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Summary of Key Points

“Spirit is the thing within us that makes us, us. Spirituality is the way we connect our ‘inner us’ to everything else, including other people’s inner ‘usness’.” — Leanne Hadley

“Spirituality, or the spirit, is the innate light or life within that is nurtured through love, facilitates connections and relationships, and expresses itself by ways of wonder, joy and compassion, among many other virtues and manifestations.” — Mata-McMahon, Haslip & Schein, (2018)

“A deep sense of spirituality creates recognition, within individuals, of a sacred meaning to all of life. This understanding contributes to a feeling of significance of self as well as of others. This includes a healthy view of self, a thoughtfulness, compassion, and empathy for others, and a fundamental consideration for the well-being of family and community..” — (Robbins, as cited by Kashin, 2017)

Schein (2018) describes spiritual development as ‘a system that can be nurtured in many ways throughout our lifetime.’

Spiritual Development in Young Children

What is Spiritual Development?

- Key characteristics of spirituality
 - Living in the moment
 - Reflecting on inner self
 - Connecting to self and others
 - Showing compassion and love to self and others (Nelson, 2009)
- Allows for diverse belief systems with both internal and external factors (Baskin, 2016; Mata, 2014)
- Spirituality and religion are different – religion is part of spirituality for some children and adults
- Spirituality is unique to each individual

Domains Of Childhood Spirituality (HART, 2005)

- Wonder (Awe)
- Wondering (Questioning)
- Wisdom (Thinking)
- Relationality (Between you and me)

Holistic - Whole Child Development

- Nurture spirituality along with physical, emotional, social and cognitive domains
- Integrate spiritual development into children's play
- Importance of exposure to nature for spiritual development
- Sometimes ignored because of emphasis on cognitive and physical development
- Vital to human development
- Essential component in aspects of human life, health, and education

Links to Emotional Well Being in Children

- Children's decreasing emotional wellness is directly linked to their limited opportunities to discover and express their identity and spirituality (Westerlund, 2016).
- Spirituality is associated with feelings of connectedness, living presently, compassion, love, and peace (Bone, 2008).
- Children's natural curiosity and wonder about spiritual aspects of life helps them better understand their experiences and can lead to a sense of hope and comfort during difficult times (Bone, 2008; Westerlund, 2016).
- Originates from indigenous ways of knowing
- Provides opportunities for relationship building and learning

Factors That Cultivate Spirituality - SCHEIN

- Authentic and mutually supportive relationships
- An uncluttered classroom with beautiful spaces
- Respect for order in these spaces
- Opportunities for children to have quiet moments for reflection
- Willingness to explore big questions and unexpected events together
- Introduction of special objects suitable for exploration and play in the classroom community/nature

Benefits of Fostering Spirituality

- Have significantly more positive markers for thriving including an increased sense of meaning and purpose, and higher levels of academic success (Miller, as cited by Richardson Dress, 2020)
- 60% less likely to be depressed as teenagers (Richardson Dress, 2020)
- 40% less likely to use and abuse substances later in life (Richardson Dress, 2020)
- Spirituality helps us slow down, reflect, appreciate our world and others and ourselves

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