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: [Signature]

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