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Feeling Good, Living Life: A spiritual health measure for young children.

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ABSTRACT

Following previous work on the spiritual health of secondary students, the author wondered if it was possible to develop a spiritual health measure for younger children. Taking Fisher's model of spiritual health as the basis, items were developed to reflect relationships with self, with others, with the environment, and with a god. The children's ideals for spiritual health (what makes them Feel Good) were compared with their lived experience (Living Life) to ascertain their levels of spiritual health. Factor analyses on responses from 1080 students in 14 schools (State, Catholic, Independent and Christian Community Schools) in Victoria and Western Australia are reported in this paper.

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INTRODUCTION

There have been many spiritual health measures developed over the last 20 years (reported in Fisher, Francis and Johnson, 2000), but an extensive literature search revealed only one reference to any attempt to measure the spiritual well-being (SWB) of young children (Ziegler, 1999). Details of Zeigler's work are rather sketchy as it was reported as a dissertation abstract and apparently has not yet been published in a readily accessible journal. Ziegler developed an instrument which 'provided a broad array of health and social skills information' including an aspect of spiritual health for 174 fourth and fifth graders in four American public schools. In addition, two references to a Student's Life Satisfaction Scale (SLSS) were found for work with middle school students (mean age 12.6 years) (Huebner, 1994; Gilman and Huebner, 1997). The SLSS addressed students' self-concept but not their spiritual well-being. Wiklund *et al.* (1994) also developed a well-being measure for 9, 11 and 13 year-olds, which included a self-perception measure but did not assess spiritual well-being.

Considerable effort has been expended in qualitative research into aspects of spirituality related to children's development (Coles, 1990; Hay and Nye, 1998; Nesbitt, 2000; Ota and Erricker, 1995; Ratcliff, 2000). Qualitative methods definitely have advantages in reaching in-depth understanding of a concept or person, but are generally very time-consuming. They are also open to the possibility of bias by the manner in which the researcher asks the questions, and/or the number of questions asked in a particular area of interest. Quantitative studies can supplement qualitative ones by providing a large amount of data, relatively painlessly, in a short space of time, with the appearance of greater objectivity.

In reference to quantitative studies, Moberg (1984) clearly pointed out that using an index or a scale to measure any area

represents an abstraction from reality. How to walk the tightrope of trying to avoid misleading reductionism that implies one has fully measured the important parameters and yet of being sufficiently effective to fulfill scientific and practical needs is a particularly acute problem in dealing with a complexly multifarious topic like SWB.

Hungelmann *et al.* (1996) reported 'spiritual well-being is a complex construct.' However, they attest that people's responses to items on questionnaires 'can provide clues to possible concerns....[which after] thoughtful discussion [by the carer]...can lead to greater awareness of strengths and personal resources on the part of the individual...that can be mutually incorporated into the planning of care.'

Following qualitative research with teachers investigating what they thought constituted spiritual health and well-being (Fisher, 1998), the challenge was faced of developing a spiritual health measure for secondary school students (Fisher 1999a, Gomez & Fisher 2003). The resultant Spiritual Well-Being Questionnaire has a distinct advantage over other spiritual health measures in that it provides an instrument which helps investigate the quality of four sets of relationships that people have with themselves, others, the environment and/or with God. A person's spiritual health is reflected in the quality of relationships that s/he has in the domains of spiritual well-being s/he embraces (Fisher 1999b). Qualitative student-centred research in the UK (Hay and Nye, 1998) brought forth the notion of *relational consciousness* at the same time that Fisher was developing his concept of *quality of relationships* for spiritual well-being. There are marked similarities between these two ideas.

The project reported herein aimed at developing a quantitative spiritual health measure for students aged from five to twelve years of age, which would be a quick, convenient way to help teachers reflect on the quality of relationships which constitute young children's spiritual health. Having experienced the joy of developing SHALOM with secondary school students, this author was motivated to develop a suitable instrument to help caring adults understand how they can assess, then hopefully address, the quality of life of young children in their care.

METHOD

Survey research was used to gather data for building an instrument to measure the spiritual well-being of pre-adolescents. Fisher's model of spiritual health (Fisher 1999b) was used to develop 40 items relating to the four domains of spiritual well-being – 10 in each of the Personal, Communal, Environmental, and Transcendental domains, that is, for students relating with themselves, other people, the environment and/or with their god.

The 40 items were included in each of two components of the developing instrument, one component investigating what students believe influences their Feeling Good, the other reflecting their perceptions of Living Life in the four domains. According to Wiley (1996), 'It has been suggested that when persons focus on their spiritual sides, they are focusing on the way they feel rather than specifically how they function.' It was felt to be important to assess both the ideal (Feeling Good) and lived expression (Living Life) of the students' spiritual well-being, hence the two components of FGLL. Comparing students' responses on these two measures will help teachers assess the degree of internal harmony or quality of life for the students.

Developing a method, which permitted non-readers to complete a questionnaire accurately, was fascinating. The researcher knew the questions had to be read to these students, but getting groups of up to 35 five and six-year-olds to stay focussed for 30 minutes presented a challenge. In order to keep the youngest students focussed, each question was read aloud twice. Older primary children worked with groups of four to six junior primary students, ensuring that they had a piece of paper under the question being read. The respondents completed their answers by circling one of five responses, following the instructions, for Feeling Good:

Please **show how good each** of the following **makes you feel** by drawing a **circle** around **your best answer** for **each** question.

There are five answers to choose from:

- YES** if it makes you feel REALLY GOOD
- yes** if it makes you feel good a little bit
- ?** if you are not sure how good it makes you feel
- no** if it does not make you feel good, just a little bit
- NO** if it REALLY does NOT make you feel GOOD

The responses for Living Life were modified to reflect the frequency with which students participated in each of the activities listed in the 40 items:

Please **show how much you do** each of the following by drawing a **circle** around **your best answer** for **each** question.

There are five answers to choose from:

- YES** if you do this ALL the TIME or very often
- Yes** if you do this fairly often
- S** if you do this sometimes
- No** if you hardly ever do this
- NO** if you NEVER do this

The non-readers were able to follow the numbers, as well as identify the BIG or small affirmative and negative responses and answer accordingly, being taken through the questionnaire as a group one item at a time.

It is not easy to gain access to students in schools for purposes of research (Harrell *et al.*, 2000). As well as obtaining permission from the Victorian Department of Education, a Director of Catholic Education, the School of Nursing Research Advisory Committee and the Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Ballarat, permission was required from the school Principals as was support from the school communities (staff, parents and students) for this project to proceed. Through perseverance, data were collected from 1080 students, aged 5 to 12 years, in 14 primary schools (in Victoria, 165 in 4 State schools, 297 in 3 Catholic schools, 131 in 2 Independent schools and 288 in 4 Christian Community schools; and in Western Australia, 199 in 2 State schools).

The goal of the purposive and convenience sample was to have a diversity of respondents, rather than a representative sample of students. Since grouping the questionnaire items into robust factors was considered most important, a key goal of this research was to develop a

sensitive instrument, which accurately assessed aspects of students' spiritual well-being. Therefore, the results shown in this study do not necessarily reflect the views of the total population in any given school or school type.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE FEELING GOOD, LIVING LIFE (FGLL) INSTRUMENT

Factor analysis.

Exploratory factor analysis. Using SPSS procedures, a principal-components analysis conducted on the 40 item FGLL yielded seven factors for Feeling Good and eight factors for Living Life. Oblimin Rotation with Kaiser Normalization was used, as the factors were found to be correlated (see details in Table III). Each of the factors had an eigenvalue greater than 1.00, accounting overall for 55% and 57% of the variance on each of the components of FGLL respectively.

Refining Feeling Good, Living Life. In order to reduce the number of items to make a more manageable instrument, four criteria were used for the selection of items to be retained: (a) a factor loading of at least .45 on the primary factor in at least one of the sectors of FGLL, (b) a difference of at least .3 between the loading of the item on the primary factor with its value on any other factor, (c) correlations of less than .9 with all other items loading on the same factor (to eliminate item redundancy), (d) more than three items per factor (to yield a useable mean value for each factor/subscale) (from Stephenson, 2000). A total of 26 items satisfied these criteria and were retained for the second stage of the refinement of FGLL.

A principal-components analysis (using Oblimin Rotation with Kaiser Normalization) conducted on the 26 remaining items in the FGLL yielded four factors for each of Feeling Good and Living Life. The factors each had an eigenvalue greater than 1.00, and accounted overall for 58% and 59% of the variance on each of the components of FGLL respectively.

In order to give equal representation to each of the four factors, the four items with the highest factor loading in each factor were extracted to form the final 16-item version of FGLL.

Table I. Factor Pattern Matrix for Feeling Good using Oblimin rotation

item Does the following make you feel good?	family	god	environ- ment	self- concern	Commun alities
Loving your family	.66	-.02	-.06	.19	.56
Knowing your family love you	.73	-.04	-.05	.18	.66
Spending time with your family	.71	-.06	.13	-.03	.59
Knowing you belong to a family	.78	.02	.06	-.08	.58
Talking with your god	-.07	-.87	-.03	.15	.77
Knowing your god is a friend	.02	-.92	.01	-.03	.85
Thinking about your god	.05	-.90	.01	-.05	.81
Knowing your god cares for you	.03	-.91	.004	-.10	.81
Watching a sunset or sunrise	-.16	-.08	.61	.31	.54
Being in the garden	.10	.01	.76	-.05	.60
Going for a walk in a park	.01	-.03	.72	-.03	.52
Looking at the stars and moon	.08	.05	.83	-.05	.68
Feeling happy	.03	.02	.004	.69	.49
When people say you are good	.11	.005	-.08	.68	.50
Thinking life is fun	.18	-.10	.11	.42	.36
Knowing people like you	-.02	.01	.07	.71	.52
extraction sums of squared loadings	4.98	2.27	1.59	1.00	
% variance	31.1	14.2	9.90	6.28	
α - reliability values	.76	.84	.75	.71	

NB The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test of sampling adequacy yielded a result of .87, with Bartlett's Test of Sphericity being significant at the .000 level.

The *environment* item '*looking at a waterfall,*' was not retained as it did not have as practical an application to everyday life as did the other items representing this domain.

Final 16-item version of FGLL. The results of principal-components analyses (using Oblimin Rotation with Kaiser Normalization) conducted on the final 16-item version of FGLL are shown in Table I (Feeling Good) and Table II (Living Life).

Table II. Factor Pattern Matrix for Living Life using Oblimin Rotation

item Do you...	family	god	environ- ment	self- concern	Commun- alities
love your family?	.75	-.01	.05	.09	.59
know your family love you?	.76	-.10	.06	.04	.62
spend time with your family?	.54	.001	-.14	.17	.46
know you belong to a family?	.81	.04	-.10	-.13	.62
talk with your god?	-.08	-.86	-.06	.003	.74
know your god is a friend?	.05	-.90	.05	.01	.82
think about your god?	-.04	-.90	-.05	-.03	.81
know your god cares for you?	.07	-.90	.05	.01	.83
watch a sunset or sunrise?	-.02	.02	-.77	.06	.60
be in the garden?	.03	.00	-.68	.07	.52
go for a walk in a park?	-.02	-.07	-.76	-.01	.59
look at the stars and moon?	.06	.01	-.84	-.08	.68
feel happy?	.14	.02	.10	.70	.53
hear people say you are good?	-.18	.05	-.06	.80	.59
think life is fun?	.14	-.08	-.09	.56	.47
know people like you?	.07	-.09	-.08	.65	.54
extraction sums of squared loadings	5.18	2.11	1.58	1.16	
% variance	32.3	13.2	9.89	7.2	
α - reliability values	.74	.82	.76	.72	

NB The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test of sampling adequacy yielded a result of .86, with Bartlett's Test of Sphericity being significant at the .000 level.

Subscale reliabilities.

Internal reliability of factors in each sector of FGLL. Alpha reliability values for the four-item factors on each of the components of FGLL ranged in value from .71 to .84 (shown in the above tables). Item-total correlations ranged from .66 to .91 within these factors.

A correlation matrix of the FGLL factors is presented in Table III. As expected, each subscale was significantly correlated with the composite measure and with each other. The significant interscale correlations suggest that the factors all measure aspects of an underlying spiritual well-being construct.

Table III. Intercorrelations between factors of FGLL and composite measures.

Feeling Good factors						
	factors	self- concern	family	Environ ment	god	FG composite measure
Living Life factors	self-concern	.416**	.518**	.355**	.255**	.635**
	family	.450**	.588**	.340**	.343**	.664**
	environment	.420**	.342**	.655**	.288**	.685**
	god	.293**	.345**	.300**	.817**	.702**
	LL composite measure	.674**	.632**	.686**	.713**	.720**

NB **. Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

Test-retest reliability. The 16-item Feeling Good, Living Life instrument was tested on a whole school population with responses being obtained from 201 students aged 5-12 years. The re-test was held one week after the initial test. On the Feeling Good and Living Life components of this spiritual well-being measure, the test-retest correlation values (Pearson r) were all significant ($p < .000$) for the four factors in each of the two components of FGLL: values for self-

concern, $r = .56$ and $.59$; for family, $r = .50$ and $.55$; for environment, $r = .66$ and $.60$; and for the god factor, $r = .72$ and $.78$. These results show the consistency of the students' responses over time, indicating the reliability of Feeling Good, Living Life as a spiritual health measure for pre-adolescent students.

Instrument validity.

Face validity was probed in the early stages of development of FGLL through careful examination of the responses to each item of FGLL from seven children (aged 4-10) in order to ensure clarity of meaning. The questions were clear and effective. The week after my four and a half year old grandson had trialled the questionnaire, with my assistance, he went up to his father with pencil and paper in hand and asked, "Dad how do you feel when you watch a sunset with a friend?" From experiencing FGLL, Liam had encapsulated three of the key components of spiritual well-being into one question, showing that he had accurately interpreted its meaning through the language, expression, etc in the instrument (Stanton *et al.*, 2000).

Content validity. As the scales were developed from Fisher's model of spiritual health and well-being, the four domains of spiritual well-being had their own internal validity. This model was developed from extensive literature review and empirical studies with secondary school staff (Fisher 1998). The model was then used as the basis for the development of a Spiritual Health And Life-Orientation Measure (SHALOM). Empirical studies of SHALOM with secondary school students (Fisher 1999a) and higher education students (Fisher 2000, Gomez & Fisher 2003) have reinforced the validity of the model of spiritual health, used in the current study.

Construct validity is partially provided for FGLL as the mean scores for the *god* factor are higher for the students in the Catholic and Christian Community Schools than in the State and Independent schools, which would be expected in schools with overtly Christian ethos.

CONCLUSION

Feeling Good, Living Life was developed to provide a screening or assessment tool for teachers and other carers of young children to facilitate their understanding of aspects of an individual's or group of children's spiritual well-being.

Feeling Good, Living Life has been shown to be a robust spiritual health measure for young children, giving a balanced view across four domains of human experience. The items which cohered to form the respective factors (of *self-concern*, *family*, *environment* and relation with *god*) reflect underlying phenomena associated with spiritual aspects of quality of life. These factors neither fully make up, nor fully measure, all features of the phenomena.

Feeling Good, Living Life is a relatively quick, convenient, valid, reliable instrument which can be used with individuals, and small or large groups of young children to gain insight into important aspects of their spiritual well-being. Carers can be made aware that for some children aspects of life measured by this instrument are not positive experiences. Improving awareness, by using FGLL can be seen as the first step to enhancing their quality of life.

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