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Educators' practices for promoting the spiritual development of children aged 3 to 4 years, in the context of Catholic childcare centres in Western Australia

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EDUCATORS' PRACTICES FOR PROMOTING THE SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN AGED 3 TO 4 YEARS, IN THE CONTEXT OF CATHOLIC CHILDCARE CENTRES IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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Abstract

The Australian early years' mandated document, the *Early Years Learning Framework* (Department for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2009), outlines the need for educators to attend to children's spiritual capacity as part of a holistic approach to the early years (p. 9). Additionally, policy that governs the Catholic sector (such as *Early Childhood Education Care Policy 2-B6* (Catholic Education Commission Western Australia [CECWA], 2013a)) reinforces this requirement for educators to attend to the holistic development of children, inclusive of their spiritual capacity alongside the cognitive, social, emotional, physical, creative and moral capacities. Consequently, educators employed in Catholic childcare are tasked with attending to children's innate spirituality. However, how this can be achieved is not clearly articulated in current policy or framework documents (Grajczonek, 2012a). The present study examined educators' practices to promote children's spiritual development within the context of Catholic childcare in Western Australia and with a specific focus on children aged 3 to 4 years of age.

A qualitative approach with a social constructivist theoretical perspective that utilised interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) and qualitative content analysis (QCA) was employed in this investigation. The investigation yielded insight into educators' understandings of spirituality and their knowledge regarding the promotion of children's spiritual development; the practices educators employed, both intentionally and incidentally to promote children's spirituality; and the practices that educators planned for to promote children's spirituality. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, observations of practice and through QCA of educators' planning documentation. IPA and QCA were employed as both theoretical perspectives underpinning the research as well as tools for data analysis.

Findings from this investigation resulted in the generation of key theory pertaining to educators' understandings of spirituality and their practices to promote children's spirituality. In essence, early childhood educators possessed limited knowledge regarding spirituality. Educators were limited in their ability to articulate spirituality and, subsequently, their ability to articulate their practices to promote children's spirituality was hindered. Educators' practices demonstrated that children's spirituality was promoted incidentally and without intentionality. It became evident that although educators did know something about promoting children's spirituality, both spiritual formation and information about spirituality is required to enable educators to intentionally and effectively plan for children's spiritual opportunities. As spiritual moments are often child initiated and spontaneous, educators must also possess the skills to discern incidental moments within each child's day that are open to spiritual possibilities.

Declaration

The Thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the Thesis. It contains no work which has previously been presented for an award of the University or any other educational institution.

Signed:

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Chapter One: The Research Defined

1.1 Introduction

Attending to the spiritual capacity of young children is considered an essential component of a holistic approach to education and care in the early years (Adams, Bull & Maynes, 2016; Kiessling, 2010; Love & Talbot, 1999). Holistic approaches are premised on nurturing the 'whole child' through the provision of opportunities for children to develop across the cognitive, social, emotional, physical, creative, moral and spiritual capacities of the human person (Department for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2009, p. 14). In the face of pressure to prioritise cognitive development that can be easily measured (Eaude, 2016) research has drawn attention to the inter-relatability of development and the need to take a more holistic and integrated approach to learning in the early years (Cameron, 2009), that is, one that includes children's spiritual development.

Australia's paradigm shift from a focus primarily on cognitive educational outcomes toward an understanding of the need for development to be nurtured across all capacities, had been acknowledged in the Australian national landmark document *Belonging, Being and Becoming: Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* [*EYLF*] (DEEWR, 2009). Significantly, the *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009) document was the first nationally mandated framework implemented in 'prior-to-school' settings that explicitly addressed the education and care of children aged birth to 5 years. Additionally, the *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009, p. 9) advocates for an integrated and holistic approach in the early years with the first explicit acknowledgement that adopting a holistic approach to children's education and care includes attending to their spiritual development.

The *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009) document is significant to this current research as it clearly articulates the responsibility of educators to attend to children's spirituality. Educators are tasked with ensuring that children work towards achieving five *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009) learning outcomes whilst following prescribed principles and pedagogical practices. Educators working with children aged 3 to 4 years, who are the focus of this investigation, now require a clear understanding of the construct of spirituality and how it can be promoted. If educators are mandated to attend to the spiritual development of children as part of their holistic development, then educators require the knowledge and skills to do so. Currently, the *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009) identifies spirituality as a component of children's development, but provides little by way of advice to educators on what constitutes spirituality and more specifically, the way that spirituality could be promoted within young children. Additionally, existing research on children's spirituality has predominately focussed on middle childhood (Adams, Bull & Maynes, 2016). This research sought to fill this gap in nurturing young children's spirituality by investigating educators' practices to promote 3 -4-year-old children's spiritual development in the context of Catholic childcare. This chapter outlines the significance of this research for theory, methodology, practice, policy and future research. The situational and political contexts of the investigation are also presented. At the conclusion of the chapter, an outline of the thesis structure is provided.

1.2 The Research Problem

This investigation makes an original and significant contribution to existing research in the field of children's spirituality. The Australian early childhood landscape has undergone significant change since the introduction of the *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009) as part of a larger national approach to raise quality across early years' settings. The *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009) explicitly articulates the need for educators to attend to

children's spiritual capacity as part of their holistic development, with little advice on how this can be achieved. Additionally, the context of Catholic childcare is unique to this study. The operation of childcare centres within the Catholic school system is a new phenomenon in Western Australia and therefore largely unrepresented in existing empirical studies. The Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia (CECWA), with its delegated authority from the Catholic Bishops, governs the office of Catholic Education Western Australia (CEWA) and outlines policy (such as *Early Childhood Education Care Policy 2-B6* (CECWA, 2013a)), the requirement for educators to address the holistic nature of the child. However, as with the *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009), CEWA provides little advice regarding pedagogical practices relating to the promotion of children's spirituality to assist educators in this task. A further distinguishing aspect of this research is the specific focus on educators' practices to promote 3 and 4-year-old children's spiritual development. Several studies exist that have attempted to describe spirituality (Bradford, 1999; Coles, 1990; Hay & Nye, 1998) and to measure children's spiritual development (Moore, Gomez-Garibello, Bosacki, & Talwar, 2016; Sifers, Warren & Jackson, 2012) although most have focussed attention on middle childhood as opposed to early childhood, under 8 years of age (Adams, Bull & Maynes, 2016). Scholarly and empirical literature exists that provides practices for educators to assist children's spiritual development within the context of a school (Bone, 2005; Kessler, 2000). However, few studies have addressed the practice of the educator with children below school age, under 5 years (Champagne, 2003; Goodliff, 2013). Additionally, scholarly literature makes the suggestion that educators are often unfamiliar with the concept of spirituality and how to address the spiritual needs of their children (Hyde, 2016). This investigation sought to explore these existing gaps in empirical research by investigating the practices of

educators to promote children's spirituality (aged 3 to 4 years) in the context of Catholic childcare in Western Australia.

1.3 Research Questions

The overarching research question guiding this investigation is: What are educators' practices for promoting the spiritual development of children, aged 3 to 4 years, in the context of Catholic childcare centres in Western Australia?

In addressing the overarching research question, the following sub-questions arose from a review of the literature:

Research Question 1: What do educators understand by the term 'spirituality'?

Research Question 2: What do educators know about promoting children's spiritual development?

Research Question 3: What practices are educators implementing, intentionally and incidentally, to promote children's spiritual development?

These three research questions collectively responded to the overarching question that guided this investigation.

1.4 Context of the Research

This research is situated within the context of Catholic childcare for 3 to 4-year-olds in Western Australia. In this section, the background and context of the research is separated into the following sections:

1.4.1   Situational context of the childcare centres in the investigation; and

1.4.2   Policy context of early childhood and Catholic education in Western Australia.

1.4.1 Situational context of the childcare centres in the investigation.

Changes to government educational policy in Western Australia, through the *Education and Care Services National Law (WA) Act (*2012a) have allowed for the introduction of childcare centres under the jurisdiction of the school sector, such as Catholic Education Western Australia (CEWA). The CEWA has provided alternative care arrangements for school aged children (such as before and after school care) for eight years (CECWA, 2008). However, the introduction of childcare in the form of long day-care centres, catering for children from 6 weeks of age to 4 years, commenced in 2010 (CECWA, 2010), in anticipation of the 2012 legislation. Compulsory schooling within Western Australia begins at age 5 (pre-primary) with many WA Catholic schools offering a 4-year-old kindergarten program for a minimum of 15 hours per week (CECWA, 2013a). As a result of the CEWA's initiative to provide childcare prior to school age, children are entering the Catholic sector at a much younger age. Concurrently, educators in Western Australia are mandated, by the *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009), to attend to the spiritual capacity of the children in their care. In relation to this investigation, the context does not currently address the practices of the educator in explicitly promoting the spiritual development of children aged 3 to 4 years. If educators working with this age group are expected to attend to the spiritual capacity of children in the same way they attend to their cognitive or physical capacities, educators must first understand spirituality and recognise how to engage with it. When educators have the knowledge to understand the spiritual capacity as a dimension of the whole child, they can subsequently focus the development of professional skills to implement practices that promote children's spirituality.

At the time of this investigation, there were three childcare centres operating as long day-care centres and administered by CEWA, within Western Australia. These three centres formed the specific context of this research. These centres are referred to

as 'long day-care centres' within CEWA to distinguish them from other care options. Two centres are located on an existing Catholic primary school site and one was located on an independent site with no physical connection to a primary school. Each centre provides for children across the birth to 5 years age range, which includes children aged 3 to 4 years, who were the focus of this research.

A qualified teacher is required within the centre, as part of the Australian government's (2009) *National Quality Standard (NQS)* legislation that is used to regulate childcare services. A qualified teacher is deemed to be a person holding a four-year tertiary degree in early childhood education and is required to be in attendance at the centre for six hours of the day (Australian Government, 2013). Under the guidance of the qualified teacher, other educational staff, holding either diploma or certificate level qualifications, work with the children. The three centres that formed this investigation differed in regards to the number of rooms, age ranges of these rooms, number of staff and qualification level.

The qualified early childhood teacher, named the 'lead educator', formed the participant group for this investigation. In exploring the lead educators' practices to promote children's spiritual development, it was necessary to consider the individual training and qualifications of each participant. Once employed within Catholic childcare, all staff members participate in professional development related to early years education and care. This professional development is offered to the centre and the centre manager selects topics most suited to the needs of their staff. The centre manager is the staff member who oversees administrative functions at the centre. At some centres this was also the role of the lead educator. Examples of professional development include: following a play-based pedagogy; strategies for early intervention; and, working with children with special needs. CECWA's *Annual*

Reports for 2013-2015 outline that most professional development offered over this time was in relation to implementing the *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009) and the *National Quality Standard* (Council of Australian Governments [COAG], 2009b). No professional development on the explicit topic of spirituality, the spiritual aspects of children's lives or spiritual development had been offered to centre staff over this time period. In addition to the professional development on offer regarding early years education and care, it is compulsory for all staff to partake in modules provided by CEWA on the mission of Catholic education and the faith story of the particular centre (CEWA, 2016). This professional development explores the role of Catholic education, what it means to work in a Catholic context and the specific culture of the centre (for example: learning about the history of the centre and the story of its patron saint or founder; how staff at the centre can live the gospel values). For the two centres located on a primary school site, professional development was most commonly undertaken with primary school staff.

1.4.1.1 Specific context of each of the Catholic childcare centres.

Centre A is an early learning centre operating on a Catholic school site. The early learning centre is a separate building to the school and contains a long daycare program (under 2 years), an Out of School Hours Care program, a pre-Kindergarten (3-year-olds) and a Kindergarten program (4-year-olds). At Centre A, children are arranged into one group of 3-year-olds and three groups of 4-year-olds. The 3 and 4-year-old programs are both in operation between 8.30am and 3.30pm. Before and after this time children are either in the Outside of School Hours Care program with children aged between 2 and 5 years, or not on site. The 3 and 4-year-old programs are all led by a teacher educator, referred to as the lead educator, with additional educators assisting in the room. The 3-year-old program is offered for two days per week. The 4-year-old program operates five days per week.

Centre B is a long day care centre operating on a Catholic school site. At Centre B, children are in a free flowing environment that includes children from 2.5 years to 4 years of age. The 3 and 4-year-old Kindergarten programs are embedded within the operational hours of 6.30am and 6pm. Children are in attendance for either a half day (either am or pm) or a full day, and the program is in operation five days per week. The programming and planning is undertaken by a teacher educator, referred to as the lead educator. However other educators in the room assist in both the development and delivery of the program.

Centre C is a long day care centre, not attached to a Catholic school but governed by the CEWA. Centre C operates as a long day care centre in operation from 6.30am to 6.30pm, five days per week. At Centre C, children are arranged into rooms according to age, with two groups of 3-year-olds and one group of 4-year-olds. The 3-year-old programs provide half days (9 – 12 pm) whilst the 4-year-old program is in operation between 8.30am and 3.30pm. Both the 3-year-old and 4-year-old programs are developed and delivered by a teacher educator, referred to as the lead educator.

1.4.2. Policy context of early childhood and Catholic education in Western Australia.

Catholic childcare in WA operates within a national policy context, driven by international and national research on education and care, as well as a local policy context, framed within Catholic education. The explicit connection of education and care in the early years, through the introduction of Catholic childcare centres, is a move in line with national initiatives (CECWA, 2010). This section provides an overview of national and localised policy that underpins practice across the early childhood sector. The specific policy context of Catholic Education in WA is then explored. In particular, CEWA's aim to contribute to children's faith development through the provision of religious instruction alongside catechesis, is discussed. Figure

1.0 illustrates the timeline of events that have led to the initiative of Catholic childcare within Western Australia and which are referred to in this section.
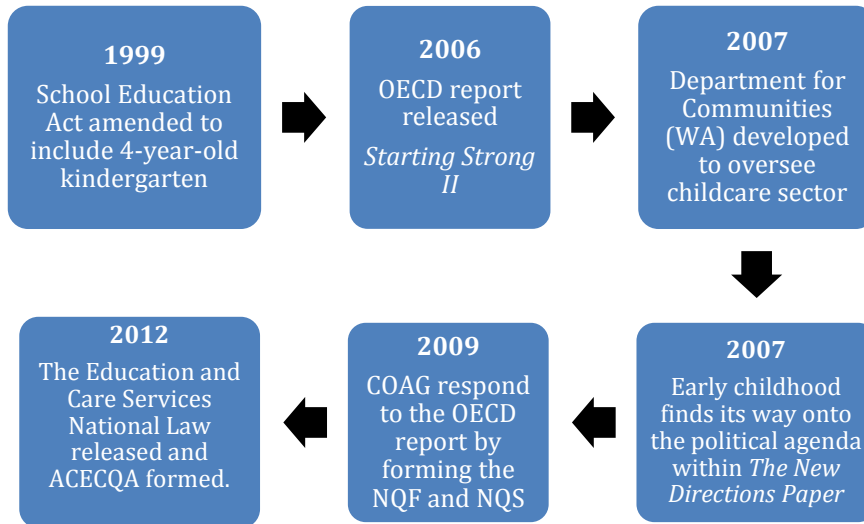
Figure 1.0. Timeline of events leading to the development of Catholic childcare.

Early years' education and early years care have historically existed as dichotomous services. Education has, and continues to be, governed by the Education Department within each State in Australia. In 1999, the *School Education Act* (Commonwealth Government of Australia, 2012b) added kindergarten (4-year-olds) and pre-school (5-year-olds) to their mandate and therefore, childcare was beyond the scope of their responsibility. The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) led the initiative towards the integration of education and care in WA, in 2009, at the national level. COAG's (2009a; 2009b) initiatives were based on international research and centred on improving quality in the early years of children's development.

COAG responded to international findings from the Organisation for Economic Development and Cooperation's [OECD] (an international organisation composed of 34 democratic countries) report, *Starting Strong II* (2006). The OECD conducts research at an international level that focuses on a nation's economic investment. In

particular, the OECD explores the long-term forecast of individual's ability to contribute to the economy. In the *Starting Strong II* (2006) report, the OECD articulated the economic viability of nations and ranked countries on their investment in the early years as a way to predict long-term success for individuals and society. As a nation, Australia performed poorly in regards to investment (OECD, 2006), ranking 23rd out of 25 countries (Cameron, 2009) and this was addressed by COAG. Subsequently, early childhood education and care found its way into the Australian political agenda. The Prime Minister at the time, Kevin Rudd, released a New Directions Paper, *The Australian Economy Needs An Education Revolution* (Australian Labor Party, 2007) that explicated the OECD's (2006) findings and articulated the need for systematic changes within the early childhood sector. In 2009, the realities of these changes came to fruition with the release of the *National Quality Agenda* [NQA] (COAG, 2009a). The *NQA* (COAG, 2009a) outlined a range of initiatives that would work toward raising quality and consistency in the early years. Specifically, the *NQA* (COAG, 2009a, p. A-2) outlined a number of key principles including the need for streamlined governance arrangements with clear roles and responsibilities. Of significance, the *NQA* (COAG, 2009a, p. A-2) explicated the need to integrate education and care and to implement a *National Quality Standard* as a means of ensuring continuous quality improvement within centres.

As articulated in the principles from the NQA (COAG, 2009a), a key component was the development of the *National Quality Standard* [NQS] (2009). The *NQS* (COAG, 2009b) contained seven quality standards that centres would be expected to adhere to, and be externally assessed on. These standards, outlined by the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority [ACECQA] (2012) are presented in Table 1.0.

Table 1.0

National Quality Standards

STANDARDS	TITLE
STANDARD ONE	Educational program and practice
STANDARD TWO	Children's health and safety
STANDARD THREE	Physical environment
STANDARD FOUR	Staffing arrangements
STANDARD FIVE	Relationships with children
STANDARD SIX	Collaborative partnerships with families and communities
STANDARD SEVEN	Leadership and service management

Following on from the development of the *NQS* (COAG, 2009b), The *Education and Care Services National Law* (2012a) was passed by the Western Australian government. The *Education and Care Services National Law* (2012a) responded to the governance arrangements within the *National Quality Agenda* (COAG, 2009a) that sought to improve quality and consistency through integrated service delivery in the childcare sector. To achieve an integrated approach to education and care, *The Education and Care Services National Law* (2012a) set out six objectives that articulated the terms of reference. Most notably, the purpose of the *Law* (2012a) was to "promote continuous improvement in the provision of quality education and care services"(p. 26) through the establishment of a "system of national integration and shared responsibility between participating jurisdictions and the Commonwealth in the administration of the national education and care services quality framework" (p. 26). In addition, the *Law* (2012a) explicitly stated the intention of the Western Australian

Government to ensure the "safety, health and wellbeing of children attending education and care services" (p. 26).

The *Education and Care Services National Law* (2012a) provided a framework for childcare centres to be operated by the school sector. The *Law* (2012a) also provided a platform for the implementation of a national regulatory authority that would oversee the registration and assessment of centres against the *NQS* (COAG, 2009b). This regulatory authority, named as the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority [ACECQA], was formed in 2012, and their brief, as outlined within the *Education and Care Services National Law* (2012a, p. 164), includes: assessing education and care services against the *NQS* (COAG, 2009b); to ensure compliance by services and individuals to the *Law* (2012a); and to promote continuous quality improvements across the education and care sector. Essentially, ACECQA, as a national authority, works with State based representatives to ensure that the *NQS* (COAG, 2009b) is adhered to within each individual centre.

COAG's drive towards integrated service delivery, through the bridging of education and care, facilitated CEWA's provision of childcare services. CEWA historically focused on the 'educative' dimension of schooling with Catholic primary schools in Western Australia typically enrolling children from Kindergarten (4 years of age, pre-compulsory) through to Year 6. The 'care' dimension, as opposed to education, was perceived as the role of the family in conjunction with the parish in informal settings, such as through offering pastoral support to families. 'Care' in terms of the 'prior-to-school' setting was perceived as the role of the childcare service under the jurisdiction of the Department for Communities, which historically had no affiliation with the Catholic education system. In relation to the context for this investigation, two levels of policy govern the provision of Catholic childcare: at the

national level (Education and Care Services National Law, 2012a; *National Quality Standard*, 2009b) and at the local level (CECWA policy).

At the national level, the *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009) mandated framework resides within the *National Quality Standard* (COAG, 2009b) legislation. Specifically, the *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009) is contained within Standard One: Education Program and Practice. The *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009) is mandated for use across birth to age 5 contexts and outlines the principles, practices and outcomes for working with children aged birth to 5 years. This mandated framework addresses quality practice in the early years and, as mentioned previously, is explicit in including the spiritual capacity of the child. The *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009) explicitly states that educators are to consider, and provide for, the spiritual aspect of children's lives and learning (p. 14) and that a holistic approach to young children's learning must include attention to the spiritual capacity "as well as the physical, personal, emotional and social aspects of learning" (DEEWR, 2009, p. 14). The *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009) is a pivotal document within the context of this research. As Grajczonek (2012a) pointed out, "*The Early Years Learning Framework* document's explicit inclusion of the spiritual is undoubtedly significant. It is a forward step to have this important aspect of children's lives both acknowledged and advocated in a national document of this calibre" (p. 159). Whilst the inclusion of the spiritual capacity in a mandated framework is perceived as a positive contribution to early years education and care, the ways in which this spirituality can be promoted by educators is not as clearly articulated (Grajczonek, 2012a). The limited nature of the inclusion of spirituality within the framework, and lack of direction for educators, adds to the gap in existing knowledge that this research sought to address.

In relation to the specific context for this study, Catholic childcare, the CEWA has limited policy articulating the responsibilities of educators within the centres and

the way centres function (CECWA, 2013a). Whilst CEWA does state that new facilities operate as an extension of the Catholic school, it is not explicit in stating how the mission of the Catholic school, and Catholic education, are reflected in the practices that occur for young children in the centre. The information that does exist regarding the pre-compulsory years (under 5 years of age) is largely procedural, relating, for example, to enrolment processes. The *Early Childhood Education Care Policy 2-B6* (CECWA, 2013a) does not specifically address centres, although the *Policy* (CECWA, 2013a) does contain specific information on the 3-year-old programs offered at Catholic schools, in particular, stating enrolment procedures into these programs do not relate to enrolment into the school. Rather, parents must formally apply to enrol their child/ren into the school program. In addition, the *Policy* (CECWA, 2013a) outlines that although entry into the 3-year-old program is open to non-Catholic families, priority is given to Catholic families from the local parish. The National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) report *Catholic Schools in Australia* (NCEC, 2016) illustrates that thirty percent of children enrolled in Catholic schools identify as non-Catholic. Although this report pertains to the compulsory years of Catholic schooling, rather than prior-to-school settings, the statistic provides some insight into the possible religious demographic at the Catholic childcare centres.

The policy that addresses the centres specifically, the *Early Childhood Education Care Policy 2-B6* (CECWA, 2013a), draws from the *Bishop's Mandate Letter* (CECWA, 2009) and states that:

Catholic schools play a vital part in the life of the Church in Western Australia by contributing to the holistic development of our young through education. Early Childhood Education and Care are integral in laying the foundational blocks on which children 'develop a Gospel vision of themselves and society'

(para. 6)…Catholic schools recognise parents as children's first and most influential educators. (CECWA, 2013a, p. 1)

The *Bishop's Mandate Letter* (CECWA, 2009) is referenced throughout the *Early Childhood Education Care Policy 2-B6* (CECWA, 2013a). The *Bishop's Mandate Letter* (CECWA, 2009) is a Western Australian document promulgated by the Bishops to articulate the role of schools and educators in attending to the evangelising mission of the Church. This document is primarily focussed on the school context and mentions spirituality, as a component of children's holistic development. If the centre is to be viewed as an extension to the Catholic school, the *Bishop's Mandate Letter* (CECWA, 2009) is also applicable to this context. The *Bishop's Mandate Letter* (CECWA, 2009) draws on international Church documents (*The Catholic School* (Congregation for Catholic Education [CCE], 1977); *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* (CCE, 1988); and *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the New Millennium* (CCE, 1997)). These Church documents from the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education (CCE, 1977) feature within the *Bishop's Mandate Letter* (CECWA, 2009) to describe the evangelising nature of the Catholic school. The *Bishop's Mandate Letter* (CECWA, 2009) outlines Catholic school's role to not only provide an education for students, but to develop in students an interplay of 'faith and life' and 'faith and culture'. Therefore faith development is articulated as a central role of the Catholic school. The *Bishops' Mandate 2009-2015* (CECWA, 2009), that governs Western Australian Catholic schools, draws on the *General Directory for Catechesis* (Congregation for the Clergy, 1997, para. 101) to explicitly articulate the role of the Catholic school below:

> The Catholic school will be concerned with the development of students as
>
> responsible, inner-directed individuals of Christian virtue, capable of free choice

and of making value-judgements enlightened by formed Christian conscience.

Catholic schools seek to help students develop a total commitment to Christ. (p.

13)

Additionally, as non-Catholics are permitted to enrol into Catholic schools,

religious diversity is addressed in Church documents, specifically, in *The Religious*

Dimension of Education in a Catholic School (CCE, 1988) which states:

The religious freedom of the personal conscience of individual students and their

families must be respected…On the other hand, a Catholic school cannot

relinquish its own freedom to proclaim the Gospel and to offer a formation based

on the values to be found in Christian education; this is its right and duty. To

proclaim or to offer is not to impose…(para. 6)

A key point made in the above quote is the role of Catholic schools to be open to

religious diversity, respectful of individual's own religious beliefs and practices whilst

offering, not indoctrinating (Grajczonek, 2012b), the opportunity to experience the

Catholic faith.

Religious Education is identified in the *Bishops' Mandate 2009-2015* (CECWA,

2009) as a prominent feature of Catholic school curriculum. The national document

Australian Religious Education – Facing the Challenges (ARE) (Holohan, 1999),

written for the Catholic Bishops of Australia, describes Religious Education as a

central feature of the Catholic school that assists in the achievement of integrating

faith, life and culture. Religious Education is described as "a means of handing on the

Christian Faith" (Holohan, 1999, p. 27) and as an educational task that is "concerned

with the development of the person from within" (p. 27). This interpretation of

Religious Education combines knowledge and experience, but acknowledges that

catechesis (faith development) is the role of the larger school community. Catechesis is

concerned with the experiential and behavioural and is considered formational in its development (Holohan, 1999, p. 31). The Vatican promulgates the parish as the pre-eminent place of catechesis (Pope John Paul II, 1979, para. 67) and as such, the role of the parish is to support families as the primary educators of their children, including assisting families with their children's faith development (Pope Paul VI, 1965, para. 6). Holohan (1999) elaborates on catechesis stating that development of a person's faith occurs not only in the context of a school, as does Religious Education, but rather in the context of a community that includes the home and parish.

Within Western Australia, Religious Education denotes the classroom program of instruction or learning area and as such, there is a clear distinction made between Religious Education and catechesis. As a learning area, Religious Education concerns the knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith tradition, and it works in conjunction with the religious dimension (activities outside of the Religious Education lesson) of the Catholic school to develop the faith experience of students. Catechetical activities occur outside of the classroom Religious Education program (National Catholic Education Commission [NCEC], 2008). The Religious Education learning area commences with compulsory schooling at 5 years of age and therefore, there is no requirement for Religious Education in the context of this investigation (3 to 4-year-olds in Catholic childcare).

The CEWA policy, *Religious Education 2-B5* (CECWA, 2013b), outlines the purpose of Religious Education, as a learning area in the Catholic school, in line with Vatican documents. This policy is explicit in addressing Religious Education as a compulsory learning area as part of the daily teaching schedule. This schedule commences from pre-primary (5 years of age), the first year of compulsory schooling in Western Australia. The section 'Procedures' highlights the limited nature of policy

that exists for specifically targeting pre-compulsory schooling (childcare and kindergarten). The policy mentions the pre-compulsory context, however only to the extent of stating that, "in three year and four year old programs, teachers are required to plan to raise the religious awareness of children through providing an atmosphere where 'God talk' permeates all" (CECWA, 2013b, para. 1). This is the only mention of the 3 to 4-year-old setting and the only mention is of raising religious awareness - spirituality is not explicitly stated. In 2014, a support document was released by CEWA (2014) titled, *Let the Little Children Come to Me,* to assist educators in their task of promoting religious awareness in children's early years. This support document also does not specifically address spiritual development. However, it does provide practical strategies for assisting children in their religious awareness. Religious awareness is described in the support document as having an awareness of the presence of God and is closely tied to the specific development of the Catholic faith (CEWA, 2014). The only mention of spirituality is the recognition that "children have a natural spirituality" (CEWA, 2014, p. 5) and then the document directs this spirituality towards a religious awareness of God's presence. For early years' educators, this is the level of specificity that currently exists to inform their practices for promoting the spiritual development of children. The relationship between spirituality and religious education is discussed in detail within the literature review in Chapter Two.

1.5 Significance of the Research

The early childhood landscape at both the national and local level has undergone significant change with the implementation of the *NQS* (COAG, 2009b) and *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009). These mandated documents task educators working with children from birth to 5 years of age with attending to their holistic development, inclusive of their spiritual capacity. CEWA's initiative to provide centres that cater for children prior to school age (under 5 years) is supported by the *NQS* (COAG, 2009b) that

advocates for integrated service delivery. This investigation into educators' practices to promote children's spirituality (aged 3 to 4 years) within the specific context of Catholic childcare is therefore significant at a number of levels: for theory; for methodology; for practice; for policy; and for further research as outlined in Sections 1.5.1 to 1.5.5.

1.5.1 Significance for theory.

Findings from this investigation present a significant contribution to theory on educators' practices to promote children's spiritual development such as: early childhood educators' understandings of spirituality as well as the pedagogies they employed to promote children's spirituality. Existing empirical literature is predominantly concerned with defining and measuring children's spirituality (Bone, 2005; Bone, 2008; Sifers, Warren & Jackson, 2012). This investigation is unique in its approach to focus on the practices of the educator working within a Catholic context. The investigation provides insight into the understandings and skills of the educator in promoting spirituality, within a specific religious context.

1.5.2 Significance for methodology.

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) provided the theoretical framework for this investigation (Smith, 2008; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009) and is explored in depth within Chapter Three: Research Design. IPA also outlined a specific approach to the analysis of data (Smith, 2008; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009), specifically for interview data that provided information on what educators understood by the term 'spirituality' and their experience in promoting children's spirituality. IPA was also employed for the observational data collected that provided information on the reality of the educators' practice within their centre room. IPA is most commonly used in the field of psychology and its expansion into the field of education is contemporary (Smith, 1996). The use of IPA in this investigation is significant to

future studies that seek to investigate phenomena in an educational context. Additionally, as IPA overtly recognises the role of the researcher, this investigation's reflexive practices, such as bracketing and de-bracketing (Smith & Osborn, 2008) contribute to the expansion of IPA as a methodology.

Qualitative content analysis was utilised as a form of analysis for the documentary data collected (as explored in Chapter Three: Research Design). The documentary data provided insight into the practices that educators planned for to promote children's spirituality. A key feature of qualitative content analysis is the development of a coding frame (Schrier, 2012). The coding frame that was developed as a result of the findings from this investigation is significant both at a practice level (see Section 1.5.3) as well as at a theoretical level. As the coding frame was initially developed using existing empirical and scholarly work and then added to with the findings from this investigation (Schreier, 2012), the coding frame, as a methodological tool, provides a lens through which an exploration of educators' practices can be observed in future studies.

1.5.3 Significance for practice.

This investigation has significance for educators' practices. Mandated documents in the field of early childhood require educators to address children's spiritual needs, with limited articulation of how this can be achieved (COAG, 2009b; DEEWR, 2009). In addition, CEWA requires educators to attend to children's holistic development (CECWA, 2013a) and to contribute to the church's mission by providing for children's development of faith (CECWA, 2009). This research provides findings relating to what educators know, what they plan for and what they actually do in practice, to promote children's (aged 3 to 4 years) spiritual development in the context of Catholic childcare. These findings offer a foundation for future professional development to address gaps evident in educators' knowledge and skills. Additionally, the use of the

coding frame developed as a component of qualitative content analysis can be utilised to positively impact educators' practices. The coding frame could be utilised by educators to audit their own, or others', practices in promoting children's spirituality.

1.5.4 Significance for policy.

Existing policy in the form of the *NQS* (COAG, 2009b) and CEWA Policy (CECWA, 2013a) articulate the spiritual capacity of the child as a component of their holistic development, therefore requiring the attention of the educator. Furthermore, the *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009), as a component of the *NQS* (COAG, 2009b), outlines principles, practices and learning outcomes for educators. This investigation sought to uncover the experience of the educators working with 3 and 4-year-olds in regards to the practices they employed to promote children's spirituality, which is the detail lacking from existing policy and frameworks. Policy changes that include frameworks outlining the 'how' of spiritual development, through the inclusion of specific pedagogical practices, are a key implication from this investigation.

1.5.5 Significance for further research.

This investigation responds to several gaps that exist in empirical studies focussed on children's spirituality, and these are reviewed in Chapter Two. To enable children's spiritual development to be promoted, educators themselves must understand the construct of spirituality and have the skills to provide opportunities and experiences with the potential to promote children's spirituality; this is significant to future research. Although this investigation focussed on educators working with 3 and 4-year-old children in a Catholic childcare context, this study has significance due to its transferability to other contexts. Specifically, the scope of the study could be altered to include the birth to age 5 pre-compulsory cohort especially as the CEWA centres increase both in number (that is the number of centres within WA increase) and in size (the internal capacity of each centre). Additionally, the potential to take a more focused

multi-faith approach within secular centres could be explored in future research, utilising the same methodological perspective. Furthermore, this investigation is significant to future research that intends to investigate the knowledge and skills of the educator by utilising the research outcomes from this study as a framework.

1.6 Structure of the thesis

This thesis comprises six chapters. Chapter One explicated the research problem and its significance. The situational and political context of the research was also presented. A short abstract for each of the remaining chapters is provided as an overview to the structure of the thesis.

Chapter Two provides a review of the extant literature. Literature within the scope of the investigation included both research and scholarly literature across three themes. These three themes included: the phenomenon of spirituality; the promotion of spirituality in children; and contemporary educational perspectives that influence practice in early childhood. The research questions driving this investigation emerged from a review of each theme within the literature and these are explicitly stated throughout the chapter.

The specific theoretical framework underpinning the design of the research is explained and justified in Chapter Three: Research Design. Chapter Three begins with the conceptual framework to illustrate the linkages between the literature review in Chapter Two and the research questions. Following this, the selected qualitative approach with a social constructivist theoretical perspective and consisting of an interpretivist paradigm with a phenomenological perspective is explained. The specific selection of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is justified and its unique recognition of the role of the researcher is explained. Subsequently, the research methods of interview, observation and qualitative content analysis are explicated and these are sequenced in the order of the research question to which they respond. The

same sequence is used throughout the data gathering and data analysis sections. Data gathering strategies and data analysis techniques are comprehensively explained and their selection for meeting the aims of the present investigation is justified. The chapter concludes by addressing ethical considerations including the integrity issues inherent in the process of data collection and analysis.

Chapter Four presents the findings from the investigation. Findings are presented by data set and reflect the order in which analysis occurred. Findings from the interview data are presented initially, followed by the observational data; both of these data sets were analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). Findings from the documentary data, obtained through qualitative content analysis, are then presented.

Chapter Five begins with an overview of the findings presented in Chapter Four. The findings are subsequently reviewed and a cross-analysis of the data sets is undertaken to provide a critical and reflective response to each of the three research questions that guided the investigation. In responding to the research questions, extant literature is drawn upon. The chapter concludes by drawing together a number of paradoxes that emerged as a result of responding to the three research questions.

Chapter Six addresses the implications of the research findings relating to theory, methodology, practice, policy, and future research. In doing so, this chapter outlines the major contributions of the investigation in response to the overarching research question. Potential limitations inherent in the study are also addressed.

1.7 Chapter Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has introduced and contextualised the research problem. The context outlined related both to the changing nature of the early years landscape and to Catholic education in Western Australia. Early childhood education and care, once distinct, is now articulated within legislation and policy as an integrated

construct, resulting in the new initiative of Catholic childcare. Through the release of the mandated *NQS* (COAG, 2009b), educators working with children birth to 5 years of age, such as those in Catholic childcare, must implement the *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009). Consequently, educators are tasked with attending to the holistic development of children, including the spiritual capacity - the focus of this research. The following chapter, Chapter Two: Review of the Literature, provides a synthesis of the empirical and scholarly literature that informed this investigation into educators' practices for promoting the spiritual development of children, aged 3 to 4 years, in the context of Catholic childcare in Western Australia.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

2.1 Introduction

In addressing the overarching research question guiding this investigation, three fields of literature required examination: the phenomenon of spirituality; the development of spirituality in children; and contemporary educational perspectives that influence practice in early childhood. Each of these areas is explored in framing the context for this investigation. The specific research questions guiding this investigation resulted from the review of the literature within each of these sections, and these are explicitly stated throughout the chapter.

2.2 Exploring the Phenomenon of 'Spirituality'

Scholarly literature on spirituality tends to refer to the qualities and characteristics of 'spirituality', rather than a definition, as a means of describing such an elusive term (Eaude, 2009; Harris, 2007; Tacey, 2004). Reid (2011) states that, "one problem is that there is little agreement as to what is meant by spirituality" (p. 12) and King (2013) goes so far as to suggest that the term spirituality "escapes definition altogether" (p. 4). It is widely acknowledged within the literature that arriving at one definition is a complex task fraught with ontological difficulties (for example in describing spirituality) and epistemological difficulties, (such as contradictions regarding the origins and nature of the phenomenon) (Adams, Bull & Maynes, 2016). A further difficulty exists due to the limited number of empirical studies that investigate spirituality within childhood, and whilst a few small scale studies have emerged in recent years (Giesenberg, 2007; Goodliff, 2013; Sifers, Warren & Jackson, 2012) there exists three significant investigations that created the seminal works from which subsequent literature builds on, namely, that of Robinson (1983), Coles (1990)

and Hay and Nye (1998). In light of these ontological and epistemological difficulties, the literature identifies features or themes of the phenomenon of spirituality as a means of articulating all that it encompasses. The three key themes found within the literature include: the innateness of spirituality; the relationality of spirituality; and expressions of spirituality. Following an exploration of these themes, the distinction between the terms *religious* and *spiritual* is explored, as these terms are often mistakenly used synonymously.

2.2.1 Spirituality as an innate capacity.

The empirical work of Edward Robinson (1983) has been influential in understanding spirituality as a humanly innate capacity. Robinson (1983) was amongst the first to investigate the concept of spirituality and subsequent studies are premised on his work. Robinson's (1983) publication, *The Original Vision*, details the stories he collected from adult participants recalling childhood events that held religious significance to them. In drawing out religious experiences, the spiritual nature of childhood emerged as a key finding, as little distinction between the concepts of religious and spiritual are made. In regards to the innateness of spirituality, a further significant contribution was the notion that the spiritual vision present in childhood is lost from the conscious awareness as individuals transition into adult life. Whilst Robinson's (1983) work is held in high regard, it is not without criticism. A recurring criticism of his work is the focus on adult participants recollecting childhood experiences, and therefore drawing into question the reliability of findings (Hay, Nye & Murphy, 1996).

The later work of Coles (1990) addressed the criticism received by Robinson (1983) by interviewing children. Coles' (1990) research spanned five years and focused on hearing from children themselves about how they sorted spiritual matters. Coles' (1990) findings supported those of Robinson (1983), concluding that children

are naturally spiritual. In describing children as naturally spiritual, Coles (1990) explained that children are naturally curious about the meaning of life and have a natural inclination to wonder and to seek. Similarly to Robinson (1983), Coles (1990) understood spirituality as part of religion, and also did not distinguish between the two terms within his research. His focus was on children's thoughts around heaven, God, faith and scepticism. The contribution of Coles' (1990) research to the field of children's spirituality is an important one, in particular, his emphasis on the experience of the spiritual as opposed to a cognitive awareness of the spiritual life. However, his focus on spirituality from a religious viewpoint, and therefore not distinguishing between the spiritual and the religious experience of children, is viewed as a limitation (Hay, Nye & Murphy, 1996).

The work of Robinson (1983) and Coles (1990) has provided the platform for scholarly literature to further articulate the notion that spirituality is innate. Kim and Esquivel (2011) describe spirituality as an inherent component to being human and Hyde (2010) concurs, stating it "is ontological…a natural human pre-disposition, something that people are born with" (p. 506). Mueller (2010) investigated children's spirituality from a nursing perspective, by drawing on existing empirical work and developmental theory. Mueller (2010) explored the connections between the trauma experienced by hospitalised children and their spiritual development. In her discussion, Mueller (2010) suggests that children are 'spiritually competent' and in their natural state of being can provide demonstrations of what it means to *be* spiritual. Mueller (2010, p. 203) describes spirituality in general as "a deeply personal experience".

The claim that spirituality is integral to the development of the whole person is also made by Baumgartner and Buchanan (2010) as they explain that "spirituality is a vital part of human nature" (p. 90). Literature frequently notes that spirituality is a

necessity for holistic development (Crompton, 1998; Zhang, 2012). Similarly, it is described as the "potential or capacity… present in every human being, but it needs to be activated and realized. Its awakening and development during childhood is of great importance" (King, 2013, p. 6) and Ruddock and Cameron (2010) describe spirituality as the medium through which meaning is obtained for an individual. The notion of 'meaning making' is further drawn on by Gibson (2014) who explains the complexity of the term spirituality in that people's 'meaning making' is "shaped by personal agency interwoven with social, cultural, economic and, in many cases, religious life experiences" (p. 521).

The insight raised by King (2013) that spirituality is innate but requires 'awakening' is referred to in the earlier work of Webster (2004) in his discussion of spiritual education within schools. Webster (2004) goes beyond the religious-secular dichotomy to describe spirituality as existential, therefore proposing an existential framework for the development of spirituality. An existential framework precipitates questions relating to the individual and their thinking as well as experiences and feelings – it is concerned with finding meaning in a person's life (Webster, 2004). Webster (2004) highlighted, through reporting on literature in the field, the innate human capacity to be spiritual and proposed that, as an integral component of each person, spirituality is primarily concerned with the meaning of one's life.

The universality of spirituality is highlighted by *The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* [UNCRC] (1989). The UNCRC (1989) identifies spirituality as a natural capacity within children. This natural capacity exists as distinct, yet complementary to the physical, mental, moral and social domains. The UNCRC (1989), in acknowledging the spiritual innateness of the child, identifies the need for

this capacity to be protected by listing it within four Articles of the Convention. Article 17 states that Government must:

> recognize the important function performed by the mass media and shall ensure that the child has access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources, especially those aimed at the promotion of his or her social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health.

Further to this, Articles 23 states the need to incorporate children's cultural and spiritual development in decision-making. Article 27 reports, "the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development" (UNCRC, 1989) and Article 32 (UNCRC, 1989) advises the right of the child to be free from exploitation and hazards that may impact their physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development. The explicit mention of the spiritual capacity alongside the other human domains (physical, cognitive, emotional and social) emphasises the view that spirituality is recognised in secular society as innately human. Literature makes frequent reference to the UNCRC (1989) convention when describing children as innate spiritual beings, and calls for children to be viewed as "active participants in their own spirituality, instead of passive recipients…" (Ingersoll, 2014, p. 166). The perception of children as active agents in their own life and faith is reiterated in the work of Champagne (2008). Champagne (2008) emphasises, from her empirical work, that adults must provide opportunities for children to participate actively in the "collective journey of spiritual interpretation" (p. 261) and, additionally, that adults must listen to the richness and depth that childhood experiences of spirituality can offer.

2.2.2 The relationality of spirituality.

The relational nature of spirituality is a recurring theme in the literature and is described as a sense of connectedness to the self, others, the environment and a transcendent (Adams et al., 2016; Hay & Nye, 2006; Long, 2000; Van der Zee & Tirri, 2009). Relational spirituality is articulated by Giesenberg (2007) as "an awareness or consciousness of the surrounding world, a sense of compassion and love towards this world and anything in it shown through wonder and through activities and relationships with peers and significant adults in the child's life" (p. 270). Long's (2000) discussion on spirituality describes it as:

> All that is most enduring and vital about the human self. For some, it points to a 'reaching out' towards the infinite. For others, it signifies a journey of personal exploration which turns inward to plumb the hidden depths of the psyche. (p. 147)

The most significant empirical work identifying the relational nature of spirituality was contributed by Hay and Nye (1998) in their research with children. The work of Hay and Nye (1998) builds on the previously discussed work of Coles (1990). Hay and Nye (1998) conducted a three year empirical investigation observing children aged 6 to 11 years. A key finding contributing to the field of spirituality is their creation of the term 'relational consciousness'. Hay and Nye (1998) detail 'relational consciousness' as consisting of two characteristics:

- An unusual level of *consciousness* or perceptiveness relative to other passages of conversation spoken to that child

- Conversation expressed in a context of how the child *related* to things, other people, him/herself, and God. (Hay & Nye, 1998, p. 113)

Essentially, the concept of 'relational consciousness' is an awareness of being, of knowing and of relating. In essence, relational consciousness is about relationship, and being aware of the self in this circumstance. The concept is described as a relational aspect that goes beyond the typical relationship of 'I-Other' to be inclusive of the relationship between 'I-Self', 'I-World' and 'I-God'. A key contribution of Hay and Nye's (1998) research was to provide greater insight into what spirituality and spiritual development comprise for young children, as opposed to adults, and their work is referred to consistently in subsequent studies. Literature recognises that the contributions of Hay and Nye (1998) are widely generalised in subsequent scholarly work, yet their research is described as influential in establishing relationality, or connectedness, as "one of the core motifs of spirituality" (Bussing, Foller-Mancini, Gidley & Heusser, 2010, p. 27). Hay and Nye (1998), in their findings, connect the concept of relational consciousness with three categories of spiritual awareness, namely: awareness sensing, mystery sensing and value sensing. These categories describe the way that children express, or demonstrate their relationality.

Awareness sensing: Awareness sensing is perceived as the ability of the child to be aware of where their attention is directed. It involves four sub-categories; here and now, tuning, flow and focusing. This category of spiritual sensitivity has a focus on listening attentively and being tuned in to aesthetic experiences (Hay & Nye, 1998).

Mystery sensing: Mystery sensing is concerned with fascination, wonder, fear, awe and imagination, and is described by Hay and Nye (1998) as providing a means for engaging with the transcendent realm. To contemplate the mystery of existence and engage with the human faculty of imagination and wonder are considered to be part of this category of spiritual sensitivity.

Value sensing: The third category, value sensing, is described as being related to emotions such as delight or despair, a sense of ultimate goodness and the process of meaning-making (Nye & Hay, 2006). In this category, Hay and Nye (1998) explain that the findings from their study indicated that children were often concerned with feelings of delight and despair regarding environmental issues. In regards to meaning-making, Hay and Nye (1998) articulated that this category of spiritual sensitivity involved asking questions such as 'who am I?' and 'where do I belong?'

2.2.2.1 Relationality with the self.

Literature affirms that spirituality has an inward focus and is concerned with the inner realm of the individual (Watson, 2000). The 'I-self' relationship, as identified in Hay and Nye's (1998) research, is central to relationality. This theme is represented in the literature as connected to the concept of identity development (Garbarino & Bedard, 1996; MacDonald, 2009; Sifers, Warren & Jackson, 2012). Identity is a broad term, concerned with a person's inward relationship regarding the construction of who they are and who they want to become (DEEWR, 2009). Identity is closely connected to the concepts of wellbeing and resilience, which overlap discourse on spirituality in the literature (Kiesling, Sorell, Montgomery & Colwell, 2006; Ratcliff & May, 2004; Sifers, Warren & Jackson, 2012). Furthermore, identity involves the search for meaning in one's life and this particular component of identity is also explored in connection to spirituality (Benson, Scales, Syvertsen & Roehlkepartain, 2012; Eaude, 2009).

In relation to identity development, Miller (2000) describes that spirituality lends itself to an exploration of human questions relating to meaning and purpose in a person's life, and therefore involves self-identity. Whilst the cultural and social dimensions for the person overlap with identity development, such as through relationships and emotions, Adams (2009) proposes that the spiritual domain engages

identity at a deeper level; "it raises issues of who a person really is, and their place and purpose in the world – fundamental questions…" (p. 115). As Adams (2009) suggests, identity can be expressed and developed through the spiritual capacity; spirituality is an innate capacity through which other characteristics of the self can be engaged. MacDonald (2009) explains that links between spirituality and identity development can be traced back to the nineteenth century and are found in psychology based literature. MacDonald's (2009) research emphasises the relationship between identity, spirituality and religion in forming a 'spiritual identity' and can be related to the work of Hay and Nye (2006) when they describe a feature of spirituality as 'relational consciousness'. Watson (2000) also found, when interviewing adult participants from a range of faith backgrounds, that spirituality was referenced as connecting to the 'within'. Most participants stated that "spirituality involved some kind of inner realm" (Watson, 2000, p. 95) referred to as the 'core of me' or 'intuitive self'. It is this relationship with the inner self that provides a foundation for "a rich inner life [that] is a prerequisite for spirituality" (Scheindlin, 1999, p. 189).

Wellbeing and resilience, as components of identity, featured as being connected to a person's spiritual capacity in the way this capacity is drawn upon to overcome adversity. Kiesling, Sorell, Montgomery and Colwell (2006) investigated the spiritual identity of adults through the use of semi-structured interviews. In their findings, Kiesling et al. (2006) articulated that their adult participants identified "the struggle to continually realise value aspects of the self and renounce adverse aspects of the self" (p. 1276) when describing how they had forged their spiritual identity. In stating the realisation of value aspects of the self, Kiesling et al.'s (2006) research connects with Hay and Nye's (2006) *value sensing* category that considers the role of emotions in spirituality. Kiesling et al.'s (2006) research specifically targeted the development of

both identity and resilience through the spiritual domain. In relation to wellbeing, findings from empirical research suggest that spirituality can develop as a protective factor against mental illness. Specifically, research involving children and adolescent participants found that those who exhibited a well-developed sense of self (positive self-concept; resilience) seemed more able to cope with difficult life events, and these participants identified that they called on their spiritual capacity at these times (Sifers, Warren & Jackson, 2012).

The 'I-Self' relationship is explained in the literature as a person's inner struggle for the search for meaning in their life. Eaude's (2009) scholarly work specifically addresses this connection to highlight three features of spirituality, all of which relate to the theme of relationality with the self. The first of these features, a search, is related to an individual's quest for identity and purpose. Eaude (2009) states that this process "involves the creation of a coherent narrative, a process of making meaning" (p. 189). Secondly, Eaude (2009) acknowledges the quest for meaning, and therefore happiness, as a component of the spiritual. The third aspect, connectedness, recognises both the independence and the inter-dependence of the individual. Connectedness is described by Eaude (2009) as focusing on making sense of one's experiences through engagement with the self as well as with others. Literature explains that when connectedness with self is experienced positively, the constructs of identity, self-awareness and self-esteem are also positively influenced leading to a strong sense of wellbeing (De Souza, 2016). It is only once a strong foundation is formed within the self that a sense of connectedness to 'other' can flourish, and moreover, this unlocks the potential to experience the mystery of transcendence (De Souza, 2016).

2.2.2.2 Relationality with others.

Relationality with others is described within the literature as a component of spirituality. This type of 'I-Other' relationship is associated with the concepts of

connectedness and belonging. When spirituality is considered as inherent in a person's relationship with others, literature asserts that it goes beyond the notion of friendships to be concerned with how a person finds their place in the world, in relation to those around them (Myers, 1997). The 'I-Other' relationship can therefore be described as focussing on the individual's sense of connection to those around them and a conscious awareness of their role within that relationship. A child's ability to develop 'wholly' is described as being impacted by the nature of relationships that they have with the significant adults in their lives, for example whether these are positively or negatively experienced (Myers, 1997). Relationality with others is described in the literature of Love and Talbot (1999) as the sense of connectedness inherent to spirituality, stating that, "the paradox of spirituality is that its experience is personal and unique, but only finds its fullest manifestation in the context of…a supportive community" (p. 4).

The connection between spirituality and morality resides within the theme of relationality with others. As the 'I-Other' relationship draws a person into an awareness of who they are in relation to others, behavioural aspects of this relationship arise, linking to morality. Eaude (2016) outlines two types of ethics within morality; *duty ethics* which is concerned with doing what is right versus what is wrong and *virtue ethics* which goes deeper into a person's sense of what is ultimately 'good' for themselves and also for society (Eaude, 2016).

Belonging also resides within relationality with others. Belonging in association to relationality with 'I-Other' is described in the work of Harris (2007) as "…how we belong or don't belong in a classroom community, and how significant we are as community members" (p. 268). The work of Harris (2007) builds on the earlier empirical contribution of Hay and Nye (1998) to discuss the important role of peer-relationships in assisting children to feel that they belong to a community, as a

component of spirituality. Harris' (2007) discussion relates to the sensing categories (awareness, mystery, value) proposed by Hay and Nye (1998) and highlights the view that children draw on their spiritual capacity when they are in relationship with others, and this in turn enhances their sense of belonging. Giesenberg (2007) describes this relationality as "an awareness or consciousness of the surrounding world, a sense of compassion and love … shown through wonder and through activities and relationships with peers and significant adults in the child's life" (p. 270).

2.2.2.3 Relationality with the environment.

Experiencing a relationship with the natural world is acknowledged as a facet of spirituality and is described as an individual having an awareness of themselves in connection to the world around them (Mayer & Frantz, 2004). Bone's (2008) scholarly work suggests that spirituality is "…a means of connecting people to all things, to nature and the universe" (p. 344). An individual's relationship with the environment can be perceived as vertical or horizontal in nature. Vertical dimensions are described as the connections to one's past and future, for example the way in which a person may feel responsible for the future of the planet for the next generation. Horizontal dimensions relate to the present such as "do we see ourselves as part of these environments and consequently see the need to act for them?" (Skamp, 1991, p. 81). Skamp (1991) suggests there is a constant interplay between these two dimensions, and that both are associated to understandings of spirituality.

Empirical work, whilst limited, also supports the 'I-World' relationship. A study that investigated early childhood educators' perspectives of spiritual development of young children within the Jewish faith found that participants "consistently related children's experiences with nature as consisting of spiritual moments" (Schein, 2013, p. 378). This research identified connectedness to the environment as being able to enhance children's spiritual development. In addition, an investigation into

adolescents' connection to nature, as a component of spirituality, affirmed that nature connectedness provides people with "feelings and experiences of self-transcendence…and continuity in an unstable world, affiliating with nature can enhance our sense of meaning in life, and ultimately lead to increased happiness and well-being" (Howell, Passmore & Buro, 2013, p. 1683).

From a cultural perspective, connectedness to the natural world is particularly significant to Australia's indigenous peoples. Literature espouses that Australia's indigenous culture is characterised by a land-based spirituality (Baskin, 2016). Indigenous culture values the sense of relationship with the environment, central to the belief system is an appreciation of the interconnectedness of life and land (Baskin, 2016). Essentially, the I-World relationship, from an indigenous cultural perspective, is viewed as a relationship that transcends the experience of the individual, to incorporate a collective and relational understanding of spirituality (Dylan & Smallboy, 2016).

2.2.2.4 Relationality with the transcendent.

Relationality with a transcendent, or divine, is described as "reaching from inside oneself to something transcendent" (Scheindlin, 1999, p. 193). An investigation into spirituality within the Jewish tradition found that adult participants emphasised the connection between self and other, where the other is considered a divine presence, as a feature of spirituality (Scheindlin, 1999). Watson's (2000) empirical work attempted to understand the way in which adults interpreted the term 'spiritual'. Findings from this investigation revealed that a common response was the reference to the perception of something beyond themselves. Watson (2000) explained that the notion of 'beyond' was constructed through participants' responses of "indescribable transcendent" and participants referring to "the edge of consciousness" (p. 93). Participants in Watson's (2000) investigation came from a range of faith backgrounds and so whilst the figure that they spoke of within the 'beyond' differed, the common thread was the

identification that spirituality was concerned with "seeing beyond one's immediate vision" (p. 94).

Significantly more scholarly literature exists in regards to relationality with the transcendent, than does empirical research. Literature describes a key feature of spirituality is the experience "beyond-the-self" (Scott, 2003, p.127) and this experience of relationality thrusts a person to look beyond the borders of the self to the realm of the transcendent (Bradford, 1999; Love & Talbot, 1999). Relationality with a transcendent is described as not limited by religion, rather literature explains that "spirituality is beyond dogma and, at its most universal, has the potential to provide avenues for real communication between people of differing backgrounds and faiths" (Hodder, 2007, p. 186). The human need to reach beyond, to search for the absolute, is not always a search for the divine, Armstrong (1993) explains. For some, transcendence involves a relationship that goes beyond an individual's ordinary existence and that unifies human and divine (Armstrong, 1993), as opposed to the 'out there', dualist approach that separates God from humanity (De Souza, 2016).

In the work of Long (2000) spirituality is described as not intrinsically transcendent but rather the experiences of reaching beyond the self to the transcendental is proposed as one form or type of spirituality. Providing opportunities for spiritual development that caters for connections to the Ultimate Other is suggested as an important aspect of spiritual development for children (Long, 2000). Shaw's (2005) discussion on spirituality separates spirituality into two types of experience – *spirituality as theistic belief* and *spirituality as a secular experience*. Shaw (2005) described *spirituality as a theistic belief* as the connection an individual feels toward a God, a divine presence, and as one that encompasses questions such as; "Is there a soul? Is there life after death?' (pp. 352-353).

2.2.3 Expressions of spirituality.

The way in which spirituality is expressed is the third key theme identified within the literature. Several empirical studies have attempted to articulate spirituality through investigating how this innate capacity is expressed (Adams, 2009; Harris, 2013; Hart, 2003; Ratcliff & May, 2004). Literature describes that individuals experience and express spirituality in different ways in that "some people feel a spiritual connection as they listen to music; others while studying sacred texts; some sense the presence of something greater than themselves as they silently meditate; others express spiritual concern as they work for justice" (Bellous & Csinos, 2009, p. 213). Children have many 'spiritual voices' that can be expressed in a number of ways (Adams, 2009). Imagination, creativity, and wonder and awe are recognised as the fundamental ways in which spirituality is expressed in the early childhood years. Childhood wonder is articulated by Hart (2003) as core to children's developing understanding of the world and core to their sense of spiritual identity. A pilot study with children aged seven to eleven years found that wonder and creativity provided a stepping stone for spiritual development (ter Avest & McDougall, 2014). In addition, an investigation of the project approach as a particular tool to enhance development in the spiritual domain found that children's dreams could be used as an avenue for channelling creativity, and therefore engaging with the spiritual capacity (Harris, 2013). Harris (2013) stated that educators have a crucial role in providing opportunities and environments that are conducive to channelling the creativity that comes from dreaming into the development of the spiritual capacity. Furthermore, this study concluded that children's spirituality is "imaginative, expressive, creative and analytical" (Harris, 2013, p. 283). Similarly, an investigation that focused on the role of the educator in nurturing the spirituality of children aged 7 to 9 years, found that "silence, meaning, questioning, bodily or kinaesthetic awareness, focusing, reflection,

use of one's imagination..." (Ng, 2012, p. 183) were all practices that provided spiritual expression for children.

Empirical work has also investigated four styles of spiritual expression amongst children, namely; a world-centred approach; an emotion centred approach; a symbol-centred approach; and an action-centred approach (Bellous & Csinos, 2009). These spiritual styles assess how individuals express what really matters to them and therefore, uncover a person's preferred style for relating to others and expressing what is of personal importance. Bellous and Csinos' (2009) research concluded that educators have a key responsibility to create holistic environments; environments that allow for all spiritual styles to be included and catered for.

In relation to very young children, empirical research suggests spirituality can be expressed through wonder and awe. An investigation with children aged 3 to 4 years provides a useful description of the way in which spirituality can be communicated:

> There is a spiritual essence that all humans share. It is a craving deep within for transcendence and meaning. It surfaces from time to time as awe and wonder, perhaps in response to a red, purple, and orange sky, leaving adults and children amazed at the progression of colours and shades, wondering about the source of sky and sun, or possible meaning to such an incredible beautiful event... Children are just as much spiritual beings as the adults in their lives. From the very beginning of life, infants seem to live a life of awe and wonder. (Ratcliff & May, 2004, p. 7)

Likewise, a study undertaken with 2-year-old and 3-year-old children, determined that children of this age engage with, and express, spirituality through wonder and imagination (Goodliff, 2013). The expression of spirituality in childhood was found to

be 'multi-dimensional', including "moments of care and compassion, inner-reflection, transcendence and the meaning-making of identity" (Goodliff, 2013, p. 1067).

Scholarly literature on children's spirituality emphasises the foundational role of wonder (Fuller, 2006). Wonder involves the contemplation of possibilities and mystery as well as offering opportunities for children to experience joy and express creativity (Harris, 2016). Similar to the findings from empirical research, such as the work of Coles (1990), literature comments that children's spirituality is "characterised by a sense of wonder and fascination, an acute awareness of present experiences and emotions, and the instinct to know when things are not as they should be or when the truth has not been told" (Zhang, 2012, p. 43).

In summary, creativity, imagination and wonder and awe are described in the literature as ways in which young children's spirituality may be experienced and expressed (Adams, 2009). It is recognised that these experiences and expressions of creativity or wonder are not synonymous with spirituality, rather, it is that they offer the potential for children's spiritual voices to be expressed and nurtured (Adams, 2009).

2.2.3.1 The shadow side of spirituality.

Discourse on spirituality largely promotes the positive ways in which spirituality is expressed (Adams et al., 2016). However, a growing body of literature espouses the need to address the less desirable characteristics of spirituality from the perspective that when addressed, these less desirable outcomes become acknowledged, increasing an individuals' sense of self-awareness and facilitating the capacity for these characteristics to be developed into their more positive counterpart (De Souza, 2016). Similarly, discourse on dark play emphasises the value of play as a means for children to explore dark emotions and situations (Osgood, Sakr & de Rijke, 2017). The 'shadow', as it is termed, refers to the more negative characteristics of spirituality such

as despair, disenchantment and destructiveness and which, when left to develop, can result in disconnectedness (De Souza, 2016; Earl, 2001). Literature suggests that although the shadow is often alluded to within descriptions of spirituality, there is little clarity surrounding how the shadow side of spirituality can be addressed, particularly in relation to children (Earl, 2001).

Discourse on the shadow side of spirituality draws on literature within the field of psychology, particular the work of Carl Jung. Jung (1953) describes individuals' need to understand the outside world by firstly experiencing it inwardly. Jung's focus on the inward, the self, is further explored in his writings on the shadow side of existence. Part of human nature, Jung (1938) explains, is coming to deal with the shadow side (more negative characteristics) of the self, whether through repression or projection, to enable an understanding that all that is in the world, good or bad, comes first from the self. O'Connor (1985) comments on Jung's notion of the shadow side of humanity explaining it as follows:

> The shadow is the inferior part of the personality, the sum of all personal and collective psych elements which, because of their incompatibility with the chosen conscious attitude, are denied expression in conscious life and therefore coalesce into relatively autonomous splinter personality with contrary tendencies in the unconscious mind….(p. 46)

Jung's contribution to the understanding of human nature as comprising both the shadow (negative) and the light (positive) intersects with the notion that spirituality is connected to 'wholeness' and whereby various characteristics of spirituality are more desirable than others (Earl, 2001). Essentially, for holistic development to occur, both the light and the dark sides of spirituality must be recognised and attended to (De Souza, 2012). Literature asserts that repressing the less desirable characteristics can

result in isolation and disconnectedness (De Souza, 2012), therefore inhibiting the relational consciousness previously discussed as integral to the development of spirituality (Hay & Nye, 1998).

Additionally, negative experiences which can draw focus on the shadow side of spirituality (anger, despair) are described as affording an individual with the opportunity to experience spiritual development or spiritual impediment (Nye, 2009). Literature describes that when elements of the shadow side of spirituality are addressed, balance can be achieved, that is, an individual learns to live with both the light and the dark in a productive way (De Souza, 2012). Palmer (2000) summates this balance effectively, "to embrace weakness, liability, and darkness as part of who I am gives that part less sway over me, because all it ever wanted was to be acknowledged as a part of my whole self" (p. 71).

2.2.4 The distinction between *religious* and *spiritual*.

It is recognised, through the literature, that "religion and spirituality are closely related" (van der Zee & Tirri, 2009, p. 1). At times, both literature and empirical research have used the two terms interchangeably, yet the two exist autonomously, as explained by Tacey (2000):

> Religion and spirituality thus face each other as paradoxical twins. Without religion we have no organized way of communicating or expressing truth, no sacred rituals to bind individuals into living community. Yet without spirituality, we have no truth to celebrate and no contact with the living and no ongoing nature of divine revelation. We need both – form and substance…(p. 28)

The use of these terms either synonymously or discreetly has added to the difficulty in understanding the phenomenon of spirituality. Scholarly literature acknowledges this difficulty and frequently attempts to articulate a position within any writing on the subject. Sheldrake (2016) suggests that the term spirituality is becoming increasingly

more popular as individuals move away from institutionalised religion and instead seek to express their values and purpose in life through the term 'spiritual'. The need to distinguish the terms is articulated by Bussing et al. (2010):

> Because spirituality is an attribute of all human beings, a more open and pluralistic view rather than exclusive interpretations of distinct religious traditions is important. Albeit the multidimensional constructs spirituality and religiosity are interconnected…they are conceptually distinct…spirituality is a complex and multidimensional issue, and can be defined as an individual and open approach in the search for meaning and purpose in life; in contrast, religion is an institutional and culturally determined approach which organises the collective experiences of people into a closed system of beliefs and practices. (p. 27)

The relationship of spirituality and religion is most commonly described as overlapping, "though they do not coincide…not everything that is spiritual is necessarily religious, nor is everything that is religious necessarily spiritual" (Ostow, 2006, p.52). This statement is reiterated by Bone (2008) whose work on spirituality articulates that "whilst it may inform religion and vice versa it is different from religion" (p. 344).

Empirical research advocates that when spirituality is nurtured, a foundation for religious affiliation is provided. The most significant research in this area has been made by Fowler (1981) in his study of faith development. Whilst Fowler's (1981) concern was with the concept of faith, there are clear links that can be made to spirituality, based on his interpretation of the various terms. Fowler (1981) interpreted faith as a universal construct. His research was concerned with the structure and process of making meaning, rather than the object of faith (Ratcliff, 2007) and his

theory suggests that in being universal, faith is not necessarily connected to religious beliefs, but can be projected in that way.

Fowler's (1981) theory of faith development draws on the work of earlier developmental theorists, such as Piaget, Erikson and Kholberg (Miller-McLemore, 2006) and constructs faith as a hierarchical seven stage process. The first two stages of Fowler's theory (1981) relate specifically to the age range of children in this proposed research, as outlined in the Table 2.1.

Table 2.1

Fowler's Stages of Faith

STAGE	DESCRIPTION	AGE RANGE
Primal Faith	Trust and safety are of primary concern at this stage. Play is also a feature.	Infancy -2 years
Intuitive - Projective	This stage is characterised by an interest in other children and a focus on interactions. There is an interest in stories and in images and religion is learnt through experience and the people that the child comes into contact with.	3 -7 years

Fowler's (1981) theory is not without criticism. As with other developmental theorists, such as Piaget, Fowler (1981) has been criticised for the hierarchical structure of his stages and their association to an age which views the child as incompetent (Jardine & Viljoen, 1992; Parker, 2010; Ratcliff, 2007). However, Fowler's research is widely regarded as making a significant contribution to the field of spiritual development (Gathman & Nessan, 1997; Grajczonek, 2013; Jardine & Viljoen, 1992).

The relationship between spirituality and religiosity has also been described in the literature through the compilation of various categories or facets of spirituality.

Bradford (1999) distinguishes three categories that he terms: human, devotional and practical spirituality in an attempt to describe the various aspects of spiritual development. Human spirituality is concerned with having essential needs meet, and involves personal development. Bradford (1999) explains that love, peace, wonder, joy and relatedness are characteristics of human spirituality and he suggests that this form of spirituality is focused on meeting the needs of the individual as a person. Devotional spirituality is connected to religion, in essence, devotional spirituality occurs through the development of elements within human spirituality, which gives rise to the opportunity for connection to religion. Devotional spirituality provides an individual with a framework for developing and acting out their human spirituality that assists in the development of religious identity. Practical spirituality utilises the previous facets of spirituality to assist in the search for meaning in one's life. Practical spirituality is concerned with wholeness, spiritual development and social commitment (Bradford, 1999). These categories provide a useful framework for conveying the distinct yet complementary nature of spirituality and religion.

The possible intersection of spirituality and religion can be expressed through the use of the term 'religiosity'. The notion of 'religiosity' is articulated as a spirituality that is directed by religious beliefs. Table 2.2 illustrates Rossiter's (2011, p. 59) interpretation of these constructs. The concept of 'religiosity' makes a useful contribution to this proposed investigation as there may be overlap in the way that spirituality is expressed when it is described as a connection to the transcendent. Given the context of this research is Catholic childcare, and therefore has a religious context, an understanding of religiosity is particularly pertinent.

Table 2.2
Summary of Relationships Between the Constructs Spiritual, Religious, Spirituality and
Religiosity adapted from Rossiter (2011, p. 59).

Spiritual	**Religious**
The spiritual is the natural dimension to life that comprises thinking and feeling in relation to transcendence; a creator; a sense of meaning and purpose; love and care for self and others and the natural world.	Being religious is to have directed one's spirituality in a particular way that is informed by the beliefs, practices of a particular religion. It includes a sense of transcendence and participation in a local religious community. The religious is immersed in ritual life, prayer, religious symbols and music.
Spirituality	**Religiosity (or religious spirituality)**
Spirituality is the way that the behaviours of an individual are expressed through a connection between the spiritual and moral dimensions of an individual.	Religiosity is a spirituality tied to religious beliefs within a community of faith. As a religious spirituality, religiosity involves engagement with self and Other. Religiosity is a spirituality that is clearly referenced to religion.

Religiosity, therefore, is the term provided in the literature for the overlapping of spirituality and religion. Religiosity is as an avenue for spiritual expression referenced to a particular religion. A further conceptualisation of the relationship between spirituality and religion, provided by Selvam (2013), supports the views of Rossiter (2011) and provides three models to describe the nature of this connection. The first of these models is an 'either/or model' whereby spirituality and religion were perceived as separate entities. From this perspective, religion is viewed as related to the institution of the religious affiliation and spirituality as a personal characteristic. The second model viewed the relationship as 'a both/and model' proposing that religion and spirituality could be inter-related and identifying that each contains elements of the

other. The final model – 'a multi-dimensional matrix' recognises both the autonomous nature and the connection between religion and spirituality. This third model suggests a point of integration of the two and Selvam (2013) describes the concept of a 'religious-spirituality' as the point of intersection, similar to the notion of religiosity referenced by Rossiter (2011).

2.2.5 Research question one.

In this section of the literature review, the phenomenon of spirituality has been explored through a review of empirical research and scholarly literature. Extant literature clearly articulates the need for spirituality to be awakened in childhood (Harris, 2013; King, 2013). Additionally literature acknowledges spirituality to be innate and therefore the spiritual capacity requires attention as a component of children's holistic development (Bellous & Csinos, 2009). Limited empirical research exists on educators' personal understanding of spirituality (Davies, 2007; Revell, 2008) and as educators working with young children must first have experienced and nurtured their own spirituality if they are to promote children's spiritual development (Adams, 2009), the following research question emerged in relation to the present study:

RQ 1: What do educators understand by the term 'spirituality'?

2.3 Promoting Children's Spiritual Development

Literature asserts that children's spirituality must be nurtured if it is to develop, otherwise it will be lost (Bradford, 1999; Crompton, 1998). Spiritual development is considered as the individual's growth in self-awareness (King, 2013; Ng, 2012) and is concerned with the way in which the spiritual domain of the human person is nurtured. Benson, Roehlkepartain and Rude (2003) define spiritual development as:

…the process of growing the intrinsic human capacity for self-transcendence, in which the self is embedded in something greater than the self, including the sacred. It is the developmental 'engine' that propels the search for connectedness, meaning, purpose and contribution. It is shaped both within and outside religious traditions, beliefs and practices. (p. 205)

As explained by Hay and Nye (2006) from their 1998 empirical work, "there is in every child a spiritual potentiality, no matter what the child's cultural context may be" (p. 60). Contemporary literature recognises that spirituality is not confined to particular religious traditions or cultural beliefs (Bloom, 2009). Spirituality is a natural part of the human condition (De Souza, 2016) and it can be expressed through the beliefs and traditions of religion or culture (Baskin, 2016). Both cultural and religious perspectives require consideration when promoting children's spiritual development. Spirituality is manifest in humanity, it transcends cultural and religious boundaries as explicated by Bloom (2009):

Contemporary spirituality emerges from all the diverse traditions in our global village. It approaches spirituality with a multicultural and interfaith attitude, and recognises the difference between spirituality and religion. It is centrally concerned with individual spiritual experience as the starting point for exploration and development. Its values and beliefs are holistic, recognising the intimate interdependence of all life. (para. 1)

When nurturing children's spirituality, literature proposes an emphasis on the role of both biology (our innate characteristics) and ecology (our environment), calling for both perspectives to be considered with spiritual development (Reker &

Chamberlain, 2000). When spirituality is nurtured and developed it "guides children to explore different ways of seeing and understanding, encouraging their personal awareness of social dimensions" (Harris, 2013, p. 283). King (2013) adds to this statement by Harris (2013) by emphasising that "to awaken spiritually, children and young people need examples and guidance to motivate them to strive, to set them on fire, so that their spiritual awareness and imagination become awakened and ignited…" (p. 14).

Nurturing children's spiritual capacities is described in the literature as attending to what it means to be human, and therefore fundamental to holistic development. The scholarly work of Sagberg (2008) explicates the holistic nature of spirituality, calling for those involved in nurturing this capacity to consider the construct as one that "is clearly a matter of cultural learning, a matter of being-in-the-world, of situated learning…of being human" (p. 365). To promote the development of children's spirituality, Sagberg (2008) proposes children need both hospitable and sacred space and access to cultural and religious traditions, "however this demands a level of education…that is anchored in cultural awareness and formation" (p, 366). Similarly, an earlier study undertaken with infants and toddlers (12-36 months) to ascertain spiritual formation within a faith community, suggested that creating opportunities that promote spiritual experience is key and that these must be developmentally appropriate:

> It is not enough to engage in cognitive reflection and attain a spiritual awareness more recognizable to adults. We must create contexts, point the way, share the stories and give directions that help toddlers express their spiritual experience in ways that transform who they are in the very real developmental stages in which they reside. (Yust, 2003, p. 149)

The role of the educator in promoting children's spiritual development is recognised in the literature as pivotal to the awakening of this capacity (Harris, 2013). The earlier scholarly work of Bradford (1999) emphasised the education of the whole child, calling on schools and educators to draw out children's 'practical spirituality' through community engagement. More recent scholarly work supports the work of Bradford (1999) and elaborates, stating that "teachers need to understand spirituality as a dimension of education, foster their own spirituality, and provide spiritual care of young children" (Zhang, 2012, p. 44). In doing so, educators require what Adams (2009) calls a 'spiritual sensitivity'. Educators must "use a wide net to catch the great variety of forms taken by children's spirituality" (Nye, 2009, p. 35). Hyde (2016) draws attention to the challenge of the current context by stating that educators often are not themselves familiar with the notion of spirituality or how to attend to the spiritual development of their students. Despite this challenge, literature explains that early childhood educators have a key role in embedding spiritual development when planning the classroom curriculum and that educators must ensure that they are attending to the cognitive, affective and spiritual domains of the child (Grajczonek, 2012a).

Scholarly work advocates for the promoting of spiritual development across the school curriculum (Priestly, 2002), suggesting that everyday conversations offer the potential for spiritual development (Bone, 2005). It is also suggested that the creative arts can offer spiritual expression (Mata, 2006) along with the provision of time for stillness and reflection (Daly, 2004). The provision of times for reflection is recognised as a means for promoting spirituality by contributing to an individual's sense of wellbeing (Mata, 2014). Within the creative arts, drawing is described as a means of

connecting to the spiritual sense of self, as it provides both an expressive and therapeutic experience (Farrelly-Hansen, 2001). Drawing is an expressive form of the arts and can assist children in the construction of their self-narrative (Coholic, 2010). Music, as a component of the creative arts is described as providing a transformative experience both inwardly (I-Self) and outwardly (I-Other) (Nortjé & van der Merwe, 2016). The transformative experience connects person to group, enhances wellbeing and contributes to a sense of belonging and connectedness and as such, opens the potential for spiritual development (Nortjé & van der Merwe, 2016). Mata (2006) highlights the role of educators in recognising and fostering children's potential within creative arts, such as music, as a means for promoting development within the spiritual capacity.

Promoting children's spiritual development through curriculum has also been a focus of empirical research. An investigation into adolescent spirituality sought to determine what should be encompassed within the school curriculum to meet the spiritual needs of students, and did so by listening to what it was that they wondered about (Kessler, 2000). The outcome of Kessler's (2000) research was the culmination of *Seven Gateways to the Soul of Students,* outlined below, that should be integrated within school curriculum:

1. The yearning for deep connection - for relationships, for a sense of belonging. These connections can be with themselves, others, nature or a higher power;

2. The longing for silence and solitude – for reflection, calm and stillness;

3. The search for meaning and purpose – the big questions such as 'why am I here?' and 'what is life for?';

4. The hunger for joy and delight – for play, celebration, gratitude, exaltation;

5. The creative drive – for discovery, for art, for awe;

6. The urge for transcendence – for the mystical realm, to go beyond perceived limits;

7. The need for initiation – for rites of passage, for transitions. (Kessler, 2000, p. 17)

The Seven Gateways link closely to the earlier themes found within this review of literature. Specifically, correlations can be drawn between the Seven Gateways and the relational aspects of spirituality, as well as the notion of belonging, the search for meaning and expressions of spirituality.

In relation to schooling systems acknowledging their role in nurturing spirituality, the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (OFSTED) in the United Kingdom, made recommendations in their document, *Promoting and Evaluating Pupils' Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development* (2004). These recommendations pertained to the role of the educator in assisting the development of spirituality. OFSTED is explicit in stating that spiritual development of students is a key feature of education and outline a number of ways that educators can assist students in developing as 'spiritual' beings. These suggestions for nurturing spirituality include: encouraging students to explore that which animates them; encouraging students to respect diversity; and providing students with the opportunity to explore human emotions and the impact these have on themselves and others. Whilst the work of OFSTED, like Kessler (2000), refers to school aged children and adolescence, it provides a worthwhile contribution and can be modified for application to an early childhood context.

In Australia, Grajczonek (2010) in collaboration with the Queensland Catholic Education Commission (QCEC) Pre-prep Taskforce wrote the, *Framework for Early Years Spiritual Development in the Catholic Tradition* (2010) that outlined the

components of spirituality and the ways these could be nurtured. The document expresses "the implicit and explicit nurturing of young children's spiritual development is essential to their becoming, as they learn to become relational, resilient and active members of their families and communities" (Grajczonek in collaboration with the QCEC Pre-Prep Taskforce, 2010, p. 2). The Framework outlined five areas that educator's should attend to in an attempt to promote spiritual development:

1. *Relationships, sense of connectedness, identity and sense of belonging* - through assisting children to understand and manage emotions; creating a community based on respect; accommodating difference; allowing children agency and voice in matters concerning them.

2. *Sense of transcendence* – through encouraging children to wonder about God; providing opportunities for silence and prayer.

3. *Sense of awareness* – through allowing children time to reflect on failures and therefore build resilience; allowing children to express opinions and to become aware of their responses to situations and events.

4. *Sense of mystery* – through stimulating imagination through story and gesture; encouraging creativity; noticing and appreciating nature.

5. *Sense of value* – through sharing children's literature and discussing the values illustrated; valuing and supporting children's religious beliefs.

Spirituality in the Early Years (CEO Rockhampton, 2012), a document that followed on from the Framework (Grajczonek in collaboration with the QCEC Pre-Prep Taskforce, 2010), also detailed the important role of the educator in nurturing children's spirituality. The purpose of this document was to assist educators in providing an early childhood environment that "supports the awakening and nurturing

of spirituality…" (CEO Rockhampton, 2012, p. 4). Among other suggestions, the document outlined the need for educators to provide opportunities for children to engage with their imagination, to learn through play, to experience wonder, to ask 'big questions'.

The role of the educator in promoting children's spiritual development is premised on educators' ability to include spirituality as a part of their planning. Literature that describes the need for educators to explicitly address children's spirituality (Grajczonek, 2010) requires that educators plan for this capacity alongside others within a holistic approach to children's learning and development. Planning explicit learning intentions is advocated as key to effective teacher practice (Hattie, 2012). Effective teachers are described as professionals who know their content, know their students and whom demonstrate preparedness through the development of efficient planning (Stronge, 2007). Essentially, the quality of the planning will largely determine the quality of lessons and the construction of learning intentions is central to the planning process (Fetherston, 2006). Learning intentions, or objectives, direct the educators' practice and provide clarity to the purpose of the activity that can result in a positive impact on student learning (Fetherston, 2006).

2.3.1 Research question two and three.

This investigation responds to the call of researchers in the field who have advocated for further empirical research involving educators, to gain an insight into children's spirituality (Adams et al., 2016; Giesenberg, 2000). Given the important role educators play in nurturing children's spiritual development, the research questions resulting from this section of the literature review are:

RQ 2: What do educators know about promoting children's spiritual development?

RQ 3: What practices are educators implementing, intentionally and incidentally, to promote children's spiritual development?

2.4 Contemporary Educational Perspectives Influencing Practice in Early Childhood

Although understandings of child development have, and continue to be, influenced by developmental theorists such as Piaget and social-constructivist theorists such as Vygotsky, contemporary perspectives have moved away from the perception of universal child development. This section of the literature review will explore the historical contributions of Piaget and Vygotsky in the construction of contemporary perspectives of the child and of early childhood education. These contemporary perspectives are pertinent in gaining an insight into the educators' practices within the context of childcare. The educators' practices influence the experiences of the child and therefore also impact the ways in which spiritual development is promoted, and so these must be understood for this investigation.

2.4.1 Historical theory impacting contemporary perspectives.

Piaget's construction of four stages of cognitive development is widely recognised as a key foundational theory in educational contexts (Craine, 2005; Flavell, 1996; Ojose, 2008). Whilst his theory has received criticism (Craine, 2005; Flavell, 1996; Ojose, 2008) it provides a framework for describing the development of cognition from early childhood through to adolescence and must be addressed in a review of literature on the contemporary practices within education settings. Contemporary perspectives reject the notion of the 'universal child' and assert that Piaget's theory underestimates the competence of the young child (Lourenco & Machado, 1996). A further criticism of Piaget's theory is that it lacks consideration of any social factors of development (Lourenco & Machado, 1996), which are later addressed through the work of Bronfenbrenner (1979).

Piaget divided cognitive development into the following named stages; sensorimotor; preoperational; concrete operational; and, formal operational. Piaget describes the development of cognition within these stages as being tied to the chronological age of the child as illustrated in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3.

Piaget's Stages of Cognitive Development (Piaget, 1963)

STAGE	AGE RANGE	DESCRIPTION
Sensorimotor	Birth – 2 years	Making sense of the world through their senses eg: sucking, grasping, hitting
Pre- Operational	2 to 7 years	Children use symbols, images and language
Concrete Operational	7-11 years	Children think systematically
Formal Operational	11 - adulthood	Children begin to think in the abstract

Piaget made several contributions to the field of cognitive development, including identifying the "active, constructive nature of the child" (Flavell, 1996, p. 201) and the knowledge that later experiences in life are influenced by earlier ones (Flavell, 1996). The constructivist approach towards development was a key contribution made by Piaget as it placed the child at the centre of their own learning (Halpenny & Pettersen, 2013). Piaget's theory was based on the premise that children's learning was active, progressive and constructive (Halpenny & Pettersen, 2013; Piaget, 1963) and this challenged previous conceptions of the child as a passive recipient of knowledge. As an active participant in their own learning, the child is perceived as being engaged in an ongoing process to make sense of their world through their experiences in it (Piaget, 1955). Piaget's view of constructivism emphasises the

individual, with little value placed on external aspects of the social or environmental contexts that later theorists explored as part of constructivism (Woolfolk, 2011).

Whilst Piaget's theory has been criticised for placing children into compartments of cognitive ability in reference to specific ages, it is widely accepted that his theory provides a useful framework for understanding the way in which children develop their thought processes (Crain, 2005; Gelman & Baillargeon, 1983). Contemporary theory embraces the child as capable – as active in constructing their learning in relationship with others and the world around them. These theories that view the child as capable build on the contribution of Piaget and include social and cultural bases for cognition, such as from the work of Vygotsky (Woolfolk, 2011) and Bronfenbrenner (1979;1986).

2.4.2 Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory.

Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory of development contrasts with Piaget's theory of cognitive development. A key feature of Vygotsky's theory is the emphasis that is placed on the 'other' in the learning process. Whist Piaget's view of constructivism focused on the individual child constructing their own meaning, Vygotsky explored the influence of the context and person in this process (Woolfolk, 2011). Vygotsky "believed that children do not construct all knowledge and understanding independently" (Feeney, Moravcik, Nolte & Christensen, 2010, p. 152) and asserted that children learn through "being assisted or mediated by teachers, or parents and tools in their environment and most of this guidance is communicated through language" (Woolfolk, 2011, p. 69). The 'Zone of Proximal Development' (ZPD) is the term given to the difference between what a child is able to do independently and what they are able to do when assisted by another (Vygotsky, 1978). Within the ZPD, a child engages in a process of imitation whereby the adult guides a child to internalise

new learning (Fleer, 2010). This is a key difference to the thinking of Piaget, as the child is viewed as having a sense of agency.

Vygotsky's theory takes into account the role of the social and cultural in the development of the child and recognises the active role of the child in the process of learning (Vygotsky, 1997). A study undertaken by Bone (2008) to ascertain parent, staff and children's perspectives of spiritual development made clear links to Vygotsky's theory, stating that the spiritual is realised through the idea of "inter/intra-personal….I/Thou or self/Other"(Bone, 2008, p.355) emphasising that "spiritual experience does not happen in a vacuum" (Bone, 2008, p. 355).

A further contribution made by Vygotsky is the importance he placed on language within the learning process. Vygotsky considered language to be central to thinking (Feeney, Moravcik, Nolte & Christensen, 2010; Vygotsky, 1997) terming this a 'dialectical approach' and used it to connect play with learning in the early years (Fleer, 2010). In this dialectical approach, Vygotsky proposed that the adult has an important role in connecting with the child at play, through dialogue, to assist the child in their learning and development (Fleer, 2010). Vygotsky used the term 'scaffolding' and described it as the process of the adult providing support to the child, through dialogue. Research undertaken as part of the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education study, in the late 1990s, supported Vygotsky's theory, finding that children were active co-constructors of their learning and that in effective early learning settings, educators were involved in scaffolding children's learning experiences (Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva, 2004). Vygotsky (1997) also emphasised the social world of the child, that is, the role of others in the environment or context in which the child is present. Vygotsky stressed that the external context cannot be ignored as an impacting factor on a child's development and learning (Fleer, 2010). When considering the

context of the current investigation, that is, of Catholic childcare, this theory highlights the influential role of the educator and the educator's dialogue with the child on the child's development.

2.4.3 Contemporary perspectives of the child.

Contemporary perspectives of the child have developed as a result of the criticisms received from historical theories. Contemporary perspectives conceptualise the child as 'capable' and they are their own agents (Walton, 2015), and this view has influenced the educational approaches currently adopted in early learning settings. Children are described as having agency, with the power to actively and creatively participate in their world demonstrating autonomy, construction and action (Leffdahl & Hagglund, 2006; Sevon, 2015). Essentially, contemporary theories focus on a child's right to a childhood, rather than an orientation towards adulthood. The Australian mandated framework for the early years, *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework [EYLF]*(DEEWR, 2009), affirms the view of the 'capable child'; "Children actively construct their own understandings and contribute to others' learning. They recognise their agency, capacity to initiate and lead learning, and their rights to participate in decisions that affect them, including their learning" (p. 9). Similarly, MacLachlan, Fleer and Edwards (2013) explained that children are viewed as "active learners, who are competent and capable and bring a wealth of social, cultural and historical knowledge from their homes and communities to bear upon their learning in educational settings, such as centres and schools" (p.202). In viewing children as competent, capable and with agency provides for the development of children's independence as a component of their identity (Duff, 2012), and therefore rejects the once held belief of the universal child (Grajczonek, 2012a). It is these conceptualisations of the child, and their development, that can be linked to current educational practice in the early years.

In exploring contemporary perspectives of the child, socio-cultural theory describes contexts that influence the child, and therefore makes a worthwhile contribution to this investigation. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) bio-ecological theory recognises that both nature and nurture effect the development of the child. Central to this theory is the belief that learning and development occur through the interaction *between* the individual and various layers of their environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Within his research, Bronfenbrenner (1986) identified differing levels of social contexts (micro, meso, exo, macro and chrono systems) that children are directly and indirectly exposed to. A key characteristic is the belief that the circumstance for optimal development of the child occurs when the contexts for the child are most similar, particularly those in which the child has immediate and direct contact; therefore emphasising the important role of contexts within the micro-system. The micro-system includes the child's home, school, childcare, place of worship and are considered to be elements of the system having direct influence on the child (Bowes, Grace & Hodge, 2012). Bronfenbrenner (1986) highlighted the need for continuity between, for example, the home and school and between the school and childcare which relate directly to the contexts explored in this study.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) explained the interconnectedness of contexts as well as the interaction between the child and others in these settings as impacting development. This system of interaction is termed the meso-system. Bronfenbrenner's theory explains that a child's development "is influenced by the extent to which the behaviour, expectations and values of the people in the two environments are similar or different and how they are perceived by the children in relation to each other" (Bowes, Grace & Hodge, 2012, p. 7). This presents implications for spiritual development in the context of Catholic childcare, as children attending the centre may come from a range

of backgrounds where different behaviours and values are promoted. Diversity issues, such as religious or cultural diversity, are also emphasised in the macro-system of Bronfenbrenner's theory. The macro-system has an indirect influence on the child and is characterised by the larger societal and cultural belief systems which are connected to a family's choice of schooling, childcare and religious affiliation (Bowes, Grace & Hodge, 2012). Bronfenbrenner's theory is pertinent to this study as it suggests interactions a child has with the significant others in their life, whether at home, childcare or school, play pivotal roles in human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

In addition to socio-cultural theory, theory pertaining to the way in which children learn also makes a useful contribution to this investigation. In particular, theory of mind describes a social cognitive skill that explains the way in which children understand their own and others' mind. In the early childhood years of development, theory of mind is connected to the development of social competence (Milligan, Astington & Dac, 2007) and relates to the development of emotion, intention and perception (Wellman, 2002). In essence, theory of mind describes the ability an individual possesses to predict, or 'mentalize' the thoughts and behaviours of another based on acquired knowledge (Frith & Frith, 2005). In relation to this investigation, theory of mind contributes an understanding that children learn what they know from others (Carlson, Koenig, & Harms, 2013). Theory of mind outlines that children develop skills in discernment as they decide whether to learn that which is being taught (Carlson, Koenig, & Harms, 2013).

2.4.4 Contemporary approaches to education.

Contemporary approaches to education in the early years can be described as consisting of various contexts for learning. These contexts for learning articulate the practices that are occurring within early years' settings that are underpinned by contemporary conceptualisations of the child. These contexts are outlined in the *EYLF*

(DEEWR, 2009) and were developed from international research findings on quality practice in the early years (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2008). These contexts for learning include; learning through play, learning environments, holistic approaches, continuity of learning and transitions, intentional teaching, responsiveness to children, cultural competence and assessment for learning.

Play is described as the basis of an early childhood approach (Colliver & Fleer, 2016), providing an avenue for children to explore and make sense of their world (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2010). Research indicates that "play provides the most natural and meaningful process by which children can construct knowledge and understandings, practise skills, immerse themselves naturally in a broad range of literacy and numeracy and engage in productive and intrinsically motivating learning environments" (Hyde, 2013, p. 6). A play-based approach within early childhood is premised on the characteristics of play, namely; play is process rather than product orientated, supports choice and independence, is intrinsically motivated by the child, allows for sustained engagement and is free from external conforms (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2010).

The *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009) emphasises the role of play in learning and development stating that, "play is a context for learning that allows for the expression of personality and uniqueness; enhances dispositions such as curiosity and creativity…stimulates a sense of wellbeing" (DEEWR, 2009, p. 9). It follows that if a play based approach to learning is considered to be the most appropriate educational practice, it should also be adopted when educators attempt to promote children's spiritual development. Within a play based approach, the use of narrative, and drawing on the imagination, are also viewed as complementary techniques. The use of a play

based approach is strongly connected to the construction of the learning environment. The learning environment should be one that encourages conversation, investigation, independence and also fosters holistic approaches, that is, the development of the 'whole child' (DEEWR, 2009).

Intentional teaching is described in the *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009) as being "deliberate, purposeful and thoughtful" (p. 15). Empirical research that informed the *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009) emphasised the need for a focus both on the intentionality of the educator in selecting content and in the process of supporting children's learning (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2008; Wellman & Gelman, 1998). The educator plays a key role in planning intentional learning experiences that bring together all contexts for learning (holistic approaches, play). Strategies include open questioning, promoting shared thinking, creating opportunities that challenge children and promoting high-level cognitive skills (DEEWR, 2009). Continuity of learning and transitions form part of this intentionality by the educator. The *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009) draws upon research that suggested an increase in children's long-term chances of success when continuity of learning is experienced (Bertram & Pascal, 2002). Educators are required to build on children's prior knowledge and experience and this involves them creating strong family partnerships so as to know children's unique contexts. Establishing partnerships with families provides a foundation for continuity between the various contexts of the child's experience. Ensuring continuity across contexts and across learning is recognised as assisting children to feel safe, secure and confident (DEEWR, 2009) and, as explored previously, is supported by Bronfenbrenner's theory.

Responsiveness to children and cultural competence are both practices outlined within the *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009) focussing on ensuring that the individual needs of

children are met. Informing this context for learning within the *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009) is literature that suggested the need for educators to understand children's home, community and cultural beliefs as a means for responding to their needs (Brooker, 2002). When educators are responsive to children's contributions, to their play, to their cultural background and traditions, they are able to build positive relationships with children. Being responsive, and understanding that children have different ways of "knowing, seeing and living" (DEEWR, 2009, p. 16) allows for shared decision making and opportunities for the scaffolding of learning. Cultural competence requires educators themselves to be move beyond an awareness of cultural diversity to an understanding of how to effectively communicate and interact with a range of cultures (DEEWR, 2009).

The process of gathering information on children's learning and development, to inform planning, is also a key contemporary practice. The *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009) terms this *assessment for learning* and describes the importance of educators using a variety of methods for gathering data on children's progress and using this information to inform future content and pedagogies. The *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009) advocates assessment that is continuous rather than separate from children's daily tasks. Literature also advocates for assessment that is integrated with learning, stating that "the push to assess children's abilities coupled with discussions around 'readiness' has transformed kindergarten classrooms into a place of tests and diagnoses rather than the social place it was designed to be" (Yoon, 2015, p. 364). Assessment for learning within the *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009) connects with research on the need for children's learning to be co-constructed through a process of gathering data to link children's current understandings with future experiences (Carr, 2001). Assessment for learning connects with each of the previously explored contexts for learning as it is the

gathering of data, and the evaluation of the data, which are used to guide the educator's planning for teaching and learning, play based approaches and constructing the learning environment.

Contemporary perspectives on early childhood education are also informed by research that suggests educators must possess content and pedagogical knowledge as well as the skills to enact this knowledge (Kleickmann et al., 2013). The work of Shulman (1987) is foundational as he presents the view that educators require what he terms 'pedagogical content knowledge'. That is, educators need to not only possess the content knowledge within specific learning areas, they must also possess the skills to discern the pedagogical practices most applicable to the teaching and learning of that content (Shulman, 1987). Pedagogical content knowledge requires educators to transform their own personal understanding of a concept or skill for the purpose of teaching (Cochran, 1997; Shulman, 1987). Research and scholarly literature that builds upon on the work of Shulman (1987) suggests educators require professional development and experience in teaching if they are to bridge the divide between content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge (Cochran, 1997; Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson & Orphanos, 2009). Although literature on pedagogical content knowledge is specific to learning area content, it does provide insight into educators' practices. Specifically, this literature draws attention to the distinction that exists between what an educator might be able to demonstrate that they know through their practice and what they may be able to articulate that they know and understand, in this case regarding children's spiritual development.

2.4.5 Alternative approaches to education.

Alternative approaches to education within Western Australia refer to those early childhood perspectives that assimilate contemporary perspectives with other existing philosophies. For the purpose of this review of the literature, only those approaches

that specifically attend to the spiritual capacity of the child, have been explored; the Montessori approach, Steiner Waldorf approach and the Reggio Emilia approach.

Montessori's approach toward child development and learning has been selected as part of this literature review for its contribution to educational practice in the early years. Dr Maria Montessori developed her theory based on observations of children and believed that, "the child's development follows a path of successive stages of independence, and our knowledge of this must guide us in our behavior towards him (sic)" (Montessori, 2011, p. 257). Montessori's theory brought together cognitive development and spiritual development (Plekhanov, 1992) emphasising the importance of nurturing the spiritual domain as part of a child's development. Montessori placed importance on the experiential aspects of learning, particularly the use of the senses (Plekhanov, 1992). Montessori's work is criticised for the diminished role of the intentionality of the educator and similarities between Montessori's method and Piaget's stages of cognitive development, previously discussed, can be identified, as both consider stages of development correlated to chronological age. The features of each of Montessori's stages of development are illustrated in Table 2.4.

Table 2.4.

Montessori's Stages of Development (Montessori, 2011)

STAGES/ PLANES	DESCRIPTION	AGE RANGE
First: Absorbent Mind	In this stage, the child is creating the person he/she will become and is influenced by the environment	Birth to 6 years
Second: Intermediate Period	The child has mastered basic skills and now learns through reasoning, imagination and discovery	6-12 years

Third: Transformational	This is a period of change. Logical thinking is developed and new skills/knowledge must relate to life skills	12-18 years
Fourth: Transition to Adulthood	A period characterized as having more certainty, direction in life.	Adulthood

In relation to this proposed study, Montessori's First Plane: Absorbent Mind, is the most appropriate. In this stage of development the child learns through being an active constructivist, being able to actively engage with their environment. According to Montessori, what others may view as the child at 'play' is actually the child re-enacting adult tasks and attempting to create their own reality (Blount, 2007). Montessori, therefore, placed importance on the child being able to learn through experience and for children to be able to connect new learning to life skills. Montessori (1966) stated:

> The human hand, so delicate and so complicated, not only allows the mind to reveal itself but it enables the whole being to enter into special relationships with its environment. We might even say that man takes possession of his environment with his hands… (p. 81)

In this statement, the relationship between cognitive development and spiritual development is also made evident through the acknowledgement of the connectedness between the child and the environment. The Montessori method advocates learning through the senses whereby children engage with the physical environment in an active manner (Helfrich, 2011). Freedom and choice are key principles to the Montessori method that outline an environment should contain minimal materials to encourage

choice, rather than overwhelm children with too many options (Montessori, 2011). The

Montessori method offers a pedagogical approach that acknowledges the role of the

spiritual capacity and it has been adopted in early childhood settings across Australia.

However, the approach is not used widely in mainstream schools (Giesenberg, 2000).

There are 23 centres and schools that provide a specific Montessori based education

within Western Australia (Montessori Australia, 2016). Empirical data suggest the

Montessori method can have a positive impact on young children's mathematical

development (Chisnell & Maher, 2007), and has had success with children at risk of

learning difficulties (Pickering, 1992).

2.4.6 Steiner Waldorf theoretical perspective.

The Steiner Waldorf perspective, based on the work of Rudolf Steiner in the

early 1900s, is well documented as emphasising the spiritual dimension of the child

(French, 2007; Krough & Slentz, 2001; Nicol & Taplin, 2012). Steiner's perspective

was based on the premise that the 'whole child' should be catered for and that

development should be viewed holistically (French, 2007). Steiner (1920) was

interested in the education of children providing for the whole child, including the

spiritual capacity, and he constructed a series of essential principles on which practice

within Steiner Waldorf kindergartens was to be based. These included:

- Care for the environment and nourishment of the senses;

- Creative, artistic experiences through domestic and artistic activities;

- Child-initiated free play;

- The development of healthy activity;

- Protection for the forces of childhood – gratitude, reverence and wonder;

- Working with rhythm, repetition and routine;

- Imitation;

- The child at the centre (Nicol & Taplin, 2012, p. 14).

Central to the Steiner Waldorf approach to learning and development is the emphasis on the human being as 'three-fold' and comprising of the body, the soul and the spirit (Nicol & Taplin, 2012). This places an emphasis on the spiritual nature of the child whereby Steiner proposes that "the spirit is strengthened through learning to organise and master problems and challenges that occur during life and enables the individual to meet adversity with a positive approach" (Nicol & Taplin, 2012, p. 30). Steiner (1923) believed that children "learn to think because they are imitative beings and, as such, are completely surrendered to the world around them" (p. 59). A Steiner Waldorf approach to education is often considered to be particularly Christian orientated. However, whilst Steiner believed in the eternal existence of the soul, his approach is viewed as accessible to all religious beliefs (Oppenheimer, 2007).

Steiner characterised development in three broad stages, with the first stage (birth to seven years) relating specifically to the age group for this study. Steiner expounds that development at this stage is concerned with imitation, and rather than an educator engaging a child in 'moral talk' to guide behaviour, an adult is best to act as a role model (Uhrmacher, 1995). The aim of education, Steiner explained, is to bring the soul-spirit together with the life-body (Uhrmacher, 1995). Steiner (1923) placed great emphasis on the connection between art and religion within education as a means of bringing together the soul and the spirit, for the student as well as for the teacher. Steiner (1923) described this, stating:

> Art and religion are thus united with education. Thus, the way becomes clear, from the matter of the student to that of the teacher, when we realise that education should become knowledge so practical, so clear, and so living that

teachers cannot become true educators of young people unless they are inwardly

able to become artistic and religious. (p. 68)

A Steiner Waldorf approach to early years' education is considered an alternative

approach to education within Western Australia, with only five schools in the state

registered as adhering to this perspective (Steiner Education Australia, 2014). As the

aim of Steiner education is "to be a health-giving education, nurturing and balancing

the human faculties of thinking, feeling and will" (Steiner Education Australia, 2014,

para 2), clear connections can be drawn between this perspective on development and

the investigation into current practices in Catholic childcare that contribute to the

spiritual development of young children.

2.4.7 Reggio Emilia approach.

The Reggio Emilia approach, so named due to its origins in the small town of

Reggio Emilia in Italy, was developed from the work of Loris Malaguzzi and is

recognised as a quality early years approach to pedagogy (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence,

1999). The approach is specifically focused on the early years of development,

targeting children from a few months of age to six years (Rinaldi, 2004). The Reggio

Emilia approach acknowledges the child as protagonist, a capable and active

participant in their learning (Rinaldi, 1998). The approach is described as embracing a

powerful image of the child, and a vision of the educator as one who listens

thoughtfully to, and works alongside, the child (Thornton & Brunton, 2014). Children

are perceived with rights, made visible through their sense of wonderment, imagination

and exploration of their world (Baker, 2015).

Central to the Reggio Emilia approach is the identification of the environment as

the third teacher (Thornton & Brunton, 2014). The aesthetics and fluidity of the

internal and external environments are considered as important as the materials

provided, and these work in collaboration with the educators to facilitate, rather than

dictate, children's learning (Thornton & Brunton, 2014). The aim of the carefully constructed Reggio Emilia environment is the facilitation of relationships, including a relationship with the self through the experience of quiet, reflective spaces (Baker, 2015).

There are several features of a Reggio Emilia approach that support children's spiritual development, signifying this approach as pertinent to the current investigation of educators' practices to promote children's spiritual development. Although spirituality is not explicitly identified as a focus of this approach, Reggio Emilia's emphasis on space and time in childhood, the consideration of the role of the environment on children's learning and a focus on relationships (Rinaldi, 2004), all align with spirituality. Within a Reggio Emilia approach, children are afforded opportunities to be reflective, and the environment is constructed to facilitate a sense of calm (Rinaldi, 2004). These opportunities facilitate children's development of their 'self'. In addition, Reggio Emilia's attention to the dialogue and conversation that occurs as part of the pedagogical practice (Stremmel, 2012), emphasises the relational focus of this approach. Families are also viewed as key contributors and partners within the relational focus of a Reggio Emilia approach (Stremmel, 2012).

It is recognised in international literature that although the Reggio Emilia approach is identified as a worthwhile and high quality approach, it is embedded within its own local culture, and as such, cannot be viewed as a blueprint for all early childhood settings (Stremmel, 2012). Individual schools or centres that premise their practice on a Reggio Emilia approach therefore do so within consideration of their own local context and draw on the term 'Reggio inspired' to articulate this process (Stremmel, 2012). In Western Australia, centres and schools that are 'Reggio inspired' do so autonomously, without the requirement for specific registration.

2.4.8 Research question three.

Historical perspectives by theorists such as Piaget and Vygotsky, have provided the foundation on which contemporary perspectives of the child and education have been built. Contemporary perspectives on the child emphasise the view that children are actively engaged in the world around them and can both initiate and lead learning (DEEWR, 2009). Contemporary practices are based on this perspective of the child, and are outlined within the *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009). Contemporary practice also incorporates the adoption of specific pedagogical approaches, such as Montessori and Steiner, within some West Australian contexts. Exploring historical perspectives and contemporary perspectives in addition to an exploration on literature regarding educators' knowledge and skills was necessary as this research sought to investigate the practices that educators employed to nurture children's (3-year-olds and 4-year-olds) spiritual development in Catholic childcare. The following research question emerged from this section of the literature:

RQ 3: What practices are educators implementing, intentionally and incidentally, to promote children's spiritual development?

2.5 Chapter Summary

This review of the literature sought to frame the context for this research into educators' practices for nurturing children's spiritual development within Western Australian Catholic childcare. In framing this research, three areas of literature were explored, namely: the phenomenon of spirituality, including an exploration of the characteristics of spirituality; the development of spirituality for children and how spirituality can be expressed; and contemporary educational perspectives that influence practice in early childhood. In investigating the extant literature, it was evident that both scholarly and empirical literature recognises spirituality as a universal human capacity that requires nurturing for its development. King (2013) articulates,

"children…need examples and guidance…so that their spiritual awareness and imagination becomes awakened and ignited" (p. 14), and therefore, educators working with 3-year-old and 4-year-old children have a responsibility to assist in children's spiritual development. Questions that have arisen from the literature review have been articulated within the chapter and are illustrated within the conceptual framework for this research investigation. Chapter Three: Research Design will articulate the theoretical perspectives underpinning this research project and the methods that were employed to undertake this study.

Chapter Three: Research Design

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided a review of the scholarly and research literature that currently exists, in relation to spirituality and pedagogical approaches in the early years. In analysing the literature, several gaps were identified; most significantly a lack of research that focused on early years educators' practices to nurture spirituality; also, few studies addressed young children's spirituality prior to compulsory schooling (under 5 years); and a clear gap arose with the unique context of Catholic childcare. These gaps have been articulated within the research questions guiding the investigation. This chapter explains and justifies the project's research design. It then outlines the methods used for data collection, participant selection, data analysis and the strategies employed to ensure reliability and trustworthiness. Finally, the ethical considerations and implications are outlined.

3.2 Research Questions

The aim of this study was to understand the experience of educators working in Catholic childcare centres, in relation to their understanding of nurturing children's spiritual development (aged 3-4 years). To achieve this aim, the investigation was guided by the following overarching research question:

> What are educators' practices for promoting the spiritual development of children aged 3 to 4 years in the context of Catholic childcare centres in Western Australia?

To address the overarching research question, the following sub questions were derived from the review of the literature:

Research Question 1:   What do educators understand by the term 'spirituality'?

Research Question 2:   What do educators know about promoting children's

spiritual development?

Research Question 3:   What practices are educators implementing, intentionally

and incidentally, to promote children's spiritual

development?

3.3 Conceptual Framework

The Conceptual Framework in Figure 3.1 illustrates the three areas of literature

reviewed in the previous chapter. The research questions that arose from that review

are illustrated to conceptualise the connection between the literature and this research

investigation.
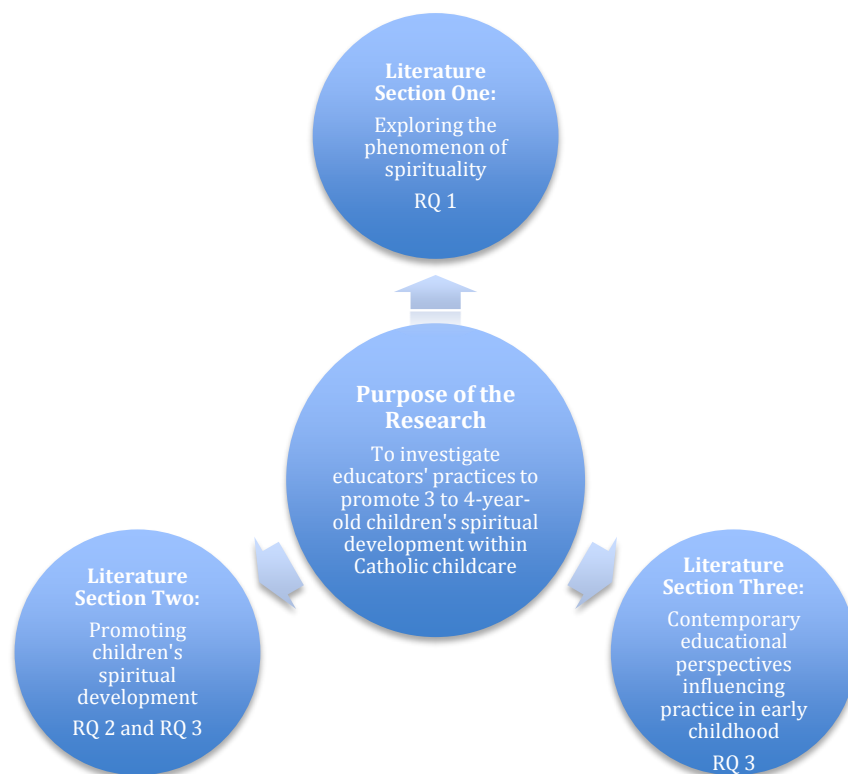
Figure 3.1 Conceptual framework.

3.4 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework shows the approach taken to respond to each of the

research questions. In exploring possible research designs, a qualitative approach was

adopted as most appropriate due to the investigative and experiential nature of the

research questions. The methodologies and methods selected were informed through the qualitative design. Figure 3.2 illustrates that a qualitative design underpinned by a social constructivist theoretical perspective was employed. Within this theoretical perspective, a phenomenological perspective within an interpretivist paradigm was selected. The use of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was employed as a specific form of phenomenological approach (Smith, 2008; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Each of these components of the research design are explained and justified in this chapter.

QUALITATIVE

Social Constructivism

Interpretivism

Phenomenology

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
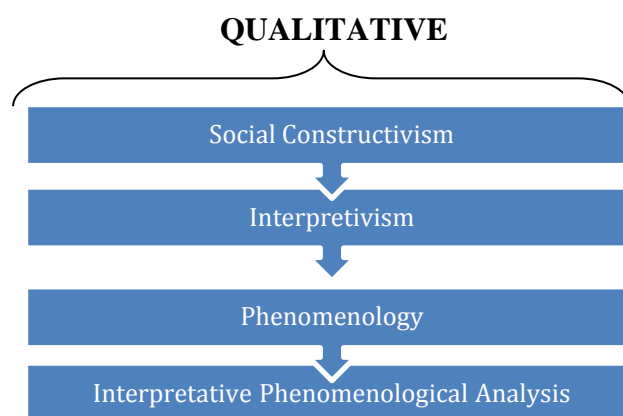
Figure 3.2 Theoretical framework.

3.4.1 Qualitative research.

Qualitative research is an inductive form of inquiry that acknowledges the complexity of social situations or events (Creswell, 2014). This approach to research is described by Creswell (2014) as "exploring and understanding the meaning individuals ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 4). Taking a qualitative approach to research implies a focus on the interpretative and social sciences whereby the researcher explores a problem through the 'eyes' of the participant within their social context (Neuman, 2011). Qualitative research allows the researcher to "develop a complex picture of the problem...reporting multiple perspectives, identifying the many factors

involved in a situation and generally sketching the larger picture that emerges"

(Creswell, 2009, p. 176). In this investigation, *that* social or human problem is

articulated as the practices adopted by educators to promote children's spiritual

development.

Qualitative research typically involves a focus on processes and events, is

situationally constrained and recognises the role of the researcher in the research

process (Neuman, 2011). Qualitative research involves "the gathering, analysis,

interpretation, and presentation of *narrative* information" (Teddlie & Tashakkori,

2009, p. 6) and is concerned with "processes and meanings that are not experimentally

examined or measured" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 10). As a qualitative approach is

described as being "contextually laden, subjective, and richly detailed" (Byrne, 2001,

p. 372), the data are collected in each participant's setting (Creswell, 2014) and the

methods involve "data based on human experience... [which] is (sic) powerful and

sometimes more compelling than quantitative data" (Anderson, 2010, p. 2). It is

recognised that qualitative studies can "provide insight into the subtle nuances of

educational contexts" (Kervin, Vialle, Herrington & Okely, 2006, p. 37).

In essence, a qualitative approach to research provides a means for exploring an

individual's or group's experience of a phenomenon through narrative. Qualitative

designs involve the use of a small number of subjects who are examined in detail to

interpret the meaning of the phenomenon and this meaning is reported as themes. The

strengths of a qualitative approach lie in its ability to engage in depth with a subject

and to examine social processes (Babbie, 2011) and as such, the theoretical perspective

underpinning this investigation was social constructivism. Social constructivism views

reality as socially constructed (Sterian & Mocanu, 2016). Individuals are viewed as

evolving makers of meaning (Fleury & Garrison, 2014). This theoretical perspective

places significance on both the context of the investigation and on the subjectivity of the research (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2013). As this investigation sought to understand the experience of educators to nurture children's spirituality within their own childcare centre, a qualitative approach was appropriate. There exist several approaches within qualitative research, and the most appropriate to this particular study was a phenomenological approach, through an interpretivist paradigm.

3.4.2 Interpretivist paradigm.

Most suited to this qualitative study was an interpretivist paradigm with a phenomenological perspective. A paradigm is described as a way of thinking, and within research, frames the process that will be undertaken and the methods that will be used (Neuman, 2011). An interpretivist paradigm is described as holding to the view that people use "constructs such as culture, social context and language to build our view of the world and that social reality is shaped through social interactions" (Gibbons & Sanderson, 2002, p. 9). Interpretivist research is therefore concerned with how people make meaning of their world and is largely based on the study of hermeneutics (Gibbons & Sanderson, 2002). Historically, hermeneutics involved in-depth inquiry of religious and literary texts and has since developed to focus on the study of parts of text in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the 'whole' (Neuman, 2011). Texts, in this sense, are viewed broadly, and whilst these could be in written form (such as books and documents), the term also extends to include conversation and narrative when transcribed (Neuman, 2011). The focus of an interpretivist approach is to uncover the embedded meaning within the text, and to understand the viewpoint it presents (Neuman, 2011). In interpretivist research, the emphasis is on process, rather than simply outcome, and the method is idiographic in that the researcher attempts to investigate a small number of subjects in detail.

The aim of this research was process-orientated rather than product-focussed as this research sought to investigate the practices that educators engage in to assist in the promotion of children's spiritual development. Interpretivist research is centred on action (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000) and can involve detailed observation of participants in their natural setting:

> The interpretive approach is the systematic analysis of socially meaningful action through the direct detailed observation of people in natural settings in order to arrive at understandings and interpretations of how people create and maintain their social worlds. (Neuman, 2011, p. 102)

Undertaking research within an interpretivist paradigm involves "the belief that facts are not things out in some objective world waiting to be discovered, but, rather, are the social constructions of humans who apprehend the world through interpretive activity" (Ferguson, 1993, p. 36). The role of the researcher within this type of research is to "begin with individuals" (Cohen et al., 2000) and theory arises as a result of the research; it is not presupposed, as was the case for this research.

In selecting interpretivism as the paradigm for this research, "it follows that the…methods include interacting with people in their social contexts and talking with them about their perceptions" (Glesne, 2010, p. 8). In the context of this research investigation, the interpretivist paradigm placed significance on gathering information through social interactions in order to ascertain how participants made sense of their world. The researcher in this study was concerned with gathering information through social interaction with the educators, within their world - Catholic childcare.

3.4.3 Phenomenology.

The interpretivist paradigm places focus on meaning making and process, therefore aligning with a phenomenological perspective. Phenomenology is concerned with 'lived experience' (Van Manen, 2016) and this perspective is interested in

"human experience and how the things that are perceived appear to the person" (Langdridge, 2007, p. 21). Phenomenology is centred on "thinking about what the experience of being human is *like*…and which constitute our lived world" (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 11). A phenomenological approach "sees behaviour as determined by the phenomena of experience rather than by external, objective and physically described reality" (Cohen et al., 2000). This particular perspective is based on coming to an understanding, by the researcher, of the experience as interpreted by the participant. Phenomenologists centre their research on investigations that seek to interpret the participants' experiences of their lived world and adopting a phenomenological perspective entails acknowledging the subjective nature of the researcher (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

Phenomenology assumes that this 'lived experience' is shared (Babbie, 2011; Letts, Wilkins, Law, Stewart, Bosch & Westmorland, 2007). Phenomenological research accepts that "there is some commonality to the perceptions that human beings have in how they interpret similar experiences" (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003, p. 437) and seeks out these commonalities through a process of engaging with participants. Phenomenology was appropriate to this study, as it sought to explore the lived experiences of educators, within the context of Catholic childcare, in relation to promoting children's spirituality. Furthermore, the aim of this research was to determine commonalities across participants' experiences, and therefore ascertain the shared nature of this experience, so as to address the research questions.

3.4.3.1 Variations within phenomenological approaches.

Edmund Husserl (1970; Husserl & Hill, 2008), regarded as the founder of phenomenology, studied the fundamental concepts of the sciences, such as psychology and physics, and how these appeared to people in their experience of the world (Husserl, 1970; Husserl & Hill, 2008). The work of Husserl (1931) laid the foundations

for phenomenological approaches that exist today, and whilst variations can be found among phenomenological approaches, all are based on the human experience of the world. Husserl's work, which largely occurred in the early 1900s, has been interpreted by more recent researchers who have added their own new insights. Cohen et al., (2000) for example, explained that Husserl's contribution to the field of phenomenology laid in his focus on investigating common sense assumptions with a focus on consciousness. Described as descriptive phenomenology, Husserl's (1931) approach was scientific in nature. Husserl asserted that lived experience could be scientifically probed to reach the true meaning of the participant's reality (Husserl, 1931; Husserl & Hill, 2008). He believed that commonalities between participants' realities provided for a truly scientific approach whereby a united description of the experience could be obtained, as explained in the interpretation provided by Lopez and Willis (2004). A key component of Husserl's (1931; 1970) phenomenology was his belief that all prior knowledge should be renounced, to enable an unbiased account to be gathered. In essence, Husserl's contribution was the focus on the centrality of the subjective experience. Thus this investigation sought to focus on the experience of educators in promoting children's spirituality.

Heidegger (1978) further developed Husserl's (1970) methods. Heidegger, as described by Cohen et al. (2000), adopted a more sociological context to Husserl's approach. Heidegger's (1978) phenomenological approach, rather than descriptive, was interpreted by Laverty (2003) as hermeneutic and interpretative in design. From this perspective, Heidegger (1978; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009) believed that not only did experiences have a surface level interpretation, but they also contained a deeper, more hidden meaning. As with the work of Husserl, Heidegger's work has continued to be translated and interpreted since the mid 1900s. Lopez and Willis (2004) described

Heidegger's phenomenology as based on the premise that bias could not be completely eliminated and instead viewed the experience of the interpreter (researcher) as valuable to the meaning making process.

Although various approaches to phenomenology exist, Langdridge (2007) iterates common characteristics across these, summarising them as four key features:

1. A focus on human experience as a topic in its own right;

2. A concern with meaning and the way in which meaning arises in experience;

3. A focus on description and relationships rather than interpretation and causality;

4. Recognition of the role of the researcher in the co-construction of the topic under investigation and built on an understanding of the way in which all experience must be understood in context.   (p. 9)

As articulated by Langdridge (2007), adopting a phenomenological approach, through an interpretivist paradigm, emphasises the importance of the individual, of context and of meaning making, within the research. The researcher sought to gain a deep understanding of the lived experience of the participants in relation to their understanding of spirituality and their practices to promote children's spirituality. As the researcher has personal experience in educational contexts, it was more appropriate to adopt an interpretive style of phenomenology, whereby the role of the researcher was recognised. This process of acknowledging the researcher within the research was an attempt to limit bias and is described by Husserl (1931) as bracketing. The role of bracketing within the investigation is explained in Section 3.4.5 and within both the data collection (Section 3.7) and data analysis (Section 3.8) sections of the chapter.

A more specific theoretical approach to this research was selected that combined the phenomenological perspective with the understanding that such an approach seeks

to "explore the …experiences, ideas and feelings of participants" (Kervin et al., 2006, p. 37). Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was therefore chosen as most suited for providing a theoretical framework for this investigation. IPA is an established phenomenological approach within qualitative inquiry and furthermore, outlines a method for data analysis. IPA therefore provided the theoretical approach to the research and additionally determined the methods of data collection and the processes for data analysis.

3.4.4 Interpretative phenomenological analysis.

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) as a particular qualitative approach is concerned with both the lived experience of the participant and the role of the researcher. Smith (2004) described IPA as involving "…a double hermeneutic. The participant is trying to make sense of their personal and social world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of their personal and social world" (p. 40). IPA is most commonly used within social psychology (Smith, 1996) such as studies that investigate social identity, and life traditions (Eatough, Smith & Shaw, 2008). IPA has been used within the general field of spirituality, such as research into adult spirituality (Joseph, 2014) and spirituality in connection to an outdoor education expedition (Jirásek, Veselský & Poslt, 2017) and as such, there is some precedence for its applicability to this research with early childhood educators. IPA is frequently selected for phenomena that are not easily measureable (Bonner & Friedman, 2011), as is the case for spirituality within the investigation. Obtaining an 'insider perspective' of a particular phenomenon is central to this approach. The 'insider perspective' in the investigation was gathered from the educators themselves, employed in Catholic childcare with 3 to 4-year- olds.

IPA is phenomenological in nature seeking to make sense of participants' experiences. As this study aims to understand the lived experience of educators in

relation to promoting children's spirituality, IPA aligns effectively. Unlike other theoretical perspectives, IPA recognises the important role the researcher plays in the process of the research investigation (Smith, 2004). IPA is described as a "dynamic process with an active role for the researcher" (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 53). Literature on IPA emphasises the concept of 'persons-in-context', the notion that the two cannot be separated and therefore research within this framework involves the social world of the participant (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2008). Likewise, the researcher cannot completely remove himself or herself from the context, or social world of the participant and instead must make attempts to remove bias through the process of bracketing, which is elaborated on further within the chapter. In essence, the researcher is trying to understand and interpret what an experience is like for an individual and this is complicated by the conceptions of the researcher.

IPA research approaches the investigation from the perspective of the participant. Larkin, Eatough and Osborn (2011) explained that IPA "aims to understand the lived experience of a conscious, situated, embodied being-in-the-world, where 'the world' is understood through respondent's involvement in it" (p. 330). From this understanding provided by Larkin et al. (2011), IPA "acknowledges that it is not possible to access an individual's life world directly because there is no clear and unmediated window into that life" (Eatough et al., 2008, p. 1771) and therefore, some sort of interpretative activity is required. In connecting to this study, IPA assisted the researcher in interpreting the experiences of the educators at the childcare centres in relation to their understanding of spirituality and their practices to promote children's spiritual development.

Theoretically, IPA is based on the premise that individuals' experiences are innately connected to both their thinking and their feeling (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

With this assumption, it is possible to observe the connection between IPA and the phenomenological perspective from which it stems. The connection among experience, thinking and feeling is described as a complicated one, as "people struggle to express what they are thinking and feeling…and the researcher has to interpret people's mental and emotional state from what they say" (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 54). IPA is described in the literature as having three characteristic features; it is idiographic, inductive and interrogative (Smith, 2004). Each of these features are outlined below and then illustrated within Table 3.1 in relation to this research.

3.4.4.1 Idiographic.

Smith (2004, p. 41) stated that IPA is "strongly idiographic". For a study to be idiographic, it must focus on the individual, understood as the individual participant or the individual case. IPA is described as idiographic as it requires a detailed analysis of each case or data set before moving on to the next. Fundamentally, IPA is idiographic at two levels: first, it is concerned with particular people in a particular context, and second, it is concerned with the detail through thorough and systematic analysis of the data (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). The process of IPA calls on the researcher to examine themes and to consider each individual case in depth. IPA usually involves a small number of cases to allow for this in-depth analysis to occur (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2008). The term 'idiographic' suggests that the focus is on the individual participant and the individual's experience, as opposed to the study of large generalities (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006).

3.4.4.2 Inductive.

The inductive nature of IPA refers to the conceptualisation of the participant as being an expert of their own experiences (Bonner & Friedman, 2011). As an inductive approach to research, IPA does not presume the experience, thoughts or feelings of participants but rather these emerge from the investigation (Smith, Flowers & Larkin,

2009). In this study, as is common within IPA research, interviews were utilised that followed a semi-structured format. In doing so, the interview provided for an in-depth account of the participant's experience whilst allowing for unanticipated responses and for the researcher to be flexible in questioning the participant. The inductive nature of IPA is also evident in the analysis of the data as themes emerge as a result of the data, rather than presupposing a hypothesis.

3.4.4.3 Interrogative.

Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) identified the need for the researcher to look inward and to interrogate the self-first in an attempt to put aside personal assumptions. The interrogative nature of IPA is most evident through a process referred to as bracketing, and this is a distinctive feature of IPA. The process of IPA is also interrogative in that it seeks to investigate the experience as interpreted by the participant, therefore, the researcher uses a more flexible method of data collection that allows for probing of areas of interest as they arise (Smith, 2008).

Table 3.1.

Features of IPA Linked to the Research

Feature of IPA	Description of the Feature	Connection to the Research
Idiographic	# It is concerned with particular people in a particular context # It is concerned with the detail through thorough and systematic analysis of data	The research was concerned with the experiences of the individual educator – their understanding of spirituality and their practices to promote children's spirituality (aged 3-4 years). A small sample size was used, and the researcher met with participants within their context of Catholic childcare.

	# Involves a small number of cases to allow for this in-depth analysis to occur	
Inductive	# The conceptualisation of the participant as being an expert of their own experiences # Does not presume the experience, thoughts or feelings of participants but rather these emerge from the investigation	Semi-structured interviews were used that provided for an in-depth account of the participants' experience whilst allowing for unanticipated responses. The researcher was able to be flexible in questioning the participant. The analysis process provided for themes to emerge from the data rather than presupposing a hypothesis.
Interrogative	# Requires the researcher to look inward and to interrogate the self first in an attempt to put aside personal assumptions (bracketing) # It seeks to investigate the experience as interpreted by the participant, therefore, the researcher uses a more flexible method of data collection	A researcher journal was used to assist with putting aside any assumptions or preconceptions held by the researcher (bracketing). Several methods of data collection were utilised that provide for flexibility (semi-structured interviews, observations of educators' practices and documentary data - educators' planning documents).

3.4.5 Bracketing in IPA.

The process of IPA outlines a method for data collection and later, analysis, which recognises the role of the researcher. A key method for the collection of data within IPA is through semi-structured interviews (Drew, Raymond & Weinberg, 2006). The interview process occurs with individuals and the research involves only a small number of subjects to allow for an in-depth investigation to occur (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2008). IPA overtly acknowledges the role of the interviewer in the interview and through the process of bracketing, as a means of reducing researcher bias.

Bracketing is a key feature of IPA and assists the investigation in being interrogative. The concept of bracketing has its foundations in Husserl's (1970) phenomenological method, previously described. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) contributed to the understanding of bracketing by suggesting that "we need to 'bracket', or put to one side, the taken for granted world in order to concentrate on our perception of that world" (p. 13). This process is also referred to in the literature as 'epoche'. 'Epoche' calls on the researcher to put aside their knowledge of the phenomenon being investigated. In this investigation, the researcher was called to put aside previous experiences in education working with children aged 3 to 4 years. In consciously putting aside the researcher's own knowledge and experience, they are more able to ensure it does not influence the data (Smith, 2008). The process of bracketing is summarised by Ashworth (1999) as a practice "not to the turning away of the world and a concentrated detached consciousness but to a resolve to set aside theories, research propositions, ready-made interpretations, etc, in order to reveal engaged, lived experiences" (p. 708).

In relation to this research, the process of bracketing was employed to overtly acknowledge, and therefore attempt to limit, researcher bias. The researcher has worked in Catholic educational contexts with 3 to 4-year-old children and thus this

process recognised that the researcher may have shared experiences to those of the educators. In undertaking this practice, a researcher journal was utilised prior to and during each stage of data collection. The journal was used to record, for example: impressions of the childcare centres, staff and children; personal views on participants, their practice and their documentation; as well as any momentary thoughts that arose connecting the researcher's experience to the participants, which may have impacted how the researcher 'heard' the experience of the educator.

The process of bracketing is threefold: it involves initially selecting a theoretical perspective to underpin the bracketing process, chosen for this investigation as IPA; then it suggests that the researcher considers any shared experiences, pre-conceived ideas or assumptions in order to set these aside; third, this information that was bracketed is integrated in the sense that it is considered alongside the analysis of data (Gearing, 2004). Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) suggested that bracketing within the interview stage will assist the researcher to ask questions and probe the participant based on attentive listening to what the participant is saying, rather than a preconceived notion or concern held by the interviewer.

IPA was well suited to this investigation as it sought to understand and interpret the lived experience of a small number of educators who shared the experience of promoting the spirituality of children aged 3 to 4 years within Catholic childcare. Smith (2004) stated that if "a researcher is interested in exploring participants' personal and lived experiences…and in pursuing a detailed idiographic case study examination then IPA is a likely candidate" (p. 48). This study addressed the purpose of IPA and aligns with the tenets of this approach; furthermore the role of the researcher within this investigation was overt, and acknowledged through the process of bracketing. IPA was therefore a suitable research approach for this study.

3.5 Participants

The participants in this research included educators working with 3 and 4-year-olds within Catholic childcare in Western Australia. The characteristics of centres required for this investigation were that they catered for the long day care of children aged 3 to 4 years and were governed by the Catholic Education Western Australia [CEWA]. Three centres that met these characteristics existed at the time of this research. All three centres were invited, and agreed, to participate in the investigation. Therefore, three Catholic childcare centres formed the population for this research. As such, centres were selected purposively, meaning that a non-random sample was gathered by the researcher locating "all possible cases of a highly specific and difficult-to-reach population" (Neuman, 2011, p. 267). As a small number of cases were used, this aligned with the features of phenomenological studies, and in particular those that utilise IPA which focuses on a more in-depth analysis of each case (Smith, 2004).

As the focus of the investigation was on the experience of the educator, educators within the three childcare centres were approached to volunteer to participate in the research. Educators were therefore purposively selected to partake in the investigation. The qualifications of educators varied across the centres and within the various rooms within centres. These qualifications ranged from teacher (four-year university teaching degree) to educators holding a Certificate III (6 month traineeship completed through a TAFE/ Vocational Education Training Centre and undertaken whilst working at a childcare centre). To ensure commonality of experience across educators, the most qualified educator for each room, referred to as the lead educator, was selected to form the participant sample. The lead educator was either a teacher educator (holding a four-year university teaching degree) or they were working towards this qualification. In all cases the lead educator held responsibility for the planning, documentation and implementation of the 3 to 4-year-old program.

An overview of each of the three centres, including contextual factors and the number of lead educators within each centre, is outlined in the following sections 3.5.1 through to 3.5.3. More detailed contextual information regarding each of the centres is located in Chapter One.

3.5.1 Centre A.

At Centre A, children are arranged into 1 group of 3-year-olds and 3 groups of 4-year-olds. The 3 and 4-year-old programs are all led by a teacher, referred to as the lead educator, with additional educators assisting in the room. The 3-year-old program is offered for two days per week. The 4-year-old program operates five days per week. In Centre A, four educators formed the participant sample. Three of these were leading a 4-year-old program and one was leading the 3-year-old program.

3.5.2 Centre B.

At Centre B, children are in a free flowing environment that includes children from 2.5 years to 4 years of age. The 3 and 4-year-old Kindergarten programs are embedded within the operational hours of 6.30am and 6pm. In Centre B two educators formed the participant sample, sharing the responsibility for both the 3 and 4-year-old programs.

3.5.3 Centre C.

At Centre C Both the 3-year-old and 4-year-old programs are developed and delivered by a teacher educator, referred to as the lead educator. Before and after this time children either transition to the long day care rooms with different educators, or they are not on site. At Centre C three educators formed the participant sample. One educator was leading the 4-year-old program and two were leading the 3-year-old programs.

As each centre provides a varying number of rooms across the 3 to 4-years age range, and therefore also a varying number of educators, Table 3.2 illustrates the rooms and participants at the time of the investigation.

Table 3.2.

Participant Details

CENTRE	NUMBER OF ROOMS	AGE RANGE OF THE ROOM	NUMBER OF LEAD EDUCATORS
Centre A	4	3yrs x 1, 4 yrs x 3	4
Centre B	2	3yrs x 1, 4 yrs x 1	2
Centre C	2	3yrs x 1, 4 yrs x 1	3

Participants in the research were provided with a pseudonym, such as *Educator 1: Centre B*, to de-identify the data. This process is explicated in the following Section 3.6, along with the research methods and specific procedures followed for data collection.

3.6 Research Methods

The research methods utilised in this study were aligned to the principles of IPA, outlined in Table 3.1. Research methods within IPA should be ones "which invite participants to offer a rich, detailed, first person account of their experiences" (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p.56). To ensure rich and detailed data, three research methods were employed:

- Semi-structured interview – with individual lead educators

- Observations of practice – of lead educators within their room, on 2 occasions

- Qualitative content analysis – of documentary data: educators' planning documentation for a two-week period

Figure 3.3 illustrates the research method adopted and data collected, in response to each of the three research questions. Research question one, *what do educators understand by the term 'spirituality'?*, employed the research method of semi-structured interview. Interpreting educators' personal understandings of spirituality required engaging educators in conversation, thus interview was the most appropriate research method. Data collected through semi-structured interview comprised of digital recordings that were subsequently transcribed.

Research question two, *what do educators know about promoting children's spiritual development?,* made use of two research methods. Utilising two research methods provided educators with the opportunity to both articulate and to demonstrate their knowledge. Semi-structured interviews were employed to engage educators in a conversation of their knowledge. Observations were employed to enable the researcher to interpret what educators knew through their daily practice about promoting children's spirituality. Data collected to address research question two consisted of transcribed interview data from the semi-structured interviews and observational records from the observation of educators' practices.

Research question three focused on the practices of the educator by questioning, *what practices are educators implementing, intentionally and incidentally, to promote children's spiritual development?* To comprehensively determine these practices, the research methods of observation and qualitative content analysis were used. Observations were conducted to determine the reality of the educators' practices, as opposed to what educators themselves understood them to be, when responding through the method of interview. Furthermore, observational data made available both the planned practices and incidental practices that arose throughout the day. Observational data were collected in the form of observational records. Qualitative

content analysis was employed as a research method for the collection of documentary data in the form of educators' planning documentation. Qualitative content analysis was the selected research method for the gathering of documentary data due to its text-based nature. The educators' planning documentation provided the educators' planned practices and formed the data set for qualitative content analysis.

The researcher journal is represented in Figure 3.3 as a tool used by the researcher to facilitate bracketing throughout each method of data collection.

Research Question	Research Method	Data Collected	
RQ1 *What do educators understand by the term 'spirituality'?*	Interview	Recorded and transcribed interview	
RQ2 *What do educators know about promoting children's spiritual development?*	Interview / Observation of practice	Recorded and transcribed interview / Observational Record	RESEARCHER JOURNAL
RQ3 *What practices are educators implementing, intentionally and incidentally, to promote children's spiritual development?*	Observation of practice / Qualitative content analysis	Observational Record / Documentary Data	

Figure 3.3 Research method and data collected for each research question.

Each of the research methods employed was qualitative in nature and utilised similar data analysis techniques. As qualitative approaches, all three methods are interpretative, naturalistic, situational, reflexive, flexible and focused on validity (Schreier, 2012). The following sections explain and justify the research methods selected for the investigation, in the order of the research question to which they respond (See Figure 3.3).

3.6.1 Semi-structured interview.

The research method of interviewing was used to address research questions one and two. Interviewing is used widely as a technique within qualitative research (Drew et al., 2006). Qualitative approaches explore participants' feelings, their ideas and their experiences (Kervin et al., 2006) so "it follows that the… methods include interacting with people in their social contexts and talking with them about their perceptions" (Glesne, 2010, p. 8). A qualitative interview "is essentially a conversation in which the interviewer establishes a general direction for the conversation and pursues specific topics raised by the respondent" (Babbie, 2011, p. 340). Whilst several forms of interview styles exist, there are seven generalised stages involved when employing qualitative interviews as a research method. These stages are described as:

1. Thematizing – articulating the purpose of the interview

2. Designing – creating the format for the interview. For example a structured or semi-structured style. In this research a semi-structured format was followed

3. Interviewing – undertaking the interviews with participants

4. Transcribing – creating a written text from the digitally recorded interview

5. Analyzing – uncovering the meaning in relation to the purpose of the study

6. Verifying – checking reliability and validity of the data

7. Reporting – disseminating the findings. (Babbie, 2011, p. 343)

Qualitative interviews can take several forms, from structured to un-structured formats. This particular investigation identified semi-structured interviews as the most appropriate format for gathering data from participants on their understanding of

spirituality and practices to promote children's spirituality. Semi-structured interviews involve the researcher having a set of prepared questions to guide the interview. However, flexibility exists in how these questions are phrased and ordered, therefore this type of interview considers the response of the participant (Drew et al., 2006). Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to follow topics as they emerge throughout the interaction and there is more respondent participation (Drew et al., 2006). This semi-structured format was most apt to this research as it provided flexibility, which is a key feature of IPA. Semi-structured interviews are commonly used within IPA research (Smith, 2008). The semi-structured interview, specifically in relation to IPA, is "a dialogue whereby initial questions are modified in the light of the participant's responses and the investigator is able to probe interesting and important areas which arise" (Smith, 2008, p. 57).

The chosen approach to this investigation, IPA, involves investigating how participants make sense of their experiences and the process of IPA "requires a flexible data collection instrument" (Smith, 2008, p. 57). The flexibility enables the interviewer to be guided, rather than dictated, by a set of questions. Smith (2008) suggested the following points be followed for conducting a semi-structured interview within IPA:

- There is an attempt to establish rapport with the respondent.

- The ordering of questions is less important.

- The interviewer is freer to probe interesting areas that arise.

- The interview can follow the respondent's interests or concerns. (p. 58)

Semi-structured interviews within the process of IPA are in-depth, taking usually an hour and therefore providing opportunity for the participant to become engaged with the topic (Smith, 2008). With this style of interview, the aim is to facilitate an

interaction whereby "for the most part, the participant talks, and the interviewer listens" (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 57). As stated, a key consideration is that the participant feels at ease, and Smith (2008) suggested that time is taken at the commencement of the interview to ensure the participant feels comfortable with the interviewer.

There are several advantages to implementing a semi-structured interview format. This style of interviewing provides "greater flexibility of coverage...and it tends to produce richer data" (Smith, 2008, p. 59). Following a semi-structured format allows the researcher to adapt to the respondent, and to ensure the meaning behind the response is obtained. Its limitations are found in this same advantage – flexibility in the interview can lead to greater difficulty in the analysis process as interviews can vary considerably (Smith, 2008).

3.6.1.1 Semi-structured interview design.

The interview questions in their entirety are located in Appendix C. The following guidelines for interview format were utilised when constructing the interview schedule:

- Date, time, place, interviewer, interviewee

- Introduction

- Key questions

- Probe questions

- Adequate response time

- A thank you statement. (Creswell, 2009, p. 183)

The interview design adhered to the guidelines recommended by both Smith (2008) and Creswell (2009). Questions were divided into three sections that paralleled

the research questions, with the researcher cognisant that the structure may change due to the flexible nature of semi-structured interview as a research method. The three sections comprised: a focus on the educators' knowledge and experiences; a focus on educators' understandings and practices related to promoting children's spirituality; and a focus on educators' general pedagogical approach to the early years and their training. The first interview question aimed to engage educators in the subject of spirituality and to determine their reference point for spirituality, for example, their own personal experiences or understandings. The second question asked educators to articulate their understanding of the term 'spirituality'. Question three turned attention to children's spirituality, and how educators understood that children expressed their spirituality. Following this, educators were questioned on, generally, how children's spirituality could be nurtured and subsequently, what practices they believed they used in their room to promote children's spirituality. Given the Catholic context of the centres within the study, question six asked educators about their understanding of the relationship between spirituality and religion. Question seven focused on understanding the general pedagogical practices of the educator to engage them in a discussion on their beliefs and philosophy. To conclude, information was gathered from educators on the professional development they had received, if and how this had influenced to their current beliefs and practices and if they had received professional development specifically in the area of spirituality.

To assist in the success of the interview questions, the initially phrased interview questions were informally trialled. This process of testing the interview questions occurred with volunteers who were educators, although these educators were not within the same context as this investigation. As a result of testing the initial interview questions, final interview questions were reconstructed. As an example, interview

question one which had asked educators to recall a spiritual experience, was amended to include the elaboration of something they had witnessed, or read (see Appendix C).

3.6.2 Observation of practice.

Observation, as a research method, assisted in responding to research questions two and three. Observation within qualitative research is "highly flexible and covers a spectrum of activity" (Baillie, 2013, p. 4). Observation is often used to investigate 'what people do and how they do it' and so was well suited to this study whereby the researcher observed the practices implemented by educators to promote children's spiritual development. The use of observation as a research method also aligned with the features of IPA, providing both further depth and flexibility to the study. Cohen et al. (2000) articulated that observations are particularly useful in gathering information on the following:

- the physical setting (environment)

- the human setting (characteristics of individuals being observed)

- the interactional setting (planned, un-planned, verbal, non-verbal)

- the programme setting (resources, pedagogic style, curricula) (p.305)

Observations of practice can be undertaken following a rigorous framework or they can take an open-ended style (Kervin et al., 2006). Observations in this investigation adopted more of an open-ended approach whereby the observation guides "the researcher to a deeper understanding of what is happening as it is embedded within the context in which it naturally occurs" (Kervin et al., 2006, p. 85). In employing the method of observations within a qualitative framework, it is recognised that the researcher "cannot hope to observe everything; nor can you record everything you do observe" (Babbie, 2011, p. 345). The purpose of the observation was to record key circumstances and events and it is recognised that these "observations represent a

sample" (Babbie, 2011, p. 345). The observational template is located in the Appendix E. The template was constructed based on guidelines outlined by Cohen et al. (2000). These guidelines suggested that the observational record include contextual information such as place and persons involved; verbal and non-verbal interactions; a systematic description of the events as they arise; and reflections by the researcher on what is being observed.

The aim of using observation as a research method was to gain "valuable insights in to the life world of the participants" (Langdridge, 2007, p. 80). IPA is a process focused on the level of the individual, and as the observations undertaken as part of this investigation focussed on the practices of the lead educator, each observational record presented data on a specific individual, therefore appropriate to the design of IPA. In this investigation, observations were undertaken to determine both the intentional and incidental practices of the individual educator to promote children's spirituality. The strategy of observation utilised by the researcher was that of 'passive presence'. As the researcher was focussed on recording the educators' practices with the 3 and 4-year-olds, limited interaction was most advantageous to gathering accurate, uninterrupted data.

The purpose of the observation was to provide comprehensive data on current practices relating to the promotion of children's spiritual development. In comparison to the interview data, the observational data would contribute the reality of the practice, and provide opportunities not only for the planned and intentional but for incidental and spontaneous practices to emerge. Kervin et al. (2006) identified a key advantage of observational techniques as their ability to allow the researcher into the world of the participant and to therefore record information as it happens. Consideration, however, must be given to the intrusiveness of the researcher in the context of the observation as

well as the role the researcher plays in interpreting the events observed. The researcher journal, as a key feature of IPA, assisted the researcher in addressing the considerations identified by Kervin et al. (2006). Section 3.7.2.1 explicates the way the researcher journal was utilised to bracket information during the collection of observational data.

To ensure the credibility of the data collected through observation, the following quality indicators suggested by Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach and Richardson (2005) were employed to guide the researcher, as detailed in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3.

Credibility Assurance of Observations Linked to the Research

Credibility Assurance	In Relation to the Study
Appropriate setting	The researcher observed the educators' practices with 3 to 4-year-olds within Catholic childcare centres.
Sufficient time spent in the field	Allowing two days per centre provided in depth and detailed data.
Researcher is accepted in the site	The researcher made an introductory visit prior to undertaking the observations to introduce themselves to the centre staff. Educators volunteered to take part in the research.
Field notes systematically collected	An observational template was developed for use at each observation (Appendix E). A researcher journal, as a feature of IPA, was also utilised.
Sound measures are used to ensure confidentiality	All participants were de-identified and allocated a pseudonym. The research obtained ethics approval from a tertiary institution before commencing data collection (See Section 3.10).

Observational techniques are not commonly employed within an IPA approach to research (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). However, as Cohen et al. (2000) explained, detailed observation of participants in their natural setting is a key feature of interpretivist research. In this study, observations as a form of data collection were selected for their capacity to provide an insight into the shared experiences of educators in relation to their practices that promote children's spiritual development. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) stated that there have been cases where observational techniques have been employed in IPA, but it must be recognised that the analyses of such multifaceted social activities are complex. In this study, the use of observations alongside the other two forms of data collection (interview and documentary data) provided more comprehensive data on educators' practices, both intentional and incidental, to promote children's spirituality.

3.6.3 Qualitative content analysis.

Qualitative content analysis is described as a research method for interpreting text-based data (Pisarik, Rowell & Currie, 2012). Text-based data includes all forms of written communication, such as diaries, newspapers and policies as well as digital forms of communication (Schreier, 2012). Qualitative content analysis is used to quantify phenomena and is recognised in the literature as a research method in its own right (Schreier, 2012), although it is also a form of analysis (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). Qualitative content analysis is both interpretative and reflexive (Adams, 2012); a method best suited to investigations of a multi-faceted nature (Elo & Kyngas, 2008) and therefore well suited for this research alongside the methods of interview and observation, previously explained. Qualitative content analysis was employed in response to research question three.

Qualitative content analysis, as a research method, is utilised for "systematically describing the meaning of qualitative material. It is done by classifying material as

instances of the categories of a coding frame" (Schreier, 2012, p. 1). A coding frame provides a structure for categorising relevant aspects of the document and can be created in one of three ways: based on what the researcher already knows (deductive), by categorising themes as they emerge from the data (inductive) or through a combination of the two (Schreier, 2012). For this investigation, the third structure was selected whereby a coding frame was constructed prior to data analysis (see Section 3.8.3) and amended post-analysis (see Chapter Four, Section 4.4). Creating a coding frame in this way was characterised by determining main categories from the existing literature on spirituality (pre-analysis coding frame) and then allowing for categories to emerge through the analysis process (post-analysis coding frame). Essentially, the purpose of the coding frame was to provide structure and focus to this method of data analysis, explained in Section 3.8.3. An essential component of the coding frame is the construction of category descriptions as these explain the rules that are used to classify the data (Schreier, 2012). Category descriptions provide the following information:

- A name;

- A description of what you mean by that name;

- Examples;

- Decision rules (if needed when categories overlap). (Schreier, 2012, p. 95)

There are several advantages to using qualitative content analysis as a method and these are outlined by the United States General Accountings Office (GAO, 1996) in their paper, Content Analysis: A methodology for structuring and analysing written material. In particular, qualitative content analysis is unobtrusive due to it focus on the written form; it can cope with large volumes of material; is systematic; and can be used alongside other methods of data collection.

In this investigation, the educators' planning documents for a two-week period formed the documentary data for qualitative content analysis, explained in Sections 3.7.3 and 3.8.3. The aim of this research method was to understand the practices of educators that were planned for, explicitly or implicitly, through their documentation, in comparison to data collected through the interview or through the observations of their actual practice.

3.7 Data Gathering Strategies

As three research methods were utilised within this investigation, the researcher gave considerable thought to the sequence in which data would be collected, within each childcare centre. As a means to add depth to the level of questioning in the interview stage, observations of practice occurred as the first method, and simultaneously, documentary data (as a second method) was collected. The interview was the final method employed, sometimes occurring immediately following the final observation or alternatively scheduled as a separate visit to the centre. The timeline for data collection is illustrated in Figure 3.4.

Figure 3.4 Timeline of data collection.

In this investigation the researcher met with each participant prior to any form of data collection. In addition, observations of practice occurred prior to the interview, as illustrated in Figure 3.4. Initial meetings (Visit 1) with educators were informal and

brief. These meetings occurred during the educators' work time, with children present, and it was at this meeting that initial introductions were made and dates and times were arranged for the subsequent collection of observational data and interview data.

The following sections outline the three data gathering strategies in the sequence of interview data, observational data and finally documentary data. This sequence is reflective of the research methods section (see Section 3.6) whereby the research questions have been used to determine the order that data gathering strategies are outlined. As such, although interviews were conducted as the final strategy, these are presented initially as interview data was collected in response to research questions one and two (See Figure 3.3).

3.7.1 Gathering of interview data.

Interview data were gathered in response to research questions one and two; to ascertain data on what educators personally understood by the term 'spirituality' and their knowledge of how to promote children's spiritual development. A key consideration when gathering this form of data is ensuring educators felt at ease for the interview (Smith, 2008). Meeting educators several times prior to the interview (see Figure 3.4) provided some familiarity between the researcher and educator and contributed to educators' feeling at ease. Furthermore, establishing rapport at the commencement of the interview and providing introductions in the interview were kept brief due to these previous meetings.

Interviews in this investigation consisted of a number of prepared questions (see Appendix C). However, as listening is a key component of the interview (Letts et al., 2007), the researcher also made use of probing and clarifying questions where necessary. For example, the first interview question was composed as follows:

1. Can you describe for me an experience of your own, or something you have witnessed, or read, that you consider 'spiritual'?

This question often required some think time for the participant as well as a variety of alterations and probing questions. These included, for example: Can you think of something that you would describe as spiritual? Perhaps a person? Or an event? It could be from your childhood? It could be from a movie? Following an initial response, further probing was often required including statements such as: Can you describe how you felt in that moment? What were some of the aspects/features you associate with that moment being spiritual? What was the context or environment of that experience? The researcher found that interview structure was noticeably varied as frequently educators' responses elaborated into topics of future questions, requiring the researcher to move flexibly between questions, rather than adhering to the set format.

As the focus of the interviewer, within IPA, is on the respondent, it was necessary to digitally record interviews. Recording interviews facilitated the researcher's active listening and ability to adapt future questions based on the participant's contributions. Smith (2008) supported this tool, "if one attempts to write down everything the participant is saying during the interview, one will only capture the gist, missing important nuances. It will also interfere with helping the interview run smoothly and with establishing rapport" (p. 64). Interviews, once digitally recorded by the researcher, were professionally transcribed to form the data for analysis. Digitally recording interviews facilitated maintaining rapport and ensuring the participant felt at ease and was a necessary component of the interview. IPA requires the transcribing process to occur at the semantic level (Smith, 2008) and, as such, the process of transcribing the digital interviews was outsourced to ensure accuracy at the semantic level. This style of transcription includes "all the words spoken including false starts, significant pauses, laughs and other features" (Smith, 2008, p. 65).

3.7.1.1 Researcher journal use during interview data collection.

A researcher journal was utilised during the interview stage of data collection to assist in the process of 'bracketing' (See Section 3.4.5). In engaging in this process of bracketing, the researcher is listening attentively to the words of the participant, and so attempts to bracket or remove their own pre-existing ideas (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). The researcher journal was utilised as a means for the researcher to question personal motives and possible assumptions in an attempt to limit personal bias.

The researcher journal was used most frequently prior to the commencement of the interview and at the conclusion, as opposed to during the interview. Before the interview commenced the researcher took time to note down her own thoughts or assumptions related to the childcare environment, expectations of the participant's responses and personal views. The researcher journal proved to be a useful tool in consciously identifying potential bias. An extract from the researcher journal, taken prior to an interview with Educator 9: Centre A, is provided as an example of the entries that were made to consciously note assumptions or bias by the researcher:

> I have just been re-introduced to the educator by another staff member who has said that the educator had many years experience across all levels of early childhood and is a quality practitioner – one of their best! This information that she is experienced has led me to make a judgement that she is going to have a well-developed philosophy of early years education and possibly be able to articulate this clearly. Also being an older educator, I have greater expectations of her ability to respond to the questions on spirituality, perhaps because I've associated age with greater experiences in life.

During the interview, the journal was used to record any interruptions that arose, or to pose questions that arose from a personal curiosity outside of the scope of the interview. The researcher recognised that in documenting this 'bracketing' process within the journal, the researcher was not unconscious of other sources of bias and

experience but rather could intentionally disengage this from the research investigation (Smith, 2008). During the final stages of analysis the journal information was utilised in a process termed de-bracketing (Bednall, 2006). The process of de-bracketing and the way in which bracketed information influenced the analysis process is explained within Section 3.8.

3.7.2 Gathering observational data.

Observational data were gathered in response to research questions two and three (*What do educators know about promoting children's spiritual development?* and *What practices are educators implementing, intentionally and incidentally, to promote children's spiritual development?*) to determine the correlation between what educators described about spirituality in the interview, and what they actually demonstrated they knew and how they promoted spirituality through their practice. To gather observational data the researcher spent two days at each centre (over a two month period), observing educators at Centre A, B and C, in the rooms catering for children aged 3 to 4 years. The number of educators and the number of rooms varied across each centre and these are outlined within Table 3.2. The researcher observed for the entire day, determined by the hours worked by the educator. In most cases observations occurred between the hours of 8am and 4pm. The purpose of the observational data was to determine the reality of educators' experiences; that is, to discover what actually occurred in the educators' rooms in relation to promoting children's spirituality, compared to data revealed from the interview phase.

Observations taken by the researcher in this investigation were inclusive of all aspects detailed by Cohen et al. (2000) within Section 3.6.2. The researcher recorded observations on the physical context of the childcare centre rooms; details on the educators; the verbal and non-verbal interactions between the educator and the children; and the pedagogical style and curricula being used. Observations were

recorded on an observational template (Appendix E) pre-formatted onto a WORD document to enable the researcher to electronically record observations on a laptop. The researcher found recording observations electronically was a more efficient way to record data quickly. The use of the laptop also allowed data to be easily amended. For example, to record data quickly, abbreviations were frequently used (for example 'E' for educator) and these were able to be corrected post observation.

In taking a 'passive presence' approach to collecting the observational data, the researcher was visible in the room of the childcare centre, however was as unobtrusive as possible. The researcher had little interaction with the educators during the observation (Kervin et al., 2006). When interactions did occur they were of a logistical nature, such as, the researcher requesting to move to a different location to increase visibility of the educator. The researcher moved between the indoor and outdoor environments as required to maintain focus on the educator's practices. At the conclusion of each observation, amendments were made to the observational templates, as required, to ensure readability during the analysis of data. For example, corrections were made to grammar and syntax and abbreviations were amended to their full terms. Observational templates were then provided with a pseudonym, such as *Educator 1: Centre B*, and printed.

3.7.2.1 Researcher journal use during observation data collection.

A researcher journal was utilised during the observational stage of data collection to assist in the process of 'bracketing' (See Section 3.4.5). The journal was used in a similar way to that of the interview stage of data collection. Predominantly, the journal was used prior to, and during the observation, as opposed to post observation. Bracketed information prior to observational data collection largely contained the researcher's assumptions of the educators' practices. The following is an extract from the journal prior to observing Educator 8: Centre A:

OBSERVATION #1: Educator 8

I've just arrived to observe Educator 8 for the day. It's 8.15 am and the children enter the room at 8.30am. I've already realised a challenge inherent in observing another educator's practice. A parent has arrived early to speak with the educator about her child. I am sitting well away from where the parent and educator are speaking but can hear their conversation. The parent is expressing concerns that her child isn't playing with other children. As an educator myself, I have dealt with similar situations and would not be handling this situation the way that the educator is. It is going to be important to continually bracket my own thoughts and opinions throughout the day to ensure that these don't influence the way my observational data is collected. When I analyse the data I can then revisit these comments and check for any influence of researcher bias.

In addition to the bracketed information recorded about the educators, the researcher also noted assumptions and potential bias based on contextual information at each of the centres. The following extract provides an example of bracketed information noted by the researcher prior to the observations at Centre B. The extract is included as a means of illustrating the researcher's consciousness of potential bias:

VISIT 1: INITIAL MEETING AT CENTRE B

The outdoor environment here is amazing. I'm really impressed at the large amount of outdoor space. There are two separate outdoor areas. One is smaller and is more of a natural environment – there's a veggie garden, sand and water play, native plants and pathways made of pebbles and wood steps. The larger outdoor area contains more traditional play equipment (sand-pit, climbing frames) and has space for ball and bike play. After viewing the large amount of outdoor space I'm very curious now as to how much they actually use it and in what ways. I will need to ensure my own views are removed from the data collection and do not influence the analysis phase.

Bracketed information noted during the observations related to the pedagogical style of the educator, the researcher's personal views on the opportunities educators' provided for children, the researcher's personal views on the indoor and outdoor environments and at times, questions for the researcher to follow up on with the educator. For example, the following are a sample of statements taken from the researcher journal: the educator talks over children frequently; the educator rarely praises children and instead reprimands behaviour quickly; and, enquire about whether the budgie in the room is a new addition or if the children are familiar with him. Information that was bracketed during the observational phase of data collection was revisited during the process of analysis, outlined in Section 3.8.

3.7.3 Gathering of documentary data.

The documentary data set for qualitative content analysis comprised of the lead educators' planning documents. Documentary data assisted in responding to research question three (*what practices are educators implementing, intentionally and incidentally, to promote children's spiritual development?*) in this investigation by communicating the practices that educators intentionally planned on the documentation for their room. Documentary data, in the form of planning documents that covered a two-week period, were collected from each of the lead educators of the 3-year-old and 4-year-old childcare centre rooms. It was recognised that educators' planning documents may contain both explicit and implicit reference to promoting children's spiritual development and this method of data collection added depth to the overall investigation by assisting in gaining a complete picture of the educators' practices.

The format of the documentation collected varied considerably. Some educators within a centre planned together on one document for a two-week period, therefore encompassing a large variety of activities, across various rooms and undertaken without restricted time frames. Other documentation was constructed by one educator,

weekly, and followed more structured time-tabled style formats. Table 3.4 presents the number of documents that were collected.

Table 3.4.

Documentary Data for Qualitative Content Analysis

CENTRE	NUMBER OF ROOMS	NUMBER OF LEAD EDUCATORS	NUMBER OF PLANNING DOCUMENTS OVER A TWO-WEEK PERIOD
Centre A	4	4	4
Centre B	2	2	1
Centre C	2	3	3

Prior to undertaking the research, it was recognised by the researcher that participants may attempt to modify their documentation at the point of invitation to participate in the research investigation. To pre-empt this, the primary school principal or centre director, whomever governed the management of the centre, was requested to take copies of the programming documents before the investigation commenced. Once consent was provided by individual participants, the principal or director passed the documentation onto the researcher in its raw form, at the time of the initial observation.

3.7.3.1 Researcher journal use during documentary data collection.

The researcher journal was a specific feature of IPA, used within the data collection and analysis of interview and observational data. The use of a journal to

collect field notes and researcher thoughts is also a feature of qualitative research more generally, to aid reflexivity (Flick, 2014). As such, the researcher journal was also adopted in the data collection and analysis of documentary data. Entries in the researcher journal when collecting and analysing the educators' planning documents were limited. No entries were made at the time of collection as documents were provided during the observational visits and entries at this time focussed on the researchers' assumptions or potential bias in relation to the educators' practice or the childcare environment. The following is an exert taken from the researcher journal, as an example of the bracketing that occurred prior to the analysis phase:

> PRE-ANALYSIS OF DOCUMENTARY DATA
>
> I have collected planning documents from the educators for qualitative content analysis. I recognise at this point that I will need to be mindful of my own bias regarding the way that educators plan. For example, as I have experience planning in early childhood settings, some planning layouts may be more appealing to me, or I may prefer a certain level of detail. In the analysis process, as a step prior to the final categories being determined, I will need to check that findings have not been influenced by my own thoughts and potential bias. In essence, the process of de-bracketing will be pertinent to the analysis.

3.8 Data Analysis

Data analysis occurred in the order of the research question to which the data set responded. All data were collected prior to undertaking any analysis. Interview data were analysed initially in response to research questions one and two; followed by the observational data in response to research questions two and three; and finally the documentary data in response to research question three. Undertaking data analysis in this sequence also afforded the researcher the opportunity to understand the educators' personal understanding of spirituality and the practices they employed before analysing

the observations of their actual practice and finally what they had intentionally planned through their documentation.

Two methods of data analysis were employed in this investigation: Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) and qualitative content analysis. IPA, detailed in Section 3.4.4, provided both the theoretical framework for the investigation and additionally, was the chosen tool for analysis of both the interview data and observational data. Qualitative content analysis, described as both a research method (See Section 3.6.3) and a method for analysis, was utilised for the analysis of the planning documents. The way in which data analysis occurred for each individual research method is explicated in detail below commencing with the interview data and then observational data. The process of qualitative content analysis of the documentary data is then explained. Chapter Four presents the findings from these processes of data analysis.

3.8.1 Interpretative phenomenological analysis of interview data.

Interview transcripts comprised the data set that were analysed using IPA. IPA research is focussed on attempting to understand the "content and complexity" (Smith, 2008, p. 66) of the meanings interpreted by participants, rather than the frequency of these meanings. In this investigation, transcripts were analysed to determine the participants' meanings and interpretations of spiritual development and their practices for promoting children's spiritual development. IPA as a theoretical perspective outlines a particular analytical process. This process of analysis involves a form of coding, whereby topics of significance are identified, termed 'flagging', and these are annotated on the transcript. The researcher analysed the data using the specific framework suggested by Bednall (2006) and which is particular to IPA. Bednall's (2006) stages are explained in Table 3.5.

Table 3.5.

Bednall's Stages of IPA

Stage	Description of the process relating to interview transcripts
Stage One: Iterative reading and 'flagging' items	Interview transcripts are read repeatedly and items 'flagged' as themes.
Stage Two: Establishing topics of significance	Items that were previously flagged are grouped together to form topics of significance, known as codes.
Stage Three: Establishing thematic linkages	Items that were identified previously as significant are re-evaluated and coding of themes becomes more refined. The focus of Stage Three is ensuring bracketing has occurred.
Stage Four: Examining the flagged items for meaning	Transcripts are revisited to check that the major themes have been identified and to determine their meaning. A list of super-ordinate themes is then created.
Stage Five: Reintegration or 'de-bracketing'	Any information previously bracketed is reconsidered (evaluating information collected in the research journal) to see if this could inform the interpretation of the themes.
Stage Six: Fashioning the units of the study	The meaning of themes is explored and any possible connections between themes are investigated. A list of sub-ordinate themes is then created, where appropriate, within the super-ordinate themes.

Bednall's (2006) process is consistent with IPA as it aims to "encourage reflective engagement with the participant's account. Inevitably, the analysis is a joint product of the participant and the analyst" (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 80). The process is an iterative one that involves reading the transcript numerous times and annotating these as significant topics or themes emerge.

When all interviews were transcribed, Stage One of Bednall's (2006) IPA was undertaken by the researcher. Initially, the researcher listened to each of the recordings and checked the transcripts for accuracy, making amendments as required. There were some instances where an educator had named specific strategies that were incorrectly

transcribed. For example, Educator 1: Centre B spoke of FMS (Fundamental Movement Skills) in her interview, and this was transcribed as 'inaudible'. The researcher identified this and amended the transcript accordingly. In reviewing the interview recordings along with the transcripts, the researcher was also afforded the advantage of being immersed in the data. During this first reading of transcripts initial flagging of items occurred.

When the researcher was satisfied that the transcripts were an accurate record of the interview, the transcripts were again read. However on this occasion, they were read by interview question, that is, research question one for all participants was read, then question two, and so on, rather than each transcript in its entirety. The decision to analyse the interview data question by question was a means of determining what educators themselves both experienced and understood by the term 'spirituality', and to distinguish this understanding from what they perceived about children's spirituality and the way they nurtured this capacity (see Appendix C: Interview Questions). As the interview followed a semi-structured format that provided flexibility, questions were not always posed in the same sequence (see Section 3.6.1). To assist the analysis process, different colours were used for the analysis of each interview question. Colour categorising the flagging of items aided the researcher in locating responses to the same question across all transcripts. Appendix D provides a sample interview transcript from Educator 1: Centre B, that illustrates both the process of amending a transcript and the initial flagging of items that occurred by interview question.

Establishing topics of significance, Stage Two of the analysis, involved an iterative process whereby transcripts were read and re-read. Items previously flagged were checked, and their presence within other transcripts investigated. Stage Two also ensured that no items were missed during Stage One analysis. This stage consisted of

annotating the transcripts with flagged items, or codes, as they arose and this occurred

for each interview question. Table 3.6 provides an example of the initial coding of

interview question one, from the transcript of Educator 2: Centre C.

Table 3.6.

Example of Initial Coding of Interview Transcripts

Initial Coding	Transcription
	Interview Question One: I'm wanting you to describe for me what you think spirituality is? And I thought as a start, you might do that by thinking about an experience that you've had that you might say, that was spiritual, and try and describe that.
Church Feeling	I mean I suppose when you're sitting in a church that you sort of get a, not a strange feeling but a feeling that sort of comes over you in that environment… [Researcher probes: So when you say a feeling comes over you, what type of feeling?]
Reflection/Reflective Quiet time	I suppose for me it's more of a reflection. It sort of makes you start thinking about things more or maybe just that you're grounded.

The drawing together of these initial codes occurred within Stage Three. For

example, across the transcripts initial flagging of items revealed codes such as 'church'

and 'faith'. During Stage Three of the analysis these terms were grouped into a common theme, 'A religious experience', as this term was broader and inclusive of the range of codes. Following this amalgamation of codes, a list of major themes, referred to as super-ordinate themes within IPA, was created. The construction of super-ordinate themes, as a feature of the fourth stage of analysis involved re-reading transcripts to ensure that all items were flagged and that all codes were identified. Stage Four also required the researcher to consider the meaning of codes developed and to check that these encompassed the initial items flagged in Stage One. Table 3.7 presents an example of the list of codes that initially emerged, across all transcripts, in the analysis of interview question one and how these were amalgamated to create super-ordinate themes. This same process was undertaken for each interview question.

Table 3.7.

Example of Initial Coding of Interview Transcripts

Initial Codes from Question One Analysis	Super-Ordinate Theme
Interview Question One: I'm wanting you to describe for me what you think spirituality is? And I thought as a start, you might do that by thinking about an experience that you've had that you might say, that was spiritual, and try and describe that.	

Church
Faith
Catholic beliefs
God
Turning to God in Sickness/ Illness
Turning to God when dealing with
death
Prayer

A religious experience

Personal
Childhood
Innate
Community
Personal in Community

A personal experience within community

Reflection
Quiet time
Feelings
Reflective Music

Reflection

Nature
Natural Environment

Experiences of nature
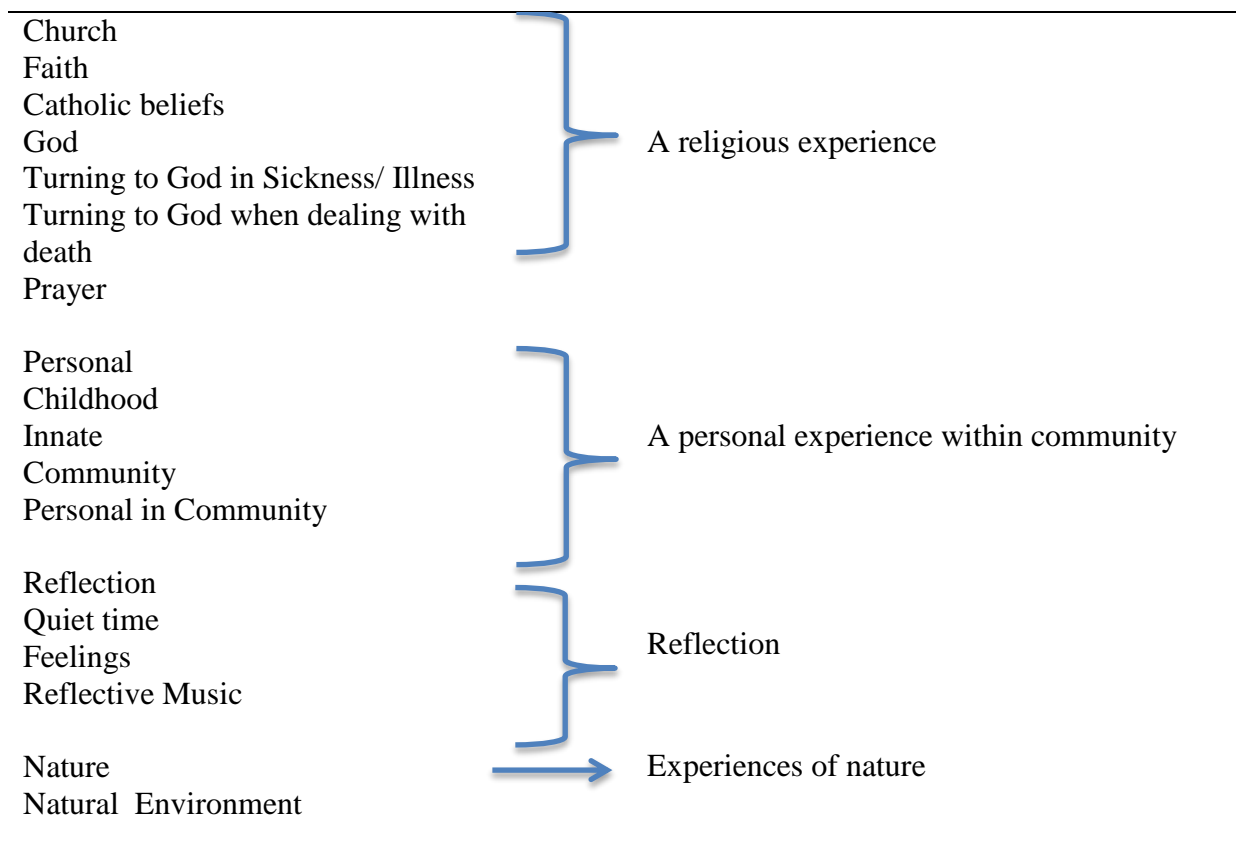
Stage Five of the analysis process, as outlined by Bednall (2006), required the

researcher to engage in the process of de-bracketing. Bracketed information was

recorded in the researcher journal throughout the data collection and data analysis

phases as a means of being reflexive and limiting bias (see Section 3.9.1). At this point

of the analysis the bracketed information was revisited to ascertain any influence it

may have had on the way initial codes and subsequent super-ordinate themes emerged.

When the research journal was revisited in the process of de-bracketing, all comments

(such as the researcher's personal views and assumptions about the centres, educators

and their practice) were reviewed, not only those made regarding the interview

process. The following is an extract taken from the researcher journal prior to

interviewing Educator 6: Centre B:

> Educator 6 is very young and yet to complete her teacher education
>
> qualifications. She also isn't Catholic. I know this because she mentioned it when

she returned the consent form and was concerned that both her unfinished qualification and not being Catholic might be an issue. I'm not sure she is going to have much to tell me compared with her more mature colleagues. She has also already taken the view that my questions on spirituality are connected to being Catholic.

Re-visiting all comments made in the journal was a further assurance that potential bias from the observational data collection phase, for example, had not influenced the analysis of the interview data. The process of de-bracketing is referred to in Chapter Four only when the process provided deeper insight into the findings.

Although the bracketed information clearly illustrated the personal assumptions held by the researcher prior to interview, the researcher found that this information did not influence the analysis process in regards to the coding process and emerging super-ordinate themes. De-bracketing was a necessary stage within the analysis process and did provide some insight into the findings, presented in Chapter Four. For example, as mentioned in Section 3.7.1.1, comments were recorded in the researcher journal prior to the interview with Educator 9: Centre A. These comments related to the assumption that a mature and experienced educator would be able to more clearly articulate their philosophy and pedagogies. The researcher also assumed that the educator, in having more life experiences due to age, would be able to provide in-depth responses to the questions regarding her own spirituality. These assumptions proved to be incorrect. The findings showed that Educator 9's responses to questions on spirituality were frequently limited. At the conclusion of the interview with Educator 9: Centre A, the researcher bracketed the following in the researcher journal:

> It's interesting that she [Educator 9] wasn't able to articulate her practice very well. I wonder if this is because she didn't think that that was relevant to my questions or whether she was unable to make the connection between her

practice and the beliefs that underpin these. I'm also disappointed that she wasn't able to add more depth to her responses on spirituality.

In comparison, the researcher recorded the following post-interview comments after interviewing Educator 6: Centre B, whom the researcher had assumed would have little to respond (see extract in Section 3.8.1.):

> I'm quite surprised by that interview. Educator 6 seemed young and inexperienced and when she mentioned that she wasn't Catholic or finished her studies I thought it would limit her ability to answer some of the questions. Actually Educator 6 responded thoughtfully and was able to really clearly articulate her beliefs about early childhood and her own faith.

The super–ordinate themes, illustrated in Table 3.7, were further explored in Stage Six of the analysis. The super-ordinate themes, and the initial codes from which they emerged, were re-considered to determine if sub-ordinate themes were evident. Sub-ordinate themes, a term used within IPA to describe categories within the super-ordinate themes, were identified in several instances. These sub-ordinate themes were recognised as those initial codes that required further explanation of their own whilst contained within the broader super-ordinate theme. For example, within the super-ordinate theme, 'a religious experience', 'the sub-ordinate theme, 'health issues' emerged as several educators responded to interview question one with an experience that was religious but which involved a family member or friend who had been ill. Sub-ordinate themes were not evident within every super-ordinate theme.

Super-ordinate themes, and where appropriate sub-ordinate themes, were then written up for each of the interview questions into a narrative account. This narrative account is presented in Chapter Four: Findings. The aim of Chapter Four is to evidence the emergent super-ordinate and sub-ordinate themes with examples from the data.

3.8.2 Interpretative phenomenological analysis of observational data.

Data obtained through observation were analysed using Bednall's (2006) stages of IPA. Bednall's stages of IPA, outlined in Table 3.5, were applied in a similar way to that of the interview data. Observational data, recorded on a WORD template, were printed and these formed the observational data set. Each observation was provided a pseudonym such as *Educator, 1: Centre B.* Stage One of Bednall's (2006) analysis, flagging of items, occurred by reading each observation in its entirety and annotating the document where items of significance, referred to as codes, emerged. This process occurred for each observational record. As new items arose in subsequent observations, previous observations were re-visited to check for instances of that item. This iterative process of cross-checking as new items emerged is detailed as Stage Two in Table 3.5. A sample of the initial coding of an observation is provided in Table 3.8. In addition, Appendix F provides the recorded observation of Educator 5: Centre A, annotated with initial codes.

Table 3.8.

Sample Extract of Initial Coding of Observational Record

Initial Coding	Observational Record
Belonging/ Identity Wellbeing	Children gather on the mat. Educator asks for the 'bell ringer' for the day. One child is upset – he can't find his name tag. Educator responds to the child; "I know who you are – you're Samuel. I won't forget you". The child looks up

	and smiles at the Educator then joins the rest of the class on the mat.
Friendship Relationships Social skills Belonging	Educator tells the class it's time to sing 'Hello Friend'. The children stand and hold hands. They sing the song "….hello friends, how are you?....I'm happy to see you….say hi to your neighbour"…"We're going to have a great day". Educator moves between children encouraging them to join in, saying "that's it John, sing with us". They clap hands and face a different partner.

Following the process of initial coding, Stage Three involved determining the meaning of the codes, ascertaining any overlap and consequently a refining of codes occurred. Bednall's (2006) Stage Four prescribed the grouping together of codes to form themes. A list of super-ordinate themes was then created at this stage of analysis. The super-ordinate themes emerged from the analysis of all observations. Table 3.9 illustrates an example of grouping initial codes into super-ordinate themes. Super-ordinate theme names were chosen as a broad term representative of the initial codes.

Table 3.9.

Example of Grouping Initial Codes into Super-Ordinate Themes

Initial Coding	Super-ordinate Theme
Belonging	
Music	
Security	
Friendship	Relationships
Relationships	
Social skills	
Conversation	
Identity	
Wellbeing	
Feelings/emotions	Identity
Self-regulation	
Resilience	

During Stage Five, de-bracketing of the information noted in the researcher journal occurred. The researcher journal was a means for the researcher to maintain a high level of self-consciousness. As such, revisiting all journal entries during the final stages of analysis ensured that assumptions, on behalf of the researcher, did not influence the findings. The de-bracketing process afforded the researcher a further opportunity to be reflexive by examining personal assumptions and views, such as those provided in Section 3.7.2.1, and ensuring these did not influence the way that data was coded and that subsequent super-ordinate themes emerged. For example, Section 3.7.2.1 provided an example of bracketing that occurred during the first observational visit at Centre B. During the de-bracketing process the researcher recognised her own personal bias toward the outdoor facilities at this centre and was

able to check that initial codes were not formed from the researcher's assumptions, rather, that these emerged from the data. The de-bracketing process caused the researcher to look analytically at the themes that emerged through the process of data analysis. The overtness of the researcher journal and the de-bracketing process acted as a safeguard against researcher bias. Information that was bracketed did offer some insight into the findings and these are discussed, where appropriate, in Chapter Four.

In the final stage of analysis, Stage Six, Bednall (2006) articulated the need to fashion the units of the study. This fashioning of the units is a comprehensive activity that involves looking at all super-ordinate themes and determining any connections between these. If appropriate, sub-ordinate themes, as topics within the broader super-ordinate themes, are formed. In the case of the observational data, all super-ordinate themes comprised sub-themes. The super-ordinate and sub-ordinate themes are presented in Chapter Four: Findings and supported with extracts, as evidence of the emergent themes, from the observational data.

3.8.3 Qualitative content analysis of documentary data.

The final method of analysis employed was qualitative content analysis. Qualitative content analysis was selected as an appropriate tool for the analysis of documentary data as it afforded an examination of practices that educators had planned for, both explicitly and implicitly within their planning documentation, for each of the rooms. The process of qualitative content analysis is described as systematic and flexible (Schrier, 2012). This particular form of analysis required the use of a coding frame. In this investigation both inductive and deductive methods were used whereby a coding frame was constructed prior to the analysis commencing, and then a post-analysis coding frame was created to present the findings as new categories emerged through the process of analysis. This form of coding frame is explicated in Section 3.6.3.

Babbie (2011) suggested that an initial consideration for this particular method is deciding on the units of analysis. For this investigation, the units for making descriptive comments were the planning documents over a two-week period, for each educator, across each room, across each centre. Figure 3.5 has been adapted from the work of Elo and Kyngas (2008) to illustrate the steps taken in qualitative content analysis of the educators' planning documentation. The red arrows in Figure 3.5 indicate the particular pathway adopted for analysis of the planning documentation.
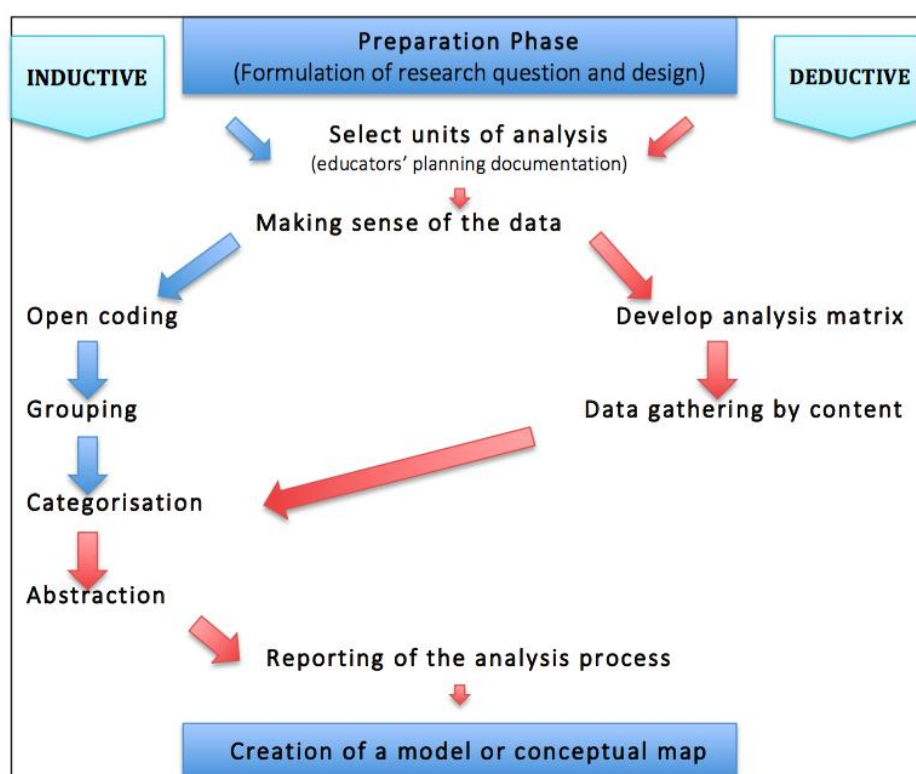
Figure 3.5 Steps in qualitative content analysis adapted from Elo and Kyngas (2008).

The chosen approach for qualitative content analysis involved both deductive and inductive methods. Following the selection of units of analysis, a coding frame was developed. The coding frame was constructed in the step 'develop analysis matrix' in Figure 3.5. Construction of the coding frame occurred through an examination of the literature on spirituality (see Chapter Two). Characteristics of children's spirituality that emerged in the review of literature were illustrated as 'main categories' on the

coding frame. These categories were then used to determine the practice of the educator in promoting that particular characteristic of spirituality. Main categories were identified as: relationality (with others, with self, with the environment; with a transcendent); creativity and imagination; and wonder and awe. The pre-analysis coding frame is presented in Figure 3.6.

Relationality:

An awareness of the 'self' and the relationship of the 'self' to 'others'. 'Others' in terms of person, environment or a transcendent…..

- ➤ **Relationality with self:** construction of the self; identity development; development of resilience and wellbeing; the search for meaning in one's life.
- ➤ **Relationality with others:** relationships; connectedness to others; friendship; creating a sense of belonging; social skills.
- ➤ **Relationality with a transcendent:** the notion of going beyond the self; God; Jesus; prayer; creator, transcendence; questions about the soul, spirit, heaven; religious education.
- ➤ **Relationality with the environment:** involvement of children with nature; nature play; natural resources.

Creativity and Imagination: activities that encourage creative expression; the arts; opportunities to engage the imagination; imaginative play, dramatic play
Wonder and Awe: educator modelling of wonder; children expressing wonder and awe; delight.

Figure 3.6. Coding frame: pre-analysis.

Each of the main categories illustrated in the coding frame required a working description, referred to as sub-categories, and these were also constructed from the review of existing literature (Chapter Two). In the process of data analysis, the method of qualitative content analysis allowed for the coding frame main categories and descriptions (sub-categories) to be amended to take into account emerging categories through the analysis process. Any new categories that emerged, and subsequent changes to the coding frame, are outlined in Chapter Four: Findings (Section 4.4). The descriptions relating to the categories within the pre-analysis coding frame are outlined in Figure 3.6. The descriptions illustrate on what basis data within the documents were categorised.

The categories illustrated on the coding frame (Figure 3.6) were used to focus the researcher's analysis of the educators' documentation. The coding frame categories comprised the characteristics of children's spiritual development from the literature, and these were used to determine the practice of the educator in promoting this particular characteristic of spirituality. In the process of analysis, the documentation was read repeatedly to allow practices in the documentation to align to these categories, and to allow new categories to emerge. Documents were annotated where the category emerged and these were listed within a main category on the coding frame. This step is detailed as 'data gathering by content' within Figure 3.5. As the process involved less than 40 categories, categorisation occurred simultaneously, for one document at a time (Schreier, 2012). Categorisation involved ensuring that practices that emerged belonged within the category and were correctly grouped, by checking the category descriptions. An example of this process is provided in Table 3.10. In addition, Appendix H provides a sample planning document from Educator 3: Centre C illustrating the process of categorisation.

Table 3.10.

Example of Categorisation from Qualitative Content Analysis

Sub-category (description of practice)	Category Grouping
Making 'good' choices	
Treating others kindly	
Friendship	Relationality with others
Participation	
Social skills	
Prayer	
'God-talk'	
Wonder questions about God	Relationality with a transcendent
Teaching about Jesus	
Religious stories	

Qualitative content analysis suggests that when a single researcher is categorising materials, as was the case in this investigation, data should be analysed initially, left for a period of up to two weeks, and then re-categorised, to ensure all categories have been established, and this process was adopted (Schreier, 2012). Comparing the categories from first analysis to those of the second is an important component of this method of analysis as it provides a more comprehensive assigning of category meanings. For example, in the initial analysis process 'social skills' was identified within the main category of 'relationality with others'. In the second round of analysis 'social skills' was re-examined and as a result re-named to 'co-operation' to more accurately represent the category description. In addition, 'making good choices' became 'moral development' as a means of including a wider variety of evidence from the documents and representing the category description more effectively.

Following the process of categorisation, abstraction occurred. Abstraction is a means of formulating a description of the categories and is the step prior to reporting the findings (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). During the abstraction phase of data analysis the main categories, both pre-determined and emergent, were compared and contrasted to create a final set of main categories and sub-categories, with examples from the raw data. A post-analysis coding frame was subsequently created, as a model, to present the findings from the qualitative content analysis of documentation, and this is presented in Chapter Four.

3.8.3.1 Researcher Journal use during qualitative content analysis.

Notes made in the researcher journal, although limited, were revisited during the categorisation stage of qualitative content analysis (see Figure 3.5). This process of re-visiting the researcher journal to 'de-bracket' was similar to that undertaken during the analysis of interview and observational data. Whilst de-bracketing was not a specific feature of qualitative content analysis, the process was employed to maintain consistency in the research and analysis phases and to further ensure reflexivity in the analytical process.

During categorisation, planning documents were re-visited to check that emerging codes were a fit to their category description and to ensure no codes were missed in the initial coding for analysis. At this point, the researcher de-bracketed by considering information recorded in the researcher journal. The purpose of reintegrating information from the journal was to acknowledge the influence of the researcher and to therefore limit bias. For example, in the extract provided in Section 3.7.3.1 the researcher had identified potential bias regarding the format and layout of the planning documents in that those documents that were more aesthetically pleasing to the researcher may be investigated more thoroughly than others. To safeguard against this bias influencing the findings, the researcher, at this point, was conscious of

ensuring that all documents were thoroughly investigated for evidence of codes, and

consequently that all documents were represented in the findings.

3.9 Integrity of Data Analysis

    3.9.1 Reflexivity.

        The term *reflexivity* refers to the "explicit evaluation of the self" (Shaw, 2010, p.

234) and is a process that acknowledges the interpretative role of the researcher.

Reflexivity was a key characteristic of this research as this study employed qualitative

techniques and the specific theoretical perspective of IPA. To be reflexive means to

make an effort to understand the participants' personal worlds, as much as possible, by

consciously recognising sources of bias. This process comes with the recognition that it

is not possible to completely gain an insider perspective. However attempting to be

reflexive is a step toward achieving this. The researcher utilised a variety of techniques

across the data collection and analysis phases of the research in an attempt to be

reflexive. Specifically, the use of the researcher journal to bracket information was

central to being reflexive (see Section 3.4.5). Ahern (1999) explained that, "bracketing

and reflexivity are fruit from the same tree. One must be reflexive in order to

bracket…" (p. 410). In being reflexive, the researcher acknowledges that they are part

of the same social world as the participant, and rather than attempt to eliminate this

connection, the researcher is transparent in recognising the relationship and instead

consciously puts it aside through the use of bracketing. In the investigation for

example, the researcher was conscious that working in educational settings with

children aged 3 to 4 years of age was a shared experience. Therefore, the awareness of

shared experience was consciously examined so that any possible bias or assumptions

about the educators, the curricula or the pedagogy were documented in the journal. The

first two entries in the researcher journal, documented prior to any data collection, was

an attempt to note any taken for granted assumptions. These first entries were re-visited during the analysis phase in the de-bracketing process:

ENTRY 1: PRIOR TO CHILDCARE VISITS AND DATA COLLECTION
Whilst contemplating that the data collection will finally commence, I've begun to consider what assumptions the educators might make of me. In doing this, I've realised that this is actually a taken for granted assumption of my own. Given I'm going to be asking educators about the topic of spirituality, it is implied that this is a topic of interest to me. This may lead to the assumption that I am spiritual or perhaps for some, that I am religious. I am religious, and so I will need to continue to bracket this to ensure it doesn't bias how I hear and see the educators' practice as well as how I interpret the data. Similarly, as my research is conducted in 3 to 4-year-old settings, my own beliefs about 'quality practice' will need to be consistently bracketed, particularly during the collection of observational data.

ENTRY 2: AFTER FIRST VISIT TO *CENTRE A* TO ARRANGE DATA COLLECTION SCHEDULE
I've just met the educators at Centre A. This was visit #1 to give the educators some background to the range of data collection methods involved in the research and to organise times for these to occur. During this brief meeting I identified further thoughts or assumptions that may influence the data collection process (not previously identified in entry 1). When I was introducing myself as an academic in the area of early childhood it struck me that this may lead to educators becoming nervous of their practice, or perform in a way that they perceive I am looking for. Perhaps similarly in being a researcher, educators may respond in the interview with the answers they perceive I want to hear. Ensuring educators understand the purpose of the research and of my aim to gain a true insight into their experience will be critical.

In this investigation, the researcher was reflexive during the data collection and analysis phases by employing the following techniques:

- The researcher utilised a researcher journal throughout all stages of data collection to annotate any personal bias, experience and feelings about the centres, educators and their practice, to 'bracket' these from the data. This bracketed information was then revisited during the analysis stage;

- During the interviews with educators, the researcher avoided providing their own views of spirituality and instead asked open-ended questions to guide the participant such as: *"What was it about that experience?'* And "Can you explain why you might feel that way?" ;

- During the analysis stage the researcher was reflexive by acknowledging, through bracketing, that they have experience in education settings with 3 and 4-year-olds, therefore attempting to remove themselves from the data to ensure an authentic representation of the participants' perspective emerged;

- During the analysis stage, and as outlined in Bednall's (2006) stages of IPA, de-bracketing occurred to ensure that themes emerging from the data were not influenced by the assumptions of the researcher;

- Reflexive statements have been included in the thesis as a further means of overtly acknowledging the role of the researcher in the research.

3.9.2 Triangulation of data.

Three methods of data collection were employed within this investigation. The use of multiple sets of data is known as data triangulation. Triangulation "is typically a strategy for improving the validity and reliability of research or evaluation of findings" (Golafshani, 2003, p. 603) and strengthens research by combining multiple data collection and analysis methods. Essentially, triangulation " allows for multiple data sources to be compared and contrasted with each other to build a coherent analysis of data gathered within a research project" (Kervin et al., 2006, p. 87). There are several

advantages to multi-method approaches for data collection and Cohen et al. (2000) stated these include an increase in reliability as the researcher has several means of obtaining information; this limits the amount of bias. In undertaking multiple methods of data collection, triangulation provides a layered aspect to the analysis, which is considered advantageous within qualitative research, and this also increases validity (Cohen et al., 2000). In this investigation, triangulation occurred through the researcher's use of three research methods (interview, observations and qualitative content analysis of planning doucmentation) to investigate educators' practices to promote children's spirituality. Employing three methods afforded the researcher the opportunity to investigate educators' practices from three angles.

3.9.3 Trustworthiness and dependability.

Trustworthiness in qualitative research refers to the validity of the study. Trustworthiness, or validity, is concerned with the processes put in place to ensure that the data collected is accurate and authentic (Neuman, 2011). As the emphasis within qualitative research is on capturing experiences and perspectives, validity is achieved through offering "a fair honest, and balanced account of social life from the viewpoint of the people who live it everyday" (Neuman, 2011, p. 214). Letts et al. (2007) articulated four components of trustworthiness. These are detailed in Table 3.11 in relation to this study.

Table 3.11.

Components of Trustworthiness in Relation to this Investigation

Component of Trustworthiness	Trustworthiness in this Investigation
Credibility	To ensure the credibility of the research, a variety of research methods and data collection, as discussed, were used. The ability to compare and contrast data is termed 'data triangulation' and this assists with the reliability of the research (Kervin et al., 2006). Additionally, in the process of coding within the data analysis phase, comparisons of themes were made by the researcher over time which assists reliability (Scherier, 2012). The researcher also made use of a research journal during the observation and interview data collection phase in an attempt to avoid preconceptions and bias influencing the process. In the process of IPA, this is termed bracketing and involves the practice of being reflexive.
Transferability	The context of the research, although specific to three centres and 9 participants, was sufficiently detailed to allow for comparisons to be made with research in other contexts.
Dependability	The procedures that were engaged for data collection and data analysis were documented, therefore providing an audit trail.
Conformability	This was ensured through the use of the researcher journal to attempt to remove bias. Also, as IPA is the chosen approach, bracketing of the researcher's ideas and perceptions occurred throughout the data collection and analysis phase of the research.

Dependability is a further consideration within qualitative research and is often termed as reliability. Reliability, or dependability, is concerned with the quality of the research in regard to how credible the methods of data collection and analysis were; it

is the extent that findings are consistent both over time and across the total population (Golafshani, 2003). Questions to determine dependability, as outlined by Babbie (2011) include:

- How defensible is the research design?

- How well does the evaluation address its original aims and purpose?

- How well was the data collection carried out?

- How well has the detail, depth and complexity of the data been conveyed?

- How clear and coherent is the reporting?

- What evidence is there of attention to ethical issues? (p. 443)

In this investigation, dependability was achieved by following the processes outlined within IPA. A key feature of this research design was the use of a researcher journal. The researcher journal, which included bracketed information, provided an avenue for the researcher to self-reflect at each stage of data collection and analysis, and therefore more able to ensure reliable, transparent findings from the research. Comments on the way bracketed information interacted with the findings are explained alongside the data presented in Chapter Four: Findings.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

The nature of qualitative research is such that it requires the researcher to become a guest within the context of the participant (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). It is therefore necessary that the researcher safeguards the well-being of the participants by ensuring that ethical standards are maintained. All methods of data collection, in this research, required formal consent from participants and the study obtained ethical approval through a tertiary institution, Australian Catholic University. Despite the researcher changing institutions during the investigation, subsequent ethical clearance was not required from the University of Notre Dame as all data collection had ceased

prior to changing institutions. To ensure ethical practice, the following steps were taken:

- Participants were provided with an information sheet and consent form that clearly outlined the purpose and direction of the investigation;

- Only participants who provided consent were involved in the project observed in practice;

- Confidentiality of identity was ensured as all data was de-identified and pseudonyms were provided in all forms of data collection;

- Participants were made aware that they had the right to withdraw at any time of the research;

- The researcher had no prior relationship with any of the participants;

- Research conformed to all ethical requirements outlined in obtaining ethical clearance.

Careful consideration was given to the ethical requirements of the research. Participants were invited to partake in the research; no one was obliged. Participants were advised that they could withdraw from the research at any time, without consequence.

3.10.1 Data storage.

Data collected through the research was, and continues to be, stored in a secure, locked cabinet accessible to the researcher only. Data stored includes a USB with interview recordings, transcribed interviews, programming documents and observational records. As per the requirements of the ethical approval, this data will be stored for a period of five years and then destroyed.

3.11 Reflexive Statement

The reflexive statement is provided at this point to situate the reader in the context of the researcher. In an attempt to overcome the difficulty in illustrating the

reflexive process, Langdridge (2007) suggested including a reflexive statement prior to the presentation of findings. Including a specific reflexive statement is a further endeavour to be overt in recognising any influence the researcher's context may have had on the research findings.

As the researcher, I acknowledge my own position within this investigation. I have worked as a teacher in Catholic early childhood settings, although in schools as opposed to childcare centres, for a period of 9 years. For the last two of those 9 years, I also held a leadership role within the school. This leadership position came with a particular focus on Religious Education and on developing and maintaining the relationship with the Parish. Following my time in Catholic schools, and the completion of post-graduate studies in Religious Education and early childhood, I commenced employment within a tertiary institution teaching pre-service early childhood teachers. I have been in this role for seven years, of which, during the past three, I have been engaged with this research. It is this experience of working with pre-service early childhood teachers, along with my experience in early childhood settings at Catholic schools that ignited my interest to investigate educators' practices to promote children's spiritual development. Given the nature of my own experiences, it was reasonable to expect that I would have assumptions and possible bias when collecting data. As required with IPA, the researcher journal was used to bracket this information at all stages of data collection. Bracketed information was re-visited as a component of the analysis of data.

3.12 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has explained and justified the research design used to investigate educators' current practices for promoting the spiritual development of children aged 3 to 4 years, in the unique context of Catholic childcare. A qualitative approach with a social constructivist theoretical perspective, and with the particular selection of IPA,

was chosen as most suited to this investigation. IPA was selected for its ability to recognise the role of the researcher, through bracketing, when exploring a new phenomenon and for its interpretative nature. The methods identified as most suitable for gathering data in response to the three research questions guiding this investigation were: interviews with educators working with 3 to 4-year-olds; observations of educators' practice; and qualitative content analysis of documentary data in the form of planning documents for a two-week period. As CEWA continues to provide childcare services, the way in which these centres support and enrich the spiritual development of the young children in its care is pertinent - pertinent to the mission of the Catholic school and to the lives of the children attending the service. As King (2013) articulated, "children…need examples and guidance…so that their spiritual awareness and imagination becomes awakened and ignited" (p. 14). The following chapter, Chapter Four, presents the findings from each of the data collection methods. These findings will then be discussed in Chapter Five in relation to the research questions that guided this investigation.

Chapter Four: Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter reports the findings from the investigation into educators' practices to promote 3 and 4-year-old children's spiritual development within Catholic childcare. As outlined in Chapter Three: Research Design, all three data sets were analysed separately. Interview transcripts and observational records were analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) (see Sections 3.8.1 & 3.8.2). Documentary data, in the form of the educators' planning documents, were analysed using qualitative content analysis (see Section 3.8.3). Findings in this chapter are presented by data set, inclusive of all educators and all centres and in the same sequence that data analysis occurred (see Sections 3.8.1, 3.8.2 & 3.8.3). As such, findings are presented in the order of the research question to which they respond (as explained in Chapter Three, see Section 3.6). The connection between the findings and each of the research questions is pertinent to the discussion within Chapter Five.

This chapter begins with the presentation of findings from the interview data in Section 4.2 in response to the first research question, *What do educators understand by the term 'spirituality'?*. Findings from the observational data are then presented in Section 4.3 in response to the first research question as well as the second research question, *what do educators know about promoting children's spiritual development?* Finally, Section 4.4 reports the findings from the documentary data in response to research question two as well as research question three, *what practices are educators implementing, intentionally and incidentally, to promote children's spiritual development?* A reflexive statement was presented in Chapter Three (Section 3.11) to ensure transparency of the analysis process and to overtly acknowledge the role of the researcher in the investigation.

During the final stages of analysis for each data set, the researcher journal was re-visited in a practice termed 'de-bracketing' (Bednall, 2006) (see Section 3.8.1). Where appropriate, bracketed information that is deemed to afford deeper insight into the emergent themes, is presented in this chapter (Sections 4.2.1; 4.2.4; 4.2.6; 4.4.2.1; 4.3.3.5). Findings are presented in this chapter using evidence from the raw data.

4.2 Findings from Educator Interviews

Findings from the analysis of interview data are presented in this section in relation to each of the eight interview questions. As outlined in Chapter 3 Section 3.8.1, the initial analysis described by Bednall (2006) involved annotating the interview transcripts by coding all items of significance (see example in Table 3.6). Appendix D provides an example of an interview transcript annotated with initial codes. An iterative process was undertaken whereby items were then grouped into a common theme, resulting in the super-ordinate and sub-ordinate themes for each interview question (see Table 3.7 and Table 4.1). These super-ordinate and sub-ordinate themes are evidenced in this chapter using prioritised examples from the educators' responses in relation to each of the eight interview questions. As a further reflexive strategy, the researcher was conscious to include the voice of all educators in the evidence provided for the emergent themes, so that bias (such as the researcher sharing views or favouring the articulation of ideas by a participant) did not influence the presentation of the findings.

Table 4.1 illustrates an overview of the super-ordinate and sub-ordinate themes that emerged in relation to each of the eight interview questions. The educator evidence provided in Table 4.1 offers an example of the type of response educators provided as evidence of that emergent theme. Sub-ordinate themes were not present within all super-ordinate themes; their presence or inclusion was dependent on the range of responses provided by participants in response to the interview question. The

number of educator responses comprising the emergent theme are represented as a

numeral within the presentation of findings. A summary of the interview findings

follows the presentation of findings from all interview questions, in Section 4.2.8.

Table 4.1.
Super-ordinate and Sub-ordinate Themes from Interview Data

Interview Question	Super-ordinate Theme	Sub-ordinate Theme	Example of Educator Evidence
One: *Can you describe for me an experience of your own, or something you have witnessed, or read, that you consider 'spiritual'?*	• A religious experience • A personal experience within community • Experiences of nature • Reflection	• Health issues • Engaging with community • Music	• "Well obviously God" (Educator 3) • "I guess involving the community" (Educator 6) • "I find nature really spiritual" (Educator 1) • "I suppose for me it's more reflection" (Educator 2)
Two: *In addition to that experience, can you describe what you understand by the term 'spirituality'?*	• Belief based • Innate and personal • Being a good person • Sense of purpose • Peaceful		• "More about beliefs" (Educator 9) • "I think spirituality is something that everybody can be" (Educator 5) • "Just the way that we care and nurture" (Educator 5) • "Just having a purpose" (Educator 3) • "Just feeling peaceful" (Educator 7)
Three: *How do you think children express their spirituality?*	• Connectedness to people and nature • Emotional regulation • Play • Through drawing • Development of morals • Identity construction	• Sense of wonder	• "Just the wonder and awe of nature" (Educator 8) • "Dealing with emotions" (Educator 1) • "So a lot of it is through play" (Educator 4) • "It's through drawing as well" (Educator 4) • "More so in the values" (Educator 2) • "Finding who they are" (Educator 1)

Four: *How do you think children's spirituality can be promoted and nurtured?* **Five:** *What types of opportunities do you think you provide in your room to assist children to develop within the spiritual domain?* **Responses analysed collectively. See Section 4.2.4**	• Religion • Opportunities to develop social skills • Conversation • Opportunities for play • Educator knowledge and skills • Identity development	• Prayer • Beliefs of the Catholic faith • Facilitating relationships • Flexibility	• "Well, even prayer is spiritual" (Educator 8) • "How to…talk to each other and to be kind to each other" (Educator 7) • "Just in everyday conversation" (Educator 2) • "Playing, because that's where they learn" (Educator 4) • "We've got a new curriculum now, so that really helps" (Educator 7) • "More identity, to help them learn where their roots were from" (Educator 3)
Six: *What is the relationship between spirituality and religion for you?*	• Distinct yet connected		• "I'd say spirituality doesn't necessarily need religion, but it works hand-in-hand" (Educator 3)
Seven: *Can you tell me a little about your early childhood educational philosophy and beliefs that inform your practice?*	• Play-based • Interest based • Socially and emotionally focused	• Choice • Behaviour management	• "We're definitely play-based" (Educator 2) • "We go off their interests" (Educator 6) • "Social and emotional development first and foremost" (Educator 2)
Eight: *What has led to these beliefs? For example, particular experience, training, documents?*	• Initial teaching qualification • Professional development • Personal experience	• Early years curriculum • Play • Catholic religion	• "In my last unit…we actually talked a lot about spirituality" (Educator 3) • "Only the PD they run at CEO [Catholic Education Office]" (Educator 7) • "A lot of relieving in early childhood centres" (Educator 5)

4.2.1 Findings from interview question one.

Can you describe for me an experience of your own, or something you have witnessed, or read, that you consider 'spiritual'?

All nine educators had difficulty responding to this initial question. Rephrasing of the question and probing questions were required to obtain an experience of spirituality from educators, for example: "So could you say an experience or a time in

your life which was spiritual?" and " Is there anything else you can think of?" In all interviews (9), educators responded with an experience of their own, as opposed to an event or moment they had witnessed in a movie or read in a book. Two educators recalled a spiritual moment from their own childhood or early adolescent period and two others reflected on a spiritual moment that involved their own children.

Four super-ordinate themes emerged from educators' descriptions of a spiritual experience: a religious experience; a personal experience within community; experiences of nature; and reflection. These super-ordinate themes are evidenced with representative examples from the educators' responses in Sections 4.2.1.1 through to 4.2.1.4. Prior to presenting the super-ordinate themes, it is necessary to address the process of de-bracketing (see Section 3.8.1), as comments were located in the researcher journal pertinent to interview question one. Notes were made in the journal, by the researcher, regarding the researcher's assumptions of each educator's ability to respond to the initial interview question. These assumptions were based on the educator's age, which was interpreted by the researcher to be correlated to their experience as an early years educator (See extract provided in Section 3.8.1). Revisiting these comments during the de-bracketing stage of analysis for interview question one assisted the researcher in ensuring that personal assumptions had not influenced the way data had been coded. The researcher found that, in fact, assumptions made prior to interview question one were unfounded. For example, the age of the educator did not affect their ability to articulate a response to interview question one.

4.2.1.1 A religious experience.

In response to interview question one, the most common experience provided by educators (8) included religious beliefs and practices. Although most educators (7) responded that spirituality and religion were not synonymous (as a response to

interview question six), educators chose to recount a religious experience in response to interview question one. Educator 6: Centre B exemplified the type of religious response educators provided when asked to recall a spiritual experience. Educator 6: Centre B described a personal moment of spiritual experience whilst participating in a religious ritual:

"…I can remember my first spiritual moment that I ever had. It was really weird. We were singing at the front in church and I was like, singing in front of people. It's no big deal. Then I just couldn't sing anymore because I was crying. Inside, I'm thinking, should I be crying in front of all of these people? This is strange. This is weird."

Similarly, Educator 4: Centre C recalled the following experience that included religious beliefs and practices:

"I guess when my Pa passed away. I'm Italian so it's very – Catholic. It's very strong. So when he passed away we all did the church thing and that was very spiritual."

As illustrated in the example above from Educator 4: Centre C's response, some educators (4) recollected a spiritual experience as a religious experience that included the loss of a family member or ill health. As such, *health issues*, emerged as a sub-ordinate theme. Educator 3: Centre C's recount of her sister's illness illustrates the type of responses that contributed to the sub-ordinate theme, *health issues*:

"Well I guess I'm from a religious background, so that sort of plays a big part for me…It was probably for my sister. She got really sick in Year 12 and she went to hospital, and she had a cyst, but they went to have surgery on it and it was no longer there, and that's when she realised she wanted to be a nurse…We did a lot of praying for her to make sure she was all right, and she was in so much pain, and then it was gone and she realised she wanted to be a nurse."

4.2.1.2 A personal experience within community.

Albeit a contradiction of terms, educators (8) regularly spoke of a very personal spiritual experience that occurred whilst they simultaneously felt a sense of community. In connection to the first super-ordinate theme, *a religious experience,* the community educators (4) referred to, was a religious community. For example,

Educator 7: Centre A elaborated that her spiritual experience was about the personal,

inner feelings of contentment whilst engaged in a whole group experience. Educator 4:

Centre C described how she felt during the spiritual experience she had recalled.

Educator 4: Centre C described that when her Pa passed away it:

"…Was just the whole setting…we all came together through the church".

Encompassed within this super-ordinate theme was the notion of personally engaging

with the needs of the community. This was exemplified in Educator 6: Centre B's

recollection of a spiritual experience that incorporated community involvement:

"I guess involving the community and giving back to the community…St Vincent De Paul…for people that don't have stuff."

4.2.1.3 Experiences of nature.

Nature was included within five educators' recollections of a spiritual

experience. Educator 1: Centre B, for example, described the following experience in

response to interview question one:

"I find nature really spiritual. The times in my life where things have been quite hard— Grandma has been very sick and things like that, particularly the pelican, I've sort of clung to that. So my Grandma had an aneurism and wasn't going to make it, and the day we found out she was okay, there were pelicans all the way to the trip to the hospital, and then it was really really bizarre, but my cousin's baby actually passed away when it was born…and we went to the funeral just the other week and there was a pelican flying in the sky…"

Educator 5: Centre A elaborated specifically on the presence of water during her

recollection of a spiritual experience:

"For me, being anywhere near water is a time when I feel very much at peace. Lying back in a swimming pool with your head half underwater so you can hear nothing but the sound of the water is a wonderful time…I spent my life at the beach. We had a swimming pool at home…everything that was positive growing up, revolved around water".

4.2.1.4 Reflection.

Reflection was included as a response by four educators in their description of a

spiritual experience. Representative responses include:

Educator 8: Centre A:

> "The first thing that springs to mind is, for me, something spiritual is when you might just be in a quiet place reflecting. Maybe a place that I might enjoy to go…"

Educator 2: Centre C:

> "Yeah, I suppose for me it's more reflection. It sort of makes you start thinking about things more or maybe just that you're grounded."

Music emerged as a sub-ordinate theme within the super-ordinate theme of *reflection.* Three educators who remarked that listening to music provided an opportunity for them to think and reflect, connected music to the notion of reflection. Educator 6: Centre B exemplifies this connection within the spiritual experience she recalled:

> "…I guess… it would have to be music. That is a big thing. I'm involved in my church with music. Anytime somebody talks about spirituality, I'm like—music! It helps me relax and think."

4.2.2 Findings from interview question two.

In addition to that experience, can you describe what you understand by the term 'spirituality'?

After participants had recalled an experience of spirituality in response to interview question one, the researcher aimed to draw out educators' understandings of the term 'spirituality', more specifically, in interview question two. Generally educators responded to interview question two by referring to the experience previously provided, as anticipated. To articulate their understanding of the term spirituality, educators referred to features, characteristics or feelings associated with spirituality for them personally. Through the process of analysis, the following super-ordinate themes emerged from educators' responses to interview question two: belief based; innate and personal; being a good person; sense of purpose; and peaceful.

Sections 4.2.2.1 through to 4.2.2.5 evidence each of the super-ordinate themes using exemplars from the educators' responses.

4.2.2.1 Belief based.

Given that many educators (8) recounted a religious experience in their response to interview question one, it was consistent that aspects of religious beliefs would feature in educators' articulations of their understanding of spirituality. As opposed to referencing a particular religion, educators (8) used the term 'beliefs' to describe spirituality. This theme emerged through educators' descriptions of spirituality. Two of the more detailed examples of these responses include:

> "Connection with something more. I would call it God but other people would call it something different." (Educator 1: Centre B)

> "I think spirituality, it's got a personal thing as well, so I'm just trying to think. Not necessarily religious but more about beliefs…It's something that you can't put your hands on. It's not concrete. It's about your own beliefs. It's a deeper sort of personal feeling that you have." (Educator 9: Centre A)

4.2.2.2 Innate and personal.

All but one educator implied that spirituality is innate. Educators, in their description of spirituality, did not specifically use the word 'innate'. However, they connected to this notion by explaining that spirituality was for everyone. A key example of this type of response was provided by Educator 1: Centre B:

> " I think everyone has an inner sort of spirit. You would call it maybe something like a soul." (Educator 1: Centre B)

All educators (9) remarked that spirituality belonged to the individual person. For example, Educator 5: Centre A described spirituality as both innate and personal:

> "I think spirituality is something that everybody can be. I think babies are very spiritual beings and animals are and maybe that's because they're purer than we are as adult human beings…well, because even at 4 [years of age] I think it starts to change a bit but I think at 3 [years of age] they're still very much in their own world."

4.2.2.3 Being a good person.

The super-ordinate theme, *being a good person*, emerged from educators'

descriptions of spirituality being about 'doing good' and 'being kind'. Four educators

commented on this particular feature of spirituality. Responses that contributed to this

theme included:

Educator 2: Centre C:

> "You know, I generally associate it with being a good person. You have these values
> behind you that are, well they're gospel values, aren't they? Being respectful, being kind
> and being a good person."

Educator 7: Centre A chose to describe a spiritual person, referring to someone who:

> "Would be a very caring person. They would be someone who relates to other people
> and can accept people for how they are…very kind, generous sort of person."

Being a good person and the notion of 'kindness' was elaborated on by Educator

8: Centre A, who, in articulating her understanding of spirituality, retold an event from

her room that involved children demonstrating kindness, through sharing:

> "It was dismissal of the children, I hope this is the right interpretation, but one of the
> children got 'superstar student' for moving up the positive reward chart throughout the
> day. Anyway so we've got a reward box and in it, there are a variety of things that they
> can choose. The child chose stickers. Anyway he was waiting to be called [to go with his
> parent] and he just started giving these stickers out until there was one left…I said: 'Did
> you want to do that?' because I thought he might have been coerced into doing it and he
> said: 'Yes'. I asked: 'Are they all gone?' and he said: 'No…there's still one for me'. I
> said: 'You know, that is the kindest thing…you are thinking of others'. I was so
> impressed…we'd been talking about acts of kindness this week."

Educator 8: Centre A used the above event to describe the actions of the child and the

feelings of pride she had felt as the educator, to portray her interpretation of

spirituality.

4.2.2.4 Sense of purpose.

Three educators described spirituality as being concerned with a sense of meaning and purpose in life. Representative responses that contributed to this emergent theme included the following:

> "I look at it as either you could be religious or you could be really, like…Nelson Mandela. He's just so—he knows what his main views are and he just knows what he's supposed to be doing and things like that…It's like having your identity, your meaning in life, just having a purpose. Knowing that purpose." (Educator 3: Centre C)

> "Yeah, personal, and having an idea of who you are and the morals that you have and the sort of person that you want to be from another level…" (Educator 1: Centre B)

4.2.2.5 Peaceful.

In articulating their understanding of spirituality, five educators referred to feelings associated with the specific spiritual experience they had provided in response to interview question one. Educators' descriptions (5) of how they felt during the spiritual experience resulted in the emergent super-ordinate theme, *peaceful.* For example, educators described the following feelings in response to interview question two:

Educator 4: Centre C, when recollecting her spiritual experience of being in a church when her 'Pa' passed away, described:

"It felt like a sense of ease"

Educator 1: Centre B, when recollecting her sister's illness and seeing pelicans flying overhead, described the feeling as:

"Inspiring, like a warmth sort of feeling, comfort, you find comfort."

The word 'peaceful' was explicitly used in the following educator responses: Educator 7: Centre A described, "feeling peaceful, happy, content I suppose" when recollecting

a spiritual experience of attending mass in a bush setting and Educator 9: Centre A used the terms, "peaceful and relaxed, happy" when describing how she felt during the experience of her child's baptism.

Educator 5: Centre A described spirituality as:

> "Tranquillity. Almost a sense of confidence…where all those fears and worries or concerns just disappear and for those brief few moments, there's absolute peace."

4.2.3 Findings from interview question three.

How do you think children express their spirituality?

Interview question three diverted the educators' attention from their own experiences and understanding of spirituality, to instead focus on children's expressions of their spirituality. Responses to interview question three were limited and despite further probing by the researcher, educators found it difficult to articulate how young children express their spirituality, instead wanting to focus on how they, as educators, might nurture children's spirituality, which was the aim of interview question four. The analysis of interview question three revealed that educators understanding of the way children expressed spirituality was through the following super-ordinate themes: connectedness to people and nature; emotional regulation; play; through drawing; in religion; development of morals; and through identity construction. These super-ordinate themes are elaborated on, with representative evidence from the raw data, in Sections 4.2.3.1 to 4.2.3.6.

4.2.3.1 Connectedness to people and nature.

The notion that children express spirituality through their connections with people and the natural environment emerged from four educators' responses. As an example, Educator 3: Centre C explained that children's spirituality is:

"Connected with life. Connected with other people."

Educator 9: Centre A responded to interview question three stating that children expressed their spirituality specifically when engaged with others:

"I think it's with the interactions with other children, just how they interact with them and talk to them." (Educator 9: Centre A)

Children's connection to nature, as a means of spiritual expression, was linked to children's experience of wonder by one educator. Educator 5: Centre A relayed the following observation in response to interview question three:

"Children express it in many different ways. Something that we do often, actually, is go out into the senior school playground and we've got these beautiful big trees there and the children call the one tree the Grandpa Tree and they go out and hug it and feel the rough bark and will lie down under his branches and look up. And I probably refer to the tree as a 'he' as well so that the children have evolved from that their idea of the Grandpa Tree. They really love it and it's very special to them to be able to go out to it. So I think that's one way that children show their spirituality."

Following probing questions from the researcher, such as: "Why do you think they like the tree?" Educator 5: Centre A went on to add:

"With children, it's a sense of wonder and awe for sure…It really is *wonder*-full."

4.2.3.2 Emotional regulation.

Children's development of emotional regulation was provided as a response to how children express their spirituality, thus forming this emergent super-ordinate theme. Educators (3) remarked on children's ability to resolve conflict independently and to control their own feelings as a way that children expressed their spirituality. Key examples that comprised this theme include:

Educator 1: Centre B described her observations of children expressing their spirituality as follows:

"I just watch them and I think they're finding who they are. Whether it's conflict…or whether it's dealing with emotions with other children, or to educators…"

Educator 6: Centre B responded to interview question three stating:

"I think it really depends, especially if they've been brought up in a spiritual home…they might not be at a stage where they're able to express that…They could be doing it by hugging a friend that's sad or just something small to begin with…That's where it starts."

Similarly, Educator 3: Centre C responded that spirituality is expressed when children are able to control their own emotions. Educator 3: Centre C described 'calming down sessions', a common practice in the early years whereby children are encouraged to remove themselves from a situation causing them distress, and to develop strategies to manage their emotions:

"Maybe through our calming down sessions. Being able to calm [them]selves down. Reflect on their behaviour and think about the consequences and whatnot."

4.2.3.3 Play.

Children's engagement with play, as a means of expressing spirituality, was articulated by three educators in response to interview question three. Little detail was provided on the features of this play, despite probing questions by the interviewer. Educator 7: Centre A, as an example, responded that spirituality was expressed through:

"How they [children] interact with each other, in play, all the dramatic play, lots of play."

Similarly, Educator 4: Centre C responded with play as a form of spiritual expression and provided a specific example of imaginative play she had observed:

"I think a lot of it is through play, if that makes sense? Playing because that's where they learn. You always see every now and then, 'Oh I'm talking to my nanna' and I'm like 'What?' and they're like, 'They're sitting right there. They're sitting on the chair'…So a lot of it is through play."

4.2.3.4 Through drawing.

Drawing emerged as a super-ordinate theme in response to interview question three. Three educators stated that drawing provided a means for children to express their spirituality. Educator 2: Centre C responded:

> "…Or even being artistic, drawing, you know, putting out pictures on a table as a prompt".

Likewise, Educator 4: Centre C commented:

> "It's through drawing as well, because they draw what they see. I think that's all mainly I can think of."

Educator 5: Centre A responded:

> "When they're drawing. That comes through their artwork, often…that texture…that movement, that fascination when she added colours. To me that's a spiritual moment for her."

4.2.3.5 Development of morals.

Four educators referred to children's demonstration of morals and values as a means of them expressing their spirituality. For example, Educator 2: Centre C responded to interview question three stating:

> "I think more so in the values…you know…being kind to friends."

Educator 3: Centre C explained that educators model the morals and that these are then learnt and expressed by children, as a part of their spirituality. Educator 7: Centre A further related the development of morals and values by describing spirituality being expressed when children are:

> "Being kind to each other, sharing, speaking nicely, respecting others, that sort of thing."

4.2.3.6 Identity construction.

The theme of identity construction emerged from two educators' explanations that children expressed their spirituality as they developed a sense of self.

Representative responses in this theme included Educator 9: Centre A who made

reference to children learning about themselves:

"I think it's [spirituality] more about themselves and developing their own self-

awareness at this age"

Similarly, Educator 1: Centre B answered the following regarding how children

expressed their spirituality:

"I just watch them and I think they're finding who they are…And I don't really know
how to explain it, but just generally developing who they are through that sort of
knowing also when something's right or wrong, showing empathy and emotions…"

4.2.4 Findings from interview questions four and five.

How do you think children's spirituality can be promoted and nurtured? What types of
opportunities do you think you provide in your room to assist children to develop
within the spiritual domain?

In addressing the practicalities of how children's spirituality might be promoted

and nurtured (the focus of interview question four), educators provided a variety of

responses, all of which included examples from their own room, in turn responding

also to interview question five. As such, interview questions four and five were

analysed collectively. The process of de-bracketing (see Chapter Three, Section 3.8.1)

was pertinent to interview questions four and five as comments had been made by the

researcher, in the journal, that related to the researcher's own assumptions about both

the educators' practices and their interview response. As observational data were

collected prior to the interviews, during the process of de-bracketing the researcher re-

visited comments made in the researcher journal relating to both the observational data

as well as the interview data. The extract below, made in the researcher journal, was

significant to interview question five as it articulated the researcher's personal views

about the educators' abilities to respond to the interview question and to connect with

their practices. The extract from the researcher journal was taken after interviewing

Educator 2: Centre C:

> Educator 2 wasn't able to articulate the beliefs underpinning her practices that I
> observed as promoting children's spirituality. Although she said she follows a play-
> based approach and not much structure, she didn't really get to the heart of her beliefs.
> I've seen her belief in children's right to choose activities, develop agency, and the value
> she places on the outdoor environment. Her practices illustrate these beliefs clearly. She
> also obviously values children's voice as I witnessed the way she included children in
> decision-making. Educator 2 didn't mention these as practices that promoted children's
> spirituality.

The de-bracketing process in this instance did not influence the analysis process,
but acted as a safe-guard to ensure the researcher was conscious of her own opinions
on the educator's practices. In overtly acknowledging personal bias or assumptions, the
researcher attempted to set these aside from the analysis to enable themes to emerge
from the data.

Across the range of responses to interview questions four and five,
commonalities were found in the ways educators described how they promoted
children's spirituality. These commonalities resulted in the following super-ordinate
themes: religion; opportunities to develop social skills; conversation; opportunities for
play; educator knowledge and skills; identity development. Five of the nine educators'
initial response related to the beliefs and practices of the Catholic religion, used within
their room, as the means they adopted for promoting and nurturing children's
spirituality. Following their initial response, probing questions from the researcher
required educators to elaborate on additional ways that they perceived children's
spirituality could be nurtured, including specific examples they employed in their
rooms. Sections 4.2.4.1 to 4.2.4.6 present evidence from the interview data that
contributed to each of the emergent super-ordinate themes.

4.2.4.1 Religion.

Eight of the educators responded that religious beliefs and practices were employed as a means of nurturing children's spirituality. In most of these instances (6), religious beliefs and practices formed educators' initial responses. Various components of religion were referenced, and some educators (6) specifically named the Catholic religion as their focus for all children. An example of educator responses that contributed to this theme include:

> "Reading a story from the Bible…having a little table with the Bible and the cross and things like that…We do little things you know like, saying, 'God Bless You' at morning mat session…" (Educator 2: Centre C)

Prayer was also specifically mentioned:

> "Of course being a Catholic centre we do the prayer before our meals. We go to the Church at Easter time…I think that's it." (Educator 4: Centre C)
>
> "Well, even prayer is spiritual. The prayers that we say everyday. We'll say a morning prayer, a morning tea prayer, a lunchtime prayer." (Educator 8: Centre A)

The beliefs of the Catholic faith were also mentioned within this theme. Talking with children about God and Jesus was provided as a way of promoting children's spiritual development:

> Educator 7: Centre A:
>
> " We make them aware of God and creation and how they can relate to other people as Jesus taught us."
>
> Educator 8: Centre A:
>
> "We talk about God, and we use stories, like the nativity".

Teaching children about religious beliefs of Christmas, as opposed to the commercial aspects, was explained by Educator 6: Centre B:

> "Like at Christmas time, instead of just saying, 'Santa's going to be coming', telling them about the whole Christmas story and about baby Jesus and everything like that…"

Two educators articulated that whilst they did focus on the Catholic religion, they were aware that there were a number of children in their room of no religious affiliation, or of another religious background. Although articulated that this was the context, neither educator elaborated that this knowledge changed their practice. For example, Educator 5: Centre A remarked that:

> "Most of our children would be Catholic and a few are non-Catholic but we do religious songs and we pray".

4.2.4.2 Opportunities to develop social skills.

Providing children with opportunities to develop their social skills, as a way of nurturing their spirituality, emerged as a super-ordinate theme. Five educators commented on facilitating children's development of social skills, such as how to interact with each other. For example, Educator 1: Centre B responded:

> "So we observe them in particular, it might be that they're not coping well with group situations, or dealing with conflict, sharing, that sort of thing, so we'll plan for that."

Likewise, Educator 9: Centre A responded that it was common practice to talk with children about friendship and encourage them to make friends:

> "And friends, like there are some children that perhaps don't have a friend, and getting other children to you know, say, 'so and so doesn't have a friend; perhaps you could go and ask them to be your friend', that sort of thing."

Educator 3: Centre C explained that she nurtured children's spirituality by encouraging children to look after each other when they are feeling sad:

> "Maybe like where we encourage a child to grab another one's hand, when he knows they're upset."

The notion of how to treat each other was elaborated on by Educator 7: Centre A who described the use of a class Christmas Elf to teach children about kindness. The Christmas Elf (a toy) was introduced to children as always watching their actions throughout the day, in particular looking for acts of kindness. Educator 7: Centre A

justified the use of the Christmas Elf, stating that it had been introduced because she

had noticed children commenting negatively about other children.

> "It's about being aware of how to…talk to each other and to be kind to each other, and not say things to make people unhappy."

Facilitating relationships, as a means of nurturing children's spirituality, emerged as a

sub-ordinate theme within the super-ordinate theme, *opportunities to develop social*

skills. Aspects of relationships were described by three educators, such as in Educator

9: Centre A's response below:

> "I think it's more sort of like conflict resolution with children as well, getting them to have that sympathy for other children…"

Similarly, Educator 8: Centre A described her 'super friend' strategy that was

used to teach children about what makes a good friend and what the qualities of a good

friend are. The strategy involved encouraging children to be a good friend to each other

and suggesting children name one of their 'super friends' at the end of the day.

4.2.4.3 Conversation.

Conversation, or discussion with children, emerged as a super-ordinate theme

from the responses of three educators. Three educators referred to the importance of

providing time to talk with children, with one educator identifying the modelling of

conversation that occurs by the educator in the way they speak to children. An example

of this was evident in Educator 9: Centre A's response:

> "I think from modelling…from yourself and also from other children. And then interactions with me and other children. If I've done something in the playground, just how you talk to them…I think maybe just talking to them as well, just getting their experiences, so their own personal experiences and sharing them with other children…"

Likewise, Educator 2: Centre C commented:

> "And I think maybe discussion. I think that's a big part of, especially in this setting. It's just in everyday conversation."

The specific use of wonder questions, as a component of conversation, was provided as a response by one educator. Educator 8: Centre A commented on her use of both prepared and spontaneous wonder questions to assist children's spiritual development. Educator 8: Centre A stated:

> "I think through wonder questions, getting them to think a little deeper. Sometimes they're in my actual program, sometimes they're off the cuff."

The interviewer probed Educator 8 further about the type of wonder questions posed to which Educator 8 responded:

> "About friends, about stories we've read."

4.2.4.4 Opportunities for play.

Three educators mentioned that play was a practice for nurturing children's spirituality. However, as with previous interview questions that elicited a play response, little elaboration was provided. Educator 1: Centre B provided the following statement, after being probed further on a range of play-based activities she had described:

> "They do certainly play. Yeah every single thing we do here is play-based."

Educator 7: Centre A provided slightly more detail, specifically naming the provision of opportunities for dramatic play, such as retelling stories through drama, as a strategy for nurturing children's spirituality. Further to this, Educator 7: Centre A elaborated on sensory play experiences in particular, as a practice for promoting children's spirituality. Experiences that involve sensory play encourage children to use their five senses by providing a range of materials that facilitate investigation and inquiry.

> "We used to have a sensory table there…but that's a big thing too, using their senses…sounds and props and different textures and bits." (Educator 7: Centre A)

4.2.4.5 Educator knowledge and skills.

Four educators noted the requirement for educators to be skilled and knowledgeable, if they are to be able to nurture children's spirituality. At times (3), this knowledge referred to religious knowledge, as opposed to an understanding of spirituality. Educator 2: Centre C, for example, responded regarding educators' knowledge and skills to promote children's spirituality:

> "Educators would have to have a lot more background knowledge…more mat sessions, reading a story from the Bible, having a little—I don't know any of the technical names are, but having a little table with a Bible…"

Educator 5: Centre A further elaborated on the identification that educators require knowledge and skills. Educator 5: Centre A spoke of her own challenges with religion and spirituality:

> "Well, from a religious perspective, obviously being in the kindy, I'm not accredited to teach religious education at this stage. So I always find that a difficult thing because although spiritual is not necessary only religious, there's a connection and I find that a dilemma for myself because I don't want to impose my perspective on children but I would like to share it and I feel restricted…and I find that quite hard, especially now around Christmas time, where most of our children are familiar with the nativity story but when I'm sharing it with the children I feel like I almost need to keep the spiritual side out of it because I don't want to overstep the mark."

The researcher probed further at this point asking: "Because?" to which Educator 5: Centre A elaborated:

> "Most of our children would be Catholic and a few are non-Catholic".

Educators' knowledge of the religious education curriculum was also responded within this super-ordinate theme. Educator 7: Centre A referenced the document, *Let the Little Children Come to Me* (Catholic Education Western Australia [CEWA], 2014) a religious education curriculum document for raising children's religious awareness. Educator 7: Centre A was the only participant to name the document specifically and she commented:

"We've got a new curriculum now, so that really helps with lots of songs and rhymes and stories, and it's fantastic…I'm doing a lot more than I used to, so I've kind of got an idea now of what I'm meant to be focussing on."

Flexibility emerged as a sub-ordinate theme within the super-ordinate theme, *educator knowledge and skills. Flexibility* emerged as a component of the educators' knowledge and skills as it was described as an intentional practice that required the educator having the skills to provide a learning environment that met the needs of the individual child. Flexibility involved the provision of opportunities for children to choose their own activities, to follow their own interests and to move between tasks as they please. Being flexible allowed the educator to provide opportunities that were also less structured, that is, opportunities that focussed on process rather than on the creation of an end product. An example of this emergent sub-ordinate theme is provided in Educator 5: Centre A's response:

"Well for me it would be less structured teaching. Obviously it's intentional, though. It's about knowing what you're trying to achieve. It's about having opportunities within the room for children to discover, to explore, to spend quiet moments…to make the environment more magical and less clinical. All of that adds to the sense of wonder and inspiration." (Educator 5: Centre A)

4.2.4.6 Identity development.
Facilitating children's development of their identity was explicated by two educators in response to interview questions four and five. Whilst limited, both participants included this practice when describing the ways they nurtured children's spirituality. Educator 9: Centre A described having a focus on the children, their individual development and assisting them to develop their own sense of self. Similarly, Educator 6: Centre B responded:

"So maybe when we find out about children's interests – we take an interest in their interests. Then we provide opportunities for those interests here, that sort of thing."

Educator 3: Centre C involved parents to assist in her practice of facilitating children's identity. Educator 3 stated that she encouraged children to talk about who they are and where they are from by initially gathering information through a parent letter:

> "I send out a letter to all the parents asking where they all originated from and whatnot, and that was more identity, to help them learn where their roots were from…"

4.2.5 Findings from interview question six.

What is the relationship between spirituality and religion for you?

Educators (6) described the relationship between spirituality and religion as distinct, yet connected. Of the nine participants, six responded in this way and each elaborated on how they distinguished spirituality and religion. Spirituality was described by educators as an innate component of being human, whereas religion was viewed as a choice. Examples from the data include:

> "Anyone could choose to be religious, but is more of a choice than spirituality." (Educator 1: Centre B)

> "Spirituality is like what you're like on the inside. What you believe, how you are as a person. Whereas religion is more the stories about from the Bible and the Catholic practices, that sort of thing, the physical part of it…" (Educator 7: Centre A)

> "Well, I personally think that they're very closely connected but I understand that they can exist separately to each other. Religion obviously needs spirituality but spirituality can exist without religion. So for me, personally, I think that believing in something supports my notion of myself as a spiritual being…"(Educator 5: Centre A)

In relating specifically to the context of 3 and 4-year-olds, Educator 9: Centre A explained that:

> "Within early childhood as well, everything's sort of combined together. So I sort of say that spirituality is developing their sort of kindness and inner peace as well. And we bring religion in with it as well…sitting silently and thinking about our thoughts…"

Of the educators (6) that responded with spirituality and religion as being distinct, yet related, one educator mentioned the significance of childhood for spirituality, stating that:

> "Well, for small children, spirituality would come first because they have no concept of religion at that age…all children have come from somewhere so whether we come from somewhere knowing about that somewhere and then forget about it as we grow older, I don't know." (Educator 5: Centre A)

Two educators articulated spirituality and religion as synonymous. Educator 6: Centre B had difficulty articulating how the two were the same but continued to speak of spirituality and religion as if they were one and the same, using the two terms interchangeably. Educator 4: Centre C explicitly stated that spirituality and religion were the same, referring to spirituality *as* a religion. The following response was provided:

> "I think they're pretty much the same to me…Spirituality is a religion as well. Even saying like, 'You've seen ghosts' or whatever, I still think it's connected to your religion…I think they're the same pretty much." (Educator 4: Centre C)

One participant viewed spirituality and religion as separate. Educator 2: Centre C stated:

> "I think possibly separate…I can't really in words explain spirituality but I don't think you need to be religious to feel that".

4.2.6 Findings from interview question seven.

Can you tell me a little about your early childhood educational philosophy and beliefs that inform your practice?

The aim of interview question seven was to assist the researcher to further understand the world of the participant by gathering the educators' beliefs and practices within early childhood education. Gaining an understanding of the beliefs held by the individual educators, and how they used these beliefs to inform their

practice, added a foundation for how they promoted and nurtured children's spirituality in their rooms. Additionally, interview question seven would afford a comparison to be made, in Chapter 5: Discussion, among what educators said they believe and practise (interview data), what educators actually enacted (observational data) and what they planned for (through the planning documents data).

The de-bracketing stage of analysis (see Chapter 3 Section 3.8.1), which involved re-visiting comments made by the researcher, in the researcher journal, was pertinent to interview question seven because comments were made by the researcher regarding personal views of the educators' practices. As the observational data were collected prior to interview, the researcher re-visited comments made throughout both the gathering of interview data as well as observational data. One example of a post-interview entry relating to the researcher's views on Educator 2: Centre C's practice is located in Section 4.2.4. In addition, the following pre-interview comment was journalled regarding Educator 5: Centre A:

> I can tell from my observations that Educator 5 is an experienced educator. I have seen some wonderful child-directed opportunities and lots of play. She has a variety of strategies that she uses and the environment is constructed in a way that encourages children's independence. I'm hopeful she will be able to articulate her beliefs and practices.

As required through the process of de-bracketing, this information was viewed alongside the analysis of interview question seven to ensure it had not influenced the emergent themes. The researcher was careful, for example, to ensure she had not allowed her bias toward Educator 5: Centre A's practice influence the coding process, and rather had allowed codes and subsequent themes to emerge from the data.

All educators (9) presented with difficulty attempting to name their beliefs and practices, instead often describing individual elements of their daily practice. Responses were, therefore, significantly varied. Three super-ordinate themes emerged

from the responses provided to interview question seven: play-based; socially and emotionally focussed; and interest based. These super-ordinate themes are elaborated on with evidence from the data in Sections 4.2.6.1 through to 4.2.6.3. Several other beliefs or practices were mentioned by individual participants, and these are reported in Section 4.2.6.4.

4.2.6.1 Play-based.

Just under half of the educators (4) responded that they followed a play-based approach in their room. The play-based approach was described as being centred on the belief that children learnt best when they were engaged in play experiences. *Choice*, on behalf of the child, was emphasised and therefore emerged as a sub-ordinate theme. Representative statements in response to interview question seven include:

> "I like them to be able to feel happy and free to play what they want…" (Educator 7: Centre A)

> "The children get to choose what area of play they want to go to, or they can ask an educator and we can set something up for them. It's all free play, so they do what they want to do—it's teaching them to make decisions, make a choice…" (Educator 6: Centre B)

Of those educators (4) that named a play-based approach, two educators also explained that it was their role to intentionally plan for children's play. This was evident, for example, in Educator 2: Centre C's response that:

> "We're definitely play-based…but a definite intention and direction to support that…"

This notion was further elaborated on by Educator 4: Centre C:

> " Well I guess my biggest belief is that children learn through play and just we have to facilitate and provide the experiences and the environment for that to happen. Also we need to observe it and then extend their knowledge and not just leave it where it is, to help them further learn through their play."

4.2.6.2 Interest based.

The belief that children's interests should inform practice was articulated by four of the nine educators. For three of the four, this belief was consistent with their response indicating that they believed in a play-based approach. Educators described how they attempted to meet the individual needs of children. Meeting this need required educators to observe the children and subsequently provide experiences that they would find both interesting and beneficial to their learning and development. Educator 3: Centre C commented that she would:

> "Go from what they need and what they're interested in and combine that…"

Likewise, Educator 6: Centre B connected her play-based approach to children's interests; she explained that children were facilitated by her to follow their interests and could request items or experiences:

> "They [the children] can ask an educator and we can set something up for them. It's all free play, so they do what they want to do—it's teaching them to make decisions, make a choice…" (Educator 6: Centre B)

Educator 9: Centre A provided a more detailed response by articulating the relationship between following an interest based approach and being intentional:

> "Well, for me, my deep-seated belief is that children learn best when it's something they're interested in and so I try and encourage the children to contribute to what we do as much as possible…But I also believe intentional teaching has a place and for me intentional teaching would be fed by children's interests."

4.2.6.3 Socially and emotionally focussed.

Three educators described elements of children's social and emotional development when attempting to explain their beliefs and practices. This super-ordinate theme emerged from statements such as:

> "I think a lot of what we sort of believe in here is the social and emotional development first and foremost." (Educator 2: Centre C)

"Some children are really struggling emotionally…but I drift towards them when I see the things arising…being proactive." (Educator 1: Centre B)

A focus on the social and emotional development of children, as a belief and practice, was also described in relation to *behaviour management* within the rooms, and this emerged as a sub-ordinate theme. Educators explained a focus on promoting positive behaviours and encouraging children to be friends with each other. Educator 9: Centre A, described her behaviour management tool, a chart, where she would move children's names based on their behaviour:

"It's like a positive reinforcement thing. So if they show behaviours that we're looking for, then we'll move their name up the chart."

The chart move, explained Educator 9: Centre A, was always accompanied by a verbal cue, such as:

"I love the way he's doing that. Let's move your name up."

Educator 9 continued:

"I try not to move their name down the chart, when they've done the wrong thing, unless it's really needed. I might just sit the child down and ask them to have a think about what they've done and then go to the person they've upset and apologise."

4.2.6.4 Additional findings in response to interview question seven.

Further to the super-ordinate and sub-ordinate themes that emerged in the analysis of interview question seven, individual responses were provided that are worth reporting as they add deeper insight to the findings. Despite the following findings being individual, rather than common across the educators, they illustrate the range of beliefs and practices held by the educators in this investigation.

- Educator 2: Centre C responded that a core belief of hers was valuing relationships with families, explaining that when open communication exists

between the educator and the family: "It gives you a better relationship with the children then".

- The specific early childhood approach, Reggio Emilia, was included in the response from Educator 5: Centre A. Educator 5: Centre A explained that she had previous experience working in a Reggio Emilia inspired early childhood environment and that she continued to follow many of the beliefs and practices, articulating learning as a journey for children where they should be able to develop to their full potential.

- The belief that children's learning should be structured was articulated by Educator 8: Centre A who believed that whilst children should have some choice, a balance was needed to ensure all curricula were covered.

- Educator 7: Centre A responded that she believed children should not be hurried from one task to another. Educator 7: Centre A explained: "I like a calm atmosphere with not too much rushing".

4.2.7 Findings from interview question eight.

What has led to these beliefs? For example, particular experience, training, documents?

Interview question eight sought to elicit from educators any prior experiences or professional development they had undertaken that connected with their beliefs and practices as an educator, as well as with promoting children's spirituality. The educators who formed the participant sample varied considerably. There were

variations in their years of experience as an early years educator as well as in their professional development— whether this had been provided or had been sought. The following super-ordinate themes emerged in response to interview question eight: their initial teaching qualification; their previous experience in early years education; and recent professional development opportunities that were generally related to either play or to the Catholic religion. Eight of the nine educators had not been offered, nor sought, professional development within the area of spirituality. The one participant who responded that she had received some information on spirituality stated that this occurred within her initial teaching qualification at university (Educator 3: Centre C).

Professional development described were formal, structured learning opportunities provided from sources external to the centre. The areas reported on were most commonly in relation to early years curriculum (5), in particular mentioning a networking opportunity known as 'kindy conversations' (2) that involved local kindergarten teachers meeting on a regular basis to share ideas. Professional development on the topic of play in the early years (4) was also reported. Professional development on aspects of the Catholic religion were mentioned by four educators and was related to the religious knowledge of the educator as opposed to a focus on the child. Professional development in the areas of working with children with a special need (3) and assisting children's emotional regulation (2) were also reported. Additionally, one educator spoke of her international experience in early childhood education as a form of professional development.

4.2.8 Summary of findings from the interview data.

To summarise, the purpose of the interview data was to provide insight into the experience of the participants. As Larkin, Eatough and Osborn (2011) note, IPA "aims to understand the lived experience of a conscious, situated, embodied being-in-the-

world, where 'the world' is understood through respondent's involvement in it" (p. 330). As such, the researcher sought to understand educators' practices to promote the spiritual development of the children in their room.

Overall, educators had difficultly recalling a spiritual experience and articulating their personal understanding of spirituality. Themes that emerged from the data clearly identified educators' connection to religion when responding to interview questions on spirituality. Educators described spirituality, for themselves, to be: belief based (8); innate (8) and personal (9); concerned with being a good person (4); connected to their sense of purpose (3); and peaceful (5). However, educators described children's spirituality—its expression as well as the practices they employed to promote it, differently from their own understanding of spirituality, although connections can be found. Spirituality was described as expressed by children when they are connected to people and nature (4); through emotional regulation (3); through play (3); through drawing (3); the development of morals (4); and through the construction of their identity (2). Educators responded that they promote children's spirituality through: religion (8); opportunities for children to develop social skills (5); through conversation (3); opportunities for play (3); through themselves having knowledge and skills (4); and through the development of children's identity (2). Findings from the interview data also illustrated the lack of professional development educators had received in the area of spirituality as well as the vast range of experiences, beliefs and practices held by the educators.

To conclude, the interview provided one dimension of understanding, allowing educators the opportunity to communicate their own understandings and experiences of spirituality as well as how they perceived they could, or were already, promoting

children's spirituality. The following findings, from the observational data, add a further dimension to the lived experience of the educator.

4.3 Findings from the Observational Data

The observational data obtained through observing the educators' practices provided both the incidental and intentional experiences that occurred in the room, which were pivotal in evidencing the practices of the educator to promote children's spirituality. As explained in the introduction to this chapter (Section 4.1), observational data were gathered as the first method of data collection. However, this chapter is sequenced in the order of the research questions to which the data responded. Whilst interview data responded to research question one (*What do educators understand by the term 'spirituality'?*) the observational data were gathered in response to research questions one and two (*What do educators understand by the term 'spirituality'?*; *What do educators know about promoting children's spiritual development?*). The analysis of the observational records, detailed in Chapter 3 Section 3.8.2, occurred by employing IPA in the same manner as interview data was analysed. As outlined in Bednall's (2006) stages of IPA (see Table 3.5) observational records were read and codes initially flagged as they emerged (see Table 3.8). The initial flagging stage was annotated on the transcript (see example Appendix F) and in an iterative process these codes were then grouped together to form themes (see Table 3.9). The emergent themes, referred to as super-ordinate and sub-ordinate themes are presented in Table 4.2. These themes represent the findings from the analysis of all observations, across all educators and all centres. Findings are presented in this section by super-ordinate theme with the representative examples from the raw data (see example Appendix F). When relevant to the emergent theme, bracketed information that provided deeper

insight into the observational findings is presented. This section concludes with a

summary of the findings from the observational data (Section 4.3.5).

Table 4.2.

Super-ordinate and Sub-ordinate Themes from Observational Data

Super-Ordinate Theme	Sub-Ordinate Theme
Relationships	• Facilitating conversation • Encouraging friendship • Creating a sense of belonging
Wonder	• Posing wonder questions • Opportunities for imagination & creativity
Identity	• Facilitating resilience • Self regulation development • Facilitating wellbeing • Encouraging independence
Transcendence	• Opportunities for prayer • Sharing religious stories

4.3.1 Relationships.

The *relationships* super-ordinate theme comprised three sub-ordinate themes,

namely: facilitating conversation; encouraging friendship; and creating a sense of

belonging. The facilitation of relationships, by the educator, was observed as a means

of promoting children's spirituality, whether undertaken intentionally or incidentally

by the educator (See Chapter Two Section 2.2.2). The observational data highlighted

the central role of relationships within the educators' day, both in creating and

maintaining relationships with children and in facilitating relationships between

children. The sub-ordinate themes are elaborated in Sections 4.3.1.1 through to 4.3.1.3,

with evidence from the raw data.

4.3.1.1 Facilitating conversation.

Within the *relationships* super-ordinate theme, educators were observed

facilitating conversations with the 3 and 4-year-old children. The facilitation of

conversations, by the educator, was observed as a practice that encouraged children to

interact with others by sharing their views or knowledge whilst also responding to another, therefore facilitating children's development of relationships. Consequently, *facilitating conversation* emerged as a sub-ordinate theme within the super-ordinate theme, *relationships*. Conversations were generally child-initiated, at times arising from the child's curiosity or a desire to share an experience of their own. For example, the following extract taken from an observation of Educator 6: Centre B illustrates a child-initiated conversation that was facilitated by the educator, and that contributed to this sub-ordinate theme:

> CONTEXT:
> A free flowing environment exists in Centre B whereby children move between two inside rooms and two outdoor play spaces. Educators are located in each of the settings and are easily accessible to the children. I am observing Educator 6 at the play-dough table inside.
>
> CONVERSATION:
> The children are seated (6) around a table. They each have a ball of play-dough and there are shared materials (rollers etc.) in the middle of the table. A child asks the educator: "Do you know who's coming to see the concert?" and the educator responds: "Hmmm let me guess, your mum?" "Oh yes she's coming but my big brother is coming too. Mum is going to get him from class and bring him". The educator continues the conversation asking: "What year is your brother in?" and the child hesitates. "I forget". "I think he is in year three—you are so very lucky—I bet you'll sing beautifully! Which part do you think he'll enjoy the most?"

The following scenario, whilst also representative of the data evidencing the sub-ordinate theme *facilitating conversation*, details Educator 3: Centre C using visual props to engage children in a conversation about a shared experience. By doing so, the educator facilitates the relationships among the children.

> The educator hands out party hats for the children to wear and asks them why they might have party hats. "Cos it's a party", respond several children. "That's right", replies the educator, "Who has been to a party?" and the children raise their hands and some call out "Me!". "And what do we need for a party?" The children share games and decorations they have seen at a party: "Balloons, presents, pass the parcel". The educator asks the children to turn to a partner to share their ideas about what's needed for a party.

Additionally, children were observed in all rooms eating their lunch in small groups with an educator. This opportunity for conversation with children consisted of low level questioning by educators in an attempt to engage children in conversation. For

example, Educator 4: Centre C was observed asking a child during lunch, "is that an apple you've got there?"

4.3.1.2 Encouraging friendship.

Encouraging friendship emerged as a sub-ordinate theme within the super-ordinate theme of *relationships*. This sub-ordinate theme typified educators' practices of explicitly teaching children what it meant to be a friend as well as identifying behaviours that illustrated 'being a friend'. Encouraging friendships between children in the room was identified in the observational data as being a considerable focus for the educator. Educators engaged with children both at whole group and individual levels to discuss characteristics and behaviours of a 'friend', and this was observed as promoting children's spirituality.

As an example, Educator 9: Centre A, was observed asking the children: "Hands up who has been kind to their friends today? I wonder who has been a friend to everyone? Or who has said something nice to their friend?" Children called out responses and the educator reminded children to think about their answer in their mind instead. In addition to this, Educator 7: Centre A made use of a Christmas Elf (toy), introduced to the children during a mat session, as a motivational strategy to facilitate the notion of friendship. The Christmas Elf was explained as always watching for behaviours that demonstrated being a friend to others and showing kindness. Educator 7: Centre A would remind children throughout the day that the Christmas Elf 'was watching' so they should ensure they were being a good friend to each other.

Educators were observed encouraging friendship through facilitating children's cooperative play, as illustrated in the following extract:

> There are four children playing outside in the sandpit by the water. The educator is present and observing the children play. The children are digging and building and making use of the water pump. The children are speaking with each other about their task: " I'm going to build a tunnel for the truck" and another child adds, "Then I'll put a

bridge over here for the truck". Occasionally a child will take an object from another child and the educator interjects: "Remember we ask our friends first…use your manners…why don't you share the shovel". The children listen to the educator and take on her advice. (Educator 1: Centre B)

Similarly, educator led cooperative activities, such as games, were observed within the sub-ordinate theme, *encouraging friendship*. For example, Educator 3: Centre C led children through a series of party games during a mat session. Rather than *encouraging friendship* as an intervention, as was evidenced within the observation of Educator 1: Centre B above, Educator 3: Centre C made statements during the playing of the party games to remind the children about being a friend, such as: "Don't forget to speak nicely to your friend" and "Remember that we're all friends so it doesn't matter who your partner is for the game". During a game of pass-the-parcel that was observed, the educator made comments to maintain children's behaviour, which included:

> "We are all friends and so we are happy for our friend if they win a prize" and
> "Friends wait for their turn, they know how to share".

4.3.1.3 Creating a sense of belonging.
The role of relationships in promoting children's spirituality, as a super-ordinate theme, included the sub-ordinate theme *creating a sense of belonging*. This theme emerged from observations of educators actively creating an environment that promoted belonging. The promotion of a sense of belonging for children, to the room and centre, was observed occurring in a number of ways: educators' sharing of information with families and colleagues to enable the child to receive a shared message between family and centre; through educators' use of grouping as a strategy to facilitate children's belonging to smaller groups; and through the use of music as a means of encouraging children to participate in a group. The range of social interactions inherent in belonging connected this sub-ordinate theme to the super-

ordinate them of *relationships*. Compared to the other sub-ordinate themes, observations within *creating a sense of belonging* regularly occurred as a part of the established routines in each of the rooms. These established routines included, for example, inviting families into the centre to enable the sharing of information between the family and the educators, as well as to nurture each family's sense of belonging to the centre. The following scenario evidences educators working together with families to create a sense of belonging for a child—Tom. Tom's mother had communicated with an individual educator about the family's upcoming holiday and this information had been shared with other educators to facilitate a sense of belonging for Tom:

> Tom keeps walking around with his backpack on. He approaches the educator and asks: "Where's mummy?" The educator responds, "You're going on a trip tomorrow aren't you, Tom? And mummy needs to get organised and buy all the food. So you need to have a play with us. We love it when you come and play with us. Then mummy will come back and you'll be ready for your holiday". Tom wanders off and finds another educator who responds similarly, " Remember mum's gone to get ready for your trip, let's see what you can play with". Each of the educators knows of Tom's circumstance. Tom is clearly anxious for his mum's return, but his anxiety hasn't escalated. At each point of need the various educators have been able to reassure Tom that he belongs here. (Centre B)

Grouping children for play, or for educator led activities, was observed as a strategy employed by educators. Grouping children into smaller groups throughout the day provided an opportunity for children to identify themselves as belonging not only to the centre or room, but also to a variety of smaller groups based on shared interests or abilities. As observations were undertaken toward the end of the school year, children were competent with the established routines in their room and able to recall to which group they belonged. Educator 8: Centre A, for example, was observed referring to group names: "Where are the giants? Over to the paints, giants…and superheros? Where are you?" The children were observed enjoying being able to recognise their group.

Creating a sense of belonging, as a sub-ordinate theme within the super-ordinate

them, *relationships,* was further evidenced through observations of educators' use of

music. Music was observed as a strategy that created a sense of belonging as it fostered

social connections among children. Although other strategies that had the potential to

create a sense of belonging were observed, such as the sharing of stories, the educator

was not observed encouraging children to contribute to the group, during these other

strategies. When educators were observed including music as a strategy, they

encouraged children's participation in the group and facilitated their interaction with

other children, thus creating a sense of belonging. Music was often accompanied with

movement or props and afforded children the opportunity to express their individuality

whilst also contributing to the group. The connection of person to group is central to

the notion of belonging (See Chapter Two Section 2.3). Educators were observed

including a variety of songs throughout their day either with small groups of children

or with the whole group. Generally, songs related to cognitive skills such as: letters and

sounds; counting; or reciting the days of the week and months of the year. Songs were

also observed with accompanying actions. Sometimes the time for a song appeared to

be planned by the educator and, at other times, it was evident that the song was used to

respond to, or value add to, a child's experience. For example, the following is an

extract from the observation of Educator 1: Centre B:

> The educator is observing a group of 5 children sitting in the reading corner on the
> beanbags. The children are all looking at the same book, *Old MacDonald had a Farm.*
> After watching for a few minutes the educator sits with the children and suggests:
> "Should we sing the song?" The children agree and the educator leads the song and the
> children fill in the animal noises. Other children in the room hear the singing and make
> their way over to join in.

Songs contributing to children's sense of belonging were also observed when educators

chose songs that encouraged children to interact with each other. As an example,

Educator 5: Centre A employed a song with lyrics that encouraged children to speak

with one another and this was observed as facilitating relationships by creating a sense of belonging within the group:

> During the morning mat session the educator leads the children through a song: "Hello, how are you today? We're going to have a great day…" There is clapping and actions too. The children turn to face a different partner for each verse.

At Centre B a similar scenario was observed of Educator 6:

> Children at Centre B were guided through a 'goodbye song' that included actions when it was their turn to leave for the day. The educator would insert the child's name into the song and the children would farewell the child until tomorrow.

The previous examples typify the use of songs by the educator as a means of creating a sense of belonging. However, educators were also observed providing opportunities for children to choose for themselves to engage with songs and music, and then value adding to these experiences. Children's choice to be involved with music and songs was observed as creating a sense of belonging when children were in a small group that had been formed based on shared interests and when educators engaged with the children to facilitate the social interaction. As the observation was focussed on the educator, only those instances where the educator engaged with children were recorded. For example, on one occasion three children were observed in the outdoor environment playing with musical instruments (tambourine, egg shakers, triangle) that the educator had placed in a box on the verandah (Educator 5: Centre A). The educator approached the children and added to their interest in music by asking if they'd like to sing a song to go along with their music. The educator led them through several nursery rhymes (Miss Polly, Farmer wants a wife) and the children accompanied these with their musical instruments. Educator 5: Centre A assisted children's sense of belonging in this example, through the facilitation of the children's shared interest in music. Additionally, the educators' actions to add to the children's own initiatives and to facilitate the social interaction assisted children's development of relationships.

Employing songs for fun, as a means of creating a sense of belonging, provided the opportunity for children to relate to others in different ways, to be light-hearted, develop comradery and therefore learn that social interactions can be fun as well as serious. Songs were observed being used by educators to create a sense of fun, contributing to children's sense of connectedness and belonging (See Chapter Two Section 2,3). These songs for fun (silly songs) were observed as a means of enhancing relationships among children, as well as between child and educator. Often these silly songs rhymed and made little literal sense, and they included actions. When the educator engaged children in silly songs, children generally requested to sing them repeatedly. Educator 9: Centre A, for example, used a silly song called "shake-a-boom-boom" that involved nonsensical lyrics and the action of shaking their whole bodies. Similarly, Educator 5: Centre A made use of songs for fun during mat session times, including "the animal song" whereby children would make the noise and an action of the animal in the verse.

4.3.2 Wonder.

Educators were observed making use of wonder questions and encouraging children's natural desire to wonder, to promote children's spirituality. Educators facilitated children's wondering when they asked open-ended questions that encouraged children to imagine possibilities and to be creative (See Chapter Two Section 2.2.3). This super-ordinate theme comprised two sub-ordinate themes: posing wonder questions (Section 4.3.2.1), and providing opportunities for children to engage their imagination and creativity (Sections 4.3.2.2).

4.3.2.1 Posing wonder questions.

The use of wonder questions, by educators, although evident in the data, were of a limited nature. In the observed instances contributing to this theme, the focus of

wonder was a text. Educators would begin story time by posing wonder questions for the children to consider. These wonder questions included, for example:

"I wonder who this creature is in the story?" (Educator 9: Centre A)

"I wonder what will happen in the story?" (Educator 8: Centre A)

"I wonder why this is such a special book?...I wonder if you have heard this story before?" (Educator 7: Centre A)

4.4.2.2 Opportunities for imagination and creativity.

The super-ordinate theme *wonder* was further evidenced in observations of educators providing an environment conducive to children using their imagination and creativity. Imaginative and creative opportunities were observed as facilitating children's natural wondering. Educators structured their day to include circumstances that provided the opportunity for children to self-select creative and imaginative activities, regardless of whether these were play-based or educator-directed. Children at all centres had access to materials in their room that encouraged them to create, make, explore and engage as they pleased. Activities observed that the educator directed children to complete, and that provided for children's creativity included: making a diorama style stable for baby Jesus (Educator 7: Centre A); making a Santa mask (Educator 5: Centre A); decorating a Christmas card (Educator 1: Centre B); and writing their name using a range of materials from shaving cream to sand (Educator 3: Centre C). Activities observed, that were offered independent of the educator, included painting; dress-ups; block play and play-dough.

Furthermore, the sub-ordinate theme *opportunities for imagination and creativity,* was evidenced in observations of children engaged in imaginative play scenarios by choice. Although educators had established the space and materials to facilitate imaginative play, children were intrinsically motivated to engage in this type of play; there were no occasions where imaginative dramatic play was observed as

educator directed. Educators rarely interacted with children when they were engaged in imaginative play, other than to call a child away from the play to complete an educator-directed task. On one occasion, illustrated in the following extract, an educator was observed as a participant in the imaginative play scenario, where she contributed to the children's vocab and storyline:

> The educator is called for by a group of children. The children want her to join them under the verandah. They ask the educator to sit down and they begin to wrap a cloth around her and to comb her hair. The educator asks: "Am I at the hairdressers? I love going to the hairdressers". A child responds: "Do you like it?" "It feels lovely, thankyou", the educator says. Another child says: "My turn" and sits to have her hair done by the educator. The educator asks the child: "Would you like a colour or a cut today?" The child doesn't respond. The educator replies: "You can say, yes please or you can say, no thank you— not today". (Educator 1: Centre B)

The following scenario was observed that evidenced an educator facilitating children's creativity and imagination by providing further materials:

> All of the children inside are engaged in a task that they have chosen. Three girls locate the box of musical instruments (tambourine, bells, egg shakers) and enjoy making noise with them along to the music that is playing on a CD. The educator looks over and watches them for a few moments. Without interrupting the girls, she places a box next to the instruments. The box contains a variety of different patterned and textured fabrics. Two of the girls start to use the fabric to dance to the music. The third girl sits down next to the box and begins to sort the fabric into categories. (Educator 6: Centre A)

Educators were observed making use of the outdoor environment as a further context for promoting children's sense of wonder by providing the space and materials for children to choose to engage in their own imaginative and creative play experiences. Outdoor play was a feature in all centres. However, although a common feature, the way that educators facilitated play in the outdoor environment was distinct to each of the centres. In Centres A and C the outdoor environment was used as a free play opportunity. Educators at Centres A and C rarely engaged with children during this time. Children were observed initiating contact with the educator by seeking them out for assistance with social concerns or to request further equipment. During outdoor

play experiences at both of these centres, children could choose to participate in ball play, bike play, sand-pit play, imaginative dramatic play or use climbing equipment. Children could imagine scenarios, create story-lines and invent games as they pleased, moving freely between activities and educators took on a supervisory role.

At Centre B, two distinct outdoor areas existed. One outdoor area consisted of typical play equipment: sand-pit, ball play area and climbing frames. The other was a natural landscape with a vegetable garden; access to water and natural materials had been used to construct pathways. The outdoor environments at Centre B were observed being used similar to the way the indoor environment was used, meaning that tables were set up on the grassed area and under the verandah that facilitated the use of craft materials and play-dough, for example, for children, with which to play. Children could move freely between the two outdoor areas and the indoors, once again facilitating children's use of their imagination and creativity (see Chapter Two Section 2.2.3).

Children at Centre B were observed choosing to create an imaginative scenario whilst playing in the vegetable garden. Educator 1: Centre B was observed adding to the children's imaginative scenario by suggesting materials to assist their storyline:

> Four children are playing in the veggie garden. The veggie garden is large and circular so children are able to walk around it and through it. The children are pretending they are shopping from the herb garden. They are pretending to be 'mums' and they talk with each other about the food they will cook for their children. The educator is watching and approaches the children: "I think you might need a shopping basket". The children pause and look around. "How about one of the buckets from the sandpit" suggests the educator and the children run off to grab a bucket each.

The process of de-bracketing that was undertaken during the analysis phase proved pertinent to the emergent sub-ordinate theme *opportunities for imagination and creativity* as comments were made in the researcher journal relating to the researcher's personal views of the outdoor environments. In Chapter 3 Section 3.7.2.1 an example

from the researcher journal pertaining to the outdoor environment at Centre B was provided whereby the researcher's personal views of the outdoor environments were documented. The researcher re-visited the comments made about Centre B's outdoor environments during analysis, to ensure that these did not influence the way the sub-ordinate theme emerged from the raw data. In this instance, the researcher was careful to present the data on the outdoor environment at each of the centres, as a means of overtly acknowledging, and attempting to limit, any bias.

The sub-ordinate theme, *opportunities for imagination and creativity,* also comprised observations of educators creating moments of suspense that encouraged children to wonder and to imagine possibilities. For example, Educator 7: Centre A employed the strategy of using a Christmas Elf (toy) to encourage friendship within the room, previously explained (see Section 4.3.1.2). Educator 7: Centre A introduced the Elf by initially creating feelings of suspense by placing a box with the Elf hidden inside, on her chair in the morning. As the children arrived and asked her about it, she would respond that it had just 'turned up' and that they would all have a look together when the day started. As the children's curiosity grew, the morning mat session was consumed with their predictions about what was in the box. When a Christmas Elf (toy) was discovered inside the box along with a letter from Santa, the children's imaginings of why they had been chosen and the purpose of the Elf's visit, continued.

In some instances, children's creativity was interrupted by the educators' time constraints or the desire to complete an assessment piece or a product. For example, Educator 9: Centre A called for a child during his play and requested he complete a retell of the story of the birth of Jesus. The child had been previously engaged in block play with two other children and had to be called several times before he was aware that the educator wanted him. When he approached the educator he wanted to share a

story he had created with the blocks: "…It's like a lift, like the one at Ikea, and it holds 35 people..." and before he could continue the educator interjected to explain the task at hand.

4.3.3 Identity.

Educators were observed assisting children's development of their identity, another key characteristic of spirituality (See Chapter Two Section 2.2.2.1), intentionally and incidentally, as a means of promoting their spirituality. Educators within the sample were observed attending to the development of children's sense of identity in a range of ways. The *identity* super-ordinate theme encompassed five subordinate themes: facilitating resilience; self-regulation development; facilitating wellbeing; and encouraging independence. These sub-ordinate themes are elaborated with representative examples from the data in Sections 4.3.3.1 through to Section 4.3.3.4.

4.3.3.1 Facilitating resilience.

Educators encouraging children to respond positively to difficult situations and to persevere despite failure typified the sub-ordinate theme, *facilitating resilience*. *Facilitating resilience* was observed as a practice educators employed that assisted children in becoming self-aware and discovering their selves—who they are and what they are capable of which is shaped by their experiences. In particular, *facilitating resilience* assisted children in discovering their emotional selves and becoming self-aware of what they can overcome when challenged. Such facilitation may have promoted children's sense of identity and contributed to the promotion of their spirituality (See Chapter Two Section 2.2.2.1). The following observation illustrates Educator 9: Centre A encouraging a child to persevere positively, and perhaps, facilitating the child's resilience as a component of his identity:

During the morning mat session the educator asks for a volunteer to complete the 'day of the week' chart. A child volunteers and the educator leads the children through the days of the week song. The educator then asks the child: "What day is it today then?" The child pauses for a time and then provides the wrong response. The child appears uncomfortable and looks to the floor. The educator responds: "That's okay. You can work it out. I wonder if we can help Luke. Let's all sing the song again together". The children sing the song again and this time the educator further prompts the child by reminding him what day it was yesterday. The child responds correctly and the educator encourages the children to give Luke a clap.

Similarly, the following is an example of an educator praising children for their perseverance and subsequent success in completing a task, post the event:

The educator turns her attention to the constructions that have been built during the previous session. The educator mentions that she had seen children working hard to make them and that even though it was a tricky task, they had kept going and now look at what they have created. The educator invites two children that have made a construction to stand with her and to describe their creation to the other children. (Educator 8: Centre A)

Facilitating resilience was also observed when educators praised children for their ability to overcome past events when children chose to spontaneously share events that incurred injury. Educators' responses to scenarios where children had been injured were observed as being focused on how the children managed their emotions in the situation and then praising the children for being 'brave' and not getting upset. For example, the following conversation was observed whereby Educator 2: Centre C encouraged a child's positive response to a situation by complimenting his ability to be brave:

"You know last night my brother got in trouble". "Really, why? What happened Mick? Is that why you have a big scratch on your leg?" "He…he...it hurt…he pushed his bike into my leg" [details of the incident continue] "Oh no! Lucky you are so brave Mr Micky". "Yeah". "You're so tough!" "Yeah, that's what mum said. The child smiles at the educator.

4.3.3.2 Self-regulation development.
Educators were observed explicitly teaching children about ways to manage and express their feelings appropriately, resulting in the emergent sub-ordinate theme *self-regulation development*. On some occasions, educators were observed attending to

children in the moment when they were unable to control their emotions. For example, Educator 3: Centre C, prior to a game of pass-the-parcel with the children, talked about turn taking. She asked them questions such as: "How do we wait for our turn?"… "Do we get upset if it's not my turn?"… "What will we say to the winner?" During another game, musical statues, some children were observed becoming over-excited. Educator 3: Centre C intervened in the moment to assist children's development of self-regulation. The educator bent down to the children and whispered to them, and the children's behaviour settled for a short period.

Assisting children's self-regulation was also observed when educators accommodated the emotional needs of children. These occasions occurred in the moment that children were unable to control their own emotions and incapable of having a conversation about their emotions. For example, the following observation of Educator 5: Centre A illustrates the educator recognising that Tom was not able to have a conversation about his needs to be removed from the buddy activity, in the moment that it was occurring. Rather, the educator accommodated Tom's needs by providing both a safe place for him and resources for him to use, signally to Tom that it was okay for him to stay there:

> The Year Four class have joined the kindergarten class for 'buddy time'. One child (3 years old) hides behind the educator's chair whilst the children are paired up with a buddy. Children from the Year Four class have brought stories with them to read to their Kindergarten buddies. Some children from Year Four try to encourage the child behind the chair to join in with them. The educator intervenes: " That's okay, that's a safe place for Tom and that's where he needs to be right now". Then the educator places a book, some paper and some crayons in close proximity to the child. The child ignores them for a period of time and then takes them and draws and colours for the duration of 'buddy time'.

In the following example, Educator 7: Centre A intervened in the moment that a child could not control his emotions. Educator 7: Centre A provided the child with space and time to calm his emotions and then returned to the child, once calm, to have a

conversation about his behaviour. In the conversation, Educator 7: Centre A scaffolded the child's ability to self-regulate, by enabling him the opportunity to articulate the cause of his outburst:

> The educator is sitting with five children and it is sharing news time. There is a child telling his news and when he finishes he makes a loud grunting noise and begins to cry. "What's wrong?" asks the educator. The child doesn't answer but continues to cry loudly. The educator advises the child that either he can talk about what's wrong or he can go over to the reading corner, sit quietly and have a some think time. The child removes himself. At the conclusion of news time the educator makes her way over to the child who had been upset and asks: "What made you feel upset?" "Are you angry? It's okay to feel angry but you can't take it out on people. Tell me what made you feel angry so that we can fix it for next time". The child responds: "They didn't say 'you're welcome' when I finished my news". The educator responds: "Okay then, we can make sure they're a better audience next time".

Facilitating children's identity development through the sub-ordinate theme of *self-regulation development* was also observed through educators' use of literature. Educators were observed sharing stories with the children during which they would pose questions related to how a character in the story must have felt, therefore assisting children to recognise feelings in others. Educator 7: Centre A, as an example, read a storybook about the birth of Jesus. Throughout the story the educator questioned children with a focus on feelings:

> The educator asks: "How do you think Mary felt?" and "Do you think she felt tired?" A child responds: "Frustrated!" The educator replies: "What a great word! Who can tell me what that word means?"… "Yes—fed up".

4.3.3.3 Facilitating wellbeing.
Wellbeing involves the development of positive dispositions, feelings of happiness and satisfaction all of which contribute to a person's sense of identity (See Chapter Two Section 2.2.2.1). The sub-ordinate theme, *facilitating wellbeing,* emerged from observations of educators focussing on children's happiness and the identification of each child as unique. An example of facilitating wellbeing was observed during a mat session, where Educator 1: Centre B led the children through a song, '*I am*

special'. In the second verse the children turned to a friend to sing '*you are special*

because you're you'.

Educator 5: Centre A was observed explicitly teaching the children about using

compliments, as a means of facilitating a sense of wellbeing:

> On the whiteboard there is a construction of a 'warm fuzzy' and a 'cold prickly' (made with pom poms, sticks and paper). The educator speaks with the whole group about 'warm fuzzies' (giving compliments), as well as 'cold pricklies' (saying mean things) and points to the constructions as visuals, on the board (warm fuzzies are made with soft pom poms and cold pricklies are made with sticks). The educator reminds the children that they should try to say warm fuzzy things to each other. "Why?" asks the educator of the children. The children respond: "Cold pricklies hurt you" and another child responds "Warm fuzzies make you happy".

In addition to educators using explicit teaching strategies to facilitate wellbeing,

educators were observed utilising a range of implicit strategies when engaged with

children. For example, an educator was observed valuing the home language of

children in her room, as a means of facilitating children's wellbeing and contributing to

their sense of identity. Valuing the children's home language signified the educator's

belief that language is integral to the person and the construction of their identity, thus

creating a sense of wellbeing for the child. The following extract of an observation of

Educator 1: Centre B illustrates this:

> Two boys are playing with the monster trucks and speaking to each other in Vietnamese. The educator observes briefly and then approaches the boys and asks, "What game are you two playing?" One boy responds in English, "we're having races". Then the children return to their game and resume speaking in Vietnamese.

The educator in the above observation did not explicitly teach the children about the

value of their home language. However, instead of insisting on the children speaking

English in the room she contributed to their wellbeing by allowing them to continue to

speak in Vietnamese, thus implicitly demonstrating that she valued the home language

of these children.

As part of the sub-ordinate theme, *facilitating wellbeing,* educators were observed encouraging children to share information about their family, or activities they do at home. Encouraging children to make connections between experiences and events at home with those in the centre room facilitated children's sense of social recognition and provided an opportunity for children to share something about themselves; possibly facilitating the development of their identity. On one occasion, three children were observed decorating the Christmas tree in the room. Educator 6: Centre B approached and questioned the children:

"Do you have a Christmas tree at home?" and "What have you decorated it with?"

The children took turns to share what each of their families did to prepare for Christmas and the educator facilitated making comparisons between the children's experiences.

Providing children with opportunities for quiet times and reflection were observed as an additional way that educators facilitated children's wellbeing. Reflective opportunities were observed assisting children's development of satisfaction, promoting feelings of calm as well as the opportunity to become self-aware, thus providing opportunities to facilitate children's wellbeing (See Chapter Two Section 2.2.2.1 and 2.3). Reflective opportunities were presented to children with an attempt to limit external influences and to allow children time to think about their own feelings and actions as well as their relationships with others. Although these opportunities were limited, observations were evident of educators offering children the opportunity for 'rest time' when presenting them with a range of activities to choose from (such as puzzles and play-dough). When reflective times were presented

in this way, it was not conducive to actual quiet as other children were in close

proximity and engaged in interactive, noisy activities. The opportunity for this type of

quiet time was observed, for example, of Educator 3: Centre C and Educator 6: Centre

B. On one occasion a child was observed taking up this 'quiet time' opportunity and

the child sat independently in the space for a period of five minutes (Centre C).

Educator 2: Centre C was observed guiding the children through a relaxation

session where she directed children's thinking toward their family:

> The educator asks the children to find a space to lie down where they won't be touching
> anyone else and to close their eyes. The educator moves some children around to keep
> distance between them. She tells the children they can think about something and
> suggests Christmas or something they like to do with their family. Alternatively children
> are told they can sleep. The educator observes the children, walking between them and
> redirecting several children who do not want to participate.

4.3.3.4 Encouraging independence.

Educators were observed encouraging children to be independent as a means of

facilitating the development of their identity. *Encouraging independence* was typified

by observations of educators facilitating children's development of agency and voice,

as a component of identity (See Chapter Two Section 2.4.3), by encouraging them to

use their initiative. Children's agency and voice was observed through the use of

choice, by educators, as a practice that facilitated children's independence, contributing

to their identity development. At Centre B, educators were observed providing

children with the choice to have morning and afternoon tea. Educator 1: Centre B for

example, invited children to morning tea: "Tommy would you like to have some

morning tea with us?" When a group of children were ready, the children were tasked

with setting the table and organising the eating area, facilitated by the educator.

Additionally, independence was encouraged through the daily routines that

existed within the various rooms. Routines appeared to assist children's independence

as they were able to use their initiative to predict what was to happen next. When

children were able to predict what would happen next they moved onto the next task without prompting from the educator. Given the lateness in the school year that observations were undertaken, routines were established and children were observed as very familiar with these. Children were observed preparing themselves for what they knew was to come. The following observation of Educator 4: Centre C provides an example:

> The educator rings the bell and the children immediately begin to pack away. The educator gives no instructions—the children know what to do. A couple of children, once packed away, go and get their lunch box and hat. The educator has not indicated that it is time for lunch (although it is 12.30). These actions suggest a familiar and established routine for the children. The children begin to line up at the sliding door that leads out to the verandah.

Independence was also observed through educators' practices to develop leadership skills. Educators used various forms of a 'job roster' that supported children taking responsibility in their room. Educator 7: Centre A for example, had developed the positions of '2 Star Leaders' for the day. These '2 Star Leaders' were two children that were chosen by the educator in the morning mat session and were tasked with being the educator's helpers throughout the day.

Furthermore, *encouraging independence* as a sub-ordinate theme was evidenced by observations of educators use of play as a practice. The amount of freedom children had in choosing what to play or how to play was observed as encouraging children to develop independence, with the possibility of contributing to their development of identity. The amount of freedom afforded to children was dependent on the educator. Educators were observed following similar practices within the same centre, and as such variation was found across centres, rather than across educators. At Centre A, play featured throughout the day. However, the play opportunities supported little choice for the child. For example, the following scenario was observed of Educator 7:

"Okay everyone we're off to play". The educator calls children by their group name and then directs them to particular areas in the room to play. These areas involve: the collage table, play-dough table, threading activity, blocks, dramatic corner and an educator table where children will write on a card. "Let's go", says the educator, and the children move off to their areas. Children are able to switch tasks as they wish, but can only select from the activities previously provided.

At Centre B a child-centred approach to play, that facilitated choice, was observed. The free flowing environment at Centre B was conducive to children moving between activities without requiring adult assistance and there were a large number of materials and equipment available to the children. Educators at Centre B were observed facilitating children's choice within play in the following example from the observation of Educator 1:

A couple of children approach the educator and ask for some dress-ups. "Yes, let's go together to get them —come with me", responds the educator. They all go over to the storeroom and the educator passes the children two boxes of dress-ups. "Where will you put them?" asks the educator. "We're going to make super hero capes so we'll put them on the mat".

Educators at Centre C provided both educator-directed experiences that contained little choice, as well as free-choice play opportunities for children. In the morning sessions observed, play was presented in the form of structured educator-directed play-based tasks that incorporated play materials, such as: completing a puzzle and manipulating play-dough into Christmas objects. During afternoon sessions, educators were observed providing a greater variety of materials for children and educators supported children choosing their own play opportunities. Play opportunities during afternoon sessions included the use of: dress-ups, painting, play-dough, blocks, craft, dramatic play and bubble-play.

The de-bracketing process that occurred as a part of the analysis of the observational data provided insight into the sub-ordinate theme *encouraging independence.* De-bracketing involved re-visiting all entries made in the researcher journal, and several notes were made relating to the researcher's personal views on

play. As play emerged as a practice that educators utilised to encourage independence, de-bracketing was pertinent to this sub-ordinate theme. The following is an entry taken during the observation of Educator 8: Centre A:

> I am surprised at the lack of interaction between educator and child during the play opportunities. Perhaps it is not actual verbal interaction that is missing, but there is no 'value-add' to the children's play. The educator is busy doing her task and has not engaged with the children at all. The educator cannot really know what the children are playing.

The de-bracketing process caused the researcher to be reflexive, by recognising personal views and attempting to remove these from the research. In doing so, the iterative process of returning to the evidence that contributed to the emergent theme was undertaken and this process ensured that the views of the researcher did not influence the way that the sub-ordinate theme, *encouraging independence,* emerged. As a safeguard against the influence of bias, the researcher ensured all centres were represented in the findings.

4.3.4 Transcendence.

The *transcendence* super-ordinate theme emerged from observations of educators facilitating discussion about an Ultimate Other, referred to as God, (See Chapter Two Section 2.2.2.4) as well as practices that were particular to the Christian religion, contributing to children's connectedness to God. The following sub-ordinate themes were distinguished in the data: opportunities for prayer (Section 4.3.4.1) and sharing religious stories (Section 4.3.4.2). Although all three centres accepted enrolments from children of a variety of faiths, a Christian religious context was clearly evident in the observational data. Educators were observed explicitly talking with children about Christianity, with no overt mention of Catholicism. As observations were undertaken

in the final two months of the year, the story of the birth of Jesus, God's Son, formed the focus of the super-ordinate theme, *transcendence*.

4.3.4.1 Opportunities for prayer.

Prayer was observed as part of the daily routine, with educators involving children in prayer during morning mat session, prior to lunch and in the last session of the day. The style of prayer, adopted by educators, varied. For example, at times, prayers were observed being recited from memory by the children, sometimes involving actions. At other times, prayers took the form of an echo-pantomime and sometimes prayers were sung.

Discussion of the prayer, by educators, was not observed on any occasion. Educators provided little, if any, introduction to the prayer and no discussion was observed at the conclusion of the prayer. Educators introduced the prayer by simply stating, for example: "Now let's say our prayer" (Educator 5: Centre A). The researcher recognised that these prayers, and their meaning, may be familiar to the children due to the lateness in the school year that observations were taken. However, as observed in the following extract, it was evident that not all children were familiar with the prayer:

> The educator puts her hands together to pray. The children copy and she states: "Let's say our lunch prayer together". Several children do not join in and are speaking with each other. One child says 'Santa' instead of 'God' but the educator does not address this. They finish the prayer with the sign of the cross and the educator directs children to lunch. (Educator 4: Centre C)

4.3.4.2 Sharing religious stories.

Sharing religious stories emerged as a sub-ordinate theme contributing to the super-ordinate theme, *transcendence.* The religious stories observed being shared by educators were variations of the story of the birth of Jesus. In the occasions observed, the source used for the story was a literary text, as opposed to either one of the scripture passages (Mt. 1:18-2:12 or Lk. 2:1-20). On one occasion an educator was

observed *telling* the children the story of the birth of Jesus without a script, but whilst holding a Bible. Prior to telling the story the educator engaged children in the following discussion:

> The educator is sitting on the mat with the whole group. The educator is holding a Bible. The educator asks children: "What's the Bible again? Can someone tell me?" One child responds: "It's a book". The educator goes on to tell the children that it is a book to help us learn about Jesus and that the biggest gift we have ever received is not the presents we get at Christmas time but Jesus—God's Son. (Educator 8: Centre A)

Drama was also observed as a practice facilitated by educators for the sharing of religious stories, in particular, the story of the birth of Jesus. Educators were observed assisting children to act out the story. For example, in some rooms, educators facilitated this informally, whereby children had chosen to re-enact the story of the birth of Jesus during a play experience and educators supported their needs by reminding them of the characters or events (Centre B). In the example provided at Centre B the educator had also facilitated children choosing to re-enact the story of the birth of Jesus by providing costumes and props in the dramatic play space. In other rooms, the re-enactment took a performance style (Centre A). In these performance style observations, educators led the re-enactment, using a self-written script adapted from the biblical accounts, and directed children to their parts.

In addition to this, sharing religious stories was observed occurring incidentally, in response to children's conversation. Educators were observed adding a religious context to conversations with children about Christmas. The following extract presents an example:

> The educator asks the children to turn to a partner to share their ideas about what is needed for a party. A child calls out to the educator: "Are we having a party cos Santa is coming?" The educator calls the child up to her and begins to explain that they are having a party to celebrate the birth of baby Jesus. (Educator 3: Centre C)

Similarly, Educator 1: Centre B was observed adding a religious context in her conversation with a child:

A child approaches the educator to tell her that she has "this thing" at home and every night she is allowed to open one of the little doors on it and she gets a chocolate. The educator proceeds to speak with the child about what they were counting down to—the birth of Jesus. The educator explains the Advent Calendar as a way to help people wait for Jesus.

4.3.5 Summary of findings from the observational data.

The purpose of the observational data was to contribute findings relating to both educators' intended practices as well as the incidental practices that arose in their room. The process of IPA resulted in the emergence of the following super-ordinate themes: relationships; wonder; identity and transcendence. Within these super-ordinate themes, sub-ordinate themes were identified as the practices educators employed to promote children's spiritual development. In addition to the observational findings and interview findings previously presented, the following Section 4.4 provides the findings from the documentary data.

4.4 Findings from the Documentary Data

Documentary data, in the form of planning documentation, were gathered from each of the educators (for a two-week period) in response to research question three (*What practices are educators implementing, intentionally and incidentally, to promote children's spiritual development?).* It was recognised that what occurred in actuality (gathered through observation) may differ from what educators had planned, and therefore these data added a further dimension to understanding educators' practices for promoting children's spirituality. Table 3.4 in Chapter 3 illustrated the number of documents collected, as this varied across the centres. Qualitative content analysis (see Section 3.8.3) was the method of analysis employed to determine both explicit and implicit planning of educators' practices to promote children's spirituality. Qualitative content analysis utilises the term 'category' rather than 'theme' to describe findings

that emerged from the analysis of data (See Chapter Three, Section 3.6.3). Prior to analysis a coding frame was developed using characteristics of children's spirituality identified from the review of literature (see Section 3.8.3 & Figure 3.6). The characteristics from the literature review were illustrated as main categories on the coding frame. Each main category required a description to focus the researcher's analysis (Figure 3.6) and these are referred to as sub-categories. As the form of qualitative content analysis chosen included both inductive and deductive methods (see Figure 3.5) a coding frame was also developed during analysis to illustrate both pre-determined categories and emergent ones. Figure 4.1 illustrates the post-analysis coding frame. In the post-analysis coding frame (Figure 4.1), the sub-categories are presented alongside the main categories for example, *belonging* emerged as a sub-category within the main category of *relationality of others*. Each sub-category includes an example of a practice, planned for by the educator, from the raw data. The examples that emerged are the evidence of the educators' practices to promote children's spiritual development. Appendix H provides one planning document from Educator 3: Centre C to illustrate the way categorisation of the raw data occurred.
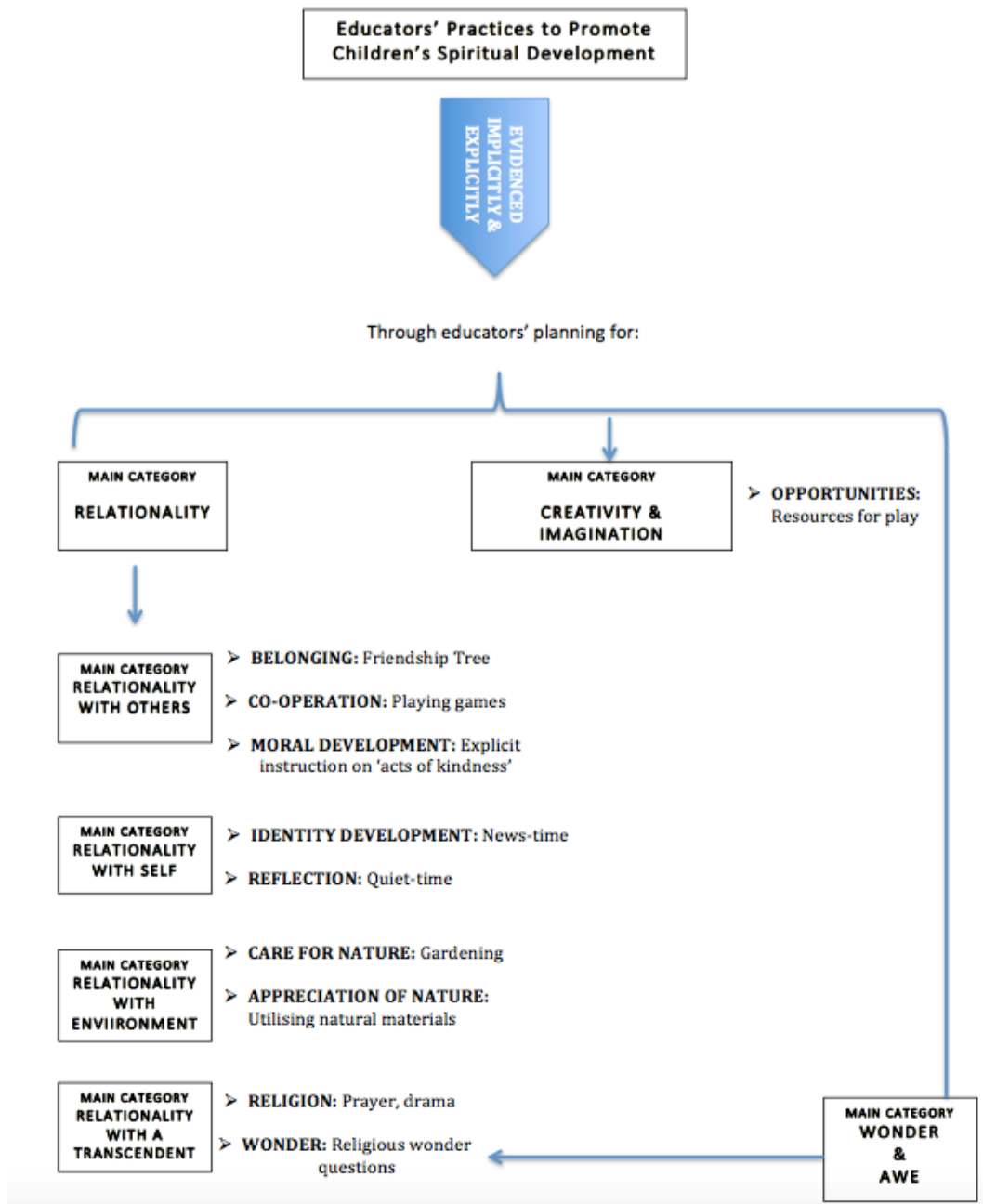
Figure 4.1. Post-analysis coding frame.

In addition to the inclusion of sub-categories and examples from the raw data, the post-analysis coding frame differed from the pre-analysis coding frame in the main category of *wonder and awe*. *Wonder and Awe* was evidenced in educators' planning documents only in a religious sense and therefore was found to be connected to the

main category of *relationality with a transcendent*, as indicated in Figure 4.1 with an arrow.

Findings are presented in this section using the main categories illustrated in the post-analysis coding frame (Figure 4.1). Representative evidence from the raw data is presented as examples of the educators' practices that emerged within these categories. To provide clarity to the presentation of findings from the documentary data, the term 'explicit' is used to indicate when documentation included specific planning for a particular category and 'implicit' is used to describe those practices that implied a category. For example, *co-operation* was explicitly planned for when educators used terms such as 'co-operative skill development' in their documentation. *Co-operation* was implicitly planned for when educators included games in their planning, as these involved co-operative skills, although not explicitly mentioned on the document.

As explained in Section 3.8.3.1, the process of de-bracketing, although not a feature of qualitative content analysis, was undertaken by the researcher to maintain consistency in the research process and to aid reflexivity. Whilst the de-bracketing process did not prove as insightful as it did with the findings from the interview and observational data, the process was adopted to safeguard against bias (based on the presentation and aesthetics of the documentation). To further limit bias, analysis took place over a period of one month, in which time the researcher became comfortable with the variations between document style and initial categories were reviewed.

4.4.1 Relationality with others.

The main category, *relationality with others,* was formed from evidence of educators' planning for relationships; connectedness to others; friendship; creating a sense of belonging; and social skills, as outlined in the category descriptions of the pre-analysis coding frame (see Figure 3.6). The category descriptions, as a feature of qualitative content analysis, were utilised as a tool to focus the process of analysis, but

not limit it. As such, some sub-categories outlined within the descriptions were evidenced and at times, new sub-categories emerged. Evidence of practices from the data within *relationality with others* included the following sub-categories that are elaborated on in Sections 4.4.1.1 to 4.4.1.3: belonging; co-operation; and moral development.

4.4.1.1 Belonging.

Educators planned for opportunities and experiences that contributed to children's *relationality with others* by encouraging a connectedness with others and contributing to children's sense of belonging. Belonging was planned for implicitly with reference made to activities that encouraged a sense of connectedness among the children in the room, for example:

- Creating a friendship tree (Educator 1 & 6: Centre B)[Making a visual display of a tree. Each branch illustrated who children were friends with]

- Transition to pre-primary, meet the teacher and visit the room (Educator 7: Centre A). [As it was near to the end of the school year, transition time was featured in planning. Transition in this sense refers to moving into the following year group to allow children to become familiar with the setting and next years' teacher]

4.4.1.2 Co-operation.

Planning documentation provided evidence of opportunities for children to develop their skills in co-operation. Co-operative activities encouraged children to interact and to be in relationship with each other. Rarely documentation outlined the specific co-operative skill to be focussed on (for example, turn-taking or winning and losing behaviours). Rather, co-operative skills featured in planning documents as:

- Play the game 'paper-scissors-rock' (Educator 3: Centre C) [This is a hand game that is played in pairs and has a set of rules to follow]

- Play the 'Dress the Santa' game in small groups. (Educator 7: Centre A)[This is a paper based game whereby children roll a dice that correlates to an item of clothing that they dress onto their Santa]

- Think-pair-share (Educator 3: Centre C) [This is a co-operative strategy that involves children thinking independently, turning to a partner and then sharing their ideas]

- Mat manners star of the day (Educator 5: Centre A) [One child is selected at the end of the day who has been observed using their manners during the mat sessions for that day]

- Reminder notes about what makes a good listener, such as, "eyes on the person who is talking" (Educator 3: Centre C).

4.4.1.3 Moral development.

Moral development was identified as a sub-category within *relationality with others* as educators planned for explicit teaching on how children's behaviours affected others. Although moral development was not explicitly contained within the category description of the pre-analysis coding frame (Figure 3.6), this sub-category emerged due to its connection to being in relationship with others. Additionally, the explicit nature of educators' planning within this sub-category distinguished it from the previous sub-category *co-operation*. For example, educators planned for facilitating children to make the 'right choice', explicitly teaching children about how to treat others and explicitly teaching children the qualities of a good friend. Documentation included the following as an example of planning for children's moral development:

- Explicit instruction on what constitutes 'acts of kindness' during a mat session (Educators 8 & 9: Centre A)

- Identifying characteristics of a 'good friend' during a mat session

  (Educators 7 & 9: Centre A).

4.4.2 Relationality with self.

Relationality with self was described from the literature as focused on evidence

of educators planning for the construction of the self; identity development;

development of resilience and wellbeing; and the search for meaning in one's life (see

Figure 3.6). Educators' planning for children's development of their own identity

(4.4.2.1) and by providing opportunities for reflection (4.4.2.1) emerged as the sub-

categories from evidence within the documentation.

4.4.2.1 Identity development.

Identity development was evidenced through educators' planning for strategies

that afforded children the opportunity to share information about themselves, for

example:

- 'News time' (Educators 7, 8, 9: Centre A; Educators 1 & 6: Centre B;

  Educator 2: Centre C) [News-time requires one child to speak with either a small

  group or the whole class and to share information that has been prepared on a

  topic]

- Grandparent Focus: ask children to bring in a photo of themselves with

  their Grandparents. Ask children what they like to do with their Grandparents.

  (Educators 1 & 6: Centre B).

Identity development was also implicitly evidenced through the following examples of

planned activities that involved a connection to the self:

- Children practise recognising and writing their name (Educator 3:

  Centre C)

- Discuss what their favourite food is to eat (Educator 3: Centre C)

- Draw a self-portrait (Educator 7: Centre A)

Identity development was further implicitly evidenced through educators' lack of planning for outdoor play experiences, which in turn increased children's ability to choose an activity for themselves. Choice afforded children the opportunity to use initiative, follow an interest and to make decisions, thus offering the possibility to contribute to their development of the self (See Chapter Two Section 2.2.2.1). Planning for outdoor play opportunities generally consisted of a list of equipment or resources provided for the children, with no focussed skill, objective or educator directed task. Such as:

- Obstacle course set up (Educator 5: Centre A)

- Dolls and prams outside (Educator 4: Centre C)

- Variety of balls (Educator 3: Centre C)

- Photos of Australian animals placed in the garden (Educator 3: Centre C)

Children's sense of identity was developed through the autonomy provided to them in the outdoor environment. Educators planned less structured activities or explicit teaching outdoors, instead allowing children choice in this space.

Additionally, educators did not use the term 'identity development' explicitly within their planning documentation. However, some educators indicated on their document that identity development was a focus by referring to Outcome 1 in *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework* (EYLF) (Department for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2009). Outcome 1 states: "Children have a strong sense of identity" (DEEWR, 2009, p. 21).

Outcomes from the *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009), when referred to in documentation, featured as overarching outcomes, relating to the entire document, rather than referenced to specific activities.

4.4.2.2 Reflection.

Opportunities for reflection were evident in some educators' planning documentation and these facilitated children's relationality with the self. The opportunity for children to take time out and to reflect provided children with the opportunity to construct their sense of self and potentially a context for children to develop a sense of meaning and purpose, as outlined in the category description (Figure 3.6). Reflection was a part of the daily routine section in planning documents and immediately followed the lunch break on all occasions. The planning documentation indicated the following:

- Children can choose to sleep, sit quietly, look at a book or complete a puzzle (Educator 5: Centre A)

- Children can move into the next room if they want to rest quietly (Educators 1 & 6: Centre B).

4.4.3 Relationality with the environment.

Relationality with the environment was focussed on planning for children's involvement with nature; nature play; and natural resources, as outlined in the category description developed from the literature (see Figure 3.6). *Relationality with the environment* was evidenced in educators' planning documentation through the inclusion of activities that encouraged children to both care for nature (4.4.3.1) and to appreciate nature (4.4.3.2).

4.4.3.1 Care for nature.

Evidence of the sub-category *care for nature* was centre based, rather than educator based, with educators in the same centre taking a similar approach to planning for opportunities for children to care for nature. For example:

- Clean out the vegetable garden to help the veggies grow; Gather interested children to plant cress; Create a Japanese zen garden with children (Educators 1 & 6: Centre B)

- Talk about how to care for the budgie (bird) (Educator 8: Centre: A)

4.4.3.2 Appreciation of nature.

Appreciation of nature, as a sub-category, emerged from educators' inclusion of natural materials within a variety of activities and this was also found to be centre based. Centre B included the following in their documentation:

- Provide recycled materials for children to freely create in the sandpit

- Provide recycled materials at the collage table

- Collect natural materials outside with children to create an art piece.

4.4.4 Relationality with a transcendent.

The main category *relationality with a transcendent* was described in the category descriptions as focussed on the notion of going beyond the self; relating to God; Jesus; prayer; creator, transcendence; questions about the soul, spirit, heaven; and religious education. The following two sub-categories emerged from the analysis of educators' documentation: religion (4.4.4.1) and wonder (4.4.4.2).

4.4.4.1 Religion.

Religion featured as part of educators' planning most specifically through educators' planning for prayer within their daily routines. Prayer featured in

documentation in the morning, prior to lunch and at the end of the day. The forms of prayer, or words to the prayer, were not included in any documentation. Documentation contained the following references to prayer:

- Transition [in this context 'transition' was used to describe the movement between activities within the room]:

   prayer, wash hands, get lunch boxes (Educator 5: Centre A)

- Morning greeting, class prayer (Educator 3: Centre C)

- Pack bags, shoes on, prayer (Educators 1 & 6: Centre B).

The sub-category of *religion* was also evidenced through educators' planning to share the story of the birth of Jesus. Raising children's religious awareness through sharing the story of the birth of Jesus is outlined in the mandated curriculum document *Let the Little Children Come to Me* (CEWA, 2014). However, on the occasions where educators planned to share religious stories with the children, no links were made to curriculum or to scripture in documentation. For example, the following references emerged in the documentation:

- Talk to children about Jesus as a baby. Relate to God, Mary and Joseph (Educator 5: Centre A)

- Intentional teaching: talk with children about the true meaning of Christmas (Educator 9: Centre A)

- Song: Welcome baby Jesus (Educators 1 & 6: Centre B).

Planning for drama experiences related to the story of the birth of Jesus were consistent within documentation. These experiences were structured, educator-directed re-enactments of the story of Jesus' birth (Educators 8 & 9: Centre A). Planning documents also provided information about 'dress ups' and 'props' that were available

to children in the dramatic corner and that were specifically related to the story of the birth of Jesus. Children could make use of these resources during free play opportunities. The following extracts from documentation are examples of evidence in the sub-category of *religion:*

- Nativity style dress-ups in home-corner (Educator 3: Centre C)[This refers to costumes for retelling the story of the birth of Jesus]

- Dramatic Play: include nativity figurines (Educator 8 & 9: Centre A).

4.4.4.2 Wonder.
The sub-category of *wonder* connected the main category of *wonder and awe* to the main category of *relationality with a transcendent*, as illustrated in Figure 4.1. *Wonder* was focused on planning for the educator modelling wonder; children expressing wonder and awe; and children expressing delight as outlined in the category description (see Figure 3.6). Wonder questions in documentation related to the story of the birth of Jesus, thus connecting *wonder* to *relationality with a transcendent*. Educators explicitly titled questions as 'wonder questions' in their documentation. However, the questions were knowledge and recall based. An example of the questions that featured in documentation as 'wonder questions' included:

- 'I wonder if Mary will find somewhere to have her baby?' And 'I wonder if you know who visits Jesus when he was born' (Educator 9: Centre A)

- 'I wonder what happens next' (Educator 3: Centre C)

- 'I wonder what is in the boxes the Wise Men carry' (Educator 2:Centre C)

- 'I wonder how Mary felt to have a visit from an angel' (Educator 7: Centre A).

4.4.5 Creativity and Imagination

The main category *creativity and imagination* was described within the category description (see Figure 3.6) as comprising activities that encouraged creative expression and the arts; opportunities for children to engage their imagination; imaginative play and dramatic play. Planning for children's *creativity and imagination* was evidenced by educators' inclusion of materials and resources in their documentation for use during play. Educators provided, often as a list, areas and materials indoors and outdoors, that provided the opportunity for children to be creative and imaginative, such as:

- A collage table with craft materials such as glitter, various papers and glue (Educator 3: Centre C; Educator 5: Centre A)

- Paints and drawing materials (Educators 1 & 6: Centre B; Educator 5: Centre A; Educator 9: Centre A; Educator 4: Centre C)

- Dress-ups (Educators 1 & 6: Centre B; Educator 5: Centre A)

- Play-dough with animals and materials for building (Educators 1 & 6: Centre B)

- Dramatic play areas and materials (Educators 1 & 6: Centre B; Educator 5: Centre A; Educator 3: Centre C)

- Construction (such as leggo and blocks) (Educators 7 & 9: Centre A; Educators 1 & 6: Centre C)

4.4.6 Summary of findings from the documentary data.

Findings from the documentary data illustrated that educators provided little in the form of explicit planning for the categories and sub-categories that emerged from the literature. Educators also did not explicitly plan for the promotion of children's

spiritual development, rather, implicit links were evident as they planned for features of spirituality, as outlined on the post-analysis coding frame (Figure 4.1). The planning documents that formed this data set all consisted of broad, suggestive style points as intentions, and as such, detail was limited. The process of qualitative content analysis revealed changes to the pre-analysis coding frame, resulting in the development of the post-analysis coding frame (Figure 4.1) that was used to present the findings. A key finding, resulting from the analysis of documentary data, was that educators' planning documentation did not illustrate educators' understanding of practices to promote children's spiritual development.

4.5. Reflexive Statement

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) challenges the researcher to recognise her own role within the investigation; to interpret the world of another whilst acknowledging that she is also trying to interpret her world. This hermeneutic circle calls on the researcher to set aside preconceptions by consciously identifying bias. This process of being reflexive was a feature throughout both the data collection and data analysis phases of this investigation. This reflexive process was evidenced, where it added deeper insight to the findings, within the chapter. A reflexive statement was included within Chapter Three (see Section 3.11) in an attempt to overtly present the position of the researcher prior to the findings of the investigation. In addition, the processes of bracketing (during the data collection and initial analysis phases) and later de-bracketing (during stage five of the data analysis) were evidenced throughout this chapter, when they were pertinent to the findings. Most significantly, the de-bracketing process afforded the researcher the opportunity to continually revisit assumptions and comments made during data collection and this added to the credibility and conformability of the findings.

4.6 Chapter Conclusion

Chapter Four has presented the findings from this study investigating educators' practices to promote children's spiritual development, aged 3 to 4 years, within Catholic childcare in Western Australia. Three sets of data were collected, and analysed, resulting in the emergence of key themes and categories. The findings presented from the three data sets, namely: interview transcripts; observational records of educators' practices and documentary data in the form of educators' planning documents, provide a comprehensive insight into the life and experience of the educator in promoting children's spirituality. As outlined at the commencement of the chapter, the findings were presented by data set, and in the sequence of the research question to which they respond. In doing so, the findings have illustrated what educators know and understand about children's spirituality (interview), the reality of their daily practice (observations) and what educators' planned for (documentary data). Chapter Five provides a critical discussion of the findings to explicitly respond to the research questions that guided the investigation. In doing so, extant literature is drawn upon.

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this investigation was to understand educators' practices, both intentional and incidental, to promote the spiritual development of children aged 3 to 4 years in Catholic childcare. Spirituality is a complex phenomenon that literature describes as presenting a definitional challenge (Eaude, 2009; Harris, 2007; Tacey, 2004) and, as such, a qualitative approach that afforded a narrative style was most appropriate. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was selected as the specific qualitative approach for this investigation. To comprehensively understand and interpret the experience of the educator, three data gathering strategies were employed: semi-structured interviews with educators; observations of the educators' practices; and collection of documentary data in the form of educators' planning documents. As explicated in Section 3.8 of Chapter Three, each data set was analysed separately. Both interview data and observational data were analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). Documentary data, in the form of educators' planning documentation, were analysed using qualitative content analysis.

Chapter Four: Findings presented the findings from the interview and observational data thematically, as super-ordinate and sub-ordinate themes (see Table 4.1 & Table 4.2). Findings from the qualitative content analysis of the documentary data were presented using a coding frame (see Figure 4.1), consistent with this method of analysis. This chapter seeks to critically discuss the findings to understand educators' practices to promote children's spirituality. In doing so, this chapter is structured around the three research questions that guided this investigation:

Research Question 1:   What do educators understand by the term 'spirituality'?

Research Question 2: What do educators know about promoting children's spiritual

development?

Research Question 3: What practices are educators implementing, intentionally and

incidentally, to promote children's spiritual development?

Following a response to each of the three research questions, paradoxes that emerged

across the data are addressed.

5.2 Key Findings

Figure 5.1 illustrates the key findings in response to each of the three research
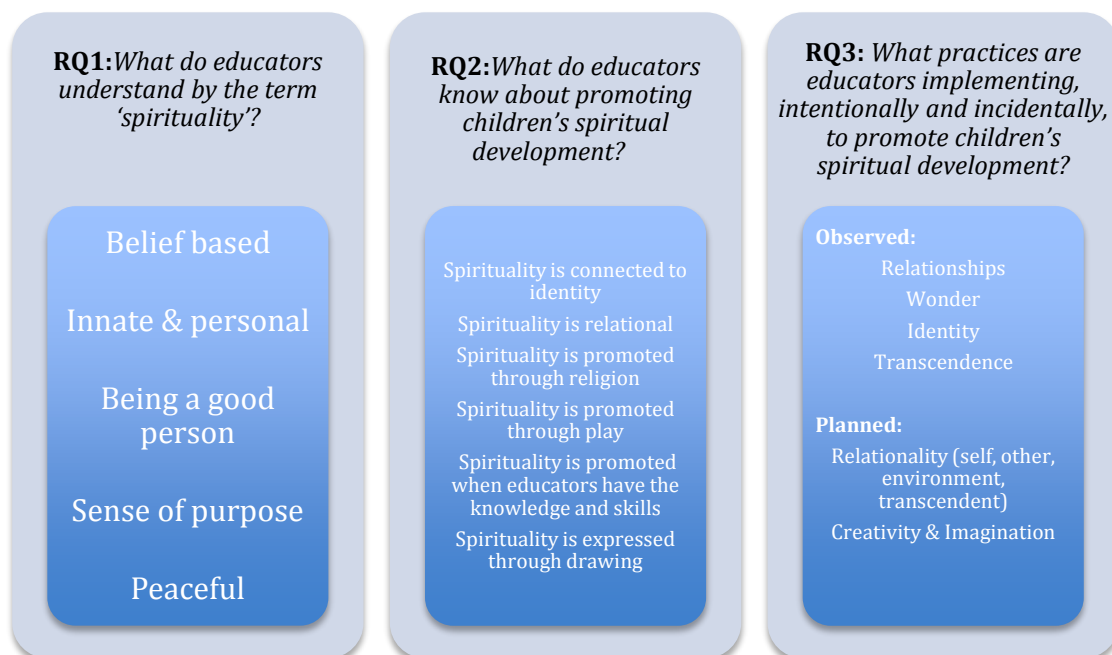
questions.

Figure 5.1. Key findings in response to each of the research questions.

5.2.1 Educators' understandings of the term 'spirituality': Key findings.

Determining what educators themselves understood by the term 'spirituality' was

gathered through semi-structured interviews. The most qualified educator for each

room, referred to as the lead educator, formed the participant sample. The lead educator was either a teacher (holding a four-year university teaching degree) or they were working towards this qualification. In all cases the lead educator held responsibility for the planning, documentation and implementation of the 3 to 4-year-old program. Existing literature suggested that educators must have developed and reflected upon their own sense of spirituality if they are to be able to provide opportunities to nurture the spirituality of the children they teach (Adams, 2009; Champagne, 2001). All educators in this investigation expressed difficulty when asked to describe a spiritual experience and to articulate their understanding of spirituality. Despite prompting for more detail or depth to the responses provided, educators' descriptions of spirituality were limited. The limited nature of educators' responses suggested that they either had not been provided, or sought, opportunities to develop and reflect upon their own spirituality. Toward the end of the interview, educators were asked about the professional development they had undertaken to ascertain any formal opportunities they may have had to reflect on their spirituality. It was clear from the responses provided that spirituality was absent from the professional development undertaken and largely also absent from initial teaching qualifications. Only one educator recalled spirituality as a topic within an undergraduate unit of study. Therefore, educators' understandings of spirituality were a result of the individuals' own personal experiences, rather than as a component of their qualifications. If educators are not provided with formal opportunities to develop and reflect on their own spirituality and additionally, if they themselves do not seek personal opportunities to do so, the task of attending to children's spirituality, as articulated in the literature (Adams, 2009; Champagne, 2001), is a challenging one.

The key findings in response to research question one, as illustrated in Figure 5.1, are focused on the analysis of the second interview question that explicitly asked educators to describe their personal understandings of spirituality. Spirituality was understood by educators to be connected to their own beliefs; perceived as innate and personal; concerned with being a good person; connected to their sense of purpose; and described as peaceful. These key findings are discussed in Section 5.2.1.1 through to 5.2.1.5 by providing insights gained from this investigation and with reference to existing literature.

5.2.1.1 Belief based.

Educators specifically used the word 'beliefs' when attempting to describe spirituality. When provided with the opportunity to elaborate on the basis and nature of these beliefs, educators' articulation illustrated a narrow understanding of spirituality. Educators' responses focussed on belief in God – singular. Although some educators spoke broadly initially, mentioning their belief in 'something more', their elaborations resulted in an explanation of their belief in one God. Consequently, educators demonstrated that their understanding of spirituality was predominantly of a religious nature and, more specifically, that this religious understanding was limited to a Christian religious interpretation.

Educators' understandings of spirituality as connected to religious beliefs, and more specifically Christian religious beliefs, presented several limitations: that, for educators spirituality existed, not in a secular sense, but in a religious sense and second, that this religious sense was not multi-faith, it pertained only to Christianity. Additionally, as the overwhelming response to understanding spirituality related to religious beliefs, no connections were made to cultural beliefs and this emerged as the third limitation within educators' responses.

With regard to the first limitation, educators connected their belief in 'something more' to what literature described as relationality with a transcendent or Ultimate Other (Hay & Nye, 1998; Long, 2000). Although relationality with a transcendent is a characteristic of spirituality found in existing literature, educators' identification of this relationship as the predominant form of spirituality suggests they held a narrow understanding of the range of ways that spirituality can be interpreted. Interestingly, when asked explicitly about the connection or distinction between spirituality and religion, educators agreed that these two concepts were in fact distinct. Although educators emphasised the distinction between spirituality and religion, stating that one could be spiritual and not religious, the analysis of all interview responses revealed that educators were unable to validate this response.

In explaining spirituality as comprising a relationship with a transcendent, educators did not refer to spirituality as a component of religions other than Christianity, leading to the second limitation in educators' understandings of spirituality. Educators all named the Ultimate Other 'God' in their explanation of spirituality being based on beliefs. In doing so, educators illustrated that for them, spirituality was a characteristic of Christian religions. Interestingly, educators acknowledged that belief in God was not confined to a particular religious tradition. However, in the way they described God, educators were illustrating a particularly Christian understanding of spirituality. In articulating one God, educators did not demonstrate any knowledge of spirituality as a characteristic of other world religions. For example, excluded from educators' descriptions of spirituality were Hinduism that believes in many Gods and Buddhism that does not believe in any God or Gods.

Understanding spirituality as connected to their own Christian religious beliefs was further represented when educators recounted a spiritual experience of their own,

in response to the initial interview question. Educators blurred the lines between spirituality and religion by frequently selecting a specifically Christian religious experience when asked to recall a spiritual experience. Educators spoke of experiences of being at Mass in a church, attending Catholic rituals such as a Baptism, praying to God as well as drawing on their religious beliefs during difficult times such as the loss of a family member. It is recognised that providing a Christian religious experience as their chosen spiritual experience could be related to the unique religious context of the centres. The Catholic context of the childcare possibly influenced the responses that educators provided and these can be connected to what Rossiter (2011) articulated as religiosity. Religiosity is described as a spirituality clearly referenced to religious beliefs (Rossiter, 2011). Educators working in the context of Catholic childcare clearly articulated a sense of religiosity, rather than a secular understanding of spirituality.

The third limitation that emerged from educators' articulation of spirituality as based on their Christian religious beliefs was the omitting of cultural understandings of spirituality. In focussing on beliefs from a religious perspective, educators failed to articulate any understanding of spirituality as connected to culture. Indigenous culture, as an example, is described in the literature as having a land-based spirituality (Baskin, 2016). For indigenous cultures, spirituality involves the interconnectedness between life and land (Baskin, 2016) and so in contrast to religious beliefs, spirituality is expressed through the beliefs and traditions of the culture. The work of Skamp (1991) can also be drawn upon when discussing spirituality in a cultural sense. Skamp (1991) describes spirituality as having both a vertical and a horizontal connectedness. The horizontal is a relationship with the environment whilst the vertical connectedness is a sense of relationship to the generations of the past and those of the future and this is a significant relationship particularly for indigenous cultures. Regardless of the presence

of indigenous children within the centres, indigenous culture is central to all Australians and requires both acknowledgement and addressing.

Additionally, *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)* (Department of Education and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2009) outlines 'cultural competence' as one of eight pedagogical practices for early years' educators. To practise cultural competence, educators must "respect multiple cultural ways of knowing, seeing and living, celebrate the benefits of diversity and have an ability to understand and honour differences" (DEEWR, 2009, p. 16). The *EYLF*, as a nationally mandated document, sets out the requirement for educators to understand and communicate with diverse cultures as well as to promote children's cultural competence. To promote children's cultural competence includes nurturing children's cultural backgrounds and making other children aware of diversity. However, cultural competence did not feature within educators' understandings of spirituality.

5.2.1.2 Innate and personal.

Educators identified spirituality as an innately human characteristic. Educators' responses that contributed to this theme were brief with little elaboration provided on this characteristic of spirituality. The identification of spirituality as innate transpired from educators' responses that acknowledged the spiritual capacity alongside other developmental capacities (cognitive, emotional, physical and social). Educators described spirituality as a part of being human, a capacity within everyone, and as a personal attribute.

Acknowledging the spiritual capacity alongside the other developmental domains (cognitive, physical, emotional and social) is present within existing literature. Empirical research, such as the work of Robinson (1983), Coles (1990) and Watson (2000) all emphasise the innateness of spirituality in their investigations. Extensive

scholarly literature also supports this, for example the contributions of Hyde (2010), and Kim and Esquivel (2011). Of significance to the context of this investigation, the innateness of spirituality is explicitly noted in international policy, specifically within Article 17 of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989). More recently at the national level, the *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009) explicitly states that, "children's learning is dynamic, complex and holistic. Physical, social, emotional, personal, spiritual, creative, cognitive and linguistic aspects of learning are all intricately interwoven and interrelated" (DEEWR, 2009, p. 9).

Identifying the spiritual capacity as intrinsic to being human is a notable contribution from the educators in this investigation. However, it is also noteworthy that other than stating it to be so, educators were not able to elaborate on the nature or purpose of the spiritual capacity nor did any educator connect the spiritual capacity with the other developmental domains. As stated in the *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009, p. 9) children's learning and development is holistic with the developmental domains being viewed as interwoven and interrelated. A holistic approach to learning and development, advocated for in the *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009) understands the way that the developmental domains are in relationship. Literature supports holistic approaches in education and there is an abundance of literature that explicates the relationships among the developmental domains (Cameron, 2009; Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2006; Vialle, Lysaght & Verenikina, 2012; Wittmer, Petersen & Puckett, 2013). Specifically, the emotional and social domains of development are described as connected to spiritual development. Literature connects spiritual development with the concepts of identity development, (Garbarino & Bedard, 1996; MacDonald, 2009; Sifers, Warren & Jackson, 2012) positive wellbeing and the development of resilience (Kiesling, Sorell, Montgomery & Colwell, 2006;

Ratcliff & May, 2004; Sifers, Warren & Jackson, 2012). Educators demonstrated little understanding of the connectedness between developmental domains. Specifically, no mention was made of the relationship among the spiritual, social and emotional domains. However, in a subsequent question regarding their beliefs and practices within early childhood, educators did describe their pedagogy as being socially and emotionally focussed. Educators valued attending to the social and emotional development of children, articulating that this is "first and foremost" (Educator 2: Centre C), suggesting that educators understood that attending to children's social and emotional needs would assist their holistic development.

Furthermore, despite agreement that the spiritual capacity was intrinsic to being human, educators were unable to elaborate on this capacity in the same way they did when describing development across the social and emotional capacities of children. Educators mentioned the personal nature of spirituality, commenting that it was central to a person's being. The sense of connection to self, to person's sense of being, is recognised as a relational characteristic of spirituality, detailed by Hay and Nye (1998) as the 'I-Self' relationship. Educators, aside from acknowledging the existence of spirituality as innate and personal, were not able to elaborate further on the components of this 'I-Self' relationship. Elements of the 'I-Self' relationship that included the other developmental domains did arise in response to subsequent interview questions pertaining to research question two, discussed in Section 5.2.2. Responses regarding educators' understandings of spirituality as innate and personal were limited to the acknowledgement that the spiritual was a component of the whole child.

It is necessary to acknowledge that in describing spirituality as part of being human, as innate, educators appeared to demonstrate an understanding of spirituality in

a secular sense, and to therefore go beyond a religious understanding. However, despite educators stating spirituality to be an innately human characteristic, all elaborations that followed contained a strong sense of their own religiosity (a religious spirituality). This insight calls into question whether educators were in fact personally religious or that the religious context of the centres influenced their practices, especially given that not all educators were Catholic (see Chapter One).

5.2.1.3 Being a good person.

It would appear that educators not only understood spirituality in terms of beliefs or characteristics, but also in terms of action. The insight that spirituality encompassed the act of being a good person was clearly evident from educators' responses. Educators moved beyond their previous, more conceptual, understandings of spirituality as an innate human capacity based on beliefs, to explain that a further characteristic of spirituality involved action. When articulating the innateness of spirituality, educators stated that it was central to a person's sense of being. In elaborating on spirituality as concerned with being a good person, educators were articulating spirituality to involve a particular way of being.

Being a good person implies having a values system and is connected to an individual's sense of morality. When spirituality is described in this way, it is concerned with the application of personal beliefs and values; it is the way an individual behaves in relation to others (Watson, 2000). Educators initially responded with broad phrases stating that spirituality involved 'being good' and 'doing good'. When prompted to explain the meaning of these phrases, educators described personal attributes of showing kindness, being generous, sharing, being respectful and accepting people for who they are. For educators, these attributes characterised a particular way of being that was understood as connected to spirituality.

An anecdote, provided by Educator 8: Centre A (Chapter Four, Section 4.2.2.3), illustrates the connection that was made between spirituality and values in action. Educator 8: Centre A chose to recount the anecdote when attempting to explain her own understanding of spirituality. The focus of the recount was the attribute of kindness. Kindness, Educator 8: Centre A explained, had been a focus in her room and at the end of a day she witnessed the independent act of kindness by a child, giving away his stickers to others. In choosing to recount this anecdote as a means of articulating her own understanding of spiritualty highlighted the sense of values she perceived as inherent to spirituality. Educator 8: Centre A clearly valued kindness and viewed this to be connected to spirituality. Furthermore, the educator described her own feelings of pride in observing the child demonstrating kindness to others. The work of Hay and Nye (1998) is pertinent to Educator 8: Centre A's response. Hay and Nye (1998) acknowledged the value component of spirituality specifically in their 'value sensing' category (one of three categories they identified including' awareness sensing' and 'mystery sensing'). One element of the value sensing category refers to an individual's sense of 'goodness' and this category draws attention to the relationality of the individual with others, however the 'other' is defined (other people, environment, God). Essentially, Educator 8: Centre A, whether conscious of it herself or not, was recounting a child engaged in 'value sensing'.

When describing the attributes of being a good person, educators in this study connected these attributes and values with their own religious interpretation of spirituality. Whilst articulating that spirituality involved action, educators described this action as based on the values connected to their religious beliefs. As presented in the findings, Educator 2: Centre C stated, "You know, I generally associate it with being a good person. You have these values behind you that are, well they're gospel

values aren't they. Being respectful, being kind and being a good person." Explicitly mentioning the gospel values as a guide for being a good person highlights two key findings: first, reference to the gospel values illustrates educators' sense of a religious spirituality –religiosity. Second, and again illustrative of the narrow understanding of spirituality shared by educators, this sense of religiosity was referenced specifically to Christianity. Similar to the way educators described both the innateness of spirituality and it connection to beliefs, educators limited their responses to a Christian perspective, offering no elaboration of how being a good person may be connected to other religions or cultures. As educators' responses focused on values connected to the teachings of Jesus, understandings of spirituality failed to acknowledge the existence of morals and values outside of Christianity. It was evident that, for educators, spirituality was not just about being a good person but about being a good Christian person.

Eaude's (2016) contribution to the connection between spirituality and morality can be drawn upon to add to this discussion of 'being a good person' as a characteristic of spirituality. Eaude (2016) considered spirituality as premised on morality or vice versa. Educators identified values as inherent to spirituality but these values went beyond beliefs to involve action. The actions described by educators, such as sharing, being generous, showing kindness and being tolerant of others all align with Eaude's (2016) exploration of duty ethics (what I ought to do) and virtue ethics (how can I live a good life). Eaude's (2016) explanation of both duty and virtue ethics becomes significant later in this chapter when educators' understandings of their practices to promote children's spirituality is explored.

5.2.1.4. Sense of purpose.
It was evident from educators' responses that, for them, spirituality was linked to having a sense of purpose and meaning in life. To have a sense of purpose and

meaning in life involves a quest or search (Adams, 2009; Miller, 2000). A sense of purpose, as a component of spirituality, stirs a person from within to ask fundamental life questions such as, "Who am I?" and "What is my influence?" Educators described spirituality as concerned with knowing who you are and who you want to become.

Describing spirituality as concerned with knowing who you are, suggests educators understood the connection between identity development and spirituality. The construct of identity involves the development of the self, referred to by Hay and Nye (1998) as the 'I-Self' relationship. Relationality with the self is an evolving process where an individual seeks to find answers to questions such as "Who am I?" Educator 1: Centre B described this as including "the sort of person you want to be" indicating that it is not restricted to who a person is at a particular time. Rather, having a sense of purpose also includes a future focus - who they want to become.

Furthermore, Educator 3: Centre C elaborated about spirituality being connected to a person's sense of purpose by providing the example of Nelson Mandela. Educator 3: Centre C spoke of how Nelson Mandela had a strong sense of identity, stating that, "he knows what his main views are and he just knows what he's supposed to be doing and things like that…It's like having your identity, your meaning in life, just having a purpose. Knowing that purpose." It was evident from Educator 3: Centre C's response that spirituality was intrinsically connected to the deepest levels of the self and therefore central to the development of identity.

The theme of identity is closely tied to the concept of belonging. The *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009) explicates belonging as, "knowing where and with whom you belong…Belonging acknowledges children's interdependence with others and the basis of relationships in defining identities" (p. 7). To belong involves the sharing of a person's identity with others and therefore implies a social dimension that goes beyond

the 'I-Self' relationship to include 'I-Other'. When Educator 3: Centre C chose to draw on Nelson Mandela as an example of a spiritual man, one with meaning and purpose, it is possible to view this choice as a result of Nelson Mandela's contribution to humanity, although this was not explicitly stated. The process of an individual finding "their place and purpose in the world" (Adams, 2009, p. 115) is one of meaning-making (Hay & Nye, 1998) that requires an inward search as well as an outward relationship with others.

Relationships are central to the development of identity and to belonging; it is what Hay and Nye (1998) referred to as relational consciousness. The inward relationship of 'I-Self' that facilitates identity development and contributes to a sense of belonging involves a search that is intrinsically connected to an individual's quest for identity and purpose (Eaude, 2009). Educators provided no elaboration that included a sense of relationship with others when describing a sense of purpose as a characteristic of spirituality. The social dimension of having a sense of purpose that includes the impact or influence an individual has on another, is common within literature that addresses this characteristic of spirituality (Adams, 2009; Eaude, 2009). Bradford's (1999) category of 'practical spirituality' specifically addresses this connection between the search for meaning and social commitment. However, educators did not connect having a sense of purpose with relationships or as part of a social dimension. Educators understood having a sense of purpose as a personal characteristic of spirituality.

5.2.1.5. Peaceful.

As a means of articulating what they understood by the term 'spirituality', educators generated a range of descriptive words that focused on how spirituality was experienced, or felt for them personally, and these were suitably portrayed by the theme 'peaceful'. As stated previously, educators had difficulty articulating their own

understanding of spirituality. To overcome this, educators took to describing spirituality in terms of the way it was experienced or felt as connected to the experience they had recollected when asked about a spiritual experience. The educators used the experience they had recollected to assist them in articulating how they understood spirituality.

Educators spoke of spirituality enabling feelings of comfort and a sense of happiness. Being content and feeling relaxed were also described as features of a spiritual experience. The connection between spirituality and happiness resonates with existing literature (Bradford, 1999; Eaude, 2009; Howell, Passmore & Buro, 2013). In particular, this connection is made within Bradford's (1999) category of 'human spirituality'. A 'human spirituality' according to Bradford (1999) is one that meets the needs of the individual at a human level. In this instance, the pursuit of happiness is a component of the individual's humanity concerned with the need to be content and to have a positive sense of wellbeing. The development of a positive sense of wellbeing is further elaborated on in the work of Howell, Passmore and Buro (2013) where happiness is viewed both as a component of the positive development of wellbeing and spirituality. Educators were unable to explicitly articulate the connection between feeling happy (when experiencing something spiritual) and the development of wellbeing. However, Educator 5: Centre A appeared to recognise, at the very least, that spirituality provided the opportunity to develop positive dispositions and feelings of contentment by stating that peace, as a characteristic of spirituality, was the absence of worry and concern.

Many educators recalled a spiritual experience that they described as personal and reflective. In articulating how they felt during these personal and reflective experiences, educators described feeling at peace and content. Often the experience

included quiet moments and some also incorporated music. Literature asserts the connection between reflective moments, which can include music and mediation, as a medium for spiritual connection (Bellous & Csinos, 2009). The descriptions provided by educators further highlighted their understanding of spirituality as personal, emphasising an inward relationship; a relationality of 'I-Self' (Hay & Nye, 1998).

Educators not only described their spiritual experience as peaceful and personal, but many also explained that this personal moment occurred whilst in a community. The community that educators referred to was a Christian religious community. Educators moved from a secular understanding of spirituality (as moments of feeling peaceful) and then continued to provide a particular religious context and understanding of spirituality. Educators provided examples such as attending their child's Baptism and attending Mass in a bush setting. Educators explained how they felt peaceful in these moments that provided a personal, individual experience whilst simultaneously being in community. Educators' elaborations of feeling at peace whilst in a Christian religious community highlighted their own sense of religiosity as well as the understanding of spirituality from a specifically Christian perspective. In addition, the examples provided by educators could further suggest that the Catholic context of the centre influenced their responses.

5.2.1.6. Summary of educators' understandings of spirituality.

A key finding in response to research question one was that educators understood spirituality as referenced to Christianity - a Christian religiosity. It would appear from this finding that there exists a connection between the Catholic context of the childcare centres and the educators' personal understandings of spirituality; the Catholic context of the childcare may have influenced educators in providing Christian religious understandings of spirituality or it could be that these educators were drawn to the Catholic childcare centres because it aligned with their religious beliefs. What is clear

is that educators understood a Christian religious spirituality for them personally. When articulating spirituality to be based on beliefs, innate and personal, about being a good person, connected to a sense of purpose and as a feeling of peace, educators communicated a Christian perspective.

Additionally, a finding emerged regarding the gap that existed in educators' responses. In emphasising a Christian understanding of spirituality, educators provided no elaboration on spirituality in connection to other world religions or that reflected their own cultural competence. The *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009) articulates cultural competence as a pedagogical practice for educators, yet it was evident that educators did not perceive this practice to be connected to spirituality. Although educators' initial interview responses often began in a secular sense, explanations that followed became narrow with spirituality being described from a Christian perspective. In omitting a sense of cultural competence, including religious diversity, from their understandings of spirituality, it is possible to question whether educators viewed all *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009) pedagogical practices through a specifically Christian lens.

Finally, a further finding was the identification of how educators had come to their understanding of spirituality. It was found that the understandings of spirituality that emerged were almost solely based on the educators' own life experiences, as opposed to any formal professional development on the subject. With only one educator recalling the topic of spirituality from an undergraduate unit of study and no professional development opportunities reported, educators had only their life experiences to draw upon. No opportunities for spiritual reflection and development had been provided to them as educators.

5.2.2 What educators know about promoting children's spiritual development: Key findings.

Both interview data and observational data were utilised to respond to research question two. Research question two focussed on determining educators' knowledge about promoting children's spiritual development. Figure 5.2 provides an overview of the super-ordinate themes that resulted from the analysis of both the observational data as well as the interview questions pertinent to this research question (Interview question three: *How do you think children express their spirituality?;* Interview questions four and five analysed collectively: *How do you think children's spirituality can be promoted and nurtured?; What types of opportunities do you think you provide in your room to assist children to develop within the spiritual domain?*).
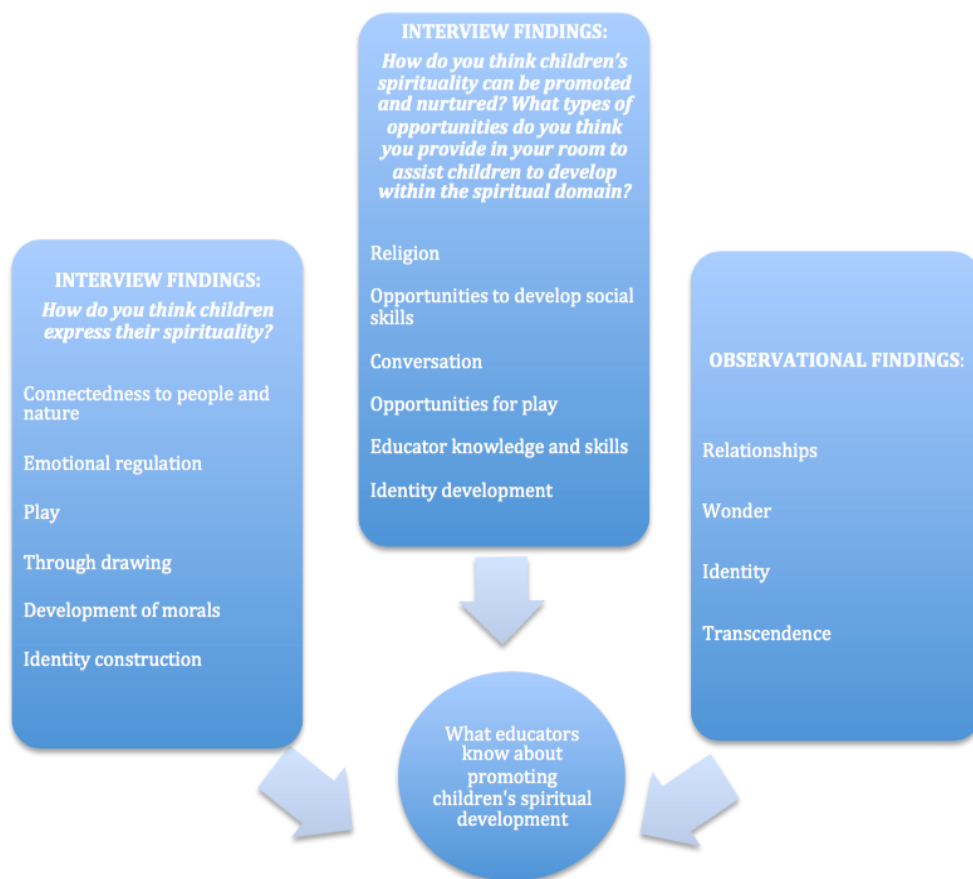
Figure 5.2 Emergent themes from the interview and observational findings in response to research question two.

To facilitate the critical discussion of findings concerning educators' knowledge about promoting children's spirituality, it was necessary to synthesise the themes illustrated in Figure 5.1. Commonalities as well as distinctions emerged from the findings regarding what educators could articulate about promoting children's spirituality and what was observed that educators knew through their actual practices. To synthesise the interview themes, an initial process of identifying similarities occurred, for example, 'identity construction' emerged in the findings from interview question three and 'identity development' emerged from the findings to interview questions four and five. 'Identity' was also an emergent theme from the observational data. As a result, 'spirituality is connected to identity' was formed as the synthesised theme. Figure 5.3 illustrates the process of synthesising the interview themes. The observational themes are presented in Figure 5.3 where they align with the interview themes, that is, where similarities were found. The connections or distinctions between themes from the interview data with themes from the observational data are discussed within each synthesised theme in Sections 5.2.2.1 through 5.2.2.6: spirituality is connected to identity; spirituality is relational; spirituality is promoted through religion; spirituality is promoted through play; spirituality is promoted when educators have the knowledge and skills; and spirituality is expressed through drawing.
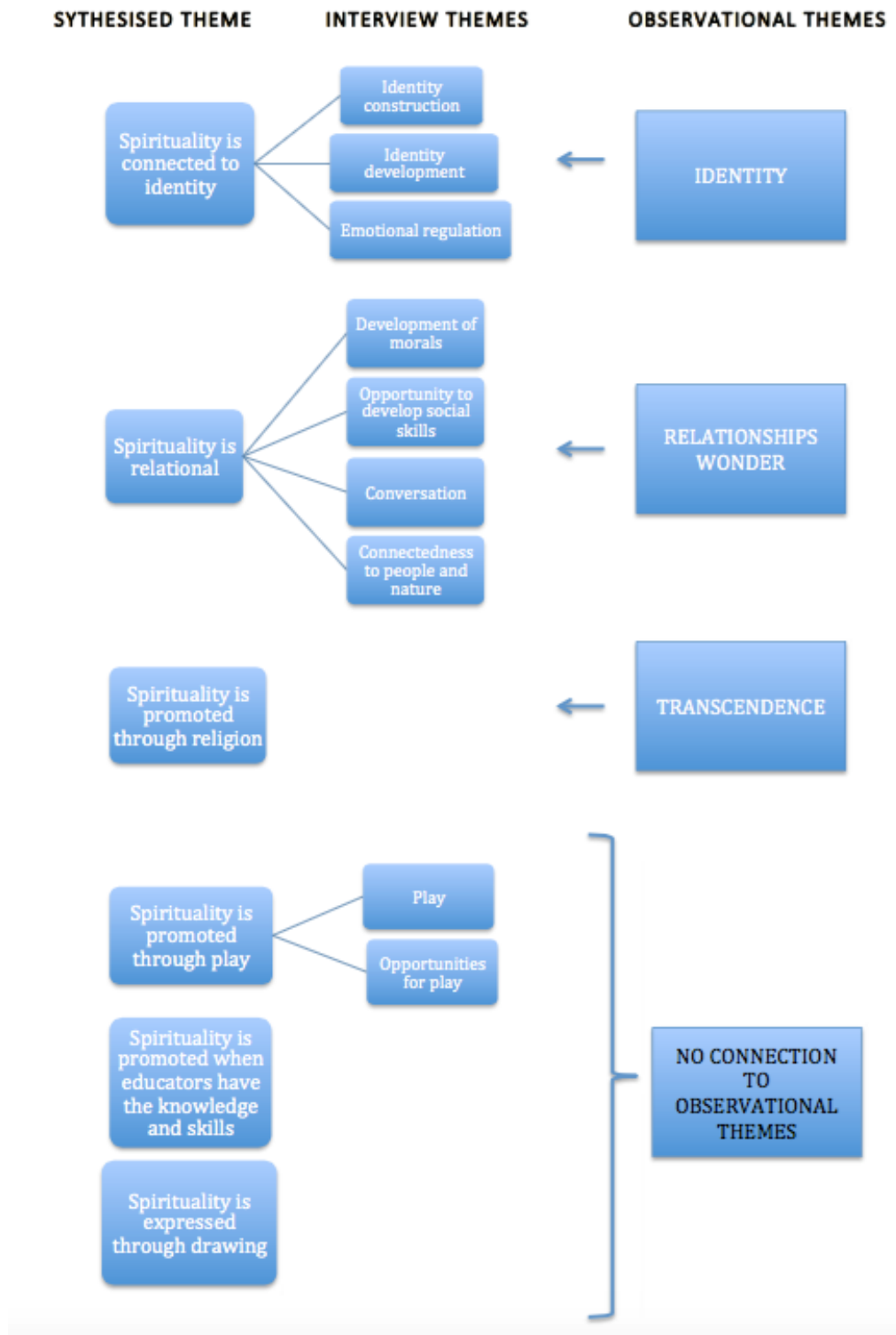
Figure 5.3 Synthesis of interview and observational themes in response to research question two.

5.2.2.1 Spirituality is connected to identity.

'Spirituality is connected to identity' emerged as a key finding across both the interview and observational data. Educators articulated, and were observed in practice, promoting children's sense of identity as a means of promoting their spiritual development. Identity is a broad term, described within the *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009) as concerned with questions such as "'Who I am', 'how I belong' and 'what is my influence?" (p. 20). Children's identity is developed when they perceive themselves to be respected and worthwhile; when they develop secure attachments with others; and as they come to understand their own culture, heritage, gender and contribution to the world (DEEWR, 2009). Essentially, identity is so integral to the person, that it embodies a relationship with the self.

Educators articulated that they understood children expressed their spirituality through their identity. Specifically, educators identified that in facilitating children's positive self-perception and sense of belonging, as components of their identity, they could potentially promote children's spiritual development. In particular, educators spoke of the need to facilitate children's self-awareness and to implement strategies that encouraged children to find out about their heritage. The findings from the interview data resonate with existing literature on spiritual development.

The connection between spiritual development and identity development is well documented in the literature (Garbarino & Bedard, 1996; MacDonald, 2009; Sifers, Warren & Jackson, 2012; Watson, 2000). Spirituality is recognised as having an inward focus (Watson, 2000) that Hay and Nye (1998) describe as an awareness of the 'I-Self' relationship. The 'I-Self' relationship involves an exploration of the self (Adams, 2009) and thus features a quest for identity (Eaude, 2009). Encompassed within literature linking spirituality with identity are the constructs of resilience and wellbeing (Kiesling, Sorell, Montgomery & Colwell, 2006; Ratcliff & May, 2004;

Sifers, Warren & Jackson, 2012) as well as the search for meaning (Benson, Scales, Syvertsen & Roehlkepartain, 2012; Eaude, 2009). Watson's (2000) study, previously mentioned, found that participants described spirituality to be deeply connected to their core or intuitive self. Comparably, educators in this investigation explained the need to facilitate children's development of their inner self, in an attempt to promote children's spiritual development. Educators identified the need for children to develop self-awareness, to understand and manage their own emotions, to understand right from wrong and the consequences of their actions as a means of assisting their identity and therefore for the promotion of spiritual development.

It is particularly noteworthy to draw attention to educators' articulation of children's emotional regulation as a means of expressing their spirituality. Several existing studies pose that spirituality can act as a protective factor against mental illness as children are more able to respond positively to adversity when they have developed a positive sense of self (Sifers, Warren & Jackson, 2012). Educators in this study referred to emotional-regulation as a component of identity that they sought to facilitate. Specifically, educators described facilitating children to solve their own conflicts, manage their own emotions and to respond appropriately to the emotions of others. Although educators did not articulate whether they were aware of spiritual development acting as a protective factor, they were evidently aware that a connection exists between facilitating children's identity and promoting their spirituality.

Observational findings reinforced educators' understandings that children aged 3 to 4 years required opportunities to develop their own identity. Educators were observed attending to children's development of resilience, self-regulation, facilitating their wellbeing and encouraging independence. Facilitating children's resilience and the ability to self-regulate emotions were both articulated and observed as practices

that educators used to promote children's spiritual development. Resilience was facilitated when educators encouraged children to persevere with tasks. Educators were observed facilitating children's ability to self-regulate when they attended to their emotional needs, speaking with children about ways to communicate their feelings and to express them appropriately (see Chapter Four Section 4.3.3).

Educators did not explicitly state the facilitation of wellbeing and independence as responses regarding how children express their spirituality or what they could do to promote this capacity. The observational findings, in contrast, illustrated that educators understood wellbeing and independence to be connected to the development of the child's inner self, and therefore these were viewed as connected to spiritual development. When individuals have a strong self-concept, they are more likely to cope with difficult life events by drawing on their spiritual capacity (Sifers, Warren & Jackson, 2012). When individuals develop a sense of satisfaction or a sense of happiness, wellbeing is promoted (Eaude, 2009).

This was evident, for example, in the practices of Educator 5: Centre A who was observed speaking with children about giving compliments that she termed 'warm fuzzies', and in doing so was facilitating children's wellbeing. Reflection was also observed as a practice that indicated educators' knowledge of how spirituality could be promoted. Reflective opportunities afforded children the opportunity to feel calm, to become more self-aware, to look inward and to reflect on their actions and relationships, and therefore these opportunities assist children's overall sense of wellbeing (Barblett & Maloney, 2010). Similarly, educators encouraged children to be independent, again demonstrating their knowledge of children's need to develop their sense of agency and voice, intrinsic to development of the self. Educators' use of

routine and the provision of choice were observed as promoting children as capable and competent and therefore contributing to their identity development.

Overall, although educators were evidently aware that spirituality and identity were connected, their articulation of this connection lacked detail. Several characteristics of identity development provided by the educators echoed central themes in literature on children's spirituality (Nye, 2009; Sifers, Warren & Jackson, 2012). The inability of educators to add depth to these characteristics (such as wellbeing and the search for meaning), as well as those characteristics that were omitted from the responses (such as deep personal questioning (Miller, 2000)) indicate that educators are, at the very least, unsure of how spirituality can be promoted through children's development of identity.

5.2.2.2 Spirituality is relational.

Educators demonstrated their knowledge of the relational nature of spirituality. When asked how children express their spirituality and how spirituality could be promoted, the 'I-Other' relationship was emphasised. Educators, during the interview, echoed the notion of spirituality being a personal experience that reveals itself in community (Love & Talbot, 1999). Similarly, observations of educators' practices revealed a strong focus on children's relationality with others. Educators' recognition of the relational as a characteristic of spirituality is evident in existing literature (Harris, 2007; Hay & Nye, 1998; Myers, 1997). Although literature identifies several components to relationality (self, other, world, transcendent), educators' most commonly referred to aspects within the theme of relationality were the sense of connectedness amongst children and between children and nature (I-World).

Encompassed within educators' understandings of spirituality as a relational construct was a focus on connectedness with people through conversation. Conversation was clearly valued by educators with several educators' articulating the

provision of time for conversation to occur as well as highlighting the importance of everyday conversation as a means they were aware of to promote children's spiritual development. In acknowledging conversation as an aspect of relationality, educators elaborated on the importance of educators modelling how to engage others in conversation as well as facilitating conversations between children. Further to this, observations of educators' practices illustrated that the facilitation of conversations was utilised by educators as a key practice for the promotion of children's spirituality.

Conversation as an aspect of relationality with others is connected to the understanding in the literature that relationships, both negative and positive, impact children's holistic development (Myers, 1997). Conversation, as a component of relationship, provides for the sharing of ideas, information and experiences – a sharing of the self. The facilitation of social conversations, particularly those that encourage sustained shared thinking, are a recognised essential feature of high-quality early childhood pedagogy (Sylva, Taggart, Siraj-Blatchford, Totsika, Ereky-Stevens, Gilden & Bell, 2007). Everyday conversations offer the potential for spiritual development (Bone, 2005). When educators responded that through the facilitation of conversations they were able to promote children's spirituality, they were touching on the connection between 'I-Self' (identity) and the concept of belonging (Harris, 2007). Conversation as a feature of relationships assists children to feel that they belong to a community, and this is recognised as a component of spirituality (Harris, 2007).

The identification, by educators, of conversation as a component of relationality that can be facilitated to promote children's spirituality is significant. Educators clearly understood that by assisting children to engage in conversation with their peers and educators, they were also assisting children's sense of belonging and attending to their spiritual development. However, whilst identified, little detail was provided regarding

the nature of these conversations, such as the topics of conversation and the particular skills inherent to conversation and how these could be connected to spirituality.

Within the theme of relationality, educators blurred the concepts of morality and social skill development when describing that both were understood, for them, to be avenues for promoting children's spiritual development. Interview findings suggested that educators themselves were unclear of how to separate social skill development from morality. Friendship also emerged as a construct when educators described both concepts. Educators tended to explicitly refer to the provision of opportunities for children to develop their social skills, which then commonly led to an example involving friendship. Educators contributed examples of social skills that they facilitated such as; resolving conflict, facilitating sharing and encouraging children to invite others into play. The 'I-Other' relationship is a sense of connectedness with people that goes beyond the notion of friendships to be concerned with how a person finds their place in the world, in relation to those around them (Myers, 1997). Relationality with other people is much more than having the skills to be in relationship, instead involving a consciousness, or awareness, of *how* the self is in relationship. It is necessary to acknowledge that the development of friendships, and the skills to be in relationship with others, are considered appropriate pedagogical practices given the age of the children in this investigation (3 to 4-year-olds) (DEEWR, 2009). However, at a deeper level, educators were unable to articulate any knowledge of how their facilitation of children's friendships assisted their opportunity to attend to children's spiritual development.

In contrast, morality is understood in the literature as distinct from the concepts of friendship and social skills development. Morality can be described as comprising 'duty ethics' that is, distinguishing right from wrong and 'virtue ethics' that is

concerned with what it means to be 'good' both as an individual and for society (Eaude, 2016). Morality involves reflective thought and action, requiring an iterative process whereby understanding what is moral is reconceptualised as an individual has new experiences (Eaude, 2016). Educators contributed responses regarding children's spirituality that illustrated an understanding primarily focused on 'duty ethics' and this understanding comprised values that blurred with the concepts of friendship and the development of social skills. This could be seen particularly in Educator 2: Centre C's response, "I think more so in the values…you know…being kind to friends." Educator 2: Centre C identified the opportunity to promote children's spirituality through developing values and then connected this to the concept of friendship.

Similarly, other educators included values such as compassion, kindness and respect as components of morality linked to spirituality. For example, Educator 3: Centre C responded that "Being kind to each other, sharing, speaking nicely, respecting others, that sort of thing" were the values that she promoted to attend to children's spiritual development. Findings suggest that educators were able to connect these values to the development of morals, yet morality encompasses so much more. The depth to morality, such as that referred to in 'virtue ethics', was not evident in educators' understandings regarding children's spiritual development. However, when describing their own personal understanding of spirituality, educators referred to 'being a good person', inclusive of both duty and virtue ethics (See Section 5.2.1.3). Specifically, the notion of awareness – a conscious reflection on one's own actions, was not provided in educators' explanations of morality as a means of promoting children's spiritual development. In essence, educators did not possess the language to articulate the dimensions of morality and how, whilst complementary, morality is distinct from the skills of social development and friendship.

Children's moral sensitivity is espoused in Hay and Nye's (2006) category 'value sensing' as describing children's awareness and expression of good and bad. Describing spirituality in connection to morality acknowledges the relational dimension (Hyde, 2008) as an individual outwardly expresses their understanding of what is right and what is good. 'Value sensing', as a category to describe children's spirituality, is concerned with moral dilemmas of right and wrong, and includes the quest for ultimate meaning (Hyde, 2008). Although educators did not specifically mention children's ability to respond to moral dilemmas within the concept of morality, the anecdotes used by educators suggested their awareness of this connection. In particular, Educator 8: Centre A retold an observation where she had witnessed a child demonstrating kindness to others by making a choice to share their stickers. This anecdote was discussed in Section 5.2.1.3 as an illustration of the educators' personal understanding of spirituality as concerned with being a good person. Additionally, this same anecdote illustrates Educator 8: Centre A's interpretation that this act of kindness, by the child, was a right or 'good' choice, suggesting that spirituality was connected to morality. Educator 8: Centre A was able to more easily articulate her own understanding of spirituality by describing it in relation to promoting children's spiritual development.

Educators moved beyond the 'I-Other' relational aspect of spirituality, when the 'other' is a person, to include relationality with the natural environment. An awareness that the natural environment provided an opportunity to promote children's spiritual development was clearly evident in the findings. However, similarly to the before mentioned aspects of relationality, educators experienced difficulty finding the language to explain this connection, providing little depth to their responses. Educators demonstrated an understanding that children enjoyed experiencing a connection with

the natural world, which literature asserts can "ultimately lead to increased happiness and well-being" (Howell, Passmore & Buro, 2013, p. 1683). Educator 5: Centre A relayed the following observation in an attempt to describe her knowledge of the way children express spirituality:

> Children express it in many different ways. Something that we do often, actually, is go out into the senior school playground and we've got these beautiful big trees there and the children call the one tree the Grandpa Tree and they go out and hug it and feel the rough bark and will lie down under his branches and look up. And I probably refer to the tree as a 'he' as well so that the children have evolved from that their idea of the Grandpa Tree. They really love it and it's very special to them to be able to go out to it. So I think that's one way that children show their spirituality.

There are several insights to be gained from Educator 5: Centre A's response. First, the response illustrates her knowledge of the 'I-World' aspect of relationality as a characteristic of spirituality. The sense of connection between an individual and the natural environment is acknowledged in existing literature that asserts sensitivity to nature as central to spirituality (Louv, 2012). In regards to children's spirituality, the work of Harris (2016) can be drawn upon. Harris (2016) identifies that the provision of "enriching outdoor space that offers opportunities to experience nature" (p. 91) is a means of nurturing children's spiritual awareness. Children are drawn to the sensory experience that the natural environment offers (Harris, 2016). Educator 5: Centre A's response indicates an understanding of the need to provide time for children to be engaged with the physicality of nature as a practice for promoting spiritual development.

Secondly, the naming of the tree is significant. The personification of the tree, in particular the selection of 'Grandpa' further emphasises the relational aspect of spirituality. Intergenerational relationships are identified as important to spirituality (Harris, 2016; Powell, 2009). The relationship between child and grandparent is often described as a nurturing, caring relationship where children are afforded the opportunity to experience an appreciation for the past (Daleo, 1996; Harris, 2016). Whether the naming of the tree was initiated by the educator or the children, the educators' facilitation of the name 'Grandpa Tree' suggests an understanding of children's desire to feel connected to nature, as a means of expressing their spirituality.

Educator 5: Centre A, whilst describing relationality with nature as a component of children's spiritual development, illustrated a further key understanding – the role of wonder within spirituality. Wonder is the basis of spirituality (Fuller, 2006; Wolf, 1996). Following her account of the Grandpa Tree, Educator 5: Centre A was probed regarding why the children may have liked the tree. Educator 5: Centre A added, "With children, it's a sense of wonder and awe for sure…It really is wonder-*full*." The experience of wonder directed at nature is a recurring theme in literature. Nature offers the opportunity for curiosity, joy and fun, facilitating imaginative play and inquiry (Harris, 2016). Wonder is relational in that it causes an individual to go beyond the perspective of the self to 'wonder' about new possibilities (Fuller, 2006; Harris, 2016). Essentially, a sense of connectedness to nature opens an individual to an appreciation of the natural beauty of creation (Harris, 2016). Children are described as natural 'wonder-ers', with an innate desire to engage with the surprises and joys of nature (Harris, 2016) as was evident in Educator 5: Centre A's response.

It is worth noting that although educators' explanations overall were brief regarding their knowledge of the connection with nature as a characteristic of

spirituality, relationality with the natural environment did feature within educators' own recollections of a spiritual moment. Educators themselves associated moments in nature, such as being close to the ocean or in a bush setting with a spiritual experience. Paradoxically, nature featured more prominently in educators' own experiences of spirituality than in their responses regarding children's spirituality.

To summarise, three key findings emerged within educators' identification that children's spirituality is relational. First, findings clearly illustrated that the language of spirituality was beyond the scope of educators' discourses. Educators were able to identify but not explain or describe what they knew about promoting children's spiritual development. Observational data illustrated that educators engaged children in relational practices that provided an opportunity for spiritual development to occur. However, it is also necessary to consider that relational practices during observation may have been based on early years' pedagogical practices rather than from a spirituality perspective. The practices adopted by educators that emerged from the observational findings are discussed in Section 5.2.3.

The second key finding pertains to educators' limited knowledge on the relationship between child and nature as a characteristic of spirituality. The awareness that a connection to the natural environment is somehow related to spirituality was evident, although not explained. In addition, educators placed more emphasis on the 'I-World' relationship for their own spirituality in comparison to their knowledge of children's spiritual development.

Finally, the connection to wonder as a characteristic of spirituality, linked particularly to relationality with nature, was limited. Children's enchantment with the natural environment and the sensory opportunities it afforded were recognised as offering an opportunity for spiritual development. However, these explanations

illustrated a limited understanding of the foundational role of wonder within children's spiritual development.

5.2.2.3 Spirituality is promoted through religion.

Educators articulated that children's spirituality could be promoted through religion. The connection between spirituality and religion was a theme evident throughout the findings. Educators' own understandings of spirituality (see Section 5.2.1) suggested a clear sense of religiosity, whereby spirituality was perceived from a religious perspective. This understanding of a religious spirituality resonated with educators' beliefs about how children's spirituality could be promoted and additionally, was reflective of their practice (see Section 5.2.3).

Educators described a range of religious beliefs and practices that they deemed promoted children's spirituality. Educators explained that they promoted children's spirituality when they spoke about God and when they made children aware of God's creation. Religious practices were identified more specifically, with educators naming prayer as a practice that engaged children's spirituality. In addition, educators identified sharing bible stories, going to church and undertaking the practice of saying 'God bless you' as practices for promoting spirituality.

The distinct, yet complementary, relationship between spirituality and religion was a difficult construct for educators to articulate. Although educators were able to name specific religious beliefs and practices that could be engaged to promote children's spirituality, the characteristics of spirituality that these beliefs and practices related to were not explained. Several limitations within educators' identification of religion as a means to promote children's spirituality were therefore evident. The first of these limitations lies within the identification of religion itself. Educators were unable to describe the characteristics of religion that enabled it to promote children's spirituality. The connection itself resonates with existing literature, where relationality

between 'I-God' is recognised as a feature of spirituality alongside 'I-Self', 'I-Other' and 'I-World' (Hay & Nye, 2006). Omitted from educators' responses was the understanding that the 'I-God' relationship is manifest in the sense of going beyond – beyond the self, the other and the world, to the transcendent (Scheindlin, 1999; Scott, 2003). Essentially, the connection to an 'Ultimate Other' as a relationship that transcends the experience of the 'here and now' was not overtly acknowledged by educators, suggesting that, for them, spirituality was understood to be promoted primarily through specific religious beliefs and practices.

Through educators' explanations of religious beliefs and practices that could promote children's spirituality, a second limitation in their understandings emerged. It would appear that educators had a limited understanding of the existence of spirituality as a human capacity that can be drawn upon to raise religious awareness. Rather, educators' responses suggested that religious beliefs and practices existed initially and could be used to raise spiritual awareness. This distinction is significant as, if educators premise spiritual development on religion, critical characteristics of spirituality are omitted. In particular, by premising spiritual development on religion, a key component of spirituality is overlooked – wonder. Wonder is espoused as the basis of spirituality and is described in the work of Hay and Nye (2006). Hay and Nye (2006) use the term 'Mystery sensing' to describe one of their three categories of spiritual sensitivity. 'Mystery sensing' describes children's sense of fascination, wonder, awe and mystery that can open a relationship with a transcendent (Hay & Nye, 2006). Wonder is referred to in the literature as a reaching out in response to the world (Ratcliff & May, 2004) that facilitates the 'I-God' relationship as an individual seeks to go beyond the self. Goodliff's (2013) empirical work with infants highlights the transcendent nature of wonder, stating that wonder involves "moments of care and

compassion, inner-reflection, transcendence and the meaning-making of identity" (p. 1067). The use of wonder as a characteristic of spirituality was not referred to in educators' responses when describing that religion was a means of promoting children's spirituality and this is viewed as a limitation within educators' knowledge.

The third limitation within educators' identification of religion as a means for promoting children's spirituality emerged from their understanding of religiosity from a specifically Christian perspective. As with their own personal understanding of spirituality, educators spoke of Christian (and some more specifically Catholic) beliefs and practices as the means they adopted to promote children's spirituality. Several educators acknowledged the presence of non-Catholics in their rooms, although this acknowledgement did not influence their responses to include other world religions. The lack of attention given to other religions presents an understanding that spirituality belongs to Christian faiths, when this is not the case. Spirituality is a universal human capacity (Baumgartner & Buchanan, 2010; Hyde, 2010) that exists separate from religion (van der Zee & Tirri, 2009; Tacey, 2000). Hodder (2007) proposes that spirituality must be unlocked from religion, it must be un-tethered to religion (Alexander & McLaughlin, 2003) to enable communication amongst varying cultures and religions. However, Hodder (2007) also acknowledges the challenge inherent in distinguishing between spirituality and religion when both are very individualised, personal constructs.

Furthermore, educators in Catholic schools are challenged to acknowledge the religious diversity present amongst the children in their rooms. *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988, para. 6) specifically addresses non-Catholics in the context of Catholic schools, outlining that educators have a responsibility to ensure the religious freedom of

individuals and to respect their beliefs and practices. Educators in this investigation were in no way disrespectful of religious diversity, though they were unable to articulate an acknowledgement nor an understanding of how spirituality could be promoted from a diverse religious perspective.

Interestingly, when asked explicitly, educators described that spirituality could exist autonomously from religion, although this was overshadowed by their descriptions of their own personal spirituality from a religious perspective and similarly, through their explanations of how to promote children's spirituality. However, literature asserts that there does exist an interconnectedness between spirituality and religion; they overlap, but do not coincide (Ostow, 2006). Commonly, literature emphasises that it is through the spiritual capacity that a transcendent relationship can develop, and thus religious affiliations can be formed - spirituality is the starting point (Bone, 2008; Bussing, Foller-Mancini, Gidley & Heusser, 2010). Educators' responses revealed that when it came to understanding religion as a means for promoting children's spirituality, they were limited either by their own sense of a Catholic religiosity or by the Catholic context of the centre. Additionally, in focusing on religion as a basis for spirituality, rather than vice versa, characteristics of spirituality that could be drawn upon to raise religious awareness were not explored.

5.2.2.4 Spirituality is promoted through play.

Implicit in educators' responses was a belief in play as the primary pedagogical practice for children aged 3 to 4 years. Unlike the previously explored themes, findings that contributed to the theme 'spirituality is promoted through play' emerged solely from the interview data, as opposed to including findings from the observation data (See Figure 5.3). Play is described as being at the heart of early childhood education and care (Colliver & Fleer, 2016) and as such, is advocated for as a fundamental pedagogical approach in the early years (DEEWR, 2009). Findings were indicative that

educators' valued play as a practice within their rooms and consequently identified play as a practice for promoting children's spiritual development.

Educators' knowledge of play, both as a pedagogical practice in early childhood as well as in relation specifically to spirituality, appeared to be simplistic. This was apparent in the lack of detail that educators were able to provide when articulating how play was implemented as a practice in their room, and in attempting to connect this to children's spirituality. As with previously mentioned responses, educators demonstrated insufficient language to be able to effectively explain their practice. The level of specificity offered in regards to play was the contribution of the term 'play-based' as the leading approach to describe their practice.

A play-based approach within early childhood refers to the inclusion of play within an intentionally planned and directed educational program (DEEWR, 2009). A play-based approach upholds the characteristics of play, namely: freedom of choice, play as an intrinsically motivating task, and a focus on process rather than product (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2010). Educators, when asked to describe their beliefs and practices within early childhood, identified that a play-based approach best encapsulated their current pedagogy. When questioned on play as a means to promote children's spirituality and to therefore make the connection between their 'play-based' pedagogical approach and play as a practice for spiritual development, educators offered specific types of play: dramatic play and sensory play. Although not articulated by the educators, both dramatic play and sensory play engage with children's sense of imagination, creativity and encourage inquiry. The *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009) that underpins early childhood practice explains that a play-based approach is viewed as providing a context for children's learning that facilitates curiosity and creativity and which leads to a strong sense of wellbeing. Although not explicit within educators'

responses, their focus on a play-based approach indicates some understanding of its importance for children's learning and development.

Educators' specific naming of dramatic play and sensory play in relation to promoting children's spirituality also resonates with literature that maintains the relationality of spirituality (Hay & Nye, 2006). Play can be viewed as a means for experiencing a sense of connectedness with self, others, nature and a transcendent. Through dramatic play children are afforded the opportunity to promote many of the characteristics of spirituality identified in the literature; to take on the role of another and therefore explore their own identity – 'I-Self' (Garbarino & Bedard, 1996; MacDonald, 2009; Sifers, Warren & Jackson, 2012); to be creative and use their imagination – 'I-Self' (Harris, 2013); and to develop cooperative skills and explore morality – 'I-Self' and 'I-Other' (Eaude, 2016). Through sensory play, characteristics of spirituality are also acknowledged; an individual engages their imagination and creativity – 'I-Self' (Harris, 2013; ter Avest & McDougall, 2014). Sensory play also offers the opportunity to experience wonder and delight (Ng, 2012) which can be directed at the natural environment (Schein, 2013) – 'I-World'. This can lead to a sense of mystery and transcendence – 'I-God' (Hay & Nye, 1998).

Educators' contribution of 'play' as a practice they understood could promote children's spirituality, aligns with literature on contemporary perspectives of the child. Contemporary perspectives, as outlined in Chapter Two (Section 2.4), conceptualise the child as capable and confident, possessing agency and voice (Leffdahl & Hagglund, 2006; Sevon, 2015; Walton, 2015). Contemporary perspectives value children's right to be active in decision making processes and encourage independence as a component of children's identity development (Duff, 2012). The *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009) also promotes this view of the child, advocating that children are active learners

with the capability to both initiate and lead their own learning. Educators' emphasis on choice as a feature of children's play in their rooms resonates with contemporary perspectives of the child. This was particularly apparent in Educators 6: Centre B's explanation of how play was implemented as a practice in her room:

> The children get to choose what area of play they want to go to, or they can ask an educator and we can set something up for them. It's all free play, so they do what they want to do – it's teaching them to make decisions, make a choice…

Existing literature specifically addresses the role of the educator in facilitating children's play to promote spiritual development. *Spirituality in the Early Years* (Catholic Education Office Rockhampton, 2012) explicates the role of educators to awaken and nurture children's spirituality through the provision and facilitation of opportunities that support learning through play, in particular, the inclusion of experiences that engage children's creativity, imagination and sense of wonder. Although educators did not possess the language to articulate the characteristics of spirituality that could be developed through play, it is appropriate to summate that the contribution of dramatic and sensory play, as specific play types connected to spirituality, indicates an understanding of some of these characteristics inherent in play experiences.

5.2.2.5 Spirituality is promoted when educators have the knowledge and skills.

Educators demonstrated a sense of self-awareness when explicating practices to promote children's spiritual development. Educators were able to self-identify that their own understandings of spirituality and consequently their knowledge and skills for promoting children's spirituality, were limited. In particular, educators expressed confusion between the concepts of spirituality and religion, and recognised that both knowledge and skills were required to enable the promotion of children's spirituality.

Educators' own sense of a specifically Christian religiosity emerged as they explained their need for a greater understanding of knowledge and skills associated with promoting children's spirituality. Specifically, educators referred to gaining background knowledge to the bible stories they shared with the children. Educator 2: Centre C response illustrates this and additionally demonstrates her limited Christian religious knowledge that she had connected to spirituality. Educator 2: Centre C explained her need to learn specific Christian religious vocabulary such as the name for "the little table with a bible", known as the prayer table. The confusion between spirituality and religion was explicitly mentioned by Educator 5: Centre A who expressed her caution to be spiritual or religious so as not to impose her own views on the children, particularly those that were non-Catholic.

The role of the educator in nurturing and promoting children's spiritual development is apparent in literature that espouses the need for children to be presented with examples and guidance to awaken their spirituality (King, 2013). The spirituality of the child must be nurtured or it will be lost (Crompton, 1998). Therefore, when every child is viewed as having the potentiality for spirituality (Hay & Nye, 1998) and educators are tasked with attending to the holistic development of children (DEEWR, 2009), educators have a critical role to play (Harris, 2013). However, attending to children's spirituality, "demands a level of education…that is anchored in cultural awareness and formation" (Sagberg, 2008, p. 366). Findings illustrated that educators drew upon their knowledge and skills regarding early childhood pedagogical practices to articulate what they did know about children's spirituality. Educators connected with the practice of flexibility by way of facilitating children's ability to follow their interests and choose for themselves to explore, discover or sit quietly.

Educators explained that they were aware that taking a flexible approach in their room could promote children's spiritual development.

It is not unreasonable that educators turned to their understandings of early childhood pedagogical practices to attempt to explain the knowledge and skills required for promoting children's spirituality. Educators explained that no professional development had been offered or sought by them in the area of spirituality or more specifically, children's spirituality. Educators' professional development was largely focussed on early years' practice, particularly play, and within the topic of the Catholic religion. Only one educator made reference to the document, *Let the Little Children Come to M*e (Catholic Education Western Australia [CEWA], 2014) that aimed to assist educators in raising religious awareness prior to compulsory schooling (under five years of age), although no elaboration was provided on how this document connected with spirituality. With no formal learning in spirituality undertaken by educators, it is also not surprising that educators did not articulate spirituality as an essential component of the child's holistic development (Sagberg, 2008) or as a feature of the education curriculum (Zhang, 2012).

The findings that emerged regarding educators' identification that knowledge and skills are required to meet the task of promoting children's spiritual development brought with it several challenges. If educators' understandings of children's spirituality is confined to a Christian religious perspective and their knowledge of this Christian religion is itself minimal, the task of promoting children's spirituality in a way that is inclusive of children from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds appears beyond their scope. Additionally, and of greater concern, is the finding that educators possessed limited knowledge and few skills, that they could articulate, regarding the promotion of children's spirituality. When the role of the educator is

deemed pivotal to spirituality, this requires addressing. It is too great a challenge to expect educators to attend to children's spirituality, as a component of their holistic development (as required in the *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009) document), when educators lack the knowledge and skills to firstly recognise spiritual moments in the lives of the children in their room, and to also provide opportunities to promote their spiritual development.

5.2.2.6 Spirituality is promoted through drawing.

Drawing was explicitly referred to, by educators, as a practice for promoting children's spiritual development and this theme emerged solely from the interview data (see Figure 5.3). Rather than taking a broader creative arts view, educators focused specifically on the activity of drawing as an opportunity they could offer children to promote spiritual development.

Drawing, as a component of the creative arts, is a recurring theme in the literature (Coholic, 2010; Farrelly-Hansen, 2001). As detailed by Adams (2009), children can be described as having multiple spiritual voices; the creative arts can be one of these voices. Similarly, Harris (2013) espouses that the very nature of spirituality is expressive and creative. The creative arts provide the opportunity for imagination and creativity to be expressed, and this can also lead to a sense of wonder (Goodliff, 2013; Coles, 1990). Furthermore, drawing is specifically referenced in the literature as a form of the creative arts that offers both an expressive outlet and a therapeutic experience (Farrelly-Hansen, 2001; Section 2.3).

It is noteworthy to draw attention to educators' specific isolation of drawing as a practice for promoting children's spiritual development. As stated, educators did not include a broader creative arts perspective when describing drawing as a practice. Neither did educators include drawing when they responded that play, and in particular dramatic and sensory play, afforded opportunities for spiritual development (see

Section 5.2.2.4). The isolation of drawing suggests educators' awareness of the characteristics of spirituality particular to the activity of drawing that are different to those embedded within creative arts activities that are generally collaborative in nature. Drawing is commonly an independent, personal activity, connecting it to the 'I-Self' sense of relationality described by Hay and Nye (2006).

Hay and Nye's (2006) relational consciousness was touched on by Educator 5: Centre A. Educator 5: Centre A described observing a child engaged in drawing, recalling the sense of enjoyment the child was experiencing during the activity. Educator 5: Centre A described the child's fascination with the colours and ability to be completely engaged in the activity. The recollection by Educator 5: Centre A aligns with Hay and Nye's (2006) category of spiritual sensitivity: 'awareness sensing'. Hay and Nye (1998) explicated this category as the ability of the child to be in the here and now, attune to aesthetic experiences with a sense of flow and focus and these aspects were inherent within Educator 5: Centre A's response.

Overall, educators were able to name drawing as a practice that afforded children the opportunity for spiritual development, although they were unable to align this activity with characteristics of spirituality. Educators' responses suggest a lack of depth to their understanding of children's spirituality and once again, perhaps also the language to effectively articulate what they do know. Importantly, educators' responses did demonstrate that they can name practices which hold the potential for spiritual development as detailed in existing literature.

5.2.2.7 Summary of educators' knowledge about promoting children's spiritual development.

To summarise, educators were able to articulate very little about practices that could be used to promote children's spiritual development. Interestingly, educators provided responses that connected to children's sense of relationship and

connectedness, their identity, religion, the use of play and drawing as a pedagogical practice, as well as the need for educators to be knowledgeable and skilled - all of which resonate with literature on children's spirituality. Absent from educators' responses was the ability to explicitly connect their response to characteristics of children's spirituality and this resonates with the notion that there exists a distinction between content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge explored in Chapter Two, Section 2.4.4. Consequently, a key insight in response to this research question is that, despite receiving no formal education on the concept, educators do know something about children's spirituality, suggesting that their own personal experiences of spirituality have provided this knowledge. However, they do not possess the language and depth to be able to effectively articulate this understanding and additionally, to be able to connect spirituality as a potentiality within all children, and a capacity requiring attention, with their understanding of early years' pedagogical practice.

5.2.3 Educators' practices to promote children's spiritual development: Key findings.

Research question three sought to investigate both the intentional and incidental practices educators employed to promote children's spiritual development. As such, both observational findings as well as documentary data informed the response to research question three. Observational findings presented the actuality of educators' practices, providing both intentional practices and the emergence of incidental practices. Documentary data presented findings specifically on the practices educators had intentionally planned to implement. In this section, the observational findings and findings from the documentary data are critically discussed. The emergent themes from the observation data frame this section, namely: relationships, wonder, identity and transcendence. Following this, additional insights from the documentary data are

explored, during which the connections between the 'planned' and the 'actual' are discussed.

5.2.3.1 Relationships.

The relational nature of spirituality emphasised by educators in the interview findings was reflected in their practices. Observational findings illustrated a focus on relationships as a central component of educators' pedagogy, with practices observed that facilitated children's development of the 'I-Other' relationship. Literature describes relationality as the essence of spirituality (De Souza, 2016). It is through the relational capacity of the person that an individual can experience and express their sense of connectedness (De Souza, 2016).

Conversation, as a pedagogical practice, was observed as a component of relationality, facilitating children's spiritual development. Interestingly, educators identified conversation as a response in the interview, although the practice itself was observed as limited. Educators were observed encouraging children to share their interests with others, and the use of 'News-Time' was a common routine observed to facilitate this process. As previously discussed, conversations that facilitate sustained shared thinking are a recognised feature of high-quality early childhood contexts (Sylva, Taggart, Siraj-Blatchford, Totsika, Ereky-Stevens, Gilden & Bell, 2007). Despite educators' identification of conversation as a key practice for the promotion of children's spiritual development, and the use of 'News-Time' for children to share something of themselves with others, a key finding that emerged was that the facilitation of sustained, high-quality conversation throughout the day was a limitation within educators' practices. Educators' conversations with children, or facilitation of conversations amongst children, were commonly in the form of asking knowledge and comprehension based questions that educators themselves already knew the answers to. Educators' identification of conversation as a practice as well as their observed

practice to facilitate extend and deepen children's conversation indicates that educators lacked the knowledge and skills to effectively engage children in high-quality conversations, and it is these conversations that are most valuable to children's developing sense of relationality. High quality conversations go beyond the level of knowledge and comprehension, to require the educator to intentionally scaffold, provoke and extend children's insights (Grajczonek, 2013). Furthermore, it is noteworthy to mention that observational findings revealed that many instances of conversation were child, rather than educator, initiated. Children appeared to have a natural inclination to engage in conversation with educators and other children. Children's natural inclination to engage with those around them reflects Hay and Nye's (1998) understanding of relational consciousness; a perceptiveness and relatedness to other people (p. 113).

A further limitation was identified within educators' practices in regards to the use of conversation to promote children's spiritual development. Conversation, as a theme within relationality, and a practice observed as frequently initiated by the child, presented several opportunities that were missed by educators. For example, routines in each of the rooms observed that afforded the opportunity to engage children in sustained conversation were not taken. Children were observed in all rooms eating their lunch in small groups with an educator. This prime opportunity for conversation with children consisted of low level questioning such as, "is that an apple you've got there?" (Educator 4: Centre C) when the opportunity existed for sustained conversation both *with* and *between* children. As an example, the opportunity existed for educators to scaffold children's conversation about likes and dislikes of foods.

Conversation, as a practice, is closely connected to the notion of belonging, which was also observed as being facilitated by educators. In encouraging children to

engage with others and to share something of themselves with others, educators were in turn promoting a sense of belonging amongst children. Harris (2007) explains that peer-relationships play an important role in assisting children to feel that they belong to a community, as a component of spirituality. When educators were observed encouraging children to connect with each other, they were attending to children's sense of belonging as a relational construct.

The integration of music and songs throughout the day was also observed as a practice for facilitating a sense of belonging. Creating an atmosphere of belonging through creative arts (such as music) is identified in existing literature (Mata, 2006). Educators employed songs that encouraged active participation and interaction amongst children, such as Educator 5: Centre A's use of the 'Hello, how are you?' song (See Chapter Four Section 4.3.1.3). Songs also contributed to children's understanding of how to be in relationship with others by providing insight into the ways that social interactions could be fun, rather than serious. Music is described as being transformative, allowing an individual to connect with their sense of self as well as to a group (Nortje & van der Merwe, 2016). Bellous and Csinos (2009) articulate music as a practice that affords spiritual expression, and this was observed in educators' practices. Educators' use of music to facilitate a sense of belonging resonates with the *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009). The *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009, p.7) emphasises children's need to express themselves and to feel accepted for who they are, which leads to a sense of belonging - an integral component of human existence and one that is "a vital factor for the well-being and positive growth of most humans" (De Souza, 2016, p. 32).

The facilitation of friendships also emerged within the findings from the relationality theme of the observational data. As with conversation, the facilitation of

friendship was identified during the interview and was also observed in practice. Explicit instruction on both the characteristics and behaviours of a 'friend' were observed being taught by educators. In addition, educators were observed implementing games that would facilitate children's developing sense of friendship. Educator 3: Centre C, for example, was observed explicitly teaching children how to play a game of pass-the-parcel and then facilitating the children in playing the game. Educator 3: Centre C made comments such as: "We are all friends and so we are happy for our friend if they win a prize" and "Friends wait for their turn, they know how to share". Educator 3: Centre C focused on the development of children's social skills in connection to developing friendships. The attention given by educators toward children's development of social skills and friendship as a component of children's connectedness with each other is developmentally appropriate for this age group (3-4-year-olds) (DEEWR, 2009). In connection to children's spiritual development, Yust (2003, p. 149) supports the implementation of practices that meet the needs of children in the developmental stage in which they reside, rather than imposing adult ways of understanding and expressing spirituality.

Essentially, educators' practices illustrating a focus on the relational nature of spirituality resulted in three key findings: First, conversation was observed as a practice that educators employed to promote children's spirituality and although articulated by educators in interview findings, this was a practice that lacked depth, extension and intentionality. Secondly, educators focused on the facilitation of children's sense of belonging through the explicit teaching of friendship and through employing music and songs to encourage positive interactions amongst children. Finally, the relational aspect of spirituality observed in practice neglected the 'I-World'

relationship evident in educators' own articulation of ways to promote children's spirituality, and prominent theme in existing literature (Harris, 2016; Louv, 2012).

5.2.3.2 Wonder.

Educators were observed facilitating wonder as a practice to promote children's spiritual development. Wonder featured in two ways; through educators posing wonder questions and through the provision of opportunities that encouraged children's creativity and imagination. During the interviews, educators demonstrated a narrow understanding of wonder, providing little depth to how wonder was connected to spirituality. Similarly, educators' practices to facilitate wonder were of a limited nature. In particular, educators' use of wonder questions to engage children in the process of wondering were restricted to literature based questions, such as Educator 8: Centre A's question when reading a text aloud to children, "I wonder what will happen in the story".

Wonder featured more predominantly as a practice in connection with opportunities that facilitated creativity and imagination, as opposed to the posing of wonder questions. Fostering children's creativity and imagination were observed as practices that facilitated the experience of wonder and thus promoted children's spiritual development. Childhood wonder is described as a powerful form of spiritual expression that "shapes the way a child sees and understands the world...core of his or her spiritual identity…" (Hart, 2003, p. 53). Largely, the educators' construction of the environment determined the opportunities children were afforded to engage in creative and imaginative play and activities. In the rooms observed, the indoor environments promoted choice and freedom. Children were observed being able to self-select activities to play and engage with. Additionally, materials were available to children that encouraged exploration, creativity and the use of their imagination (See Chapter

Four Section 4.4.2.2). The activities and play opportunities available to the children were a mix of educator-directed tasks and play-based tasks. Interestingly, children were observed engaging in imaginative play, creating imaginative scenarios, by choice – children were intrinsically motivated to engage in imaginative play. Educators' construction of the indoor environment in such a way as to facilitate children's creative and imaginative capacities is viewed as a strength in their practice. Harris (2013) outlines the crucial role of the educator in providing environments that foster creativity and likewise, Scheindlin (1999) suggests that educators must create the conditions within which spiritual moments might occur. Similarly, English, Fenwick and Parsons (2003) articulate that "environments that promote spirituality through learning are characterized by flexibility, creativity, newness, engagement [and] reflectiveness…" (p. 124). Educators' use of the environment to afford children opportunities to be creative and imaginative were observed as characterising these conditions.

Whilst educators provided the conditions for spirituality to be promoted through the construction of the indoor environment, a limitation in practice during these play opportunities also emerged. Children were afforded spaces and materials that encouraged their creative and imaginative capacities. However, during children's play, educators were mostly absent. Findings from the observational data illustrated few instances whereby educators were observed engaging with children during their play. Educators were observed rarely interacting with children during their play, and most commonly, interaction involved interrupting the play to remove a child for assessment purposes. Educators were observed calling children away from their play to participate in one-to-one assessment tasks which subsequently not only removed the child from the play (and the opportunity for the child to be engaged in sustained thinking) but also inhibited the role of the educator as facilitator and observer of play. Literature

recognises that children learn best when they are afforded social opportunities; opportunities to be actively engaged, in particular through play; and when their imagination and creativity are stimulated (Grajczonek, 2013). Additionally, literature also identifies that educators are under increasing pressure to assess (Yoon, 2015) and it was evident that this pressure impacted educators' ability to observe and value-add to children's play.

The outdoor environment was observed as a space educators used to encourage children's creativity and imagination, thus promoting the experience of wonder. Essentially, creativity and imagination were fostered in the outdoors through the provision of space and choice, as opposed to any formal facilitation by the educator. During the interviews, educators identified the role of nature in fostering wonder and this was reflected in the unstructured format educators provided in the outdoor environment. As with the indoor play observed, during the outdoor play sessions educators were also absent from children's play, taking on a supervisory role. Educators were observed as available to the children, to assist with the provision of equipment or to mediate conflict. Few instances of educators value-adding to children's play were observed (see Chapter Four Section 4.4.2.2), suggesting that educators may require further development in this area.

Combining the current investigation with previous research further emphasises the need to develop educators' understandings of how to facilitate children's sense of wonder as a characteristic of spiritual development. Coles (1990) explained that children have a natural inclination to wonder that allows spirituality to be expressed and this includes reflection, questioning and using one's imagination (Ng, 2012). Wonder and creativity, as a means of spiritual expression, are the stepping stones toward spiritual development (ter Avest & McDougall, 2014). With literature

emphasising the critical period of early childhood for spiritual expression (Goodliff, 2013) and with the recognition that children's natural spiritual capacity requires awakening in childhood to allow it to flourish (King, 2013), early years' educators must be knowledgeable about spirituality and have the skills to effectively awaken children's spirituality (Champagne, 2001).

5.2.3.3 Identity.

Educators were observed implementing practices within the following themes that connected to the development of children's identity: facilitating resilience, self-regulation development, facilitating wellbeing and encouraging independence. Educators were observed engaging in a range of intentional practices as well as taking incidental opportunities to facilitate children's development of a positive sense of identity, and this emerged as a key insight in response to research question three. Identity, as a component of spirituality was a recurring theme in the findings and was explored in the previous Section 5.2.1.4. The interview data illustrated that educators understood the connection between the development of identity and the promotion of children's spiritual development. Little depth to this connection was articulated during the interview and whilst the intention driving educators' practices relating to identity cannot be assumed, it was evident that the facilitation of children's sense of identity, and therefore also their spirituality, was a priority for educators.

Practices that facilitated children's development of resilience were observed being undertaken by educators as a component of identity development. Resilience, as discussed in Section 5.2.2.1, was facilitated when educators encouraged children to persevere positively in the midst of challenging situations and this was also observed when educators praised children for their perseverance post an event. Resilience, as a component of identity, is reflected in the literature on spirituality, specifically in relation to the 'I-Self' relationship described in the work of Hay and Nye (1998). The

'I-Self' relationship is centrally concerned with questions such as *'Who am I?'* and develops into an understanding of what an individual can overcome when challenged. Essentially, the development of resilience is tied to the development of the emotional self in constructing one's identity, leading an individual into a search for meaning and purpose in life (Benson, Scales, Syvertsen & Roehlkepartain, 2012). The development of resilience as part of the "inner realm" (Watson, 2000, p. 95) of an individual connects with literature on the shadow side of spirituality. As explored in Chapter Two (Section 2.2.3.1), spirituality is commonly articulated from a positive viewpoint. However, characteristics of spirituality, such as despair, disenchantment, anger and hurt, which can lead to disconnectedness, also exist. De Souza (2016) suggests that if the less desirable characteristics of spirituality are ignored, the resulting behaviours include irrationality and anger. Educators must therefore, attend to these less desirable characteristics of spirituality (De Souza, 2016) in order to draw on the more positive characteristics of spirituality. This drawing on the positive characteristics of spirituality was apparent in the observational findings. Educators were observed, for example, recognising moments when children's sense of doubt emerged and as a response, educators promoted the more positive characteristic of resilience. Educator 9: Centre A was observed engaging in this particular practice as she promoted perseverance and an attitude of resilience when a child was doubtful of the correct response to provide (see Section 4.3.3.1). Educator 9: Centre A demonstrated the ability to identify characteristics and behaviours of the shadow side of spirituality and to use the incidental moment that occurred as an opportunity to facilitate the more positive characteristic of resilience.

The facilitation of children's development of self-regulation was a further component of identity facilitated by educators, and which promoted spiritual

development. Literature on spirituality asserts that a strong sense of self is required if individuals are to flourish in their relationships with others (De Souza, 2016). Within the 'I-Self' relationship resides the ability to manage the emotional self, that is, to self-regulate emotions as they arise and to control the behaviours that can manifest because of these emotions. Both explicit teaching and incidental opportunities were observed being taken by educators to assist children in their capacity for self-regulation. A focus on the development of children's capacity to self-regulate their emotions is appropriate for this age group (3 to 4-year-olds) and this exists as a prominent theme within the mandated *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009). The *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009) articulates the requirement for children to "demonstrate an increasing capacity for self-regulation" (p. 22) and to be able to "express emotions…constructively" (p.24). Additionally, the *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009) addresses the role of the educator, tasking educators with being actively engaged in children's emotions (p. 45). As with previous observational findings, the intention of the focus on self-regulation cannot be assumed. However, educators' explicit mention of children's ability to control their emotions as a component of identity and a means for promoting children's spiritual development during the interviews suggests that the connection was not only understood by educators, but practiced.

A further key insight emerged in relation to educators' identification of less desirable characteristics of spirituality as a means to facilitate children's capacity to self-regulate and thus promoting spirituality. The promotion of the positive characteristics of spirituality, through recognising and addressing more adverse characteristics of spirituality is a discourse gaining prominence within the literature (Adams, 2009; De Souza, 2016; Kiesling, Sorrell, Montgomery & Colwell, 2006). This practice was evident for example, in an observation taken of Educator 7: Centre A

during and after a 'News-Time' session (see Chapter Four Section 4.3.3.2). Educator 7: Centre A returned to speak with a child after 'News-Time' who had displayed anger and frustration after sharing their news with a small group. The educator recognised the incidental moment that had emerged as an opportunity to speak with the child about expressing their emotions constructively, rather than through anger and frustration. Explicitly talking with children about their emotions, as did Educator 7: Centre A, supports children's sense of self-awareness which is connected to their spiritual capacity (De Souza, 2016), which also facilitates understanding of their feelings and how these can be effectively communicated to others. Attention to children's emotions and thereby the construction of their identity resonates within Nye and Hay's (2006) category of spiritual sensitivity termed 'value sensing'.

Essentially, educators' practices to develop children's capacity to self-regulate suggests that educators understood the important role of emotional development within the construct of identity. Furthermore, practices observed support educators' articulation of their own understanding that, through facilitating children's self-regulation, they are promoting children's spiritual development.

The concept of wellbeing, as a component of identity, is closely connected to the previously discussed concepts of self-regulation and resilience. The development of a strong sense of wellbeing is facilitated by the ability to manage emotions and behaviours constructively. The development of positive dispositions, feelings of happiness and satisfaction all contribute to an individual's wellbeing, and therefore, their construction of identity. In relation to spirituality, literature asserts that spirituality can act as a protective factor due to its connection with the development of a positive self-concept and sense of self (Sifers, Warren & Jackson, 2012) as well as to the intrinsic search for meaning and purpose in life (Benson, Scales, Syvertsen &

Roehlkepartain, 2012; Eaude, 2009). The spiritual capacity of an individual is drawn

upon in difficult times. Literature refers to the painful and difficult emotions that are

experienced by individuals as components of the shadow side of spirituality (De Souza,

2016) outlined in Chapter Two (Section 2.2.3.1). When individuals have nurtured their

spiritual capacity through the development of a strong sense of wellbeing, adversity

can be managed more positively.

Educators were observed engaging in practices that contributed to children's own

sense of wellbeing, and therefore, promoting children's spiritual development.

Specifically, educators focussed on promoting children's intrinsic sense of happiness

by promoting the uniqueness of each child. This was evident, for example, in Educator

1: Centre B's use of the 'I am special song'. Educator 5: Centre A was observed

explicitly teaching the children about how to give compliments and how someone else

might feel receiving one. Educator 5: Centre A called these compliments 'warm

fuzzies' and children were encouraged to say 'warm fuzzies' to each other. The

educator then went on to describe 'cold pricklies' as saying mean things to others.

A further practice observed contributing to children's sense of wellbeing was the

valuing of children's home language. Educator 1: Centre B was observed

demonstrating an understanding of how language is integral to an individual's identity

by responding in an affirming manner to two children who were conversing in

Vietnamese. Educator 1: Centre B's actions suggest an understanding of the need to

facilitate children's developing sense of identity by supporting their wellbeing.

Engaging in practices that promoted children's sense of wellbeing supports the notion

that educators attended to the shadow side of spirituality (see Section 5.2.3.3; Chapter

Two Section 2.2.3.1). Attending to the shadow side of spirituality is recognition of the

need to support children in dealing with difficult situation and emotions (De Souza, 2016).

The use of time and space for reflective purposes was an additional practice observed that afforded children the opportunity to develop a strong sense of wellbeing. Mata (2014) describes that the provision of time for reflection is a means for promoting spirituality by contributing to an individual's sense of wellbeing. Similarly, Ng's (2012) research with children concluded that educators must facilitate children's spirituality by providing opportunities for "silence, meaning, questioning…focusing, reflection, use of one's imagination..." (p. 183). Although educators provided the opportunity for reflection, these were limited. Opportunities that were observed being made available to children, were not explicitly encouraged by educators. A paradox subsequently emerged between educators' own understandings and recollections of spirituality, and the practices they implemented to promote children's spirituality. Educators conveyed a strong sense of the role of reflection within their own spiritual experiences. Reflective opportunities were emphasised by educators as a central way in which spirituality was experienced. The disjunction between educators' own understandings and the practices they implemented to promote children's spirituality emerged as a key insight.

The facilitation of children's identity as a means for promoting their spiritual development, was also observed occurring when educators encouraged children's independence. The *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009) advocates for a contemporary view of childhood, one that moves away from the 'universal child' toward the perspective that children are competent, capable and with agency, thus providing for the development of children's independence as a component of their identity (Duff, 2012). Findings illustrated that educators employed several practices to encourage children's

independence. Educators facilitated children's independence by: encouraging initiative through the use of routines that provided predictability for children; implementing job rosters that afforded children the opportunity to take responsibility for the tasks in their room; and by offering choice within the daily routines, such as inviting children to have morning tea when they were hungry rather than at set times.

The use of play as a practice to facilitate children's independence as a component of their identity development was observed in all centres. However, the way in which play opportunities were offered differed across the centres and therefore, the affordance of independence also differed. When children are viewed as active learners (MacLachlan, Fleer & Edwards, 2013), then play is considered a process that recognises children's intrinsic motivations and supports choice (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2010). Educators at Centre B were observed providing children with a range of play-based opportunities within the indoor and outdoor environments that were offered for children to choose to engage with. In contrast, the practices surrounding the implementation of play at other centres suggest a less contemporary understanding of the child, as children were grouped and directed to play in specific areas of the room (Educator 7: Centre A). The *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009) advocates for play that makes use of the learning environment to encourage independence and to foster the development of the 'whole child'. Educators' practices provided a key insight into the variations that currently exist in understandings of play, and additionally, illustrate a limited understanding of how play can contribute to children's growing sense of independence and identity. Furthermore, as play emerged as a recurring theme across the interview data, being explicitly identified as a practice for both the expression and promotion of spirituality, it is interesting that the actuality of play was so varied across the centres.

5.2.3.4 Transcendence.

Educators' practices reflected their own understandings of spirituality provided during the interviews in relation to the theme of transcendence. Reference to a transcendent is evident in existing literatures' discourse on the 'I-Other' relationship. Specifically, literature describes a sense of going beyond the self (Scott, 2003) to seek connectedness with a divine presence (Schleindlin, 1999). Connectedness to a transcendent is not confined to any particular religion, but rather is universally accessible to all faiths and backgrounds (Hodder, 2007). A key insight gained through the previous discussion of educators' own understandings of spirituality was their specifically Christian understanding of spirituality, rather than taking a multi-faith perspective, and this followed through to the practices that were observed.

Providing opportunities for children to pray were observed as a common practice educators employed that promoted children's spirituality through connection to a transcendent. Opportunities to pray were always led by the educator and occurred as part of the daily routine, often during the morning mat session, prior to eating lunch and the end of the day. The routine of praying at these times, as well as the types of prayers recited were observed as familiar to the children. Despite the observational findings indicating familiarity with the routine of prayer, in one observation of Educator 4: Centre C, a child replaced 'God' with 'Santa'. This confusion was not addressed, or not heard, by the educator. Additionally, educators were not observed entering into any form of discussion or explanation prior to commencing the prayers. Given that observational data were collected toward the end of the school year it is acknowledged that the prayers undertaken may have been previously discussed with children. However, it is noteworthy that no discussion was apparent within any of the observations resulting in prayer appearing as a routine task rather than a relational experience.

The sharing of religious stories with children was also observed as a practice educators employed that facilitated a connection to a transcendent. Stories shared by educators were always variations of the story of the birth of Jesus and generally told from literary texts, and therefore, specifically Christian. Interestingly, Educator 8: Centre A was the only educator who provided some relevance, or context, to the children prior to reading the story. Educator 8: Centre A explained to children that the bible was a text that helped people to learn about Jesus and also explained Jesus as the Son of God. Educator 8: Centre A then retold the story of the birth of Jesus orally, whilst holding the bible. Providing some context for the children and retelling the story in her own words suggests Educator 8: Centre A possessed an understanding of the Christian religion. Promoting the 'I-God' relationship through the sharing of religious stories was further supported by educators' use of drama. The story of the birth of Jesus was observed being re-enacted in all centres, although in different ways. At Centre B, for example, children were provided with the materials and space to freely select to act out the story. This aligned with educators' philosophy of practice, as play in Centre B was observed as a time of choice for children (see Section 5.2.3.3).

Omitted from the observational findings was the connection between the 'I-God' relationship and wonder, presenting a key insight regarding educators' practices to promote children's spiritual development. Literature acknowledges that wonder and awe provide a means for an individual to engage with the transcendent realm, and this is central to Hay and Nye's (1998) 'mystery sensing' category of spiritual sensitivity. Affording children opportunities to wonder results in the opening of possibilities and offers the potential to seek (Nye, 2009). When wondering is directed beyond the self, to the 'Ultimate Other', it is tied to the process of meaning-making and promotes a sense of connectedness that moves beyond the human to engage the divine (Nye,

2009). The absence of wonder within educators' practices that focussed on relationality with a transcendent, not only provides insight into the narrow nature of their 'I-God' practices, but further illustrates educators' overall limited use of wonder as a means to promote children's spiritualty.

5.2.3.5 Insights into educators' practices to promote children's spiritual development gained from educators' planning documentation.

Documentary data obtained through qualitative content analysis of educators' planning documentation provided insight into educators' intentional practices. As outlined in Chapter Four Section 4.4, findings were illustrated within a coding frame that identified practices educators had planned for in relation to the themes in extant literature (see Figure 4.1). Educators' planning documentation clearly illustrated a lack of intentional planning for children's spirituality. Overall, activities or intentions that promoted children's spiritual development were of an implicit nature, with connections to themes in the literature being made through the process of qualitative content analysis, as opposed to the explicit mention of spirituality by educators within their documentation. Insights into the intentionally planned practices for the promotion of children's spirituality are discussed within the themes of 'relationality' and 'creativity and imagination'. Following this, additional insights in relation to educators' overall planning, are explored.

5.2.3.5.1 Relationality.

Relationality with others, the self, the environment and a transcendent were all evidenced within educators' planning documentation. Observations indicated that educators focused their efforts on developing children's sense of relationality with others, with little emphasis on the 'I-World' aspect. Planning did however, illustrate the intention for all aspects of relationality to be developed. In particular, opportunities that described nature-based experiences were far more evident in planning than in the

actuality of educators' practices. Planning for the 'I-Self' sense of relationality was also evident and this was the only aspect of relationality within which educators made the explicit connection to the *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009), indicating that attention to the development of children's identity was addressed in 'Outcome 1: children have a strong sense of identity'.

In contrast to insights gained from educators' practices, educators planned for the inclusion of wonder questions in connection to religion, and therefore the 'I-God' sense of relationality. Although not observed, educators had explicitly planned to include within their practice specific wonder-based questions that related to the Christian religion. *Let the Little Children Come to Me* (CEWA, 2014), the leading document for educators' use to raise children's religious awareness in the early years was not referred to within educators' planning.

5.2.3.5.2 Creativity and Imagination.

Documentation illustrated that educators planned opportunities for children to engage with their own sense of creativity and imagination. Literature asserts that the provision of opportunities for children to be creative and imaginative can promote spiritual development (Harris, 2013; ter Avest & McDougall, 2014) in particular, the creative arts can offer a means of spiritual expression (Mata, 2006). Although evident, planning for these creative and imaginative opportunities lacked detail and comprised of a list of areas in the room or resources that would be provided for children as opposed to teaching and learning intentions. For example, educators listed dress-ups, construction and paints under the heading 'play' on their documentation.

The document *Spirituality in the Early Years* (Catholic Education Office Rockhampton, 2012) that was developed to assist educators in the Rockhampton diocese outlines the need for educators to provide opportunities for children to engage

with their imagination, to learn through play, to experience wonder and to ask 'big questions'. This connection to play as an opportunity that provides children the affordances to be creative and imaginative was evident in educators' documentation. Notably, play was articulated by educators during the interview as a practice that could promote children's spiritual development, suggesting that educators valued the inclusion of play. As educators' documentation included resources and materials for children's play, rather than intentions and provocations for play, it was not surprising that the play that was observed in actuality was limited and lacked the opportunity for children to engage in sustained shared thinking (Sylva, Taggart, Siraj-Blatchford, Totsika, Ereky-Stevens, Gilden & Bell, 2007).

5.2.3.5.3 Additional insights into educators' planning.

Literature explicates that early childhood educators have a key role in embedding spiritual development when planning the classroom curriculum (Grajczonek, 2012a). Furthermore, the *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009) outlines educators' central role in planning intentional learning experiences that attend to children's holistic development, inclusive therefore of the spiritual domain.

A key insight gained from the analysis of the documentary data relates to educators' overall lack of detail in planning and the absence of explicit learning outcomes or intentions. As such, the explicit planning for children's spiritual development was also absent. Existing literature asserts the connection between the planning for learning intentions and teacher effectiveness (Fetherston, 2006; Hattie, 2012; Stronge, 2007). Effective teachers not only understand the content and the needs of their students, effective teachers are also prepared by implementing efficient planning strategies (Stronge, 2007). Essentially, the quality of the planning determines the quality of the lesson or activity (Fetherston, 2006) and as such learning intentions

must be planned if there is to be any opportunity for them to actually occur. The findings from this investigation suggest that the limited nature of practices observed are, in part, a result of poor planning for the explicit promotion of the children's spirituality. This is supported in the work of De Souza (2016) who explains that when educators articulate and plan for the learning outcomes for children's cognitive, affective and spiritual capacities "there is a greater probability that the learning can become a transformative experience which helps the child connect to previous learning, to their inner thoughts and to the Other…" (p. 133). If educators do not plan for children's spiritual development it is likely to result in missed opportunities.

Given educators' own personal understanding of spirituality from a narrow Christian perspective, as discussed previously, it is not surprising that a key finding was educators' planning for the 'I-God' sense of relationality with explicit reference to God through their planning for religion. Essentially educators planned for spirituality in the way that they personally understood spirituality; religiosity. Educators' overall lack of planning for children's spirituality further asserted the finding that educators are, at the very least, unsure of how to promote children's spiritual development.

5.2.3.6 Summary of educators' practices to promote children's spiritual development.

Research question three provided insight into the intentional and incidental practices educators employed to promote children's spiritual development. Educators' practices illustrated a focus on relationships, wonder, identity and transcendence. The relational nature of spirituality was emphasised in educators' practices, with the facilitation of the 'I-World' sense of relationality being the least observed. A further key insight was educators' limited inclusion of wonder, as a feature of spirituality. Opportunities for wonder were intentionally planned for, by educators, although only in connection to religious literature. Overall, planning for children's spirituality was

not explicitly evident. Essentially, practices that were observed promoting children's spirituality occurred incidentally rather than intentionally and through planned opportunities.

5.3 Reflective Statement

Reflexive statements are included throughout the thesis in the spirit of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). IPA has underpinned both the theoretical and methodological design of this research investigation. The inclusion of reflexive statements is a further means to situate the reader within the context of the research by overtly acknowledging the role of the researcher (Langdridge, 2007). In this chapter, the reflexive statement is employed to provide insight to the reader on the researchers' own critical reflection that occurred throughout the discussion of findings within this chapter.

During the analysis of findings and the construction of this discussion chapter, the researcher journal continued to be used by the researcher to note thoughts and reflections. A key insight gained from this process was the evolving use of the term 'spiritual development' toward the term 'spirituality'. At the commencement of the investigation, the two terms were used somewhat inter-changeably, as was evident in extant literature. The term 'spiritual development' was adopted for use within the research questions on the basis that existing literature articulated spiritual development as a part of holistic development. During the process of formulating the discussion, and therefore returning to the literature with the insights gained from the analysis of findings, the researcher came to reflect more directly on the specific term 'spiritual development'. The word 'development' has several connotations, leading one to understand that, as with cognitive development, children would move through stages or criteria to demonstrate progression. Spirituality is unlike other areas of development (Priestly, 2002), it does not occur in this linear way. Rather, spirituality is promoted

and nurtured through the affordances children are provided to experience and express their innate spirituality. Nye (2009) articulates this effectively, stating that spirituality "does not necessarily go from less to more, from simple to complex" (p. 85) and therefore the term 'development' limits understandings of children's spirituality to a linear type progression. In retrospect, with the insights gained through undertaking this research investigation, the term 'spirituality' would be selected to replace 'spiritual development'.

5.4 Chapter Summary

There are several insights gained from this investigation, and discussed within this chapter, that illustrate subtle yet important digressions from existing discourse on educators' practices to promote children's spiritual development. Research question one yielded insight into educators' own personal understandings of spirituality and this was found to be a sense of spirituality referenced specifically to Christianity – a Christian religiosity. Furthermore, the clear connection, for educators, between spirituality and the Christian religion eliminated any connection to other world religions or any sense of cultural competence. Additionally, it was found that the educators' understandings of spirituality were almost solely based on their own life experiences.

Findings from research question two, regarding educators' knowledge of practices to promote children's spirituality suggested that, despite receiving no formal education on the concept, educators did know something about children's spirituality. Furthermore, what they did know was developed from their own experiences. As such, educators did not possess the knowledge or the language to enable them to effectively articulate their understandings or to connect their understandings of how to promote children's spirituality with their understandings of early years' pedagogical practices.

Research question three yielded insight into educators' practices, both incidental and intentional, to promote children's spirituality. These insights related to the themes of relationships, wonder, identity and transcendence. Specifically, insights gained in response to research question three suggested that educators did not intentionally plan for children's spiritual development; rather, opportunities for children's spiritual development occurred incidentally, and as child-initiated experiences.

In conclusion, this chapter critically discussed the findings from this research investigation. In doing so, each of the research questions that guided this investigation was explicitly addressed. In critically discussing the key insights that emerged, existing literature was also drawn upon. The following chapter, Chapter Six, provides an overview of the key insights discussed in this chapter, and their contribution to theory. Additionally, Chapter Six presents the implications and recommendations arising as a result of this research.

Chapter Six: Implications and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

The purpose of this research was to investigate educators' practices to promote the spiritual development of children aged 3 to 4 years within the context of Catholic childcare in Western Australia. At the time of this investigation, Catholic Education Western Australia (CEWA) offered the provision of childcare across three centres, and these centres formed the specific context for this investigation. Further framing the context of this investigation was the nationally mandated *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework* [EYLF] (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2009). The *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009) outlined the requirement for educators working with children from birth to age five, to attend to children's spiritual capacity as part of an holistic approach to care and education, although with limited articulation of how this can be achieved (Grajczonek, 2012b). Educators, who formed the participant group in this investigation, were those recognised at the centre as the lead educator. The lead educator was the most qualified for each room, either holding a four-year university teaching degree or working towards this qualification. In all cases the lead educator held responsibility for the planning, documentation and implementation of the 3 to 4-year-old program.

In addition to the *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009) which outlined the role of the educator in attending to children's spirituality, existing literature espoused the need for further research into the ways in which children's spirituality can be nurtured or developed (Adams, Bull & Maynes, 2016). As such, this research has addressed a significant gap in the literature. Specifically, this research focussed on the practices of the educators, working with 3 and 4-year-olds, and therefore utilising the *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009), to promote children's spiritual development.

This investigation yielded insight into educators' personal understandings of spirituality, their knowledge regarding children's spiritual development and educators' practices to promote children's spiritual development. These insights responded to the three research questions that framed this qualitative inquiry. Uncovering the understandings and experiences of the participants was central to the research design, as this was a qualitative inquiry with a social constructivist theoretical perspective and located within an interpretivist paradigm from a phenomenological perspective. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was employed as both a theoretical framework for the investigation as well as tool for data analysis. Utilising three research methods, namely: semi-structured interview, observations of practice and qualitative content analysis (QCA) ensured the collection of rich data in response to each of the research questions. Analysis of data, as outlined in Chapter Three, included the use of IPA for the interviews and observations, and QCA as a tool for the analysis of the documentary data. Chapter Five provided a critical discussion on the findings whereby each of the research questions were explicitly addressed. A summary of the major insights, and subsequent contribution to theory generated as a result of this investigation, is outlined in Section 6.2.

6.2 Research questions answered: contribution to theory generated

The discussion in Chapter Five reviewed existing literature to clearly ascertain new insights gained as a result of this investigation. In this section, these new insights are outlined in response to each of the three research questions. Additionally, the theoretical contributions of these insights are explicitly illustrated.

Research question one sought to investigate educators' personal understandings of the term 'spirituality'. Literature has advocated the need to inquire about educators'

interpretations of the elusive term 'spirituality' to better understand their practices to promote children's spirituality (Zhang, 2012). With literature also espousing that educators are often not themselves familiar with the notion of spirituality or how to attend to the spirituality of their students (Hyde, 2016), this initial research question provided critical insights into the personal experiences and understandings of educators that influenced their practices with children. Table 6.1 presents the contribution to key theory generated in response to research question one, as a result of the insights gained from this investigation.

Table 6.1

Key Theory Generated in Response to Research Question One

RQ1 What do educators understand by the term 'spirituality'?	
Key Theory Generated Early childhood educators must have an understanding of spirituality that reaches beyond their own personal perceptions if they are to promote *all* children's spirituality. A connection exists between the Catholic context of the childcare centres and the educators' personal understandings of spirituality. Educators in the three centres emphasised a Christian understanding of spirituality that omitted a sensitivity towards religious and cultural diversity. Additionally, educators' understandings of spirituality had been formed through their own personal experiences, as opposed to having received any professional development on the topic. The Catholic context of the childcare may have influenced educators in providing Christian religious understandings of spirituality or it could be that these educators were drawn to the Catholic childcare centres because it aligned with their religious beliefs.	
i) Spirituality as a Christian construct.	Educators understood spirituality from a specifically Christian perspective.
ii) Educators' personal understandings of	Educators provided no elaboration on spirituality in connection to other world

	spirituality influence practice.	religions or that reflected their own cultural competence. In omitting a sense of cultural competence, including religious diversity, from their understandings of spirituality, it is possible to question whether educators viewed all *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009) pedagogical practices through a specifically Christian lens.
iii)	Educators' understandings of spirituality were formed through personal, not professional, experiences.	Understandings of spirituality that emerged were almost solely based on the educators' own life experiences, as opposed to any formal professional development on the subject.

The second research question moved beyond the personal understandings of spirituality held by the educators, to focus on their knowledge regarding children's spirituality. Specifically, educators were asked about their knowledge regarding how children's spiritual development could be promoted and additionally, the response to this question was informed by the observations of their practice. Findings in response to research question two highlighted both the connections and distinctions that educators made between spirituality for themselves and the promotion of spirituality for the children in their rooms. Table 6.2 presents the contribution to key theory generated in response to research question two.

Table 6.2

Key Theory Generated in Response to Research Question Two

RQ2	What do educators know about promoting children's spiritual development?
Key Theory Generated Early childhood educators do know something about children's spirituality. However, their knowledge was limited and they did not possess the language to effectively articulate what they did know about children's spirituality. Furthermore, educators' limited knowledge and articulation necessitated their inability to connect spirituality (as a potentiality within all children and a capacity requiring attention) with their understanding of early years' pedagogical practice. As educators mostly received no formal education on the concept, their own personal experiences of spirituality formed the basis of their knowledge.	
i) Educators do not possess the language to describe their pedagogical practices that promote children's spirituality.	Educators are, at the very least, unsure of how spirituality can be promoted. Pedagogical practices could be named. However, explanations illustrated a limited understanding of the how these pedagogical practices were connected to children's spirituality.
ii) The relationship between spirituality and religion was a difficult construct for educators to articulate.	When asked explicitly, educators described that spirituality could exist autonomously from religion. Despite stating this distinction, educators' descriptions of their personal spirituality was from a religious perspective and similarly, their explanations of how to promote children's spirituality demonstrated their difficulty in describing the relationship between spirituality and religion.
iii) Educators' explanations conveyed that religious beliefs and practices existed	Educators possessed a limited understanding of the existence of spirituality as a human capacity that can be drawn upon to raise religious awareness. In premising spirituality on religion,

initially and could be used to raise spiritual awareness.	critical characteristics of spirituality were omitted (such as wonder and awe) as well as an understanding of spirituality that is inclusive of a range of religions and cultures.

Research question three focused on both the intentional and the incidental practices that early childhood educators employed to promote children's spirituality. Insights gained in response to research question three therefore also explicitly responded to the overarching research question that guided this investigation: *What are educators' practices for promoting the spiritual development of children, aged 3 to 4 years, in the context of Catholic childcare centres in Western Australia?* Research question three provided insight into the planned practices of the educator as well as allowing incidental practices to arise. Table 6.3 presents the response to research question three.

Table 6.3

Key Theory Generated in Response to Research Question Three

RQ3 What practices are educators implementing, intentionally and incidentally, to promote children's spiritual development?
Key Theory Generated   Children's spirituality was promoted by early childhood educators incidentally and without intentionality. Pedagogical practices that were employed by educators were chosen from educators' understanding of appropriate early years practice, and by default, some of these practices also promoted children's spirituality. Children's spirituality was not intentionally or explicitly promoted.

i)	Planning documentation lacked intention and so did educators' practices.	Educators' planning documentation lacked essential detail. The absence of explicit learning outcomes or intentions regarding the specific nurturing of children's spirituality followed through to educators' practices. Explicit planning for children's spirituality was also absent.
ii)	Educators must have the skills to discern moments of spirituality.	Children were observed taking the lead with spirituality. As such, children require the affordances of both space and time, by the educator, to facilitate their spirituality. Curricula and assessment demands resulted in educators being removed from children's play experiences. Play is a key way in which children's spirituality could be promoted. Educators were disengaged in terms of the intentionality of play experiences provided, as well as in value-adding to children's play during the play opportunities observed.
iii)	Facilitation of relationships was a central component of educators' pedagogy.	Educators' practices illustrated their focus on facilitating children's sense of relationality. The I-Self and I-Other relationship were emphasised and the I-World relationship was the least observed. Educators addressed what literature refers to as the 'shadow side of

		spirituality' by engaging children in explicit learning experiences when these less desirable characteristics emerged (anger, frustration). However, educators' focus on relationality was observed as an early childhood pedagogical practice rather than an intentional means of promoting children's spirituality.
iv)	The potential of wonder to promote children's spirituality was not understood by educators, or it was not realised.	Educators articulated wonder as a component of spirituality and they engaged children in moments of wondering. However, wonder was at the level of pondering, rather than offering children an experience of wonder.

6.3 Implications

Several implications emerged as a result of this investigation into educators' practices to promote children's spiritual development, in the context of Catholic childcare. These implications became evident through the generation of key theory in response to the research questions that framed this inquiry. Implications for theory, for methodology, for policy, for educators' practice and for research are identified in the following Sections 6.3.1 through to 6.3.5. Following the presentation of implications, recommendations are made.

6.3.1 Implications for theory.

This investigation has contributed to the body of research on spirituality in early childhood and, more specifically, assisted in narrowing the understanding of

spirituality by focussing on the practices of educators working in the early years. Furthermore, this investigation has contributed to the existing empirical investigations by revealing early childhood educators' narrow understanding of spirituality as well as the lack of intentionality in their practices regarding spirituality. These insights have implications for future theoretical developments. Key insights that emerged from this investigation reveal the need for two theoretical approaches to spirituality: information on spirituality and formation in spirituality. To promote children's spirituality requires an educator to have developed a personal sense of spirituality, that is, to have experienced spiritual moments in their own lives – spiritual formation. Educators must also have the knowledge and skills to reflect on their own spirituality and the ability to use these experiences, alongside their early years' pedagogical practices, to create and facilitate spiritual opportunities for children. Educators require an understanding of spirituality that is both human and religious within the context of Catholic childcare, that is, they require information on spirituality.

This research yielded a further implication for future theory regarding spirituality. Specifically, this investigation distinguished between spirituality and religion, despite the religious context of this investigation being Catholic. As such, theory generated from this investigation can aid the development of future theoretical understandings that premise spirituality as an innate capacity from which religious understandings can develop.

6.3.2 Implications for methodology.

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) and qualitative content analysis (QCA) were both employed as methods for data analysis. In utilising IPA, this investigation contributed to the expansion of this method. The use of IPA outside of

psychology and in the field of education is considered contemporary (Smith, 1996). Although IPA has been used in the general field of spirituality (Jirasek et al., 2017; Joseph, 2014), this investigation contributes to the expansion of IPA to the field of early childhood education. Utilising IPA within this investigation has implications for future research on spirituality that may adopt this specific methodology. The key features of IPA, that include it being inductive, interrogative and idiographic (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009) were well suited to this investigation on a construct that is universal and embedded in relationality.

The use of QCA required the construction of a post-analysis coding frame that contributes further implications for methodology. As recommended by Schreier (2012), the post-analysis coding frame explicitly illustrated both the characteristics of spirituality identified from the review of literature and alongside the findings from this research. As such, the post-analysis coding frame has implications for future studies by providing a tool for research.

6.3.3 Implications for policy.

Educators' practices are shaped by policy. When policy, and the frameworks that reside within these, does not descriptively articulate its terms, such as 'spirituality', the result is confusion and misunderstanding. This investigation revealed that early childhood educators knew very little about practices they could employ to promote children's spirituality. Educators were confused about how spirituality could be promoted and about the relationship between spirituality and religion. Policy and frameworks must address this confusion. Currently the *EYLF*'s (DEEWR, 2009) statement that the spiritual capacity must be attended to as part of children's holistic development, and the limited definition it provides (DEEWR, 2009, p. 14) does not

adequately support educators in promoting this capacity. Implications for policy pertain to educators' need for knowledge on the characteristics of spirituality, how spirituality can be expressed in early childhood and strategies they can employ to promote children's spirituality if they are to effectively, and intentionally, promote children's spirituality. Furthermore, if spirituality is to be understood as a universal and non-linear capacity, then it must be separated from the term 'development' within future policy and framework documents.

6.3.4 Implications for practice.

Four implications for practice emerged from this investigation. First, it was evident that the Catholic context of the centres shaped, to some degree, educators' understandings of spirituality. Furthermore, the Christian religious understanding of spirituality that permeated educators' responses omitted a sense of religious diversity and cultural competence. Consequently, it is possible to question whether educators viewed all the *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009) pedagogical practices through a specifically Christian lens. Essentially, educators working in Catholic contexts must realise the spiritual capacity in every child, regardless of culture and religion. That is, educators must realise both the human and the religious dimensions of spirituality. Doing so will assist children of other, or no religious affiliation, ensuring that all children are afforded the opportunity for their spirituality to be promoted.

The second implication for practice pertains to the quality of the conversations that were observed between the educators and children. Educators must be skilled in value-adding to children's conversations if children are to move beyond low-level talk to conversations that require higher-order thinking and sustained shared thinking (Sylva, Tagart, Siraj-Blatchford, Totsika, Ereky-Stevens, Gilden & Bell, 2007).

Spirituality is understood as being facilitated in day-to-day conversations that occur (Bone, 2005). However, these day-to–day conversations must be of a high quality if they are to engage the spiritual capacity of the child. The skill set required of educators in order to facilitate sustained shared thinking (Sylva et al., 2007) and deeper level conversation is connected to educators' ability to be intentional. When educators are explicitly and overtly aware of their learning intentions and the strategies; when educators can adopt to teach and develop these learning intentions and strategies; and when educators can meet the needs of the children, then there is greater potential for conversations to become spiritual opportunities.

The identification, by educators, that spirituality can be promoted through play, resulted in the third implication for practice. However, although play was articulated as a means for spirituality to be promoted, this articulation occurred in contradiction to the lack of play observed in practice. Educators named play as a means for promoting spirituality but provided little elaboration on what they understood as play, what play involved or how play was connected to the construct of spirituality. Furthermore, play in practice required intentionality in regards to educators' value-adding to children's play and at the same time, play in practice required increased space and time to grant children the opportunity for their play to develop, or to facilitate children's tuning-in (Hay & Nye, 1998). Play was already understood by educators as a key pedagogical practice. If this knowledge can be consolidated and extended to include play as a context that intentionally includes children's spirituality, the result for future practice can affect both educators and children.

The fourth implication pertains to the post-analysis coding frame (Chapter Four Figure 4.1) developed as a component of qualitative content analysis (QCA). The post-

analysis coding frame has the capacity to positively influence educators' practices. Specifically, the coding frame can assist educators in engaging in reflective practices. As a reflective tool, the coding frame provides a framework for educators to audit their own, or others', practices in promoting children's spirituality. The coding frame presents key themes in existing literature on spirituality alongside actual practices that educators employed to promote children's spirituality, enabling it to be used as a practical and educator-friendly tool. Engaging in the process of reflective practice, by using the coding frame, can provide an educator with feedback on current practice in addition to identifying possibilities for future practice. For example, an educator could reflect on the opportunities they had provided children over a week and align these with the categories of the coding frame. This process of aligning practice to the components of spirituality on the coding frame could potentially reveal gaps, missed opportunities or components of spirituality that are emphasised in practice, thus facilitating change.

6.3.5 Implications for further research.

Key insights regarding educators' understandings of spirituality and the practices they employed to promote children's spirituality contributed to existing empirical research on spirituality in early childhood. The significance of the findings from this investigation pertain to its focus on the educators' practices to promote children's spiritual development and additionally, the unique context of Catholic childcare. As such, three implications emerged regarding the direction of future research. The first of these implications relates to the key theory generated in response to research question one (see Table 6.1). As educators offered an understanding of spirituality that was specifically Christian, further research is required that includes more culturally and religiously diverse contexts as this will add to the relatively few empirical studies in

this field. Given that thirty percent of children enrolled in Catholic schools identified as non-Catholics (National Catholic Education Commission, 2016; See Chapter One Section 1.4.2), research that can add to the insights gained from this investigation by taking a multi-faith approach to educators' practices would also be beneficial in making comparisons across religious contexts.

A second implication arose from the connection made between play and spirituality. Although this connection is identified in existing literature (Catholic Education Office Rockhampton, 2012; Harris, 2016; Ng, 2012), its prominence as an early childhood pedagogical practice along with the articulation of play as a practice to promote children's spirituality by educators in this investigation, necessitates further, more targeted research. Research that specifically investigates the way in which play can offer children the potential for spiritual expression; the characteristics of play pertinent to spirituality; and the environmental play factors that contribute to play's ability to promote spirituality, all require explicit investigation.

Finally, the concept of wonder in connection to spirituality emerged within existing literature and was also evident through the findings from this investigation. It was clear that educators' understandings of wonder were narrow (Table 6.3). Wonder, the form that goes beyond a sense of pondering, was not evident in educators' practices. Although a part of wonder involves creating opportunities to reflect and to consider possibilities, at a deeper level, wonder involves mystery which comes from experiencing a sense of wonder (Chapter Two Section 2.2.3). Further research that explores the use of wonder in early childhood through a spiritual lens, can add to the findings from this investigation to explicate the gaps that exist in current practice in relation to facilitating wonder as a pedagogical practice.

6.4 Recommendations

The key insights and theoretical understandings generated from this investigation precipitated five recommendations. These recommendations are presented from a micro to macro perspective, espousing initially those recommendations at the level of educator and moving more broadly to recommendations at the level of research. Figure 6.1 provides a visual representation of the recommendations provided, illustrating the inter-connectedness of the various levels potentially affected by this investigation. The following Sections 6.4.1 through to 6.4.5 outline each of the recommendations.
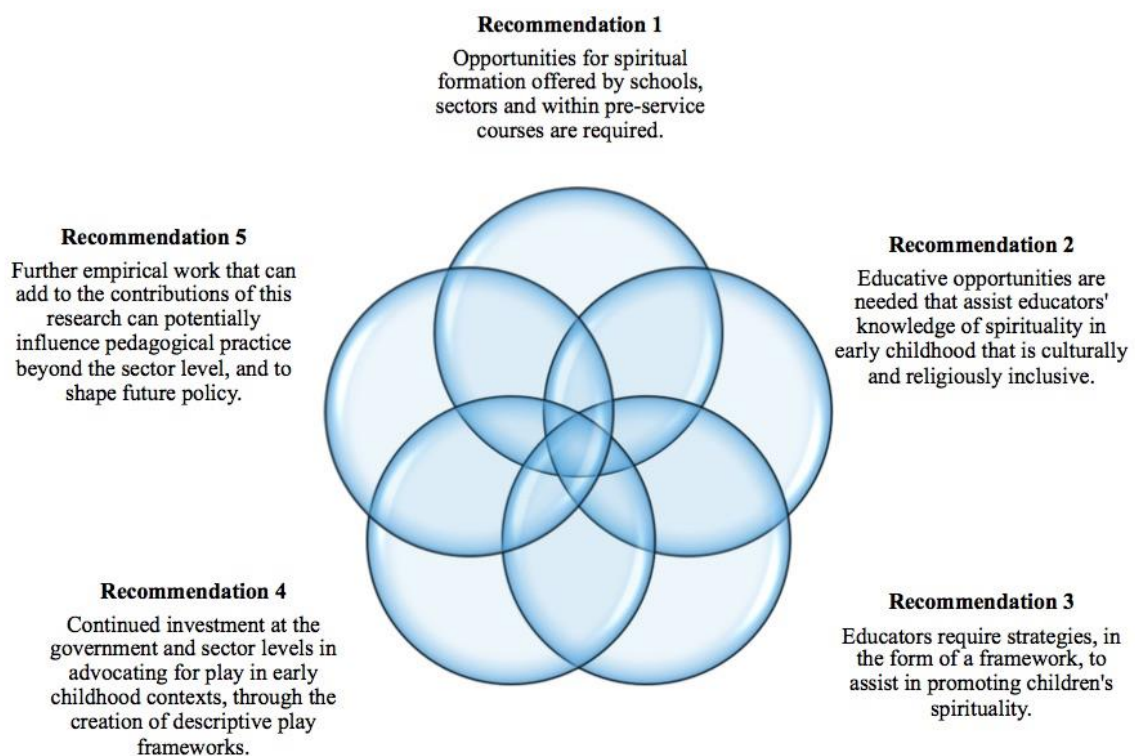

Figure 6.1. Representation of the connectedness among the recommendations emerging from this investigation.

6.4.1 Recommendation one.

Targeted professional development that affords educators knowledge about spirituality as well as the opportunity for their own spiritual formation, that is, one which includes an understanding of a wider perspective on spirituality beyond a specific Christian perspective, is recommended. This investigation revealed that educators are unable to attend to, facilitate or promote a construct that they themselves do not fully understand or have not experienced. Educators' limited ability to articulate their own adult understanding of spirituality suggested that they themselves had received little in the way of spiritual formation that went beyond the religious sense. Spiritual formation can occur through an awareness of the spiritual moments that occur in an individual's life, particularly when these moments are shared and modelled by others. This research indicated that these moments are not shared, at least not for the participants in this investigation. Educators unanimously displayed difficulty in explicating a spiritual moment in their life. Alternatively, spiritual formation can occur through structured formation offered as professional development. Educators responded that professional development in the area of spirituality had not been offered to them, rather any formation offered had been focussed on the Catholic religion. Consequently, professional development that focuses on the provision of spiritual formational development would be most beneficial to educators. It is recommended that this formation is offered at the school and centre level, sector level and in pre-service qualifications for educators, including Diploma courses. The provision of spiritual formation for educators can positively assist educators in their task of attending to children's spirituality.

Furthermore, in addition to formational opportunities, educators require knowledge and understanding about spirituality. This knowledge and understanding

will assist educators to intentionally plan opportunities for the promotion of children's spirituality. Gaining an understanding of the characteristics of spirituality and the ways that children's spirituality can be facilitated and nurtured will assist educators in making connections between their pedagogical practices for promoting spirituality and their early childhood philosophical understandings.

6.4.2 Recommendation two.

Professional development offered to educators must emphasise spirituality as an innate characteristic from which religious understandings can develop. In this way, spirituality in its broadest sense will be advocated, thus inclusive of cultural and religious diversity. The difficulty educators presented when articulating the relationship between spirituality and religion clearly suggests the need for educative opportunities for educators. In addition, educators' narrow understandings of spirituality from a specifically Christian perspective, requires addressing.

The *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009) outlines the requirement for early childhood educators to understand and communicate with diverse cultures. The *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009) also tasks educators with promoting children's cultural competence (p. 16), suggesting that educators also assist children to become aware of, and appreciate diversity. However, as cultural competence did not feature within educators' understandings of spirituality, there are several limitations within educators' understandings of the requirements outlined in the *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009, p.16). It was recognised that the Catholic context of the centres may have influenced the understanding of spirituality that educators provided. Therefore, educators require educative opportunities that support an understanding of spirituality that goes beyond a definition they believe they should hold, to include a broader understanding of spirituality that has scope for a spirituality that is culturally and religiously diverse.

6.4.3 Recommendation three.

Educators require guidance on the strategies they can employ to promote children's spirituality. Educators' practices revealed a limited repertoire of pedagogical practices to promote children's spirituality. Practices educators did employ lacked intentionality and were selected as practices appropriate for the early years, rather than explicitly to assist children's spirituality. Furthermore, educators reference to the CEWA document, *Let the Little Children Come to Me* (CEWA, 2014) was limited. Existing literature has suggested that educators require a 'spiritual sensitivity' (Adams, 2009), that is, an awareness of their own spirituality and that of their children. As a result of this investigation, it is appropriate to advocate for more than an awareness; educators must be 'spiritual opportunists'. Educators require the skills to interpret spiritual opportunities when they arise and to value-add to these effectively. Value-adding to spiritual opportunities requires informed pedagogical practices and a knowledgeable educator who knows when to value-add by engaging with the child and when to value-add by affording children space, flow and flexibility. If educators are to "use a wide net to catch the great variety of forms taken by children's spirituality" as Nye (2009, p. 35) argues, then they require the knowledge and strategies to do so. It is therefore recommended that educators are provided with strategies to assist them in the task of promoting children's spirituality that is inclusive of religious and cultural diversity. These strategies could be in the form of support documentation that educators could access alongside the *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009).

6.4.4 Recommendation four.

A key recommendation resulting from this investigation is the need for continued investment in advocating for play in early childhood contexts. This investment must occur at a government and then sector level for it to have an authentic and lasting

effect at the level of the educator. Specifically, targeted and strategically planned professional development is required. In addition, the creation of framework documents that articulate, more descriptively, the spiritual opportunities of play, is essential.

Play was established in existing literature as a pedagogical tool that facilitated children's spirituality (Catholic Education Office Rockhampton, 2012; Harris, 2016; Ng, 2012). In particular, literature on children's spiritual expression referred to play as a context that provided children with opportunities for creative and imaginative activities that are central to spirituality (Harris, 2013; Ng, 2012). To enable spirituality to be promoted through play, play must adhere to the description outlined in the *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009, p. 9), that is, play must be offered as a context for learning that encourages conversation, investigation and independence.

6.4.5 Recommendation five.

Further research in the area of educators' practices to promote children's spirituality is recommended in order to further develop theoretical understandings regarding both children's spirituality and the pedagogical practices of the educators. Specifically, further empirical work that can add to the contributions and insights gained as a result of this research can potentially influence pedagogical practice beyond the sector level, and contribute to future policy. Additionally, continued research in this area will add depth to the established theoretical perspectives on spirituality in early childhood. Subsequently, in distilling the key insights gained from this investigation, what remains is the need for on-going research and scholarship in the hope that policy and practice will accommodate and promote children's spirituality.

6.5 Strengths and Limitations of the Research

This research was original and has significance for those in the field of early childhood education and in the area of spirituality. A strength of this research was its focus on the educator, in promoting children's spirituality, which was identified as a gap in existing literature. Through contributing research on the understanding and practices of educators, this research has made a contribution to current discourse on children's spirituality. In addition, a further strength resides in the use of IPA to inform the research methodology. Utilising IPA enhanced the rigour of both the data collection and data analysis phases of the research. In particular, the establishment of the researcher journal as a tool used throughout the entirety of the investigation overtly established the role of the researcher in the research and facilitated the ability to be reflexive. The use of the researcher journal and reflexive statements strengthened this investigation as these processes provided assurances of reliability and rigour throughout each step of the investigation.

The identification of limitations within this investigation occurred through the reflexive process that underpinned each stage of the research. Whilst IPA is acknowledged as a strength, as a qualitative approach, it also has its limitations. These limitations exist in relation to the interpretative nature of data collection and analysis. Whilst all attempts were made to ensure that the researcher remained objective, the very nature of qualitative investigation places the researcher within the context of the research. Therefore, it must be recognised that whilst the researcher attempted to bracket any personal assumptions or bias from the research, one cannot be fully aware of all pre-conceptions or their influence. It is also apparent that people's perspectives and the observations gathered provide a 'snapshot' in time and, as recognised within an interpretivist paradigm, people's perspectives are in a constant state of flux (Oliver,

2012). A further limitation inherent to investigating a new phenomenon is the small sample size. As Catholic Education Western Australia governed three centres that met the requirements of this investigation, at the time of the research, the sample size, although exhaustive, was relatively small.

6.6 Reflexive Statement

My experience of conducting this research has been both challenging and personally fulfilling. On reflection, the process reminded me of T. S. Eliot's statement, "in my end is my beginning" (Eliot, 1940, para. 23). This journey of research has been one in which I have become acutely aware of my own shift in understandings. It has caused me to reflect on my own personal understanding of spirituality and to consider how this understanding is influenced by, and influences, the spirituality of those I teach. My understanding of the ways that spirituality can be promoted, by educators, in early childhood has also been significantly impacted by the participants in this study. Understanding spirituality as a multifaceted construct, one that relates to the human as well as the religious, and as a construct that transcends the linear pathways of development assists in promoting children's spirituality in a myriad of ways. Coming to an understanding that discourse on children's spirituality must omit the phrase 'development' if educators are to truly contribute to children's spirituality in a broad, rather than linear sense, has been a remarkable insight for me as a researcher, as an academic and as an educator.

6.7 Closing Remarks

This research has contributed insight into the practices educators engage with to promote children's spirituality within a specific religious context. In focusing on the practices of the educator, this research also revealed the educators' understandings of

spirituality. These understandings informed educators' practices, culminating in the development of new theoretical understandings regarding the pedagogical practices that educators employ to promote children's spirituality.

The *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009) has drawn attention to the need for educators to attend to children's spiritual capacity as part of a holistic approach to the early years (p. 9). To enable educators to not only attend to children's spirituality but also to intentionally and explicitly promote this capacity requires the acquisition of both knowledge and skills. Adams (2009) emphasised the need for educators themselves to have received spiritual formation if they are to nurture the spirituality of children. The insights gained from this investigation support this need for spiritual formation. Additionally, educators must be knowledgeable about children's spirituality to enable them to intentionally and effectively plan for children's spiritual opportunities. As spiritual moments are often child initiated and spontaneous, educators must also possess the skills to discern incidental moments within each child's day that are open to spiritual possibilities. To conclude, this investigation has responded to the call for further research in the field of early childhood spirituality (Adams et al., 2016). In placing the focus of this inquiry on the educators' pedagogical practices, the impact of this research augments research in the field of children's spirituality with educators' practices. Knowledgeable educators who intentionally awaken and promote children's spirituality are required if early childhood education is to truly value holistic and integrated practices.

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PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LETTER
Principal/ Director

PROJECT TITLE:

An investigation into educators' practices for promoting the spiritual development of

children aged 3 to 4 years, in the context of Catholic childcare centres in Western

Australia

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Dr Jan Grajczonek
STUDENT RESEARCHER: Christine McGunnigle
STUDENT'S DEGREE: Doctor of Philosophy

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in the research project described below.

What is the project about?
This research project investigates educators' practices that promote the spiritual development of children aged 3 to 4 years, within the specific context of Catholic childcare. The project aims to investigate what educators understand by the term 'spirituality'; what educators know about promoting children's spiritual development; and what practices educators are implementing, intentionally and incidentally, to promote children's spiritual development. It is intended that this research will benefit participants by providing them with clarity around attending to children's spiritual development. Belonging, Being and Becoming: Early Years Learning Framework for Australia [EYLF] (Department for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR]) is a mandated framework in Australia for use in settings working with children birth to 5 years of age. The EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) articulates that educators must attend to, and provide experiences that engage children's spirituality, however little advice is provided on the way this may be achieved.

Who is undertaking the project?
This project is being conducted by Christine McGunnigle and will form the basis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Australian Catholic University under the supervision of Dr Jan Grajczonek.

Are there any risks associated with participating in this project?
There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this research investigation. In some cases participants may feel challenged by some questions and if they expressed interest, the researcher could later organise an informal, unrecorded discussion group as a debriefing session.

What will I be asked to do?

As the Centre Director/ Principal, your involvement in the project is through providing access to the Centres and their educators. Educators will be asked to be involved in the following:

- Provide a 2 week example of their planning/documentation for the 3-4 year old rooms within the Centre;
- Participate in a semi-structured interview that will take up to one hour. The interview will take place at the Centre at a mutually convenient time. Questions in the interview will be investigating the educators' understanding of the term 'spirituality'. EG: Can you describe for me an experience of your own, or something you have witnessed, or read, that you consider 'spiritual'? Interviews will be digitally recorded and transcribed. Participants will have the opportunity to check the accuracy of the transcribed interview;
- Have their practice observed by the researcher for 2 non-consecutive days

How much time will the project take?
It is intended that there will be 3 visits to the Centre.
Visit One: Interview with the Educator/s and collect 2 week planning documents (1 hour / educator)
Visit Two: Full day observing the educators' practice with 3 to 4-year-olds
Visit Three: Full day observing the educators' practice with 3 to 4-year-olds

What are the benefits of the research project?
This research will benefit the educators by providing them with clarity around attending to children's spiritual development. As the EYLF mandates that educators attend to the spiritual capacity of children, this research aims to assist educators in achieving this. More widely, a benefit of this research is the focus on the practices of the educator in promoting children's spiritual development. Several studies exist that have attempted to describe and to measure children's spirituality, however few have addressed the actions of the educator with children below school age and this investigation seeks to explore this gap in current research.

Can I withdraw from the study?
Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are not under any obligation to participate. If you agree to participate, you can withdraw from the study at any time without adverse consequences. If you choose to withdraw after data has been collected, it will be destroyed.

Will anyone else know the results of the project?
All data collected in this project will be de-identified during the data collection phase. Confidentiality of participants will therefore be maintained. All data will be stored securely in a locked cabinet and on password protected USBs. Results of the project will be published in journals and presented at conferences on the themes of spirituality and children's spiritual development. No identifiable data will be shared.

Will I be able to find out the results of the project?
An executive summary will be provided to participants at the conclusion of the investigation. Any publication that comes as a result of the research will be made known to participants also.

Who do I contact if I have questions about the project?
Please contact Christine McGunnigle on email:
cemcgu001@myacu.edu.au
What if I have a complaint or any concerns?
The study has been reviewed by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University (review number 2015-153E). If you have any complaints or concerns about the conduct of the project, you may write to the Manager of the Human Research Ethics Committee care of the Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research).

Manager, Ethics
c/o Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research)
Australian Catholic University
North Sydney Campus
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NORTH SYDNEY, NSW 2059
Ph.: 02 9739 2519
Fax: 02 9739 2870
Email: resethics.manager@acu.edu.au

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

I want to participate! How do I sign up?
Please complete the consent form to indicate your ability to participate. Please sign both copies. I will collect the consent form in person at the Centre.

Yours sincerely,

Christine McGunnigle

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LETTER
Educator

PROJECT TITLE:

An investigation into educators' practices for promoting the spiritual development of

children aged 3 to 4 years, in the context of Catholic childcare centres in Western

Australia

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Dr Jan Grajczonek
STUDENT RESEARCHER: Christine McGunnigle
STUDENT'S DEGREE: Doctor of Philosophy

Dear Participant,

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Who is undertaking the project?
This project is being conducted by Christine McGunnigle and will form the basis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Australian Catholic University under the supervision of Dr Jan Grajczonek.

Are there any risks associated with participating in this project?
There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this research investigation. In some cases participants may feel challenged by some questions and if they expressed interest, the researcher could later organise an informal, unrecorded discussion group as a debriefing session.

What will I be asked to do?
As an educator working with children aged 3- 4 years, you will be asked to be involved in the following ways:

- Provide a 2 week example of your planning/documentation for the 3 to 4-year-olds rooms within the Centre;

- Participate in a semi-structured interview that will take up to one hour. The interview will take place at the Centre at a mutually convenient time. Questions in the interview will be investigating the educators' understanding of the term 'spirituality'. EG:
  - Can you describe for me an experience of your own, or something you have witnessed, or read, that you consider 'spiritual'?
- In addition to that experience, can you describe what you understand by the term 'spirituality'?
- Interviews will be digitally recorded and transcribed. You will have the opportunity to check the accuracy of the transcribed interview;
- Have your practice observed by the researcher for 2 non-consecutive days.

How much time will the project take?
It is intended that there will be 3 visits to the Centre.
Visit One: Interview with the Educator/s and collect 2 week planning documents (1 hour / educator)
Visit Two: Full day observing the educators' practice with 3-4 year olds
Visit Three: Full day observing the educators' practice with 3-4 year olds

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Can I withdraw from the study?
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Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

I want to participate! How do I sign up?
Please complete the consent form to indicate your ability to participate. Please sign both copies. I will collect the consent form in person at the Centre.

Yours sincerely,

Christine McGunnigle

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LETTER
Parent

PROJECT TITLE:

An investigation into educators' practices for promoting the spiritual development of

children aged 3 to 4 years, in the context of Catholic childcare centres in Western

Australia

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Dr Jan Grajczonek
STUDENT RESEARCHER: Christine McGunnigle
STUDENT'S DEGREE: Doctor of Philosophy

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in the research project described below.

What is the project about?
This research project investigates educators' practices that promote the spiritual development of children aged 3 to 4 years, within the specific context of Catholic childcare. The project aims to investigate what educators understand by the term 'spirituality'; what educators know about promoting children's spiritual development; and what practices educators are implementing, intentionally and incidentally, to promote children's spiritual development. It is intended that this research will benefit participants by providing them with clarity around attending to children's spiritual development. Belonging, Being and Becoming: Early Years Learning Framework for Australia [EYLF] (Department for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR]) is a mandated framework in Australia for use in settings working with children birth to 5 years of age. The EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) articulates that educators must attend to, and provide experiences that engage children's spirituality, however little advice is provided on the way this may be achieved.

Who is undertaking the project?
This project is being conducted by Christine McGunnigle and will form the basis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Australian Catholic University under the supervision of Dr Jan Grajczonek.

Are there any risks associated with participating in this project?
There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this research investigation.

What will I be asked to do?
- As a parent, you are asked to provide consent for the researcher to observe the practice of the educator within the 3-4 year old rooms. The children are not the focus of the research, but will be present whilst observations of the educator take place. The children will not be in any way identifiable

How much time will the project take?
There is no time commitment for you as a parent. The researcher will attend the Centre on 3 occasions.

What are the benefits of the research project?
This research will benefit the educators by providing them with clarity around attending to children's spiritual development. As the EYLF mandates that educators attend to the spiritual capacity of children, this research aims to assist educators in achieving this. More widely, a benefit of this research is the focus on the practices of the educator in promoting children's spiritual development. Several studies exist that have attempted to describe and to measure children's spirituality, however few have addressed the actions of the educator with children below school age and this investigation seeks to explore this gap in current research.

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All data collected in this project will be de-identified during the data collection phase. No identifiable information about the children will be recorded. Confidentiality of participants will therefore be maintained. All data will be stored securely in a locked cabinet and on password protected USBs. Results of the project will be published in journals and presented at conferences on the themes of spirituality and children's spiritual development. No identifiable data will be shared.

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I want to participate! How do I sign up?
Please complete the consent form to indicate your ability to participate. Please sign both copies. I will collect the consent form in person at the Centre.

Yours sincerely,

Christine McGunnigle

<div align="center">

Appendix B: Participant Consent Forms

</div>

CONSENT FORM: Principal/Director

TITLE OF PROJECT:

<div align="center">

An investigation into educators' practices for promoting the spiritual development of children aged 3 to 4 years, in the context of Catholic childcare centres in Western Australia

</div>

PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR: Dr Jan Grajczonek
STUDENT RESEARCHER: Christine McGunnigle

I .... *(the participant)* have read (*or, where appropriate, have had read to me*) and understood the information provided in the Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate by providing access to the Centre and the educators of the 3-4 year old children. I realise that I can withdraw my consent at any time without adverse consequences. I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify myself, the Centre or my staff in any way.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT:

SIGNATURE ....**DATE:**...............................

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR:

DATE:………………………..

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:

DATE:.......................……….

CONSENT FORM : PARENT/GUARDIAN

TITLE OF PROJECT:

An investigation into educators' practices for promoting the spiritual development of children aged 3 to 4 years, in the context of Catholic childcare centres in Western Australia

PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR: Dr Jan Grajczonek
STUDENT RESEARCHER: Christine McGunnigle

I .... *(the participant)* have read (*or, where appropriate, have had read to me)* and understood the information provided in the Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate by providing consent for the researcher to observe the practice of the educator whilst my child/ren is at the Centre. I realise that my child may be observed but understand that no identifiable information about my child/ren will be recorded. I realise that I can withdraw my consent at any time without adverse consequences. I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify my child/ren in any way.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT:

SIGNATURE ....**DATE:**..............................

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR:

DATE:………………………..

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:

DATE:.......................……….

CONSENT FORM: EDUCATORS

TITLE OF PROJECT:

An investigation into educators' practices for promoting the spiritual development of

children aged 3 to 4 years, in the context of Catholic childcare centres in Western

Australia

PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR: Dr Jan Grajczonek
STUDENT RESEARCHER: Christine McGunnigle

I .... *(the participant)* have read (*or, where appropriate, have had read to me)* and understood the information provided in the Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in a one hour interview that will be digitally recorded; submit 2 weeks of my planning documentation; and have my practice observed for 2 non-consecutive days. I realise that I can withdraw my consent at any time without adverse consequences. I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT:

SIGNATURE ....**DATE:**..............................

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR:

DATE:………………………..

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:

DATE:......................……….

Appendix C: Interview Questions

Interview Format and Questions

- Date, time, place, interviewer, interviewee
- Introduction: provide some background to the research
- Key questions

    1. Can you describe for me an experience of your own, or something you have witnessed, or read, that you consider 'spiritual'?

    2. In addition to that experience, can you describe what you understand by the term 'spirituality'?

    3. How do you think children express their spirituality?

    4. How do you think children's spirituality can be developed and nurtured?

    5. What types of opportunities do you think you provide in your room to assist children to develop within the spiritual domain?

    6. What is the relationship between spirituality and religion for you?

    7. Can you tell me a little about your early childhood educational philosophy and beliefs that inform your practice?

    8. What has led to these beliefs? For example, particular experience, training, documents?

- Probing questions as required: Can you tell me more about...? What do you mean by...?
- A thank you statement

Appendix D: Sample of Interview Data

Analysed interview transcript from Educator 1: Centre B

TranscribeMe!

Transcription results:

EDUCATOR 1: CENTRE B

How are you?

Yeah, good thanks. Busy day!

Yeah! I saw! Thanks for making this time for me.

No problem.

So yeah, is it working?

Ahh, yep I think so, yes, all good so -

Okay yeah good. Did you get my planning?

Yes I did thanks – that's great.

Okay, yeah.

Okay, then we'll start. The first question's the hardest - and there's no wrong answer, it's all your thoughts - so the first one is, I want you to describe for me a time in your life, an experience that you've had that you might say was spiritual and then describe that, or an image, whatever comes to mind.

I think it's more of an individuality sort of thing, spirituality, as in - because I'm not personally Catholic - I see spirituality as accepting everyone for who they are, and embracing everyone's differences and individuality, like with the children and that sort of thing. Yeah, spirituality is having--

So it's individual?

Yeah, personal, and having an idea of who you are and the morals that you have and the sort of person that you want to be from another level. But more than just physical or what's going on around you in a physical way, but more of a thought processes and connection with something more. I would call it God but other people would call it something different.

Do you think you've had a spiritual moment, or is there something, a particular moment that comes to mind as being--

I find nature really spiritual. In times in my life where things have been quite-- *hard Grandma has been very sick and things like that, particularly the pelican, I've sort of clung onto that. And so my grandma actually had a aneurism and wasn't going to make it, and the day we found out she was okay, there was pelicans all the way to the trip to the hospital, and then it was really, really bizarre, but my cousin's baby actually passed away when it was born, an hour after it was born. And we went to the funeral just the other week, and there was a pelican flying in the sky. It was really bizarre, but to me, that sort of connection--

Yeah. Wow -It's like a symbol like that, though.

Yeah, it was just-- looking up in the sky, all the others like, "Um, okay." Something's going on a bit more for me, I feel like maybe something more. Because I'm open and

TranscribeMe

1

accepting to that sort of thing.

Yeah, okay thanks. So in a spiritual moment, so for example in both of those scenarios, what are the types of feelings that they bring ,that is spiritual? Like how are you feeling internally, so when you saw that?

BELIEFS (SOMETHING MORE)

Just that sense that there is something greater out there, that we're not just here to be human in that respect. Like that there is a bigger connection with what's going on in the whole world, in the universe, and how we're all meant to be, I suppose.

So it's a bit of a .. a what type of feeling, or--

WONDER
PEACEFUL/CALM

Yeah, wonder, inspiring, like a warmth sort of feeling, comfort, you find comfort in that sort of thing, spirituality.

Great, perfect. And just to really be sure I've got it [laughter]. You've said everything. Can you describe anything more about how you understand spirituality? What about if I told you that I am a very spiritual person, what sort of qualities, or connotations, all that, do you attach to me? Or is there anyone in your life you've thought they're a very spiritual person, what is it then about them?

I think there's different aspects of spiritual. Because some people are spiritual when they're quite-- spiritual in a earthy sense, like I dunno [laughter]. Yeah, Sonya's rocks and--

Oh like stone and gems.

accepting →

Yeah, the way their lifestyle is, in food choices and all that sort of thing, makes them more gentle and generous I think. Like if they're vegetarian and things like that they have obviously respect for animals and just whole different kettle of fish. And then spiritual as in having that commitment to the church and the community feel within that, and I think genuinely spiritual people are very open and accepting, and yeah.

Yeah, great. Perfect. So now, on to children. How do you think children of this age, because they've got two and a half to sort of five-year-olds, how can they express their spirituality? So I've been here trying to observe. What types of things do you think they do to express spirituality?

PERSONAL
↓ IDENTITY
EMOTIONAL
REGULATION

They're-- it's really, I think, all the time, for me personally. I just watch them and I think they're finding who they are. Whether it's a conflict-- just crazy, or whether it's dealing with emotions to other children, or to educators, or recognising something-- so sometimes community members, things like that, they'll call out like, "Mr. [Beets?], Mr. [Beets?]--"

Sorry, can I just grab my bags?

Oh, do you have...? Do you want the pink one as well?

No, that can stay [crosstalk]. Thank you.

IDENTITY
MORAL DEV.
EMOTIONS
(REG)

So whether it's things like that, Mrs. Finch is obviously a rock normally for them. And I don't really know how to explain it, but just generally developing who they are through that sort of knowing when something's right and wrong, showing empathy and emotions and--

So, a lot of that is actually planned or unplanned? Like, ah, what opportunities could you provide?

Oh, yeah, unplanned.

What about-- what do you think you do planning-wise that would promote their spiritual development? [pause] What structures or what activities do you set up?

INDIVIDUAL SOCIAL SKILLS EMOTIONAL REG.

Planning-wise is we do a very individualised approach to their learning, so when we observe them in particular, it might be that they're not coping well with group situations, or dealing with conflict, sharing, that sort of thing, so then we'll plan for that. We'll do the observation at a particular moment, and then the follow-on might be, "How can we encourage you to join in the group?" and things like that. Otherwise, if it's something like they're very-- **INTEREST-BASED** I'll have to say creative, because we've had a lot of children who've done amazing observational drawings and that's things that we want to promote because it's them showing personality and who they are through their art, so obviously we'll encourage that, provide more materials and resources for them to explore that sort of side of them. Because personally I'm very artistic as well. I like to **SELF-REFLECTION (SELF-EFFICACY)** promote that sort of thing with the children because it is very self-reflecting, and it makes you reflect on-- you've done a good job, things you could be getting better at, that sort of thing.

PHYSICAL SOCIAL SKILLS (GAMES)

★ FUNDAMENTAL MOVEMENT SKILLS

Or else we do like physical, if they enjoy games and things like that, then we'll do FMS and group games, or specific games, running races, all that sort of physical affair. Or if they're not doing very well with that, we'll still do it just to start in with [laughter]. And if they're interested in writing, we set up the whole writing area with guidelines and things, but developmentally appropriate, so we wouldn't do that for the two and a half year-olds. We're saying that these children who are in kindy who are trying to work, we're just encouraging them to be.

And so it seems that, from what I can see about the planning, that there's a lot on offer. Do the children get to choose?

INDIVIDUAL

INTEREST-BASED

Yeah, in the broader centre, yeah. So how the group plan works is from those-- basically what happens is we have a month goes by, so then from that month we pick out the things that either maybe weren't as successful because the children weren't interested and won't do it, or we'll pick out something that we think's really important that they haven't done yet, and we'll put it back in at maybe a different area or a different way, because sometimes you take things outside, it's completely different. So and then we'll put that on the plan, and each staff member so far has been responsible for an area. So, construction, out the back, out front, and they'll all set up their area with those resources for the children. And then we'll write observations based on that, and for the group and the individual, depending, and then that will come back to the next month.

Yeah [laughter]. All right, you've already mentioned this a bit, but as a separate question, what for you is the relationship between spirituality and religion? How are they separated or connected, how do you see them?

That's interesting.

Yeah [laughter].

SEPARATE & CONNECTED

I think religion is basically just putting a face to it, if that makes sense. So--

Do you mean naming it--?

--just because if I'm not to go to church, doesn't mean I'm not spiritual person, but if I go to church then I'm a religious and spiritual person, so, yeah, putting that emphasis

RELIGION A
CHOICE

on how you create your spirituality, through religion, that sort of thing.

So do you think that everyone is spiritual?

Yeah.

So when you look at the children, would you say, "They're all spiritual"?

SPIRTUALITY
INNATE

Yeah, I think everyone has an inner sort of spirit. You would call it maybe something like a soul, or a--

Yes.

--who you are in a greater perspective, when you don't put life pressures on yourself and things like that. The potential.

And then religion comes along.

RELIGION A
CHOICE
SP. INNATE

Yeah, I think anyone could choose to be religious, but it's more of a choice than spirituality. I think that's something that is in everyone, sort of like a God-given thing, if you would call it that, and religion is something that you can choose to then follow on and then have a greater focus for your spirituality.

Perfect. [laughter]So I'll ask you now about your early childhood practice, because the way, or your beliefs about children and the way they learn and about the environment, so if you could make just a few statements about your beliefs there [laughter].

INDIVIDUAL

[laughter] well, my beliefs about children are that everyone is individual, or every child, whether they're the same age or the same gender. Early childhood teaches you that really quickly.

"You've seen nothing." [laughter]

SOCIAL -
EMOTIONAL

INTEREST
BASED

Yeah, that is right, "You've seen nothing," that is definitely right [laughter], and that they all deserve your time and your patience and all you can basically-- and I do sometimes have to go on a-- because we have such a large number of children coming through that like are needs-based, so some children are really struggling either emotionally or things like that, so I tend to-- just not be with them all the time, but drift towards them when I see the things arising so that it doesn't happen. Just looking at those sorts of situations and trying to stop the meltdowns before they happen so that we can-- being proactive I suppose. But yeah, I believe that all children are individual. I believe that all children can learn and have the ability to engage with learning, and that impacts greatly on how we set up. If we have meaningful things that the children are interested in set up, you'll know because it's quiet. Or there's a great communication between them. And then obviously on the other side, if it's not set up properly then that's when the conflict and that sort of thing starts. Kids they're very eager to learn, and they all learn in different ways. That's something massive as well, in the fact that, like I said, some are artistic, some are more physical, some are invert, in the block corner every day, or in the dolls area, things that they drift towards because that's their interest. But they're still doing a lot of the same things. When you bring them all back together, they're still all learning and playing.

That's good. You just mentioned play …

PLAY
(CHOICE)

Oh yeah, sorry. They do certainly play. Yeah, every single thing we do here, so, yeah.

And, which previously you've mentioned, but like the choice. I observed children they just ask for things and then the educators go and get it or facilitate them getting it or--?

Yeah, that's right. So we make it available to them. Definitely.

Yeah. Perfect. Okay, last one is about your training and experience, so that I've got it what your background is. What sort of has led to your beliefs?

Well, I've been here in the Centre for about seven years.

You'd be running it by now [laughter].

0·75 TEACHER QUALIFIED

Seven years, but that's from an assistant to a qualified to just about finished my education, so like a bachelors.

When do you graduate, or when do you hope to graduate?

I'll have next year study and then hopefully then.

Yeah, excellent, well done.

--I'll graduate soon. Yeah, which is really, I suppose, taking on the role as the lead without having the degree, at first I was terrified. I thought, "No one's going to think that I can do it [laughter]."

Today, everyone does.

Obviously there's a bit more there than what I've previously actually thought about myself, but--

It's funny because you think you don't know anything, and then you're there and then you make decisions because you know something [laughter].

Yeah, that's right. You think teachers have-- because a lot of teacher have obviously been interested a long time, but things are changing all the time. I don't think you would ever know--

No, you never feel like you know everything [laughter]. And what about any recent PD you've had?

CONFERENCES ECE (EARLY YEARS)

I went to the Child Australia conference.

Oh, yeah? Was that through here?

Yeah. Anna and I went. I've been to the Autism Association too. This year I went to a visual strategies one--

SPECIAL NEEDS

Autism spectrum type thing, yeah. Are you involved in the PD that the school offers, or do you get to pick and choose if you go to that, or--?

I have been invited to it previously, but obviously I'm still working on the floor with the children, so if it doesn't match up, then I can't attend. But generally I went to the conferences at the beginning of the year, which was very interesting and actually.

Yeah.

Yeah, I think also. And what else--?

Yeah.

EARLY YEARS Yeah, I think I went to a EYLF one

Yeah, [laughter], yeah.

I dunno I think that's it.

Alright.

Oh and then I've also been to a few, run by Notre Dame, but they do, like a language development one. Obviously early childhood--

Yeah, early literacy stuff.

Yeah, that's right, from here to pre-primary one, so, yeah, it was very good.

Great. And just to clarify, anything on spirituality?

NO SPIRITUALITY No, not as yet [laughter].

Nope? That's it.

Yeah. All right [laughter].

Thank you so much.

Thanks. Okay.

Appendix E: Observation Template

Contextual Information: eg: age group, setting, times

Room:
Lead Educator:

Events – Verbal and non verbal Environmental notes including resources

Appendix F: Sample of Observational Data

Analysed extract from observational data of Educator 5: Centre A.

Observation Template

Room: 3 year old Kindergarten: Centre A

Educator: Educator 5

Observation Time: Observation # 1: 8am-3.15pm

Environmental Comments:

Large room located connected to other classrooms by a communal kitchen. Entry through lobby into the indoor environment. Access through large sliding doors to a shared outdoor environment (with 4 year old kindergarten classes). There is also a verandah outside.

Observation:

Doors open: 20 min before session starts. Mums and dads come in with their children – they put bags into pigeon-holes and most do a puzzle with their child. The educational assistant (EA) greets parents and children as they enter. She encourages them to take their parent over to the IWB to drag their name into the school building. The Educator is engaging with children whose parents have left. She asks two children the about the space video they watched yesterday, "can you remember what happens when the astronaut eats chocolate pudding in space?" One child responds and explains they have to catch the flying pudding.

A parent approaches the Educator to provide information about what's been happening for her child, "Lisa may be out of sorts today as we just moved house…"

Handwritten annotations: BELONGING | CONVERSATION | BELONGING (FEELINGS) CONNECTEDNESS

1

Educator listens and responds, "Thanks for letting us know we'll keep a special eye on her".

The Educator is now sitting in the story-time chair on the mat placing picture cards onto the easel but they are back-to-front. Two girls make their way over to the Educator and ask why she is changing the picture. The Educator responds, "because I have something to show you – a letter! Wait till you see!" The children are interested and speak at the same time to ask, "who is the letter from? When can we see the letter?" The Educator advises that they will get to open the letter when the bell rings and they must be patient until then.

RELATIONSHIPS

ENCOURAGING WONDER

The Educator and EA continue to engage the children in activities before the day starts – they encourage them to do a task, "why don't you look at your 'All about me' book" and "why don't you do a puzzle". Most children entertain themselves.

IDENTITY
BELONGING
CHOICE

A child enters with her dad, Educator asks, "What happened to your chin Lisa?" Dad responds…"She had a run in with her brother's train" "Oh no Lisa" Lisa then responds to say… "We were playing and he hit the train on my face" Educator says, "Ouch".

It is passed the usual start time of 8.45 (it's now 9am) and the room is still filled with parents and children. Educator and EA are moving around engaging parents and children in conversation. Some parents take this opportunity to speak with the teacher about incidents that have happened as well as how their child is feeling today.

BELONGING
CONVERSATION

2

EA rings the bell with a helper child.

FEELINGS OF SECURITY ↳BELONGING

Children move to the mat and sit in a circle (no Educator direction). The Educator and EA sit on the floor with the children. The child who is upset now that mum has gone sits on the lap of the EA. There is also a child with special needs and he sits on the lap of another EA whom he has walked in with.

MUSIC BELONGING (ROUTINE)

During the morning mat session the Educator leads the children through a song; "Hello, how are you today? We're going to have a great day…" There is clapping and actions too. The children turn to face a different partner for each verse. It appears to settle/calm all of the children. Educator introduces all of the adults in the room (EAs and parent helpers). Then Educator says…"where's Melissa?" "Melissa tell everyone where you are going next week!" Melissa says…"I'm going to see my mum" "That's right….to watch her get a certificate…[story continues about mum's award]". Educator concludes story saying, "Thanks for sharing that with us Melissa".

BELONGING

FEELINGS WONDER (ponder)

Educator gets the Christmas hamper and pulls it into the middle of the circle. She says – "I wonder what it would feel like to open a box / present for xmas and find nothing in there….how would you feel?" Children call out to respond "sad"…"I would scream"

GIVING TO OTHERS

Educator says, "we would all feel sad – what would make you feel happy? When you have something in your box like what mums and das have put into the hamper. We should thank our mum and dads for being so kind."

3

Appendix G: Pre-Analysis Coding Frame
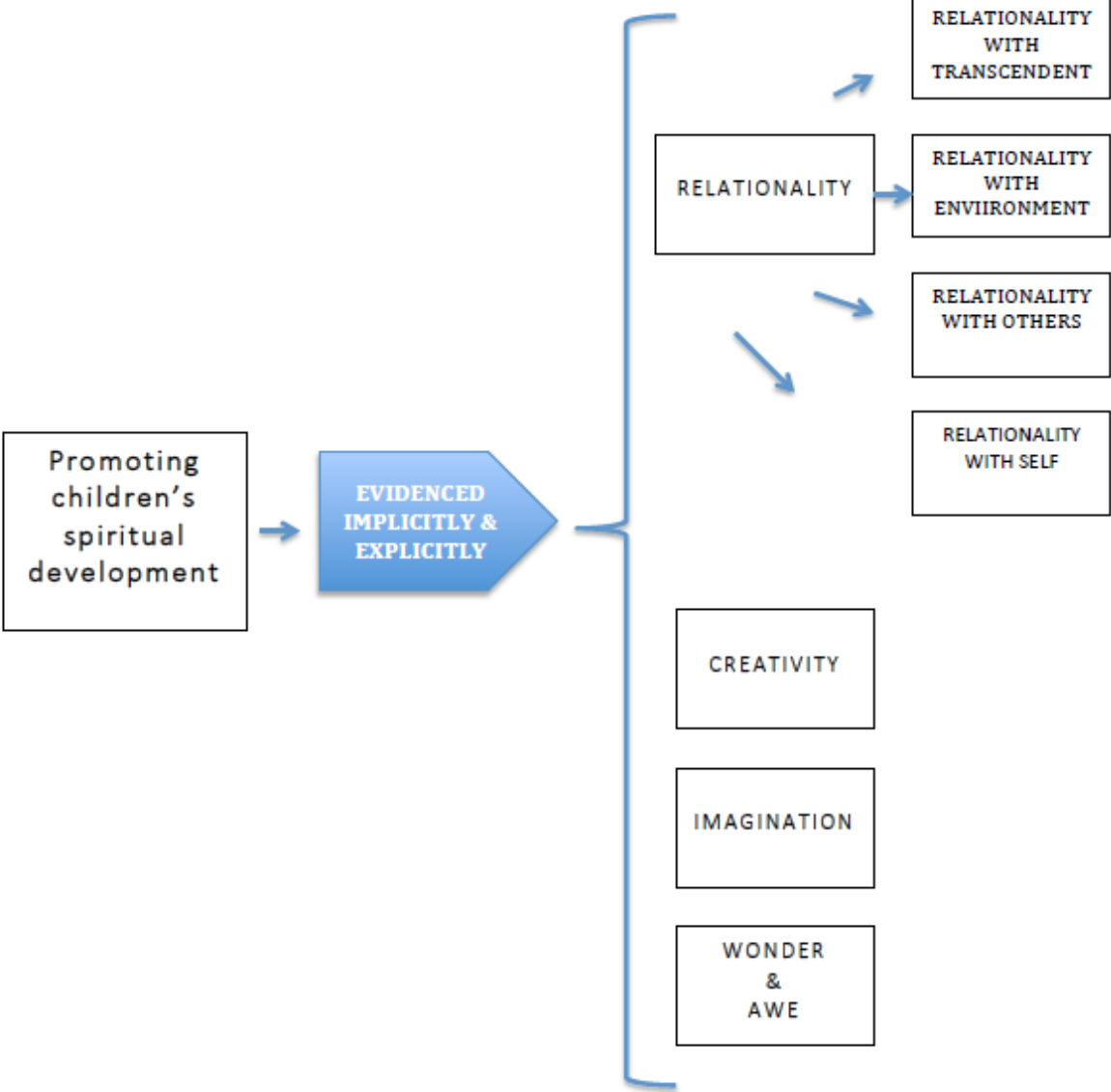
CATEGORY DESCRIPTIONS

Relationality:

An awareness of the 'self' and the relationship of the 'self' to 'others'. 'Others' in terms of person, environment or a transcendent.

> **Relationality with self:** construction of the self; identity development; development of resilience and wellbeing; the search for meaning in one's life.

> **Relationality with others:** relationships; connectedness to others; creating a sense of belonging; social skills.

> **Relationality with a transcendent:** the notion of going beyond the self; God; Jesus; prayer; creator, transcendence; questions about the soul, spirit, heaven; religious education.

> **Relationality with the environment:** involvement of children with nature; nature play; natural resources.

Creativity: activities that encourage creative expression; the arts;

Imagination: opportunities to engage the imagination; imaginative play (dramatic play)

Wonder and Awe: educator modelling of wonder; children expressing wonder and awe; delight.

Analysed extract of documentary data from Educator 3: Centre C.

Room: Three Year Old Kindy
Educators: 3 Centre C.

Thursday Week Six Program
Morning Greeting / Prayer / Mat Session

SELF IDENTITY

Read Christmas story, "The Christmas Tree"
Table One: Write your name in your passport
Table Two: Picture retell of 'The Christmas Tree'
Table Three: Counting sticks activity
ALSO: collage table, nativity dress ups

RELIGIOUS

Morning Tea
What shapes are all the fruit that we have today? – educator cuts the fruit in to different shapes.

SELF - IDENTITY

Outdoor Play
In the courtyard – play Hanaichimonme (paper-scissors-rock) introduced last week. Divide the children into two equal groups. The two groups hold hands with the members of their own group. The two groups face one another. Each team picks a player they would like to "win" from the other group. Then, those two players play jan-ken-pon (better known to many of us as rock, paper, scissors). The loser leaves his team and joins the other team.

Mat Session
Youtube: counting song and months of the year song.

RELATIONALITY WITH OTHERS
CO-OP SKILLS

Link to Theorists
Howard Gardner
True understanding is being able to represent the knowledge in more than one way.

Developmental Domains Key

| Cognitive/Language | Social/Emotional | Gross Motor |
| Fine Motor | Creative/Aesthetic | |

Multiple Intelligences Key

| Picture Smart | Self Smart | Body Smart | Word Smart |
| Logic Smart | People Smart | Music Smart | |

Friday Week Six Program

SELF IDENTITY

Morning Greeting / Prayer / Mat Session
What does your family do at Christmas?
Inside Play
Table One: Write your name as a sign in. Trace it first and then write it on the green piece of paper all by yourself.
Table Two: Make a list of what each family does for Christmas
Floor Space: Decorate a Christmas tree (craft)

SHARING SENSE OF SELF
BELONGING (FAMILY)

Morning Tea
Fruit: colour group

Outdoor Play
Variety of balls; Obstacle course

Mat Session
Begin learning Christmas song: Baby Jesus

RELIGIOUS

Group Focus
• Listening
eyes on the person who is talking
• Making Good Choices
Making choices that are positive and determining solutions to negative behaviours. Celebrating those good choices as a class.

RELATIONALITY WITH OTHERS
CO-OP SKILLS

MORALS

Individual Learning
• Writing our own names
• Those who are able to write their first name can start on their last name
• Look at the sounds in their names.

IDENTITY / SELF

Our Spontaneous Activities

Links to Outcomes: Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world. Children respond to diversity with respect. Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity. Children develop knowledgeable and confident self-identities.
EYLF Principles: 4 Respect for Diversity: Respecting diversity means within the curriculum valuing and reflecting practices, values and beliefs of families. Educators honour the histories, cultures, languages, traditions, child rearing practices and lifestyle choices of families.
Practices: Learning Through Play - Play provides a supportive environment where children can ask questions, solve problems and engage in critical thinking. They cater for different learning capacities and learning styles and invite and children and families to contribute ideas, interests and questions.

Appendix I: Post-Analysis Coding Frame