

SPIRITUAL INTELLIGENCE: A CRITIQUE

Abstract

The term *spiritual intelligence* is an expression that has begun to appear in the recent literature on spirituality. It is a term that is beginning to make its way into the vocabulary of some religious educators who have sought to explore ways of nurturing the spiritual lives of their students. This article briefly describes and critiques what is meant by this term. It outlines different categories of intelligence that have been presented in recent literature, and discusses some concerns that have been expressed in describing spirituality as an intelligence. In light of this, some conclusions are then drawn for Catholic religious educators.

In exploring the spiritual lives of children and young people, some religious educators have begun to use the term *spiritual intelligence*, to describe students' ability to access and draw on the spiritual dimension of their lives. Spiritual intelligence (SQ) is a phrase that has acquired a growing status in recent literature (Edwards, 1998; Emmons, 2001; Levin, 2000; Sinetar, 2000; Zohar & Marshall, 2000). But is it accurate to describe spirituality as an intelligence? Certainly, recent scholarship has maintained that spirituality is a natural and fundamental predisposition of being human (Chater, 2001; Groom, 1998; Hay & Nye, 1998; O'Murchu, 1997, 2000; Scott, 2001). However, this is not necessarily to suggest that spirituality is a form of intelligence.

The purpose of this article is to describe and critique what is meant by the term spiritual intelligence. In order to determine whether or not the notion of spiritual intelligence exists, this article begins by briefly describing what is meant by intelligence. It will outline different categories of intelligence that have been presented in recent literature, as well as discuss some concerns expressed in describing spirituality as an intelligence. Such an exploration may help to elucidate whether or not it is possible for an individual to possess spiritual intelligence.

Describing intelligence

The concept of intelligence is difficult to describe. There is no one basic definition that outlines or captures what intelligence comprises. Colombo and Frick (1999) have asserted that this is because intelligence can denote different meanings to various professionals and academics in the field of psychology. Adding to this complexity, Anderson (2000) has maintained that the notion of intelligence is culturally relative – what is considered to be “intelligent” in one particular culture may be considered as “unintelligent” in another cultural setting.

Zohar & Marshall (2000) have reported that for much of the early part of the twentieth century, the concept of intelligence was confined to the rational

domain, described as the ability to solve logical or strategic problems. The tests devised for measuring this intelligence in an individual were known as IQ (intelligence quotient) tests. The higher an individual's IQ score of one of these tests, the higher their intelligence was said to be.

Much of the literature now seeks to broaden this description of intelligence. Whereas once, intelligence was perceived to be of a unitary nature, that is, it possessed a fixed capacity pertaining to an individual's rational or cognitive ability, many writers now describe intelligence in more expansive ways by describing the characteristic features of intelligence. Three such characteristics will now be discussed.

Nature verses nurture

Recent scholarship has indicated that an individual's intelligence is seen to be the result of a combination of biological functioning and cultural experience, *nature versus nurture* (Anderson, 2000; Halford, 1999; Hay, 1999; Reznick & Corley, 1999; Zohar & Marshall, 2000). Both biological construction of the human mind and the experiences of one's cultural setting or community are crucial factors in the make up of intelligence. This has been the view adopted in Torff and Gardiner (1999) in their description of intelligence as “a term for organising and describing human capabilities in relation to the cultural contexts in which those capabilities are developed, used, and given meaning” (p. 140).

Ability to solve problems

The literature also reveals that a number of writers note the importance of problem solving in defining intelligence. Chiu, Hong and Dweck (1994) have defined intelligence as “the level of skills and knowledge currently available for problem-solving” (p. 106). Walters & Gardner (1986) have held a similar view of intelligence, maintaining that it is “a set of abilities that permits an individual to solve problems or fashion products that are of consequence in a particular cultural setting” (p. 164). In addition to this, Emmons (2000) has acknowledged also the importance of problem solving in describing intelligence.

Abstract reasoning

The literature further reveals writers who have held to the primacy of the ability to think in an abstract fashion in describing intelligence. Sternberg (1997) has maintained that the hallmark of intelligence is the potential to carry out abstract reasoning. Mayer (2000) has described intelligence as "the capacity or ability that primarily concerns performing valid abstract reasoning with coherent symbol systems" (p. 48).

Describing intelligence in a broader fashion to include the notions of nature versus nurture, the ability to solve problems and the hallmark of abstract thinking, allows for an exploration of the different categories of intelligence that have been outlined by a number of writers in recent times.

Categories of intelligence

Educators and psychologists today are familiar with the terms intellectual, cognitive or rational intelligence. As discussed, tests designed to measure such intelligence were developed in the early 1900s, and were used to investigate processes such as memory, attention, comprehension, discrimination and reasoning (de Souza, 2001). The levels of performance on these tests were expressed as a global figure called an intelligence quotient (IQ).

In more recent times, Gardner (1983, 1993) has questioned this notion of intelligence and the concept of IQ, maintaining that it was too narrow a view of a person's intelligence. He proposed a case for the multiplicity of the intellect, identifying initially seven intelligences. Gardner maintained that these operated together to assist individuals to solve problems. Gardner thus described intelligence as "an ability to solve problems or fashion products that are of consequence in a particular cultural setting or community" (Gardner, 1993, p. 15). Gardner defined seven such intelligences as: logical/mathematical, linguistic, music/rhythmic, visual/spatial, body/kinaesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal. More recently, Gardner (1995) has argued the case for an eighth intelligence, the existence of a naturalist intelligence and also for a ninth intelligence that he has termed an existential intelligence (Gardner, 1999).

In determining whether or not particular abilities and capacities qualify as an intelligence, Gardner (1993) offered eight essential criteria for distinguishing an independent intelligence:

1. An identifiable core operation or set of operations;
2. An evolutionary history and evolutionary plausibility;

3. A characteristic pattern of development;
4. Potential isolation by brain damage;
5. The existence of persons distinguished by the exceptional presence or absence of the ability;
6. Susceptibility to encoding in a symbol system;
7. Support from experimental psychological investigations;
8. Support from psychometric findings.

Gardner's work, however, has been questioned in recent times. Zohar and Marshall (2000) have argued that all of an individual's intelligence can be linked to one of three basic neural systems of the brain and that the intelligences described by Gardner are in fact variations of associated neural arrangements. Also, de Souza (2001) has maintained that Gardner's intelligences are based on cognition, since a cognitive-scientific model of the mind has informed his thinking. As such, the intelligences described as "interpersonal" and "intrapersonal" do not focus on the role of feeling, but rather their focus lies in thinking about the feeling. This represents more of a meta-cognitive process.

Elliott (1998) has also expressed some reservation about accepting Gardner's notion of the plurality of intelligence. While Gardner has asserted that each of his identified intelligences is separate, with its own set abilities that can be observed and measured, Elliott, in drawing on the work of Morgan and Messick, has pointed out that each of these intelligences is more realistically termed a cognitive style. He has suggested that the concept of multiple intelligences is "simply a reframing of cognitive styles into seven areas of intelligence" (Elliott, 1998, p. 24). These cognitive styles refer to an individual's preferred way of organising what is seen, learnt, or thought about. Such cognitive styles, Elliott has argued, are not separate intelligences.

The case for a second category of intelligence has been proposed and refined by Salovey and Mayer (1990), and Goleman (1996). This category is referred to in the literature as Emotional Intelligence (EQ), defined as "the ability to process emotional information, particularly as it involves perception, assimilation, understanding and management of emotion, that is, its capacity to carry out abstract reasoning ... the hallmark of intelligence" (de Souza, 2001, p. 37).

Mayer, Salovey and Caruso (2000) have described four branches of basic mental ability in a hierarchical movement from basic processes (perceiving and expressing emotions) to more advanced psychological processes (conscious, reflective regulation of emotion):

1. emotional identification, perception and expression of emotion (identifying emotion in faces, music, stories, and so on);
2. assimilating emotion in thought (for instance, relating emotion to other mental sensations such as taste, or colour as in art) and using emotion in reasoning and problem solving (integrating emotion and thought);

3. understanding and analysing emotion (solving emotional problems such as knowing which emotions are similar, or opposites, and what relations they convey);
4. reflective regulation of emotion (understanding the implications of social acts on the emotions, and the regulation of emotion in self and others). (pp. 399-401).

Salerno (1996) has listed and outlined a set of qualities that a person with a developed emotional intelligence would display. These attributes are listed in table 1.

Table 1:
Emotional Quotient Qualities

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional Courage • Compassion • Composure • Balance • Awareness • Business Acumen (understanding people) • Co-operation • Inspiration • Humbleness • Resourcefulness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Precise Communicator • Staminar • Dress & Grooming • Social Grace • Health & Fitness • Horizontal Intelligence (to be open to information coming from other systems) • Problem Solver • Impartiality • Financial Status • Intuition |
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(Salerno, 1996, pp. 61-63)

Goleman (1996) has maintained that intellectual intelligence (IQ) and emotional intelligence (EQ) are not opposing competencies, "These two minds, the emotional and the rational, operate in tight harmony for the most part, intertwining their very different ways of knowing to guide us through the world" (p. 9). He has also maintained that one's emotional intelligence is a fundamental requirement for one's effective use of rational intelligence. In other words, a person's feelings play an important role in their thought processes.

In more recent times, the proposal for a third category of intelligence has been put forward. It has been suggested that this third category of intelligence be called "spiritual intelligence" (SQ).

The question as to whether or not this is in fact an authentic 'intelligence' now needs to be explored. This may shed light upon the question as to whether or not a person can possess spiritual intelligence.

Spiritual intelligence

A number of writers and theorists in recent literature have presented arguments for the existence of a third category of intelligence, known as spiritual intelligence (SQ) (Edwards, 1998; Emmons, 2000; Levin, 2000; Sinetar, 2000). Zohar and Marshall (2000) have presented a detailed case for the existence of spiritual intelligence, having drawn upon neuro-scientific and psychological research to inform their understanding this third

category of human intelligence. They have described spiritual intelligence as the mental aptitude used by human beings to address and find solutions to problems of meaning and value, and to place their lives and actions into a wider, richer, meaning-giving context (pp. 3-4).

In exploring and presenting the case for spiritual intelligence, Zohar and Marshall (2000) asserted that there are essentially three types of intelligence that derive from three basic neural systems of the human brain. In drawing upon the work of Sigmund Freud, two initial psychological processes were identified - the primary and secondary processes. The primary process is associated with Freud's notion of the id, that is, with instincts and emotions of the unconscious. Zohar and Marshall have maintained that this kind of thinking derives from structures within the brain known as neural networks (p. 50). It is *associative thinking*. It is thinking with the heart and body, and refers to what has come to be understood as emotional intelligence (EQ).

The secondary process is associated with Freud's concept of the ego, that is, with the conscious and rational mind. Zohar and Marshall (2000) have argued that this kind of thinking is based on the serial neural wiring of the brain and as such they call this *serial thinking* (pp. 46-47). Serial thinking is rational and logical, and is not dissimilar to the serial processing undertaken by computers. Serial thinking has come to be understood as rational or cognitive intelligence (IQ).

Zohar and Marshall (2000) have noted that the human brain, in its complexity, operates across systems of thinking. Far from consisting of isolated modules of intelligence, the two systems described above interact and enhance each other. In other words, IQ and EQ operate in such a way as to support each other, thereby giving a person the type of intelligence that neither EQ nor IQ could provide on its own (p. 56). Therefore, a person's thinking is the product of at least both rational and emotional intelligence. Nonetheless, Zohar and Marshall have maintained that there are other mental abilities and aptitudes possessed by human beings that are unaccounted for by either rational thinking or emotional thinking, or indeed, by a combination of both. They have asserted that there is a third category of intelligence which offers plausible explanations for these other abilities of the human mind and its thinking. This third category of intelligence has been termed spiritual intelligence (SQ).

Zohar and Marshall (2000) have described a third neural system of the brain which gives rise to what they term *unitive thinking*, or spiritual intelligence. In doing so they have drawn on the research of

Wolf Singer and Charles Gray. They reported that when a person perceives an object such as a tennis ball, the many neurons in every part of the brain that are involved in that perception oscillate in unison, the frequency of which is between 35 Hz and 45 Hz, uniting the many localised perceptual responses to that ball - its shape, colour, size and so forth. The person then has the experience of perceiving a single, solid object, in this case, the tennis ball. These synchronous neural oscillations in the 40 Hz range are the neural basis for what Zohar and Marshall (2000) have described as the higher-order, unitive intelligence - a tertiary process termed spiritual intelligence (pp. 62-63).

Further to this, Zohar and Marshall (2000) have referred to studies that show the existence of what has become coined as the *God spot* in the human brain (pp. 91 - 112). This God spot is located in the temporal lobe of the brain and appears to become active when a person speaks about, God, and religious or spiritual matters. While cautious about the extent to which the God spot contributes to spiritual intelligence, Zohar and Marshall have noted that it has evolved in the human brain to fulfil an evolutionary purpose as an essential biological role in spiritual experience (pp. 95-96). This notion supports the theses that have been put forward by O'Murchu (1997), and by Hay and Nye (1998) that spirituality is a natural human predisposition and has a biological foundation.

Zohar and Marshall (2000) have concluded then, that the 40Hz oscillations are then the neural basis for spiritual intelligence (SQ), the unitive intelligence that integrates both IQ and EQ. It makes possible a dialogue between reason and emotion (p. 7). But further, they have maintained that spiritual intelligence is at the core of what it means to be human and to be connected to the wider and richer, meaning-giving context - the universe:

Our spiritual intelligence is rooted in life itself, and thus has biological and evolutionary origins ... We conscious human beings have our roots in the origins of the universe itself. Our spiritual intelligence grounds us in the wider cosmos, and life has purpose and meaning within the larger context of cosmic evolutionary processes (p. 88).

In outlining the characteristics of spiritual intelligence, Zohar & Marshall (2000) have maintained the following are indications of a highly developed SQ:

1. The capacity to be flexible (actively and spontaneously adaptive);

2. a high degree of self-awareness;
3. a capacity to face and use suffering;
4. a capacity to face and transcend pain;
5. a quality of being inspired by vision and values;
6. a reluctance to cause unnecessary harm;
7. a tendency to see the connections between diverse things (being "holistic");
8. a marked tendency to ask "Why?" or "What if?" questions and to seek "fundamental" answers;
9. being what psychologists call "field-independent" – possessing a facility for working against convention;
10. someone who is responsible for bringing higher vision and value to others and showing them how to use it, in other words, a person who inspires others (servant leader) (pp 15-16).

Emmons (2000) has argued also for the existence of a spiritual intelligence. In doing so, he has drawn upon the framework outlined by Gardner (1993) in describing intelligence as a set of abilities used to solve problems and create products of value within a particular cultural setting or community. Emmons has identified at least five core components that would define spirituality as an intelligence, maintaining that a spiritually intelligent person possesses:

1. the capacity to transcend the physical and material;
2. the ability to experience heightened states of consciousness;
3. the ability to sanctify everyday experience;
4. the ability to utilize spiritual resources to solve problems;
5. the capacity to be virtuous.
(Emmons, 2000, p. 10)

While articulating the need for further research in this area, it has been the contention of Emmons (2000) that spiritual intelligence shows a definable developmental history, and that there exists the possibility of there being differing levels of proficiency or sophistication in what he terms as *spiritual abilities* (p. 16). In addition, he has

maintained that such spiritual abilities and competencies enable an individual to adapt and to function effectively in a wide range of life endeavours (p. 16).

Kwilecki (2000) has supported the notion of spiritual intelligence as outlined by Emmons. Writing from the perspective of a religious studies scholar, Kwilecki has presented the case study of the religious life of a woman she believed to be spiritually aware. Kwilecki then applied the five core components outlined by Emmons to this case study to determine whether or not this woman might in fact be considered to be spiritually intelligent. Kwilecki concluded that each of the core components outlined by Emmons did in fact capture the essential dynamics of this person's spiritual growth. On this basis, Kwilecki then accepted, the concept of spirituality as a category of intelligence as put forward by Emmons.

Spiritual intelligence, or heightened spiritual consciousness.

There has, however, been some discussion and debate about the definition of intelligence and the framework used by Emmons (2000), that subsequently led him to describe spirituality as an intelligence. As noted, several writers have questioned the notion of the multiplicity of intelligences, proposed by Gardner, upon which Emmons has based his work. Emmons maintained that the theory of multiple intelligences was selected as his framework for outlining spiritual intelligence because of its familiarity and recognition among psychologists and educationalists. However, much of the literature would suggest that while the theory of multiple intelligences is widely known, there is hardly universal agreement with its hypothesis (Elliott, 1998; Morgan, 1996; de Souza, 2000; Zohar & Marshall, 2000).

While not ruling out the possibility that the category of spiritual intelligence may exist, Mayer (2000) has contended that the five characteristics outlined by Emmons (2000) have more to do with heightened consciousness than with intelligence. In shifting the language of mental ability and capacity (used by Emmons) to consciousness and awareness, Mayer has revised these five characteristics as:

1. *attending* to the unity of the world and transcending one's existence;
2. *consciously entering* into heightened spiritual states;
3. *attending* to the sacred in everyday activities, events and relationships;

4. *structuring consciousness* so that problems in living are seen in the context of life's ultimate concerns;
5. *desiring* to act, and consequently, acting in virtuous ways (to show forgiveness, to express gratitude, to be humble, to display compassion (Mayer, 2000, p. 48).

Mayer (2000) has called into question the description of intelligence offered by Emmons (2000) as a set of abilities used to solve problems and create products of value within a particular cultural setting or community. Mayer has argued that intelligence primarily involves the capacity for abstract reasoning, that is, thinking that "involves the ability to carry out many types of mental transformations, such as identifying similarities and differences, making generalisations, mentally rotating figures, and other tasks, all according to specifiable rules" (p. 48). Mayer has contended that only two of the five characteristics of spiritual intelligence put forward by Emmons - the ability to sanctify everyday experiences, and the ability to utilise spiritual resources to solve everyday problems - meet this necessary criterion of abstract reasoning. Mayer has maintained that more research needs to be undertaken in order to clarify the abstract reasoning that may be involved in spiritual intelligence.

Spiritual intelligence as 'inspired thought'

Sineta (2000) has applied the notion of spiritual intelligence to describe spiritually aware young children. She has described spiritual intelligence as *inspired thought* - "It (is) inspired drive and effectiveness, the 'is-ness' or aliveness of divinity of which we're all a part" (p. 17). The term *early awakens* has been applied to those young children who display signs of this inspired thought. In exploring the notion of spiritual intelligence in young children, Sineta has identified a series of qualities, which she maintains are displayed in early awakens. These include animated essence, intuitive authority, the ability to heed love, rising to the occasion, choosing the best option, early artistry, wholesome authority, positive rebellion, and early reconciling.

In young children, or early awakens, Sineta (2000) has believed that the "stirrings of spiritual intelligence" (p. 196) can be found. These qualities of spiritual intelligence are not evident all at once. There is a sense in which they develop gradually over a person's lifetime. They arrive "incrementally" (p. 196). The notion of wholeness is lifetime's journey, as Sineta puts it, "Each life seems a work in progress, and some 'works' are further along than others" (p. 196).

Importantly for educators, Sineta (2000) has noted that spiritually intelligent children, or early awakens tend to be lively, vibrant and creative children who can tire adults out with their focused energy. Such children "with strong spiritual drives have displayed a zeal for independence" (p. 11). According to Sineta, this should not be viewed as a sign of rebellion or disruptiveness. It is not that these children are deliberately trying the patients of their teachers or parents. Rather, it is their "seeking of unity that is spiritual" (p.10).

An unresolved question

That spirituality is a natural and fundamental quality of being human has been established by scholarship in this field (Chater, 2001; Groome, 1998; Hay & Nye, 1998; O'Murchu, 1997, 2000; Scott, 2001). The question as to whether there exists a separate intelligence that can be called spiritual intelligence, however, remains somewhat unresolved. While Zohar and Marshall (2000) have presented a detailed case for the existence of such an intelligence based upon the neurological systems of the human brain, the contentions of Emmons (2000), who drew upon Howard Gardiner's notion of multiple intelligences, have been questioned.

The qualities of spiritual intelligence, as outlined by Sineta (2000) are derived through observation and conversation with children and adults of many ages over a number of years. However, her use of the term spiritual intelligence is not based on neurological or psychological investigation, nor does the description spiritual intelligence - inspired thought - address directly the notions of problem solving or abstract thought. Her outline of the attributes and qualities of what she has termed as spiritually intelligent children may be valid, but the question as to whether they actually indicate the existence of a spiritual intelligence needs to be raised. Perhaps they are more indicative of what Mayer (2000) has termed spiritual consciousness.

Other writers, among whom are Edwards (1998) and Levin (2000) have also coined the term spiritual intelligence, but they seem to have used this phrase more because of its appeal than they do for any researched neurological or psychological basis. Their use of the term seems to have had more to do with spiritual consciousness or development, or even a spiritual domain of one's life, than with an actual category of intelligence. Mayer (2000) has noted that when an attribute is labelled as an intelligence its prestige is raised. He has cautioned that this labelling of personal attributes or non-intelligences in fact diminishes the concept of intelligence.

Conclusion

In light of the concerns that have been outlined, it

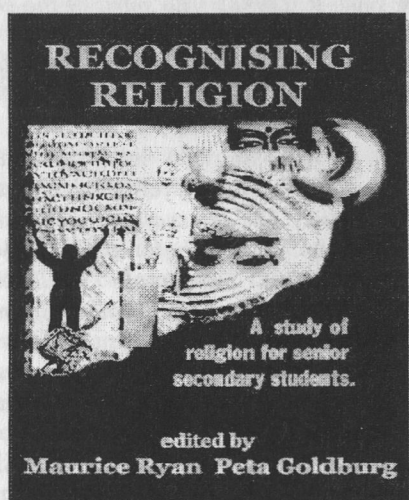
would seem that further research is needed to determine whether the notion of a spiritual intelligence exists as a separate intelligence. While this is not to suggest that there is no such thing as spiritual intelligence, religious educators need to be both aware of the debate concerning the use of this term, and cautious about using it in their own discourse. Quite possibly, what is being described when one employs the term spiritual intelligence, is the spiritual dimension of a person's being. A number of scholars have argued that such a dimension can and should be nurtured in both the secular and religious educational setting (Chater, 2001; Erricker, 2001; Hay & Nye, 1998; Kessler, 2000; Moffett, 1994; Palmer, 1999). Catholic religious educators are well positioned to nurture the spiritual dimension of students' lives, and are able to intentionally plan activities that may achieve this purpose. In doing so, what may need to be acknowledged is that such a nurturing is attending to the spiritual dimension of students' lives rather than the notion of their spiritual intelligence.

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RECOGNISING RELIGION

Maurice Ryan and Peta Goldberg

Recognising Religion is a student text that has been written to support school programs based on the revised 2001 *Study of Religion Syllabus* of the Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies. It has also taken account of the senior secondary school programs offered in other Australian states. A teacher guide provides background, teaching and learning approaches and assessment and evaluation strategies.

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