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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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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.