Chapter 1
Language for Talking About Spiritual Development and Flourishing

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter the author responds to the question: What is spiritual development and why is spiritual development important for people of all ages worldwide; religious and nonreligious? Some of the answers come in the form of a system for spiritual development uncovered by a social construct grounded theory study conducted by Schein. Other theorists such as Montessori, Bowlby, Buber, and Senge will be discussed. The author also looks at spirituality from an educational perspective asking: Why and what should parents and educators know about spiritual development? What words should be used to reference our human spirituality? How is spirituality talked about when children play, spend time in nature, or simply stop to contemplate life? The author's intent is to demonstrate how spiritual development can help provide for healthy, happy, productive human growth so that children do not need to be fixed, but rather can grow freely to reach their full human potential.

INTRODUCTION

Spiritual development is not easy to define or discuss (Roehlkepartain et al., 2006). Yet, it has become an important concept for our changing, complex, and often turbulent world. Fisher (2022) writes that the world is not only turbulent but broken. It is helpful to know that a spiritually developed self can help cope with human fear and despair while offering wholeness and hope (Miller, 2021).

This chapter has four goals: 1) to examine spiritual development at the early phases of life in a secular/non-religious context, 2) to explore concepts, words, and ideas that help to provide a language for families, caretakers, and educators to talk about spiritual development in young children, 3) to discuss how spiritual development begins as stage-development that eventually becomes a system for spiritual
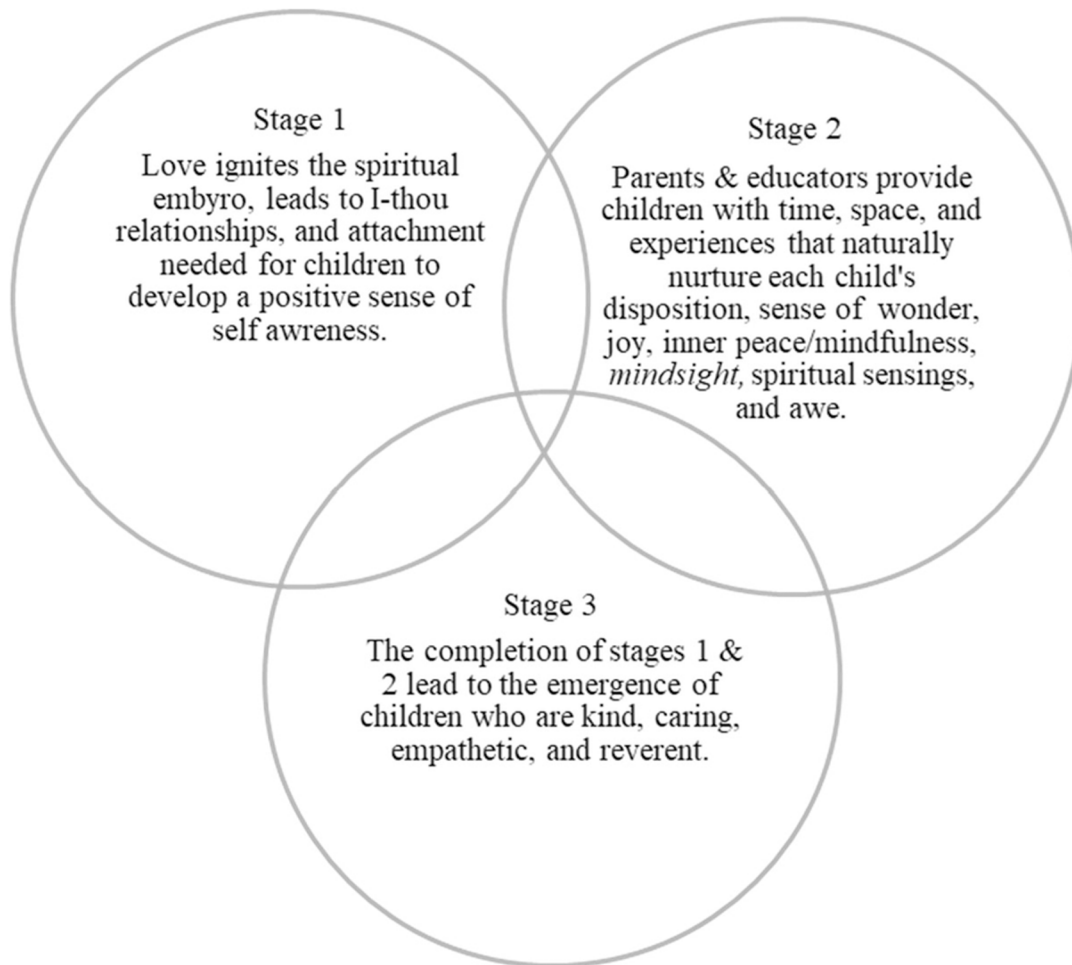
flourishing, and 4) to explore how *nature* and *play* provide resources for nurturing human spiritual flourishing.

LANGUAGE, CONCEPTS, AND THEORIES FOR SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

It should be noted that the discussion centered around the concept of spiritual development and the three stages that lead to a system of spiritual flourishing are derived from the findings of a research study entitled "*Early Childhood Educators' Perceptions of Spiritual Development in Young Children: A Social Constructivist Grounded Theory Study*" (Schein, 2012). Figure 1 illustrates these stages.

Figure 1. Three stages of spiritual development in infants

Stage 1
Love ignites the spiritual embyro, leads to I-thou relationships, and attachment needed for children to develop a positive sense of self awreness.

Stage 2
Parents & educators provide children with time, space, and experiences that naturally nurture each child's disposition, sense of wonder, joy, inner peace/mindfulness, *mindsight,* spiritual sensings, and awe.

Stage 3
The completion of stages 1 & 2 lead to the emergence of children who are kind, caring, empathetic, and reverent.

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