

Theses

2017

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

Christine Robinson

Follow this and additional works at: <https://researchonline.nd.edu.au/theses>



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA
Copyright Regulations 1969

WARNING

The material in this communication may be subject to copyright under the Act. Any further copying or communication of this material by you may be the subject of copyright protection under the Act.
Do not remove this notice.

This dissertation/thesis is brought to you by ResearchOnline@ND. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses by an authorized administrator of ResearchOnline@ND. For more information, please contact researchonline@nd.edu.au.



Chapter Four: Findings

4.1 Introduction

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

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

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

4.2 Findings from Educator Interviews

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

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

number of educator responses comprising the emergent theme are represented as a numeral within the presentation of findings. A summary of the interview findings follows the presentation of findings from all interview questions, in Section 4.2.8.

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

Interview Question	Super-ordinate Theme	Sub-ordinate Theme	Example of Educator Evidence
One: <i>Can you describe for me an experience of your own, or something you have witnessed, or read, that you consider 'spiritual'?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A religious experience • A personal experience within community • Experiences of nature • Reflection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health issues • Engaging with community • Music 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Well obviously God” (Educator 3) • “I guess involving the community” (Educator 6) • “I find nature really spiritual” (Educator 1) • “I suppose for me it’s more reflection” (Educator 2)
Two: <i>In addition to that experience, can you describe what you understand by the term 'spirituality'?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belief based • Innate and personal • Being a good person • Sense of purpose • Peaceful 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “More about beliefs” (Educator 9) • “I think spirituality is something that everybody can be” (Educator 5) • “Just the way that we care and nurture” (Educator 5) • “Just having a purpose” (Educator 3) • “Just feeling peaceful” (Educator 7)
Three: <i>How do you think children express their spirituality?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connectedness to people and nature • Emotional regulation • Play • Through drawing • Development of morals • Identity construction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sense of wonder 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Just the wonder and awe of nature” (Educator 8) • “Dealing with emotions” (Educator 1) • “So a lot of it is through play” (Educator 4) • “It’s through drawing as well” (Educator 4) • “More so in the values” (Educator 2) • “Finding who they are” (Educator 1)

Four: <i>How do you think children's spirituality can be promoted and nurtured?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Religion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prayer • Beliefs of the Catholic faith 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Well, even prayer is spiritual" (Educator 8)
Five: <i>What types of opportunities do you think you provide in your room to assist children to develop within the spiritual domain?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities to develop social skills • Conversation • Opportunities for play • Educator knowledge and skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitating relationships • Flexibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "How to...talk to each other and to be kind to each other" (Educator 7) • "Just in everyday conversation" (Educator 2) • "Playing, because that's where they learn" (Educator 4) • "We've got a new curriculum now, so that really helps" (Educator 7)
Responses analysed collectively. See Section 4.2.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identity development 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "More identity, to help them learn where their roots were from" (Educator 3)
Six: <i>What is the relationship between spirituality and religion for you?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distinct yet connected 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I'd say spirituality doesn't necessarily need religion, but it works hand-in-hand" (Educator 3)
Seven: <i>Can you tell me a little about your early childhood educational philosophy and beliefs that inform your practice?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play-based • Interest based • Socially and emotionally focused 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choice • Behaviour management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "We're definitely play-based" (Educator 2) • "We go off their interests" (Educator 6) • "Social and emotional development first and foremost" (Educator 2)
Eight: <i>What has led to these beliefs? For example, particular experience, training, documents?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial teaching qualification • Professional development • Personal experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early years curriculum • Play • Catholic religion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "In my last unit...we actually talked a lot about spirituality" (Educator 3) • "Only the PD they run at CEO [Catholic Education Office]" (Educator 7) • "A lot of relieving in early childhood centres" (Educator 5)

4.2.1 Findings from interview question one.

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

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

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

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

4.2.1.1 A religious experience.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4.2.1.2 A personal experience within community.

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

Educator 7: Centre A elaborated that her spiritual experience was about the personal, inner feelings of contentment whilst engaged in a whole group experience. Educator 4: Centre C described how she felt during the spiritual experience she had recalled.

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

“...Was just the whole setting...we all came together through the church”.

Encompassed within this super-ordinate theme was the notion of personally engaging with the needs of the community. This was exemplified in Educator 6: Centre B’s recollection of a spiritual experience that incorporated community involvement:

“I guess involving the community and giving back to the community...St Vincent De Paul...for people that don’t have stuff.”

4.2.1.3 Experiences of nature.

Nature was included within five educators’ recollections of a spiritual experience. Educator 1: Centre B, for example, described the following experience in response to interview question one:

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

Educator 5: Centre A elaborated specifically on the presence of water during her recollection of a spiritual experience:

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

4.2.1.4 Reflection.

Reflection was included as a response by four educators in their description of a spiritual experience. Representative responses include:

Educator 8: Centre A:

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

Educator 2: Centre C:

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

Music emerged as a sub-ordinate theme within the super-ordinate theme of *reflection*. Three educators who remarked that listening to music provided an opportunity for them to think and reflect, connected music to the notion of reflection.

Educator 6: Centre B exemplifies this connection within the spiritual experience she recalled:

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

4.2.2 Findings from interview question two.

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

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

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

4.2.2.1 Belief based.

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

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

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

4.2.2.2 Innate and personal.

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

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

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

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

4.2.2.3 *Being a good person.*

The super-ordinate theme, *being a good person*, emerged from educators' descriptions of spirituality being about 'doing good' and 'being kind'. Four educators commented on this particular feature of spirituality. Responses that contributed to this theme included:

Educator 2: Centre C:

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

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

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

Being a good person and the notion of 'kindness' was elaborated on by Educator 8: Centre A, who, in articulating her understanding of spirituality, retold an event from her room that involved children demonstrating kindness, through sharing:

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

Educator 8: Centre A used the above event to describe the actions of the child and the feelings of pride she had felt as the educator, to portray her interpretation of spirituality.

4.2.2.4 Sense of purpose.

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

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

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

4.2.2.5 Peaceful.

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

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

“It felt like a sense of ease”

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

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

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

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

Educator 5: Centre A described spirituality as:

“Tranquillity. Almost a sense of confidence...where all those fears and worries or concerns just disappear and for those brief few moments, there’s absolute peace.”

4.2.3 Findings from interview question three.

How do you think children express their spirituality?

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

4.2.3.1 Connectedness to people and nature.

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

“Connected with life. Connected with other people.”

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

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

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

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

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

“With children, it’s a sense of wonder and awe for sure...It really is *wonder*-full.”

4.2.3.2 Emotional regulation.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4.2.3.3 Play.

Children’s engagement with play, as a means of expressing spirituality, was articulated by three educators in response to interview question three. Little detail was provided on the features of this play, despite probing questions by the interviewer.

Educator 7: Centre A, as an example, responded that spirituality was expressed through:

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

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

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

4.2.3.4 Through drawing.

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

“...Or even being artistic, drawing, you know, putting out pictures on a table as a prompt”.

Likewise, Educator 4: Centre C commented:

“It’s through drawing as well, because they draw what they see. I think that’s all mainly I can think of.”

Educator 5: Centre A responded:

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

4.2.3.5 Development of morals.

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

“I think more so in the values...you know...being kind to friends.”

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

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

4.2.3.6 Identity construction.

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

Representative responses in this theme included Educator 9: Centre A who made reference to children learning about themselves:

“I think it’s [spirituality] more about themselves and developing their own self-awareness at this age”

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

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

4.2.4 Findings from interview questions four and five.

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

In addressing the practicalities of how children’s spirituality might be promoted and nurtured (the focus of interview question four), educators provided a variety of responses, all of which included examples from their own room, in turn responding also to interview question five. As such, interview questions four and five were analysed collectively. The process of de-bracketing (see Chapter Three, Section 3.8.1) was pertinent to interview questions four and five as comments had been made by the researcher, in the journal, that related to the researcher’s own assumptions about both the educators’ practices and their interview response. As observational data were collected prior to the interviews, during the process of de-bracketing the researcher revisited comments made in the researcher journal relating to both the observational data as well as the interview data. The extract below, made in the researcher journal, was significant to interview question five as it articulated the researcher’s personal views about the educators’ abilities to respond to the interview question and to connect with

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

Educator 2: Centre C:

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

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

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

4.2.4.1 Religion.

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

“Reading a story from the Bible...having a little table with the Bible and the cross and things like that... We do little things you know like, saying, ‘God Bless You’ at morning mat session...” (Educator 2: Centre C)

Prayer was also specifically mentioned:

“Of course being a Catholic centre we do the prayer before our meals. We go to the Church at Easter time...I think that's it.” (Educator 4: Centre C)

“Well, even prayer is spiritual. The prayers that we say everyday. We'll say a morning prayer, a morning tea prayer, a lunchtime prayer.” (Educator 8: Centre A)

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

Educator 7: Centre A:

“ We make them aware of God and creation and how they can relate to other people as Jesus taught us.”

Educator 8: Centre A:

“We talk about God, and we use stories, like the nativity”.

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

“Like at Christmas time, instead of just saying, ‘Santa's going to be coming’, telling them about the whole Christmas story and about baby Jesus and everything like that...”

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

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

4.2.4.2 Opportunities to develop social skills.

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

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

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

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

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

“Maybe like where we encourage a child to grab another one’s hand, when he knows they’re upset.”

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

justified the use of the Christmas Elf, stating that it had been introduced because she had noticed children commenting negatively about other children.

“It’s about being aware of how to...talk to each other and to be kind to each other, and not say things to make people unhappy.”

Facilitating relationships, as a means of nurturing children’s spirituality, emerged as a sub-ordinate theme within the super-ordinate theme, *opportunities to develop social skills*. Aspects of relationships were described by three educators, such as in Educator 9: Centre A’s response below:

“I think it’s more sort of like conflict resolution with children as well, getting them to have that sympathy for other children...”

Similarly, Educator 8: Centre A described her ‘super friend’ strategy that was used to teach children about what makes a good friend and what the qualities of a good friend are. The strategy involved encouraging children to be a good friend to each other and suggesting children name one of their ‘super friends’ at the end of the day.

4.2.4.3 Conversation.

Conversation, or discussion with children, emerged as a super-ordinate theme from the responses of three educators. Three educators referred to the importance of providing time to talk with children, with one educator identifying the modelling of conversation that occurs by the educator in the way they speak to children. An example of this was evident in Educator 9: Centre A’s response:

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

Likewise, Educator 2: Centre C commented:

“And I think maybe discussion. I think that’s a big part of, especially in this setting. It’s just in everyday conversation.”

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

Educator 8: Centre A stated:

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

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

“About friends, about stories we've read.”

4.2.4.4 Opportunities for play.

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

“They do certainly play. Yeah every single thing we do here is play-based.”

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

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

4.2.4.5 Educator knowledge and skills.

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

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

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

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

The researcher probed further at this point asking: “Because?” to which Educator 5:

Centre A elaborated:

“Most of our children would be Catholic and a few are non-Catholic”.

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

Educator 7: Centre A was the only participant to name the document specifically and she commented:

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

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

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

4.2.4.6 Identity development.

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

Similarly, Educator 6: Centre B responded:

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

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

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

4.2.5 Findings from interview question six.

What is the relationship between spirituality and religion for you?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4.2.6 Findings from interview question seven.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4.2.6.1 Play-based.

Just under half of the educators (4) responded that they followed a play-based approach in their room. The play-based approach was described as being centred on the belief that children learnt best when they were engaged in play experiences.

Choice, on behalf of the child, was emphasised and therefore emerged as a sub-ordinate theme. Representative statements in response to interview question seven include:

“I like them to be able to feel happy and free to play what they want...” (Educator 7: Centre A)

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

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

“We’re definitely play-based...but a definite intention and direction to support that...”

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

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

4.2.6.2 Interest based.

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

Educator 3: Centre C commented that she would:

“Go from what they need and what they're interested in and combine that...”

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

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

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

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

4.2.6.3 Socially and emotionally focussed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

“I love the way he’s doing that. Let’s move your name up.”

Educator 9 continued:

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

4.2.6.4 Additional findings in response to interview question seven.

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

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

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

- The specific early childhood approach, Reggio Emilia, was included in the response from Educator 5: Centre A. Educator 5: Centre A explained that she had previous experience working in a Reggio Emilia inspired early childhood environment and that she continued to follow many of the beliefs and practices, articulating learning as a journey for children where they should be able to develop to their full potential.
- The belief that children’s learning should be structured was articulated by Educator 8: Centre A who believed that whilst children should have some choice, a balance was needed to ensure all curricula were covered.
- Educator 7: Centre A responded that she believed children should not be hurried from one task to another. Educator 7: Centre A explained: “I like a calm atmosphere with not too much rushing”.

4.2.7 Findings from interview question eight.

What has led to these beliefs? For example, particular experience, training, documents?

Interview question eight sought to elicit from educators any prior experiences or professional development they had undertaken that connected with their beliefs and practices as an educator, as well as with promoting children’s spirituality. The educators who formed the participant sample varied considerably. There were

variations in their years of experience as an early years educator as well as in their professional development— whether this had been provided or had been sought. The following super-ordinate themes emerged in response to interview question eight: their initial teaching qualification; their previous experience in early years education; and recent professional development opportunities that were generally related to either play or to the Catholic religion. Eight of the nine educators had not been offered, nor sought, professional development within the area of spirituality. The one participant who responded that she had received some information on spirituality stated that this occurred within her initial teaching qualification at university (Educator 3: Centre C).

Professional development described were formal, structured learning opportunities provided from sources external to the centre. The areas reported on were most commonly in relation to early years curriculum (5), in particular mentioning a networking opportunity known as ‘kindy conversations’ (2) that involved local kindergarten teachers meeting on a regular basis to share ideas. Professional development on the topic of play in the early years (4) was also reported. Professional development on aspects of the Catholic religion were mentioned by four educators and was related to the religious knowledge of the educator as opposed to a focus on the child. Professional development in the areas of working with children with a special need (3) and assisting children’s emotional regulation (2) were also reported. Additionally, one educator spoke of her international experience in early childhood education as a form of professional development.

4.2.8 Summary of findings from the interview data.

To summarise, the purpose of the interview data was to provide insight into the experience of the participants. As Larkin, Eatough and Osborn (2011) note, IPA “aims to understand the lived experience of a conscious, situated, embodied being-in-the-

world, where ‘the world’ is understood through respondent’s involvement in it” (p. 330). As such, the researcher sought to understand educators’ practices to promote the spiritual development of the children in their room.

Overall, educators had difficulty recalling a spiritual experience and articulating their personal understanding of spirituality. Themes that emerged from the data clearly identified educators’ connection to religion when responding to interview questions on spirituality. Educators described spirituality, for themselves, to be: belief based (8); innate (8) and personal (9); concerned with being a good person (4); connected to their sense of purpose (3); and peaceful (5). However, educators described children’s spirituality—its expression as well as the practices they employed to promote it, differently from their own understanding of spirituality, although connections can be found. Spirituality was described as expressed by children when they are connected to people and nature (4); through emotional regulation (3); through play (3); through drawing (3); the development of morals (4); and through the construction of their identity (2). Educators responded that they promote children’s spirituality through: religion (8); opportunities for children to develop social skills (5); through conversation (3); opportunities for play (3); through themselves having knowledge and skills (4); and through the development of children’s identity (2). Findings from the interview data also illustrated the lack of professional development educators had received in the area of spirituality as well as the vast range of experiences, beliefs and practices held by the educators.

To conclude, the interview provided one dimension of understanding, allowing educators the opportunity to communicate their own understandings and experiences of spirituality as well as how they perceived they could, or were already, promoting

children's spirituality. The following findings, from the observational data, add a further dimension to the lived experience of the educator.

4.3 Findings from the Observational Data

The observational data obtained through observing the educators' practices provided both the incidental and intentional experiences that occurred in the room, which were pivotal in evidencing the practices of the educator to promote children's spirituality. As explained in the introduction to this chapter (Section 4.1), observational data were gathered as the first method of data collection. However, this chapter is sequenced in the order of the research questions to which the data responded. Whilst interview data responded to research question one (*What do educators understand by the term 'spirituality'?*) the observational data were gathered in response to research questions one and two (*What do educators understand by the term 'spirituality'?*; *What do educators know about promoting children's spiritual development?*). The analysis of the observational records, detailed in Chapter 3 Section 3.8.2, occurred by employing IPA in the same manner as interview data was analysed. As outlined in Bednall's (2006) stages of IPA (see Table 3.5) observational records were read and codes initially flagged as they emerged (see Table 3.8). The initial flagging stage was annotated on the transcript (see example Appendix F) and in an iterative process these codes were then grouped together to form themes (see Table 3.9). The emergent themes, referred to as super-ordinate and sub-ordinate themes are presented in Table 4.2. These themes represent the findings from the analysis of all observations, across all educators and all centres. Findings are presented in this section by super-ordinate theme with the representative examples from the raw data (see example Appendix F). When relevant to the emergent theme, bracketed information that provided deeper

insight into the observational findings is presented. This section concludes with a summary of the findings from the observational data (Section 4.3.5).

Table 4.2.
Super-ordinate and Sub-ordinate Themes from Observational Data

Super-Ordinate Theme	Sub-Ordinate Theme
Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitating conversation • Encouraging friendship • Creating a sense of belonging
Wonder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Posing wonder questions • Opportunities for imagination & creativity
Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitating resilience • Self regulation development • Facilitating wellbeing • Encouraging independence
Transcendence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities for prayer • Sharing religious stories

4.3.1 Relationships.

The *relationships* super-ordinate theme comprised three sub-ordinate themes, namely: facilitating conversation; encouraging friendship; and creating a sense of belonging. The facilitation of relationships, by the educator, was observed as a means of promoting children’s spirituality, whether undertaken intentionally or incidentally by the educator (See Chapter Two Section 2.2.2). The observational data highlighted the central role of relationships within the educators’ day, both in creating and maintaining relationships with children and in facilitating relationships between children. The sub-ordinate themes are elaborated in Sections 4.3.1.1 through to 4.3.1.3, with evidence from the raw data.

4.3.1.1 Facilitating conversation.

Within the *relationships* super-ordinate theme, educators were observed facilitating conversations with the 3 and 4-year-old children. The facilitation of conversations, by the educator, was observed as a practice that encouraged children to

interact with others by sharing their views or knowledge whilst also responding to another, therefore facilitating children's development of relationships. Consequently, *facilitating conversation* emerged as a sub-ordinate theme within the super-ordinate theme, *relationships*. Conversations were generally child-initiated, at times arising from the child's curiosity or a desire to share an experience of their own. For example, the following extract taken from an observation of Educator 6: Centre B illustrates a child-initiated conversation that was facilitated by the educator, and that contributed to this sub-ordinate theme:

CONTEXT:

A free flowing environment exists in Centre B whereby children move between two inside rooms and two outdoor play spaces. Educators are located in each of the settings and are easily accessible to the children. I am observing Educator 6 at the play-dough table inside.

CONVERSATION:

The children are seated (6) around a table. They each have a ball of play-dough and there are shared materials (rollers etc.) in the middle of the table. A child asks the educator: "Do you know who's coming to see the concert?" and the educator responds: "Hmmm let me guess, your mum?" "Oh yes she's coming but my big brother is coming too. Mum is going to get him from class and bring him". The educator continues the conversation asking: "What year is your brother in?" and the child hesitates. "I forget". "I think he is in year three—you are so very lucky—I bet you'll sing beautifully! Which part do you think he'll enjoy the most?"

The following scenario, whilst also representative of the data evidencing the sub-ordinate theme *facilitating conversation*, details Educator 3: Centre C using visual props to engage children in a conversation about a shared experience. By doing so, the educator facilitates the relationships among the children.

The educator hands out party hats for the children to wear and asks them why they might have party hats. "Cos it's a party", respond several children. "That's right", replies the educator, "Who has been to a party?" and the children raise their hands and some call out "Me!". "And what do we need for a party?" The children share games and decorations they have seen at a party: "Balloons, presents, pass the parcel". The educator asks the children to turn to a partner to share their ideas about what's needed for a party.

Additionally, children were observed in all rooms eating their lunch in small groups with an educator. This opportunity for conversation with children consisted of low level questioning by educators in an attempt to engage children in conversation. For

example, Educator 4: Centre C was observed asking a child during lunch, “is that an apple you’ve got there?”

4.3.1.2 Encouraging friendship.

Encouraging friendship emerged as a sub-ordinate theme within the super-ordinate theme of *relationships*. This sub-ordinate theme typified educators’ practices of explicitly teaching children what it meant to be a friend as well as identifying behaviours that illustrated ‘being a friend’. Encouraging friendships between children in the room was identified in the observational data as being a considerable focus for the educator. Educators engaged with children both at whole group and individual levels to discuss characteristics and behaviours of a ‘friend’, and this was observed as promoting children’s spirituality.

As an example, Educator 9: Centre A, was observed asking the children: “Hands up who has been kind to their friends today? I wonder who has been a friend to everyone? Or who has said something nice to their friend?” Children called out responses and the educator reminded children to think about their answer in their mind instead. In addition to this, Educator 7: Centre A made use of a Christmas Elf (toy), introduced to the children during a mat session, as a motivational strategy to facilitate the notion of friendship. The Christmas Elf was explained as always watching for behaviours that demonstrated being a friend to others and showing kindness. Educator 7: Centre A would remind children throughout the day that the Christmas Elf ‘was watching’ so they should ensure they were being a good friend to each other.

Educators were observed encouraging friendship through facilitating children’s cooperative play, as illustrated in the following extract:

There are four children playing outside in the sandpit by the water. The educator is present and observing the children play. The children are digging and building and making use of the water pump. The children are speaking with each other about their task: “I’m going to build a tunnel for the truck” and another child adds, “Then I’ll put a

bridge over here for the truck”. Occasionally a child will take an object from another child and the educator interjects: “Remember we ask our friends first...use your manners...why don’t you share the shovel”. The children listen to the educator and take on her advice. (Educator 1: Centre B)

Similarly, educator led cooperative activities, such as games, were observed within the sub-ordinate theme, *encouraging friendship*. For example, Educator 3: Centre C led children through a series of party games during a mat session. Rather than *encouraging friendship* as an intervention, as was evidenced within the observation of Educator 1: Centre B above, Educator 3: Centre C made statements during the playing of the party games to remind the children about being a friend, such as: “Don’t forget to speak nicely to your friend” and “Remember that we’re all friends so it doesn’t matter who your partner is for the game”. During a game of pass-the-parcel that was observed, the educator made comments to maintain children’s behaviour, which included:

“We are all friends and so we are happy for our friend if they win a prize” and
“Friends wait for their turn, they know how to share”.

4.3.1.3 Creating a sense of belonging.

The role of relationships in promoting children’s spirituality, as a super-ordinate theme, included the sub-ordinate theme *creating a sense of belonging*. This theme emerged from observations of educators actively creating an environment that promoted belonging. The promotion of a sense of belonging for children, to the room and centre, was observed occurring in a number of ways: educators’ sharing of information with families and colleagues to enable the child to receive a shared message between family and centre; through educators’ use of grouping as a strategy to facilitate children’s belonging to smaller groups; and through the use of music as a means of encouraging children to participate in a group. The range of social interactions inherent in belonging connected this sub-ordinate theme to the super-

ordinate them of *relationships*. Compared to the other sub-ordinate themes, observations within *creating a sense of belonging* regularly occurred as a part of the established routines in each of the rooms. These established routines included, for example, inviting families into the centre to enable the sharing of information between the family and the educators, as well as to nurture each family's sense of belonging to the centre. The following scenario evidences educators working together with families to create a sense of belonging for a child—Tom. Tom's mother had communicated with an individual educator about the family's upcoming holiday and this information had been shared with other educators to facilitate a sense of belonging for Tom:

Tom keeps walking around with his backpack on. He approaches the educator and asks: "Where's mummy?" The educator responds, "You're going on a trip tomorrow aren't you, Tom? And mummy needs to get organised and buy all the food. So you need to have a play with us. We love it when you come and play with us. Then mummy will come back and you'll be ready for your holiday". Tom wanders off and finds another educator who responds similarly, "Remember mum's gone to get ready for your trip, let's see what you can play with". Each of the educators knows of Tom's circumstance. Tom is clearly anxious for his mum's return, but his anxiety hasn't escalated. At each point of need the various educators have been able to reassure Tom that he belongs here. (Centre B)

Grouping children for play, or for educator led activities, was observed as a strategy employed by educators. Grouping children into smaller groups throughout the day provided an opportunity for children to identify themselves as belonging not only to the centre or room, but also to a variety of smaller groups based on shared interests or abilities. As observations were undertaken toward the end of the school year, children were competent with the established routines in their room and able to recall to which group they belonged. Educator 8: Centre A, for example, was observed referring to group names: "Where are the giants? Over to the paints, giants... and superheros? Where are you?" The children were observed enjoying being able to recognise their group.

Creating a sense of belonging, as a sub-ordinate theme within the super-ordinate them, *relationships*, was further evidenced through observations of educators' use of music. Music was observed as a strategy that created a sense of belonging as it fostered social connections among children. Although other strategies that had the potential to create a sense of belonging were observed, such as the sharing of stories, the educator was not observed encouraging children to contribute to the group, during these other strategies. When educators were observed including music as a strategy, they encouraged children's participation in the group and facilitated their interaction with other children, thus creating a sense of belonging. Music was often accompanied with movement or props and afforded children the opportunity to express their individuality whilst also contributing to the group. The connection of person to group is central to the notion of belonging (See Chapter Two Section 2.3). Educators were observed including a variety of songs throughout their day either with small groups of children or with the whole group. Generally, songs related to cognitive skills such as: letters and sounds; counting; or reciting the days of the week and months of the year. Songs were also observed with accompanying actions. Sometimes the time for a song appeared to be planned by the educator and, at other times, it was evident that the song was used to respond to, or value add to, a child's experience. For example, the following is an extract from the observation of Educator 1: Centre B:

The educator is observing a group of 5 children sitting in the reading corner on the beanbags. The children are all looking at the same book, *Old MacDonald had a Farm*. After watching for a few minutes the educator sits with the children and suggests: "Should we sing the song?" The children agree and the educator leads the song and the children fill in the animal noises. Other children in the room hear the singing and make their way over to join in.

Songs contributing to children's sense of belonging were also observed when educators chose songs that encouraged children to interact with each other. As an example, Educator 5: Centre A employed a song with lyrics that encouraged children to speak

with one another and this was observed as facilitating relationships by creating a sense of belonging within the group:

During the morning mat session the educator leads the children through a song: “Hello, how are you today? We’re going to have a great day...” There is clapping and actions too. The children turn to face a different partner for each verse.

At Centre B a similar scenario was observed of Educator 6:

Children at Centre B were guided through a ‘goodbye song’ that included actions when it was their turn to leave for the day. The educator would insert the child’s name into the song and the children would farewell the child until tomorrow.

The previous examples typify the use of songs by the educator as a means of creating a sense of belonging. However, educators were also observed providing opportunities for children to choose for themselves to engage with songs and music, and then value adding to these experiences. Children’s choice to be involved with music and songs was observed as creating a sense of belonging when children were in a small group that had been formed based on shared interests and when educators engaged with the children to facilitate the social interaction. As the observation was focussed on the educator, only those instances where the educator engaged with children were recorded. For example, on one occasion three children were observed in the outdoor environment playing with musical instruments (tambourine, egg shakers, triangle) that the educator had placed in a box on the verandah (Educator 5: Centre A). The educator approached the children and added to their interest in music by asking if they’d like to sing a song to go along with their music. The educator led them through several nursery rhymes (Miss Polly, Farmer wants a wife) and the children accompanied these with their musical instruments. Educator 5: Centre A assisted children’s sense of belonging in this example, through the facilitation of the children’s shared interest in music. Additionally, the educators’ actions to add to the children’s own initiatives and to facilitate the social interaction assisted children’s development of relationships.

Employing songs for fun, as a means of creating a sense of belonging, provided the opportunity for children to relate to others in different ways, to be light-hearted, develop comradery and therefore learn that social interactions can be fun as well as serious. Songs were observed being used by educators to create a sense of fun, contributing to children's sense of connectedness and belonging (See Chapter Two Section 2.3). These songs for fun (silly songs) were observed as a means of enhancing relationships among children, as well as between child and educator. Often these silly songs rhymed and made little literal sense, and they included actions. When the educator engaged children in silly songs, children generally requested to sing them repeatedly. Educator 9: Centre A, for example, used a silly song called "shake-a-boom-boom" that involved nonsensical lyrics and the action of shaking their whole bodies. Similarly, Educator 5: Centre A made use of songs for fun during mat session times, including "the animal song" whereby children would make the noise and an action of the animal in the verse.

4.3.2 Wonder.

Educators were observed making use of wonder questions and encouraging children's natural desire to wonder, to promote children's spirituality. Educators facilitated children's wondering when they asked open-ended questions that encouraged children to imagine possibilities and to be creative (See Chapter Two Section 2.2.3). This super-ordinate theme comprised two sub-ordinate themes: posing wonder questions (Section 4.3.2.1), and providing opportunities for children to engage their imagination and creativity (Sections 4.3.2.2).

4.3.2.1 Posing wonder questions.

The use of wonder questions, by educators, although evident in the data, were of a limited nature. In the observed instances contributing to this theme, the focus of

wonder was a text. Educators would begin story time by posing wonder questions for the children to consider. These wonder questions included, for example:

“I wonder who this creature is in the story?” (Educator 9: Centre A)

“I wonder what will happen in the story?” (Educator 8: Centre A)

“I wonder why this is such a special book?...I wonder if you have heard this story before?” (Educator 7: Centre A)

4.4.2.2 Opportunities for imagination and creativity.

The super-ordinate theme *wonder* was further evidenced in observations of educators providing an environment conducive to children using their imagination and creativity. Imaginative and creative opportunities were observed as facilitating children’s natural wondering. Educators structured their day to include circumstances that provided the opportunity for children to self-select creative and imaginative activities, regardless of whether these were play-based or educator-directed. Children at all centres had access to materials in their room that encouraged them to create, make, explore and engage as they pleased. Activities observed that the educator directed children to complete, and that provided for children’s creativity included: making a diorama style stable for baby Jesus (Educator 7: Centre A); making a Santa mask (Educator 5: Centre A); decorating a Christmas card (Educator 1: Centre B); and writing their name using a range of materials from shaving cream to sand (Educator 3: Centre C). Activities observed, that were offered independent of the educator, included painting; dress-ups; block play and play-dough.

Furthermore, the sub-ordinate theme *opportunities for imagination and creativity*, was evidenced in observations of children engaged in imaginative play scenarios by choice. Although educators had established the space and materials to facilitate imaginative play, children were intrinsically motivated to engage in this type of play; there were no occasions where imaginative dramatic play was observed as

educator directed. Educators rarely interacted with children when they were engaged in imaginative play, other than to call a child away from the play to complete an educator-directed task. On one occasion, illustrated in the following extract, an educator was observed as a participant in the imaginative play scenario, where she contributed to the children's vocab and storyline:

The educator is called for by a group of children. The children want her to join them under the verandah. They ask the educator to sit down and they begin to wrap a cloth around her and to comb her hair. The educator asks: "Am I at the hairdressers? I love going to the hairdressers". A child responds: "Do you like it?" "It feels lovely, thank you", the educator says. Another child says: "My turn" and sits to have her hair done by the educator. The educator asks the child: "Would you like a colour or a cut today?" The child doesn't respond. The educator replies: "You can say, yes please or you can say, no thank you— not today". (Educator 1: Centre B)

The following scenario was observed that evidenced an educator facilitating children's creativity and imagination by providing further materials:

All of the children inside are engaged in a task that they have chosen. Three girls locate the box of musical instruments (tambourine, bells, egg shakers) and enjoy making noise with them along to the music that is playing on a CD. The educator looks over and watches them for a few moments. Without interrupting the girls, she places a box next to the instruments. The box contains a variety of different patterned and textured fabrics. Two of the girls start to use the fabric to dance to the music. The third girl sits down next to the box and begins to sort the fabric into categories. (Educator 6: Centre A)

Educators were observed making use of the outdoor environment as a further context for promoting children's sense of wonder by providing the space and materials for children to choose to engage in their own imaginative and creative play experiences. Outdoor play was a feature in all centres. However, although a common feature, the way that educators facilitated play in the outdoor environment was distinct to each of the centres. In Centres A and C the outdoor environment was used as a free play opportunity. Educators at Centres A and C rarely engaged with children during this time. Children were observed initiating contact with the educator by seeking them out for assistance with social concerns or to request further equipment. During outdoor

play experiences at both of these centres, children could choose to participate in ball play, bike play, sand-pit play, imaginative dramatic play or use climbing equipment. Children could imagine scenarios, create story-lines and invent games as they pleased, moving freely between activities and educators took on a supervisory role.

At Centre B, two distinct outdoor areas existed. One outdoor area consisted of typical play equipment: sand-pit, ball play area and climbing frames. The other was a natural landscape with a vegetable garden; access to water and natural materials had been used to construct pathways. The outdoor environments at Centre B were observed being used similar to the way the indoor environment was used, meaning that tables were set up on the grassed area and under the verandah that facilitated the use of craft materials and play-dough, for example, for children, with which to play. Children could move freely between the two outdoor areas and the indoors, once again facilitating children's use of their imagination and creativity (see Chapter Two Section 2.2.3).

Children at Centre B were observed choosing to create an imaginative scenario whilst playing in the vegetable garden. Educator 1: Centre B was observed adding to the children's imaginative scenario by suggesting materials to assist their storyline:

Four children are playing in the veggie garden. The veggie garden is large and circular so children are able to walk around it and through it. The children are pretending they are shopping from the herb garden. They are pretending to be 'mums' and they talk with each other about the food they will cook for their children. The educator is watching and approaches the children: "I think you might need a shopping basket". The children pause and look around. "How about one of the buckets from the sandpit" suggests the educator and the children run off to grab a bucket each.

The process of de-bracketing that was undertaken during the analysis phase proved pertinent to the emergent sub-ordinate theme *opportunities for imagination and creativity* as comments were made in the researcher journal relating to the researcher's personal views of the outdoor environments. In Chapter 3 Section 3.7.2.1 an example

from the researcher journal pertaining to the outdoor environment at Centre B was provided whereby the researcher's personal views of the outdoor environments were documented. The researcher re-visited the comments made about Centre B's outdoor environments during analysis, to ensure that these did not influence the way the subordinate theme emerged from the raw data. In this instance, the researcher was careful to present the data on the outdoor environment at each of the centres, as a means of overtly acknowledging, and attempting to limit, any bias.

The sub-ordinate theme, *opportunities for imagination and creativity*, also comprised observations of educators creating moments of suspense that encouraged children to wonder and to imagine possibilities. For example, Educator 7: Centre A employed the strategy of using a Christmas Elf (toy) to encourage friendship within the room, previously explained (see Section 4.3.1.2). Educator 7: Centre A introduced the Elf by initially creating feelings of suspense by placing a box with the Elf hidden inside, on her chair in the morning. As the children arrived and asked her about it, she would respond that it had just 'turned up' and that they would all have a look together when the day started. As the children's curiosity grew, the morning mat session was consumed with their predictions about what was in the box. When a Christmas Elf (toy) was discovered inside the box along with a letter from Santa, the children's imaginings of why they had been chosen and the purpose of the Elf's visit, continued.

In some instances, children's creativity was interrupted by the educators' time constraints or the desire to complete an assessment piece or a product. For example, Educator 9: Centre A called for a child during his play and requested he complete a retell of the story of the birth of Jesus. The child had been previously engaged in block play with two other children and had to be called several times before he was aware that the educator wanted him. When he approached the educator he wanted to share a

story he had created with the blocks: "...It's like a lift, like the one at Ikea, and it holds 35 people..." and before he could continue the educator interjected to explain the task at hand.

4.3.3 Identity.

Educators were observed assisting children's development of their identity, another key characteristic of spirituality (See Chapter Two Section 2.2.2.1), intentionally and incidentally, as a means of promoting their spirituality. Educators within the sample were observed attending to the development of children's sense of identity in a range of ways. The *identity* super-ordinate theme encompassed five subordinate themes: facilitating resilience; self-regulation development; facilitating wellbeing; and encouraging independence. These sub-ordinate themes are elaborated with representative examples from the data in Sections 4.3.3.1 through to Section 4.3.3.4.

4.3.3.1 Facilitating resilience.

Educators encouraging children to respond positively to difficult situations and to persevere despite failure typified the sub-ordinate theme, *facilitating resilience*. *Facilitating resilience* was observed as a practice educators employed that assisted children in becoming self-aware and discovering their selves—who they are and what they are capable of which is shaped by their experiences. In particular, *facilitating resilience* assisted children in discovering their emotional selves and becoming self-aware of what they can overcome when challenged. Such facilitation may have promoted children's sense of identity and contributed to the promotion of their spirituality (See Chapter Two Section 2.2.2.1). The following observation illustrates Educator 9: Centre A encouraging a child to persevere positively, and perhaps, facilitating the child's resilience as a component of his identity:

During the morning mat session the educator asks for a volunteer to complete the ‘day of the week’ chart. A child volunteers and the educator leads the children through the days of the week song. The educator then asks the child: “What day is it today then?” The child pauses for a time and then provides the wrong response. The child appears uncomfortable and looks to the floor. The educator responds: “That’s okay. You can work it out. I wonder if we can help Luke. Let’s all sing the song again together”. The children sing the song again and this time the educator further prompts the child by reminding him what day it was yesterday. The child responds correctly and the educator encourages the children to give Luke a clap.

Similarly, the following is an example of an educator praising children for their perseverance and subsequent success in completing a task, post the event:

The educator turns her attention to the constructions that have been built during the previous session. The educator mentions that she had seen children working hard to make them and that even though it was a tricky task, they had kept going and now look at what they have created. The educator invites two children that have made a construction to stand with her and to describe their creation to the other children. (Educator 8: Centre A)

Facilitating resilience was also observed when educators praised children for their ability to overcome past events when children chose to spontaneously share events that incurred injury. Educators’ responses to scenarios where children had been injured were observed as being focused on how the children managed their emotions in the situation and then praising the children for being ‘brave’ and not getting upset. For example, the following conversation was observed whereby Educator 2: Centre C encouraged a child’s positive response to a situation by complimenting his ability to be brave:

“You know last night my brother got in trouble”. “Really, why? What happened Mick? Is that why you have a big scratch on your leg?” “He...he...it hurt...he pushed his bike into my leg” [details of the incident continue] “Oh no! Lucky you are so brave Mr Micky”. “Yeah”. “You’re so tough!” “Yeah, that’s what mum said. The child smiles at the educator.

4.3.3.2 Self-regulation development.

Educators were observed explicitly teaching children about ways to manage and express their feelings appropriately, resulting in the emergent sub-ordinate theme *self-regulation development*. On some occasions, educators were observed attending to

children in the moment when they were unable to control their emotions. For example, Educator 3: Centre C, prior to a game of pass-the-parcel with the children, talked about turn taking. She asked them questions such as: “How do we wait for our turn?”... “Do we get upset if it’s not my turn?”... “What will we say to the winner?” During another game, musical statues, some children were observed becoming over-excited. Educator 3: Centre C intervened in the moment to assist children’s development of self-regulation. The educator bent down to the children and whispered to them, and the children’s behaviour settled for a short period.

Assisting children’s self-regulation was also observed when educators accommodated the emotional needs of children. These occasions occurred in the moment that children were unable to control their own emotions and incapable of having a conversation about their emotions. For example, the following observation of Educator 5: Centre A illustrates the educator recognising that Tom was not able to have a conversation about his needs to be removed from the buddy activity, in the moment that it was occurring. Rather, the educator accommodated Tom’s needs by providing both a safe place for him and resources for him to use, signally to Tom that it was okay for him to stay there:

The Year Four class have joined the kindergarten class for ‘buddy time’. One child (3 years old) hides behind the educator’s chair whilst the children are paired up with a buddy. Children from the Year Four class have brought stories with them to read to their Kindergarten buddies. Some children from Year Four try to encourage the child behind the chair to join in with them. The educator intervenes: “That’s okay, that’s a safe place for Tom and that’s where he needs to be right now”. Then the educator places a book, some paper and some crayons in close proximity to the child. The child ignores them for a period of time and then takes them and draws and colours for the duration of ‘buddy time’.

In the following example, Educator 7: Centre A intervened in the moment that a child could not control his emotions. Educator 7: Centre A provided the child with space and time to calm his emotions and then returned to the child, once calm, to have a

conversation about his behaviour. In the conversation, Educator 7: Centre A scaffolded the child's ability to self-regulate, by enabling him the opportunity to articulate the cause of his outburst:

The educator is sitting with five children and it is sharing news time. There is a child telling his news and when he finishes he makes a loud grunting noise and begins to cry. "What's wrong?" asks the educator. The child doesn't answer but continues to cry loudly. The educator advises the child that either he can talk about what's wrong or he can go over to the reading corner, sit quietly and have a some think time. The child removes himself. At the conclusion of news time the educator makes her way over to the child who had been upset and asks: "What made you feel upset?" "Are you angry? It's okay to feel angry but you can't take it out on people. Tell me what made you feel angry so that we can fix it for next time". The child responds: "They didn't say 'you're welcome' when I finished my news". The educator responds: "Okay then, we can make sure they're a better audience next time".

Facilitating children's identity development through the sub-ordinate theme of *self-regulation development* was also observed through educators' use of literature. Educators were observed sharing stories with the children during which they would pose questions related to how a character in the story must have felt, therefore assisting children to recognise feelings in others. Educator 7: Centre A, as an example, read a storybook about the birth of Jesus. Throughout the story the educator questioned children with a focus on feelings:

The educator asks: "How do you think Mary felt?" and "Do you think she felt tired?" A child responds: "Frustrated!" The educator replies: "What a great word! Who can tell me what that word means?"... "Yes—fed up".

4.3.3.3 Facilitating wellbeing.

Wellbeing involves the development of positive dispositions, feelings of happiness and satisfaction all of which contribute to a person's sense of identity (See Chapter Two Section 2.2.2.1). The sub-ordinate theme, *facilitating wellbeing*, emerged from observations of educators focussing on children's happiness and the identification of each child as unique. An example of facilitating wellbeing was observed during a mat session, where Educator 1: Centre B led the children through a song, '*I am*

special'. In the second verse the children turned to a friend to sing '*you are special because you're you*'.

Educator 5: Centre A was observed explicitly teaching the children about using compliments, as a means of facilitating a sense of wellbeing:

On the whiteboard there is a construction of a 'warm fuzzy' and a 'cold prickly' (made with pom poms, sticks and paper). The educator speaks with the whole group about 'warm fuzzies' (giving compliments), as well as 'cold pricklies' (saying mean things) and points to the constructions as visuals, on the board (warm fuzzies are made with soft pom poms and cold pricklies are made with sticks). The educator reminds the children that they should try to say warm fuzzy things to each other. "Why?" asks the educator of the children. The children respond: "Cold pricklies hurt you" and another child responds "Warm fuzzies make you happy".

In addition to educators using explicit teaching strategies to facilitate wellbeing, educators were observed utilising a range of implicit strategies when engaged with children. For example, an educator was observed valuing the home language of children in her room, as a means of facilitating children's wellbeing and contributing to their sense of identity. Valuing the children's home language signified the educator's belief that language is integral to the person and the construction of their identity, thus creating a sense of wellbeing for the child. The following extract of an observation of Educator 1: Centre B illustrates this:

Two boys are playing with the monster trucks and speaking to each other in Vietnamese. The educator observes briefly and then approaches the boys and asks, "What game are you two playing?" One boy responds in English, "we're having races". Then the children return to their game and resume speaking in Vietnamese.

The educator in the above observation did not explicitly teach the children about the value of their home language. However, instead of insisting on the children speaking English in the room she contributed to their wellbeing by allowing them to continue to speak in Vietnamese, thus implicitly demonstrating that she valued the home language of these children.

As part of the sub-ordinate theme, *facilitating wellbeing*, educators were observed encouraging children to share information about their family, or activities they do at home. Encouraging children to make connections between experiences and events at home with those in the centre room facilitated children's sense of social recognition and provided an opportunity for children to share something about themselves; possibly facilitating the development of their identity. On one occasion, three children were observed decorating the Christmas tree in the room. Educator 6: Centre B approached and questioned the children:

“Do you have a Christmas tree at home?” and “What have you decorated it with?”

The children took turns to share what each of their families did to prepare for Christmas and the educator facilitated making comparisons between the children's experiences.

Providing children with opportunities for quiet times and reflection were observed as an additional way that educators facilitated children's wellbeing. Reflective opportunities were observed assisting children's development of satisfaction, promoting feelings of calm as well as the opportunity to become self-aware, thus providing opportunities to facilitate children's wellbeing (See Chapter Two Section 2.2.2.1 and 2.3). Reflective opportunities were presented to children with an attempt to limit external influences and to allow children time to think about their own feelings and actions as well as their relationships with others. Although these opportunities were limited, observations were evident of educators offering children the opportunity for 'rest time' when presenting them with a range of activities to choose from (such as puzzles and play-dough). When reflective times were presented

in this way, it was not conducive to actual quiet as other children were in close proximity and engaged in interactive, noisy activities. The opportunity for this type of quiet time was observed, for example, of Educator 3: Centre C and Educator 6: Centre B. On one occasion a child was observed taking up this 'quiet time' opportunity and the child sat independently in the space for a period of five minutes (Centre C).

Educator 2: Centre C was observed guiding the children through a relaxation session where she directed children's thinking toward their family:

The educator asks the children to find a space to lie down where they won't be touching anyone else and to close their eyes. The educator moves some children around to keep distance between them. She tells the children they can think about something and suggests Christmas or something they like to do with their family. Alternatively children are told they can sleep. The educator observes the children, walking between them and redirecting several children who do not want to participate.

4.3.3.4 Encouraging independence.

Educators were observed encouraging children to be independent as a means of facilitating the development of their identity. *Encouraging independence* was typified by observations of educators facilitating children's development of agency and voice, as a component of identity (See Chapter Two Section 2.4.3), by encouraging them to use their initiative. Children's agency and voice was observed through the use of choice, by educators, as a practice that facilitated children's independence, contributing to their identity development. At Centre B, educators were observed providing children with the choice to have morning and afternoon tea. Educator 1: Centre B for example, invited children to morning tea: "Tommy would you like to have some morning tea with us?" When a group of children were ready, the children were tasked with setting the table and organising the eating area, facilitated by the educator.

Additionally, independence was encouraged through the daily routines that existed within the various rooms. Routines appeared to assist children's independence as they were able to use their initiative to predict what was to happen next. When

children were able to predict what would happen next they moved onto the next task without prompting from the educator. Given the lateness in the school year that observations were undertaken, routines were established and children were observed as very familiar with these. Children were observed preparing themselves for what they knew was to come. The following observation of Educator 4: Centre C provides an example:

The educator rings the bell and the children immediately begin to pack away. The educator gives no instructions—the children know what to do. A couple of children, once packed away, go and get their lunch box and hat. The educator has not indicated that it is time for lunch (although it is 12.30). These actions suggest a familiar and established routine for the children. The children begin to line up at the sliding door that leads out to the verandah.

Independence was also observed through educators' practices to develop leadership skills. Educators used various forms of a 'job roster' that supported children taking responsibility in their room. Educator 7: Centre A for example, had developed the positions of '2 Star Leaders' for the day. These '2 Star Leaders' were two children that were chosen by the educator in the morning mat session and were tasked with being the educator's helpers throughout the day.

Furthermore, *encouraging independence* as a sub-ordinate theme was evidenced by observations of educators use of play as a practice. The amount of freedom children had in choosing what to play or how to play was observed as encouraging children to develop independence, with the possibility of contributing to their development of identity. The amount of freedom afforded to children was dependent on the educator. Educators were observed following similar practices within the same centre, and as such variation was found across centres, rather than across educators. At Centre A, play featured throughout the day. However, the play opportunities supported little choice for the child. For example, the following scenario was observed of Educator 7:

“Okay everyone we’re off to play”. The educator calls children by their group name and then directs them to particular areas in the room to play. These areas involve: the collage table, play-dough table, threading activity, blocks, dramatic corner and an educator table where children will write on a card. “Let’s go”, says the educator, and the children move off to their areas. Children are able to switch tasks as they wish, but can only select from the activities previously provided.

At Centre B a child-centred approach to play, that facilitated choice, was observed. The free flowing environment at Centre B was conducive to children moving between activities without requiring adult assistance and there were a large number of materials and equipment available to the children. Educators at Centre B were observed facilitating children’s choice within play in the following example from the observation of Educator 1:

A couple of children approach the educator and ask for some dress-ups. “Yes, let’s go together to get them —come with me”, responds the educator. They all go over to the storeroom and the educator passes the children two boxes of dress-ups. “Where will you put them?” asks the educator. “We’re going to make super hero capes so we’ll put them on the mat”.

Educators at Centre C provided both educator-directed experiences that contained little choice, as well as free-choice play opportunities for children. In the morning sessions observed, play was presented in the form of structured educator-directed play-based tasks that incorporated play materials, such as: completing a puzzle and manipulating play-dough into Christmas objects. During afternoon sessions, educators were observed providing a greater variety of materials for children and educators supported children choosing their own play opportunities. Play opportunities during afternoon sessions included the use of: dress-ups, painting, play-dough, blocks, craft, dramatic play and bubble-play.

The de-bracketing process that occurred as a part of the analysis of the observational data provided insight into the sub-ordinate theme *encouraging independence*. De-bracketing involved re-visiting all entries made in the researcher journal, and several notes were made relating to the researcher’s personal views on

play. As play emerged as a practice that educators utilised to encourage independence, de-bracketing was pertinent to this sub-ordinate theme. The following is an entry taken during the observation of Educator 8: Centre A:

I am surprised at the lack of interaction between educator and child during the play opportunities. Perhaps it is not actual verbal interaction that is missing, but there is no 'value-add' to the children's play. The educator is busy doing her task and has not engaged with the children at all. The educator cannot really know what the children are playing.

The de-bracketing process caused the researcher to be reflexive, by recognising personal views and attempting to remove these from the research. In doing so, the iterative process of returning to the evidence that contributed to the emergent theme was undertaken and this process ensured that the views of the researcher did not influence the way that the sub-ordinate theme, *encouraging independence*, emerged. As a safeguard against the influence of bias, the researcher ensured all centres were represented in the findings.

4.3.4 Transcendence.

The *transcendence* super-ordinate theme emerged from observations of educators facilitating discussion about an Ultimate Other, referred to as God, (See Chapter Two Section 2.2.2.4) as well as practices that were particular to the Christian religion, contributing to children's connectedness to God. The following sub-ordinate themes were distinguished in the data: opportunities for prayer (Section 4.3.4.1) and sharing religious stories (Section 4.3.4.2). Although all three centres accepted enrolments from children of a variety of faiths, a Christian religious context was clearly evident in the observational data. Educators were observed explicitly talking with children about Christianity, with no overt mention of Catholicism. As observations were undertaken

in the final two months of the year, the story of the birth of Jesus, God's Son, formed the focus of the super-ordinate theme, *transcendence*.

4.3.4.1 Opportunities for prayer.

Prayer was observed as part of the daily routine, with educators involving children in prayer during morning mat session, prior to lunch and in the last session of the day. The style of prayer, adopted by educators, varied. For example, at times, prayers were observed being recited from memory by the children, sometimes involving actions. At other times, prayers took the form of an echo-pantomime and sometimes prayers were sung.

Discussion of the prayer, by educators, was not observed on any occasion. Educators provided little, if any, introduction to the prayer and no discussion was observed at the conclusion of the prayer. Educators introduced the prayer by simply stating, for example: "Now let's say our prayer" (Educator 5: Centre A). The researcher recognised that these prayers, and their meaning, may be familiar to the children due to the lateness in the school year that observations were taken. However, as observed in the following extract, it was evident that not all children were familiar with the prayer:

The educator puts her hands together to pray. The children copy and she states: "Let's say our lunch prayer together". Several children do not join in and are speaking with each other. One child says 'Santa' instead of 'God' but the educator does not address this. They finish the prayer with the sign of the cross and the educator directs children to lunch. (Educator 4: Centre C)

4.3.4.2 Sharing religious stories.

Sharing religious stories emerged as a sub-ordinate theme contributing to the super-ordinate theme, *transcendence*. The religious stories observed being shared by educators were variations of the story of the birth of Jesus. In the occasions observed, the source used for the story was a literary text, as opposed to either one of the scripture passages (Mt. 1:18-2:12 or Lk. 2:1-20). On one occasion an educator was

observed *telling* the children the story of the birth of Jesus without a script, but whilst holding a Bible. Prior to telling the story the educator engaged children in the following discussion:

The educator is sitting on the mat with the whole group. The educator is holding a Bible. The educator asks children: “What’s the Bible again? Can someone tell me?” One child responds: “It’s a book”. The educator goes on to tell the children that it is a book to help us learn about Jesus and that the biggest gift we have ever received is not the presents we get at Christmas time but Jesus—God’s Son. (Educator 8: Centre A)

Drama was also observed as a practice facilitated by educators for the sharing of religious stories, in particular, the story of the birth of Jesus. Educators were observed assisting children to act out the story. For example, in some rooms, educators facilitated this informally, whereby children had chosen to re-enact the story of the birth of Jesus during a play experience and educators supported their needs by reminding them of the characters or events (Centre B). In the example provided at Centre B the educator had also facilitated children choosing to re-enact the story of the birth of Jesus by providing costumes and props in the dramatic play space. In other rooms, the re-enactment took a performance style (Centre A). In these performance style observations, educators led the re-enactment, using a self-written script adapted from the biblical accounts, and directed children to their parts.

In addition to this, sharing religious stories was observed occurring incidentally, in response to children’s conversation. Educators were observed adding a religious context to conversations with children about Christmas. The following extract presents an example:

The educator asks the children to turn to a partner to share their ideas about what is needed for a party. A child calls out to the educator: “Are we having a party cos Santa is coming?” The educator calls the child up to her and begins to explain that they are having a party to celebrate the birth of baby Jesus. (Educator 3: Centre C)

Similarly, Educator 1: Centre B was observed adding a religious context in her conversation with a child:

A child approaches the educator to tell her that she has “this thing” at home and every night she is allowed to open one of the little doors on it and she gets a chocolate. The educator proceeds to speak with the child about what they were counting down to—the birth of Jesus. The educator explains the Advent Calendar as a way to help people wait for Jesus.

4.3.5 Summary of findings from the observational data.

The purpose of the observational data was to contribute findings relating to both educators’ intended practices as well as the incidental practices that arose in their room. The process of IPA resulted in the emergence of the following super-ordinate themes: relationships; wonder; identity and transcendence. Within these super-ordinate themes, sub-ordinate themes were identified as the practices educators employed to promote children’s spiritual development. In addition to the observational findings and interview findings previously presented, the following Section 4.4 provides the findings from the documentary data.

4.4 Findings from the Documentary Data

Documentary data, in the form of planning documentation, were gathered from each of the educators (for a two-week period) in response to research question three (*What practices are educators implementing, intentionally and incidentally, to promote children’s spiritual development?*). It was recognised that what occurred in actuality (gathered through observation) may differ from what educators had planned, and therefore these data added a further dimension to understanding educators’ practices for promoting children’s spirituality. Table 3.4 in Chapter 3 illustrated the number of documents collected, as this varied across the centres. Qualitative content analysis (see Section 3.8.3) was the method of analysis employed to determine both explicit and implicit planning of educators’ practices to promote children’s spirituality. Qualitative content analysis utilises the term ‘category’ rather than ‘theme’ to describe findings

that emerged from the analysis of data (See Chapter Three, Section 3.6.3). Prior to analysis a coding frame was developed using characteristics of children's spirituality identified from the review of literature (see Section 3.8.3 & Figure 3.6). The characteristics from the literature review were illustrated as main categories on the coding frame. Each main category required a description to focus the researcher's analysis (Figure 3.6) and these are referred to as sub-categories. As the form of qualitative content analysis chosen included both inductive and deductive methods (see Figure 3.5) a coding frame was also developed during analysis to illustrate both pre-determined categories and emergent ones. Figure 4.1 illustrates the post-analysis coding frame. In the post-analysis coding frame (Figure 4.1), the sub-categories are presented alongside the main categories for example, *belonging* emerged as a sub-category within the main category of *relationality of others*. Each sub-category includes an example of a practice, planned for by the educator, from the raw data. The examples that emerged are the evidence of the educators' practices to promote children's spiritual development. Appendix H provides one planning document from Educator 3: Centre C to illustrate the way categorisation of the raw data occurred.

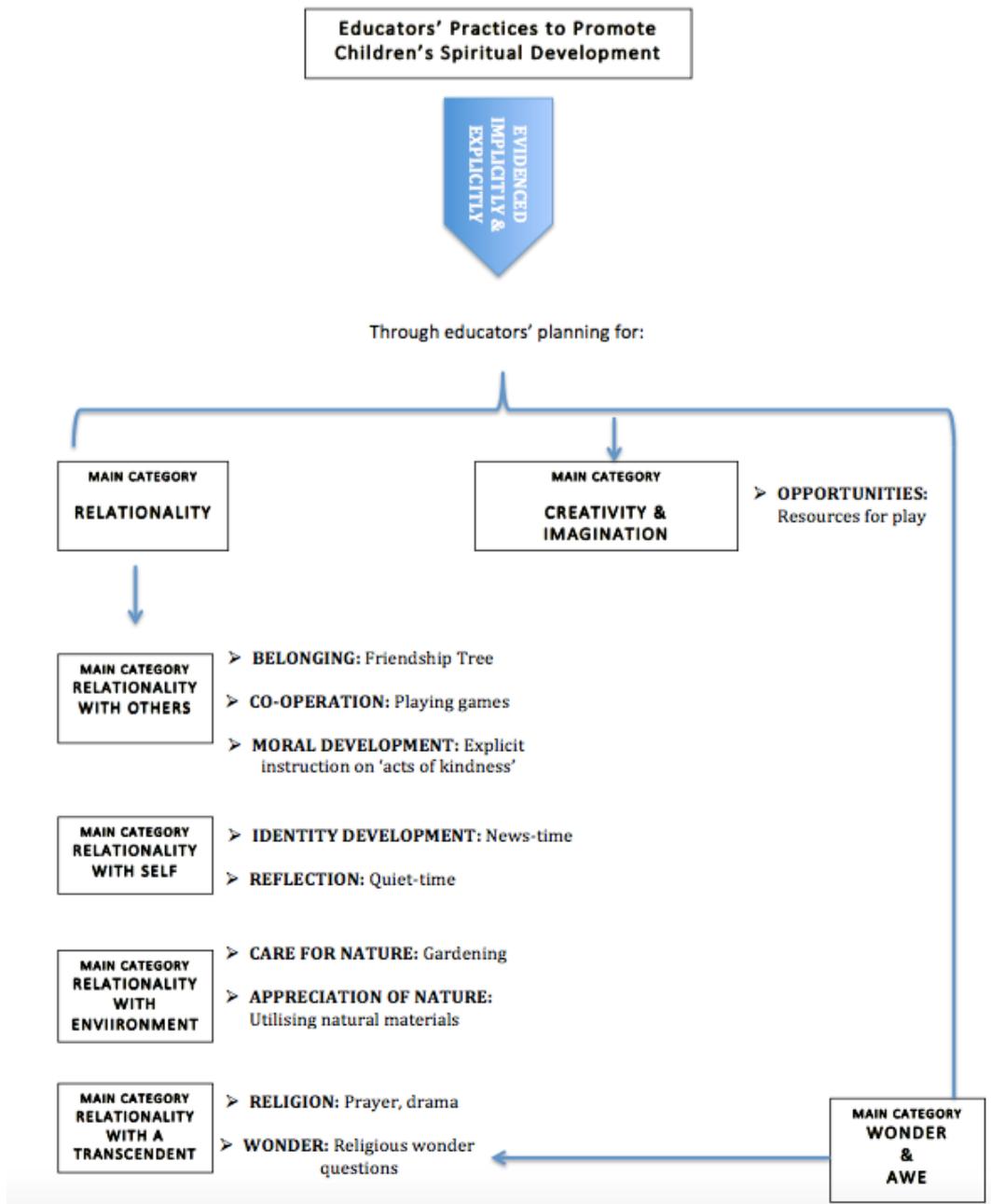


Figure 4.1. Post-analysis coding frame.

In addition to the inclusion of sub-categories and examples from the raw data, the post-analysis coding frame differed from the pre-analysis coding frame in the main category of *wonder and awe*. *Wonder and Awe* was evidenced in educators' planning documents only in a religious sense and therefore was found to be connected to the

main category of *relationality with a transcendent*, as indicated in Figure 4.1 with an arrow.

Findings are presented in this section using the main categories illustrated in the post-analysis coding frame (Figure 4.1). Representative evidence from the raw data is presented as examples of the educators' practices that emerged within these categories. To provide clarity to the presentation of findings from the documentary data, the term 'explicit' is used to indicate when documentation included specific planning for a particular category and 'implicit' is used to describe those practices that implied a category. For example, *co-operation* was explicitly planned for when educators used terms such as 'co-operative skill development' in their documentation. *Co-operation* was implicitly planned for when educators included games in their planning, as these involved co-operative skills, although not explicitly mentioned on the document.

As explained in Section 3.8.3.1, the process of de-bracketing, although not a feature of qualitative content analysis, was undertaken by the researcher to maintain consistency in the research process and to aid reflexivity. Whilst the de-bracketing process did not prove as insightful as it did with the findings from the interview and observational data, the process was adopted to safeguard against bias (based on the presentation and aesthetics of the documentation). To further limit bias, analysis took place over a period of one month, in which time the researcher became comfortable with the variations between document style and initial categories were reviewed.

4.4.1 Relationality with others.

The main category, *relationality with others*, was formed from evidence of educators' planning for relationships; connectedness to others; friendship; creating a sense of belonging; and social skills, as outlined in the category descriptions of the pre-analysis coding frame (see Figure 3.6). The category descriptions, as a feature of qualitative content analysis, were utilised as a tool to focus the process of analysis, but

not limit it. As such, some sub-categories outlined within the descriptions were evidenced and at times, new sub-categories emerged. Evidence of practices from the data within *relationality with others* included the following sub-categories that are elaborated on in Sections 4.4.1.1 to 4.4.1.3: belonging; co-operation; and moral development.

4.4.1.1 Belonging.

Educators planned for opportunities and experiences that contributed to children's *relationality with others* by encouraging a connectedness with others and contributing to children's sense of belonging. Belonging was planned for implicitly with reference made to activities that encouraged a sense of connectedness among the children in the room, for example:

- Creating a friendship tree (Educator 1 & 6: Centre B)[Making a visual display of a tree. Each branch illustrated who children were friends with]
- Transition to pre-primary, meet the teacher and visit the room (Educator 7: Centre A). [As it was near to the end of the school year, transition time was featured in planning. Transition in this sense refers to moving into the following year group to allow children to become familiar with the setting and next years' teacher]

4.4.1.2 Co-operation.

Planning documentation provided evidence of opportunities for children to develop their skills in co-operation. Co-operative activities encouraged children to interact and to be in relationship with each other. Rarely documentation outlined the specific co-operative skill to be focussed on (for example, turn-taking or winning and losing behaviours). Rather, co-operative skills featured in planning documents as:

- Play the game 'paper-scissors-rock' (Educator 3: Centre C) [This is a hand game that is played in pairs and has a set of rules to follow]

- Play the ‘Dress the Santa’ game in small groups. (Educator 7: Centre A)[This is a paper based game whereby children roll a dice that correlates to an item of clothing that they dress onto their Santa]
- Think-pair-share (Educator 3: Centre C) [This is a co-operative strategy that involves children thinking independently, turning to a partner and then sharing their ideas]
- Mat manners star of the day (Educator 5: Centre A) [One child is selected at the end of the day who has been observed using their manners during the mat sessions for that day]
- Reminder notes about what makes a good listener, such as, “eyes on the person who is talking” (Educator 3: Centre C).

4.4.1.3 Moral development.

Moral development was identified as a sub-category within *relationality with others* as educators planned for explicit teaching on how children’s behaviours affected others. Although moral development was not explicitly contained within the category description of the pre-analysis coding frame (Figure 3.6), this sub-category emerged due to its connection to being in relationship with others. Additionally, the explicit nature of educators’ planning within this sub-category distinguished it from the previous sub-category *co-operation*. For example, educators planned for facilitating children to make the ‘right choice’, explicitly teaching children about how to treat others and explicitly teaching children the qualities of a good friend. Documentation included the following as an example of planning for children’s moral development:

- Explicit instruction on what constitutes ‘acts of kindness’ during a mat session (Educators 8 & 9: Centre A)

- Identifying characteristics of a ‘good friend’ during a mat session
(Educators 7 & 9: Centre A).

4.4.2 Relationality with self.

Relationality with self was described from the literature as focused on evidence of educators planning for the construction of the self; identity development; development of resilience and wellbeing; and the search for meaning in one’s life (see Figure 3.6). Educators’ planning for children’s development of their own identity (4.4.2.1) and by providing opportunities for reflection (4.4.2.1) emerged as the sub-categories from evidence within the documentation.

4.4.2.1 Identity development.

Identity development was evidenced through educators’ planning for strategies that afforded children the opportunity to share information about themselves, for example:

- ‘News time’ (Educators 7, 8, 9: Centre A; Educators 1 & 6: Centre B; Educator 2: Centre C) [News-time requires one child to speak with either a small group or the whole class and to share information that has been prepared on a topic]
- Grandparent Focus: ask children to bring in a photo of themselves with their Grandparents. Ask children what they like to do with their Grandparents.
(Educators 1 & 6: Centre B).

Identity development was also implicitly evidenced through the following examples of planned activities that involved a connection to the self:

- Children practise recognising and writing their name (Educator 3: Centre C)

- Discuss what their favourite food is to eat (Educator 3: Centre C)
- Draw a self-portrait (Educator 7: Centre A)

Identity development was further implicitly evidenced through educators' lack of planning for outdoor play experiences, which in turn increased children's ability to choose an activity for themselves. Choice afforded children the opportunity to use initiative, follow an interest and to make decisions, thus offering the possibility to contribute to their development of the self (See Chapter Two Section 2.2.2.1). Planning for outdoor play opportunities generally consisted of a list of equipment or resources provided for the children, with no focussed skill, objective or educator directed task.

Such as:

- Obstacle course set up (Educator 5: Centre A)
- Dolls and prams outside (Educator 4: Centre C)
- Variety of balls (Educator 3: Centre C)
- Photos of Australian animals placed in the garden (Educator 3: Centre C)

Children's sense of identity was developed through the autonomy provided to them in the outdoor environment. Educators planned less structured activities or explicit teaching outdoors, instead allowing children choice in this space.

Additionally, educators did not use the term 'identity development' explicitly within their planning documentation. However, some educators indicated on their document that identity development was a focus by referring to Outcome 1 in *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework* (EYLF) (Department for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2009). Outcome 1 states: "Children have a strong sense of identity" (DEEWR, 2009, p. 21).

Outcomes from the *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009), when referred to in documentation, featured as overarching outcomes, relating to the entire document, rather than referenced to specific activities.

4.4.2.2 Reflection.

Opportunities for reflection were evident in some educators' planning documentation and these facilitated children's relationality with the self. The opportunity for children to take time out and to reflect provided children with the opportunity to construct their sense of self and potentially a context for children to develop a sense of meaning and purpose, as outlined in the category description (Figure 3.6). Reflection was a part of the daily routine section in planning documents and immediately followed the lunch break on all occasions. The planning documentation indicated the following:

- Children can choose to sleep, sit quietly, look at a book or complete a puzzle (Educator 5: Centre A)
- Children can move into the next room if they want to rest quietly (Educators 1 & 6: Centre B).

4.4.3 Relationality with the environment.

Relationality with the environment was focussed on planning for children's involvement with nature; nature play; and natural resources, as outlined in the category description developed from the literature (see Figure 3.6). *Relationality with the environment* was evidenced in educators' planning documentation through the inclusion of activities that encouraged children to both care for nature (4.4.3.1) and to appreciate nature (4.4.3.2).

4.4.3.1 Care for nature.

Evidence of the sub-category *care for nature* was centre based, rather than educator based, with educators in the same centre taking a similar approach to planning for opportunities for children to care for nature. For example:

- Clean out the vegetable garden to help the veggies grow; Gather interested children to plant cress; Create a Japanese zen garden with children (Educators 1 & 6: Centre B)
- Talk about how to care for the budgie (bird) (Educator 8: Centre: A)

4.4.3.2 Appreciation of nature.

Appreciation of nature, as a sub-category, emerged from educators' inclusion of natural materials within a variety of activities and this was also found to be centre based. Centre B included the following in their documentation:

- Provide recycled materials for children to freely create in the sandpit
- Provide recycled materials at the collage table
- Collect natural materials outside with children to create an art piece.

4.4.4 Relationality with a transcendent.

The main category *relationality with a transcendent* was described in the category descriptions as focussed on the notion of going beyond the self; relating to God; Jesus; prayer; creator, transcendence; questions about the soul, spirit, heaven; and religious education. The following two sub-categories emerged from the analysis of educators' documentation: religion (4.4.4.1) and wonder (4.4.4.2).

4.4.4.1 Religion.

Religion featured as part of educators' planning most specifically through educators' planning for prayer within their daily routines. Prayer featured in

documentation in the morning, prior to lunch and at the end of the day. The forms of prayer, or words to the prayer, were not included in any documentation.

Documentation contained the following references to prayer:

- Transition [in this context ‘transition’ was used to describe the movement between activities within the room]:
prayer, wash hands, get lunch boxes (Educator 5: Centre A)
- Morning greeting, class prayer (Educator 3: Centre C)
- Pack bags, shoes on, prayer (Educators 1 & 6: Centre B).

The sub-category of *religion* was also evidenced through educators’ planning to share the story of the birth of Jesus. Raising children’s religious awareness through sharing the story of the birth of Jesus is outlined in the mandated curriculum document *Let the Little Children Come to Me* (CEWA, 2014). However, on the occasions where educators planned to share religious stories with the children, no links were made to curriculum or to scripture in documentation. For example, the following references emerged in the documentation:

- Talk to children about Jesus as a baby. Relate to God, Mary and Joseph (Educator 5: Centre A)
- Intentional teaching: talk with children about the true meaning of Christmas (Educator 9: Centre A)
- Song: Welcome baby Jesus (Educators 1 & 6: Centre B).

Planning for drama experiences related to the story of the birth of Jesus were consistent within documentation. These experiences were structured, educator-directed re-enactments of the story of Jesus’ birth (Educators 8 & 9: Centre A). Planning documents also provided information about ‘dress ups’ and ‘props’ that were available

to children in the dramatic corner and that were specifically related to the story of the birth of Jesus. Children could make use of these resources during free play opportunities. The following extracts from documentation are examples of evidence in the sub-category of *religion*:

- Nativity style dress-ups in home-corner (Educator 3: Centre C)[This refers to costumes for retelling the story of the birth of Jesus]
- Dramatic Play: include nativity figurines (Educator 8 & 9: Centre A).

4.4.4.2 Wonder.

The sub-category of *wonder* connected the main category of *wonder and awe* to the main category of *relationality with a transcendent*, as illustrated in Figure 4.1.

Wonder was focused on planning for the educator modelling wonder; children expressing wonder and awe; and children expressing delight as outlined in the category description (see Figure 3.6). Wonder questions in documentation related to the story of the birth of Jesus, thus connecting *wonder* to *relationality with a transcendent*.

Educators explicitly titled questions as ‘wonder questions’ in their documentation.

However, the questions were knowledge and recall based. An example of the questions that featured in documentation as ‘wonder questions’ included:

- ‘I wonder if Mary will find somewhere to have her baby?’ And ‘I wonder if you know who visits Jesus when he was born’ (Educator 9: Centre A)
- ‘I wonder what happens next’ (Educator 3: Centre C)
- ‘I wonder what is in the boxes the Wise Men carry’ (Educator 2: Centre C)
- ‘I wonder how Mary felt to have a visit from an angel’
(Educator 7: Centre A).

4.4.5 Creativity and Imagination

The main category *creativity and imagination* was described within the category description (see Figure 3.6) as comprising activities that encouraged creative expression and the arts; opportunities for children to engage their imagination; imaginative play and dramatic play. Planning for children's *creativity and imagination* was evidenced by educators' inclusion of materials and resources in their documentation for use during play. Educators provided, often as a list, areas and materials indoors and outdoors, that provided the opportunity for children to be creative and imaginative, such as:

- A collage table with craft materials such as glitter, various papers and glue (Educator 3: Centre C; Educator 5: Centre A)
- Paints and drawing materials (Educators 1 & 6: Centre B; Educator 5: Centre A; Educator 9: Centre A; Educator 4: Centre C)
- Dress-ups (Educators 1 & 6: Centre B; Educator 5: Centre A)
- Play-dough with animals and materials for building (Educators 1 & 6: Centre B)
- Dramatic play areas and materials (Educators 1 & 6: Centre B; Educator 5: Centre A; Educator 3: Centre C)
- Construction (such as leggo and blocks) (Educators 7 & 9: Centre A; Educators 1 & 6: Centre C)

4.4.6 Summary of findings from the documentary data.

Findings from the documentary data illustrated that educators provided little in the form of explicit planning for the categories and sub-categories that emerged from the literature. Educators also did not explicitly plan for the promotion of children's

spiritual development, rather, implicit links were evident as they planned for features of spirituality, as outlined on the post-analysis coding frame (Figure 4.1). The planning documents that formed this data set all consisted of broad, suggestive style points as intentions, and as such, detail was limited. The process of qualitative content analysis revealed changes to the pre-analysis coding frame, resulting in the development of the post-analysis coding frame (Figure 4.1) that was used to present the findings. A key finding, resulting from the analysis of documentary data, was that educators' planning documentation did not illustrate educators' understanding of practices to promote children's spiritual development.

4.5. Reflexive Statement

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) challenges the researcher to recognise her own role within the investigation; to interpret the world of another whilst acknowledging that she is also trying to interpret her world. This hermeneutic circle calls on the researcher to set aside preconceptions by consciously identifying bias. This process of being reflexive was a feature throughout both the data collection and data analysis phases of this investigation. This reflexive process was evidenced, where it added deeper insight to the findings, within the chapter. A reflexive statement was included within Chapter Three (see Section 3.11) in an attempt to overtly present the position of the researcher prior to the findings of the investigation. In addition, the processes of bracketing (during the data collection and initial analysis phases) and later de-bracketing (during stage five of the data analysis) were evidenced throughout this chapter, when they were pertinent to the findings. Most significantly, the de-bracketing process afforded the researcher the opportunity to continually revisit assumptions and comments made during data collection and this added to the credibility and conformability of the findings.

4.6 Chapter Conclusion

Chapter Four has presented the findings from this study investigating educators' practices to promote children's spiritual development, aged 3 to 4 years, within Catholic childcare in Western Australia. Three sets of data were collected, and analysed, resulting in the emergence of key themes and categories. The findings presented from the three data sets, namely: interview transcripts; observational records of educators' practices and documentary data in the form of educators' planning documents, provide a comprehensive insight into the life and experience of the educator in promoting children's spirituality. As outlined at the commencement of the chapter, the findings were presented by data set, and in the sequence of the research question to which they respond. In doing so, the findings have illustrated what educators know and understand about children's spirituality (interview), the reality of their daily practice (observations) and what educators' planned for (documentary data). Chapter Five provides a critical discussion of the findings to explicitly respond to the research questions that guided the investigation. In doing so, extant literature is drawn upon.