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Response to Manami Ozaki—Spiritual Health Education: Restoration of Connectedness with Others, with Nature, and/or with the Transcendent

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I. INTRODUCTION

I want to thank Manami Ozaki for an interesting and very thought provoking paper. Ozaki's intellectual and professional background is different from my own and this paper demonstrates her considerable scholarship in her own discipline. Different disciplines have different traditions, dialogues, methodologies and purposes. Our exchange here is across the boundary of our different disciplines. It is not my intention to take a specific position on spirituality and educating for spirituality either contra or in support of the one in the paper. I'm not competent to do that—this isn't my area of work. Rather I will air a number of issues suggested to me by Ozaki's paper but from the perspective of my own background.

II. A DEFINITION OF SPIRITUALITY

My opening remarks concern the definition of spirituality. Spirituality, I suggest is a contested concept, and any review of the philosophical literature indicates a wide variety of interpretations. Philosophically we would probably be cautious about any idea that there is an aspect or a dimension of our experience called spirituality which we can point to, define and measure without careful regard to how spirituality is characterised in different ways in different discourses.

Spirituality then resists being defined, apprehended, understood independently of the meanings and nuances it carries in particular contexts and discourses, cultural and individual. I think in Ozaki's paper, perhaps more than a philosopher would be comfortable with, spirituality is represented as a scientific concept, a phenomenon with an objective reality beyond the messy differences of usage; one of the key research questions the paper seeks to answer is (quote) 'what kind of objective scales would be possible to measure an individual's maturity level of spirituality?' I want to be tentative here and not misrepresent Ozaki: at points in her paper Ozaki suggests that the definition of spirituality depends on its context but I think that what is meant on these occasions is that there will be different operational considerations in different contexts. The particular context of Ozaki's work of course is health promotion.

To illustrate this variety of views and perspectives on the nature of spirituality, I will mention

just four, very briefly, but there are many. Each of these four perspectives differs from the others, and from Ozaki's.

First example: this position locates spiritual development in the context of a specific religion. Faith schools would usually subscribe to this view. That conclusion is different from the position in the paper. With regard to educating for spirituality Ozaki maintains 'the program must be free from the individual's faith or belief, and foster the fundamental joy of being alive'.

Second example: In contrast to the position that spirituality can only be nurtured in the context of a particular belief system is the account that specifically does not see spirituality in terms of a relationship with a supreme being but still wishes to describe it as ineffable, and incapable of description in literal everyday language.

Third example (to quote John White):

There is, in my view, a place for what might be called 'the spiritual' in education but it should be uncoupled from religion. It has to do with the cosmic shudder we all feel from time to time when contemplating the existence of life, especially our own self conscious life, and of the universe. . . . If OFSTED wants evidential criteria to help its inspectors, it is what the arts and contemplation of nature can bring about rather than religious knowledge, which should be top of the list (White, 1994).

Fourth example: Michael Hand argues that there can be no methodology for the evaluation of the truth claims in relation to 'spiritual' propositions since they involve reference to a transcendental being and are therefore matters of faith. Since the presentation of faith-based propositional knowledge is inappropriate to the secular school, our attention will be more productively turned towards those qualities that we identify with the human 'spirit', that is, generosity, magnanimity, good heartedness, etc.

I'm not advancing these examples of conceptions of spirituality against that in the paper but rather to illustrate that spirituality is not a self evident concept about which there is general consensus. There is a plurality of spiritualities that can be understood in terms of the particularity and contextuality of different narratives. That is not to deny the appropriateness of commitment to a particular account of spirituality but such a commitment will be defended, will take account of this complexity and will recognise its relationship to a particular frame of reference. In the context of education it raises important issues about the appropriate and supple relationship between the commitment, care, and attentiveness of the teacher, and the hopes, the expectations and the yearning of the individual.

(I'm leaving to one side that account which dismisses all talk of spirituality as mystification; and indeed the increasing commodification of spirituality.)

III. THE MEASUREMENT OF SPIRITUALITY

Turning to the measurement of spirituality, some of my thoughts on the section on the measurement of spirituality follow from the issues I raised in the previous section. But it's not just the variety of conceptions of spirituality that makes it difficult to assess spirituality

statistically. After all in spite of the variations in conceptions of physical health (mainstream western, alternative western, holistic conceptions from other cultures) at least some of these are able to advance yardsticks which enable us to usefully measure physical health in statistical terms.

I openly admit that I am not qualified to interrogate the detail of the scales and yardsticks for measuring spirituality that are discussed in this paper. It seems to me that notions of spirituality, even allowing for divergent accounts, are not expressing an experience, an engagement that is statistically measurable. And indeed in this paper I don't interpret Ozaki as measuring spirituality but rather as measuring proxies for spiritual well being.

The empirical work sets out to measure respondents' openness, self esteem, connectedness with others, altruism, relief from symptoms of mental problems—i.e. aspects of students' well being. Some examples of the research statements put to respondents are quoted in the paper: 'I will do what I feel is right even if I am the only one'. 'When there are negative feelings such as anxiety and depression, I can shake them off and aim my energy on positive things'. Ozaki maintains in her conclusion that what is measured through these indicators is students' greater awareness of the transcendent, which is characterised as connection with their inner and transpersonal selves. There seemed to me possibly something of a leap between the empirical observations regarding well being that come out of the research and the claims that these are evidence of spirituality. Indeed I wonder whether the individual's experience of spirituality lends itself to public and statistical measurement or whether perhaps in their nature they are inimical to such assessment?

It is pertinent here perhaps to quote Colin Wringe who applauds the wisdom of the UK curriculum authorities 'who have recognised the difficulty . . . of assessing the spiritual development of individual pupils, favouring instead the strategy of judging the potential of the school to promote the spiritual and moral development of pupils in general' (Wringe, 2002).

IV. EDUCATION FOR SPIRITUALITY

Finally I will make a few remarks about education for spirituality. The model of education for spirituality in the paper suggests three programmes: cosmology education which provides students with a knowledge of contemporary science and Buddhist philosophy; psychosynthesis which uses guided imagery and 'act of will'; and a life skills program. In one programme delivered by the author an introductory lecture was followed by a variety of activities including icebreaking, relaxation techniques, meditation, body work. Overall the model is one of a compact learning programme with an explicit focus on spirituality.

In this section I thought I would briefly portray some different approaches to spiritual formation through the thoughts of a couple of other thinkers in the field. Both of these conceive of education for spirituality as infused across the curriculum, on a long term basis. But let me introduce these by quoting OFSTED's (The Office for Standards in Education, the inspection body in England and Wales) definition of spiritual development:

Spiritual development is the development of the non-material element of a human being which

animates and sustains us and, depending on our point of view, either ends or continues in some form when we die. It is about the development of a sense of identity, self-worth, personal insight, meaning and purpose. It is about the development of a pupil's 'spirit'. Some people may call it the development of a pupil's 'soul'; others as the development of 'personality' or 'character' (OFSTED, 2004).

The first quotation that follows is from Colin Wringle, reflecting on national curriculum documents in 'Can spirituality be part of education?'

English . . . may help pupils to represent, explore and reflect upon their own and others' inner life; through music they may become aware of the power of music to take the listener out of the commonplace and reflect upon their own thoughts and feelings. History may lead to an appreciation of the achievements of past societies (pyramids, cathedrals, illuminated manuscripts) and an understanding of the motivation of individuals who made sacrifices for a particular cause, while . . . Geography may help them to reflect upon such experiences as a visit to an imposing landscape or response to dramatic environments (Wringle, 2002).

The second quotation is from John White:

In thinking about how to provide opportunities for spiritual growth, is it too fanciful to suggest that a 'quiet minute' should happen as a structured component of many school activities and learning experiences? Many schools now have their own wildlife area: how about sitting down under a tree after a nature walk around it? Or trying to take in what a hundred million years means when looking at pre-Cambrian rocks on a Geography field trip? What about a quiet few minutes to wonder at the beauty and intricacy of crystal structures viewed through a microscope? And on a visit to an art gallery, might not the occasional quiet time to absorb the beauty of art . . . provide a time for reflection and refreshment of the spirit? (White, 1994)

I offer these examples in no way as definitive models of educating for spirituality but rather for the contrast they provide with Ozaki's paper in their longer term, less direct approach and the nature of their substantive content.

I want to end by mentioning an insight offered by Terence H. McLaughlin, Professor of Philosophy of Education at the Institute of Education until his early untimely death. How much an attentive and conscientious teacher committed to nurturing the spiritual development of pupils might achieve in these and other ways depends on what McLaughlin termed the pedagogic *phronesis* of the teacher. Education for spirituality must pay proper attention not only to what that might mean for students but also to the responsibilities it places on and demands that it makes of teachers.

I would like to thank Ozaki for the opportunity to respond to her paper and for the pleasure of reading hers.

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