Children’s Spirituality: Conceptual Understanding of Developmental Transformation

Joseph M. Cervantes
Department of Counseling
California State University, Fullerton
Fullerton, CA 92834-6868
(657)278-3669
Fax (714)744-1830
jcervantes@fullerton.edu

Alexis V. Arczynski
Department of Educational Psychology
University of Utah

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Joseph M. Cervantes,
Department of Counseling, School of Health and Human Development, California State
University, Fullerton, Fullerton, CA 92834.
Abstract

Children’s spirituality is a dimension of human functioning not well addressed in the professional literature. This article provides an overview of the primary conceptual issues related to the spirituality of children and the role this understanding brings to practice for counselors working with children. A working definition of children's spirituality is prescribed and followed by a discussion of relational/cultural theory, relational consciousness, and transpersonal experiences for children. Voices of children are also included in order to add clarity and concreteness to the conceptual ideas of spirituality that are presented. Lastly, the importance of knowledge about children's spirituality and its contribution to counseling practice is described.

*Keywords:* children’s spirituality, relational cultural theory, relational consciousness, transpersonal experience with children, spirit in the child.
Children’s Spirituality: Conceptual Understanding of Developmental Transformation

Historically, the disciplines of anthropology, religion, and theology primarily have explored the construct of spirituality. Over time, academic and professional psychology increasingly have integrated ideas of spirituality into clinical practice and those ideas and interests have become fertile ground for writing, research, and professional practice (Gold, 2010). Mainstream communities, peer-reviewed journals, conferences, and workshops, and practitioner-oriented books and articles provide scholarly acknowledgement and dialogue about spirituality in the discipline of psychology (e.g., Parker, 2011; Plante, 2009; Plante & Sherman, 2001; Spilka, Hood, Hunsberger, & Gorsuch, 2003). Continued recognition of spirituality has spurred further interest for clinicians working with adults (Cervantes & Passalacqua, 2008; Richards & Bergin, 2000), while interest for clinicians working with children has lagged behind.

Recently, children’s spirituality has demonstrated increased scholarly, clinical, and research investment related to this developmental population (Roehlkepartain, King, Wagener, & Benson, 2006; Walker & Hathaway, 2013). There has been a growing interest in viewing spirituality as a core developmental process, recognizing that a child often asks existential questions related to being aware of powers greater than him or herself regardless of religious affiliation (Emmons & Crumpler, 1999; Kielty Briggs, Akos, Czyszczon, & Eldridge, 2011; Richert & Barrett, 2005). Early writers commented that at least some aspects or capacities for spirituality might be inherited (Elkind, 1963; Wilber, 1996). Consequently, the implication that people are hard-wired for spiritual awareness (Chopra, 2000) is consistent with Hay and Nye’s (2006) discussion of an inherent natural spiritual understanding in children.

What psychology has not addressed well is the significance of understanding spirituality in childhood. Namely, does the conceptualization of spirituality present in the mainstream
CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING: CHILDREN’S SPIRITUALITY

psychological literature accurately represent spirituality in early human development (Boyatzis, 2005; Eaude, 2004; Hart, 2006)? Further, are there unique characteristics of children’s spirituality that have direct application in professional counseling practice (Benson, 2004; Miller & Kelley, 2006)?

To answer these questions, first, we define the major concepts underlying spiritual experiences during childhood: children’s spirituality, spiritual development, relational consciousness, and transpersonal experience. Second, we propose an integrated model of spiritual development in childhood via the following interrelated dimensions: cognitive-spiritual components, relational-cultural theory, relational consciousness, and experiential and transpersonal experience. Lastly, we provide clinical implications of a new developmental understanding of children’s spirituality.

**Definitional Issues in Children’s Spirituality**

As noted by Boyatsis (2005), spirituality and religion are central dimensions of human development. A working definition of children’s spirituality is an increasing awareness, subjective inner experience of wonder and curiosity, striving for something greater than oneself, believability in unseen forces, and playful transcendence. Spiritual development, relational consciousness, and transpersonal experience, Hay and Nye (2006) contended, are natural processes inherent to all children. Respectively, these concepts have been defined as acknowledgement of the mystery and sacredness in life; increasing awareness of the interconnectedness of all things; and openness to mystical, unexplained events and experiences. We view these concepts as primary elements that connect both secular and sacred life experience and that underscore a person’s fuller participation in the human life span. Defining the core concepts of children’s spirituality begs the question: How does spirituality develop in children?
An Emerging Theory of Spirit in the Child

We argue that spirituality unfolds on a distinct developmental platform whereby childhood experiences of wonder, awe, and vivid transpersonal imagery are the backdrop to human growth (Schlarb, 2007; Taggert, 2001; Walsh, 1999). Previous scholars provided important cognitive understandings of the development of faith, religion, and spirituality in children and adolescents modeled on a stage-like progression based on Piagetian developmental-cognitive sequencing (Elkind, 1961, 1963; Fowler, 1991, 2001; Fowler & Dell, 2004; Genia, 1995; Goldman 1964; Oser, 1991; Oser & Scarlett, 1994; Piaget, 1968; Washburn, 1995).

Historical emphasis on stage sequencing that has highlighted neurodevelopmental processes such as cognitive awareness and logical thinking (Hart, 2006) tended to overlook the experience of spirituality for children. Thus, cognitive-spiritual models provided little understanding for the inclusion of a child’s personal life narrative (Hay & Nye, 2006; Long, 2000; Piechowski, 2001). In addition, stage models offered little opportunity for children to be seen holistically, thus, limiting inclusion of potentially inherent abilities such as the experiences of naturalistic wonder and compassion for others (Furrow, King, & White, 2004; Hart, 2006; Richert & Barrett, 2005). Last, cognitive-spiritual models took a universalist perspective in which the familial and cultural contexts of individuals were ignored (Cervantes & Parham, 2005; Mattis, Ahluwalia, Cowie, & Kirkland-Harris, 2006; Yeh, Borrero, & Shea, 2011). Consequently, available studies on children’s spirituality reported primarily on White, Anglo-Saxon, and Christian populations with ethnicity and culture viewed as less significant.

We suggest that in order for a theory of spirituality to effectively incorporate the implications of childhood and adolescence, a more inclusive theory should account for the transpersonal and visionary experiences reported by children (Pearmain, 2005), explain a child's
aesthetic appreciation of the natural world (Hart, 2006; Schlarb, 2007), and understand a child's experience of a higher being’s presence (Richert & Barrett, 2005). Consequently, a model of children’s spirituality should consider the seemingly mystical yet developmentally normative everyday experiences of children. We propose that while the cognitive-spiritual component is a significant element in a fundamental understanding of the stage evolution of one's spiritual understanding, a more integrative approach also needs to include other relevant concepts: relational-cultural theory (RCT), relational consciousness (RC), and experiential and transpersonal dimensions. It is our belief that the interrelatedness of these components can provide more inclusivity to understanding children’s spirituality than has been captured by individual studies and models in the past (see Table 1).

**Cognitive-Spiritual Components**

In an attempt to understand spirituality developmentally, various writers emulated Piaget’s (1968) theory of cognitive development using his conceptual framework to describe discontinuous, stage-like, and progressive models of spiritual, religious, and faith development. These models followed a cognitive-developmental logic in which a person’s understanding of their religion (Elkind, 1961, 1963; Genia, 1995), comprehension of religious stories (Goldman, 1964), faith in God (Fowler, 1991; Fowler & Dell, 2004), and judgment of the role of religion in daily life (Oser, 1991; Oser & Scarlett, 1994), progressed through stages similar to all other forms of cognition. Early cognitive-spiritual theorists tended not to incorporate affective and relational states into their developmental models (Spilka et al., 2003).

By focusing on cognitive components of spiritual development, early theorists emphasized that children were incapable of possessing a spiritual understanding due to their limited cognitive capacities (Allport, 1950; Oser, 1991; Oser & Scarlett, 1994). Authors
CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING: CHILDREN’S SPIRITUALITY

conceived that children’s spiritual awareness was subordinate to adult spirituality through the logic of developmental models: incremental and age-bound stages described increasing levels of spirituality, faith, or religious awareness that began with a primitive consciousness (Elkind, 1961, 1963; Fowler, 1991; Fowler & Dell, 2004; Genia, 1995; Goldman 1964). Therefore, only adults were able to meaningfully cultivate spiritual awareness and understanding. These authors concluded that children are better able to maintain abstract religious thought as they age and cognitively mature. To strengthen an understanding of childhood spirituality, which we believe is a more accurate representation of this human experience, we incorporated relational awareness and other unique, internal experiences of developmental spirituality.

**Relational-Cultural Theory**

RCT is a conceptual framework that expands the individual focus of the cognitive-spiritual perspective and, instead, highlights the dynamics that occur in mutual interaction (Jordan, 2010). Gilligan’s (1982) well-known work continues to serve as an anchor for clarifying not only the voices of women and relationship but also provides language for the development of a relational framework. Jordan (2010) described an alternative perspective to traditional models of behavior that moved fundamentally away from a psychology of the individual to a psychology of interaction and relationship.

The primary tenets of RCT evidenced the theory's focus on relational development (Comstock et al. 2008). Comstock and colleagues explained that throughout the life span, individuals grow in the direction of and through relationships. Further, one’s movement toward mutuality characterized mature functioning, while movement toward separation exemplified immature functioning. In addition, growth was characterized by increasingly differential and elaboration of relationships. Finally, relational development occurs within a person’s context and
is necessarily linked to his or her cultural background; religious or spiritual identification; social identities (e.g., age, cohort, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual/affectional orientation, class, and physical ability); and experiences with power, oppression, privilege, and marginalization.

At the core, Comstock and colleagues (2008) affirmed that growth-fostering relationships involve mutual empowerment and empathy, and authenticity is a significant dimension that emphasizes genuine involvement and continued development through the process of relationship. This focus on transactional growth provides reciprocal benefits. In accordance with RCT, a primary developmental goal is to gain increased relational competence and interpersonal awareness. In addition, RCT has invited the opportunity to acknowledge the wonder and mystery in life and to integrate these experiences as meaningful aspects of living. In this respect, to recognize and affirm is to respect and give life. Thus, we contend that spirituality, generally, and childhood spirituality, specifically, is characterized by and develops through relationships and cultural contexts. To consider spirituality in an individual vacuum limits the scope of a theory of spiritual development.

For example, consider a young child playing in a garden. He or she is in continuous movement. Suddenly, this child stops to look at a flower she or he has never seen before, and places his or her nose into the flower to smell its aroma and gazes at its color and form. Ecstatic, this child shows off her or his new find to a nearby parent and excitedly asks many questions about the flower. This and related moments occur frequently with children who experience nature in a spiritual way replete with awe and wonder. The child in this example experienced the world in the here and now without any constraints or inhibitions. This observation of early childhood spirituality exemplifies how new experiences are transcendent, sacred, and relational. Further, this example highlights the relational component of childhood spirituality by demonstrating that
children seek spiritual knowledge from those closest to affirm their growing awareness of a new and interesting world.

**Relational Consciousness**

The concept of RC, formulated by Hay and Nye (2006), provides a relevant extension of RCT. In RC, authors described an inclusive perceptiveness that occurs naturally relative to the appreciation of intrapersonal and interpersonal domains. As such, RC provides the extended dialogue about how children learn and relate to “things, other people, him/herself, and God” (Hay & Nye, 2006, p. 113). The fundamental idea to RC is that a child begins to secure a more holistic awareness of self and context out of which can arise meaningful understandings of various personal, interpersonal, and relational experiences. For example, acknowledgment of a child’s ability to open wider doors of perception, imagination, and awareness lends permission to incorporate broader levels of experience. This more inclusive level of awareness of deep play, as Ackerman (1999) describes, can set a tone for spontaneity, creative action, and openness to new challenges. Consequently, these experiences provide linkages to the larger human drama and to the connectedness of all things (Wilber, 2007). In brief, “waking up” and observing one’s experience can facilitate the initial portal to relational awareness and spiritual awakening (Hanh, 1987). In the words of Chief Seattle, "we are all part of the large web of life—we share responsibility to this interconnection. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves" (Seattle, 1887).

Tolle (2007) and the writings on mindfulness by Mace (2007) commented on the experience of one’s momentary existence emphasizing the powerful and dynamic present. This timeless experience is a characteristic that has been seen with children as they engage in a relational connectedness of their environments (Hart, 2006; Piechowski, 2001). Consequently,
transpersonal awareness, often expressed in the aesthetics of nature, experience of wonder, pretending, and imagination, is viewed as core to a relevant theory of the spirit in the child and is seen as highlighting a prominent dimension in the understanding of child development. In brief, to notice one’s personal awareness with increased detail fosters relational sensitivity, experiences of mutuality, and imaginable possibility that furthers an emotional bonding process and the development of compassion.

Hay and Nye (2006) added that their description of a children’s spirituality encompassed four distinct dimensions: child/God consciousness, child/people consciousness, child/world consciousness, and child/subconsciousness. Each dimension indicated interpersonal and relational properties that underscored awareness of unknown forces and the transcendence of self, serving to enlarge perspective and connection with the broader mysteries of life.

RCT and RC complement one another in their conceptual meaningfulness of relationship and their extension to awareness of something greater than oneself. We postulate that a child is continuously in relationship with some aspect of life while learning to adapt to her or his context, her or his interaction with others, and her or his understanding of experience. The fluidity between RCT and RC suggests that there are distinct planes of connection that include spoken and unspoken, visible and invisible, secular and sacred, and reality-based and mystical, which are all part of a larger continuum of relationship for children (Hart, 2006; Oaklander, 1997), namely a heightened sensitivity toward knowingness of the web.

The integration of RCT and RC serves as a bridge toward relational inclusivity in which a child's awareness is matched with validation and respect as he or she makes meaning of the world. For example, children may comment on perceptions that focus on the intensity of one’s physical surroundings, which may incorporate brilliant colors, beauty, nature, and unity of one’s
CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING: CHILDREN’S SPIRITUALITY

being (Hay & Nye, 2006). Further, this interrelationship of RCT and RC can also be captured in
the unique language young children use to express their awareness of the Creator, God, or higher
entity. For example, a five-year-old girl stated, “Sometimes I feel like I am in a special place and
everywhere, like in the sky, in the clouds, outside, and inside my house, there is a really big
person who is watching and taking care of me”. In additional, a ten-year-old boy emphasized his
belief in a higher entity through connection to nature, “I talk with the flowers and the birds a lot.
They always tell me nice things and that their boss, [God], is a really good guy.” As such,
observing how relationships, people, and events are connected to one another and how they can
be understood in metaphorical, mystical, or philosophical ways are primary reference points in

Experiential and Transpersonal Dimensions of Spirituality

Experience is a major component of a child’s being and a salient aspect of living in the
present moment (Oaklander, 1997). Experiential awareness includes a child’s feelings of awe,
wonderment, curiosity, joy, and relational beingness; and a child’s ability to create a world
through imaginative play (Davies, 2001; Eaude; 2004; Oaklander, 1997). Other aspects include
blurring of consensual reality and fantasy, and in many cases, the opportunity to live in moment-
to-moment experience. Ackerman (1999) described salient aspects of childhood experience as a
special form of deep play, a natural process that leads to transcendence, creativity, feelings of
ecstasy, and a need for the sacred.

Many of the characteristics unique to a relational consciousness and a component of
children’s spirituality can be identified with what has been frequently described as mystical
experience (Brand, 2002; Wulff, 2000). Bucke (1961) described mystical experiences to include
several distinct aspects: ineffability, an inadequacy of words to describe this heightened state;
profound and authoritative knowledge or insight; transience of experience; and passivity to and surrendering control in the face of a superior power. These experiences become less relevant and subsequently less credible as a child begins to age (Schlarb, 2007). We argue that transpersonal experiences and relationships are intricately connected and form a basis of knowing, exploration, and awareness for children.

An additional premise in our emerging theory is the awareness of unseen forces, such as a sacred and divine presence, that are a cornerstone to human experience (Helminiak, 2008; Jones, Wainwright, & Yarnolds, 1986; Walsh, 1999). This cornerstone is highlighted by a child’s non-socialized awareness of a reality greater than oneself (Coles, 1990). A seven-year-old boy poignantly demonstrated his belief in the unseen, “I just feel like the Holy Spirit is inside me, like a light that turns on in my bedroom. He lets me see what's there.” Likewise, an eight-year-old girl illustrated her experience of wonder and curiosity in the mundane, “I just feel alive when I wake up in the morning, like the air is fresh, the sun is shining on me and the trees and the flowers outside are talking to me.”

As such, we suggest that a transpersonal or mystical dimension of human experience is a salient and relevant outcome of relational consciousness and provides a prominent level of meaning to the understanding of one’s place in the larger collective (Slife, Hope, & Nebeker, 1999). This interweaving process heightens literacy in one’s personal awareness and meaning in one’s relationships, life events, and community. Hart (2003) indicated that a sense of wonder and cultivation of mindfulness are significant ingredients that result from a spiritually literate individual who has embraced the intuitive as a natural course of life. This cultivation increases awareness, caring for the universe, and a desire to participate in the transformation of one’s
community (Helminiak, 2008). However, a major question remains unanswered: What are the benefits of a spiritual understanding of children?

**Psychological Benefits of a Spiritual Understanding**

Writers have commented on the advantages of acknowledging the spiritual lives of children (Coles, 1990; Hart, 2003, Oaklander, 1997; Taggart, 2001). For example, Champagne (2003) studied 60 children in daily life situations. Champagne observed children’s imaginative activities and transcending behaviors through the games they initiated. This author found that children’s games demonstrated playful and creative imitation of others, use of symbols, and continuous imaginative experience in which fantasy fused with consensual reality. Other results indicated that in “child’s play,” children worked to understand the world around them, demonstrated awareness of their socialized reality, engaged in quests for meaning, and rehearsed life scripts through imaginary roles. Consequently, relationship and transcendence were found to be primary aspects of play that can frequently prompt existential questions commonly asked by children, such as: Where did I come from? Who is God? What do I say to angels who speak with me? (Piechowski, 2001). It is in this context that the connection between self and others becomes especially prominent. Therefore, children learned to navigate the importance of relationships and their meaning for lifelong inquiry about the world and beyond (Furrow et al., 2004).

Exploring spirituality with children can cultivate their emotional resiliency, which can serve as a protective factor in managing life challenges (Pearmain, 2005; Smith & Denton, 2005; Spilka et al., 2003). Spirituality introduces a holistic perspective that allows a child to understand that he or she is not alone in the world and that there are greater forces surrounding and impacting his or her life, which emphasizes hope and belief in something greater than the child (Plante & Sherman, 2001). Consequently, cultivating a spiritual base can help children
internalize sacred images, prayers, affirmations, and emotional states and can enhance feelings of wellness, security, and groundedness. (King & Furrow, 2004; Smith & Denton, 2005).

In addition, recognition of spirituality in children serves as an affirmation of identity, which may provide context and meaning to each developmental stage (King & Furrow, 2004). Spiritual meaning and identity can add stabilization and clarity as inevitable change occurs in the lives of children and their families. In addition, spirituality can serve as a primary connection to others whose beliefs, traditions, and cultures may be different but, nonetheless, lay a foundation for familiarity, friendship, and mutual understanding (Desrosiers, Kelly, & Miller, 2011; Taggart, 2001). As such, learning to honor diverse religious and spiritual belief systems can initiate more peaceful co-existence among communities (Helminiak, 2008).

Further, Long (2000) argued that children naturally live in an altered state of consciousness by virtue of their propensity toward play, imagination, and belief in unseen forces. Similarly, Duff (2003) reported that a spirituality of children can help to set the stage for the development of a child’s creative core through guided awareness, mentoring, and realization of human potential, which can stimulate imagination and a deepened understanding of children’s own abilities. As such, children’s self-awareness of their capacities, developed through relationships, prompts social consciousness alerting children to the importance of relational connection and responsibility to others (Desrosiers et al., 2011; Halstead & Halstead, 2004). Therefore, relational connection to others serves to enhance children’s commitment to their communities and creates consciousness, engagement, and productive behavior in the preservation of life resources (Frendo, 2007).

Spirituality opens the self to creative and affirming processes that can support further exploration of personal and psychological strengths. This union can profoundly deepen with
owned identities, underscore unique abilities, and cultivate relational consciousness as a personal and developmental resource (Hay & Nye, 2006; Hay, 2000). Defining the psychological benefits of spirituality initiates a practical inquiry: How can psychotherapists incorporate a developmental understanding of spirituality into their clinical work with children and adolescents?

**Clinical Implications**

We maintain that spirituality is a fundamental dimension of human experience (Jones et al., 1986; Walsh, 1999). Therefore, clinicians should routinely assess the role of spirituality in all clients’ lives, general functioning, and presenting concerns (Hathaway, 2003). Recognition and acknowledgement of a spiritual dimension can be significant in a developmental understanding of children (Miller, 2013). Thus, we provide several ways that psychotherapists can incorporate a developmental understanding of spirituality into their provision of applied psychology with children and adolescents.

First, commentaries made by children about their growing awareness of the world relationally, interpersonally, and metaphorically are relevant observations that deserve validation, inclusion, and affirmation by practitioners (Piechowski, 2001; Schlarb, 2007). This consensual validation can allow a child to feel supported by an adult in a professional setting, can enhance the development of a strong therapeutic rapport, and can foster a growing awareness of the interconnectedness and interdependence of life (Taggart, 2001). As indicated by Hay and Nye (2006) and Kielty Briggs and colleagues (2011), a child’s developing literacy about an awareness greater than him or herself should be understood and acknowledged as the model for later life spirituality. Because this developmental awareness and birthright becomes less relevant and characteristically ignored as part of the socialization process, it is significant to capture
spiritual innocence and validate its relevance before a more restrictive consensual reality takes hold (Schlarb, 2007).

Second, it is important to support and encourage understanding the relational aspect of a child’s inquiry (Jordan, 2010). A relational inquiry can imply a consciousness, as defined by Hay and Nye (2006), that highlights a self-reflective union of I-others, I-Self, I-self, I-world, and I-God. Recognition of a child’s relational conscientiousness can clarify the important developmental, emotional, familial, and psycho-spiritual linkages that may be evident with a child (Roehlkepartain et al., 2006) and foster the evolution of a spiritually literate individual. Further, a pathway of understanding that may validate feelings of competency, emotional connectedness toward others, and relationship to a higher spiritual source can follow (Hart, 2006; Pearmain, 2005). For example, a nine year old female children commented, "I believe that when I go with my family to visit my grandmother in the mountains where she lives, there is a spirit in the forest that makes me feel safe and special".

Third, recognition of a spiritual dimension in children can be important in developing a clinical ear for the sacred and profound in the experience of childhood (Gearon, 2006). Consequently, the understanding of unique, metaphorical language that children frequently use is perhaps a transpersonal door to a fuller disclosure of depth for both therapist and client (Bartolini, 2007; Washburn, 1995). Writings on mindfulness (Mace, 2007; Hanh, 1987) referred to a reflexive process of “being aware of one’s awareness,” which permits an individual to be enveloped in the experience of the present moment. This “felt sense” can be a salient process in assisting children to cope effectively with distressing or difficult life events.

Fourth, it is important to acknowledge a child’s cultural, familial, and individual uniqueness in order to frame appropriately the context of his or her religious experience
(Cervantes & Parham, 2005; Yeh, Hunter, Madan-Bahel, Chiang, & Arora, 2004). In brief, a child’s spirituality cannot be divorced from her or his personal dynamics, which often reveals a “signature” or key that unlocks the layers and meanings otherwise hidden from the naïve listener. Attending to the sociocultural background of children and prior exposure to religious and spiritual views can initiate a relevant opportunity toward meaningful dialogue about potential conflict between behavior, religious values, and presenting complaints.

Fifth, it is important to view children from a more holistic perspective rather than a one-dimensional, problem-focused format (Oaklander, 1997). Problem-oriented methods of assessing children can significantly decrease an opportunity of delving into a more complete understanding, involving a child’s inner life experiences and awareness of his or her relationships to others. Recognition of a child’s unique personality and related connectedness to others can be a powerful mindset in appreciating the complexities of human experience. Having this experience acknowledged by an adult in a professional setting can validate a growing awareness of a child’s relational consciousness and a deeper appreciation for the interdependence of life.

Finally, the therapist must recognize his or her own spiritual connection. A spiritual exploration needs to occur in order for the counseling professional to understand a relational consciousness in children (Hay & Nye, 2006; Miller, 2013; Oaklander, 1997). One cannot foster a spiritual journey in children without exploring that journey oneself beforehand (Gold, 2010).

These clinical implications suggest that there are unique features of a therapeutic relationship that honors the spiritual journeys of children. One must appreciate the profound understanding of consciousness that is the birthright and mainstay of human experience. Recognizing and honoring the spirituality of children can deepen the innate awareness of this
developmental process and permit practitioners, parents, and spirituality literate individuals to foster a more relevant and universal compassion in our communities (Heminiak, 2008).
References


handbook of spiritual development in childhood and adolescence (pp. 421-434).


Table 1

*Relationships Between Cognitive-Spiritual Components, Relational Cultural Theory, Relational Consciousness, and Transpersonal Experience*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Cognitive-Spiritual Components</th>
<th>Relational Cultural Theory</th>
<th>Relational Consciousness</th>
<th>Transpersonal Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>Socialization by family and religious denomination</td>
<td>Growth in and through relationships</td>
<td>Increased inter-awareness between self and others, places, things, and Creator</td>
<td>Relational awareness of secular and mystical/scared space and connection to the larger collective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>States of consciousness</td>
<td>Increasing consciousness over life-span</td>
<td>Mutually broadened and deepened experiences through relationship</td>
<td>Heightened perceptiveness and consciousness</td>
<td>Blurring of reality and fantasy, creation of one’s own world through play, and mindfulness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective states</td>
<td>Subjugated to cognitive meaning-making</td>
<td>Mutual empathy and empowerment</td>
<td>Augmented experience of the every day</td>
<td>Ineffability, awe, wonderment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-reflection</td>
<td>Increasing ability to self-reflect on spiritual/religious identity and behavior over the lifespan</td>
<td>Genuineness and authenticity</td>
<td>Deep reflectiveness on one’s own experience</td>
<td>Authoritative insight</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>