60) refers to our spiritual 'being in the world'. However, recently there has been empirical evidence relevant to the ontological aspect of spiritual experiences. Hay and Nye conducted a well-known study on spirituality on thirty-eight 6 and 10-year-old children. In their study, they approached spirituality following McCreery's

definition of spirituality as the ‘more’ in the everyday life course of events (McCreery 1996). Based on previous empirical studies and the literature, Hay and Nye identified characteristics of a pre-linguistic spiritual experience. They formed three categories of spiritual sensitivity which were called awareness sensing, mystery sensing and value sensing (Nye & Hay 1996; Hay 1998). These categories have also been operationalised into a quantitative test of spiritual sensitivity (Tirri 2004; Tirri, Nokelainen & Ubani 2006) used in this thesis.

*Awareness sensing* refers to an experience of a deeper level of consciousness when we choose to be aware by ‘paying attention’ to what is happening. According to Hay (1998, 60) this kind of awareness refers to a reflexive process of being attentive towards one’s attention or ‘being aware of one’s awareness’. Awareness sensing may include psychological states, such as flow. The second category of spiritual sensitivity is *mystery sensing* which is connected to our capacity to transcend the everyday experience and to use our imagination. For instance, the beauty and wonder of sunrise and sunset includes the sense of mystery. This occurs regardless of whether the scientific explanations concerning the phenomenon are known. Imagination is essential to religious activity through the metaphors, symbols, stories and liturgies which respond to the otherwise unrepresentable experience of the sacred.

The third category of spiritual sensitivity is *value sensing*. This category emphasizes the importance of feelings as a measure of what we value. Among such things are the events that we find especially significant and meaningful. The question of mystery seems to be intriguing especially to gifted students. Nokelainen, Tirri and Ubani (2004; 2005) conducted a comparison of the spiritual sensitivity of academically gifted and average pupils. The study revealed a statistically significant difference in the category of mystery sensing in favour of the gifted pupils (Nokelainen, Tirri & Ubani 2005).

In their study, identification of spirituality was based on the categories of spiritual sensitivity. The key finding of the study was called ‘relational consciousness’. According to Hay and Nye, ‘relational consciousness’ is the core of spirituality (Hay 1998, 113; Hay 2000b, 38). In their studies they noticed that this spiritual awareness (Hay 2000b, 39) was expressed in a context of how the child related to things, other people, him/herself, and God/Transcendence (Hay 1998, 113). The study showed that spirituality appeared to be an integral part of the way we as humans exist and relate to each other and to world. In other words, relational consciousness represents an ‘elemental quality, an ever-present aspect of being human’ (Hay 1998, 145).

The kind of spirituality Hay suggests penetrates our existence and how we relate to reality. The fourth article of this thesis ‘What makes life spiritual?’, im-

plies that there can be discerned three qualities in the perceptions of life (Ubani 2006b). First, the pupils perceive that life has a *referential* aspect. For instance, the consciousness of referentiality was shown as a use of different religious teachings and tales in their interpretations of life. Second, life included a *relational* aspect. Pupils contemplated the roles of other people and their relationships in light of the meaning of life and God. The third aspect was called *revelatory*. This aspect referred to awareness of the process of finding out essential truths concerning life. The revelatory aspect matches what Holm (1987) describes as a mystical experience. According to Holm (1987, 56), mystical experiences include often ‘an sight to the “true essence” of the world, God’s being and ascent in to totality’ (ibid.). While the revelatory aspect is less poignant than a mystical experience, it shows that also in milder forms mystical elements are part of the life of the pre-adolescents.

While ‘relational consciousness’ is the core finding of Hay’s (1998) study, his theory seems to include links to the other two aspects in Article 4, too. For instance, the revelatory aspect seems to be close to the type of experience that Hay describes as the immediateness of spiritual experience (p. 62) and the sense of ultimate goodness (p. 72). Hay refers to Berger (1967) and describes the situation where a child wakes up from a nightmare but when its mother assures him or her that everything is all right, the child senses that there is order in midst of chaos: that there is a ultimate goodness taking care of life. According to Berger, (ibid.) this ‘implies a statement about reality as such’. On the other hand, the referential aspect resembles what Hay views as a transcendent quality inherent in human life (Hay 1998, 74). It can be argued that referentiality can also be a part of the reflective act of a single experience (cf. Hay 1998). Moreover, it seems that the very grounding of spirituality to the notion of there existing *more* in the everyday life events (Hay 1998; McCreery 1996) implies that in Hay’s conception on spirituality life refers to beyond what is seen.

Finally, Hay’s studies and the results in Article 4 do not focus exactly in the same thing. The difference between the referential, relational and revelatory aspect and Hay’s theory is that the former include perceptions of reality. In contrast, Hay’s categories of spiritual sensitivity focus on the affective states of the person and are if not more intensive at least more purely experiential. The need to acknowledge the ontological truth-value of the mystical experiences has been expressed in the literature (Hood, Spilka, Hunsberger & Gorsuch 1996, 230, 265). The accounts of experiences, regardless of the intensity of the recalled event, include notions of the nature of reality the experiences pre-suppose. Thus, the referential, relational and revelatory aspects can be interpreted as a frame-



work for representing the ontological truth-claims inherent in mystical and transcendental experiences.



## 4 The existential search of gifted pupils

### 4.1 Spirituality and existential search

This chapter approaches the spirituality of the gifted pre-adolescents in terms of existential search. When drawn together, the main results in the four original articles concerning the pre-adolescents and existential search were: (1) the pupils had four kinds of existentially significant interests: personal, transcendental, cosmic and ethical (Article 2, Article 3 & Article 4). In addition, two results can be highlighted that are subject to the first result: (2) nature and science are integral sources for existential thinking (Article 2); and (3) the perception of God is connected to the perception of the meaning of life (Article 3). In this chapter, the discussion focuses first on existential search and its relation religion and spirituality (Chapter 4.1). Next the focus is explicitly on the existentially significant interests of the pupils (Chapter 4.2). Finally, the intentional nature of the existential interests are acknowledged and further discussed.

First, the focus of the discussion is on the existential search and its relation to religion. In RE in the Nordic countries, the emphasis on the existential search has been strong (Selander 2004, 167; Tamminen 1988). Existential thinking has been described to deal with the bases of life and existence in relation to the person's personality. Its function is to find profound solutions to the problems relevant to the self, personal identity and the meaning of his/her life. (Tamminen 1988, 8–9; Niemi 1987; 2006.) In practice, research in Nordic RE has had a tendency to pay attention to the substantial elements in the search for meaning and meaning of life. The focus has been narrowed down to the contents and the topics that life questions involve (i.e., Tamminen 1988; Rusama 2002; Frangén 2000) instead of exploring the various kinds of expressions that dealing with 'life's basic conditions' produce (Tamminen 1988, 10).

In addition, Finnish research in RE has viewed the existential search primarily in the context of religiousness (i.e. Tamminen 1988, 50) and further elaboration exploring existential search as the heart of spirituality have been scarce (cf. Niemi 1991). For instance, Tamminen's (1991) studies of Finnish children and young people show that among 12–13 year old children religion and religious teachings are included in the pupils' contemplation on the meaning of life. In the existential questions of children aged 9–16, the reflections on God and religion seem to be a constant topic from childhood to youth (Tamminen 1988). However, the peak of the reflections especially on God and religion occurs during the sixth grade (see also Helve 1993).

However, a longitudinal investigation has revealed some changes in the existential thinking among Finnish pupils. Tamminen's study included data from 1986 and 1974. The difference between the two groups was that in the study from 1974 the peak on religious questions was two or three years earlier than in 1986 and in 1986 the reflections on religion in existential thinking had generally slightly decreased among children, the latter likely due to societal changes (Tamminen 1988, 22, 30–31). On the other hand, Niemi (1987) investigated the conceptions of meaning of life among secondary school pupils ( $N = 394$ ). The sample included 162 13-year old pupils. According to the study, 75 percent of the secondary school pupils thought that the purpose and the meaning of life should be dealt with at school. Yet nearly two-thirds of the students (61%) did not think that the existential questions were sufficiently dealt with.

In Finland, Niemi (1987; 1991; 2006) has represented a more integrative and holistic approach to the existential search than focusing on its religious manifestations. While she has acknowledged the role of religious tradition in the personal development of pupils, her emphasis on nurturing pupils into becoming 'subject's in life' has drawn inspiration mainly from humanistic psychologists, especially Viktor Frankl. According to Frankl, the inventor of logotherapy, life challenges us with the question of what is the meaning of life and we respond to the question with our lives (Frankl 1959/2004, 113). In this relationship, 'life' or 'world' is viewed almost like an active partner: relationship and the interaction imply reciprocity.

While coming from a Franklian tradition, Baumeister (1991, 14), has described some properties in life which facilitate our spirituality. First, life entails unity. What affects one thing in the world tends to affect the rest of the world, too. Second, life is a process involving change. This is challenging because when we try to understand the purpose of different events, we are trying to apply stable concepts to a changing phenomenon. A good example is the problem of theodicy. If God is good, loving and almighty, then why there is so much suffering, death and violence in the world? Third, life is bounded in time. The time allowed for the process of change is limited. Each life begins and ends at specific times. Therefore, the question of what the meaning of life is and the time of reflecting upon it is also restricted. Fourth, we have natural needs and wants. As a result we seem to seek some things and avoid others. In the absence of meaning, our natural needs are the only factors that influence our behaviour. On the other hand, the meaning that is given is what makes things significant. It brings depth to different things and actions in life.

In this framework religion is not excluded but viewed as one active partner in life. The different religious forms can be assimilated by us in an existential

way and 'made our own' (Frankl 1948/2000, 72). Whether it is a thing, a belief, a lifestyle or any other aspect of human life, we are trying to make sense of what is worth being committed to and what is sacred to us (see Pargament 1999; Emmons & Paloutzian 2003, 382; Emmons 1999, 94). If 'the sacred' of the tradition is relevant to our search, then it may be integrated into our spiritual life and become a constituent of our search. This 'sacred' can also be canonised and institutionalised. For instance, people committed to a certain religious tradition share the conceptions of the sacred. Furthermore, the faith community validates, facilitates and supports the means of the search for the sacred (Emmons & Paloutzian 2003, 383). This view places the religious traditions, religious behaviour and religious institutions subject to the existential search: the relevance of a given faith tradition is judged by the nature of its relation to the individual.

The previous example shows that the phrase 'existential search' is a broad concept. When described in the context of spirituality, the phrase refers to 'attempts to identify, articulate, maintain or transform' (Emmons & Paloutzian 2003, 382). The 'search' covers fundamentally defining existential questions of who am I, why am I and what should I do as well as the question of ultimate meaning, nature and purpose of life (Wright 2000a, 10; Stifoss-Hanssen 1999, 28; Hay 1998, 73–74). The search can be lived or articulated like any other kind of (creative) activity (see Tamminen 1988, 10). If spirituality concerns the whole person, then the whole life of the person can be understood as this kind of articulation. Our whole life makes visible our beliefs and process as well as position toward big existential questions as the sacred, divine, transcendent, ultimate reality and Ultimate Truth (Pargament 1999; Emmons & Paloutzian 2003). This also means that existential search can be used as an upper category for aspects such as 'existential thinking' and 'life questions', and they all have different kinds of connotations. Based on the actual concepts, they can be distinguished so that while 'existential search' is an intentional, fundamental and a dynamic process, 'life questions' are objects of thought or blocks of knowledge relevant to the search, and 'existential thinking' is a mental activity focusing on the former two and an expression of the existential search. It can be understood to exceed 'thinking about' these matters and includes more depth because it can be described as 'thinking in relation' to our search.

In the next section (4.2) the existential significant interests of the pupils are discussed. The root for the term 'existential significance' can be traced from Pargament's concept of 'search for significance' (Pargament 1997). 'Significance' refers to what is important to the individual, institution, or culture whether it is religion, physical health or wealth (*ibid.* p. 31). By using 'significance' with 'search', Pargament (1997) aims to bridge the substantial aspects

(what is sacred) with the functional elements (the personal process related to sacred). In this study, the purpose of the use of the concept ‘existential’ with ‘significance’ is to emphasise the special value and quality of the things that are relevant to the spiritual life if compared to, for instance, something being just ‘important’ to the individual (cf. Pargament 1997, 30–31). If something is existentially significant to the person, it means it defines that person in a fundamental way. In other words, the things that most profoundly touch the individual’s questions concerning: who am I? Why am I? And what should I do? These questions are existentially significant (see Wright 2000a).

## 4.2 Existentially significant interests of the gifted pupils

There are two articles in this thesis that cover the existentiality significant interests of the gifted pupils. These articles are Article 2: ‘Spiritual science. An empirical study of Finnish gifted boys.’ (Ubani 2006a) and Article 3: ‘How do gifted girls perceive the meaning of life?’ (Tirri & Ubani 2005a). In addition, Article 4: ‘What makes life spiritual’ (Ubani 2006b) includes results that relate to the existentially significant interests of the gifted children.

Based on the articles, the existentially significant interests of the gifted pupils can be grouped into four types of interests: personal, transcendental, cosmic and ethical interests (see also Ubani 2006c). The *personal* interests focus on the question of who am I as a human individual and person. For instance, the articles show how the children marvel in their own existence (Article 4: Ubani 2006b, 131) and a case on how one girl, Jean, contemplated her personal meaning and purpose (Article 3: Tirri & Ubani, 2005a, 271). The personal interests also included the pupils’ career aspirations, although professional choices could be part of ethical interests, too. However, as a personal interest, a career was a question of investing time and finding out and channelling individual talents. Likewise, a profession could also be considered as a functional and pre-determined contribution to the whole world. Such was, for instance, the role of an architect who was perceived as irreplaceable in building a certain house (Article 4: Ubani 2006b, 129).

The *transcendental* interests focus on the position towards the supernatural and the Divine. The existence and nature of God interest the pupils (e.g., Article 2: Ubani 2006a). Furthermore, as has been stated, only one pupil did not believe in the existence of God or a Higher Being (Article 4: Ubani 2006b). Article 3 describes how thinking about existential questions raised the question about the existence of God (Tirri & Ubani 2005a, 271). Furthermore, in Article 4 ‘What

makes life spiritual?’ (Ubani, 2006b), Jean describes the actual experience where her consciousness is broadened in such a situation to the existence of God (p. 130). In addition, both boys and girls reported significant dreams that had affected their views on transcendence or when it had prepared them for future difficulties (Article 4: What makes life spiritual?).

The *cosmic* interests include the questions concerning the cosmos, nature and natural phenomena. One article in this thesis explores how nature and science function as sources of mystery for gifted boys (Article 2: Ubani 2006a.) According to Hay (1998) mystery sensing is one of the main characteristics of a spiritual experience. Furthermore, he claims that the scientific explanations may serve as further reason for a sense of mystery and existential pondering (p. 68). This claim is also supported by this study. The boys reflected the mysteries of life, natural phenomena, and scientific theories in light of their existential search.

In Article 2 the gifted boys described 58 issues that seemed mysterious to them. ‘Nature’ ( $N = 28$ ) was the largest group and it included topics such as scenery and landscape ( $n = 9$ ), cosmic phenomena ( $n = 7$ ) and flora and fauna ( $n = 7$ ). The second largest group was by a margin ‘Spiritual realm’ ( $n = 11$ ) and it included questions on God and transcendence. The other groups were ‘Origin of life’ ( $n = 7$ ), ‘Everyday life’ ( $n = 6$ ) and ‘Natural science’ ( $n = 5$ ), which focused on physics and chemistry (Ubani 2006a). Furthermore, scientific knowledge concerning natural phenomena enriched their awareness of the unexplainable and provided them with things to marvel about. They reflected on each theory and perception in the light themselves and humanity in general.

The *ethical* interests include questions and ideals related to the fundamentally and ultimately valuable aspects of life. The ethical issues that the children raised in the articles in relation to their search for meaning were unequal welfare (Article 3: ‘How do gifted girls perceive the meaning of life?’), helping academically challenged peers (ibid., p. 271) and the suffering caused by wars (ibid., p. 273). The third article ‘How do gifted girls perceive the meaning of life?’ (Tirri & Ubani 2005a) focuses on gifted girls and how their search for meaning becomes concrete when they are relating to other God, themselves, other people and the environment. Interestingly, some gender studies on morality seem to compliment the emphasis on the focus on different relationships in girls’ spirituality. Gilligan (1982) claims that the female sense of self is organised around forming and maintaining affiliations and relationships (p. 48), and adds that women’s moral judgments are based on feelings of empathy and compassion. According to Gilligan, the question of dependency in relationships is experienced differently by the sexes (p. 8). It is possible that this difference on

dependency also concerns their relationships to God and is connected to the results which show women as more religious than men (Tamminen 1996).

In addition, Yeung (2004) has studied volunteerism in Finland. Her studies emphasise the spiritual aspect of volunteerism. If compared to men, Finnish women volunteers spend approximately four hours more volunteering and are more interested in health care and social activities (Yeung 2004, 89–90). According to the study, even the passive church members view volunteering as part of their personal religious practice and putting ones beliefs into practice (p. 100). Another finding of her study was called ‘selving’ (p. 101). In Yeung’s case ‘selving’ refers to the use of voluntary work as ‘creating’ oneself as more virtuous and spiritual. For instance, Article 3 describes how Jean wants to make career choices based on her spiritual call and strives to help the unprivileged pupils around her (Tirri & Ubani 2005a, 271, 273). It can be claimed that Jean wants to establish herself as a ‘significant other’ to people (cf. Fry 1998).

Jean’s conscious search to channel her task in life is consistent with the phase of her personal development. Pre-adolescents are typically searching for relationships that would provide meaning in their lives (see Fry 1998, 91). According to Fry, different personal reference groups contribute to the development of personal meaning. In this way, the relationships can be understood as having an affirming role in the questions concerning who am I. They provide in themselves meaning to the people’s lives. (Fry 1998, 91, 100, 106.) The search for personal meaning has also been viewed as a powerful motivator in the identity formation of youth (p. 92). Apparently, in the case of Jean the ethical aspect in her search for personal meaning has started to contribute to her emerging professional identity.

However, the case of Susan shows that a conception on meaning of life does not automatically produce altruism. As is shown in Article 3 (Tirri & Ubani 2005a), Susan did not believe in a higher meaning or task in life. To her, the task in life was an outcome of different actions in life and shaped by ones our own choices. At the same time she did not have any ultimate imperative to help others. Susan’s case implies that spirituality and morality should not be seen as parallel phenomena, at least not in a sense that spirituality produces sound ethical awareness or compassion (cf. Elkins 2001). In fact, it would be worth investigating the extreme cases of morally questionable behaviour, namely, what is the role and nature of spirituality in a selfish, self-destructive and violent behaviour.



### 4.3 Existential intentions and the ultimate concern

The previous chapter described some of the existentially significant interests of the pupils. In the framework of existential search, the interests imply intentional activity that is related to the existential needs of the person (cf. Niemi 2006, 36). Baumeister (1991, 32–57) has identified four needs for meaning. The four needs focus on purpose, value, efficacy and self-worth. According to Baumeister, they offer a framework for understanding how a person makes sense of his/her life and search (p. 57). Furthermore, if the four needs are satisfied then the person will most likely feel that his or her life has a meaning (Baumeister 1991).

The first need is the need for purpose. According to Baumeister, people want their lives to have a purpose. The purpose includes a goal, whose fulfilment is an ideal that is analysed and conceptualised. Our current actions and choices are made and evaluated in light of this goal. The second need is a need for value. People are motivated to find sources of value and to justify their actions and choices. The value bases are capable of justifying things without needing further legitimisation themselves (p. 40). The third need is the need for a sense of efficacy. It refers to feeling capable and strong and believing that one is making a difference. It is a sense of being able to achieve one's goals and live by one's values. In a situation where the question of efficacy arises, we can react either by changing the environment to suit ourselves or by changing ourselves to suit the environment. The fourth need that is connected to the sense of meaning is the need for self-worth. According to Baumeister, people need to find some basis for positive self-worth. The sources of value help people to feel that their lives have a positive value and are 'good'.

The descriptions by Baumeister show the fundamental and serious nature of the needs for meaning. These needs can be viewed as personal psychological constituents to our ultimate concern. While these needs focus on the self, the ultimate concern transcends the self. Emmons (1999), an American empirical psychologist, uses the phrase 'ultimate concern' as a substitute term for the primary value that underlies our daily actions and helps people to understand them (Emmons 1999, 7, 135). The 'ultimate concern' is a concept originally from Paul Tillich's theology. Tillich (1964/1984) viewed religion as the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern that is preliminary and contains the answer to the meaning of our life. Accordingly, Tillich (1964/1984, 211) equated our ultimate concern as our god because of its effect on our lives, such as, our actions, choices and attitudes. The ultimate concern gives the related actions, choices and attitudes a quality of significance. Therefore, 'the ultimate concern' can also

be used to refer to the meaning that is of the highest hierarchy. It makes other meanings—and interests—relevant to our existential search.

According to Baumeister (1991) we are trying to form a coherent lifestory around a ‘broad integrative meaning’. According to him, our acts and events tend to draw meaning from it (p. 21). While there are socio-cultural ways of expressing our spirituality, we still manage to give different meanings and value different things from each other. The meanings the individuals’ give to life consists of different levels of meanings. It is the higher level meaning that gives meaning and value to our acts and different events in life (Baumeister 1991, 21; Sommer & Baumeister 1998). In other words, the ultimate concern can be viewed as the higher integrative meaning for the individual and his/her whole life and experiences can be interpreted in light of the ultimate concern (Baumeister 1991, 21). This also implies that what is called ‘the task in life’ is such only due to its relationship with the person’s ultimate concern and existential search.

Article 3 was called ‘How do gifted girls perceive the meaning of life?’ (Tirri & Ubani 2005a). Among other things, the study described how the perceptions on God by Jean and Susan were connected to their interpretations of life. Jean’s belief in a good God was connected to a search for a virtuous task in life and expressions of solidarity (pp. 270–272). It seems that in her case, ‘God’ functioned as a higher level meaning which together with her career interests (teacher) and ethical attitudes (solidarity) formed what she perceived as her future role—or task—in life.

However, people may not be actively conscious of their search for meaning. In addition, they may have difficulties in explicating their perceptions of the meaning of life. (Klinger 1998, 32.) In this case, they most likely live their lives based on a lower level of meanings. Everybody has got some values and needs that affect their interpretations and guide their behaviour. But without a broader integrative meaning, life does not seem to follow a coherent story line. (Baumeister 1991, 11.) However, conscious or not, all people face similar questions concerning life as the people ‘actively searching’ for meaning (Klinger 1998, 32). And conscious or not, we all articulate our position towards ultimate questions through living our lives (see Frankl 1959/2004, 113). For instance, Susan in Article 3 had not actively thought about the meaning of life (Tirri & Ubani 2005a, 272). However, her attitudes toward other people and her view that there is no imperative task in life were consistent to an extent with the fact that she used the lack of a task as a licence for hedonistic, selfish and individualistic behaviour (ibid.). It seems that regardless of the lack of a constant and conscious

search for meaning, she had a higher ultimate value which was shown in her interpretations of life.



## 5 Methodological discussion

### 5.1 Mixed methods and the study of spirituality

#### 5.1.1 The methodological framework of this thesis

The aim of this dissertation thesis is to explore the spirituality of Finnish academically gifted pre-adolescents. Their spirituality is investigated with the following research questions: (1) What is their relationship to religion? (2) How do they perceive transcendence? and (3) How does their search for meaning integrate into their lives? In a case study the participants and the results of the study represent an instance of a larger class (Shulman 1992).

A case study is typically qualitatively oriented but may mix different kinds of approaches. In short, a study can be termed a ‘case’, when it is possible to draw temporal, geographical etc., boundaries around the case, there is a specified group defined by a characteristic and the study can be defined by participant roles and functions in the case (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2001, 182). In this thesis the geographical boundary is ‘Finland’, the defining characteristic is ‘academically gifted pre-adolescents’, and their function is ‘being spiritual’ (ibid. 183, 186).

As chapters 2, 3, 4 implicate, the case of the spirituality of academically gifted pre-adolescents can be discussed inside different conceptual frameworks, such as institutional religion, relationship to transcendence and in terms of existential search. For an explorative case study to cover the diverse frameworks of the phenomenon represented by the research questions a number of research methods have to be used. The qualitative approaches and quantitative tests used in the articles of thesis are described in the following chapters. However, the world-views of the qualitative and quantitative approaches are not without tension. The quantitative tests represent an objectivist conception of reality (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2001, 8–9). They are based on realist assumptions that the world exists and is knowable as it really is. Furthermore, such research aims at discovering universal laws of society and human conduct in society. On the other hand, the qualitative approaches in this study basically embrace subjectivist and idealist conceptions of reality: the world exists but different people construe or perceive it in different ways. For this reason the focus of qualitative approaches is on exploring how different people interpret the world we live in (ibid.).

Connecting different methods calls for a meta-framework that acknowledges the grounding differences of the methods yet advances a coherent research process. The mixed method approach has distinguished itself as a separate research paradigm over the past few decades (Teddlie & Tashakkori 2003). It can be viewed as a unifying principle and an attempt to be conscious and be explicit about the nature of the study using multiple viewpoints or research tools. After all, using multiple sets of methods in a single study is not in itself a new idea. The mixed methods approach typically includes different types of data gathering and analysis procedures in order to produce a unified description of a particular phenomenon. However, the mixed method approach is not merely a compilation of studies with various methods. The mixed method approach is rather a democratic attitude as it tries to acknowledge different kinds of voices speaking in a social realm of human research (see Greene & Caracelli 2003; Greene 2001). Moreover, it aims to approach the traditional rift between quantitative and qualitative practices in a dialogical manner.

This study has adopted a dialectical stance with regards to the use of different methods. While the dialectical stance is conscious of the tensions present in the ontologies of different research methods (Tashakkori & Teddlie 2003, 677), it aims to utilizing the strengths from each approach to the understanding of the phenomenon. The dialectical position rejects the selection of one paradigm over another (Teddlie & Tashakkori 2003, 18). It engages in multiple sets of paradigms and does not advocate any of them above the others. All the different paradigms are understood as offering a partial worldview (Greene & Caracelli 1997; 2003). Greene and Caracelli (2003) describe the dialectical stance as an approach that views different paradigms as social constructions. They are formulated in a certain time, place and conditions, and are, therefore, mutable and dynamic. The dialectical study identifies and engages intentionally with the multiple sets of assumptions, models, or ways of knowing in the process of gaining better understanding of the reality (p. 97).

According to Greene (2001, 251), the primary motivation behind a mixed method approach is the desire to understand more fully, to generate insights that are deep and broad, and to develop important knowledge about claims that respect different perspectives and interests (see Teddlie & Tashakkori 2003, 15). In other words, the research framework of thesis is supposed to produce results concerning gifted pre-adolescents and spirituality that can be discussed with different scientific traditions and integrated into knowledge concerning the whole of humanity. Naturally, the most pressing interests in this study are educational and those concerning RE in particular. At the same time, this study can be rele-

vant in the areas of humanistic psychology, practical theology and gifted education (see Chapter 6), to name a few.

### 5.1.2 The quantitative tests in the study

The data gathering methods and the data of this study have been presented in Section 1.4. The data was gathered between 2003–2004. The four articles reported in thesis used both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative tests were the test of spiritual sensitivity and the Defining Issues Test (DIT). The participants of the thesis were all the sixth-grade pupils ( $N = 101$ ) from the private school Helsingin Suomalainen Yhteiskoulu, in Helsinki, Finland.

The test of spiritual sensitivity is a 20-item self-evaluation questionnaire (APPENDIX 1). The questionnaire is an extension of the Multiple Intelligence Profile Questionnaire (Tirri & Komulainen 2002) and has been developed by Tirri (2004). The test of spiritual sensitivity includes four categories. The categories are called: awareness sensing, mystery sensing, value sensing and community sensing. The first three categories have been derived from the work of Hay (1998) and have been described in Chapter 3. However, the categories of spiritual sensitivity by Hay do not explicitly cover the social aspect of spirituality. For this reason the category of community sensing has been added to the questionnaire (Tirri 2004). In the questionnaire, each category is represented by five questions.

The Defining Issues Test focuses on moral judgment. It consists of six moral dilemmas. The participants rate the importance of each dilemma and rank a list of concerns one might have concerning the dilemma. The test produces a P-score which is used for comparing the moral reasoning of the subjects. It is based on Kohlberg's moral judgment stages 5 (morality based on contract, individual rights and democratically accepted law) and 6 (morality based on individual principles of conscience) (Rest 1986).

The test of spiritual sensitivity was used for choosing the participants in the interviews. The interviews are the primary data in three articles (Article 2, Article 3 & Article 4). In total, there were nine girls and eight boys interviewed with a high score in the test ( $M = 4.21$ ,  $SD = 0.27$ ). In addition, to get a more diversity in the data there were also nine pupils (five girls and four boys) interviewed with a low-score in the test of spiritual sensitivity ( $M = 2.27$ ,  $SD = 0.33$ ). This group consisted of five girls and four boys. The DIT test was only used in the third article 'How do gifted girls perceive the meaning of life?' in the background information of the two girls in the respective case study (Tirri & Ubani

2005a). In the article, the two girls represent instances of high spiritual sensitivity and low spiritual sensitivity. While Jean's score in the test of spiritual sensitivity was exceptionally high ( $M = 4.5$ ), Susan's score ( $M = 2.5$ ) was among the lowest means among their peers. The highest mean possible in the test was 5 and the mean of all the sixth grade pupils was 3.3 ( $SD = 0.6$ ). In addition, the same difference was found between the girls in the DIT test. While Jean's P-score was 32, Susan's P-score was 14. The average P-score among the pupils was 27.9 ( $SD = 11.8$ ).

### 5.1.3 The qualitative approaches in the study

The qualitative approaches in this thesis included content analysis (Ubani 2006a; Ubani & Tirri 2006) and the phenomenological approach (Tirri & Ubani 2005a; Ubani 2006b). The analysis process in each sub-study has been reported in their respective articles. The methodological understanding on phenomenology used in this thesis is discussed in more precise detail in the next section.

In this thesis there were two articles which both used quantification of qualitative data in a different manner. Bos and Tarnai (1999) describe two types of content analysis. While hermeneutical content analysis focuses on the meaning, empirical (or quantitative) content analysis focuses on the manifest content. In the terms of Bos and Tarnai, the first article in this thesis (How do Finnish pre-adolescents perceive religion and spirituality) is an example of a quantitative content analysis. In the study, the frequencies of text units (dictionary meanings given to religion and spirituality) and categories (i.e., institutional dimension, supernatural dimension and humanistic dimension) are counted and compared with each other (see Bos & Tarnai 1999, 663). In the article, the relationship between pre-adolescents and religion and spirituality is reduced into an economical form which, however, can neglect the personal attitudes, connotations and symbolic elements present in the perceptions of the pupils.

The other article that quantifies the qualitative data is the article: 'Spiritual science? An empirical study of Finnish gifted boys' (Ubani 2006a). The study used numeric representation of the interviews to compliment the hermeneutical analysis of the interviews (Ubani 2006a, Tables 1 & 2). The issues that the boys mentioned as sources of mystery were categorised and the frequencies were calculated. This gave a rough overview of the data. However, the emphasis of the article was on the description of the interpretative analysis of the content. The actual interpretation of the data follows the hermeneutic content analysis. The purpose of the hermeneutic content analysis is to 'convey the meaning of the



texts which is unfolded via interpretative reading' (Bos & Tarnai 1999, 661). It gets closer to the participants and gives room to their subjective accounts. In conclusion, while the former article (How do Finnish pre-adolescents perceive religion and spirituality?) relies more heavily on numeric information, in the latter article (Spiritual science? An empirical study of Finnish gifted boys) quantification is used to compliment the interpretative analysis of the data.

#### **5.1.4 The phenomenological perspective in this thesis**

In this thesis, two articles used the phenomenological approach. Article 3 (How do gifted girls perceive the meaning of life?) presents a case of two girls (Tirri & Ubani 2005a). Article 4 (What makes life spiritual?) investigates the gifted pupils' perceptions of life (Ubani 2006b). Originally constructed by Husserl (1859–1938), phenomenology seeks to find the essence of the phenomenon studied through its appearance to consciousness and what meanings are attributed to the objects of reality (Giorgi 1986, 6–8; Husserl 1913/1998, 64). While the phenomenological thought is not uniform in all aspects, the following assumptions are generally shared inside the tradition. First, there is a belief in the importance of subjective consciousness. Second, consciousness is understood as active and meaning bestowing. Third, it is believed that reflection can gain knowledge of different kinds of structures of consciousness or meanings (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2001, 23; see also Welch 2001, 60–61; Hammond, Howarth & Keat 1991, 9–11). The phenomenological method is a systematic method for the study of those lived and experienced meanings (van Manen 1990).

In phenomenology, human beings are viewed as intentional (Wertz 2005, 168; Giorgi 1997, 237). Intentionality is a 'relational phenomenon' in which consciousness and object constitute together 'one irreducible totality' (Churchill & Wertz 2001, 249–250). Our consciousness is always consciousness of something and our experiences are always experiences of something. In other words, intentionality implies the 'something' that it is directed to. We can perceive the 'essence' of this 'something' that appears. The essence is the most invariant meaning concerning the phenomenon. Without it the phenomenon could not present itself as it is. (van Manen 1990; Giorgi 1997, 242.) In Article 4: 'What makes life spiritual' it is claimed that the pre-adolescents perceptions of life include referential, relational and revelatory aspects. They can be considered as the three most invariant meanings in the perceptions on life: the most invariant meaning is the 'spiritual', hence the name of the article. The article suggests that the presentation of life includes more than what is empirically observed. And

this 'more' (i.e., the referential, relational and revelatory) in the perceptions of the gifted pre-adolescents is what *makes life spiritual*, in a phenomenological sense.

In order to understand what his/her expression means to the individual, the intention which has given rise to the expression has to be recognised (Jackson 1997, 25). This is the 'new style phenomenology' as described by Jackson (1997) which aims at reconstructing meanings with reference to intentions (Waardenburg 1978, 115–117). This view is especially important in the study of spirituality. When describing intentionality in human spirituality, Niemi (2006, 36) uses the concept of *telos* to describe humans striving for significance, purposes and meanings. Through recognising the personal flavour in the intentionality the articulation of spirituality can be interpreted in its respective context. Jackson insists that the reconstitution of a personal religious universe is the fundamental pre-requisite for any kind understanding of persons' spiritual meanings.

This results that this kind of phenomenology adopts the hermeneutical position over the pure descriptive stance (p. 27). For instance, in Article 3 of this thesis (How do gifted girls perceive the meaning of life?) the described statements on the philosophies on the meaning of life of the two girls were used for situating the expressions of the girls into their respective personal contexts in phase 5 of the analysis (Tirri & Ubani 2005a, Figure 1, 270; 272). This 'new style phenomenology' counters the previous accusations which claim that phenomenology is taking religious data out of its context assuming that there is no fundamental difference between the subjectivity of the participant and the researcher (Jackson 1997, 25).

Acknowledging the role of intention in the narrative acts forced the phenomenological analysis to broaden the scope of analysis to the 'circumstances' in the narratives where the meanings are communicated. In other words, the 'intuitive reading' (Giorgi 1986) typical of descriptive phenomenological studies was accompanied by analysis that is closer to the hermeneutical circle of understanding as described by Gadamer (1975/2004). It includes a sense of 'dwelling' in front of the text that contrasts with 'intuitive reading'. Gadamer (1975/2004, 269) discusses that we project the meaning for the text as a whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges and this process is repeated until the unity of the meanings becomes clearer (p. 269). In this process, in contrast to 'bracketing out' our assumptions concerning the phenomenon (Ashworth 1996), also our 'prejudices' (Gadamer 1975/2004, 169) function as a pre-stage helping us to orientate to the text which is still subject to the process of refinement.

The analysis structure was modified from Giorgi (1985, 10–19) and is presented in more detail in Articles 3 and 4 (Tirri & Ubani 2005a; Ubani 2006b). The analysis adhered to the assumption that the plot of the narrative can be configured into one thought or theme and that from that point the story can be seen as a whole (Ricoeur 1984, 67). In practice, the analysis begun by extracting the key theme (the meaning of life) it then proceeded to using the whole narration for gaining a more complete picture of the phenomenon studied, and to produce networks of meanings in relation to the ‘key theme’ (the philosophy on the meaning of life; see Ubani 2006b; Tirri & Ubani 2005a). This kind of synchronic data analysis makes the historical and developmental dimensions subject to the lived present situation or belief of the person (Polkinghorne 1995, 12). According to Polkinghorne (1995), and in contrast to the previous analysis, the ‘pure’ narrative research uses the diachronic approach in analysis of the data so that it emphasises the sequential relationship of events.

## 5.2 Validity of the study

This section focuses on evaluating the validity of the whole study. The validity of the single studies in the articles has been discussed in the articles, respectively. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2003, 40–41) have defined a set of criteria for evaluating a mixed method study. The criteria emphasise the evaluation of design, interpretation and conceptual consistency. The first criterion is the consistency of the design. There are several factors that tie the four articles together. First, the participants of the thesis belong to the same sample throughout the articles. The sample is quite homogenous. The participants are of the same age and go to one school in Helsinki that selects its pupils with an entrance exam. In academic skills and success they are academically gifted pupils. Furthermore, three of the articles (2, 3 & 4) use data from the same interviews.

The execution of the design can be described in terms of two kinds of strategies. They are called sequential and concurrent strategies (see Creswell 2002, 211–212). This study included elements of both strategies but was based on the concurrent strategy. In the sequential strategy, the quantitative and the qualitative data are collected in phases so that the following study is affected by the previous data gathering. For instance, in this study the participants in the interviews were chosen with regards to their score in the quantitative test. In addition, their responses in the questionnaire were discussed in the interviews. In the concurrent strategy, different sets of data are usually collected at the same time in the chronology of the study (ibid.). In other words, the previous phases do not

cause or guide the next data gathering and each set of data collected stands on its own (p. 217). In this thesis, the DIT test, test of spiritual sensitivity and the brainstorming task were in a concurrent relationship. While the concurrent emphasis may have saved time and resources, the sequential strategy could have helped in focusing more extensively on topics emerging in the data gathering.

The second criterion is the interpretation concerning the whole study. The spirituality of the gifted pre-adolescents was studied with the following questions: (1) What is their relationship to religion? (2) How do they perceive transcendence? and (3) How does their search for meaning integrate into their lives? Chapters 2, 3 and 4 discuss the results of the articles in these contexts respectively. The published articles tend to emphasise some issues over others. In order to gain a more comprehensive picture of the spirituality of the pre-adolescents this thesis could have benefited from the frameworks set by previous studies on religiousness (Tamminen 1991; Glock & Stark 1965). These include for instance, the Glock and Stark (1965) dimensions of religiousness: beliefs, knowledge, experience, practice and consequences (or rituals). The articles in this thesis included, albeit non-systematically, elements of the Glock and Stark's dimensions of religiousness with the exception of rituals.

Furthermore, while traditionally different kinds of expressions of religiousness are 'religious' due to their relation to the religious (Christian) dogma, the determinant for the spirituality in chapter 2, 3 and 4 is forced to be more context-bound. It is finally in chapter 7, when the relationship to the three contexts are described as ways of how one's awareness of himself or herself as a spiritual being can be supported. Thus the conceptualisation of spirituality is arbitrarily tied to the individual's existential search for educational purposes and not directly due to the empirical results. Admittedly, this kind of dialectic view reflects the current situation that there are many theory-based conceptualisations of spirituality that are controversial and are, thus, difficult to be combined into an agreeable meta-theory (Emmons & Paloutzian 2003).

On the other hand, discussing spirituality in the context of the existential search (Chapter 4) is in itself a concrete outcome of the process generalisation and specification. For instance, 'existentially significant interests' offers an integrative framework in which the themes from institutional religion and, especially in this data, the results in the articles describing the relation to transcendence could be covered. Furthermore, the concept of existential significance is also able to cover the spirituality of a religiously devout participant, an average person who 'belongs without believing' (see Davie 2000) and the inner life of the person who denies transcendence altogether.

The third criterion in the evaluation of the whole study is the conceptual consistency. It examines to what degree the four articles are consistent with each other. There is some disharmony in the four articles concerning their respective frameworks of spirituality. In the first article, spirituality is explored through the meanings given to religion and spirituality and it emphasises the cognitive knowledge of the concepts (Ubani & Tirri 2006). The second article explores spirituality of the boys' in terms of existential thinking (Ubani 2006a). The third article connects Hay's theory on relational consciousness with the girl's search for meaning (Tirri & Ubani 2005a). The fourth article explores spirituality in terms of perceptions of reality (Ubani 2006b). The results of the four articles have been regrouped in order to compliment each other in the discussion of the three themes in Chapters 2, 3 and 4. This choice can be criticised due to the fact that while the three contexts may help overcome the diverse frameworks of spirituality in the articles, it creates three new contexts (institutional religion, transcendence and existential search). On the other hand, the fact that the results of the four articles are presented in the three contexts implies that the articles have sufficient conceptual consistency to be relevant in the discussions concerning pre-adolescent pupils' relationships to institutional religion, transcendence and existential search.



## 6 The relevance of the study: Wholeness, spirituality and giftedness

### 6.1 Spirituality in a holistic framework of humanity

Chapter 6 focuses on the relevance of this study in the context of gifted education. The discussion begins with the ideal of the holistic approach to humanity in education (Section 6.1). In Section 6.2 the discussion proceeds to the cultural challenges in acknowledging the spiritual aspect of humanity in gifted education. Finally, in Section 6.3 the focus is on Gardner's (1993) Multiple Intelligences theory as a holistic solution in gifted education for covering the spiritual development of gifted pupils.

The holistic approach to humanity is a cohesive framework for including spirituality in education and especially gifted education. There are different ways to describe the holistic approach. The use of 'whole' implies that educational paradigm and policy is considered somewhat to lack a comprehensive understanding of humanity and education. Reportedly, in Finland academic and creative skills are well supported in gifted programmes and special schools (Tirri 1997, 220). However, Finnish education has been accused of lacking programmes that foster the *whole* personality of the gifted pupils, especially the social and affective needs of the pupils (ibid.)

In the educational literature, the 'holistic approach' is generally used in contrast to an emphasis on learning being understood as acquiring separate knowledge blocks (e.g., Best 2000, 1) or on learning being based on compartmentalising and reducing human life (see Erricker et al. 1997; Bigger 1999, 3). Allegedly, education should focus on understanding the comprehensive nature of the relationship between us and world instead (Erricker et al. 1997; Bigger 1999, 3). In other words, the holistic approach to education seems to be more like an ideological and idealistic tide against what is considered to be a negligent and one-dimensional mainstream approach to humanity and education than one set philosophy of human being.

Consequently, the understanding of what is meant by the whole human is not uniform in the holistic movement. Thus, there have been different ways to cover the various aspects of humanity. For instance, the 'whole human' has ranged from the addition of affective and cognitive domains to cognitive activities (Kryger 2005; Helve 1996), to the Gardnerian set of multiple intelligences (Gardner 1993). Afterwards, the latter was supplemented with additional intelli-

gences to the original seven in order to cover human behaviour and giftedness even more comprehensively (see Gardner 1999). Section 6.3 discusses spirituality in the multiple intelligences framework.

Hull (2002a) has recently explored the relationship between humanity and spirituality from a holistic viewpoint. Hull (2002a, 172) describes humanity to include simultaneously spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical aspects. Sometimes the social aspect is also included in the list of holistic education (Best 2000; Bigger 1999). According to Hull (2002a, 172) 'the spiritual is the whole of human considered from a certain viewpoint'. When humans are viewed pre-dominantly as spiritual beings, then also the other previously mentioned domains can be considered as expressions of spirituality. This is in line with the thinking of the sociologist Bauman (1998, 56). He views spirituality (religion) as the most universal of human qualities. To prove his point he uses the fact that everything human—from painting, through orgasms, to writing sociology—has been defined as a religious phenomenon. In research, spirituality has been linked with moral and ethics (Rodger 2000), society (Yinger 1970, 9), culture (Slee 1992), mental well-being (Emmons 1999), and bodily impressions (Hay 1998). Recently in education, in addition to holistic education and RE (Er-ricker et al. 1997; Best 2000), spirituality has been linked to citizenship education (Watson 2003).

As Hull (2002a) suggests, all the aspects can be viewed as distinctive areas where spirituality is expressed and the whole of our humanity takes form. As there are no set institutions in human societies exclusively for moral or social behaviour, likewise spirituality can not be limited strictly to church related activities. This results in that life itself is viewed as the arena where our spiritual life takes form (see Smart 1983, 11). On the other hand, viewing everything in human life as potentially spiritual is also problematic because it bypasses the question of what can be rightfully studied as human spirituality.

Consequently, the in-built criticism of the holistic approach also challenges the traditionalistic and cognitive emphasis on spirituality (Hay, Nye & Murphy 1996). While speaking in a British educational context, Hay et al. (1996, 58) feel that the conceptualisations of spirituality need to turn into a more holistic view than any individual religion for them to be educationally plausible and to correlate with the societal changes apparent today. Furthermore, without a shift in emphasis, the aspects of the gifted individual's life that do not fall within the creed of a certain tradition may not be recognised. This problem of failing recognition is especially constant with children's spirituality, because they do not know the religious vocabulary well enough (Hay 1998). For instance, when doctrinal knowledge is emphasised, childhood spirituality is easily found to be in-



adequate and naïve along with the spirituality of the intellectually or verbally challenged (Hay, Nye & Murphy 1996, 56). According to Hay et al. (1996), the holistic viewpoint offers a framework for examining spirituality not in terms of development as adding skill but rather as a universal in-built characteristic, where development is understood as coming to terms with and being aware of one's spiritual pre-disposition. This kind of spirituality may include some kind of attribution of added significance, meaning or perception to an event than the incident would suggest in itself (ibid.; Hay 1994; 1998).

## **6.2 The cultural challenge of spirituality in gifted education**

In the Western culture there are some culture-specific characteristic that make the inclusion of spirituality in the conception of a gifted person problematic. The relationship between religion and science is one of the great cultural stories in Western societies (see Noddings 1993). In gifted education, this relationship finds its parallel in the relationship between spirituality and giftedness. There are different kinds of Western stereotypes concerning giftedness and spirituality. For example, there is the stereotype of gifted people being gifted in academic skills. Traditionally giftedness has been connected to academic achievement and high IQ. For instance, there is a persistent belief that the gifted score certain scores in the IQ tests (Piiro 1994, 14–15). In fact, the academically gifted children have been verified to possess a high level of scientific argumentation (Tirri & Pehkonen 2002). Especially the gifted boys seem to fit the stereotype of scientific orientation well (e.g., Piiro 1994, 267). However, at the same time the concern for the spiritual development of gifted boys, especially, has been recognised in the literature (e.g., Kerr & Cohn 2001, 301).

The concern over gifted children has brought up some re-evaluation of some cultural pre-dispositions and attitudes concerning spirituality, science and manhood. Especially, the cultural story of man and science seems to exclude spirituality. It has been claimed that the masculine tradition has limited the spirituality of men (Kerr & Cohn 2001, 11). In addition, it has been suggested that the cultural pre-conception of men and science often leaves spirituality as a separate realm in life for the boys (Hay 1998). Spirituality is viewed as something vague, irrational, emotional, and, therefore, non-masculine (see Hay 1998). Often males are portrayed as being less religious than females (Tamminen 1991). Although the conceptions of science have evolved since the Enlightenment, various connotations concerning science and spirituality still exist. In addition of being labelled as less religious, the gifted boys are easily stereotyped as science ori-

ented. Many sources in culture teach boys what it means to be a man. And according to Kerr and Cohn (2001, 25) it seems that gifted boys learn this lesson better than most.

Kerr and Cohn suggest that socialisation to a masculine facade causes the gifted boy to hide or suppress his special sensitivities and talents. Furthermore, they are concerned over the tendency of gifted boys to conform to societal expectations, for instance, in their academic and professional choices (Kerr & Cohn 2001, 320–321). It seems that both the gifted girl and the gifted boy suffer from cultural stereotypes in their life choices. In the case of a gifted boy, Kerr and Cohn single out feminine characteristics, such as care and compassion, as especially problematic and rejected. It can be claimed that this may cause the boy to adopt a pre-determined professional path for the wrong reasons with questionable moral consequences. In a study of moral reasoning of the gifted by Tirri and Pehkonen (2002), they reported the case of Alex, a fourteen year old boy excelling in chemistry. Alex did not perceive any moral problem in exploring a grave for a scientific purpose. Tirri and Pehkonen claimed that he demonstrated a ‘lack of emotional and spiritual sensitivity in evaluating scientific issues involving moral dilemmas’. In the words of Kerr and Cohn (2001, 25), it could be said that Alex had learned his lessons on masculinity very well.

However, an interest in science can also be used as a grounds for a spiritual education, as Article 2 suggests. Education is sometimes pre-occupied with presenting explanations implying that there is an answer to everything. For an older child this may result in the neglect of the ‘true mysteriousness of existence’. (Hay 1998, 68.) As a contrast, Hay advocates the possibilities of education in presenting scientific explanations as a basis of further questions and as causes to wonder (*ibid.*). Scientific knowledge and explanations concerning mysteries can serve as starting points for further questions and mysteries. Therefore, spirituality and science do not have to exclude each other. For instance, the history of science does not support the separation of gifted spiritual men and science. Spirituality has been the inspiration for many inventions and advancements in science (i.e., Noddings 1993, 2–3). There seems to be a need for re-definition and re-construction of the relationship between gifted boys and science that would not demote their spirituality.

In addition to the problematic nature of gifted boys’ spirituality, also the question of the gifted girl and spirituality includes a clash of roles and expectations. According to Batson and Ventis (1982, 40), the role of women seems to include an involvement in religion more than the role of men. However, if the academically gifted girl excels at the same time in ‘masculine’ scientific sub-

jects where religion is implicitly or explicitly undermined, there would seem to exist two kinds of voices making claims in their lives.

In the case of an academically achieving girl there is also a role of ‘niceness’ and caring present (see Kerr 1994, 103). The aspect of care can be seen in the career choices of women, too. For instance, in Finland over 80 percent of the annual enrolment in fields such as veterinary medicine, health care, pharmacology, and educational sciences are women. In contrast, the ratio between men and women is just the opposite in technical subjects (Women in Academia 1999). Among scientifically competent women in America, it was noticed that helping others and social usefulness is a strong motivator that attract gifted girls to science and was a basis for professional choices (Rosser 2000, 11). In other words, even if the women would seemingly make the same choices concerning the professional field than men, the reasons were different.

Finally, the case of Alex amplifies the burden of the label ‘gifted’. The difference between the boys in this thesis and Alex is that Alex has been chosen to a science oriented Olympiad giftedness programme. As a contrast, the label of gifted (along with the connotations) is not as strong in the pupils in this thesis as they are ‘only’ academically gifted. For this reason, future studies should explore ‘being gifted’ as an identity. If education finds it appropriate to label a person, it should at the very least offer tools with which to cope with the label. The consciousness of ‘being gifted’ may have fundamental effects on things such as one’s moral and career choices and interpretation of life events. Furthermore, ‘being gifted’ may be existentially significant for a talented child. Exceptional skills can include divine undertones as they are sometimes interpreted as a God-given gift (Piiro 1994, 5). In other words, for better or worse, a label of ‘gifted’ may be an existentially significant definition for the person. It is possible that this kind of ‘gifted awareness’ is to be found from a group that has been segregated according to their special skills much like there are spiritualities built around the uniqueness of a given minority.

### **6.3 Spirituality and multiple intelligences**

This Section discusses the question of spirituality inside the most well-known theory on giftedness, Howard Gardner’s (1993) popular multiple intelligences (MI) theory. The MI theory is a holistic framework for giftedness. It aims at covering giftedness in its various expressions. Generally, ‘intelligence’ refers to an adaptive problem-solving behaviour (Sternberg & O’Hara 1997; Emmons 2000, 5). The literature has identified different types of intelligences and areas

of giftedness. Gardner represented his theory on multiple intelligences first during the eighties. He defined intelligence as a set of abilities that are used to solve problems and fashion products which are valuable in a certain cultural setting or community (Gardner 1993).

According to Gardner, the intelligences exist as potentials in each person but the potential may vary genetically and the actualisation differs due to developmental history. Originally, Gardner listed seven kinds of intelligences but increased the number to eight. The eight intelligences are linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, musical, bodily-kinaesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalist intelligence. It should be noted that Gardner's theory has been severely criticised (Kincheloe 2004a). For instance, Gardner's position has been described as patriarchal, insensitive to racial and socioeconomic class issues, colonialist and Eurocentric (Kincheloe 2004b, 7). In light of the accusations it would seem that his theory is suited for regions of more homogenous populations and communities of equal opportunities, such as Nordic countries.

There has also been discussion whether there are additional intelligences. For instance, Gardner (1999) has pondered the question of moral intelligence, existential intelligence and spiritual intelligence (SQ). In fact, the question of existence and nature of spiritual intelligence has led to a wide debate (Emmons 2000; Gardner 2000; Mayer 2000). As a result, there are different understandings of what spiritual intelligence (Emmons 1999; Mayer 2000) is or if it even exists (Gardner 2000). For instance, Emmons (2000, 9) believes that there exists a set of skills and abilities associated with spirituality that are relevant to an intelligence and that the individual differences in those skills constitute core features in the character of the person.

However, it should be also noted that while speaking of spirituality as a form of intelligence, the studies have to acknowledge what is understood by 'intelligence' in the multiple intelligences theory. In addition to the problem solving aspect, Gardner wants to emphasise the cognitive aspect of intelligence. To him, intelligence is a biological potential to analyse certain types of information in culturally valued ways. He does not want to include just a certain type of experience as an intelligence. (Gardner 2000.) Following his own sets of criteria, Gardner (1999, 54–58) has sketched three possible domains for spiritual intelligence. First, he attributes the 'concern with cosmic or existential issues' to the sphere of spiritual intelligence. Second, he emphasizes 'spiritual as achievement of a state of being' which represents the psychological states and phenomenal experiences that are called spiritual. The third domain is 'spiritual as effect to others', a social aspect, which also coincides with the term charisma and is an important element in conveying other people towards the fulfilments of the first

two domains in their lives. It should be recognised that Gardner (2000, 28) is hesitant about the addition of SQ to his list of multiple intelligences. In fact, he has pondered whether it would be more appropriate to consider spiritual intelligence underneath the domain of 'concern for existential issues' thus making SQ a form of existential intelligence (Gardner 1999, 60). This would also emphasise the problem solving and cognitive elements of the intelligence.

However, there is also the question concerning the differences in this spiritual ability. If there are individuals who possess exceptional musical intelligence, do we also have people who are spiritually prodigious? And what about spiritually unintelligent or spiritual idiots? Furthermore, Article 3 (How do gifted girls perceive the meaning of life?) described a case of two girls, one of whom had a low score in the test of spiritual sensitivity and other who had a high score in the test (Tirri & Ubani 2005a). Can a spiritually insensitive person be spiritually intelligent? At least the case of Susan demonstrates that a person with a low score in the test has been able to do her existential problem solving in a manner that her perceptions on the meaning of life and behaviour toward other people and image of God forms a coherent and predictable whole. When spirituality enters the realm of intelligences, then it means that it is subject to the vocabulary and methods of measurement of multiple intelligences which may not do justice to the complexity of the phenomenon of spirituality.

The existence of existential intelligence implies that there are existential problems comparable to mathematical puzzles (see Edwards 2003, 52). Gardner (1999) proposes that the core ability of existential intelligence is a capacity to locate oneself with respect to the furthest reaches of the cosmos. In addition, existential intelligence includes a capacity to locate oneself with the existential features of human condition, such as the significance and the meaning of life and the ultimate fate of the physical and psychological worlds. (Gardner 1999, 60–61.) Emmons (1999) emphasises the goal-oriented nature of problem-solving in existential questions. According to him, this process of problem-solving existential questions calls for inner-regulative mechanisms to deal with frustrations and set-backs when failing to succeed with regards to the goal that are similar in any other problem-solving (p. 159). Consequently, a person may have problems dealing with the contrast between the demands of the existential questions and the level of development and amount of resources available to the person. The sense of efficacy (Baumeister 1991, 41) seems to especially fragile in the search for meaning among teenagers (Fry 1998).

This connection between spiritual or existential intelligence and problem-solving behaviour (Emmons 1999, 176; Gardner 1999, 62) is close to the functional approach in the study on spirituality. After all, the functional approach has

focused on the role of spirituality in the life of the individual and in his/her dealings with existential questions (Zinnbauer et al., 1997, 550). In fact, there are recent results covering the functional aspect of spirituality that support the problem-solving aspect that existential intelligence implies. For instance, the children in Coles (1990, 100) study used this kind of resources when they tried to make sense of their lives and what was happening to them. A similar thing was found in the study in the fourth article in this thesis ('What makes life spiritual?'). In the article, the 'referential aspect' described actions where the pupils used different stories in order to interpret life and seek guidance for their actions (Ubani 2006b).

However, the current research concerning existential intelligence may need some cultivation if the existential life is to be comparable with mathematical puzzles. This is because the existential questions are likely often recognised as such when they are intense, durable and life-changing (Pargament 1997, 27). It needs to be explored whether existential problem-solving builds on previous knowledge and on the problems already solved by the individual. Therefore, more theoretical and empirical research is called for also on the less fundamental and less intense expressions of existential problem-solving. For instance, spiritual sensitivity (Hay 1998) and identifying different kinds of existentially relevant issues (see chapter 5) could lead research to the lower level existential problem-solving of pre-adolescents. After all, it can be reasoned that in problem solving, identification precedes the application of intelligence: algebra is identified first to belong to the rules and language of mathematics and then explored within the respective laws and logic.

In conclusion, while the supplementation of MI with existential intelligence may make the MI theory more holistic, it would also quite likely affect the theoretical understanding of the original Gardnerian intelligences. This is the case especially with intra-personal intelligence as it involves the capacity to understand oneself, including fears, desires and capacities and to use such information to regulate one's life effectively (Gardner 1999, 43). In other words, the distinction between existential and intra-personal should be maintained if the MI theory is to be further supplemented. Furthermore, despite the increase in tests measuring spiritual intelligence, at the same time there has been a problem of discerning the spiritual intelligence measured by the tests from the general intelligence of the person. In fact, psychometric investigations have shown that measures of spiritual transcendence and religious attitudes are statistically dependent on the measure of general intelligence among teenagers. (e.g., Francis 1998; Emmons 2000; see also Edwards 2003, 51.) This has led, for instance, Emmons (2000) to question the reliability of testing spiritual intelligence with

self-measurement instruments and has caused him to see more promise in ability-based measures.





## 7 Pedagogical implications

### 7.1 Implications for educational policy

This final chapter discusses the pedagogical implications of the study. The first focus is on the educational policy (Section 7.1). This is followed by the pedagogical suggestions for an integrative spiritual education (Section 7.2). The first focus is on the structures provided for spiritual development in the educational policy.

According to the Convention on the rights of the child issued by the United Nations in 1989, every child has a right for spiritual development. In general, ‘spiritual development’ has been included in the curricula around Europe along with moral, cultural, mental, and physical development (Carr 1995; Tirri 2004). Schweitzer (2005) stresses that while the UN convention could have educational significance in practice, the declaration does not require the state to provide the necessary opportunities for spiritual development in education (Schweitzer 2005, 105–106). However, the Finnish solution in RE has been devised to meet the human rights requirements in structure. The Act for Freedom for Religion that was enacted in 2003 in Finland was applied to the National Core Curriculum of Basic Education in 2004. The positive right to freedom of religion was enforced so that each pupil would attend RE according to his or her own religion (NCCBE 2004, 202).

In short, the Finnish educational decision on giving RE in schools on the basis of the own religious tradition of the pupil (NCCBE 2004) reflects both the UN 1989 Convention on the rights for the child and is in line with human rights in general, too (Schweitzer 2005). In addition, if it stays intact, in the long run the solution may prove beneficial for the development of the RE subject. It can be expected that it allows smaller learning groups, more intimacy and enhances in-depth encounter between the pupils and the teacher. However, it has been questioned if the segregation of students into different religion fits with the understanding of a democratic and plural society, where people with different confessions and backgrounds are supposed to integrate and work together (Kalli-oniemi & Siitonen 2003).

The educational system in Finland provides basically the structures needed for spiritual development of the individual pupil. On the other hand, the Finnish educational policy has some inbuilt controversy between the spiritual beliefs and values of pupils, and the mainstream philosophy underneath educational prac-

tice. During the past twenty years, education in Finland has been influenced by constructivist ideas. Also, the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education includes constructivist, especially social constructivist undertones in its guidelines for instruction (see NCCBE 2004, 16). Grimmitt (2000) has recently explored the applicability of constructivist approaches in RE. Generally, constructivism is not a method of instruction but a meta-theory about knowledge and learning which at its roots identifies knowledge as a human construct. Therefore, knowledge does not reflect the ontological reality but reflects the way we organise our experiences with fitting concepts. This also means that 'religious knowledge' and 'truth-claims' are subject to multiple, and even controversial interpretations. (Grimmitt 2000, 208.) This view is not unproblematic, because religious (and spiritual) truth-claims are by their nature exclusively true (Wright 2000b). The concern is that if an approach takes a relativistic attitude to what is 'the truth' to the pupil or faith tradition, it undermines the essential nature of such a statement concerning reality. It can be argued that in this situation the 'own religion' or spiritual tradition that the pupils become familiar with in school may differ considerably from their actual religious tradition that they live and experience.

In consequence, perhaps the most emergent need in the Finnish policy is finding a well functioning definition of 'good' spiritual development for the purpose of humanistic education with regards to diverse traditions of faith and thought. The discussion should explicate the ultimate goal of spiritual education. The educational relevance of a conceptualisation of a given phenomenon stems from its ability to be nurtured, assessed, and being theoretically plausible with the general educational aims. In addition, this discussion has to pay attention to the realist question of whether there is a Truth and how do different beliefs and claims relate to it. The understanding on 'spiritual development' should be applicable to the diversity of religious traditions present in school and to their respective RE curricula. One solution could be grounding spirituality as an articulation of one's existential search in different contexts and with different means.

In short, the pre-adolescents have beliefs and aspects in their life that should be addressed in education and this should be explicitly in the interests of educational policy. The existential aspect has traditionally been recognised as an important element in Finnish RE research (i.e., Niemi 1991; Puolimatka & Tirri 2000). Furthermore, internationally Wright has defended the case of RE recently as a school subject with its relevance to the existential search of the pupils (Wright 2004; White 2004). The results in this thesis support the conceptualisation of spirituality as an articulation of one's existential search. In this thesis, the academically gifted pupils' spirituality was discussed in three contexts: relationship to religious institutions, position to transcendence and in terms of one's ex-

istential search. In short, the results concerning their spirituality were as follows. First, the articles show that the pupils connect religion with Christian institution and do not consider religion and spirituality to overlap (Chapter 2). Second, the articles show that the pupils believe in God and the interference of God in their lives and they think that reality includes a spiritual dimension (Chapter 3). Third, the pupils had four kinds of existentially significant interests: personal, transcendental, cosmic and ethical (Chapter 4). In the third chapter, the existentially significant interests integrated the other contexts and their respective results inside it. While God and transcendence has a domain of its own (transcendence), it can be argued that institutional religion in its broadest and fullest understanding can be relevant to any of the four areas of existential significance.

## **7.2 Nurturing the integrative development of the person**

In order to proceed with the implications in the educational practice, this section uses the description of spirituality as an articulation of one's existential search as a premise for discussion. In light of the description, nurturing spiritual development could be approached in terms of supporting the pupil in becoming conscious of oneself as a spiritual subject, that is, conscious of the personal ways in articulating the existential search. Niemi (2006) emphasises the role of religious and spiritual education in bringing cohesion and as the tools for nurturing the developing identities in a post-modern world (Niemi 2006, p. 43). Niemi (2006) views identity formation as a process of becoming a subject in one's own life (p. 42). By taking into account the spiritual dimension in humanity, RE promotes a more whole concept of the human being which supports the pupil in becoming subject in his or her life. The process of becoming a subject in one's own life is a dialogical process (Niemi 2006). In RE, the enhancement of this process should cover one's relationship to religious institutions, position to transcendence and awareness of one's search for meaning.

Moreover, the serious treatment of existential questions contributes not only to the spiritual growth of children but to their intellectual, moral, and emotional development as well (Noddings 1993, 2). Therefore, the cultural truth-claims concerning the individual's talents, skills and age should be made explicit and introduced into the personal dialogue and evaluated. Furthermore, the pupils should be supported in identifying the kind of significance and role their individual gifts have in their lives.

Niemi (1991, 14; 1987) has explored the question of personally relevant RE with the relevance structure presented by Olkinuora (1983). Personal relevance

includes the cognitive and affective domain. The cognitive relevance refers to a situation where the person gets a clear understanding on the structures of the phenomenon, and is able to perceive the relationships of the details concerning the phenomenon. Affective relevance includes positive experiences that the topic is interesting and useful. While it is questionable if the concepts of cognitive relevance and the affective relevance are sufficient to cover existential relevance, it is advisable that the pupils should become conscious of the kind of relationship they have with the different sources of truth-claims. According to Wright, RE provides pupils a space where they can engage in the search for the ultimate truth, 'in an informed and literate manner' (Wright 2004, 26). The recognition of emergent beliefs and attitudes and the meaning horizons of the pupils should become a conscious and integral part of the learning process (Wright 2000b, 178). In addition, the child's own beliefs should be enriched by encountering the different religious traditions and explicating one's position in regards to the truth-claims of different value-systems (p. 179).

In the Finnish context, the pupil's 'own religion' offers a familiar set of ultimate—and cultural—truth-claims which the pupils can become conscious of and articulate their position towards. This is not nurturing into a religion but rather nurturing the pupil in relation to the faith and value traditions that (s)he meets in his/her life. However, the inclusion of individual talents in the search for truth means that RE is not to be viewed merely as the subject that makes the school holistic by representing spirituality in the curriculum. Instead of being a guardian for spirituality, with this inclusion RE may become itself a holistic subject and, in fact, overcome from itself the echoes of a dualistic division between 'heavenly matters' and 'earthly matters'.

However, the dualist division is also problematic in other subjects, as they tend to use an exclusively earthly orientation toward the learner. The professional training of teachers should imitate the cross-curricular nature of the personal processes of the pupils. Since the 1990's teacher training in Finland has explicitly emphasised the development of reflection skills and argumentation of beliefs and values underlying the pedagogical practice (Luukkainen 1994; Kansanen et al. 2000). In order to become more sensitive toward the processes different topics should be examined, the teacher students should be encouraged, not only to formulate the aims of the cognitive content for their own studies, but also identify their existentially relevant issues concerning the topics dealt with. The teacher training in RE should also enhance the professional awareness in RE which includes realising the different value assumptions of society, pupils and in the personal life of the teacher that are present in the RE class-room (Watson 1993). Without reflection, it is likely that the teacher students' nega-

tive—or positive—perceptions of religion and RE (see Tirri & Kallioniemi 1999, 63–64) will become manifest in an uneducated way distorting the spiritual development of their future pupils.

Noddings (1993, 132) suggests that teachers in school should be aware that religious and metaphysical questions arise also in subjects such as mathematics and physics. Any given lesson can become spiritual education, if it goes beyond the everyday discussion and touches the fundamental questions concerning the meaning of life and ultimate truth (Wright 2000a). The pupils reflect on the meaning of the theories presented and formulate statements concerning reality and existence. This kind of reflection is not probably written in the original script of the school lesson nor later acknowledged by the teacher. The ideal would be to give room to pupils to formulate their belief statements in the context of all school subjects. This task calls for intentional measures also in the school curriculum (see Noddings 1993). Moreover, for education to meet this spiritual challenge, it has to break away from the humdrum of the traditional curriculum and prioritise the child's search for meaning as a key issue in education (p. 6). This aim should undisputedly be at the core of all educational activity. Education is supposed to prepare a child for life. And meaning *is* the key issue in life.



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## APPENDICES

## Appendix 1. The test of spiritual sensitivity

Suomalaisen yhteiskoulun 6. lk:n oppilaita koskeva tutkimus syksy 2003  
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## OSA 1

*Seuraavat väittämät mittaavat omaa käsitystäsi erilaisista vahvuusalueistasi. Merkitse vastauksesi jokaisen väittämän jälkeen ympyröimällä viidestä vaihtoehdosta se numero, joka parhaiten vastaa käsitystäsi.*

	Täysin eri mieltä			Täysin samaa mieltä	
	1	2	3	4	5
1. Kirjoittaminen on minulle luonteva tapa ilmaista itseäni.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Matematiikka, fysiikka tai kemia kuuluu lempiaineisiini koulussa.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Geometria ja erilaiset avaruudelliset tehtävät ovat minulle koulussa mieluuisampia kuin esim. yhtälönratkaisu.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Olen kätevä käsistäni.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Kielikuvat ja rikkaat kielelliset ilmaisut auttavat minua oppimaan tehokkaasti.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Kuultuani jonkun sävelkulun kerran tai pari pystyn yleensä toistamaan sen melko tarkasti.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Vieraassakin seurassa löydän helposti keskustelukumppanin.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Äidinkieli ja/tai yhteiskunnalliset aineet ovat minulle koulussa helpompia kuin matematiikka, fysiikka ja kemia.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Minua viehättää monimutkaisten ongelmien kanssa työskentely ja niiden ratkaisu.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Minun on helppo hahmottaa monimutkaisia ja moniulotteisia kuvioita.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Minusta on mukavaa tehdä käsilläni jotain konkreettista (neulominen, puutyöt tms.)	1	2	3	4	5
12. Musiikkikappaletta kuunnellessani kykenen erottamaan siinä käytettyjä instrumentteja ja sävelkulkuja.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Minun on helppo tulla toimeen erilaisten ihmisten kanssa.	1	2	3	4	5
14. Pystyn analysoimaan hyvin omia vaikuttimiani ja tapojani toimia.	1	2	3	4	5
15. Olen hiljakkoin kirjoittanut jotain sellaista, josta olen erityisen ylpeä tai josta sain tunnustusta.	1	2	3	4	5
16. Päässälasku on minulle helppoa.	1	2	3	4	5
17. Pystyn helposti kuvittelemaan, mitä maisema näyttää lintuperspektiivistä.	1	2	3	4	5
18. Olen hyvä näyttämään, miten jokin käytännön asia on tehtävä.	1	2	3	4	5
19. Rummuttellessani jotain melodiasa pysyn hyvin tahdissa.	1	2	3	4	5
20. Minun on helppo luoda kontakti toiseen ihmiseen.	1	2	3	4	5
21. Pohdin usein omia tunteitani ja tuntemuksiani ja etsin syytä niihin.	1	2	3	4	5
22. Käytän säännöllisesti aikaa mietiskelyyn, pohdiskeluun tai elämän tärkeiden kysymysten ajatteluun.	1	2	3	4	5
23. Nautin peleistä tai "aiivopähkinöistä", jotka vaativat loogista ajattelua.	1	2	3	4	5
24. Lukiessani tuotan usein mielessäni ilmiöitä havainnollistavia kuvia tai kuvioita.	1	2	3	4	5
25. Käsiyöaineet ovat minulle mieluuisia aineita koulussa.	1	2	3	4	5
26. Tunnistan heti kun sävel soi epäviireisesti.	1	2	3	4	5
27. Neuvottelu- tai ryhmätyötilanteissa vaikutan yhteisymmärryksen syntymiseen.	1	2	3	4	5
28. Luen mielelläni psykologista tai filosofista kirjallisuutta oppiakseni enemmän itsetuntemusta.	1	2	3	4	5

## Appendix 1 (Continued). The test of spiritual sensitivity

Suomalaisen yhteiskoulun 6. lk:n oppilaita koskeva tutkimus syksy 2003  
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### OSA 2

*Seuraavat väittämät koskevat elämäsi. Merkitse vastauksesi jokaisen väittämän jälkeen ympyröimällä viidestä vaihtoehdosta se numero, joka parhaiten vastaa käsitystäsi.*

	Täysin eri mieltä		Täysin samaa mieltä		
	1	2	3	4	5
1. Hiljentyminen on minulle tärkeää kaiken kiireen keskellä.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Ihailen luonnonilmiöiden kauneutta esim. auringonlaskua.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Pohdiskelen usein elämän tarkoitusta.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Minulle on tärkeää löytää yhteisö, johon tunnen kuuluvani.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Yritän kuunnella kehoni tuntemuksia opiskellessani ja tehdessäni töitä.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Maailmassa on ilmiöitä, joita tiede ei pysty selittämään.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Minulle on tärkeää löytää oma tehtäväni maailmassa.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Haluan edistää rauhaa omalla toiminnallani.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Uskon että erilaiset meditaatio- ja joogaharjoitukset auttavat meitä tuntemaan omaa itseämme.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Mielikuvituksen käyttö rikastuttaa elämää.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Olen ahdistunut maailman pahuudesta.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Haluan auttaa vähempiosaisia lähimmäisiäni.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Keskittyessäni johonkin toimintaan kokonaisvaltaisesti saatan unohtaa ympärilläni olevat asiat.	1	2	3	4	5
14. Tarinat ja symbolit ovat minulle tärkeitä asioita elämässä.	1	2	3	4	5
15. Etsin hyvyttä elämässä.	1	2	3	4	5
16. Minulle on tärkeää saada hiljentyä muiden kanssa yhdessä.	1	2	3	4	5
17. Kuunnellessani tuttua musiikkiesitystä tai katsellessani taideteosta, jonka olen nähnyt aikaisemmin, saatan kuulla tai nähdä ne erilaisina.	1	2	3	4	5
18. Tavallinen arkielämäkin on täynnä ihmeellisiä asioita.	1	2	3	4	5
19. Pyrin iloitsemaan elämän kauneudesta aina kun se on mahdollista.	1	2	3	4	5
20. Haluan löytää yhteisön, jossa voin kasvaa hengellisesti.	1	2	3	4	5
21. Eläinten oikeudet ovat minulle tärkeitä asioita.	1	2	3	4	5
22. Osallistun ympäristön suojeleluun liittyviin talkoisiin tai muihin tapahtumiin.	1	2	3	4	5
23. Kiinnitän huomiota kulutustapoihini suojellakseni ympäristöä.	1	2	3	4	5
24. Ruokavalioni on terveydellisistä syistä kasvispainotteinen.	1	2	3	4	5
25. Harrastan aktiivisesti kierrätystä.	1	2	3	4	5
26. Haluan oppia tuntemaan erilaisia luontoon liittyviä asioita kuten kasvi- ja eläinlajeja.	1	2	3	4	5
27. Kuulun (tai olen kuulunut) johonkin eläin- tai luonnonsuojelukerhoon.	1	2	3	4	5
28. Olen valmis maksamaan ympäristöystävällisistä tuotteista enemmän kuin tavallista.	1	2	3	4	5
29. Olen kasvisyöjä, koska pidän lihan syöntiä eettisesti ongelmallisena.	1	2	3	4	5



**Appendix 1 (Continued).** The test of spiritual sensitivity

30. Lajittelen kotitalouden jätteet eri jätteenkeräilyastioihin vietäviksi.	1	2	3	4	5
31. Minusta on mukavaa liikkua luonnossa.	1	2	3	4	5
32. Vältän kosmeettisia tuotteita, joita on testattu eläinkokeilla.	1	2	3	4	5
33. Luonnon suojeleminen on minulle läheinen asia.	1	2	3	4	5
34. Valitsen mieluummin luomuvaihtoehdon mikäli se on tarjolla.	1	2	3	4	5
35. Ostan mahdollisimman vähän kulutustavaroita.	1	2	3	4	5
36. Nautin luonnon kauneudesta ja luontoelämyksistä.	1	2	3	4	5

Oppilaan nimi: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 2. The thematic structure of the interviews

Teemahaastattelun runko.

Martin Ubani

PVM: \_\_\_\_\_

id: \_\_\_\_\_

<i>Teema</i>	<i>Sisältö</i>
Tietoisuuden tason muutos <i>Awareness-sensing</i>	A. Lomakkeessa oleva asia/ilmaisu: -mitä tarkoittaa? -mihin asioihin liittyy? -onko itse tehnyt?  B. Aiheeseen liittyvä tapahtuma: -mitä tapahtui?  C. Mitä ajatuksia tapahtumaan liittyy nykyään -onko pohtinut tapahtumaa myöhemmin?
Mysteerin kokeminen <i>Mystery-sensing</i>	A. Lomakkeessa oleva asia/ilmaisu: -mitä tarkoittaa? -mihin asioihin liittyy? -onko itse tehnyt?  B. Aiheeseen liittyvä tapahtuma -mitä tapahtui?  C. Mitä ajatuksia tapahtumaan liittyy nykyään -onko pohtinut tapahtumaa myöhemmin?
Arvon kokeminen <i>Value-sensing</i>	A. Lomakkeessa oleva asia/ilmaisu: -mitä tarkoittaa? -mihin asioihin liittyy? -onko itse tehnyt? .  B. Aiheeseen liittyvä tapahtuma -mitä tapahtui?  C. Mitä ajatuksia tapahtumaan liittyy nykyään -onko pohtinut tapahtumaa myöhemmin?
Yhteisöllisyys <i>Social Dimension</i>	A. Lomakkeessa oleva asia/ilmaisu: -mitä tarkoittaa? -mihin asioihin liittyy? -onko itse tehnyt?  B. Aiheeseen liittyvä tapahtuma -mitä tapahtui?  C. Mitä ajatuksia tapahtumaan liittyy nykyään -onko pohtinut tapahtumaa myöhemmin?

## ORIGINAL PUBLICATIONS

### I

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### II

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