Nurturing Children's Spirituality: Insights for Catholic Schools in the Philippines

Julius Anthony L. Porqueriño

Abstract: Catholic schools in the Philippines give due importance to children's spiritual development. However, initiatives that support children's spirituality often emphasize a distinct Catholic formation, potentially overlooking students from diverse religious backgrounds or worldviews. This article critically examines scholarship on children's spirituality to propose an alternative approach. By exploring themes of space, time, body, relationships, and agency, the article identifies practical strategies for nurturing spirituality broadly and inclusively. These strategies aim to create environments that support the spiritual growth of all children, regardless of their religious traditions or worldviews.

Keywords: Children • Children's Spirituality • Nurturing Spirituality • Catholic Schools

Introduction

In the Philippines, the holistic development offered by Catholic schools typically involves "a distinctly Christian formation, with an essential religious dimension and confessional purpose."[1] Holistic development here refers to the education of the whole person, including one's social, emotional, psychological, and spiritual dimensions. This approach also aims at the formation of individuals given their ultimate end and contribution to the good of society.[2]

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[1] Johnny C. Go, *Religious Education from a Critical Realist Perspective: Sensus Fidei and Critical Thinking*, Routledge Studies in Critical Realism (New York: Routledge, 2019), 13.

[2] For discussions on the whole-person formation in Catholic schools, see *Gravissimum educationis, Decree on Christian Education,"* October 28, 1965 (accessed April 2, 2021),

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Due to the predominantly Catholic population, spiritual formation in Philippine schools is often linked to Catholic tradition. Catholic schools would thus organize formation programs that include liturgies, recollections, retreats, and community services.[3] While worthwhile, these may give the impression that the nurturing of children's spirituality is founded on the Catholic faith. Against the backdrop of the whole-person formation, we may ask: If spiritual development is crucial, how can Catholic schools nurture the spirituality of all students, including those with different religions or worldviews?

To address the question, this article proposes a more inclusive approach to nurturing spirituality in Catholic schools. First, it develops a broad understanding of children's spirituality; second, it explains the necessity of nurturing spirituality, and; finally, it explores ways to nurture children's spirituality and its implications for Catholic schools' formation programs. This study relies on existing literature that deals with relevant issues and developments and relates them to the local setting.

Nurturing Children's Spirituality

Defining spirituality is complex and any attempt to create a single, universal definition may be accused of

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http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vatii_decl_19651028_gravissimum-educationis_en.html, paragraph no. 1; The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School*, March 19, 1977 (accessed April 2, 2021), http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_19770319_catholic-school_en.html, paragraph nos. 19 & 29.

[3] See Jove Jim S. Aguas, "Catholic Education in the Philippines," in *Encyclopedia of Teacher Education*, ed. Michael A. Peters (Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2019), 9.

reductionism.[4] Spirituality's complexity arises from its diverse interpretations across theology, philosophy, religious studies, psychology of religion, sociology, anthropology, and medicine, each offering unique assumptions and perspectives.[5] This complexity increases with the inclusion of the spirituality of specific groups, such as children, whose experiences and expressions add new dimensions to the field. Research on children and childhood not only has added complexity to the definition of spirituality but also enriched and challenged the previously adult-focused discourse on spirituality.[6]

Following the view of Tony Eaude, rather than seeking a universally agreed definition of children's spirituality, it is more helpful to identify common features and use a range of metaphors to understand it.[7] While this survey is broad and not exhaustive, it provides a foundational definition of children's spirituality and suggests approaches for its nurturance.

Annemie Dillen argues that seeing children as "not-yet" adults or "blank sheets of paper" implies that they need knowledge transmitted by adults, portraying them

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[4] See Tony Eaude, "Shining Lights in Unexpected Corners: New Angles on Young Children's Spiritual Development," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 8, no. 2 (2003): 152.

[5] See Doug Oman, "Defining Religion and Spirituality," in *Handbook of the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, ed. Raymond F. Paloutzian and Crystal L. Park, 2nd Edition (New York: The Guilford Press, 2013), 23–47.

[6] See Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, "Exploring Scientific and Theological Perspectives on Children's Spirituality," in *Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives, Research, and Applications*, ed. Donald Ratcliff (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2004), 121.

[7] See Tony Eaude, "Revisiting Some Half-Forgotten Ideas on Children's Spirituality," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 28, no. 1 (2023): 24.

as incomplete beings.[8] Despite the recognition that children have the inherent potential to be spiritual, these presumptions lead many adults to overlook or undervalue children's spiritual experiences and expressions. Joyce Mercer notes that children's insights are usually brushed off as insignificant when they are described as "cute," "precocious" or just "mimicking adults".[9] Susannah Cole adds that "adult assumptions about spirituality, which rely on rational thinking and religious concepts, often hinder the ability to understand the spiritual nature of children."[10] Karen-Marie Yust and Erin Reibel argue that in religious education, children are seen as needing to be filled with pre-determined religious content and cannot be trusted to engage in meaningful spiritual practices and reflection.[11] This view, stemming from developmental theories, assumes children cannot actively engage meaningfully in spirituality.

Developmental stage theories that were developed in psychology constructed an image of children and their spirituality as only becoming and not being, and as only

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[8] See Annemie Dillen, "Religious Participation of Children as Active Subjects: Toward a Hermeneutical-Communicative Model of Religious Education in Families with Young Children," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 12, no. 1 (2007): 38–40.

[9] Joyce Ann Mercer, "Children as Mystics, Activists, Sages, and Holy Fools: Understanding the Spirituality of Children and Its Significance for Clinical Work," *Pastoral Psychology* 54, no. 5 (May 2006): 498.

[10] Susannah Cole, "Situating Children in the Discourse of Spirituality," in *Spirituality, Education & Society: An Integrated Approach*, ed. Njoki Nathani Wane, Energy L. Manyimo, and Eric J. Ritskes (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2011), 5.

[11] See Karen-Marie Yust and Erin Reibel, "Innovations in Children's Spiritual Nurture," *Religious Education* 118, no. 5 (2023): 504.

a means to an end.[12] Examples of these theories in developmental psychology include Jean Piaget's cognitive development theory, Lawrence Kohlberg's moral development theory, and Erik Erikson's psychosocial development theory.[13] Although these theories offer a framework for understanding children, they assume the existence of a "universal child" or a child who represents all children and progresses through a series of predictable and linear developmental stages.[14] These theories have also influenced other theories that attempt to understand children's religious and spiritual development such as James Fowler's faith development theory.[15] The images these theories construct may have inadvertently reinforced perceptions that children are empty vessels, incompetent and passive subjects, and not yet adults. Recent developments in children and childhood studies have challenged these traditional views, offering new perspectives on children and their spirituality. For one, scholars have been critical of the "universal child" and researchers recognize that each child is "unique and distinct to a variety of contexts

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[12] See Jan Grajczonek, "How Shall We Know Them? Part 1 - the Construction of 'Child' and 'Childhood' in Official Church Educational Documents," *Journal of Religious Education* 58, no. 2 (2010): 10.

[13] For an illustration of the stage theories, see Saul McLeod, "Jean Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development," Simply Psychology, June 6, 2018, https://www.simplypsychology.org/Erik-Erikson.html; Saul McLeod, "Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development," Simply Psychology, October 24, 2013, https://www.simplypsychology.org/Erik-Erikson.html; Saul McLeod, "Erik Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development," Simply Psychology, May 3, 2018, https://www.simplypsychology.org/Erik-Erikson.html.

[14] See Grajczonek, "How Shall We Know Them? Part 1 - the Construction of 'Child' and 'Childhood' in Official Church Educational Documents," 9.

[15] See James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1981).

including their social, cultural, political and religious contexts."[16] Another contemporary view advocates treating the child as a child, without making too much reference to the adult the child will become. This implies valuing the child's inherent capacities, which include cognitive, affective, and even spiritual capacities. In other words, this perspective treats the child as a 'competent subject,' countering earlier views that treat them as incomplete or passive.

Recognizing children as competent subjects, scholars have employed qualitative methodologies that emphasize listening to children, and enhancing the understanding of their spirituality. Their studies would serve to enumerate and summarize key research findings on children's innate spirituality.

One of the earlier works demonstrating children's intrinsic spirituality is by Robert Coles, who conducted a longitudinal study with children. He found that "children are interested in the meaning of life, understand life as a journey, and are able to ask questions of ultimate meaning."[17] Building on Coles' work, David Hay and Rebecca Nye affirmed children's innate spirituality.[18] Using grounded theory, Nye analyzed interviews with children and coined the term "relational consciousness" to describe the spirituality observed in the conversations.[19] "Relational consciousness" emerged as a result of

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[16] Grajczonek, "How Shall We Know Them? Part 1 - the Construction of 'Child' and 'Childhood' in Official Church Educational Documents," 10.

[17] See Jan Grajczonek, "Spiritual Development and Religious Education in the Early Years: A Review of the Literature" (Unpublished Report, Queensland Catholic Education Commission, Brisbane, 2010), 14; See Robert Coles, *The Spiritual Life of Children* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1996).

[18] See David Hay and Rebecca Nye, *The Spirit of the Child*, Rev. ed. (London; Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2006).

[19] See Hay and Nye, 108–9.

two patterns observed during these interviews: that children exhibited an unusual level of consciousness or perceptiveness and that the conversations were expressed in the context of the child's relationship to other things, to oneself, to other people, and to God.[20] This relational consciousness became the basis for Nye's definition of spirituality:

> Children's spirituality is an initially natural capacity for awareness of the sacred quality of life experiences. This awareness can be conscious or unconscious and sometimes fluctuates between both, but in both cases can affect actions, feelings, and thoughts. In childhood, spirituality is especially about being attracted towards 'being in relation', responding to a call to relate to more than 'just me' – i.e., to others, to God, to creation, or a deeper inner sense of Self. This encounter with transcendence can happen in specific experiences or moments, as well as through imaginative or reflective activity (thoughts and meaning-making).[21]

Elaine Champagne contributes to the discourse by recognizing children's spirituality in concrete situations or the activities of daily life.[22] Using a phenomenological research methodology, she observed preschool children and used an adapted form of theological method to interpret her findings.[23] In her research, she observed three "spiritual modes of being": sensitive, relational, and existential. The sensitive mode of being involves how children use their senses to interact with the world, revealing their inner selves.[24] The relational mode of

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[20] See Hay and Nye, 109.

[21] Rebecca Nye, *Children's Spirituality: What It Is and Why It Matters* (London: Church House Publishing, 2009), 6.

[22] See Elaine Champagne, "Being a Child, a Spiritual Child," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 8, no. 1 (2003): 44.

[23] See Champagne, 44.

[24] See Champagne, 45–46.

being pertains to the quality of the children's "interpersonal relations from a spiritual perspective."[25] Children's spirituality, in a sense, consists of forming connections with other people and the world around them. Coming to terms with being related to one's parents, family or peers creates a symbolic home for children and opens them to love.[26] Lastly, the existential mode of being concerns children's relation to time and space, meaning their engagement with the present moment or the experience of the "here and now."[27] This mode of being emphasizes the importance of the here and now for children, where they live and experience life.

Brendan Hyde, expands on Hay and Nye's research by engaging with children from three primary schools in Australia. Through a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, Hyde was able to identify four characteristics that illustrate the innate spirituality of children. The first is the "felt sense," situated in the here-and-now of experience, highlighting an intense and immediate awareness of the present moment.[28] The second characteristic, "integrating awareness," refers to the children's capacity to enter into a deeper level of consciousness while remaining engaged in the initial activity that they are involved in.[29] The third characteristic, "weaving the threads of meaning," involves how children integrate diverse experiences into a coherent worldview. Hyde noted that the children's sense of wonder helps them express their spirituality as they use it "to make meaning of events and to piece

[25] See Champagne, 46.

[26] See Champagne, 50.

[27] See Champagne, 51.

[28] Brendan Hyde, "The Identification of Four Characteristics of Children's Spirituality in Australian Catholic Primary Schools," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 13, no. 2 (2008): 120.

[29] Hyde, 121–22.

together a worldview based around their attempts at meaning-making."[30] The fourth characteristic, "spiritual questing," refers to how children "seek to explore new and perhaps more authentic ways of connecting with self, others, the earth, and God."[31] Hyde also identified two factors that inhibit children's spirituality. He referred to the first as "material pursuit," where children prioritize material desires over connecting to others. Hyde argues that these desires focus only on satisfying the child's superficial self or ego, neglecting the true self.[32] The second factor, "trivializing," occurs when children avoid confronting issues of meaning and value in life by creating a "façade of complacency" and making light of these topics.[33] He observed that this often results when children sense mistrust, suspicion, and ambiguity and, if left unchecked, may lead to the loss of meaning and purpose.[34]

As research into children's spirituality further develops, there is growing recognition that children are "competent subjects," whose spirituality has its integrity and needs support. Accepting children as naturally spiritual beings does not guarantee that spiritual development will come automatically, nor does it mean that each child will experience the same spiritual development.[35] Children's spirituality is a dynamic process rather than a static trait. Hay and Nye

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[30] Hyde, 123.

[31] Hyde, 124.

[32] Brendan Hyde, *Children and Spirituality: Searching for Meaning and Connectedness* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2008), 143.

[33] Hyde, 149.

[34] Hyde, 157.

[35] See Annemie Dillen, "Children at the Center? Practical Theology by, about, and with Children," in Annemie Dillen and Stefan Gärtner, *Discovering Practical Theology: Exploring Boundaries*, vol. 47 (Leuven: Peeters, 2020), 135.

documented in their research the changes that occurred in children's spirituality over time noting what led to the resistance or a magnification of the spiritual.[36] They observed that gaining more knowledge and experiences leads to changes in children's spirituality. Micheline Wyn Moriarty upheld this view when she modified her understanding of spirituality to a more dynamic conceptualization. In her research, Moriarty describes the process of spirituality as evolving in a circular or spiral pattern within the child.[37] For Moriarty, "there was some evidence that identity formation developed out of experiences of heightened consciousness, leading to enhanced relationships and a sense of meaning or value," which then leads to the ongoing formation of "the sense of self."[38] However, this process does not always lead to positive development. Eaude argues that the process of spirituality can either progress or regress, which is why he thinks the term 'development' cannot sufficiently capture the complexity of the process within the child.[39] In a recent article, Eaude emphasizes the importance of acknowledging the "shadow" side of spirituality, which includes aspects children refuse to acknowledge but need to integrate for wholeness.[40] Thus, caregivers must guide this dynamic process toward fostering a healthy spirituality.

Drawing on these insights, it could be asserted that

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[36] See Hay and Nye, *The Spirit of the Child*, 124–25.

[37] See Micheline Wyn Moriarty, "A Conceptualization of Children's Spirituality Arising out of Recent Research," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 16, no. 3 (2011): 283.

[38] Moriarty, 283.

[39] See Tony Eaude, "Strangely Familiar?—Teachers Making Sense of Young Children's Spiritual Development," *Early Years* 25, no. 3 (2005): 245.

[40] See Tony Eaude, "Revisiting Some Half-Forgotten Ideas on Children's Spirituality," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 28, no. 1 (2023): 24–25.

children's spirituality is an innate human potential that is seen in children. It is embedded in their consciousness, relationality including a relationship towards a transcendent 'other,' and their ability to make meaning. Ultimately, children's spirituality is a culturally mediated process that requires nurturing.[41]

On Nurturing

The term 'nurture' serves to address the spiritual needs of children. Common terms for supporting spiritual growth in children and adults include 'to form,' 'to develop,' and 'to nurture.' The term 'develop' is most frequently used for its emphasis on progression and growth.[42] It aligns well with developmental stage theories, such as those of Piaget, Kohlberg, and Fowler.[43] These theories describe a linear progression from a simpler to a more complex understanding of spirituality, which can be effective in structured educational environments.

However, using 'develop' can also imply a movement from less to more or from nothing to something. Dillen argues that this perspective may view children as "not-

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[41] See Brendan Hyde, *Children and Spirituality: Searching for Meaning and Connectedness* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2008), 23–44; See Roehlkepartain, "Exploring Scientific and Theological Perspectives on Children's Spirituality," 122–25.

[42] For use of 'develop' or 'development', see Eugene Roehlkepartain et al., *The Handbook of Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence* (Thousand Oaks, California, 2006); Also see Peter L. Benson, Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, and Stacey P. Rude, "Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence: Toward a Field of Inquiry," *Applied Developmental Science* 7, no. 3 (2003): 205–13.

[43] Roehlkepartain, "Exploring Scientific and Theological Perspectives on Children's Spirituality," 124.

yet" – either not yet adults or not yet full human beings.[44] Such a view risks overlooking children's current capacities and contributions, leading to what Dillen describes as a "deficit approach."[45] This approach overly emphasizes what children lack, rather than what they currently possess. Consequently, adults who adopt the deficit approach as their understanding of 'develop' might focus their support on filling perceived gaps in children's spirituality, often neglecting to reinforce and stimulate the strengths that they already exhibit at the present moment.

Similarly, 'form' or 'formation' is widely used, particularly in religious contexts, to denote the shaping of spiritual identity. It is commonplace in Catholic schools and youth ministry to refer to efforts leading to the spiritual growth of children and young people. In his attempt to define spiritual formation, Max Turner lists all partial synonyms for 'formation' and all of them suggest a movement from nothing to something or from less to more.[46] Dallas Willard identified three different but interrelated meanings of spiritual formation but all of them understand the word formation as 'shaping.'[47] This term suitably reflects the intentional guidance provided in educational or ministry settings, acknowledging that children and young people often start with a

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[44] See Annemie Dillen, "Between Heroism and Deficit: Challenges to Research on Children's Spirituality from a Christian Theological Standpoint," *Concilium* 5 (2007): 60, 62.

[45] See Dillen, 62.

[46] See Max Turner, "Spiritual Gifts and Spiritual Formation in 1 Corinthians and Ephesians," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 22, no. 2 (2013): 188. Turner's list of partial synonyms for 'formation' include: 'transformation', 'development', 'building up', 'maturation', 'transformation', 'sanctification'.

[47] See Dallas Willard, "Spiritual Formation in Christ: A Perspective on What It Is and How It Might Be Done," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 28, no. 4 (December 2000): 254–58.

less-defined spiritual identity that is progressively shaped by teachings and experiences. Yet, the language of 'formation' can imply that children's spirituality begins as entirely shapeless, and children become passive recipients of external influences. These could undermine the understanding of their agency and inherent spirituality.

The term 'nurture,' chosen for this article, aims to fill the gaps that both 'form' and 'develop' have by highlighting sustenance and support for children's spirituality to flourish in the present moment.[48] 'Nurture' incorporates the developmental progression of 'develop' and the intentional guidance of 'form,' while focusing on strengthening what is already present within the child.

The preference for 'nurture' reflects an understanding that while children require structured spiritual growth, they also thrive under supportive conditions that recognize and build upon their existing spiritual capacities. This choice does not aim to diminish the importance of 'develop' and 'form.' 'Develop' helps map out progression while 'form' focuses on shaping a child's spiritual understanding. By focusing on 'nurture,' this article aims to integrate these structured approaches into a holistic framework, supporting both the present strengths and future growth of children's spirituality. This balanced approach ensures that nurturing spirituality is not just about preparing for future maturity but also about enriching the child's current spiritual experience and expressions.

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[48] Some publications that used 'nurture' to refer to the task of supporting children include Karen-Marie Yust et al., eds., *Nurturing Child and Adolescent Spirituality: Perspectives from the World's Religious Traditions* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006); Holly Catterton Allen, ed., *Nurturing Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives and Best Practices* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008); and Hyde, *Children and Spirituality*.

For the Sake of Children: Why Nurture their Spirituality?

Nurturing children's spirituality is not only beneficial but also necessary. Studies in medicine and psychology have shown that a person's spirituality and religion affect one's mental health and well-being. Most of these studies indicate a positive relationship, allowing clinicians to incorporate spirituality and religion into their interventions.[49] This implies that nurturing spirituality could lead to positive mental health. Eaude links children's spirituality, particularly the search for meaning and connectedness, to their happiness, emotional well-being, and mental health.[50] From a rights perspective, developing the spiritual domain of children should be considered a fundamental right because of its integral role in children's overall development.[51] The same article indicated that the United Nations' 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child promotes spiritual development and well-being.[52] Additionally, nurturing children's spirituality can stimulate their "power within," a key aspect often discussed in power dynamics.[53] This underscores that nurturing children's spirituality should

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[49] See Larkin Elderon Kao, John R. Peteet, and Christopher C. H. Cook, "Spirituality and Mental Health," *Journal for the Study of Spirituality* 10, no. 1 (2020): 42–54.

[50] See Tony Eaude, "Happiness, Emotional Well-Being, and Mental Health – What Has Children's Spirituality to Offer?," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 14, no. 3 (2009): 185–96.

[51] See Fred B. Bryant et al., "The Child's Right to a Spiritual Life," in *International Handbook on Child Rights and School Psychology*, ed. Bonnie Kaul Nastasi, Stuart N. Hart, and Shereen C. Naser (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 307.

[52] See Bryant et al., 309.

[53] See Annemie Dillen, "Empowering Children in Religious Education: Rethinking Power Dynamics," *Journal of Religious Education* 59, no. 3 (2011): 5.

be for the sake of the children.

Reflecting on Dillen's theological understanding of the phrase "for the sake of the children" provides a profound justification for nurturing children's spirituality. It emphasizes the importance of recognizing and valuing children's voices and contributions while protecting and providing for them.[54] While various theological positions on children claim to be for the sake of the children, perspectives such as viewing children as "not-yet adults," "future members of the Church," or "vulnerable beings" can be harmful.[55] These views often neglect children's inherent dignity and agency. To counter these negative views on children in the theological discourse, Dillen advocates for seeing children as subjects.[56] This notion underpins three key reasons for nurturing children's spirituality: building resilience, encouraging participation, and recognizing children as whole persons.

The first reason is to build children's resilience. Recognizing "children as subjects" means acknowledging them as both vulnerable persons and competent agents. Nurturing spirituality involves a balancing act between protecting children from harmful relationships or frameworks of meaning and respecting their inherent capacity to relate and make meaning. This approach fosters resilience, not only as a means to cope with loss and suffering but also as an inner resource for hope and positive engagement with everyday life.[57] Furthermore, focusing on resilience should inspire social action and support for children, ensuring that their capacity to cope

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[54] See Annemie Dillen, "For the Sake of Children? Theology, Care and Children," *Hapág: A Journal of Interdisciplinary Theological Research* 16, no. 1–2 (2019): 85–97.

[55] Dillen, 90.

[56] Dillen, 93–95.

[57] See Dillen, 94.

does not excuse neglect of social responsibilities.

The second reason for nurturing spirituality is participation. While children's participation is often encouraged in the Church, they are sometimes perceived as a nuisance when they make noise or do not pay attention during celebrations of the sacraments. Seeing "children as subjects" means reconceptualizing the understanding of children's participation in theology. In this reconceptualized participation, their voices and insights are considered valuable. They are even encouraged to theologize because their insights are deemed significant in their communities and society. Nurturing their spirituality is necessary to stimulate meaningful participation.

The third reason is that the child is a whole person. Seeing children as whole persons and as active subjects means they should not be reduced to models or categories defining how adults must respond to them or address their needs. They are and will always be whole persons, who give and receive at the same time. They are capable of giving, participating, and sharing, while also needing guidance, support, and protection. Nurturing their spirituality respects and fosters their complete identity as whole persons.

The 'How' of Nurturing Children's Spirituality

Having justified the importance of nurturing children's spirituality, I now discuss how it can be effectively achieved particularly in the context of the Catholic schools in the Philippines. Drawing on Hyde's insights, four key areas are identified to nurture children's spirituality: space, time, body, and relationships.[58] Similarly, Nye uses the acronym SPIRIT—space,

[58] See Hyde, *Children and Spirituality*, 160.

process, imagination, relationship, intimacy, and trust—to nurture spirituality.[59] This discussion utilizes Hyde's categories and integrates some insights from Nye and other relevant literature. Additionally, this article introduces 'agency' as a critical theme, neither covered by Hyde nor Nye, to address the presence of power dynamics in the task of nurturing spirituality. These principles can be translated into practical applications to create the school environment that nurtures the spirituality of children.

Space

Space is a key factor in nurturing children's spirituality. Space connotes a place or an environment of freedom, where one can think, move, speak, or act freely. At home, such a space might be a dedicated room where children can just be. These spaces serve as places of retreat to get away from the noise and clutter of everyday life, acting as sanctuaries or safe spaces. According to Raisuyah Bhagwan, "When such sacred spaces are nurtured, children are allowed to 'be', to feel spiritually safe, and to share their hurts and struggles."[60] It is within these spaces that spirituality can be discovered and fostered.[61] For many, including Christians, this space of freedom may be interpreted as a place to have a meaningful encounter with the divine. According to Hyde, nurturing spirituality can be done when those responsible for children furnish and maintain spaces and environments that allow their spirituality to flourish and

[59] Nye, *Children's Spirituality*, 41.

[60] Raisuyah Bhagwan, "Creating Sacred Experiences for Children as Pathways to Healing, Growth and Transformation," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 14, no. 3 (2009): 226.

[61] Bhagwan, 226.

grow.[62] Nye similarly notes that the quality of space can have a positive or negative effect on one's spiritual well-being.[63]

Nye identifies three types of spaces: physical, emotional, and auditory.[64] Physical spaces are tangible areas where children can go and experience support for their spirituality. Nye describes these as sacred spaces, noting they "speak their own language of meaning and help us express what we value."[65] Children intuitively recognize the unique atmosphere and meaning of these places. The setup, furnishing, and decoration of these spaces communicate distinct messages to the children who enter them. For example, traditional classroom setups with chairs and tables facing the teacher communicate that the teacher is the primary source of knowledge, and proper behavior is expected to ensure order in the classroom. Emotional space encompasses areas that allow for personal expression and safety. Nye describes these spaces as those that allow individuals "to be apart, to be ourselves and perhaps have different opinions, but also the space in which we can feel closely held and safe."[66] These spaces require balancing autonomy with safety and acceptance. In these spaces, children are encouraged to express themselves freely, yet with awareness and respect for others in the community. This dual challenge of autonomy and intimacy in emotional spaces is at the core of developing and maintaining spiritual communities.[67] Auditory space emphasizes the importance of silence. In auditory spaces, adults talk less and listen more, tuning into what the

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[62] See Hyde, *Children and Spirituality*, 161.
[63] See Nye, *Children's Spirituality*, 42.
[64] See Nye, 42–45.
[65] Nye, 42.
[66] Nye, 45.
[67] See Nye, 45.

children are saying and not saying. This auditory space allows children to respond freely, without strictly conforming to adult expectations. It is important to note that providing space for spiritual nurture does not imply isolating children, but rather creating environments where they can explore and develop their spirituality with appropriate support.

To nurture children's spirituality in Catholic schools, providing these spaces need not just be spaces for prayer and meditation. Research in children's spirituality suggests that these spaces should support key attributes of spirituality: consciousness, relationality, and meaning-making. Firstly, these spaces should enable children to perform structured or unstructured tasks that heighten their consciousness. Such spaces allow children to focus on their activities, whether it be playing, reading, or doing chores. This enables deep engagement free from distractions. For example, bombarding spaces with activities merely to keep children busy can hinder meaningful engagement. This is common in many classrooms. Additionally, these spaces should provide children with opportunities to rest, be silent, and reflect on what they are doing. Secondly, to foster relationality, spaces for prayer are good for deepening children's relationship with the divine. However, the question remains as to whether children of other religions have their own spaces of prayer. Aside from prayer or meditation spaces, healthy spaces should be spaces that allow for a community atmosphere that cultivates mutual trust, respect, and open inquiry among its occupants.[68] Hyde's proposals for nurturing spirituality through spaces highly emphasize the role that adults play in the space, as they significantly influence how children make meaning. Thirdly, to support meaning-

[68] See Hyde, *Children and Spirituality*, 161.

making, healthy spaces should encourage exploration and a sense of wonder, which will then serve as the basis for the framework of meaning they will weave together. In such spaces, adults should avoid hastily dismissing or harshly judging the meanings children derive from their experiences. Healthy spaces should also allow for constructive dialogue between different worldviews, enhancing children's interaction with others. Hyde notes a concern when children in these spaces encounter ambiguous or potentially dangerous frameworks of meaning.[69] In such cases, adults might be tempted to completely take control of these meaning-making spaces or to take children away from them. While concerns for children's welfare and safety are legitimate, nurturing their spiritual dimension should come in the form of guidance and accompaniment, and not of control nor imposition of one's will. For example, if teachers find a child upset over a loss in a competition, they should resist the urge to dismiss the child's feelings simply to cheer them up. Instead, within this nurturing space, the teacher should help the child understand and process their feelings about the loss. For Hyde, the adult should act as a guide and a responsible partner, which sometimes means adopting a more passive or silent role. Shielding the child from negative feelings may inadvertently teach them that such emotions are unacceptable, discouraging them from openly sharing these negative emotions in the future.

It is also important to recognize that spaces for spiritual growth are not always active; they can be places of quiet and stillness. Hyde believes that skills like silence, stillness, and reflection should be cultivated and practiced in spaces of spiritual nurture.[70] Silence and reflection are crucial for developing a heightened level of

[69] See Hyde, 161.
[70] See Hyde, 162.

awareness and for reflecting on one's values and meaning. In schools, creating these silent spaces can be challenging. These spaces are often scarce in the school setting, requiring deliberate effort from adults. In addition, cultivating spiritual spaces sometimes means creating areas where adults are absent, allowing children to explore their spirituality independently. Children must have opportunities to nurture their spirituality in their own dedicated spaces. This approach requires adults to exercise wisdom, sensitivity, and trust, stepping back when necessary to allow children's independent spiritual flourishing. Catholic schools usually have dedicated space for these like chapels and prayer rooms. However, to be more inclusive silent reflection or meditation spaces that non-Catholic students can freely use can benefit everyone regardless of affiliation.

For Catholic schools to cultivate spaces as described above, they can turn to Eaude's "hospitable space," which encapsulates what spaces for spiritual nurture look like.[71] These spaces are designed to foster relationships based on mutual trust and provide opportunities for all children to be cared for and to care for others, regardless of one's beliefs and worldviews.[72] In such environments, children are encouraged to reflect, imagine, and explore their feelings and responses, which helps them feel accepted and empowered. Emphasizing voluntary participation, schools can create spaces that encourage personal growth and spiritual exploration without obligation. These hospitable spaces avoid fast-paced, competitive, or outcome-driven environments, offering a sanctuary where students can pursue their spiritual

[71] Tony Eaude, "Creating Hospitable Space to Nurture Children's Spirituality-Possibilities and Dilemmas Associated with Power," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 19, no. 3–4 (2014): 236–48.

[72] Eaude, 242.

journey at their own pace.[73] Regular classrooms can be the sites of these hospitable spaces.[74] Teachers play a crucial role in sustaining these spaces, ensuring they are welcoming and supportive while allowing students the freedom to explore and question spirituality on their terms. This approach not only respects the diverse spiritual backgrounds and social-cultural contexts of students but also fosters a culture of understanding and acceptance crucial for nurturing the spiritual lives of all students in Catholic schools.[75]

Time

Nurturing spirituality requires dedicated time and a deep appreciation for the present moment. Time is crucial in nurturing spirituality, supporting the assumption that spirituality undergoes a process. This stands in contrast with the modern obsession with production or productivity. According to Nye, the focus on production prioritizes outcomes over processes, altering people's perception of time.[76] In this productivity-driven culture, individuals are measured by their output in a given amount of time. Regrettably, children's education often mirrors this production focus, emphasizing performance over genuine learning experiences. Children are judged according to their output and performances while teachers are measured by the number of high-performing children and the time spent to reach this

[73] Eaude, 246.

[74] Eaude, 245–46.

[75] See David M. Csinos, "From the Ground Up: Cultural Considerations in Research into Children's Spirituality and Theology," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 23, no. 1 (2018): 60–62; Annemie Dillen, "Children's Spirituality and Theologising with Children: The Role of 'Context,'" *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 25, no. 3–4 (2020): 239–43.

[76] See Nye, *Children's Spirituality*, 46.

output.[77] However, it is vital to recognize that children, like their spirituality, are not mere products but are involved in an ongoing process. Adopting this perspective honors the present time, making it a key element of nurturing spirituality.

Supporting consciousness in children's spirituality requires allocating time for children's diverse experiences. As children grow more aware of their experiences, they must be encouraged to value each present moment. Referring to Hyde's concept of 'felt sense,' adults should give children opportunities to engage in the here and now of their experiences.[78] This challenge intensifies in performance-based educational systems, where children are expected to complete learning a set of skills or acquiring a set of knowledge by a certain deadline. Engaging in the present is often mistakenly seen as unproductive because it does not always show immediate results. Valuing the present moment challenges adults to both prepare and seize opportunities to nurture spirituality, even beyond planned activities. Furthermore, periods of silence and rest are crucial for spiritual nurturing, not wasted time.

Considering the importance of the present, it is necessary to take into account the current diverse, postmodern, milieu especially observable in advanced economies. Hyde notes that the present time is characterized by the plurality of ideas and the abandonment of or distrust in a single, absolute

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[77] See Brendan Hyde, "Silenced by Performativity: The Child's Right to a Spiritual Voice in an Age of Neoliberal Educational Imperatives," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 26, no. 1–2 (2021): 9–23. In this work, Hyde argues that the performative-centered or outcomes-centered approaches to education, which are prevalent in many schools in the Philippines, silence the spiritual voices of children.

[78] Hyde, *Children and Spirituality*, 163.

framework of meaning.[79] There should be openness to how children use the present time to weave together diverse worldviews and forge their self-understanding and connections with others. This openness requires courage from adults because it may challenge their long-held traditions and frameworks of meaning. Therefore, valuing the present moment calls forth a dialogue-oriented approach.[80] This approach encourages adults to walk together with children, guiding them as they navigate through the plurality of meanings. Children thus receive the support they need to discern between constructive and destructive frameworks of meaning.

In Catholic schools, these principles can be applied to create an environment that values and nurtures the present moment. Allocating time for diverse experiences and opportunities for children to engage in the present can enhance their spiritual growth. Teachers should encourage periods of silence and rest. Giving time for dialogue-oriented approaches allows children to navigate diverse worldviews and develop their self-understanding. By focusing on the process than just outcomes, Catholic schools can support the holistic development of their students.

Body

For children, corporeality is a primal way of knowing.[81] Initially, children connect with others and derive meaning through their senses. Educational institutions often prioritize cognitive skills like speaking and reading, overlooking other forms of learning.

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[79] See Hyde, 163–64.

[80] See Dillen, "Between Heroism and Deficit: Challenges to Research on Children's Spirituality from a Christian Theological Standpoint," 64.

[81] See Hyde, *Children and Spirituality*, 165.

Children are expected to read and write from an early age, under the assumption that verbal expression is the primary way of knowing. For Hyde, engaging the body and the senses is an important approach to nurturing the spirituality of children, particularly through what he terms 'felt sense.' In this felt sense, children "draw upon the wisdom of their bodies in a holistic sense."[82]

A bodily approach to nurturing spirituality involves designing experiences that fully engage children's bodies. Engaging their bodies leads to a heightened consciousness, enabling children to reflect, connect, and make meaning. Play is a common activity that occupies children holistically. During play, children engage fully—mentally and physically—in relating with others, unleashing their imagination, and deepening self-understanding. Jennifer Mata-McMahon's research supports this, finding that preschool teachers see free, open-ended play as vital for nurturing children's spirituality.[83] While intellectual activities are important, adults should also incorporate sensorial, tactile, and hands-on activities.[84] Such experiences should encourage children to actively engage by "getting their hands dirty." Bhagwan proposes several whole-body engaging activities, including:

- participating in sacred rituals that deepen the child's identity and connectedness with their community and the divine;
- participating in creative and expressive arts such as poetry, drama, dance, and painting;
- practicing solitude and mindfulness for children;

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[82] Hyde, 165.

[83] See Jennifer Mata-McMahon, "Finding Connections between Spirituality and Play for Early Childhood Education," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 24, no. 1 (2019): 44–57.

[84] See Hyde, *Children and Spirituality*, 165.

- embracing an eco-spirituality or activities that engage the child's connectedness with nature.[85]

In addition to these suggestions, Catholic schools can adopt some activities which are based on research on children's spirituality. Some of these include Jerome Berryman's Godly play and Yust and Reibel's embodied prayer.[86] However, it is important to note that implementing activities designed for children elsewhere in the world should not be done blindly. Schools must be aware of the cultural contexts of their students to ensure these activities are meaningful and do not inadvertently silence their voices. By adapting activities to fit the contextual needs of students, schools can create more impactful and inclusive spiritual experiences.

Despite these possibilities, adults should be open to other nurturing activities. Adults must remember that the goal is to cultivate a holistic and healthy spirituality in children. Hee Jung Min and Joseph Lynn criticize that mindfulness activities in education are often used as capital for student success rather than for its intended purpose which is to support their spirituality.[87] They recommended a de-capitalization of mindfulness for it to be truly beneficial in educational settings. Hyde argues that material pursuits that cater to the ego impede the growth of the child's spirituality. This critique serves as a reminder that the goal of nurturing children's

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[85] For a thorough explanation of these practices, see Bhagwan, "Creating Sacred Experiences for Children as Pathways to Healing, Growth and Transformation."

[86] For Godly play, see Jerome Berryman, *Godly Play: A Way of Religious Education* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991) and https://godlyplayfoundation.org. For embodied prayer, see Yust and Reibel, "Innovations in Children's Spiritual Nurture."

[87] See Hee Jung Min and Joseph Lynn, "De-Capitalizing Mindfulness in Education," *Critical Sociology* 46, no. 6 (September 2020): 931–46.

spirituality should be for their holistic development. Such awareness helps counter the tendency to produce children poised for academic and economic success, instead of fostering well-rounded individuals.

Relationships

Relationality is recognized as a necessary attribute in the discussion of children's spirituality. Hyde identifies relationality as the foundation of all the characteristics of spirituality, making relationships paramount in nurturing spirituality.[88] While relationships with other people (I-others) are essential, relationality also encompasses the relationship with oneself (I-Self), with the world (I-world), and with a transcendent other (I-God).[89] In Christian contexts, this primarily involves the relationship between the child and God. Nye notes that the quality of one's relationships can set the parameters for how people, including children, can relate spiritually.[90]

Cultivating relationality in children involves nurturing their connections with the self, the world around them, and the transcendent. Many aspects of nurturing children's spirituality discussed above through space, body, and time already address these relationships. For instance, creating dedicated spaces for reflection helps children connect with their inner selves and develop a sense of "I-Self." Engaging children in activities that involve exploring nature or participating

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[88] Hyde, *Children and Spirituality*, 166.

[89] See Hay and Nye, *The Spirit of the Child*, 109. Hay and Nye explicitly used "I-God" to denote the relationship with the transcendent other. However, this can be interpreted broadly to include any transcendent other, allowing for the inclusion of various beliefs.

[90] Nye, *Children's Spirituality*, 51.

in community service fosters their relationship with the world (I-World). Practices such as embodied prayer, mindfulness, and participation in religious rituals deepen their connection with the transcendent (I-God), whether they perceive this as God or another form of higher power. While these dimensions are crucial, this section specifically emphasizes the importance of I-Others—relationships with other people. By focusing on fostering healthy, intimate, and trusting relationships children can experience the values of love, empathy, compassion, and mutual respect. These interpersonal relationships are foundational to their spiritual growth, allowing them to see and experience the divine or transcendent in their interactions with others. Therefore, this section gives important attention to others, ensuring that children develop meaningful connections in all dimensions of their spirituality.

Bhagwan's research emphasizes the importance of situating children within a community's spirituality.[91] A child's spirituality flourishes when they have a sense of belonging and connectedness within a spiritual community. Within these communities, children learn values like love, empathy, compassion, forgiveness, and service to others, integrating them into their identities and worldviews.[92] Although these values can be taught through stories or structured activities, nothing can compare to an experience of these values being lived out by people in the community.

In the community, the crucial role of the adult-child relationship must be emphasized. At home, this involves parents and children. In school, it is between teachers

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[91] See Bhagwan, "Creating Sacred Experiences for Children as Pathways to Healing, Growth and Transformation," 231.

[92] See Jennifer Mata, *Spiritual Experiences in Early Childhood Education: Four Kindergartners, One Classroom* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 29.

and students. Adults in these relationships are directly responsible for nurturing children's spirituality. Nye's framework for nurturing spirituality emphasizes two key ingredients for relationality: intimacy and trust.[93] Nye describes intimacy as a sense of "coming closer," for spirituality thrives in this closeness where delving deeper, taking risks, and pursuing passions is possible.[94] However, this closeness poses risks, as it makes the child vulnerable to potential misuse of intimacy by adults. This vulnerability may be the reason Nye found it necessary to emphasize trust in the spiritual relationship.[95] Spiritual relationships between adults and children should be safe and trust-filled, allowing children to be open and vulnerable. Healthy, intimate, and trusting relationships can positively influence the spiritual connections children form with themselves and others.

Karen-Marie Yust, Cathy Ota, and Brendan Hyde utilize Anne Phillips' metaphor of the womb from her study on girls' spirituality to describe the ideal type of relationship between adults and children.[96] They described the overall role that adults play as "wombing," comprising three different parts: "chorionic companions" who protect, "amniotic accompaniers" who support free exploration, and "placental partners" who foster relationality. The chorion acts as a protective outer membrane for the fetus. As "chorionic companions," adults protect children from external threats to their flourishing and

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[93] See Nye, *Children's Spirituality*, 53–56.

[94] See Nye, 53.

[95] See Nye, 54–55.

[96] See Karen-Marie Yust, Cathy Ota, and Brendan Hyde, "Wombing: Chorionic Companions, Amniotic Accompaniers and Placental Partners," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 18, no. 4 (November 1, 2013): 303–5. For the use of the "womb" as the role of the adult in the child's formation process, see Anne Phillips, *Faith of Girls: Children's Spirituality and Transition to Adulthood.* (Surry, UK: Ashgate, 2011).

create a safe environment for children to nurture their spirituality.[97] The amnion, a fluid-filled expandable bag allowing the fetus free movement, symbolizes how adults should let children explore their spirituality freely. "Amniotic accompaniers" support children's free exploration of their own identity and connectedness to others. Adults must nurture their spirituality, because "a spiritually bereft adult is hard-pressed to provide a fluid environment for the self-discovery tasks" in caring for the child.[98] The placenta symbolizes the connections and relationships in the child's life. Children's spirituality thrives when they experience their interconnectedness with the wider world. "Placental partners" commit to fostering healthy relationships as the baseline for children's relationships, choosing mutuality over inequality.[99] In this role, adults are mindful of their control and readily relinquish this control "in favor of mutuality and greater spiritual interrelatedness."[100] By creating safe, trusting, and mutually respectful environments inside and outside the classroom, Catholic schools can nurture the spiritual lives of all students.

The womb metaphor effectively illustrates the dynamics of relationships when nurturing the spirituality of children. However, this metaphor has its limitations, potentially idealizing adults and not addressing the risks of abuse, overcontrol, or imposition of views on children. This leads to an important theme. Eaude criticizes Nye's SPIRIT acronym for underplaying the power dynamics in adult-child relationships.[101] This may also be a limitation of Hyde's discussion on

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[97] Yust, Ota, and Hyde, "Wombing," 303–4.

[98] Yust, Ota, and Hyde, 304.

[99] Yust, Ota, and Hyde, 304.

[100] Yust, Ota, and Hyde, 304.

[101] See Eaude, "Creating Hospitable Space to Nurture Children's Spirituality–Possibilities and Dilemmas Associated with Power," 237.

relationships and even the womb metaphor. Therefore, addressing power dynamics by emphasizing children's agency is crucial in nurturing their spirituality.

Agency

Nurturing spirituality should empower children to cultivate their spirituality with appropriate support from the adults in their lives. This involves letting children exercise agency within healthy adult-child relationships. Recognizing that power dynamics exist in all social relationships, it is important that adults responsibly guide the nurturing of children's spirituality. In this case, there is already an imbalance of power, with adults in a position of power over children.[102] At this juncture, examining Dillen's framework for understanding power dynamics in nurturing spirituality becomes beneficial.[103] Using Max Weber's broad definition of power, as the "opportunity to impose one's will upon others" or "to influence others in social relations, even if one encounters resistance," she outlined three types of power: "power over," "power within," and "power with," which she applies to nurturing spirituality.[104]

"Power within" clearly articulates the goal of nurturing children's spirituality and serves as a guiding principle. Dillen views stimulating the child's inner strength or inner resources as a form of "power within."[105]

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[102] See Eaude, 238.

[103] See Dillen, "Empowering Children in Religious Education: Rethinking Power Dynamics," 4.

[104] See Dillen, 4; For a consideration of the English translation of Max Weber's definition of power, see Isidor Wallimann, Nicholas Ch. Tatsis, and George V. Zito, "On Max Weber's Definition of Power," *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology* 13, no. 3 (1977): 231–35.

[105] Dillen, "Empowering Children in Religious Education: Rethinking Power Dynamics," 4.

These inner resources may come in the form of children's capacities for greater consciousness, meaningful connections, and meaning-making. This "power within" embodies children's spiritual agency.[106] Dillen notes that in some religious settings, like those in the Belgian Catholic Church, nurturing spirituality often prioritizes the church or community's needs reducing children to mere potential future members.[107] The "power within" concept restores agency to children, allowing them space and time to develop their spiritual agency. With this agency, the narratives that children create and constantly recreate to make sense of their identity and their relationship with others and the world become possible.[108]

"Power with" involves sharing power with children, thereby empowering them. This article exemplifies this approach through discussions on space, time, the body, and relationships. For instance, allowing children to interpret their own experiences demonstrates "power with" in action. While adults provide the space, children have the autonomy to use it as they deem appropriate. In nurturing spirituality, "power with" necessitates collaboration and shared responsibility between adults and children. To use an analogy, adults act both as guides and companions, supporting and guiding while respecting children's agency. Recognizing a child's capabilities, the "power with" approach fosters empowerment and agency, which is essential for spiritual growth.

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[106] For some examples of how children exercise a spiritual "power within" or agency in research, see Peter J. Hemming and Nicola Madge, "Researching Children, Youth, and Religion: Identity, Complexity, and Agency," *Childhood*, 2011, 43–45.

[107] Dillen, "Empowering Children in Religious Education: Rethinking Power Dynamics," 5.

[108] Tony Eaude, "Revisiting Some Half-Forgotten Ideas on Children's Spirituality," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 28, no. 1 (2023): 26–27.

However, Dillen cautions against shifting "power with" to potentially harmful dynamics, where fellow children or uninvolved adults replace the primary caregiving adult.[109] This is risky for insecure children, who are searching for their spiritual path, or those who are easily influenced by others. In such situations, there needs to be a "power over"—direct influence adults exert over children—to correct misguided ideas or beliefs. Adults must vigilantly monitor instances where "power over" is exercised over children because they will always be present.[110] Dillen points to classical teaching methods in religious education as examples of "power over," where school administrators and teachers control the content to initiate and socialize children into a religious tradition.[111] However, "power over" is not limited to direct adult-child interactions but can also manifest in prescribed educational content and theological language.

Regardless of its form, when "power over" dominates, it risks reducing children to "not-yet adults" or as incompetent subjects, hindering their spiritual flourishing. This can stifle children's 'power within.' However, "power over" can be protective and necessary, especially in situations where children face vulnerability, like intimidation or bullying. Adults may need to intervene to address problematic spiritual beliefs and practices ingrained in children. Thus, a minimal and thoughtful application of "power over" is recommended.

In Catholic schools, nurturing spirituality should cultivate their "power within," by balancing "power with" and "power over." Teachers and administrators can create environments that stimulate children's inner strengths, foster collaborative relationships, and provide necessary guidance and correction. By respecting

[109] Dillen, 5.
[110] Dillen, 5–6.
[111] Dillen, 6.

children's agency and providing supportive structures, schools can help children nurture their spirituality. This includes creating spaces for reflection, promoting meaningful experiential learning activities, and ensuring that the educational content respects and enhances children's spiritual growth. An awareness and thoughtful balance of the power dynamics in school ensures that children are not only protected but also empowered to grow spiritually.

Conclusion

This article critically engages with contemporary literature on children's spirituality, particularly focusing on nurturing this dimension that can provide relevant insights for Philippine Catholic schools. The analysis underscores the necessity of adopting a broader perspective on spirituality—one that transcends traditional forms and embraces a more holistic understanding that acknowledges children's inherent relational consciousness and capacity for meaning-making. To effectively nurture spirituality, school leaders and teachers must foster environments rich in resources like space, time, bodily engagement, meaningful relationships, and opportunities to exercise agency. These resources enable an educational atmosphere where children can explore spiritual concepts and texts, experience wonder and awe, and engage meaningfully with the transcendent, regardless of their religious backgrounds.

Philippine Catholic schools must also recognize the diverse cultural backgrounds of students, including those from non-Catholic traditions, and incorporate culturally sensitive approaches in their programs. Future directions could include creating collaborative spaces for communal spiritual and theological meaning-making and ensuring that cultural diversity is critically considered at

every stage of efforts toward nurturing spirituality. By embracing this expanded approach, schools can transform traditional educational strategies and policies, making them more adaptive, respectful, and effective in meeting all students' spiritual needs. Such a commitment to inclusivity and cultural sensitivity not only aligns with but also enhances the mission of whole-person formation, enriching the educational journey of every student. By adopting these inclusive practices and recognizing the unique cultural dimensions of spirituality in the Philippines, schools can nurture a generation of students who are academically prepared and spiritually nourished, emphasizing the importance of spirituality as an integral part of holistic education.

About the Author

Julius Anthony L. Porqueriño is currently a PhD researcher and an FWO fellow for fundamental research at the Faculty of the Theology and Religious Studies, in KU Leuven, Belgium. His research project involves working with religious education teachers in developing principles for a religious education that responds to the context of the Philippines. He obtained his Masters in Theological Studies at the Ateneo de Manila University in 2018 and his Research Masters: Masters of Advanced Studies in Theology and Religion from KU Leuven in 2021. His areas of research include children's spirituality, postcolonial practical theology, and religious education. Email address: jules.porquerino@kuleuven.be

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