Nurturing students' spiritual well-being: caring for the whole child

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Abstract:

Spiritual well-being is reflected in up to four sets of relationships that people have, namely with themselves, with others, with the environment, and/or with God. Details are provided about quantitative measures for SWB used with students and teachers in Victorian Christian primary and secondary schools. The results obtained are presented and discussed. Case studies illustrate how such quantitative measures can be used to inform pastoral care of students to help ensure the holistic development of each child in our schools.

Key words

Spirituality, pastoral care, assessment, Christian schools

Brief Bio:

Over the last 46 years John Fisher has been a teacher, principal, lecturer and researcher in science, education and health. John has focussed his interest on spiritual health for the last 15 years and he is currently completing his second doctorate in this area.

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Introduction

The pastoral care of students in our schools is a matter of importance and has been highlighted by the recent introduction of the National School Chaplaincy Programme by the Australian government. Nurturing spiritual well-being is a significant element of pastoral care and the question arises 'Do we have the right and/or responsibility of nurturing children's spiritual well-being in schools?' It is argued here that we do have the right and the responsibility to do so.

Ways of measuring this entity have been developed and used in an ongoing research program. One aspect of this is to compare the spiritual well-being of students and teachers and the implications for the relationship between them. The results of an investigation in some Christian schools in Victoria are presented. Further evidence of the usefulness of the measures to inform pastoral care is provided by two case studies.

Nature of Spiritual Well-Being

The expression 'spiritual well-being' (SWB) is reported to have first been used by the National Coalition on Aging, in Washington DC, where it was described as 'the affirmation of life in a relationship with God, self, community and environment that nurtures and celebrates wholeness' (NICA, 1975). Through interviews with 98 secondary school educators in 22 schools in Victoria, it was found that relationships in these four areas can be considered to have two related components of knowledge and inspiration (Fisher 1999a). The notion of progressive synergism was also proposed to help explain the interrelationship between the domains of SWB. This notion implies that the more embracing domains of SWB not only build on, but also build up, the ones they include.

In the model displayed as Figure 1 (Fisher 1999a), the quality or rightness of relationship, in each of the four domains, constitutes a person's SWB in that domain. Different people embrace the four domains to varying extents, depending on their world-view and belief systems.

Figure 1. Spiritual Well-Being – expressed by quality of relationships in each DOMAIN
Knowledge aspects of each domain are written in **bold type**, at the top of each cell.
Inspiration aspects of each domain are written in *italics*, in the centre of each cell.
Expressions of well-being in each domain are in **roman type**, at the base of each cell

Figure 1 aims to include all world-views. Rationalists do not acknowledge religion or transcendent aspects of SWB described here as ‘inspiration.’ As such, the ‘knowledge’ components that Rationalists acknowledge are encased in clear balloons in the figure. Other world-views are more expansive than that of Rationalists. For more detail see Fisher (2000).

Do we have the Right &/or Responsibility of Nurturing Children's SWB in Schools?

When Curriculum and Standards Framework I was developed in Victoria in 1994, it was the first time that spiritual well-being of students had featured in official curriculum documents. It mirrored this inclusion in national and other state's documents at that time. However, when pruning the crowded curriculum in 2000, the writers of

CSF II deleted references to students' mental and spiritual well-being in Health & Physical Education and Studies of Society and Environment components.

The window of opportunity supporting the holistic development of children, ... from 1994, appears to have closed somewhat in 2000. The HPE curriculum document [and others] no longer supports the vital aspects of human development (ie the head and heart) at its core. (Fisher 2001a, p.7).

In the development of the latest curriculum initiative, Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS), the authors continue to ignore The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century, which states, 'These goals [of schooling] provide a foundation for the intellectual, physical, social, *spiritual*, moral and aesthetic development of young Australians' (MCEETYA, 1999). VELS extends the emphasis on what humans can *do*, rather than how they can *be*.

VELS has a solitary reference to 'spiritual dimensions' in exploring the 'Indigenous perspectives in Australian history' (VELS, Discipline-based learning, Humanities/History 2005, p.12). Further on in this unit, one can find several references to beliefs and (cultural) values and even a reference to religions. Values and beliefs are also mentioned in the Physical, Personal and Social Learning Strand - Interpersonal Development (VELS, VCAA 2005). From these references, it is possible to infer that some aspects of spiritual development, as defined by the model in this paper, have a place within VELS, which purportedly 'describe what is essential for all students to achieve from Prep to Year 10 in Victorian schools.' Teachers in Christian schools in Victoria need to see VELS as a basic framework to which need to be added psychological and spiritual well-being to care for the whole child.

'Education, properly understood, is a spiritual activity' (Rodger 1991, p.13) and according to Marfleet, 'it would seem morally reprehensible to deny a spiritual education to the young' (1992, p.25). Hull contends that 'teachers must provide ways

for young people to understand and accept their own spirituality so as to free them for human awareness in the teeth of the cultural rejection of spiritual and religious claims' (1993, p.19).

Acknowledging these calls for education in spirituality, we need to look at what this entails. Wright expressed the view that

a critical spiritual education does not imply a modernist analytical approach that inevitably destroys the spiritual dimension in a haze of suspicion, but rather an education for discernment that recognises the material content of a diversity of spiritual traditions, and leads the child towards spiritual wisdom through a pedagogical dialectic of nurture and critique (1997, p.17).

Rather than an either/or choice in or out of religious education (RE), Hill contends, 'Promoting spiritual development requires an across-the-curriculum strategy....it also requires the specific study of world-views and notions of the spiritual in a subject such as RE. Both strategies are necessary' (1989, p.178). A qualitative study of 98 educators (Fisher 2001b) and a quantitative study of 144 secondary school staff in Victoria (Fisher 2001c) indicated that spiritual health had a place in the school curriculum.

It appears we have the right and responsibility to nurture students' well-being in our schools (together with parents and the wider community).

Ways of Measuring Spiritual Well-Being

As people embrace each of the four different domains of SWB to varying extents, depending on their beliefs and world-view, Fisher developed spiritual well-being questionnaires (SWBQs), which help ascertain the relative importance of each domain. The Spiritual Health And Life-Orientation Measure (SHALOM) was initially developed with secondary school students in Victoria (Fisher, 1999b) and validated

with secondary school and university students (in Australia, UK and Hong Kong), and nurses (in Victoria), church attendees, workers in a university and a manufacturing industry (in Ballarat) (Gomez and Fisher 2003), with a total of 4462 people. SHALOM comprises 20 items, with five in each of the four domains of Personal, Communal, Environmental and Transcendental well-being.

The Personal SWB items referred to *sense of identity, self-awareness, joy, inner peace, and meaning in life*. The Communal SWB items referred to *love, forgiveness, trust, respect and kindness towards other people*. The Environmental SWB items referred to *connection, oneness, harmony with the environment, sensing awe and 'magic' in the environment*. The Transcendental SWB items referred to *personal relationship with the Divine/God, worship of the Creator, oneness and peace with God, and prayer life*. Therefore it is often referred to as the 'God-factor'.

Each item in SHALOM is scored on a five-point Likert scale from 1 = very low to 5 = very high in response to:

- a.) how important each item is for your *ideal* of spiritual well-being, and
- b.) how you *feel* each item reflects your *personal experience* most of the time.

The Junior SWBQ (called Feeling Good, Living Life - FGLL) was developed with 1080 primary school pupils aged 5-12 years in Victoria and Western Australia (Fisher 2004). It is made up of 16 items, with four items in each domain of spiritual well-being.

The items in FGLL are more concrete in keeping with the conceptual levels of pre-adolescents. They never-the-less refer to the four domains of SWB shown in Figure 1. Personal SWB items for FGLL relate to *feeling happy, hearing people say you are good, thinking life is fun, knowing people like you*. Family are the significant others for pre-adolescents. The Communal SWB items refer to *loving and being loved by family, spending time with and knowing you belong to a family*. The Environmental SWB items

refer to *watching a sunset or sunrise, being in a garden, going for a walk in a park and looking at stars and moon*. The Transcendental SWB items refer to *thinking about and talking with your god, and knowing your god is a friend, who cares for you*. Each item in FGLL is also scored on a five-point Likert scale.

The Quality Of Life Influences Survey (QOLIS) was developed by considering who it was within each of four categories (of home, school, church and community) that had greatest influence on students' relationships with self, others, nature and God, i.e., four domains of spiritual well-being. For example, the people in school include teacher, principal, religion teacher, etc. Each item on QOLIS has a four -point Likert response from 0 = never to 3 = all of the time (Fisher 2004b).

Research Methods for Two Studies of Students' and Teachers' Views on SWB

Study 1. Students.

The research on students described here is part of a larger study, some of which is reported by Fisher (2006). Following ethics approval from the University of Ballarat (2002), a convenience sample of 11 primary schools (4 Catholic, 5 Christian, & 2 Independent schools) agreed to participate in this study. This necessitated further approvals from Directors of Catholic Education Offices, school principals and in some cases Boards, as well as parents and pupils. Even though FGLL had been developed with children aged 5 to 12 years, it was quite time-consuming working through it with younger children who could not read fluently. Pupils in Years 4 to 6, aged 8 to 12 years, were therefore chosen for this study. The 372 pupils in this study completed FGLL, QOLIS, followed by the Revised Junior Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (JEPQR) (Francis, 1996), comprised of 48 items which require Yes or No responses. These 48 items give measures of Extraversion, Neuroticism, Psychoticism and the Lie Scale (designed to detect socially desirable responding).

Responses were gathered on SHALOM and QOLIS from 1002 students aged from 12 to 18 years in 10 secondary schools in Victoria, Australia during 2002-3 (3 Catholic, 6 Christian and 1 Independent school). These secondary students also completed JEPQR and the Oxford Happiness Inventory (Hills and Argyle, 1998) to see if any relationship existed between SWB and personality and/or happiness, which have been found among university students (Gomez & Fisher 2003). Any such relationships can inform pastoral care considerations, included here in case studies near the end of the paper.

Study 2. Teachers.

SHALOM was completed by 238 teachers in 24 Christian schools in Victoria in 2005 (77 upper primary, 81 junior secondary and 80 senior secondary teachers in 7 primary only, 1 secondary only and 16 combined primary-secondary schools). As well as indicating a.) their *ideal* and b.) how they *feel* for each item on SHALOM, the teachers were also asked to show (for each of the 20 items):
c.) how much *help* you think students gain from school to develop this aspect of their lives.

Comments on statistical procedures

The QOLIS scores were converted from their original score from 0-3 to a score from 1-5 for comparison with the 5-point SWBQ scores (i.e. multiplied by 1.333 add 1). Correlations remained the same; it just made visual comparison easier.

In a recent study of 76 Christian school students in Years 6 to 12, a third column was added to SHALOM, which requested students to indicate how much help they received on each of the 20 items. These responses were collated as 'help' categories for each of the four domains of SWB. Medium, yet significant, correlations were found between these 'help' categories on the SWBQs and 'help from teachers,' using QOLIS. For example, the correlation of Personal help (Perh) and help to self from teachers (trs)

is .265, with $p=.021$; Comh – tro $r=.434$, $p=.000$; Envh – trn $r=.338$, $p=.003$; Trah – trg $r=.429$, $p=.000$. These findings provide support for the comparisons made between the different instruments in this paper.

Results

For the purposes of this paper, the results of surveys for the students in the Christian schools were selected from Study 1. They are presented along with the results for teachers from Study 2.

Personal SWB

The mean values and independent t-test results on Personal SWB for students (st) compared with teachers (tr), at upper primary (up), junior secondary (js) and senior secondary (ss) levels are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Personal SWB values and t-tests for Christian primary & secondary school students and teachers

level	up			js			ss		
SWB	st	tr	t ^{sig}	st	tr	t ^{sig}	st	tr	t ^{sig}
ideal	4.49	4.53	-.66 ^{ns}	4.03	4.27	-2.78 ^{.006}	4.12	4.43	-3.75 ^{.000}
feel	4.01	4.13	-1.70 ^{ns}	3.77	3.91	-1.72 ^{ns}	3.74	4.06	-3.62 ^{.000}
help	4.22	3.69	4.47 ^{.000}	3.73	3.58	1.15 ^{ns}	3.64	3.60	.36 ^{ns}
Ideal cf feel	13.2 ^{.000}	7.55 ^{.000}		6.46 ^{.000}	5.61 ^{.000}		7.91 ^{.000}	5.60 ^{.000}	
	rt	pr	tr-pr	rt	pr	tr-pr	rt	pr	tr-pr
help	3.81	3.21	11.4 ^{.000}	3.83	2.97	8.04 ^{.000}	3.71	2.57	8.22 ^{.000}

An inspection of Table 1 shows that the students and teachers have high *ideals* for Personal SWB, with secondary teachers scoring higher than students. Although their lived experience, or how they *feel* most of the time about their relationships with themselves, is statistically lower than their *ideals*, they still express relatively high or positive experiences in this area of life (see Table 1 for results). The primary pupils are very positive about how their teachers help them relate with themselves, which is greater than the teachers expect, and higher than the students' lived experiences

($t(220)=-3.21$, $p=.002$). The secondary students indicate a lower, but still reasonable, level of help from teachers and religion teachers (rt). The secondary students' reported levels of Personal SWB are similar to what the teachers think students gain from school in developing this area.

Students indicate lesser influence by principals (pr) than teachers at primary school, dropping to even lower levels at junior and senior secondary school (see Table 1). This finding is not surprising because principals do not generally have as close a personal contact with students as teachers do in the normal operation of schools, so they are less likely to influence students' *Personal* well-being to as great an extent.

Primary and junior secondary boys and senior secondary girls in Christian schools reported that their teachers helped them more in this area of life than did their counterparts in the Catholic and independent schools studied (Fisher, 2006).

In the big picture, schools do not make the only contribution to students' personal well-being.

Other Influences on Personal SWB

Analysis of data reported by Fisher (2006) shows that students in Catholic and independent schools indicated that the most significant influence on their personal well-being came from their mothers and female friends, followed closely by grand-parents, male friends, fathers and themselves. Students in Christian schools attributed the greatest influence on their personal well-being to God, with significant influence from youth leaders (about the same as female friends and mothers, followed by similar patterns to the other students).

Communal SWB

The mean values and independent t-test results on Communal SWB for students (st) compared with teachers (tr), at upper primary (up), junior secondary (js) and senior secondary (ss) levels are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Communal SWB values and t-tests for Christian primary & secondary school students and teachers

level	up			js			ss		
SWB	st	tr	t ^{sig}	st	tr	t ^{sig}	st	tr	t ^{sig}
ideal	4.78	4.76	.31 ^{ns}	4.28	4.58	-4.04 ^{.000}	4.43	4.67	-3.26 ^{.001}
feel	4.64	4.18	7.44 ^{.000}	4.00	4.06	-.77 ^{ns}	3.95	4.18	-2.71 ^{.007}
help	4.06	3.97	.87 ^{ns}	3.75	3.90	-1.06 ^{ns}	3.60	3.90	-2.02 ^{.045}
Ideal cf feel	5.35 ^{.000}	10.5 ^{.000}		7.12 ^{.000}	8.13 ^{.000}		10.4 ^{.000}	8.35 ^{.000}	
	rt	pr	tr-pr	rt	pr	tr-pr	rt	pr	tr-pr
help	3.51	3.31	8.01 ^{.000}	3.81	3.12	6.24 ^{.000}	3.65	2.86	5.90 ^{.000}

Primary pupils and teachers expressed similar, high ideals for Communal SWB, but the primary pupils indicated very positive relationships with their families (the relevant measure of ‘others’ for primary pupils). Secondary teachers expressed higher ideals than students in this area but their lived experience (how they feel) was comparable with the students’ at junior secondary and slightly higher at senior secondary levels.

Teachers’ expectations of the help students receive from school in relating with others is comparable with what students report (as for Personal SWB). However, students report less help from school than their lived experience in this area (upper prim $r=7.52$, $p<.001$; jun sec $r=3.15$, $p=.002$; sen sec $r= 3.01$, $p=.003$). Principals again have less influence than teachers especially among older students.

Other influences on Communal SWB

Analysis of data reported by Fisher (2006) shows that students in Catholic and independent schools attribute strongest influences on their relationships with others (Communal SWB) to self and female friends, closely followed by mothers and male friends, with lesser influence from fathers and teachers. Christian school students again report that God has greatest influence on this aspect of their lives, with youth leaders coming in second, together with self. Similar patterns then follow as in other schools.

Environmental SWB

The mean values and independent t-test results on Personal SWB for students (st) compared with teachers (tr), at upper primary (up), junior secondary (js) and senior secondary (ss) levels are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Environmental SWB values and t-tests for Christian primary & secondary school students and teachers

level	up			js			ss		
SWB	st	tr	t ^{sig}	st	tr	t ^{sig}	st	tr	t ^{sig}
ideal	3.45	3.26	1.60 ^{ns}	2.99	3.35	-2.74 ^{.007}	2.78	3.27	-3.69 ^{.000}
feel	3.15	3.19	-.39 ^{ns}	2.83	3.32	-4.07 ^{.000}	2.65	3.17	-4.22 ^{.000}
help	3.89	2.81	7.21 ^{.000}	3.25	2.70	3.63 ^{.000}	2.98	2.62	2.30 ^{.023}
Ideal cf feel	7.05 ^{.000}	.89 ^{ns}		4.34 ^{.000}	.36 ^{ns}		2.27 ^{.025}	1.21 ^{ns}	
	rt	pr	tr-pr	rt	pr	tr-pr	rt	pr	tr-pr
help	3.35	2.97	9.68 ^{.000}	3.41	2.82	4.13 ^{.000}	3.20	2.39	5.25 ^{.000}

Less interest is expressed in this area of SWB by students and staff in these Christian schools. Primary pupils and their teachers have similar ideals and reported lived experiences in this area (see Table 3) but secondary school teachers report higher levels (of ideal and feel) than their students. However, the students report more help from the schools in nurturing their relationship with nature than teachers expect and higher than students' reported lived experiences (upper prim $r=-8.24$, $p<.001$; jun sec $r=-4.40$, $p<.001$; sen sec $r=-2.86$, $p=.005$).

Principals once again have less influence than teachers and both of these influences are lower among oldest students.

Other Influences on Environmental SWB

Analysis of data reported by Fisher (2006) shows that influences on students are generally weaker in this area of spiritual well-being. Students themselves and their mothers are reported to have greatest impact. The influence of religion teachers is rated

higher by Catholic girls than those in other schools. God is once again ascribed greatest influence on Christian school students in this area.

Transcendental well-being

The mean values and independent t-test results on Transcendental SWB (God-factor) for students (st) compared with teachers (tr), at upper primary (up), junior secondary (js) and senior secondary (ss) levels are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Transcendental SWB values and t-tests for Christian primary & secondary school students and teachers

level	up			js			ss		
SWB	st	tr	t ^{sig}	st	tr	t ^{sig}	st	tr	t ^{sig}
ideal	4.69	4.94	-4.78 ^{.000}	4.42	4.75	-3.53 ^{.000}	4.61	4.79	-2.10 ^{.037}
feel	4.46	4.27	3.83 ^{.000}	2.83	4.06	-1.56 ^{ns}	3.87	4.18	-2.51 ^{.013}
help	4.33	3.78	4.30 ^{.000}	4.29	3.66	4.82 ^{.000}	3.94	3.77	1.14 ^{ns}
Ideal cf feel	5.14 ^{.000}	8.67 ^{.000}		9.17 ^{.000}	9.49 ^{.000}		10.1 ^{.000}	8.69 ^{.000}	
	rt	pr	tr-pr	rt	pr	tr-pr	rt	pr	tr-pr
help	4.36	3.75	6.91 ^{.000}	4.54	3.51	7.22 ^{.000}	4.38	3.44	4.30 ^{.000}

Teachers are more idealistic than students in relating with God (see Table 4) with primary being higher than secondary ($t(236)=3.33$, $p=.001$). Although primary pupils' personal relationship with God is measured on a different instrument (FGLL compared with SHALOM), their reported lived experience is never-the-less markedly higher than for the secondary students ($t(595)=9.31$, $p<.001$) but there were no significant differences between their lived experiences and how much help they provide to students. Religion teachers have greater impact than other teachers on students' relationship with God ($t(368)=5.03$, $p<.001$).

Except at senior secondary level, students report very high influence of schools on their relationship with God; significantly greater than that anticipated by the corresponding teachers. Students report greater influence of principals on them in this

area than in the Personal, Communal and Environmental domains, although it is still lower than that of other staff and it is lower for older students.

Other Influences on Transcendental SWB

Analysis of data reported by Fisher (2006) shows that greater numbers of students in Christian schools, compared with other schools, rate their relation with God moderate to very high (primary 97.8% vs 66.7%; junior secondary 81% vs 39.2%; senior secondary 83.5% vs 27.3%). Christian school students report markedly greater influence on their relationship with God, from God, church leaders and school teachers than do students in other schools. Students' influence on themselves in this area emulates that of their parents, with Christian school parents being rated considerably higher than those in other schools.

Discussion

Personal SWB

According to the above definition, spiritual well-being is reflected in the quality of relationships that people have in up to four domains of life, namely with self, others, the environment and/or with God (for Theists). This does not mean that spiritual well-being is constantly like being in a field of roses with everyone seeking a happy feeling, as some New Age mystics might think. That could reflect some form of emotional well-being, but not SWB. SWB can be expressed in happy as well as challenging times. And it is in the challenges that the strength of a relationship is tested. For example, an ascetic, removed from the hustle and bustle of everyday life should be able to have a form of peace, in the absence of any substantial challenge, except the mental one of concentration. A post-modern individualist might claim to have peace by defining her/his life to be so, but that does not necessarily make it so.

The peace of Personal SWB comes from a testing of purpose and values with them not being found wanting. The ideal for Christians is to have a vibrant personal relationship with God, through Christ, which lays the foundation for meaning, purpose and values in a life that bears the fruit of the Holy Spirit, which is love, joy, peace, etc.(Galatians 5:22-3) It would be interesting to see how dynamic or static students' (and for that matter, teachers') views were, as expressed by their responses to these survey questionnaires. If repeated over time, what variations are both possible and likely as a result of life influences from school compared with home and wider community?

Results from the studies described in this paper suggest that students' Personal SWB is well nurtured at primary level, where they give great credit to their teachers for how good they feel about themselves. Teachers are well in touch with what is happening with regards the Personal SWB of students in these Christian secondary schools. Teachers' expectations almost mirror what students report experiencing in school with respect to this aspect of their development.

Communal SWB

Teachers were also able to accurately predict the level of help given by schools for students developing their Communal SWB. However, the help received at school is significantly lower than students' lived experience in this area, and it is lower for older students. What do these results indicate about the relative importance or place of schools in helping students develop inter-personal relationships? Are adequate opportunities given and/or are other influences stronger? There appears to be some need for Christian schools to look carefully at fine tuning their understanding and practice of nurturing students' communal well-being to provide answers to these questions.

Reference to Interpersonal Development in VELS (Physical, Personal and Social Learning, 2005 page 6) contributes to a discussion in this area by encouraging teachers to address 'positive social relationships' with students and the 'capacity to work cooperatively' especially in pluralistic Australia where people have 'varying interests, values and beliefs.' It encourages 'approaching topics from different viewpoints,' with the school providing 'students with opportunities for reflection and growth.' I hope teachers will take students beyond a search for peace and being good team players in school, to greater depths of understanding and enlivening the hearts of students to the dynamic of *agape*, or selfless love. In Christian schools, this would enhance the outworking of the second part of the Great Commandment, 'to love our neighbours,' and not just be 'accepting' of differences so as to 'act in socially responsible ways,' to which this VELS' publication seems to be appealing.

Table 5 below shows that at junior and senior secondary levels, more Christian school students show greater variance, between their ideals and how they feel, in the Communal domain of spiritual well-being, than students in other schools. Are too many Christian young people feeling that they are failing to reach their ideals in relating to others? Spiritual growth, which involves character growth, can come from facing challenges. A little bit of pressure of striving for ideals can be stimulating, but too much can be destructive. How are the teachers encouraging students to reflect on the positives, whilst supporting them in exercising the love and grace of God in ministering to others in realistic ways?

Environmental SWB

Moderate to low ideals, lived experiences and expectations with regards the environment, are shown in these studies, but students report receiving moderate help from schools. Catholics have more of a tradition of relating with the Creation,

compared with Protestants, with examples set by people such as St Francis of Assisi. It is possible to live in harmony/unity with the environment without worshipping earth spirits. God said that his Creation was 'Good,' so why do so many Protestants shy away from nurturing, even embracing, it? Creation was cursed at The Fall, but humans were separated from God by sin. Christ came to reconcile all of Creation to God. Just as we are a work in progress so too we need to live in harmony with the environment the best we can and take responsibility for nurturing it. If we aim to keep it in a fit state for our great-grand children, for example, by not denuding the landscape and poisoning the waterways, there should be enough food and oxygen for them to have the possibility of life.

Most people would admit to 'magic' (meaning wonder-full) moments in nature, such as walking barefoot in sand on a golden beach, basking in the radiance of a glowing sunset. And some children's hospitals have introduced gardening activities for their patients, because they know the healing power of relating with the environment. But there is more to relating with the environment than this. The brilliance of the Creator can be seen in his Creation. (N.B. The expression “‘magic’ in the environment” is an integral part of the validated SHALOM instrument. It also plays a valuable role in helping to identify people who read items literally, rather than in-depth.)

Transcendental SWB

Previous analyses have shown that Christian school students rated God of greatest influence on the four areas of spiritual well-being (Fisher 2006), but this impact is experienced at home and church as well as school, because God is seen to be omnipresent. So, how great an influence does God have in Christian schools? The reported impact of schools helping students relate with God is high at primary level, reducing somewhat by senior secondary. How can we be sure that primary pupils are not just

being compliant telling teachers what they think they want to hear? All the students were given a personality questionnaire that contained a so-called Lie Scale, which reflects the social desirability of responses. Independent school girls at primary and junior secondary levels scored higher than others, raising some concern about their responses, but not those of Christian school students.

Staff in the Christian, Catholic and Independent schools reported similar influence on helping primary pupils relate with God (Fisher 2007). At secondary level, the Christian school staff reported significantly greater levels of support than that by other schools in line with the students' positive comments noted above (ibid).

Further studies

This paper contains summaries of reported experiences and expectations of students and teachers in some Christian schools in Victoria. It would be interesting to investigate how consistent these responses were over time by doing a longitudinal study of students through the school years and after leaving school. It would also be useful to do a larger study to see how representative these students and teachers were of all schools in Victoria, or Australia. Limited analysis of subsets within these data revealed consistency with the general trends reported herein.

Use of Studies for Pastoral Care

These instruments have been used to compare views of students and teachers; to test the heartbeat of schools. They can also be used to indicate how many students (and staff) have major dissonance between their ideals and lived experiences in each of the four domains of spiritual well-being reported here. QOLIS can be used in conjunction with the SWBQs to identify areas of support, or lack thereof, for students who present with problems in their relationships.

A difference in score of 0.6-0.8 between 'ideal' and 'feel' categories of SWB yielded statistically significant results for small groups of students and teachers. A slightly larger difference of 1.0 has been arbitrarily ascribed as the critical value to investigate the variance between groups here (Fisher 2006). Results in Table 5 show that at the upper primary level more Christian school pupils had significant variation from their ideals in the Personal domain compared with other pupils, whose greatest variation came on the God factor (Transcendental SWB). Comment has already been made on secondary students' results in the Communal domain.

Table 5. Percentage of students with variance >1.0 between 'ideal' & 'feel' in 4 domains of SWB

	Upper primary			Junior secondary			Senior secondary		
	Chr	Other	Chi-square sig	Chr	Other	Chi-square sig	Chr	Other	Chi-square sig
<i>n</i>	228	144		243	313		125	317	
<i>domain</i>	%	%		%	%		%	%	
<i>Per</i>	13.6	4.2	8.76 p=.003	8.6	7.7	.175 ns	10.4	7.9	.721 ns
<i>Com</i>	2.2	0.0	3.20 ns	9.5	5.1	3.98 p=.046	16.0	5.0	14.4 p<.000
<i>Env</i>	7.9	4.2	2.03 ns	4.9	8.6	2.82 ns	5.6	11.4	3.83 ns
<i>Tra</i>	2.6	8.6	5.07 p=.024	19.9	21.4	.518 ns	28.0	28.1	.000 ns

NB Chr=Christian Per=Personal Com=Communal Env=Environmental
Tra=Transcendental SWB

Two case studies follow.

Case study 1. 11 Year-old boy in Grade 5.

Table 6. Measures of SWB for 11 year-old boy (scales are scored 1-5)

Personal SWB		Communal SWB		Environmental SWB		Transcendental SWB	
ideal	feel	ideal	feel	ideal	Feel	ideal	feel
4.25	2.5	4.75	3.5	2.25	2.25	4.5	3.0

How this boy felt in three of the four domains of SWB was markedly lower than his ideals. The fourth area (Environment) had low perceived and experienced value for

his spiritual well-being (see Table 6). He reported a reasonable support from family in relating with himself, but little from school or friends. Little support came from family and friends for relating with others, with even less from school (teachers= never). Friends often help him relate with the environment and the school staff do sometimes. Church staff help him relate with God all the time, and family, school and friends do sometimes. This boy reported that God helps him relate in all four areas 'all the time'. A score of 2/12 on the Lie Scale indicates this boy believes what he is saying. He appears to have head knowledge about God but has not fully appropriated the relationship at heart level to influence his life. He scored very high on the Neuroticism scale (11/12, group mean=6.81) and Psychoticism scale (8/9, group mean=2.98). This boy needs help to make contact with reality and to build positive human relationships for his well-being.

Case study 2. 15 Year-old female in Year 10.

Table 7. Measures of SWB for 15 year-old female (scales 1-5)

Personal SWB		Communal SWB		Environmental SWB		Transcendental SWB	
ideal	feel	ideal	feel	ideal	feel	ideal	feel
3.8	1.8	4.0	1.8	1.0	1.0	4.6	1.2

This girl reported reasonable levels of support from home and school with very positive feedback about help from friends in relating with both herself and others. Negligible help was forthcoming for the environment. Neither this girl, nor her family, attend Church, although she reported that school staff always help her relate with God, and friends do sometimes (for males) or often (for females). God sometimes helps her relate with self, others and God but never with the environment. With such marked differences in scores (shown in Table 7), it is likely that this girl is depressed. Other results support this view - score of 13/72 on the Oxford Happiness Inventory, with the following subsets - 3/15 for satisfaction in life, 2/18 on self-efficacy, 3/18 on

sociability/empathy, 2/17 for positive outlook, 0/9 for well-being, 4/9 for cheerfulness and 1/6 for self-esteem, with a score of 6/12 (group mean=2.71) on the Psychoticism scale. This girl should seek medical or psychological assessment for depression and build on her positive relationships to assist her well-being.

Final Comment

We must keep in mind that it is a privilege and responsibility to carefully interpret and make judicial use of the innermost thoughts and feelings expressed on these questionnaires. They have been developed to help teachers identify needs and nurture students' spiritual well-being. As well as being a simple, convenient way to gain an overview of the SWB of whole schools, classes or groups, I earnestly desire to see how useful they are in helping inform the pastoral care of students identified with concerns, as in the above cases. School staff, who want to use these instruments for these purposes, are invited to contact the author.

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Figure 1. Spiritual Well-Being – expressed by quality of relationships in each DOMAIN
Knowledge aspects of each domain are written in **bold type**, at the top of each cell.
Inspiration aspects of each domain are written in *italics*, in the centre of each cell.
Expressions of well-being in each domain are in **roman type**, at the base of each cell