

Title

**An investigation of the spirituality of children in Victorian state primary schools.**

Submitted by

**M. Wyn Moriarty**

B.A., Dip. Ed, Grad. Dip. R.E., B. Theol., M. Theol.

A thesis submitted in total fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

School of Religious Education

Faculty of Education

Australian Catholic University

Research Services

Locked Bag 4115

Fitzroy, Victorian, 3065

Australia

February 2010

## Statement of Sources

This thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of this thesis.

This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

All research procedures reported in this thesis received the approval of the relevant Ethics/Safety Committees.

Signed:

Dated:

## ABSTRACT

The aim of this research was to investigate aspects of the spirituality of children in Victorian state primary schools. The researcher's experience as a teacher of Christian Religious Education (CRE) in Victorian state primary schools motivated her to investigate the spiritual experiences of contemporary children in this secular, and largely unexplored, context. The objective was to enhance the teaching of Christian Religious Education in these schools.

The theoretical framework for this research was hermeneutic phenomenology, drawing on Gadamer's (1975) "fusion of horizons", and Ricoeur's (1974, 1985) methods of textual interpretation and his concept of "narrative identity". A review of the literature of recent research into children's spirituality suggested to the researcher that children's spirituality can be expressed in four dimensions: 1) consciousness and 2) relationships, 3) identity and 4) roadmap, with an integrating central concept of worldview. This conceptualization became the basis for the research method. The research method consisted of three semi-structured interviews, two group interviews and one with individual children. These interviews were conducted in three Victorian state schools, with a total of 24 children aged eight to ten years (grades three and four). The group interviews explored the children's experiences relating to heightened consciousness (for example, awe and wonder) and their relationships with the Transcendent, other people and the natural world. The individual interviews explored the meaning-making dimensions of *identity* (self concept), and *roadmap* and *worldview* (values and aspirations). These interviews were video-taped, and transcribed. Profiles were prepared on each child based on Champagne's (2003) *spiritual modes of being*.

There were four major findings of the research. Firstly, the children demonstrated their capacity to "reach out" with a heightened consciousness to explore their understanding of, and relationship with the natural world, the Transcendent, and other people (Hay & Nye, 2006). Secondly, the children demonstrated innate spiritual resources within themselves (Hart, 2003). The different environments in which the children were living seemed to have an impact

of the development of their values, and their “sense of meaning and connectedness” (Hyde, 2008). For most of the children the social context was non religious. This meant that the children used contemporary resources other than religion to express meaning and values. Finally, the children’s sense of identity seemed to grow out of all these factors, as they tried to construct a meaningful “story” of their lives (Ricoeur, 1985).

These findings led the researcher to revise the initial conceptualization of children’s spirituality to a more dynamic construction culminating in a sense of self identity and meaning.

Based on this study the researcher recommends that the teaching of CRE in state schools attempts to enhance this sense of self-identity by providing the children with Biblical language and stories as vehicles for expressing their innate spiritual awareness through their own story. This may also encourage a meaningful relationship with Other. Furthermore, introduction to Christian values can both enhance the positive and critique the negative values of the society in which these children are developing their sense of self-worth and connectedness.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my thanks and appreciation to all the people who have helped me throughout this research study.

Firstly, I wish to express my thanks to my principal supervisor, Dr Brendan Hyde for his untiring attention to this project. Dr Hyde's insightful advice, relevant expertise, meticulous attention to detail, and his unfailing encouragement have made it possible for me to complete this project.

I also wish to thank my co-supervisor, Dr Kathleen Engebretson, who has been generous with her time, knowledge and insight. She has given me a great deal of personal encouragement and affirmation. I have received advice at various stages through the process of completing this research from other members of the staff of the Australian Catholic University, Melbourne Campus, in particular Dr Philip Clarkson. I wish to thank Dr Sally Liddy, Senior Lecturer, of ACU, Canberra Campus, for reading this thesis and for her encouraging comments.

I wish to express my appreciation to the many people who have given me advice and support in specific ways. I would like to thank Mr Norman Dance for giving his time to proof-reading this thesis. I thank Mr Don McKinnon and Mr Kenneth Steel for giving me photographs for use in the interviews. Also I wish to thank Dr Camille McDonald, Art Therapist, for her help in interpreting the children's drawings.

I am thankful to the (former) Victorian Department of Education and Training for giving me permission to conduct this research in Victorian state primary schools. I thank the principals and vice-principals of the four schools in which the research was conducted. These school leaders gave me invaluable support, and insight into the culture of the school communities. I am also grateful to the teachers in these schools for accepting some inconvenience caused in the process of conducting the interviews, and for their co-operation and help in allowing me time in their classrooms.

I am especially grateful to the children who participated in this research. These children generously gave their time, and shared their, sometimes painful,

experiences. These shared experiences enabled me to learn a great deal about their spirituality. It was the participation of the children which made this research possible and meaningful, and gave me great pleasure.

Finally, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my family for their patience, encouragement and emotional support, especially in times of discouragement. My thanks go to my daughter, Claire, for the insights of a younger mind. My special thanks go to my husband, Bill, for his unfailing patience and love, and for his help with technical problems. Without my family, and my many faithful friends, this task might never have been completed.

## Table of Contents

	Page
Statement of Sources	2
Abstract	3
Acknowledgements	5
Table of Contents	7
List of Tables	12
List of Figures	13
<b>Chapter One – Introduction</b>	
Background.....	14
<i>The problem to be investigated</i> .....	17
The researcher’s worldview.....	18
The significance of this study.....	20
Organization of the thesis.....	21
<b>Chapter Two – An overview of spirituality</b>	
Introduction.....	24
Spirituality as human longing for something more.....	25
<i>Spirituality from Christian perspective</i> .....	26
<i>Spirituality as a mystical experience</i> .....	27
<i>Relevance to this research</i> .....	29
<i>Spirituality as universal</i> .....	30
<i>Spirituality as integral union</i> .....	31
<i>Summary</i> .....	32
Understanding spirituality from various academic perspectives.....	33
<i>Longergan’s contribution</i> .....	33
<i>Psychology</i> .....	35
<i>The Self as regulator of the psyche</i> .....	36
<i>Spirituality as a process of evolutionary adaptation</i> .....	37
<i>The brain as the seat of spirituality</i> .....	38
<i>Integral Vision</i> .....	41
<i>Being a spiritual human being – summary</i> .....	43
Spirituality as relationship, modern perspectives.....	44
<i>William James</i> .....	44
<i>Contemplative life</i> .....	45
<i>Modern mystics</i> .....	46
<i>Contemporary spirituality outside the mainstream religions</i> .....	48
<i>Relationship with earth</i> .....	48
<i>Relationship with other people</i> .....	50
<i>Summary</i> .....	51
Everyday spirituality: being a child.....	51
Some theologies of childhood.....	53
<i>Summary</i> .....	55
...Conclusion.....	56

<b>Chapter Three – Literature Review</b>	
Introduction.....	59
Consciousness and Relationship.....	60
<i>Introduction</i> .....	60
<i>Two modern trends</i> .....	62
<i>Retrospective studies of spiritual experiences</i> .....	63
<i>New methods for exploring children’s spirituality</i> .....	65
<i>Relational Consciousness</i> .....	67
<i>A critique of Hay &amp; Nye’s Relational Consciousness</i> .....	69
<i>Extending the concept of Relational Consciousness</i> .....	70
<i>The secret spiritual world of children</i> .....	71
<i>Spirituality in early childhood – modes of being</i> .....	74
<i>Other research into early childhood spirituality</i> .....	74
<i>A more recent retrospective study</i> .....	76
<i>Meaning and connectedness in an Australian context</i> .....	77
Identity, Roadmap and Worldview.....	80
<i>Worldview</i> .....	80
<i>Worldviews of Australian youth</i> .....	82
<i>Identity</i> .....	85
<i>Australian Identity</i> .....	86
Conclusion.....	87
<b>Chapter Four – Methodology</b>	
Introduction.....	89
Theoretical Framework.....	89
Epistemology – Constructionism.....	90
Theoretical Perspective – Hermeneutical Phenomenology.....	92
<i>Phenomenology</i> .....	94
<i>The objective reality of phenomena</i> .....	95
<i>Hermeneutics</i> .....	97
<i>Interpretation in the human sciences</i> .....	97
<i>Understanding Being</i> .....	98
<i>Fusion of horizons</i> .....	99
<i>Understanding through text and language</i> .....	101
<i>Symbol and language</i> .....	101
<i>From discourse to text</i> .....	103
<i>Interpretation, and validation of interpretation, of text</i> .....	104
<i>Narrative identity</i> .....	106
<i>Summary</i> .....	107
Methodology – Hermeneutical Phenomenological Research.....	108
Research method.....	110
<i>Designing and preparing the research</i> .....	110
<i>Conducting the research</i> .....	113
<i>Collection of research material</i> .....	115
<i>Analyzing the information through texts</i> .....	115
<i>Verification</i> .....	118



Limitations of the study.....	120
Conclusion.....	120
<b>Chapter Five – Reaching beyond themselves</b>	
Transcendence, as relating to God or something Other.....	122
<i>Sense of Wonder</i> .....	123
<i>The children at the suburban school</i> .....	123
<i>The children at the provincial school</i> .....	126
<i>Summary; sense of wonder:</i> .....	129
<i>The mystery of death</i> .....	130
<i>The mystery of death: summary</i> .....	133
<i>Reaching for transcendence in the natural world</i> .....	133
<i>Summary: Reaching beyond themselves in the natural world</i> .....	137
<i>Religious experiences of the transcendent</i> .....	138
<i>Summary: Religious experience of the transcendent</i> .....	140
Reaching beyond themselves through relating to the earth, others and themselves.....	141
<i>Introduction</i> .....	141
<i>Relating to the earth</i> .....	141
<i>Relating to animals</i> .....	143
<i>Relating to other children</i> .....	146
<i>Relating to families</i> .....	149
<i>Summary: Reaching out through relationships</i> .....	151
Conclusion.....	152
<b>Chapter Six – Reaching within themselves</b>	
Introduction.....	153
Meditation and Self discipline.....	154
Resilience.....	156
Sport and physical activity.....	159
Imagination.....	163
Symbols.....	166
<i>Introduction</i> .....	166
<i>Snake</i> .....	167
<i>Mountain</i> .....	168
Transition or lack of integration.....	170
Conclusion.....	173
<b>Chapter Seven – Charting the path</b>	
Discussion – Social context of children’s spirituality.....	174
Children’s Values.....	175
Individual development and Dynamic Systems Theory.....	183
Children’s Aspirations.....	185
<i>Introduction</i> .....	185
<i>Regional differences</i> .....	185
<i>Material aspirations</i> .....	188

<i>Family influences</i> .....	189
<i>Aspirations as “spiritual questing”</i> .....	190
A critical evaluation.....	191
Summary – A Spiritual Path.....	193
<b>Chapter Eight – Footprints</b>	
Introduction.....	195
<i>Alex</i> .....	196
<i>Bianca</i> .....	196
<i>Mary</i> .....	197
<i>Harry</i> .....	198
The Role of Story.....	199
Narrative Identity.....	202
<i>Luke</i> .....	204
<i>Kelly</i> .....	207
<i>Aimee</i> .....	208
<i>Identity as a spiritual dimension</i> .....	209
Conclusion.....	210
Reviewing the conceptualization.....	211
<b>Chapter Nine – Conclusion</b>	
Introduction.....	213
Summary of the findings of the research.....	213
<i>Reaching beyond themselves</i> .....	213
<i>Reaching within themselves</i> .....	214
<i>Charting the Path</i> .....	214
<i>Footprints</i> .....	215
<i>Summary</i> .....	215
Exploration of the dissonance.....	216
The effects of methodology and method on the dissonance.....	216
<i>Summary</i> .....	219
Explanation of the dissonance in terms of the context of the research.....	219
<i>World events</i> .....	219
<i>The Australian context</i> .....	221
Examination of the dissonance with reference to specific research material..	223
<i>Worldview</i> .....	223
<i>Input of cultural influences</i> .....	224
<i>Identity</i> .....	225
Significance of the dissonance.....	226
Some implications for religious education.....	228
<i>Christian Religious Education in Victorian state schools</i> .....	228
The limitations of this research.....	230
Areas for further research.....	232
Summary and conclusion.....	233

<b>Appendices</b>		
<b>Appendix A</b>	ACU National Human Resources Ethics Committee Approval.....	234
<b>Appendix B</b>	Approval of Department of Education and Training.....	235
<b>Appendix C</b>	Letter to school principals.....	237
<b>Appendix D</b>	Letter to the parents and participants.....	239
<b>Appendix E</b>	Parents' and participants' consent form.....	241
<b>Appendix F</b>	Interview schedule (version two).....	242
<b>Appendix G</b>	Some stimulus material used in interviews.....	244
<b>Appendix H</b>	Some profiles of participants.....	249
<b>Appendix I</b>	Some children's drawings.....	308
<b>Bibliography</b> .....		318

## List of Tables

		page
Table 1	Definitions of spirituality according to Helminiak (1996, p.32)	36
Table 2	Summary of perspectives of spirituality	58
Table 3	Some authors contributing to the conceptualization of spirituality in Figure 1	88
Table 4	Summary of the contributions of hermeneutic phenomenology	108
Table 5	Interview guide	114

## List of Figures

		page
Figure 1	A conceptualization of the Dimensions of Spirituality	60
Figure 2	Theoretical model for this research according to Crotty (1998)	90
Figure 3	Theoretical perspective of hermeneutical phenomenology	93
Figure 4	A revised conceptualization of the Dimensions of Spirituality – emanating from the findings of this research	227

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

The motivation for this research project emanates from more than ten years of experience in teaching Christian Religious Education in Victorian State Primary Schools. A growing familiarity with the literature led the researcher to believe that there was a lack of research relevant to Christian Religious Education. This lack of research was, and remains, in the context of rapidly changing technology, and a social world which is increasingly secular and multicultural. Experience showed a need to find some information about children's current perceptions about themselves, other people, the natural world and the transcendent, and also about their values, aspirations and worldviews.

#### Background

In the state of Victoria, Australia, "special religious instruction in Government schools is authorized under section 2.2.11 of the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 and can be given only where accredited and approved religious instructors are available" (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, DEECD, 2007a). This Act superseded legislation on religious instruction contained in the Education Act 1958. The Act of 2006 distinguishes between two forms of religious education. "General religious education" is defined as "education about major forms of religious thought and expression characteristic of Australian society and other societies in the world" which may be provided in the general school curriculum. "Special religious instruction" is defined in section 2.2.11(5) of the Act as "instruction provided by churches and other religious groups and based on distinctive religious tenets and beliefs" (DEECD, 2007a). Special religious education is not compulsory, and may only be delivered by accredited instructors who are approved by the Minister for Education. Instructors who deliver the non-denominational agreed Christian syllabus *Religion in Life* ® are accredited through **ACCESS ministries** (2007a).

**ACCESS ministries** is the acronym for the body representing all main branches of the Christian Church in providing Christian education in State Schools in Victoria. Similar provision is made for instruction in other recognized religions.

DEECD Form No. GC 566 (revised 2007b), which allows parents to advise their wishes regarding their child receiving special religious instruction, has the following summary of the agreed Christian syllabus *Religion in Life*®.

- Complements lesson themes and current Departmental policy.
- Builds on the Victorian Essential Learning Standards as they relate to the physical, personal and social learning strand.
- Helps children explore their own lives for meaning and purpose.
- Introduces children to the religious life and ideas of their community.
- Provides some understanding of stories, festivals, worship and symbols of the Christian faith in the community.
- Respects children’s rights to uphold their own opinions while providing a broader understanding of this major influence on contemporary Australian culture. (DEECD 2007b).

**ACCESS ministries** is the body responsible for providing the approved Christian curriculum, for training volunteer teachers and submitting their names for accreditation to the government department. The practice is that Christian Religious Education (CRE) is taught for half an hour per week in state primary schools where suitably accredited “instructors”<sup>1</sup> are available, and at a time negotiated with the school. As the system depends on the availability of volunteer instructors, not all schools or all classes have RE programs. As the program is voluntary, in the majority of classes not all students participate.

The **ACCESS ministries** curriculum (2009) is used in government primary schools in most Australian states and in New Zealand. The present curriculum, first introduced in 2006, aims to be:

*Biblically based, educationally sound, student-focused, theologically clear and contextually appropriate. The material is constructed around a*

---

<sup>1</sup> The Education and Training Reform Act 2006 mandated that Access ministry material will be used for special religious instruction, the allotted time be half an hour per week, given by accredited instructors.

*theological framework that intersects with **values, students' lives and educational emphases** (CRE Curriculum Overview, 2009, p. 1, emphases in the original).*

The CRE curriculum aims to have outcomes which:

*make connections between the student, values, the Bible and the Christian way of life. It introduces students to the key **beliefs and values** of the Christian faith and makes **connections** with their lives as individuals and as members of a community. (2009, p. 1)*

As a retired professional teacher, and a volunteer CRE teacher in state primary schools for many years, this researcher had a number of concerns as she approached the research. Some of her educational concerns have been addressed by the revised curriculum. This revised curriculum attempts to encourage more active learning than the syllabus it replaced, and it also acknowledges that state schools are multicultural, and teachers should “not presume that the children have a particular or any faith position” (ACCESS ministries 2009). One continuing concern, however, was with the lack of research into the current students’ lives, beliefs and values and those of their communities, to enable some children to be able to make meaningful “connections” with Biblical stories and Christian values.

Another concern related to the need to tailor the lessons to the limitations of instructors, most of whom do not have professional qualifications or experience. Another limitation on the curriculum is that lessons are restricted to the legislated half an hour per week, which limits the time for interaction with students.

In addition, many instructors come to classes with very different worldviews from the worldviews of the students. Most of the teachers are retired people with many years of life in the Church, whereas most of the students are two generations later, growing up unfamiliar with the Christian traditions, many with no religious affiliation, or belonging to a religion other than Christianity. Some instructors are young people, but also have usually grown up within a Church tradition. These factors raised a concern that the worldview of the CRE course providers and those of



the children in CRE classes may be very different, making it difficult for instructors (teachers of CRE) to understand the children's perceptions and experiences of spiritual matters. A number of scholars researching in the areas of children's spirituality (Erricker, Erricker, Ota, Sullivan & Fletcher, 1997; Hart, 2003) used the term "worldview" to describe the process by which children incorporate spiritual and social experiences into a meaningful whole, which guides their lives. As Hart (2003) maintained "A spiritual worldview locates the individual in a multidimensional, sacred universe" (p. 9). Therefore this researcher decided to investigate the spirituality of children in state primary schools in the early 21st century so that educators might better understand their worldviews, and be in a strategic position to listen and learn from them in the classroom situation. The long-term aim was to enhance religious education in this country, in particular, in state schools in Victoria.

*The problem to be investigated*

The problem at the centre of the research concerns the current spiritual perceptions and experiences of children in Victorian state primary schools. This is in the light of a scarcity of primary research in this area, and the researcher's assumed disparity between the worldviews of the children, and those of the writers of the CRE curriculum and the teachers who implement it. Extensive research was used in the preparation of the revised CRE syllabus, which began to be implemented in 2006, but this research targeted the perspectives of teachers of CRE, through extensive focus groups (**ACCESS ministries**, 2005). That particular project did not conduct any research with children.

The purpose of this research study then was three fold:

- 1) to develop a conceptual framework based on the literature about children's spirituality;
- 2) to identify characteristics of children's spirituality in Victorian state primary schools;
- 3) to articulate the significance of the findings of this research for religious education in state schools,.

### The researcher's worldview

At the beginning of this thesis the researcher wishes to establish her prejudice, or "horizon" (Gadamer, 1975/2004). Research which is approached with integrity "seeks to open up a middle space of rich engagement between the research object and the researcher (Sharkey, 2001, p. 17). Gadamer asserted that the task of interpretation (hermeneutics) of research material (text) involves:

*neither 'neutrality with respect to content nor the extinction of one's own fore-meanings and prejudices... (but being) aware of one's own bias, so that the text can present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one's own fore-meanings (Gadamer, 1975, p. 271-272).*

The researcher's personal worldview, and understanding of spirituality have been shaped by her story. She grew up in a devout Presbyterian family, with a conservative evangelical tradition. In her early adult years she continued in the evangelical tradition, but from her thirties she experienced personal disillusionment with that tradition. She joined the Anglican Church, and has had experiences of Catholicism in school and other institutions, and studied at a liberal and ecumenical theological college. Her understanding of spirituality tends therefore to be expressed in theological and personal/experiential terms. This understanding has been enhanced and broadened by the academic discipline of study as a higher degree research student. The development of her spirituality has been almost entirely within the Christian tradition, although she has been influenced by wide reading, the influence of the media and friends who do not have a Christian commitment. She is also spiritually enriched by experience of the natural world. She is awestruck by the dynamics of the ocean. She feels calmed when gardening and her fingers reach into the soil, and she loves caring for small animals. This spiritual consciousness of the natural world enhances her awareness of God as Creator. However she has limited personal experience of the spiritual expressions of other religious traditions, or of spiritual expressions outside of formal religious traditions.

This researcher's religious traditions have influenced her in two key directions which had relevance to this research. One influence was the evangelical tradition. In its more conservative form as expressed by (Raiter, 2003) this tradition

maintains that “being spiritual in the New Testament (as the writer interpreted the Pauline tradition) is being indwelt by the Spirit of God. Only those people so indwelt can, biblically, be described as spiritual” (p. 196). While Raiter conceded that “people are essentially spiritual seekers” (p. 118), and all animate beings have a spirit, (that is, life), he quotes Paul as writing that “men and women outside of Christ are spiritually dead” (from Ephesians 2:12). While the researcher now rejects literal interpretations of the Bible, and the dualistic world view implied in the above statements, early influences in the conservative evangelical tradition was an inhibiting influence on her. She found herself continually questioning whether phenomena characterized by other researchers, as well as phenomena observed in this research, were in fact “spirituality”.

The other influence, from the Catholic tradition, had a more positive influence on the researcher’s spirituality and worldview, and therefore on her research. Spirituality can be described from a Catholic perspective as “concerned not so much with the doctrines of Christianity as with the ways those teachings shape us as individuals who are part of the Christian community who live in the larger world” (Cunningham & Egan, 1996, p. 7). Several characteristics of Catholic spirituality are contained in this description: Catholic spirituality is an individual experience but remains within the boundaries of Catholic teaching; and it is essentially communal but is directed to living in and serving the needs of the world. The Incarnational or unitive worldview of Catholicism, as the researcher has experienced it, describes spirituality as an experience of the transcendent in everyday which is available to people within or outside the Church. It is also a way of living, which can be expressed as “the way of devotion; the way of works; and the way of knowledge” (Collins, 1999, pp.15-16). This balance between transcendent experience, knowledge, and living in the world, and an acceptance of spiritual diversity, has provided the researcher with a worldview which is compatible with the findings of this research and that of the wider community of research into children’s spirituality.

This researcher holds to a creation theology which believes that humanity bears the image of God, and that all creation is spiritual. She also values a holistic spirituality which includes cognitive, ethical, social and experiential dimensions.

This is the “horizon” (Gadamer, 1985) against which the researcher attempted to interpret the spiritual experiences of the children who took part in the study.

#### The significance of this study

This study is significant in that it provides some empirical information about the spirituality of children in Victorian state schools. This information can assist curriculum providers and teachers of Christian Religious Education to make meaningful connections between a Biblically based syllabus and the perceptions, values and worldview of children growing up in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. While the knowledge and experience of teachers of CRE have been widely canvassed for preparing the ACCESS ministries revised syllabus, to the researcher’s knowledge there has not been recent research which interviewed children in Victorian state schools with regard to their spirituality.

This study is also significant in that it provides information about children’s spirituality which is specific to the Australian context, and the context of primary school children in government schools. There is Hyde’s (2008) study in Australia of children in Catholic primary schools, which used a similar focus on consciousness and relationships, and similar interview methods with which the present study may be compared. Mountain’s (2005) research with Victorian children of various faith traditions was more specifically focused on the effects of religious practice (prayer) on children’s well-being. There has been research of the spirituality of Australian youth (de Souza, 2003, Engebretson, 2003, Crawford & Rossiter, 2006, and others) from a Catholic perspective. Hodder (2007, 2009) conducted research in Victoria with young people with New Age and evangelical connections. These studies of Australian youth have some application to younger children who are subject to similar cultural influences. However this study is unique to Victoria in that it investigated the spirituality of children in the environment of secular schools. This research aimed to build on research in other contexts, and may have relevance to the understanding of children’s spirituality in other countries and school jurisdictions.

Finally, this research may add to the understanding of the concept of spirituality, in particular children’s spirituality in that it may offer a more dynamic or

developmental model than that of some previous studies. Hay and Nye (2006) arrived at a general, discrete model of spirituality as Relational Consciousness. Hart (2003) described five spiritual capacities of children. Hyde's (2008) research identified four characteristics of children's spirituality of increasing development from the more peripheral "felt sense" to the more unitive "spiritual questing". This researcher believed that through examining the dissidence between her original conceptualization of spirituality, derived from the literature, and a revised conceptualization at the conclusion of the research analysis, she may be able to demonstrate that different characteristics of spirituality observed in this previous research may possibly be interrelated in a way that tends toward unity.

#### Organization of the thesis

The organization of the thesis is as follows.

Chapter One sets out the aims and context of the research. It outlines the prejudice of the researcher as it is relevant to the research process. It provides justification for the significance of this study.

Chapter Two presents a general, historical overview to clarify the meaning of spirituality as it is understood within this research. The chapter begins by identifying spirituality as "longing for something more" as expressed by mystics in Christian and other traditions. The chapter then proceeds to review spirituality from the perspective of different academic disciplines, including anthropology, psychology, neurophysiology, Wilber's (2001) integral vision, and contemporary spiritual practices which are often outside the ambit of religion. Finally this chapter addresses children's spirituality as the everyday experience of "being a child".

Chapter Three presents a review of literature concerning recent research and observations about children's spirituality, and the relevance of this literature to the present thesis. This review outlines the research of contemporary scholars, including (Robinson, 1977; Erricker et al. 1997; and Hay & Nye, 2006, Coles, 1990; Hart, 2003; and Champagne, 2003). The work of these and other scholars formed the basis of a conceptual model of children's spirituality which provided the framework for the present research. The conceptualization represented four dimensions of

spirituality – Consciousness, Relationality, Identity and “Roadmap”, which relate to a central dimension of Worldview.

Chapter Four sets out the methodology for this research. It outlines the use of hermeneutic phenomenology as the theoretical perspective which was the basis for the methodology and methods of this research. Details of the methods used to interview children from Victorian state primary schools are presented.

Chapters Five to Eight – present the findings and the analysis of the research under the following headings.

- 1) “Reaching beyond themselves”. This examines the children’s experiences of awe and wonder in relations to their sense of the transcendent, their attitudes to the beginning and end of life, and their experiences of the wonder at the world of nature, and human relationships.
- 2) “Reaching within themselves”. This examines the children’s use of their inner resources, such as the use of quiet reflection, the role of resilience and the imagination to provide spiritual strength.
- 3) “Charting the path”. This examines the influences of the social and natural environment in shaping the children’s spirituality. The chapter examines the way these environmental influences shape the children’s values and aspirations
- 4) “Footprints”. This explores the way the children develop a sense of identity out of their life experiences.

Chapter Nine discusses the significance of the research findings and their application for religious education and future research. Of particular relevance in this chapter is the discussion of the dissonance which was found to exist between the original conceptual model of spirituality, which emanated from the literature review, and the findings of the present research, which resulted in a revised conceptualization, presented as Figure 5. In this revised conceptualization Identity, as a spiritual life-narrative, was the culmination of the exercise of the other dimensions; Consciousness, Relationality and Roadmap (which, in the revised conceptualization, includes Worldview). This may have some significance for the

understanding of children's spirituality. Possible reasons for this dissonance are discussed in this particular chapter.

The following chapter presents a general discussion of the nature, origins and experience of spirituality. This discussion is in preparation for the Literature Review, which is a more specific exploration of research in children's spirituality.

## CHAPTER TWO

### AN OVERVIEW OF SPIRITUALITY

#### Introduction

The previous chapter presented the research problem as the need to investigate the current spiritual perceptions and experiences of children in Victorian state primary schools. This is in the light of a lack of primary research in this area, and the researcher's assumed disparity between the worldviews of the children, and those of the writers of the CRE curriculum and the teachers who implement it. The previous chapter then presented an outline of the personal factors and religious environments which formed the researcher's worldview. This disclosure of the researcher's personal bias is encouraged by the chosen methodology of this research -hermeneutical phenomenology – which seeks to operate in a “middle space” between the researcher's perspective and that of the research object (the children). This engagement tests prior understandings through the process of interpreting the “research object” (Sharkey, 2001, p. 17).

However, in order to present clearly the findings and implications of this research project, it was necessary to broaden the scope of the researcher's understanding of spirituality. Prior to the commencement of this research project the researcher's understanding of what is meant by the term “spirituality” was mostly formed by a conservative Christian tradition. However the current study of spirituality is much broader than this. Firstly, much of the current research in children's spirituality was conducted among children who were not necessarily growing up in a Christian tradition. For example, Coles (1990) conducted interviews with 500 children from various national, religious and cultural backgrounds in America, Africa, Europe and the Middle East. Hay and Nye (2006) conducted research in England with children whose religious affiliation included Church of England, Muslim, Roman Catholic and no affiliation (p. 87). Erricker, Erricker, Sullivan, Ota & Fletcher (1997) investigated the worldview, or spirituality of children in the United Kingdom in “rural schools and inner city schools, church schools and state schools, schools with a wide multicultural and multi-faith mix, and



schools which lack such a perspective” (p. 21). Hyde (2008) conducted research in children’s spirituality in Australia with children from a number of ethnic and religious traditions who were attending Catholic schools. Secondly, under the influences of secularization and multiculturalism, spiritual expression in Western societies is becoming more diverse, more personal, and less likely to be affiliated with organized religion (Tacey, 2003). Thirdly, the academic study of spirituality is no longer confined to theologians, but has extended to other disciplines, such as Psychology (Jung, 1960) and Neurophysiology (Zohar & Marshall 2000). Therefore, in order to recognize and appreciate the spirituality of the children who were interviewed for this research, this researcher explored a wide range of examples of the phenomenon of spirituality and a diversity of academic studies and opinions. This has led the researcher to a much broader appreciation of contemporary as well as historical manifestations of spirituality.

Therefore, this chapter explores some of the parameters of what is meant by spirituality. However, the emphasis is predominantly on Christian spirituality, since this is the context of the researcher’s worldview, and the context of the projected application of the research, which is Christian Religious Education in Australian state schools. This chapter explores the meaning of spirituality under the following headings.

- Spirituality as human longing for something more.
- Understanding spirituality from various academic perspectives.
- Spirituality as relationship, modern perspectives.
- Everyday spirituality: being a child.

#### Spirituality as human longing for something more

Traditionally, spirituality has been the domain of religion. Search for union with the transcendent or infinite is common to all religions. This section begins with discussion of spirituality from religious perspectives, particularly Christianity, since this has been the perspective of spirituality in Europe and the Mediterranean region for 2000 years, until recent times.

*Spirituality from Christian perspectives*

Augustine (354-430 CE) expressed this longing for something more in his *Confessions*.

*Who, O Lord, will grant that I may repose in thee? Who will grant that thou mayest enter into my heart and inebriate it, that I may forget all my wicked ways and embrace thee, my only good? (Augustine, 1965, Book 1, p. 34)*

This extract illustrates the two-way relationship between God and human beings that is central to Christian spirituality. As the human being searches to be united to God, God enters and unites with the human spirit. In this extract from Augustine one finds other key features of Christian spirituality. Spirituality can be experienced as repose, or stillness, and also as ecstasy. Christians believe that this communion with God is possible through God's initiative and God's grace, for God forgives and heals our "wicked ways" (p. 34) which act as barriers to our communion with God.

While Christians' "longing for more" is a longing to experience God in some transcendent way it is also a longing to experience God in daily life, an involvement of the whole person. Rowan Williams (1979), the present Archbishop of Canterbury, stated that Christian spirituality is not "an escape into the transcendent, a flight out of history and the flesh, but the heart of its meaning is a human story... an odd and ambivalent story, which becomes open to interpretation in terms of God's saving work" (p. 2). He also understood spirituality in terms of the interaction between the contemporary social and religious conditions of various saints and leaders, and their individual personalities, shaping their relationships with Jesus Christ. The goal of Christian life becomes not only enlightenment but wholeness, a wholeness of life in this world, lived as consequence of a past historical event and in hope of a future fulfillment of the saving relationship that has begun. Therefore, for Williams, Christian spirituality is holistic, more than "a science of interpreting exceptional private experiences: it must touch every area of human experience, public and social, the painful, negative, even pathological byways of the mind, the moral and relational world" (p. 2).

*Spirituality as mystical experience*

Through the ages people from many faith traditions have had mystical experiences. For Christian mystics this longing for something more has been fulfilled in reaching great moments of experience of union with God.

One such mystic was Julian of Norwich, an anchoress or recluse, who lived in England from approximately 1342 until after 1413 (Julian, 1966). In 1373 she experienced a severe illness, and at that time she received sixteen revelations or “shewings”. These became the basis for her spiritual reflection and writing. In most of these revelations Julian had graphic visions of the sufferings of Christ, and insights into the meaning of the love of Christ as revealed in his Passion. The description of her first vision begins:

*And at once I saw the red blood trickling down (from the crucifix on which she had fixed her gaze) under the garland, hot fresh, and plentiful, just as it did at the time of his passion when the crown of thorns was pressed on the blessed head of God-and-Man, who suffered for me. And I had a strong, deep conviction that it was he himself and none other that showed me this vision.*

*At the same moment the Trinity filled me full of heartfelt joy, and I knew that all eternity was like this for those who attain heaven. (1966, p. 66).*

This extract reveals something of the nature of Julian’s spirituality. Her visions came upon her unexpectedly, as something given, not just the culmination of spiritual exercises. The vision was very sensuous and emotional in content, and she had a strong sense of its meaning, and divine source. It also filled her with joy and renewed her faith. The extract also notes one of the key themes in her theological reflections, that is the reality and role of the Trinity. Another theme of her writing was that of God as Mother, which she usually associated with the nurturing attributes of Christ. She wrote:

*So when he made us God almighty was our kindly Father, and God all-wise our kindly Mother, and the Holy Spirit their love and goodness; all one God, one Lord....I saw the blessed Trinity working. I saw that there were these*

*three attributes: fatherhood, motherhood, and lordship – all in one God*  
 ((1966, p. 165).

Julian of Norwich was a true mystic in her desire to be united to God through prayer. She referred to times when “we are often as barren and dry after our prayers as we were before” (1966, p. 123), but she believed that prayer was both “the deliberate act of the soul” and also possible by the action of God’s grace “for (the soul) is united with and fixed into the will of our Lord by the inner working of the Holy Spirit” (p. 124). In chapter 43 Julian explained the higher levels of prayer that unite the soul to God. In this state of unity “we care no longer about praying for any thing, for our whole strength and aim is set on beholding...the vision of him to whom we pray. Wondering, enjoying, worshipping, fearing.” (pp. 128-129). Julian exhibited characteristics of openness and longing for union with the transcendent, and the willingness to share the wisdom she acquired through mystical experiences with others.

The following century saw the development, especially in Spain, of a science of spiritual life, by Ignatius Loyola (1491 or 1495 -1556), Teresa of Avila (1515 – 1582) and John of the Cross (1542 – 1591). Scientific spirituality involved a systematic analysis of spiritual experience “with the intention of describing both the means and the ends of that experience in such a way that it can be taught and followed” (Holmes, 2002, p. 93). Ignatius achieved this through *The Spiritual Exercises* which are still widely practiced. Teresa built on her own experiences of spiritual dryness followed by ecstatic experiences of the presence of God to define steps in the life of prayer, towards unity with God. In her *Life* (St. Teresa, 1949) she uses the image of watering a garden. In *The Interior Castle* Teresa presented a more elaborate model for spiritual growth as seven rooms which lead one to an interior of union with God. These “rooms” are summarized as follows.

1. A state of grace in which we are still very much in love with the world.
2. An openness to the practice of prayer and edifying books, sermons, and conversations, while still in the world.
3. A life of high virtue, still susceptible to lapses.
4. The experience of spiritual consolation, as in the prayer of quiet.

5. A kind of incipient union.
6. A growth of intimacy with God.
7. Spiritual marriage. (Holmes, 2002, p. 98).

John of the Cross also used the image of spiritual marriage, which was inspired by the biblical *Song of Songs*, in his three-fold ways to spiritual enlightenment: *purgation*, *betrothal* and *spiritual marriage*. He described a ladder of ascent of ten steps, in the progression of prayer towards God. John of the Cross is best known today for his two facets of the way of purgation: the dark night of the senses and the dark night of the Spirit. The dark night of the senses is the renunciation of all material things, relationships and “spiritual consolations”. This renunciation is painful, but leads to the second phase, the dark night of the Spirit, which is experienced as a paralyzing sense of alienation and isolation, even from God (Holmes, 2002). This period of darkness was experienced by many mystics, including the unknown author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*. This stage is followed at some time by a greater sense of unity with God.

Evelyn Underhill (1949), a twentieth century authority on mysticism, observed that the Mystic Way:

*began by the awakening within the self of a new and embryonic consciousness: a consciousness of divine reality...She (the self) opened her eyes upon a world still natural, but no longer illusory; since it was perceived to be illuminated by the Uncreated Light. She knew then the beauty, the majesty, the divinity of the living World of Becoming which holds in its meshes every living thing. (Underhill, 1949, pp. 448, 449).*

#### *Relevance to this research*

The experience of mystics has some relevance to children’s spirituality. The relevance is not in the years of arduous spiritual exercises undertaken by the great mystics, but rather in the possibilities which arise from children’s openness to wonder and new ways of seeing the transcendent as it appears in the ordinary events of life.

*Spirituality as universal*

This longing for something more is not restricted to Christians, but scholars have discovered that it is a universal phenomenon. Bede Griffiths (1994) outlined the universal nature of the main world religions, which, Griffiths claimed, developed these universal characteristics during the millennium before Christ, when “a breakthrough was made beyond the cultural limitations of ancient religion to the experience of ultimate reality” (p. 8).

*This reality has no proper name, since it transcends the mind and cannot be expressed in words, was called Brahman and Atman (the Spirit) in Hinduism, Nirvana and Sunyata (the Void) in Buddhism, Tao (the Way) in China, Being (toōn) in Greece and Yahweh (“I am”) in Israel, but all these are but words which point to an inexpressible mystery...the goal of all human striving, the truth which all science and philosophy seeks to fathom, the bliss in which all human love is fulfilled (Griffiths, 1994, p. 8).*

Over the centuries each of the world religions has developed in different physical and cultural environments, and extended these primal insights to produce their great doctrinal systems and religious practices. But there remains a remarkable commonality of spiritual experience underlying the differences (1994. p. 9), which Griffiths called “perennial philosophy” (p. 8). Griffiths summarized a universal pattern by which spirituality is expressed through the various world religions. This pattern includes first of all the “supreme Principle, the ultimate truth, beyond name and form” variously called the nirguna Brahman in Hinduism, the nirvana in Buddhism, The Reality – al Haqq- of Sufi Islam, the Godhead of Christianity. Secondly, there is the manifestation of the hidden Reality, through the Saguna Brahman of Hinduism, the Buddha of Buddhism, the Sikh Guru, the personal God, Yahweh or Allah, of Judaism and Islam, and the Christ of Christianity. Thirdly there is the Spirit, the *atman* of Hinduism, the “compassion” of the Buddha, the “Breath of the Merciful” is Islam, and the Holy Spirit in Christianity. Finally in each religion this universal truth is embodied, not just in individual believers, but in a community, where spirituality finds expression through the structures of ritual and doctrine. (p.

42). Progress has been made, since the middle of the twentieth century, towards understanding the common spiritual features of all religions.

*Spirituality as integral union*

Sri Aurobindo (1979) was an Indian sage who sought to extend his traditional religious consciousness of unity with the divine to a concept of Integral Perfection as the culmination of the evolutionary process. His starting point was the teaching of the ancient sages of India that:

*behind the appearances of the universe there is the reality of a being and consciousness, a self of all things, one and eternal. All beings are united in that one self and spirit but divided by a certain separativity of consciousness, an ignorance of the true self and reality in the mind, life, and body (1979, p. 155).*

Aurobindo taught that the psychological discipline of yoga could be used to remove this “veil of separative consciousness” and a person could become “aware of the true Self, the divinity within us all” (1979, p. 155).

Aurobindo believed that humanity is in a transition phase in the evolutionary process of the development of consciousness, an ascent beginning with inanimate matter, through the stages of the development of bacteria, plants, animals and humanity. He described these stages as “groping” or “seeking” (1979, p. 161) of each stage to transcend itself toward the development of mind or consciousness. The ultimate goal of this process is the development of a “supramental Truth-Consciousness” (p. 156). This goal can be achieved by a dual process. First is the self-discipline of yoga which enables a person to reach beyond the distractions of the outer elements of mental, vital and physical experience to engage with the spark of the divine fire within, and “discover the One Self in all” (p. 157). Secondly Aurobindo wrote of “The Hour of God...when the Spirit moves among men and the breath of the Lord is abroad upon the water of our being”, challenging and transforming a human life (p. 157). However Aurobindo rejected the religious ideal of reaching beyond this world (a Nirvana) for the achievement of the ultimate

human goal of “integral perfection”. Aurobindo described a yoga or path to integral perfection, which aims at the liberation and perfection of a person’s divine nature, involving mind, life and body (p. 158). For this perfection of unity with the universal Mind or Life there needs to be “a supramental conversion” which spiritualizes and transfigures the mental, vital and physical parts of mundane life by the spiritual ideality (p. 160). This transformation to integral unity involves “union with the supreme Divine, unity with the universal Self, and a supramental action, but still with the individual as the soul-channel and natural instrument, (constituting) the essence of the integral divine perfection of the human being” (p, 160-161). That is, integral union transforms humanity, but does not negate it. Aurobindo had a vision of this personal transformation as initiating a process of transformation of whole communities (p. 164). While he saw this as difficult to achieve, he believed this spiritual change to a “common mind” to be “a certainty”, presumably, as part of the unfolding evolutionary process.

In summary, Aurobindo conceived of spirituality as humanity striving towards a state of personal and communal unity with the Divinity or Self which is within all creation. This unity is presently blocked by ignorance and “separativity”, but can be achieved by the discipline of yoga and by receptivity to the divine Self.

#### *Summary*

“Longing for something more” has been the experience of many people throughout history. In the Christian tradition Augustine of Hippo and Julian of Norwich are two of many people who expressed this longing through daily life and through heightened mystical experiences. Mystical experiences occur both spontaneously and in response to a life of spiritual discipline. A longing for unity with ultimate, or integral, reality is found in all religious traditions, so that scholars such as Griffiths and Aurobindo describe this characteristic of spirituality as universal.



### Understanding spirituality from various academic perspectives

The universal nature of spirituality has been studied by scholars of various disciplines, demonstrating the many ways the human “longing for something more” can be understood. Many scholars have attempted to discover the origins of spirituality in pre-history and evolutionary science. Mircea Eliade’s (1967/1974) studies of tribal people, uncovered patterns of ritual and myth which expressed an underlying understanding of a cosmic power as manifesting itself alike in nature and in man, and is responsible for the fertility of the earth, the changes of the seasons. This power is also the source of moral law and tribal ritual. According to Eliade, this awareness of the sacred is not just a product of the rational, conscious mind, but the experience of the whole person (Griffiths 1994, p. 12).

Rudolph Otto identified the overwhelming feeling, such as Abraham had when confronted with God, when he said “I am but dust and ashes” (Genesis 18:27), as “creature consciousness” (Otto, 1923/1958, p. 10). This sense of creaturehood engenders a sense of a transcendent Other, for which Otto coined the term “numinous”. The presence of the numinous is experienced as awe and fear (“mysterium tremendum”), but also as joy and fascination. This longing to experience this “something more” appears to be a universal spiritual phenomenon.

*This shows that above and beyond our rational being lies hidden the ultimate and highest part of our nature, which can find no satisfaction in the mere allaying of the needs of our sensuous, psychical, or intellectual impulses and cravings. The mystics called it the basis or ground of the soul (Otto, 1958, p. 36).*

### *Lonergan’s contribution*

Lonergan ((1958) was a philosopher and theologian who identified spirituality, or understanding the transcendent, as a higher function of reason. Lonergan’s ideas are relevant to this research in three areas: the notion of consciousness, the notion of being, and the notion of transcendence and of God. The notion of consciousness is more than “some sort of inward look” (1958, p. 320). Consciousness is “an awareness immanent in cognitional acts” (p. 322), that is, one

is conscious of an object in a rational and unifying or meaning-making way which involves the identity of the perceiver. There is self-affirmation of the knower in making a judgment about the nature, the “unconditioned” reality of what is observed (p. 336). This process of self- understanding through “non-reflecting awareness” is taken up by Helminiak (1996) and reviewed later in this chapter.

Lonergan’s notion of being is applicable to the theme of this section, of spirituality as “longing for something more”. Lonergan defined being as “the objective of the pure desire to know” (1958, p. 348). While knowing is finite (determinate), being is all-inclusive, for “the wonder is inquiry” (p. 351), and being, as the desire to know, as distinct from the objects of knowing, is all-pervasive. This desire to know is more than a desire for knowledge. It is also a search for “the core of meaning”, which is a key attribute of spirituality. “The search for and discovery of meaning may directly form an aspect of developing spirituality” (Hay & Nye, 2006, p. 77).

The third of Lonergan’s ideas which has relevance to this study is the notion of transcendence. Transcendence is ‘going beyond’ or asking further questions (Lonergan, 1958, p. 635). Lonergan argued that the notion of transcendence can be arrived at by logic. To understand the realm of transcendent being one must “go beyond both common sense and present science, to grasp the dynamic structure of our rational knowing and doing, and formulate a metaphysics and an ethics” (p. 635). In the search for knowledge of transcendent being one must proceed through a series of levels of consciousness:

1. cognitive activity such as mathematics, science
2. the activity of self-awareness, self-affirmation
3. knowledge of “proportionate being” and ethics
4. the possibility of knowledge of transcendent being – through human outer and inner experience. (Lonergan, 1958, p. 640).

Lonergan described transcendent being as “immaterial but of the material, non-temporal but of the temporal, non-spatial but of the spatial” (1958, p. 645) which can be understood, not by ordinary logic of deduction and prediction (p.651), but by

“unrestricted understanding”. This understanding enables an “intelligent grasp and reasonable affirmation” of what the transcendent, or God, is (p.669).

### *Psychology*

Based on Lonergan’s theology, Helminiak (1996) provided a link between philosophy and psychology. He based his theory on Lonergan’s notion of human consciousness – or spirit, since the terms were used interchangeably (1996, p. 44). Helminiak’s goal was to “explain the human core of spirituality apart from talk of God or use of the spiritual vocabulary that comes from the different religions... to say what spirituality actually is on its own terms” (p. 6). Nevertheless Helminiak attempted to clarify the difference between the spiritual and the divine. In western culture religion means *theism*, and entails a belief in God and the human status as a created being. Helminiak noted that for Gnosticism, Neo-Platonism and Hinduism part of being human is to be somehow divine (p. 12). Helminiak proposed a model by which theology and psychology can be separated into four separate analytical viewpoints, and a scientific explanation for spirituality can be achieved. The theological viewpoints of the Divine (uncreated Spirit) are: the Christians’ Triune (Theotic Viewpoint), or of One God (Theist Viewpoint). The perspective of Spirit as human (created) can be studied through one of two kinds of Psychology: a neutral, Positivist Psychology can study “actual experiences”, and a psychology based on human consciousness. For Helminiak, the need was for a “distinction between the authentically human and the neutral or noncommittally human” (p. 19). Being authentically human includes human advance or well-being, and issues of good and evil, truth or falsehood (p. 19) – “the peculiar awareness that conditions and constitutes highest functioning of the human mind” (p. 13). This, for Helminiak, is the proper study of spirituality.

Helminiak presented a useful table of definitions of spirituality, which is summarized below.

This thesis examines aspects which align with the first four categories.

Table 1. *Definitions of spirituality according to Helminiak (1996, p. 32).*

1. Spirituality as <i>the human spirit</i>	that which makes humans spiritual
2. Spirituality as <i>concern for transcendence</i>	
3. Spirituality as <i>a lived reality</i>	<p><b>a.</b> in a general sense: all aspects of human living that help to enhance and unfold the human capacity</p> <p><b>b.</b> in a social or cultural sense: ways of advancing spiritual growth by different traditions or schools</p> <p><b>c.</b> in the individual sense: the beliefs and practices that a person follows to nourish his or her spiritual growth</p>
4. Spirituality as <i>an academic discipline</i>	<p><b>a.</b> of the pastoral, professional or practical kind</p> <p><b>b.</b> of the theoretical kind</p>
5. Spirituality as <i>spiritualism</i>	communication with human spirits, or the dead
6. Spirituality as <i>parapsychology</i>	

#### *The Self as regulator of the psyche*

Jung's contribution to a psychological understanding of spirituality is his concept of Self. Where "Self" is used with a capital S, it refers to the ordering factors behind development, the structuring, self-regulating functions of the psyche (Salman, 1997, p. 63). Jung's concepts arose out of his clinical experience, and his many fields of study, including Eastern philosophy. The original, undifferentiated self of early childhood "later gives rise to the ego and other complexes and to the central Self of the adult" (Zohar & Marshall, 2000, p. 157). This adult Self, in conjunction with one's 'transcendent function' is the archetype responsible for regulation and transformation, and the pursuit of purpose and meaning in life. The function of the archetype of the Self is to assimilate unconscious processes of the psyche into the conscious, rational ego, for "conscious wholeness consists in a successful union of ego and self" (Jung, 1960, p. 159).

Archetypes, which appear to arise out of the collective unconscious, since they are shared by people from many cultures, manifest themselves in the individual in dreams and fantasies. "The archetypes have, when they appear, a distinctly numinous character which can only be described as 'spiritual', if 'magical' is too

strong a word” (Jung, 1960, p. 136). Such an archetype can appear as a spirit or ghost. Its effect can be destructive for people who are mentally fragile, but for others it can bring healing, or “mobilize philosophical and religious convictions” (p. 137). The process of assimilation or conscious wholeness which takes place through a successful union of ego and self is also referred to as “individuation”, such as occurs in the “inscrutable interrelations between ego and self” on the borders of consciousness. This occurs in Zen meditative states, or is referred to by St John of the Cross as “the dark night of the soul” (p.160). Jung explained this process of “ultimate unity” with the transcendent, other people, and the natural world as possible because ultimately “psyche and matter are aspects of one and the same thing” (p. 148). “Individuation does not shut one out from the world, but gathers the world to oneself.” (p. 161).

#### *Spirituality as a process of evolutionary adaptation*

Early scientists who embraced evolution saw religion, or spirituality, as a negative adaptation. Marx viewed religion as “the opiate of the people”, and Freud as a symptom of neurosis. However, Alister Hardy (1979) as a zoologist, was one of the first scientists to take the view that “religious experience” has a positive function, having evolved through the process of natural selection because it has survival value for the individual (Hay & Nye, 2006). He built on the works of R. R. Marett, and Emile Durkeim, who both believed that religion is a universal human characteristic, which provides an inner force or strength to face the trials of existence (Hardy, 1979, p. 6). Hardy believed that religion developed by evolutionary process, not just through random genetic changes, but as “the result of the extraordinarily rapid evolution of the brain ...and the evolution of human society” (p. 11). As a result of his research Hardy described spirituality as awareness of transcendent reality, beyond material time and space. He distinguished between two kinds of transcendent experience: *numinous*, awareness of the holy, and *mystical*, a feeling of merger of the self with divine reality.

*The brain as the seat of spirituality*

A number of neural scientists have investigated the link between brain activity and spirituality, in particular, the activity which occurs during meditation or mystical experiences. Zohar and Marshall (2000) presented the concept of the Spiritual Quotient (SQ), of spirituality having neural foundations, based on recent discoveries of neurology. They mention two specific brain features. The “God spot” is a special neural connection in the temporal lobe of the brain which is activated by “religious” words or stimuli. Synchronous oscillations over the whole brain seem to be related to spirituality as unitive thinking, and lateral problem solving. These authors believed that a person’s spiritual intelligence (SQ) is developed by use as the result of a long process of biological evolution and socialization. For Zohar and Marshall, some of the characteristics of spirituality are:

- deep intuitive sense of meaning and purpose
- finding unity behind difference, therefore tolerance
- heightened self-awareness and awareness of others
- heightened sense of “transpersonal visions of goodness, beauty, perfection, generosity and so on”
- ability to face existential darkness and doubt (Zohar & Marshall 2000, p. 14).

Zohar and Marshall (2000) extend their neurological findings to produce a unitive model of the Self. Based on Hindu, Buddhist, and Taoist philosophy, they drew on the symbol of the lotus to produce a multilayered model of the Self. The centre of the lotus represents the mystical centre, where “things, existence, the self, the body are held together by a permeating centre that cannot itself be seen or expressed” (2000, p. 152). This concept of an impersonal, undifferentiated centre is present in Eastern philosophies which state that “I am the cosmos and the Buddhas are in myself”, or Hindus speak of “the divine light which is mysteriously present and shining in each one of us” (Zohar & Marshall, 2000, p. 152, quoting T. Giuseppe. *Mandala*, pp. 14-15, 78). A Christian mystic John of the Cross defined this centre of the soul as God, “and when the soul has attained to Him according to the whole capacity of its being, and according to the force of its operation of its

being...it will have reached the last and deep centre of the souls” (p. 153, quoting St John of the Cross, *The living flame of love*, Stanza I). However, a characteristic of those who have reached enlightenment is to return from the centre, back to the world. A prime example is the Buddha, who searched for many years for enlightenment, and after he achieved enlightenment he returned to the world to share his message, and lead others along the same path.

Another aspect of the lotus symbol which Zohar and Marshall (2000) develop, illustrates the different paths to raising one’s Spirituality Quotient, or reaching spiritual maturity. These paths and their characteristic personality types include:

- the path of duty, corresponding to the conventional personality type,
- the path of nurturing, the social personality type,
- the path of knowledge, the investigative type,
- the path of personal transformation, the artistic type
- the path of brotherhood, the realistic type
- the path of servant leadership, the enterprising type. (Zohar & Marshall, 2000, chapter 6).

The symbol of the lotus, with its circle of petals, also embodies the concept of a “spiral of existence”, as a journey, encompassing all of the six spiritual paths. ”None of us is really complete, really whole, really enlightened. Until we have to some extent walked *all* of the six spiritual paths...” (2000, p. 268). The list above indicates that there is more than one way to spiritual maturity or enlightenment.

Newberg, D’Aquili and Rause (2002) gave a more detailed analysis of brain function in relation to spiritual experience. Research was conducted on Tibetan monks engaged in meditation and Franciscan nuns during prayer. Using such techniques as brain imaging and EEG, these authors noted significant changes in many areas of the brain during meditation. Scattered around the brain are association areas, which enable us to respond to the world around us, and play an important role in producing the mind’s mystical potential. These are the visual, orientation, attention and verbal conceptual association areas. The orientation association areas of left and right brain are responsible the sense of self, for generating the sense of

the boundaries of the body, and its orientation in space. “The brain’s sense of mystical and religious experiences often involves altered perceptions of space and time, self and ego” (p. 29).

Other significant functions of the brain activated in meditation are the complementary arousal and quiescent functions of the autonomic system. The limbic system interweaves emotional impulses with higher thoughts and perceptions which appear to be integral to religious and spiritual experiences. Other sections of the brain act as controllers of emotional functions. The cognitive operators, which make us distinctly human, give us our ability to think, feel, interpret, and analyze our world (Newberg et al. 2002, p. 47, 48). Some neuroscientists have recently studied the origins of left and right brain in lower vertebrates, including apes, chickens and fish, which have implications for the evolutionary development of spirituality. They conclude that “the relative roles of the left and right hemispheres in having self-awareness, consciousness, empathy or the capacity to have flashes of insight... will be best understood in terms of the descent with modification of pre-human capabilities” (MacNeilage, Rogers & Vallorigara, 2009, p. 55).

Newberg et al. (2002) describe the neurobiology of mystical experience, as involving all of these brain functions in an integrated way. In comparison with hallucinatory states, which usually only involve a single sensory system, mystical experiences “tend to be rich, coherent, and deeply dimensional sensory experiences...(and) are the proper, predictable neurological result of a stable, coherent mind willing itself toward a higher spiritual plane” (p. 112-113). As indicated by Holmes (2002), there are two pathways to the ultimate mystical experience of unitary being. The passive or apophatic method uses the right brain to clear the mind of conscious thought. The active or kataphatic method uses the left brain to focus on a sacred object or idea until a similar unitive state is achieved.

*Neurologically, and philosophically, there cannot be two versions of this absolute unitary state. It may look different, in retrospect, according to cultural beliefs and personal interpretations – a Catholic nun, for whom God is the ultimate reality, might interpret any mystical experience as a melting into Christ, while a Buddhist, who does not believe in a personalized God,*



*might interpret mystical union as a melting into nothingness (Newberg et al., 2002, p. 123).*

Differing interpretations are made after the event of a mystical experience, since it is impossible to make observations in the unitary state, when there is no distinction between the self and the experience; “no *this* and no *that*”. (2002, p. 123).

### *Integral Vision*

Wilber (2001) was influenced by Aurobindo’s thought in achieving his “coherent and consistent vision that seamlessly weaves together truth claims” from many fields, including physics, biology, chaos theory and the systems sciences, neurophysiology, aesthetics, developmental psychology, the Great Chain theorists, and the mystical schools of the great meditative traditions, East and West (Wilber, 2001, p. xii). Wilber’s integral theory of consciousness is the culmination of the work of the multi-disciplinary research of the Human Consciousness Project, whose aim is to map the entire spectrum of human consciousness, including the unconscious (pp. 27-28). As part of this integral approach Wilber maintained that all knowledge disciplines could be divided among four quadrants of a diagram: the left hand side being the interior or subjective approach, and the right hand side the exterior or objective approach. These are divided into upper and lower quadrants which represent individual and collective studies respectively. (p. 9). This model was applied to the present research in Chapter Seven of this thesis, “Charting the Path”.

Wilber (2001) provided a model of the study of mind or consciousness, as distinct from brain, which falls on the left side of the model, and then reflects on how this model may be integrated with the right side for a more integrated theory of consciousness (2001, p. 254). His comprehensive theory of human psychology has five main components: developmental *levels* or *waves* of consciousness, developmental *lines*, normal and altered *states* of consciousness, the *self* or self-system, and the four *quadrants* (mentioned above). The developmental waves are so called because Wilber did not conceive them as rigid stages, but rather as the “Great Nest of Being” (p. 257). These waves are conceived differently from culture to

culture, but generally progress through consciousness of matter, body, mind, soul and spirit. This is not a rigid, even progression, for each level includes the lower levels as “fluid, flowing, overlapping waves” (p. 256). These waves of consciousness move “various developmental lines or streams (such as cognition, morals, affects, needs, sexuality, motivation and self-identity)” (p. 259). Each of these lines acts as an independent module, so that a person would have higher levels of development in some modules than others.

States of consciousness can include “normal” states such as waking, dreaming and deep sleep, and “altered” states such as peak experiences, religious experiences, drug states, and meditative states. Altered states, including peak experience (a term coined by Maslow to describe a state of mystical illumination, Hyde 2008, p. 28), are not restricted to higher levels of consciousness, but can occur at any level of development. Wilber identifies at least four higher or transpersonal states which are common across cultures: *psychic*, *subtle*, *causal*, and *nondual*. (2001, p. 260). The psychic state is a type of *nature mysticism* in which a person experiences a profound sense of oneness with the natural world. This appeared to occur for some children who took part in the research. The subtle state is a type of *deity mysticism*, where individuals report an experience of oneness with God, or the source or ground of the sensory-natural world, e.g. St. Teresa of Avila. The causal state is a type of *formless mysticism*, where a person experiences cessation, or immersion in a formless consciousness, e.g. *The Cloud of Unknowing*. The non-dual state is a type of *integral mysticism* of union with Form or Emptiness, e.g. Sri Ramana Maharshi. (p. 260)’

According to Wilber, spirituality may be described as both a developmental wave, and a separate line (Wilber, 2001, p. 192). This depends on two different uses of the term “spiritual”. In the first sense, “spiritual” applies to the higher levels (post-conventional) of developmental lines such as cognition, affect, where consciousness transcends conventional or material levels of consciousness. At the lower levels this implies that spirituality cannot be attained until a minimum of cognitive, verbal or cognitive competence has been achieved. This model should not

be used to exclude the possibility of very young children (Champagne, 2003, Hay and Nye 2006) experiencing spiritual consciousness.

The second sense of “spiritual” may be defined as a separate line, for which Wilber used Tillich’s term *ultimate concern* (2001, p. 197). Wilber described various levels along this line of spirituality or religious as: magical religion, mythic religion, rational religion, psychic religion (shamans/yogis), subtle religion (saints), causal religion (sages), and non-dual religion (siddhas) (p. 196). “Using other terms, the spiritual line moves from a pre-personal wave (archaic, food, safety, pre-conventional concern) to a *personal* wave (from belongingness and conventional concern to post conventional/global concern) to a transpersonal wave (post-post-conventional, subtle, causal, bodhisattvic concern).” (p. 200). This dual model allows for spiritual development happening unevenly, through gradual growth, with some leaps and regressions, which is acknowledged by other developmental theorists, e.g. Cupit (2007). It also allows for differing levels of ultimate concern along different lines. For example, a person may operate rationally in the cognitive domain and at the magical level in the affective domain.

All these modes of consciousness are under the control of a central driver, the Self. The Self has to “juggle, and navigate” levels of consciousness, developmental lines, the various states of consciousness, heterarchic competences, and discrete talents (Wilber, 2001, p. 203).

*This integral theory of consciousness, with its notion of Self and the integrating tendency of Self, has the potential to assist in explaining how Self, through integrating higher levels of consciousness with lower levels, might achieve unity with the Absolute, the true Self. That is, to say, Self becomes one with Other (Hyde, 2008. p. 42).*

#### *Being a spiritual human being – summary*

This section has focused on what it means to be a spiritual human being from various academic perspectives. Lonergan (1958) presented an intellectual understanding of spirituality. Helminiak (1996) clarified some differences between human spirituality and the divine being. Jung (1960) described the Self as the

regulator of the human spirit. Hardy's (1979) investigations suggested that the occurrence of spirituality is the natural result of evolutionary adaptation. Zohar & Marshall (2000), and Newberg et al (2002) documented evidence that observable brain functions occur during spiritual experiences, leading Zohar & Marshall (2000) to conclude that the brain is the physiological seat of human spirituality. Wilber (2001) concluded that all scientific disciplines lead to a model of human spirituality where the Self has the ultimate unifying role. Most of these scholars conclude that spirituality can be studied through the various scientific disciplines, and that human spirituality has an adaptive unitive function, for the wellbeing of the individual and the species.

### Spirituality as relationship, modern perspectives

#### *William James*

During the twentieth century understanding of spirituality has seen an emphasis on its relational aspects: relationship with the transcendent and within the Divine Trinity, relationship with other people and with the earth. There has also been a shift from understanding spirituality only in a religious context to recognizing spiritual experiences as common to all humanity. Early research into the nature of relationship with the transcendent can be traced to William James (1902/1928), who was also one of the first scholars to carry out psychological studies of religious experiences. James' aim was to defend subjective experience against the prevailing rationalism and positivist philosophy of his time (Priestley, 2001, p. 186). James showed, from many first-hand examples, that there is variety of religious experiences of relationship with the divine, such as conversion, or mystical encounter, which cannot be accounted for by logic alone (p. 189). James attempted to capture the immediacy of spiritual experiences by recording their variety, and allowing each individual the freedom to express his or her own experience in its own way (p. 191). This has relevance when examining contemporary spiritual experiences, such as those of the children in the present study. In contrast with the dominant Protestant culture of James' society, in this present diverse society spiritual experiences arise out of many different narratives and worldviews, and each

child's experiences of transcendence needs to be received in its own narrative and symbolic form.

Another significant contribution of James to understanding relationship with the transcendent was to emphasize the numinous and spontaneous nature of spiritual experiences. For James their origin is an encounter with the Other. James discovered some common features of mystical experience, as follows:

- Ineffable – a state which words cannot adequately describe.
- Neotic – a state of knowledge, insight or certainty. This change is marked by moral growth.
- Transient – a state which cannot be sustained for long, and cannot always be recalled clearly. Its passing may result in a temporary reaction of depression.
- Passive – a state which the mystic feels is “given”, and is not the result of his or her willing it. He or she is overwhelmed by what Wordsworth called “a power that disturbed”. (James, 1928, pp. 380,381; Priestley, 2001, pp. 189-191).

### *Contemplative life*

Thomas Merton was a twentieth century contemplative monk whose spiritual journey was marked by tension between his longing for solitude to enrich his relationship with God, and his other vocation as a writer, which brought him into ever closer relationship with the world outside the monastery (Del Prete, 2002). In Merton's writings there is a theme of unity: unity with nature, with the suffering world, and with other faiths, and his own journey towards unity with God. Merton played an active role in the wider community in confronting Americans with the moral choices of his time, such as those presented by the Vietnam War and the threat of nuclear war. Merton saw his spirituality in being united with other people as follows. “I must look for my identity, somehow, not only in God, but in other men [sic]. I will never be able to find myself if I isolate myself from the rest of mankind.” (*New Seeds of Contemplation*, quoted in Forrest, 1991, p. 118). He was also aware of the unity of the created world with God and with himself. He wrote “A tree gives glory to God first of all by being a tree. For in being what God means it to be, it is

obeying Him. It ‘consents, so to speak, to His creative love.’ (p. 109). The following passage shows the way in which Merton linked the created world with his own spiritual journey and his calling to the monastic life:

*I don't think there was ever a moment in my life when my soul felt so urgent and special an anguish...Please help me. What am I going to do? I can't go on like this'. Suddenly, as soon as I had made the prayer, I became aware of the wood, the trees, the dark hills, the wet night wind, and then, clearer than any of these obvious realities, in my imagination, I began to hear the great bell of (the abbey of) Gethsemani ringing in the night...The bell seemed to be telling me where I belonged...as if it were calling me home (The seven story mountain, in Forrest, 1991, p. 78).*

Merton's spirituality included dialogue between his Catholic faith and Eastern religions, particularly Zen Buddhism. He found certain features of Christian mystical experience to be similar to transcendent experiences in Buddhism. Merton explained that “in the Christian experience the focus of this ‘experience’ is found not in the individual self as a separate, limited and temporal ego, but in Christ, or the Holy Spirit, ‘within’ this self . Similarly, in Zen, what is the detached Void is Self, not the self-regarding ego” (Merton, 1976, p.124). True life is the freedom that transcends the self and subsists in “*the other*“ by love (Merton, 1961, p. 9). “To find the full meaning of our existence we must find not the meaning we expect but the meaning that is revealed to us by God. The meaning that comes to us out of the transcendent darkness of His mystery and our own.” (p. 6). In his life and his writings Merton exemplified the paradox that in “losing one's self” a person finds his true self, and spiritual relationship with God and others.

### *Modern mystics*

A previous section of this chapter referred to medieval Christian mystics, such as Julian of Norwich (1966) and Teresa of Avila (1949). A collection of stories of some twentieth century woman mystics (Bancroft, 1989) revealed that, in common with mystics in other times and places, these women also had a longing for unity with the Transcendent. This ultimate Unity was described in various ways.

Toni Packer, who was influenced by Zen, described it as “in-touchness with what’s there” (p. 49), or a state of no self (p. 58). Evelyn Underhill (1949), who was influenced by Plato, Plotinus and Christianity, preferred the term “unity with Reality”. These women identified the object of their unity in a variety of ways. Meinred Craighead, who had American Indian ancestry, maintained a Christian identity but always referred to God as the Mother, or the Great Spirit (Bancroft, 1989). The Mother was a protector from the patriarchal values of Christianity, whom she related to through female and earth symbols and such as blood, water, earth and its vegetation and animals, and the cycles of the moon. For Simone Weil, the object of her contemplation was the suffering Christ. Her own bodily suffering, and entering into the suffering of others, enabled her to enter into “the unimaginable beauty” of Gregorian chants so that “in the course of these services the thought of the Passion of Christ entered into my being once and for all” (p. 98). Amandamayi Ma, who was described as “one of India’s greatest saints” (p. 59), believed in the Divine as one alone with the universe: “There is He and He and only He” (p. 59) For Ma “all things are that ineffable One, heavily disguised... (therefore) everything is precious, everything must be listened to and respected” (p. 59).

Spirituality provided a path of personal liberation for each of these women, and a way to share the wisdom they had learned with others (Bancroft, 1989). Raine was able to express and disseminate her spiritual experiences of seeing the beauty of the natural world through her poetry, as Craighead did through art and poetry. Weil and Underhill related to others through their writing, and Anandamayi Ma and Macy, by instructing enquirers who came to them. These women did not isolate themselves, but disseminated their love and concern for the suffering and need of other people and the planet. Macy achieved these objectives by practising “deep ecology” which consisted of learning to listen to a tree and being “open to the dog at the corner”. “Social mysticism” was her vision for the future, for people to see in incarnation of God in every person, even the criminal or the Nazi (1989, pp. 11-12). These features of connectedness and compassion, are not exclusively feminine virtues, but are features of the mystic’s unity with all things: the Divine and the created.

*Contemporary spirituality outside the mainstream religions*

A characteristic of much contemporary spiritual experience is that it is recognized in people who are not affiliated with organized religion. Tacey's (2003) observation of Australian young people found that at the same time as they are abandoning formal religion, they are increasingly embracing spirituality. For these young people spirituality means "our relationship with the sacredness of life, nature, and the universe, and this relationship is no longer confined to formal devotional practice or to institutional places of worship... (spirituality) is an inclusive term, covering all pathways that lead to meaning and purpose" (p. 38). This spirituality allows the sacred to enter their lives and experiences. This sacredness can include "ecology, nature and the physical world, or the stars, plants and stellar cosmology, or the search for the inner or true self, or the quest for mystical experiences" (p. 80). Youth spirituality, as Tacey described it, is personal, but not private, but an engaged spirituality, concerned with the welfare of the world and the sacredness of endangered life, and social issues like racism and wars (p. 66). For Tacey, the positive features of this kind of spirituality is that it is essentially incarnational, in its deep and personal engagement with the sacredness of self and the created world, which strives for wholeness and integration (p. 79).

However, Tacey believed that this contemporary spirituality is one-sided, being susceptible to the excesses and trivializing of much New Age spirituality, and lacks the roots and guidance that organized religion can provide. It also lacks a realistic sense of evil as well as of good. (2003, p. 85). Tacey (1995) lamented that "society becomes a demonic parody of sacred reality when society no longer recognizes the divine sources from which its own life springs." (p. 177) Therefore the new interest in spirituality exhibited by the young needs to be directed towards "connection to our life-sustaining roots" (Tacey, 2003, p.226), in traditional religion, for the wellbeing of individuals, society and the earth.

*Relationship with earth*

The present concerns about climate change and the degradation of the environment have led to a renewed interest in spirituality which involves



relationship with the earth, and all living things. However, there have always been traditional nature spiritualities, such as Wicca, which have a sense of connection to the earth. Indigenous people, such as the Australian aborigines, have always had a relationship with the spirit of the earth. Patrick Dodson, an aboriginal leader, said

*The land is a living place made up of sky, clouds, rivers, trees, the wind, the sand; and the Spirit has planted my own spirit there, in my own country. It is something – and yet it is not a thing – it is a living entity. It belongs to me. I belong to it. (Dodson, 1973, quoted by Rosendale, 2007, p. 32).*

Concern for the environment is not only an issue of personal connection with the land, but for some people is also about relationship with God as creator, which has ethical and political implications about the community's management of the earth and its resources. John Avard is a Victorian farmer who wrote:

*I see in nature – a wonderful, powerful, patient, Creator God. It's a process of continual conversion from self to other. Christians are often very un-Christian on the farm. We can still see raping and pillaging of the land. There's a lack of wisdom, or there is intentional blindness in government handling of environmental issues. (Avard, 2007).*

In the foreword to Conlon (1994), Thomas Berry observed that in the late twentieth century people were suffering a dislocation from a sense of the sacred, and need to return to an understanding of the mystery and meaning of the universe as having a primordial consciousness as well as a physical dimension. For:

*the universe as a whole is implicated in every manifestation and every activity of the universe... (human beings) have an immediate presence to every being in the universe individually and to the universe itself in its unity. Every atom is immediately present to every atom in the universe." (Berry, cited by Conlon, 1994, p. vii).*

Conlon (1994) elaborated three patterns of this interconnectedness with the universe. *Differentiation* means that every rock, snowflake or person is different, and therefore to be valued as a unique manifestation of the divine. *Interiority* means that each created subject has a capacity for deep interior experience - to recognize and listen to our own inner voice, and to each member of the Earth community.

*Community* means we are bonded together in relationship with other human beings, the natural world, and all that is (pp. 18-19). In Christian tradition the Trinity is understood as a dynamic oneness of God, expressed as a community of equality and diversity. Conlon understood that there is a direct connection between the dynamic patterns of the universe (differentiation, interiority and communion) and the Trinity (p.20).

Consciousness of relationship with a sacred and evolving universe and its creator can help the society to be less exploitative and more nurturing of the earth and all creatures (Ruether, 1992). For Ruether the healing of earth, relationships between individuals, classes and nations, and human beings and the earth can be achieved by abandonment of a patriarchal theology of dominance and exploitation in favour of a new consciousness based on a holistic worldview, personified under the name of the Greek Earth Goddess, *Gaia*. For ecofeminists such as Ruether, a nurturing relationship with the earth can lead to enhanced relationships within society and a transcendent reality, “a new life-sustaining community of humans as part of the biosphere of Gaia (where all) are interrelated” (p. 259).

#### *Relationship with other people*

Erricker (2001) provided an example of spirituality as relating to other people in a non religious context. Erricker maintained that the small street where she lived, in a small town by the sea, had the hallmarks of a spiritual community. The street provided a community for its inhabitants by reason of their close proximity to each other. The residents shared beliefs and values of trust and mutual help and support for one’s neighbours, and living a simple lifestyle, by the sea. These values were expressed by welcoming the children into each other’s homes, and by the adults sharing cups of tea or family barbeques. These activities had the quality of ritual celebration. Such a ritual occurred on the death of a long-time neighbour, when all the members of the street gathered to wait for the hearse, then they silently followed it to the church. “This solidarity acted not only to honour the death but to affirm the community left behind” (p.231).

### *Summary*

This section discussed spirituality as relationship with the sacred Other through mystical encounters or everyday experiences, within or outside religious tradition. This sacred Other may mean God, the earth and its creatures, or other human beings. Relationship with the transcendent in its many forms was explored by James. Living out a mystical relationship was exemplified by Merton, and various modern female mystics. Characteristics of these lives included relating to the human community and the natural world in an ethical way in the light of transcendental experiences, and finding the inspiration for these experiences in many places: in Christianity, in other religions and outside of religious tradition. Particular characteristics of modern spirituality include an emphasis on finding an individual meaning for living, and a return to the sources of transcendental relationship in the natural world.

#### Everyday spirituality: being a child

An earlier section of this chapter quoted Rowan Williams' statement that Christian spirituality is not "an escape into the transcendent, a flight out of history and the flesh, but the heart of its meaning is a human story" (Williams, 1979, p. 2). The human story, as an indicator of spirituality in the life of the children in the study, was the story of their day-to-day lives. This meant their relationships with their families and their peers, and the struggle of everyday Being-in-the-world.

Hyde (2008) summarized his understanding of spirituality of children as follows:

*My understanding is that children's spirituality is an ontological reality and involves a path towards the realization of the true Self, in which ultimately, Self is unified with everything that is Other than Self (Hyde, 2008, p. 44).*

This quote highlights two aspects of spirituality: self-realization and relationship or communion with others. Heidegger (1980) shed some light on the aspect of self-realization, the "ontological reality" of spirituality as being human, when he explored the ontological question of Being. He used the term "Dasein" to describe the human phenomenon of self-understanding. "Dasein, in its Being, has a

relationship towards that Being – a relationship which itself is one of Being” (1980, p. 32). Further, “Dasein always understands itself in terms of its existence – in terms of a possibility of itself: to be itself or not itself” (1980, p. 33). This existential self-understanding takes place “within a world”, a particular time (temporality) and place, which Heidegger called “everydayness” (1980, p. 38). This human phenomenon of self understanding is described by Helminiak (1996, based on Lonergan, 1957) as “consciousness as consciousness”, or “non-reflecting awareness” (p. 46). For Helminiak, being able to distinguish between the continuing self as “I” from the “Me” as the self as object, means that “nonreflecting consciousness is the key to the human sense of personal continuity and identity” (p. 70). This process of self-understanding, of relating to oneself as a continuing identity is seen in the findings of this research as a key feature of spirituality (Chapter Eight, Footprints).

On the other hand, Webster (2005), based on the writings of Heidegger and Kierkegaard, argued that a spiritual understanding is more than self regard; it is relational. Personal identity is not essential, that is “What am I?” but is best understood as “Who am I?” which is existential in character. Webster stated that “personal identity should be understood to be embedded in the purposes one has for one’s life through *how* one relates, and is therefore spiritual” (p. 5). Evidence of this spiritual capacity for both self-regard and a contextualized sense of identity through relationship with others were found in this research. Hyde (2008) expressed this phenomenon as “a path towards the realization of the true Self, in which ultimately, Self is unified with everything that is Other than Self” (p. 44).

Writers expressing this concept of spirituality through everyday living in the world, include the Dalai Lama. He made the distinction between two levels of spirituality, a religious life, or what is more common today, a life without religion, which can still be a meaningful happy life (Jinpa, 2001). The central premise of the Dalai Lama’s argument for the universality of spirituality is that we all naturally aspire to happiness (p. 83). He believed that happiness is achieved for the individual and society by leading an ethical life, whose central principle is compassion.

*Some Theologies of childhood*

In an age where spirituality is pervasive, but largely divorced from religious traditions, there is a twofold desire: within educational circles to nurture the spirituality of children and young people, and within religious institutions to reconnect children and young people with their faith traditions (Yust, Johnson, Sasso & Roehlkepartain, 2006, p. 3). There is a renewed interest among scholars of children's spirituality, as well as within the various faith communities, to reflect on the meaning of spirituality within and between faith traditions (2006).

A brief review of the major religions (Yust et al. 2006) indicated that although most religious traditions do not have a well developed theology of childhood, sacred texts call for the care and nurture of children, and members of the communities value the instruction and initiation of children into the faith community. From a Christian perspective, Bunge (2006) argued that "the church has not developed theologies of childhood that acknowledge the needs and vulnerabilities of children, as well as the gifts and strengths they bring to families and communities" (p. 53). Bunge presented six different and often conflicting Christian perspectives of childhood:

- Gifts of God and signs of God's blessing, and sources of blessing to their parents.
- Sinful creatures (who have therefore sometimes been abused), but also moral agents with growing responsibility for their actions.
- Developing beings who need instruction in the faith, and guidance in virtuous living.
- Fully human from infancy, therefore to be respected as made in the image of God.
- Models of faith and sources of revelation, whose wisdom can be a challenge to adults.
- Vulnerable human beings in need of protection, justice and compassion.
- (Bunge, 2006, pp. 58-62).

These perspectives of childhood are shared by other religious traditions, with varied emphases. For example, in the various strands of Hinduism deities have

manifested themselves as children or youths, and therefore children are models of faith and revelation. Children are seen as having latent spirituality through their “karma” inherited from previous lives (Agarwal, 2006). In Buddhist tradition children may enter the life of the religious communities of monks. Children are seen as “metaphors” for the lower stages of spiritual development, and also as Bodhisatvi, or sources of inspiration and enlightenment (Nakagawa, 2006). Jewish children are seen as a source of blessing, and an inspiration as signs of God’s relationship with the people of Israel. They also have ritual and moral obligations within the religious community, and need to be given instruction in the Law (Shire, 2006). In Islamic tradition children are valued because they were loved by the Prophet. Children are born innocent, and have the capacity to know God and lead a spiritual life. But they need adult guidance and example in the practice of the faith, and protection from evil influences, to reach their spiritual potential (Yildirim, 2006). This brief overview demonstrated that in the world religions children may not have a central place in theological reflection, but they are valued for their place in the sacred texts and as sources of blessing to the communities. Children are recognized as innately spiritual, but who need the community’s guidance if they are to reach their full potential.

Berryman (2005) presented a fuller reflection on the lack of a Christian theology of childhood, and this tradition’s ambiguity about the nature of childhood. He noted the low view that children are born with the taint of original sin but could become good through baptism and grace, as emphasized by Augustine. There is also the high view, as propagated by Rousseau, that children were born good and became evil under the influence of society (p. 118). Berryman explored the attitude of Jesus to children, as recorded in the Gospels, where Jesus welcomed children and blessed them (Mark 10: 13-16), and encouraged his followers to “become like a child” (Matthew 18:3) in exercising humility, in order to enter the kingdom of heaven. Berryman maintained that, in the light of these and other biblical references to children, a contemporary view of the spirituality of children can be developed by “noticing children around us and remembering our own childhood” (p. 131). From his many years of teaching children by “Godly Play” Berryman presented three

propositions for understanding and encouraging children's spirituality, and extending this to understanding adult spirituality also. The first proposition is derived from the children's game of "peek-a-boo", which demonstrates the theological insight that "God is hidden yet also present" (p. 131). The second proposition is that of "the silent child", which demonstrates that for any relationship non verbal communication is as necessary as verbal communication, and there should be consistency between the two modes. Thirdly, Berryman explored the importance of relationships which include "an ethic of blessing" which often includes physical contact, and provides a guide for our action and development on life's journey (p. 132). Thus, Berryman turned the usual model of spiritual education on its head, suggesting that not only can children learn from their relationships with adults, but adults can learn from children.

Champagne (2003, 2005) also presented theological reflection on the meaning of spirituality for young children. Firstly, she challenged the contemporary reflection that consciousness is "one of the fundamental and necessary elements" in the case of young children. (2003, p. 43). This challenge also applies to the older children in the present study, who are only becoming self aware. Rather, Champagne maintained that young children are spiritual by virtue of "*being alive*", which she compared to Heidegger's (1980) *being-in-the-world*, their *Dasein*. Young children's spirituality is expressed unselfconsciously through three *modes of being*, which is elaborated in this thesis in Chapter Four. Champagne believed that as the child lives in the present, he or she is fulfilling the spiritual purpose in life of *being-a-child*, which can be an opening into the ultimate "knowing" of being part of the Kingdom of God (2003, p. 52). Champagne concluded that "Reflecting on the meaning of their *being-a-child* can enrich us with renewed perspectives on our own *being-in-the-world*" (p. 52). This is an ultimate goal of the study of spirituality.

### *Summary*

This section examined spirituality as a quality of being, in everyday life, for all people, but particularly for children. This began with Hyde's (2008) summary of spirituality as an ontological reality, not just a special psychological state. Heidegger

refers to this state of being as mediated by Dasein. For Hyde (2008) the teleology of this state of being is realization of the true Self, as the Self is united with significant Other. Some contemporary writers, the Dalai Lama (2001) and Erricker (2001), saw the possibility for this self fulfillment outside of a religious life. Yust and other writers (Yust et al. 2006) explored the understanding of children's spirituality from within the world's main religious traditions. From within the Christian tradition, Champagne (2003) and Berryman (2005) believed that children are already in a spiritual state of being, in the immediacy of the experience of being a child. Both of these writers stressed the Christian community's responsibility to nurture the spontaneous spirituality of children.

### Conclusion

This chapter reviewed a range of understandings of the meaning of spirituality.

This was examined under the headings of

- Spirituality as human longing for something more
- Understanding spirituality from various academic perspectives
- Spirituality as relationship, modern perspectives
- Everyday spirituality: being a child

Longing for something more was exemplified in the daily lives and mystical experiences of heightened sense of God, by Christian spiritual leaders such as St Augustine (1923/1965) and Julian of Norwich (1966). The twentieth century saw an awakening of awareness through such writers as Griffiths (1994) and Aurobindo (1979), to the universality of spirituality in all faiths. Aurobindo awakened the world to the possibility of an "integral vision" of a "supramental Truth-consciousness", as a new level of human evolution.

This melding of the physical and the spiritual was demonstrated in various academic disciplines of recent decades. Eliade the anthropologist (1974), Otto (1923/1958) the philosopher, Lonergan (1983) the theologian, Helminiak (1996) and Jung (1960/2001) as psychologists, Zohar and Marshall (2000) and Newberg et al. (2002) as physiologists, have all contributed insight into human spirituality from



their different perspectives. These scholars lend legitimacy to the study of spirituality as science and philosophy. Wilber's contribution is to integrate all these fields in the study of spirituality

A major contemporary contribution to the understanding of spirituality is the emphasis on its relational quality. Merton's (1976) life as a contemplative demonstrated spirituality as unity with self, the natural and social world, and with God. Modern mystics continue to demonstrate lives of union with the transcendent, whether this is understood as a divine entity or the sacredness of earth. Contemporary spirituality is often lived outside mainstream religion, but maintains a sense of relationship with the self and others through respect for the sacredness of life.

The focus on the spirituality of children began with an emphasis of the spiritual significance of everyday living, or spirituality as an ontological reality, that spirituality is what we are, not just what we do. This applies within or outside a religious context. Champagne (2003) and Berryman (2005) maintained that children's spirituality is inherent in their being-a-child, and their spontaneous spirituality needs to be nurtured in faith communities.

The relational role of children's spirituality is presented in the first three chapters of the findings of this research. The unitive aspect of spirituality is explored in the fourth chapter of the findings, where the children's sense of identity is seen as a unifying factor in their self understanding.

After reviewing all of this literature the researcher came to the resolution that, for the purposes of this research, she defines spirituality as:

*the inherent human capacity to aspire to and experience unity with the Other: that is unity with transcendent Being, with the natural world and with other people.*

The table below outlines the main perspectives of spirituality which were reviewed in this present chapter.

Table 2. *Summary of perspectives on spirituality*

	<u>Longing for something more</u>	
Christian perspectives	everyday relationship with God mystical experience	Augustine, Williams Julian, Teresa
Spirituality as universal	insights common to major religions goal of integral perfection	Griffiths Aurobindo
	<u>Various academic perspectives</u>	
Anthropology	cosmic power in nature and humanity	Eliade
Philosophy	experience of the numinous spirituality as higher reason	Otto Lonergan
Psychology	scientific study of human consciousness	Helminiak
Neurophysiology	brain as the seat of spirituality	Zohar & Marshall Newberg et al.
Philosophy	integral vision	Wilber
	<u>Spirituality as relational, modern perspectives</u>	
	Scientific study of spiritual experiences	James
	Integration of the transcendent with everyday life	Merton
	Mysticism in various modern religious contexts	Underhill, Weil
	Spirituality outside religion	Tacey
	Spiritual relationship with the earth	Berry, Ruether
	Spirituality as living in community	Erricker
	<u>Being a child – (a) everyday spirituality</u>	
	Being-in-the-world	Heidegger
	Personal identity as existential “Who am I?”	Webster
	Realization of Self through unity with Other	Hyde
	Aspiring to happiness	Dalai Lama
	<u>Being a child – (b) Theological perspectives</u>	
	High and low views of childhood in major religions	Bunge
	Biblical perspectives of childhood	Berryman
	Spiritual modes of being	Champagne

This present chapter has sought to describe the understanding of spirituality that will be carried forward in this thesis. This present chapter is followed by a review of the literature outlining some of the significant research into children’s spirituality.

## CHAPTER THREE

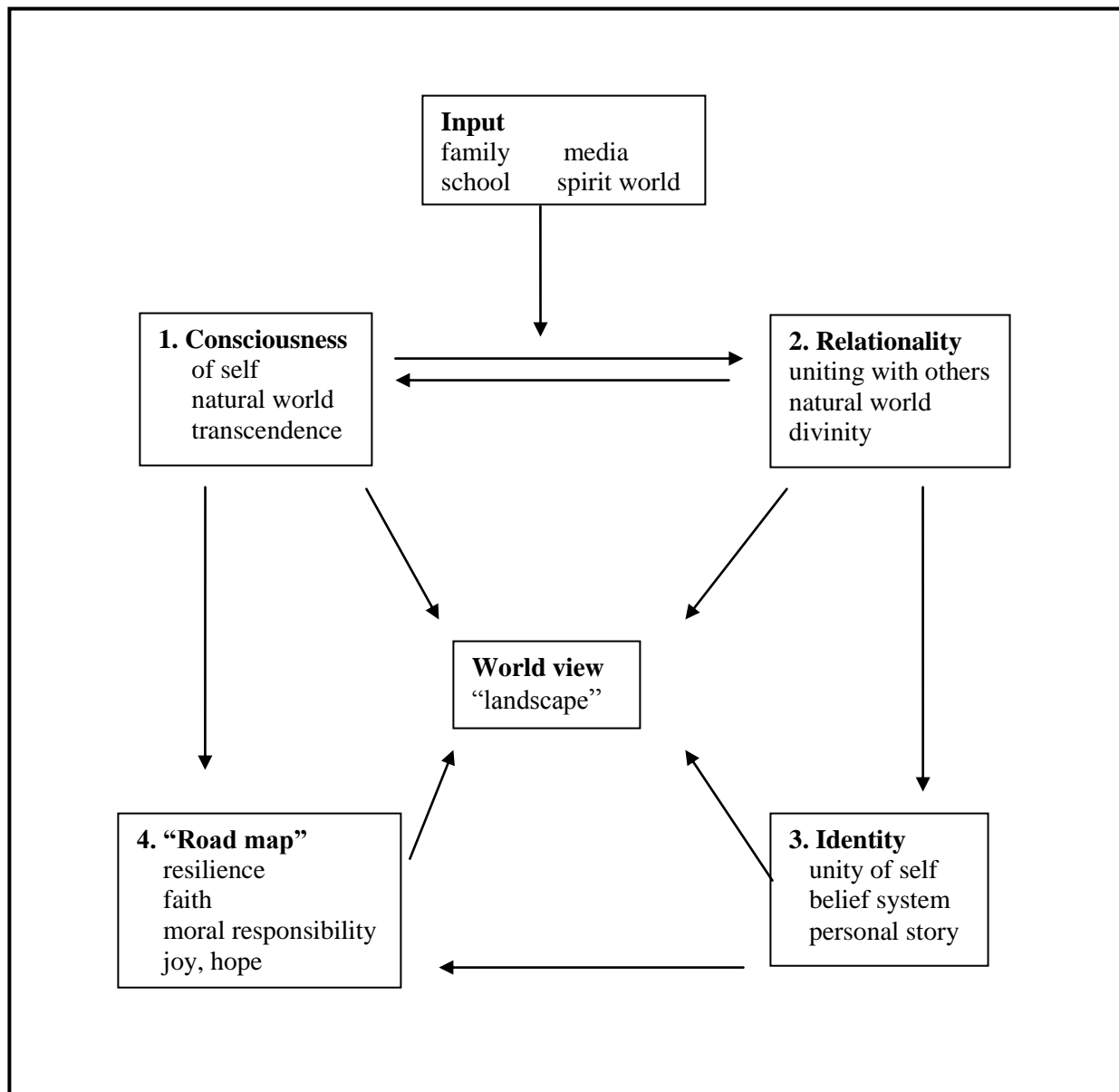
### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

The previous chapter reviewed a number of authors' definitions and discussions about the meaning of spirituality in general terms, and from the perspective of a number of academic disciplines. This chapter focused on the spiritual experiences of children through a review of the empirical studies and the philosophical analysis of a number of authors working in the field of children's spirituality, as well as psychology, education, and sociology. This chapter reviews the relevant literature under the following headings: a) Consciousness, b) Relationality, c) Identity, and d) Roadmap, according to the model shown in Figure 1 (on the following page).

This model arose out of the researcher's reflection on the works of these authors, and became the basis for her research method and discussion of the findings. These dimensions all relate to each other, as indicated in Figure 1. In particular, consciousness (or sensitivity) and relationality are often conceived of as one dimension, Hay and Nye (2006). However, the four dimensional model, finally integrated as worldview, provided a convenient and relevant method for reviewing the literature, and for conducting and analyzing the research.

*Figure 1: A Conceptualization of the Dimensions of Spirituality*



## Consciousness and Relationship

### *Introduction*

The earliest record that the researcher has encountered of a child's spirituality being exhibited as heightened consciousness is the story of Phebe Bartlet, born in 1731 in Massachusetts (Edwards, 1997). The context of this story is the New

England Great Awakening of 1734-1735, when Phebe was aged 4. In her community everyone went to church, where they heard a lot of “hell-fire” sermons and an emotional conversion experience was considered necessary to prove to the person concerned that he or she was predestined to salvation, not damnation (Hay & Nye, 2006, p. 43). Edwards reported that Phebe had a conversion experience which went through the stages of frequent prayer and anxiety and crying about her need to “find God”, followed by a sudden sense of joy, when she exclaimed “Mother, the kingdom of heaven is come to me!” and “I can find God now” (Edwards, 1997, pp. 136,138). In the time after this experience Phebe displayed an increased desire to be in church, a greater concern for the “souls” of her siblings, and for the needs of a poor neighbour who lost his cow, and a more sensitive awareness of moral values, such as not stealing plums. She also had a sense that her destiny from then on was to “serve God”.

This anecdote shows all the features of the researcher’s four-fold model of children’s spirituality. Phebe demonstrated a heightened consciousness of the transcendent in her sense of joy, a deeper relationship with other people in her concern for their wellbeing, a sharper sense of moral values (roadmap), and a sense of meaning or destiny in her life (identity).

Hay and Nye (2006) wrote that Jonathon Edwards, the preacher, and recorder of the story above, was “one of the founding fathers of the psychology of religion” (p, 43), who reacted against the purely cognitive approach to religion which issued from the Enlightenment, and the Established Church’s horror of “enthusiasm”. But this interest was not taken up in academic circles until William James’ *The Varieties of Religious Experience* was published in 1902. The aim of James’ Gifford lectures in 1901-1902 was to confront the growing skepticism from the scientific community about the validity of subjective religious experiences, such as conversion and mysticism. James addressed this “medical materialism” (James, 1928, p. 13) with a wealth of empirical examples from literature and from other researchers. He argued that these instances of heightened religious consciousness, with their sense of reality, and perception of “something there”, which were not experienced in the usual “sensible” ways, could not easily be refuted (pp. 58, 59). On the other hand he

maintained that these religious experiences could be understood through psychology of the unconscious, and that reason and intuition could work together to study these phenomena (p. 74).

James had little to say directly about children's spiritual or religious experiences (James did not make a distinction between religious and spiritual, but he did distinguish between "institutional religion" and "personal religion"), but some of his observations have relevance. In particular, he distinguished between people who were "once-born" or "twice-born". Regarding the "once-born" he called on an earlier writer, in describing them as having a happy, childlike quality of believing in the goodness of God, and the beauty and harmony of the world. These people generally do not have metaphysical tendencies or indulge in introspection or feelings of guilt. They know little of sin in themselves or in the world, but are tenderhearted towards suffering (1928, pp. 80, 81). These characteristics were evident in some of the children in the present study. The term "twice-born" referred to conversion experiences, usually involving a sense of sin or unworthiness, which in James' examples usually happened in adolescence or adulthood. However, James gave an example of a fourteen year old boy who appeared to have a "once born" type of experience, followed by a more adult spiritual crisis nine years later (pp. 189-191).

#### *Two modern trends*

In the middle of the twentieth century cultural changes to a more secular society in western countries, particularly England, led to a new focus in religious education. This was reflected in the wording of the *British Education Act* of 1944 which referred to 'spirituality' rather than "religion". The *Education Reform Act* of 1988 increased the secular and multicultural trend (Hay & Nye, 2006). There were parallel changes in society in Australia, as well as other parts of the western world, where church attendance declined, and people of other faiths migrated from other parts of the world, particularly Asia. People came to associate religion with churches, mosques, religious officials, and experiences of boredom, narrow-mindedness and irrelevance. Spirituality, on the other hand, was generally associated

with “love, inspiration, wholeness, depth, mystery and personal devotions like prayer and meditation” (p. 19).

The other trend which has relevance to the study of children’s spirituality is the cognitive, developmental approach to religious education, as “religious teaching” which was seen as primarily about teaching children “religious truths” (Goldman, 1964). Under the influence of Piaget’s developmental theories, religious educators such as Goldman (1964) maintained that children’s stage of mental development in the primary school years, that is, Piaget’s concrete operations stage, are unable to understand abstract religious concepts, and particularly, the metaphorical language of Biblical texts. Goldman also believed that direct spiritual awareness was limited to adult mystics, and was “practically unknown in children” (p. 14). This ignored the possibility that spiritual awareness “might be a very ordinary aspect of young children’s everyday experience” (Hay & Nye, 2006, p. 50). Hay & Nye (2006) were also critical of the work of later developmental theorists, such as Fowler (1980), in that their approach stressed cognitive and moral development, but downplayed the spiritual dimension. Another limitation was that, in focusing on the language of Christianity, these earlier researchers may have overlooked the spirituality of children from other faiths or secular environments who were unfamiliar with this language (Hay & Nye, 2006).

Empirical research by the Elkins (1978) into cognitive development of children focused on how they assimilated concepts in the process of being integrated into institutional religion. The Elkins followed Piaget’s method of questioning, and elicited responses that closely followed Piaget’s stages of cognitive development in the areas of religious behaviour (prayer), perception, and egocentricity. At this time there was still no distinction between religious affiliation and spirituality as an individual phenomenon.

#### *Retrospective studies of spiritual experiences*

Alister Hardy (1979) opened *The Religious Experience Research Unit* at Oxford in 1968 which studied over four thousand first-hand written accounts of the spiritual experiences of people who responded to newspaper articles and pamphlets.

Some responses were followed up with questionnaires. The massive amount of data was eventually classified under twelve categories, which included sensory experiences, behavioural and developmental changes, cognitive and affective elements, and ‘triggers’ of experience. Although these were retrospective studies Hardy and his colleagues were at pains to argue that scientific study of spiritual experiences was valid. Much of the contemporary study of the human mind was reduced to the physics and chemistry of the brain, but Hardy believed that “all (human) phenomena, may be called *natural* “ (p. 9), and that “the time (had) come to use scientific method to demonstrate whether or not a belief in the spiritual side of man [sic] may be regarded as reasonable or not” (p. 15). Hardy (1979) believed that the mass of data which they accumulated was compelling evidence that human beings are religious by nature, and that their experience convinced him that there is “Something More” that the respondents were aware of, without making assumptions about the existence of a personal God.

Edward Robinson (1977), from the same research unit, concentrated his research on the experiences which occurred in childhood. He noted that “some 15 per cent of all correspondents . . . looked back at their early experiences and regarded them as of vital importance” (p. 11). Robinson was concerned with two main issues: to establish the validity of his research, and to define the unique quality of children’s spirituality. He sought to establish the validity of the written responses, first by following them up with a more directed questionnaire, then by defending the quality of the responses. Robinson was convinced by the immediacy of the reports that they were genuine memories (p. 14), and by the lasting, life-changing effects of childhood experiences of heightened consciousness. Robinson claimed validity for these experiences in their coherence, correspondence to reality and their immediacy, this last being the conviction with which the respondents held them. He quoted an example of how the childhood event of one respondent watching ants, resulted in a unitive vision of eternity for her (pp. 12-13). Robinson’s major contribution was in his idea that children are spiritual beings in their own right, and not immature or inefficient adults, a general view which emanated from the work of Piaget (p. 9). Robinson concluded that childhood spiritual experiences “seem to belong to a world



that is for ever closed to most of us” (p. 24), which he called “the Original Vision”. This vision is not the logical understanding of an adult, but a child is able to use imagination and intuition to make sense of the whole in an “almost mystical” way (pp. 18-19). While Robinson claimed mystical qualities for children’s experiences, especially “nature mysticism” (p. 27), he noted that in most instances “religious experience is really something quite ordinary, commonplace” (p. 15), like observing ants.

*New methods for exploring children’s spirituality*

The loosening of the nexus between religion, in Western culture, from spirituality led to reassessment of the methods and language used to investigate children’s spirituality. A further impetus in Britain was the enactment of the 1988 Education Reform Act with its aim of “developing the spiritual” in school children. McCreery (1996) questioned whether the current activities in the classroom, which aimed at stimulating personal reflection through language, were appropriate for young children. Taking a definition of spirituality as “an awareness that there is something other, something greater than the course of everyday events” (p.196), McCreery investigated the spirituality of children aged 3 to 5. She avoided direct questions that might elicit a response in religious language, and used activities such as story, drawing, and asking “difficult questions”. Her aim was to explore young children’s awareness of “something other” in their everyday experiences of home, school and the popular media. She concluded that “development of the spiritual needs to start with the questions children ask” (p. 205). McCreery’s method and assumptions formed the basis of further studies, including the present research.

Robert Coles (1990), a child psychoanalyst based in the United States, whose work preceded that of McCreery in the United Kingdom, spent many years with his associates, extending the study of children’s spirituality. They interviewed over 500 children in several countries, from various religious and social situations. Besides interviews, which often occurred over a number of years, Coles also collected drawings and photographs of the children. From these interviews, which allowed children to communicate their experiences in their own “language”, Coles concluded

that children's spiritual awareness is a universal phenomenon. He noted that although not all of the children he interviewed had a religious family environment, there was a large overlap between the children's religious and spiritual life, and also between their religious and moral life (p. xvii). The children displayed courage and optimism arising from their inner meaning-making experiences, whether they were religious believers or atheists. Their spirituality was a pervasive influence on their lives, exhibited in heightened consciousness and relationships. For example, Natalie, a Hopi Indian child, spoke of her unity with natural phenomena, such as the hawks flying overhead, which she felt were communicating with her (p. 150). Margarita, from Brazil, had a personal consciousness of relationship with Jesus, who was a visible presence to her in the giant statue at Rio de Janeiro, and also a moral awareness of injustice in her community (pp. 91-95). Through this heightened consciousness children were able to achieve a sense of their personal identity and a purpose in life. Thus Coles' direct dialogue with so many children demonstrated all four of the categories forming the model for this research: consciousness, relationality, identity, and "roadmap" which included features such as resilience, moral values and meaning making.

Jerome Berryman's (1991) observations of children's spiritual experience occurred in a local church setting, where he provided a space for young children to explore their spirituality through "Godly Play". Berryman believed that "children *do* have an awareness of the existential limits of their being and their knowing and that they are crying out in ways we do not often recognize for the language tools to help them build a life that takes such ultimate concerns into consideration" (p. x). Play provides means whereby the immediate sensory experiences of the external world, and the interior sense of unity which they produce, may proceed through the intermediate zone of play, or "the reality gate" of understanding (p. 145). As children grow older they need to be introduced to an appropriate verbal "religious" language to objectify and articulate the experiences of childhood. The present research made use of play activities to explore spiritual expression, such as relating to others. The research also highlighted the children's lack of a religious language to express their spiritual insights.

### *Relational Consciousness*

Probably the most influential research into children's spirituality was that conducted by Hay and Nye, whose book *The spirit of the child* was first published in 1998, and is now in its second edition (Hay & Nye 2006). A great deal of later research has taken their work into new territory (Hyde, 2008; Reimer & Furrow, 2001; Champagne, 2003; Johnson 2006; Pearmain, 2007 and others). Hay (2006) took up Hardy's (1979) thesis that spirituality is broader than religion, being a form of awareness which is potentially present in all human beings and which (Hardy believed) has a positive biological function for the survival of individuals in their natural environment (Hay & Nye, 2006, p. 22). However, Hay and Nye's research led them to the conclusion that in contemporary western society, (in England in particular where they have a direct concern for public religious education), the natural spiritual connectedness with which an infant is born is eroded by the prevailing individualism of our culture (Hay, 2000). The prevailing view that spirituality is seen as a private matter, together with the developing child's enculturation into scientific rationalism, would account for Hay and Nye's observation that "children are embarrassed by their spiritual awareness, particularly by the time they reached the age of ten" (p. 39). Hart (2003) confirmed that children's spiritual experiences were largely kept "secret" from other people. The present research also showed children's preference for discussing spiritual experiences in a one-to-one situation.

Hay and Nye's (2006) key concept of *relational consciousness* arose out of Nye's conversations with 38 children – 18 aged 6 to 7 and 20 aged 10 to 11 from two state primary schools in Nottingham and Birmingham, UK. Twenty eight of these children were classified as having no religion. As well as spending informal time at the school, Nye had up to three meetings with each child lasting about half an hour. Interviews were tape-recorded. In the interviews, the children were shown photographs designed to generate reflective discussion. Religion or religious experience was not mentioned unless it was brought up spontaneously by the child. However any religious affiliation the child might have was noted at the end of the interview.

Based on prior concepts, such as Csikszentmihalyi's "flow" (1990), the theoretical starting point for Hay & Nye's research was a provisional set of three interrelated themes or categories of sensitivity or awareness:

- awareness-sensing – here and now, tuning, flow, focusing
- mystery-sensing – wonder and awe, imagination
- value-sensing – delight and despair, ultimate goodness, meaning. (Hay & Nye, 2006, p. 65).

Nye's analysis of the data began with a "case study" of individual children which identified his or her fundamental spiritual characteristics or "personal signature" (Hay & Nye, 2006, p. 94). Guided by the categories mentioned above, Nye was able to isolate key passages of what she saw as spiritual features out of the mass of largely mundane conversation, and arrive at a core category of relational consciousness. This special data reflected two patterns:

- an unusual level of consciousness or perceptiveness, relative to other passages of conversation spoken by that child
- conversation expressed in a context of how the child related to things, other people, him/herself, and God. (2006, p. 109).

"Consciousness" referred to "something more than being alert and mentally attentive". It referred to a distinctive reflective consciousness that, in certain contexts, "fostered a new dimension of understanding, meaning, and experience (of higher consciousness)" (p. 109). "Relational" included more than relationships of "I-Others", and included also "I-Self", "I-World" and "I-God" in a special sense of awareness that added value to the children's everyday perspective (p. 109). This was connected to the special state of awareness: a conscious and a relational component in interaction. For example, six year old Ruth referred to her sensuous experiences of heaven as 'waking up and 'noticing', suggesting a different kind of consciousness. The relational component of her experience was her strong feeling of its connection to the sights and sounds of a spring morning. (p. 110).

Nye used the core concept of *relational consciousness* as a basis to ask further questions, out of which she identified a number of dimensions of children's spirituality. These dimensions included contexts, the type of language used,

strategies for maintaining the sense of the spiritual, changes in their spirituality over time, and the consequences of researching their experiences for the children and for nurturing adults. Nye concluded that all of these processes were within the range of normal childhood experience, locating spirituality “within the reach of the ordinary child” (Hay & Nye, 2006. p. 113).

Hay and Nye’s work influenced the present research in a number of ways. The core concept of relational consciousness was incorporated into the research model’s four dimensions. For the sake of symmetry, consciousness and relationality were taken as separate categories, but the analysis that followed showed that the two categories were too interwoven to be discrete categories in practice. This researcher’s method had similarities in comparable numbers of children, ages, some of the interview techniques, and context of the state school system, but in the Australian context. That this researcher did not arrive at one core concept and a number of dimensions, like the Hay and Nye model, may be a consequence of using hermeneutic phenomenological methodology which led to a series of interpretive modes rather than discrete categories.

#### *A critique of Hay & Nye’s “relational consciousness”*

Scott (2005) cautioned that in embracing the concept of relational consciousness one should not “valorize the spiritual and ignore or downplay other areas of developmental insight” (p. 94). Scott argued that children’s spirituality needs to be viewed more broadly than Hay & Nye’s (2006) categories of awareness-sensing, mystery-sensing and value-sensing., and “be grounded in the full range of a child’s experience and capacity, including the child’s social systems and their interactions” (Scott, 2005, p. 95). For example, in judging awareness-sensing and mystery-sensing to be spiritual capacities one needs to consider the effect of the development of children’s normative cognitive and imaginative skills. Scott maintained that “mystery and imagination are not exclusively spiritual” (p. 99). The spiritual may only be knowable in social, religious, familial and emotional contexts. The spirituality of a child’s particular experience may be recognized by the quality and the long-term impact of that experience (p. 100). Scott also noted that childhood

spiritual experiences may differ from that of adults, because “the personal boundaries of children are more porous and flexible than later in life, which leaves them more accessible to beyond-the-self experiences” (p. 100).

Scott’s observations helped this researcher to distinguish whether the experience of a particular child was normal child behaviour or spiritual, especially in the absence of any religious reference by the child. Scott gave the example of a child’s curiosity about the mystery of a chicken laying an egg (2005, p. 99), which may be construed as focusing on cognitive development and understanding of the world rather than a spiritual experience. But Scott (2004) also gave examples of experiences which he found to be not only awesome and mysterious, but also highly emotional, meaning-making, and “life-shaping” (2004, p. 75).

#### *Extending the concept of relational consciousness*

Reimer and Furrow’s (2001) research in the United States “sought to qualitatively expand an understanding of relational consciousness” (2001, p. 12). Their method was to interview twelve children aged 7-8 years from congregations of three Christian denominations. These interviews focused on processes of the internal self, and the child’s socio-cultural context, and included a drawing of God. Analysis of data used grounded theory methodology (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Some of the categories (or themes) which emerged from this method were as follows. *Ideological clusters* referred to themes and words emanating from the children’s socially shared religious experience, used to refer to past experiences of transcendence. *Existential map* referred to a child’s personalized representation of a unique spiritual experience or perception of objects, places etc. Relational Consciousness (Hay & Nye 2006) was identified with a cluster of subcategories which demonstrated an attachment towards people or symbols at a spiritual level (Reimer & Furrow, 2001, pp. 15, 16). *Symbolic attachment* occurred when the child used a visual or generative likeness to order transcendence, e.g. “cross”, “smile”. *Bonding* referred to words which identified God as near or personal. Other sub-categories referred to mystery and meaning in relation to God, prayer, and a sense of justice. The authors represented their illumination of the concept of *relational consciousness* in a diagram, in which

bonding and symbolic attachment were central, with the other categories – existential map, ideological clusters, prayer and positive justice as surrounding points. The significance of Reimer and Furrow’s (2001) research was in confirming Hay and Nye’s (2006) concept of relational consciousness. The religious language and concepts used by the children in Reimer and Furrow’s study to articulate and integrate their spiritual experiences was not available to the children in this researcher’s study.

Other writers who have called on Hay and Nye’s concept of relational consciousness included Johnson (2006), who presented a reflection on the way in which children’s inherent desire to relate to others through a shared identity, can be distorted and corrupted by fundamentalism in all its forms. This presents a challenge for religious education’s task to encourage a sense of relationship and identifying with all people. In another perspective, Pearmain (2007) who presented an empirical study in the United Kingdom, with young people aged 15 to 18 years, suggested that the role of the researcher/interviewer is important in creating an inter-subjective (relational) space for exploring spiritually sensitive issues. This space, or field of meaning (p. 80), can make use of images (such as pictures), metaphors, or other presentational sources of knowing (such as body movement and dance). This enables both the researcher and the group of participants to share the “deeply stirring and moving experiences” of the ineffable manifestations of spirituality (p. 79).

### *The secret spiritual world of children*

Hart (2003) set out to address the problem that, although children’s spiritual experiences are widespread or universal, they are largely denied or misunderstood by adults. “Their capacity for wonder and wisdom, for compassion and deep questioning and for seeing beneath the surface of the physical world is largely unacknowledged” (p. 3). This is largely because researchers in the past have limited their considerations to “God talk” (p. 4). He and his colleague conducted in-depth interviews with hundreds of individuals and families, and gathered written accounts from hundreds of children, and from adults who recollected their childhood experiences (p. 4), and they used other sources such as autobiographical records

from historical figures (2004). They questioned the participants about a variety of different kinds of specific spiritual experiences, including moments of awe and wonder, unitive experiences, and receiving spiritual guidance from a non physical source (2003, p. 6). In the survey, from 60 percent to 90 percent of adult respondents indicated that their first experiences of a particular spiritual nature occurred in childhood (p. 7). While much of Hart's discussion was about unusual or "secret" experiences of children, he believed that spirituality is a universal human experience, which "may take place inside or outside the context of religion" (Hart, 2004, p. 39). Spirituality is "that unquantifiable force, the mystery that animates all things and of which all things are composed. . . We might recognize that mystery is the power of creation or sense of wholeness, homecoming, or perhaps a truth deeper than words" (2003, p. 7).

Hart (2003) introduced five classifications of children's spiritual capacities as follows.

*Wisdom*: a way of knowing and being that takes small children beyond the limits of ordinary, everyday experiences into the deep stream of consciousness where they are able to connect with people beyond the limits of their time and space (p. 45), for example, Haley's communication with Mahalia Jackson, although she was not physically present (pp. 20-22).

*Wonder*: experiences that can involve feelings of awe, connection, joy, insight, and a deep sense of reverence and love. Sometimes these are experiences of deep unity and ecstasy (2003, p. 48), for example, Miranda standing still in the sea, and afterwards reporting to her father that "I was the water" (p. 47).

*Relationship*: ("Between You and Me"): refers to the compassion and sensitivity to the needs of others that is often displayed by young children. "Relational spirituality is about communion, connection, community and compassion. It is about the way (children) know and meet the world" (p. 68), and "resonate" with the thoughts and feelings of other children and adults.

*Wondering*: refers to the young child's capacity to "entertain perplexing and paradoxical question" of ultimate concern (such as questions about infinity, God and death) because of their openness, vulnerability and tolerance for mystery (p. 92).



Hart maintained that in asking these questions children are not looking for direct, logical answers, but are exploring deeper ways of understanding their own being, in an intuitive, and often sensory way.

*Seeing the Invisible:* In this section Hart explored many examples of an altered state of consciousness in children. For example his daughter Maia could see faces around her bed, and Laura could see lights and colour (aura) around people, or children being aware of the presence of angels (pp. 125-126), Hart accepted these experiences as spiritual because they (a) reflected an openness and expansion of consciousness, (b) showed people more of who they are and what the universe is, and therefore shaped their worldview; and (c) reflected a more direct, intuitive knowing that is often the route toward spiritual insight” (p. 116).

Hart’s findings are significant for the present study. His five spiritual capacities helped to form the four-part model of spirituality, relationality, identity and roadmap, culminating in a central worldview, which is the foundation of the present research. The research method, detailed in Chapter Four, consisted of three interviews: the first examining children’s experiences of awe and wonder and also their Big Questions, calling on Hart’s Listening to Wisdom, Wonder and Wondering, The second interview topic was Relationships, as in Hart’s “Between You and Me”. The third interview explored topics of identity, and worldview, which Hart examined in his chapter on Wondering, and in his later discussion chapters. In the third interview this researcher found isolated examples of Seeing the Invisible. Hart defined spirituality as both a worldview, which locates the individual in a multidimensional sacred space to which the child is open through intuitive awareness, and also as a process of self realization and identity formation (Hart, 2003, p. 9). This alerted the researcher to the range of possibilities, and the limitations of the children’s development, and the expressive capabilities that might emerge. Hart’s perception that children’s spiritual experiences were largely secret from the adult world also presented a challenge to try to gain the confidence of the children in order to access this “secret world”.

*Spirituality in early childhood – modes of being*

Champagne (2001) based her observations of the spirituality of young children by listening for “signals of transcendence” (p. 78, quoting P. Berger in Hay & Nye, 1998, p. 54) in their everyday experiences. She found these transcendent moments to be expressed in relationships, rituals, questioning the mysteries of life, and in the existential modes of time and space. In Champagne (2003) these concepts were refined to identify three spiritual “*Modes of Being*”: *Sensitive, Relational and Existential*. This was based her observations of sixty children in three day-care centres. The *Sensitive Mode of Being* referred to the way children with limited language skills engage with the world through their individual senses of sight, hearing, physical movements etc. to communicate who they are in a holistic way, embodying spirituality (pp 45-46). *Relational Mode of Being* referred to the quality of the children’s relationships with adults and their peers. Champagne identified various “keys” to this mode of being, e.g. affirming, referencing, exclusion/inclusion (pp. 46-50). *Existential Mode of Being* referred to “the relation to time and space and to the relation to existence itself through daily activities” (p. 50). Some of her “keys” to this mode are time, space, games, imitations, symbolism, and imagination. In summary, by engaging in the search for meaning, and living in the present, young children express their spirituality by “being-a-child” (p. 52).

Champagne’s (2003) spiritual modes of being became the lens through which this researcher analyzed the findings of the interviews with somewhat older children, aged 8 to 10, using similar keys to identify the spiritual content of the interviews. This is detailed further in Chapter Four.

*Other research into early childhood spirituality*

Eaude’s (2003, 2005) approach to empirical study of early childhood spirituality involved co-research with fourteen teachers of four and five year olds in English primary schools. This research project (2005) explored the way in which teachers “related spiritual to emotional, religious, moral and creative development and the importance they ascribed to specific experiences and to relationships” (p. 241). This compares with Hay & Nye’s (1998) “relational consciousness”. The

project also explored the teachers' understanding of what young children's spiritual development entails, and how this is fostered in the classroom. Further, Eaude was concerned to answer questions about whether very young children have "what one may recognizably and meaningfully call spirituality, and whether children do *develop* spirituality" (p. 241) as compared to physical or emotional development. While the teachers in the project came to a variety of conclusions about what constituted children's spiritual experiences, there was a general consensus that spiritual development was important and did occur. They observed that it was largely unrelated to religious belief, but was linked to emotional and moral maturity, and was "largely embedded in the environment (the teachers) created and the relationships they fostered, rather than specific experiences or activities" (p. 243).

Eaude (2003, 2005) discussed the problems of defining spirituality which involves problems of language and is best understood obliquely or indirectly. He believed spirituality to be wider than religion, "more akin to a universal search for meaning and identity" (2003, p. 153). In a search for understanding of the nature of children's spirituality he explored the contribution of psychoanalysis, which emphasizes the importance of the development of selfhood or identity, and "interdependence and relationship" (p. 156). The contribution of cognitive psychology is in the search for meaning, which lead one writer to describe "narrative as the medium for integrating individual learning...and the individual into moral and thinking communities" (Bruner, 1996, quoted in Eaude, 2003, p. 158). Both of these disciplines suggest a developmental model. However, Eaude (2005) recognized that at a young age children have unique spiritual capacities for "openness, curiosity and joy", which need to be nurtured.

Eaude's contribution to this research is not so much in his method, but in his discussion, which introduced a number of concepts which are developed in this thesis, for example, spirituality as relational and meaning making, and embedded in a cultural context. He also discussed the development of identity and personal integration through narrative, and the understanding of spirituality as "a process, rather than a set of experiences" (Eaude, 2005, p. 245).

Harris (2007) reflected on the meaning of spirituality for young children in light of her own childhood experiences of engaging in awe with the natural world, and being nurtured by sacred rituals and symbols. In her role as educator she viewed children's spirituality as peer-relational; to be transformational in the way their peer interactions facilitate and guide the lives of other children. She believed that the role of the teacher was to offer directive spirituality in providing a peaceful environment which encourages a sense of wonder at the world, and responsibility for their peers.

Sagberg (2008) offered some reflections from a Norwegian perspective. He presented the example of young children's response to a dramatic performance about a child looking for her father, held in a small chapel of a cathedral. The children explored the chapel with all senses and their whole bodies, reacted with awe to the sacred space, and entered emotionally into the story being performed. These reactions echo each of Champagne's spiritual modes of being: Sensitive, Relational, and Existential. Sagberg noted the evidence that small children "transcend time and space in search of meaning" (p. 8), and respond to "an intentional framework for experience and expression" provided for them (p. 9). He maintained that a spiritually sensitive educational context can provide a "bridging concept between religious traditions and other cultural expressions and contexts" (p. 10).

#### *A more recent retrospective study*

Scott's (2004) Canadian-based study analyzed twenty-two written accounts of adults concerning events in their childhood and adolescence which they claimed as spiritual. Unlike Robinson (1983) and Hart (2003), whose focus was on experiences of early childhood, Scott concentrated on experiences that occurred around the ages of 8-10 years, the same age group as the present study. The childhood spiritual experiences in Scott's study were persistent and life-shaping in character (Scott, 2004, pp. 68-75). They were characterized by strong and often conflicting emotions (pp. 70-73). Some adults recalled having capacities for heightened consciousness, such as seeing auras, and having prescience of danger, or "a moment of mystical union and a simultaneous sense of identity" (p. 74), (see also Hart, 2003; Robinson, 1983). Scott also noted that for many of the reported

childhood experiences there was a pre-existing emotion and social context for the mystical experience. For example, Gwen, who was an abused child, found a deep experience of maternal comfort and healing in the presence of a statue of the Madonna (Scott, 2004, p. 74).

Scott's (2004) participants also reported the inhibiting effect of adult reaction to childhood spiritual perceptions (c.f. Hay & Nye, 2006), so that they were kept private, or the child went on to experience confusion and self doubt. Scott (2004) confirmed the findings of research previously reviewed, and the present research. Scott (2006), through his metaphor of wrestling, raised more theoretical, but significant issues for this research. Some of these issues included – the need to avoid a limited definition of spirituality, since its nature is to be elusive and many layered; also to be persistent but sensitive in exploring children's spiritual experiences, or "children may lose engagement" (p. 92). Scott also noted that engaging with spirituality requires openness and vulnerability on the part of the researcher, who needs to be receptive to change in his/her own life through the research experience.

#### *Meaning and connectedness in an Australian context*

Hyde (2008) conducted research that was comparable to that of Hay and Nye (2006), in the setting of Australian Catholic schools. The research was comparable in method, and in context, in that Australia is a secular society like the United Kingdom, and shares historical and cultural links. Hyde's study was conducted with a total of 36 children aged 8 and 10 in three schools: outer suburban, inner urban, and rural, using videotaped group interviews. His semi-structured interviews were based on Hay and Nye's categories of spiritual sensitivity. In Hyde's study, *awareness sensing* involved attention to "here and now" experience while the children were engaged in a variety of creative activities. *Mystery sensing* was elicited by exposing the children to a number of sensory experiences – of sound, smell, and a set of photographs. *Value sensing* was the focus of the third group in which the children were asked about what "really, really matters", and what their three wishes would be. Using the methodology of hermeneutic phenomenology, Hyde interpreted his data through the lens of van Manen's (1990) lifeworld

existentials: lived space, lived body, lived time, and lived human relation (Hyde, 2003, 2005b).

The starting point for Hyde's (2005c, 2008) research was Hay and Nye's (2006) relational consciousness under four characteristics:

- The felt sense
- Integrating awareness
- Weaving the threads of meaning
- Spiritual questing (Hyde, 2008, p. 82),

The first two characteristics described consciousness, and the second two described relationship, although the two elements were connected. The *felt sense* (Hyde, 2006b) described as a phenomenon of the children being completely absorbed in the here-and-now of creative tasks, such as planting seeds, so that they were unaware of others and the passing of time. This phenomenon of complete bodily engagement by the children extended the concepts of "flow" (Csikszentmihlyi, 1990), or "point time" (Donaldson, 1992). Hyde believed that the children's experiences to be spiritual in that they constituted an "ontological awareness" (Del Prete 2002), involving mind, body and soul, which is consistent with Thomas Merton's notion of the Self becoming unified with Other through a higher state of consciousness (Hyde, 2008, p. 89). Hyde (2005a) described *integrating awareness* as a phenomenon in which the children entered into spontaneous, uninhibited conversation with each other while still continuing their individual activities. Hyde interpreted this as entering a second level of consciousness whose purpose was relationship with each other (Hyde, 2008, pp. 98-99). This was discussed with reference to Wilber's (2001) concepts of developmental levels (waves) of consciousness, and the Self as an integrating agent. The children's Self system can integrate the previous level of consciousness (the children's physical activity) with a higher wave (the conversation with each other) to produce a higher level of integrating awareness. The children were then occupying a relational space with Other, where their sense of time past, present and future are merged into a unified consciousness (Hyde, 2008, pp 101-104).

The context for the emergence of what Hyde described as *weaving the threads of meaning* was the interview devoted to mystery sensing, where “the children’s sense of wonder acted as a tool for expressing their spirituality” (Hyde, 2008, p. 108). Out of their sense of wonder the children were able to make meaning and construct a worldview. The stimulus activity was the viewing of a series of photographs, e.g. Uluru, a famous Australian landmark, and a picture of two children crying. The former elicited questions about earth’s origins, and the latter conversations about death, heaven and God. In forming meaning the children entered a “space” where they drew on a range of frameworks of meaning, from the media, their own experience, prior learning, mythology, and faith traditions including the Christian story (p. 116). They were seeking, not only cognitive consonance, but also a sense of connectedness, in particular a connectedness between the living and the deceased.

*Spiritual questing* was a concept that arose out of the value sensing interview. The children were asked “what really, really matters” to them, and what their three wishes would be. The term was adapted from Horell’s (2003) term “questing postmodernity”. Horell noted that the present generation of young children (the ‘Millennials’) accept the challenge of the shift from modernism’s certainty to find in the multiplicity of present options, “more life-giving and life-enhancing ways of being... more authentic ways of connecting with self, others, the earth and with God” (Hyde, 2008, p. 125). The children in Hyde’s study drew on a range of community and personal sources to make meaning and explore purpose in their lives. They sought to affirm their sense of self, their sense of identity as family members, their concern for other people less fortunate than themselves, and their connection with the Transcendent. *Spiritual questing* also expressed an awareness which that underpins altruism and ethical behaviour.

Hyde (2008) also described two factors which inhibited spirituality. These were material pursuits, and trivializing. Hyde saw preoccupation with material pursuits and possessions as inhibiting relationships with other people and the transcendent, and “encouraging promotion of the outer self and its desires” (p. 143). Trivializing (2006b, 2008) was a mechanism used by some children in Hyde’s study,

as an apparent attempt to avoid confronting issues of meaning and value in life (2008, p. 149).

Hyde's work influenced the present study in a number of ways, particularly in the use of hermeneutic phenomenology as a methodology, and in some of the choices of method, such as the similar ages and geographical representation. Other similarities were the use of group interviews and some of the activities, such as discussing photographs to elicit reactions of awe and wonder, and some of the group activities. However, this researcher was able to discover some distinctive interpretative features in her work. These features are discussed in Chapter Nine.

### Identity, Roadmap and Worldview

The concepts of Identity, Roadmap and Worldview constitute the lower half of the model, Figure 1, presented at the beginning of this chapter. The concepts of Consciousness and Relationship or Relationality, which form the upper portion of the diagram are primary, in that they are open to direct investigation, and are closely interrelated. However the concepts in the lower part of the diagram are secondary, in that their presence in the findings must be inferred rather than directly observed, and flow on from Consciousness and Relationality as spiritual attributes. Also, the three concepts are interrelated in a more complex way. The researcher anticipated that the development of Identity in children's spirituality would be prior to that of Roadmap, but the research findings as discussed in Chapter Eight seemed to indicate that Identity was a later developmental process, perhaps even later than Worldview. Worldview was not well articulated by the children in the study.

### *Worldview*

Worldview was an early concern for researchers into children's spirituality, particularly in the context of formulating educational policy. Erricker and his team of researchers conducted the *Children and Worldviews Project* beginning in 1993, which listened to children's views about religious and spiritual topics (Erricker, Erricker, Sullivan, Ota & Fletcher, 1997). Erricker (1997) summarized the philosophies behind past and present education policies in England as truth



imparted, knowledge realized and narrative construction respectively. Erricker's discourse began with worldview, "landscape", or narrative construction. He maintained that "children already possess a narrative within which they construct meaning" (p. 9). This narrative arises out of all their past experiences and relationships, and is the basis for their worldview – the mental landscape within which they construct these worldviews.

*This is the landscape within which their existential reality is defined, which involves their relationships, both with the living and the dead, their concerns as to their present identity and their future aspirations, and most important, it is the central location of their map of the world to which they can retreat as a sanctuary, and from which they obtain their energy for living (Erricker et al., 1997, p. 143).*

This concept of worldview was a basis for the present research model. The categories may be identified as spirituality in that they deal with "existential reality" and "energy for living". "Present identity" and "future aspirations" (roadmap), form the lower poles of the model, and worldview is the central, integrating concept. The methods of drawing and dialogue (1997, p. 150-155), and interviewing in groups (p. 43) of the *Children and Worldview Research Project* were also adapted for the present research. Erricker and Erricker's interviews with children on their dealing with death, and their use of scientific and ethical perspectives on death influenced the present research, which largely substantiated their views about the capability of young children to deal with these issues, using scientific and popular religious beliefs (199).

Writing in the context of Religious Education in English public schools, Clive Erricker (2001, 2007) challenged the traditional role of religion as arbiter of faith and the Religious Education curriculum, in favour of recognizing that in the post-modern world spiritual identity and relations are constructed "diatactically" from a variety of individual narrative experiences (2001), and faith is an "autonomous category" which the individual chooses (2001). This view was challenged by Wright (2001), who believed that religious education can not be divorced from religious traditions or the rigor of academic disciplines.

A contrasting view was presented by Belcher (2005), regarding the acquisition of a Christian worldview in the classroom. She reviewed the link between “educational worldview cognition and actual practice” (p. 10), maintaining that teaching of worldview must be linked to an understanding of what it means to be human, and needs to be embodied by the teachers to be effective. A Christian worldview needs a cognitive component addressing issues of ontology (what it means to be human), epistemology (what it means to know something and how to do it), axiology (understanding about good and evil and their consequences in human life, and teleology (a vision for the future) (p. 11). It must also be learning-appropriate. Belcher also believed that acquiring appropriate (Christian) language and literacy enables students to develop a “transformative worldview” (p. 12) which is truly spiritual in that it pervades the whole person, mind, body and soul.

While this present research was conducted with a view to enhancing the teaching of Christian Religious Education, consideration needs to be given to Erricker’s (2007) insights, given that Religious Education in Australian state schools occurs in a secular or multi-faith context where the developing worldviews of all students should be respected and enhanced.

#### *Worldviews of Australian youth*

The Australian academics, de Souza (2003, 2008), Engebretson (2003), and Crawford and Rossiter (2006), have each been engaged in research among young people aged 11 to 25, with reference to religious education in Catholic secondary schools. Much of this has relevance to the spirituality of primary school children in all Australian schools. Like the Errickers, their concerns were for the spiritual development of the whole person, taking account of the social influences which are already shaping the young people’s worldviews. Crawford and Rossiter (2006) argued that Australian young people in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century tend to view spirituality as distinct from religion, which many view in a negative way, and many see their spirituality as non-religious. Spirituality is seen as informal, personal, and open to questioning, individual interpretation, less concerned about traditional religious beliefs than with existential questions (p.183). These findings compare with Tacey’s

(2003) study of the spirituality of young Australians. Tacey found that young people define their spirituality as “our relationship with the sacredness of life, nature, and the universe, and this relationship is no longer confined to formal devotional practice or institutional places of worship” (2003, p. 38).

Tacey stated that “for many of our youth spirituality is the search for visions and values within this world, for the deep currents of spiritual impulse and reality that give life meaning and direction” (2003, p. 65). Crawford & Rossiter (2006) analyzed this spiritual search under the interrelated constructs of meaning, identity and spirituality. In a rapidly changing cultural environment based on individualism and consumerism, where the influence of a traditional religious perspective is declining, these authors focused on the role of religious education in schools in helping young people “to find ways of making meaning in their lives and developing an authentic sense of self” (p. 8). Education which develops spirituality needs to be broad enough to include a religious foundation, but also to take into account the “values, commitments and aesthetic concerns” of all students, including those students whose spirituality draws on other sources, in order to help all students critically evaluate their developing “reason for living” (pp. 9-11). This present research explored some personal and cultural influences on the spirituality of the children, as expressed in their values and meaning making, and their development of identity.

Engebretson (2003) drew on the writing of the sociologist, Hugh Mackay, who noted that organized religion has never played a large part in Australian life, and religious faith has always been considered private and relatively unimportant, yet Australians do admire a person who has strong moral values and religious conviction (p. 11, citing Mackay 2000). Engebretson made some specific observations about younger children, drawing on the UK research of Kay and Francis, who found that “children start with positive attitudes towards religion and end with negative ones” as they reach adolescence (1996, *Drift from the Churches*, cited in Engebretson, 2003, p. 7). Kay and Francis found that girls had a more positive attitude than boys across all ages. Engebretson attributed this gender difference to the “feminine characteristics” of much religious language and teaching.

Erricker et al. (1997) also found gender differences, where the girls' stories were characterized by emotional and relational qualities, while the boys' conversations were more skeptical and philosophical. Engebretson has conducted further research into the spirituality of boys (Engebretson, 2007).

de Souza (2003) believed that the current dehumanizing influences of the breakdown of conventional frameworks for living in the family, and negative influences of peers, the media and the political climate, are leading to a lack of connectedness to Self, Other, the world and transcendence among Australian young people. She contributed to the research dimensions of worldview, roadmap and identity in this research in asserting that the key to wellbeing is connectedness (de Souza 2003, 2005, 2007, 2008). Her research project (2003) involving interviews with young people aged 15 to 20, explored their relationships with self, other people, the wider world and a transcendental dimension in their lives, as these were expressed in the language and values of the participants. de Souza described the participants' spirituality as multi-layered, reflecting different levels of spiritual maturity, as expressed in deepening concern for the Other in the wider world. She described spirituality as "the human person's movement towards Ultimate Unity in an ever-swirling spiral built with layers of accumulated learning and experiences which span a lifetime" (2003, p. 276). In consequence, de Souza emphasized the importance of spiritual education of the whole child, as needing to address three dimensions of learning: intellectual/thinking, emotional/feeling and spiritual/intuiting (p. 278) in order to "address both the *inner* and the *outer* lives of the student (2005, p. 41, emphases are the author's).

de Souza (2008) advocated the development of intuition, through creative activities such as music, story telling and silent reflection. The role of education is to assist students to develop connectedness through consciousness of the needs of the alienated and marginalized people in their community and the world (2008). de Souza drew on the insights of Wilber's (2001) integral vision, and Harman's global mind change (1998, *Global mind change: the promise of the 21<sup>st</sup> century*, cited in de Souza, 2008) to support the need for a balance between rational/analytic and imaginative/intuitive modes of thinking (de Souza, 2008, p. 32). These authors have

recognized a global shift to awareness of the interconnectedness of everything and a growing recognition of the value of inner knowledge and wisdom.

Although these Australian authors were writing about an older age group, their findings influenced the present researcher to view children's spirituality in a holistic way: as children using their various mental and spiritual faculties to integrate external cultural factors with a growing sense of Self into a worldview. The role of religious education is therefore to foster this integrative process.

### *Identity*

Identity as a dimension of spirituality is reviewed separately here because it emerged that identity may be the end product of the children's process of developing a roadmap of values and a worldview. This has led to the production of a revised model of children's spirituality, with identity as the last dimension (see Chapter Nine, in which the dissonance between the original conceptualization as presented in Figure 1 and the revised model is discussed).

Webster's (2004, 2005) works were influential in clarifying the concept of identity for this research. His work is theoretical rather than empirical, and based on the existential philosophies of Heidegger and Kierkegaard. Webster (after Kierkegaard) maintained that authentic, and therefore spiritual, identity is not based on the 'objective' *what* a person is, but a more 'subjective' *how* a person relates, where the *who* of personal identity is to be found (2005, p. 7). Webster distinguished between an essentialist "identification" of a person by such attributes as gender, occupation, and an existential identity based the purposes one has for life as *how* one relates, which is therefore spiritual (p. 5). An authentic identity flows from the choices one makes, and the values one espouses, and therefore the meaning one attaches to one's life. These choices are not made in isolation, but occur in a social context by means of "a 'circular' type of dialogue between one's personal identity and one's social identity" (p. 10). "Authentic spirituality is based on freedom of choice, and involves one's coming to understand how meanings and frameworks are to count for one's own situation, and then to take ownership of this" (p. 11). Webster warned that inauthentic identity results from passively accepting superficial

identification with such features as the labels and images of the crowd. The role of spiritual education is to give children and young people opportunities who ask existential questions about “Who am I?” rather than “What am I?”

This discussion is useful for the present research in its insight into how spiritual identity is formed, through interaction between social environment and personal choice, and for evaluating the spiritual quality of identity through relationships and values. However, children’s identity is a work in progress, since children still have limited choices because of their social dependence and an emerging ability to make independent choices. However, the present research did demonstrate that the children were making personal choices and had a sense of their distinct identity in relation to the peers and family.

#### *Australian Identity*

The children in this study were concerned about their identity as Australians, and the spirituality they derived from the land and its history was important for a number of them. It may be significant that these children attended secular state primary schools where a religious meta-narrative is absent (c.f. Hyde’s study in Catholic schools), and is replaced by a meta-narrative of national identity. Kelly (1990) presented some insights into Australian spiritual identity, drawing on our nation’s literature. Kelly identified Australian spirituality as distinctive in its consciousness of being ‘Down Under’, resulting in “an isolated sensitive individuality at the expense of self-transcendence into the real centre of things” (p. 6). Australian culture is subversive of authoritative opinions, especially religious traditions, and “resolutely inarticulate about spiritual issues” (p. 8). Yet Australian poets and spokespersons are aware of a spiritual imagination, a “burning soul”, which is inspired by the vast and silent land, a searching for a wholeness beyond modern superficiality, for connection with the Self, and the Other in our community. The inability to articulate their spirituality, and the longing for connection emerged in the present study.

## Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed a significant body of literature in relation to research in the field of children's spirituality which influenced the development of this present research. Study of this literature resulted in the conception of a model of children's spirituality with four dimensions – Consciousness, Relationality, Identity and Roadmap, culminating in a central concept of Worldview, as illustrated in Figure 1 at the beginning of the chapter. By way of summary, the key authors whose work has contributed to this model are listed as follows in Table 3 below. The work of these authors has also assisted the researcher in developing the method for the research, as described in the following Methodology chapter. The analysis of the findings of this research resulted in a reconceptualization of the model of Figure 1 (discussed in detail in Chapter Nine).. The researcher is indebted to theories and methods of the writers outlined in this chapter, in particular, the work of Hay & Nye (2006), Hart (2003), Hyde (2008), and Champagne (2003).

The contribution to the present research of a number of the authors reviewed in this chapter is summarized below in Table 3.

The following chapter details the methodology employed in this present research. It sets out and describes the epistemology, the theoretical perspective, and the methodology of this present research. Also, the following chapter describes in detail the particular methods employed for collecting relevant material through the group and individual interviews with the children who participated in this research project

Table 3. *Some authors contributing to the conceptualization of spirituality in Figure 1.*

<b>Primary Dimensions – spirituality identified</b>		
<b>Consciousness and Relationality</b>		
James (1902/1928)		Tacey (2003)
Coles (1990)		Coles (1990)
Hay and Nye (2006)		Hay and Nye (2006)
Erricker et al. (1997)		Erricker (1997)
Hart (2003)		Hart (2003)
Crawford & Rossiter (2006)		de Souza (2003)
Hyde (2008)		Hyde (2008)
Scott (2004)		Champagne (2003)
Champagne (2003)		
<b>Secondary Dimensions – meaning making</b>		
<b>Identity</b>	<b>Roadmap</b>	<b>Worldview</b>
Robinson (1979)	Tacey (2003)	Tacey (2003)
Coles (1990)	Coles (1990)	Coles (1990)
Erricker et al. (1997)	Erricker (1997)	Erricker (1997)
Hart (2003)	de Souza (2003)	de Souza (2003)
de Souza (2003)	Hyde (2008)	Hyde (2008)
Webster (2005)		
Kelly (1990)		



## CHAPTER FOUR METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

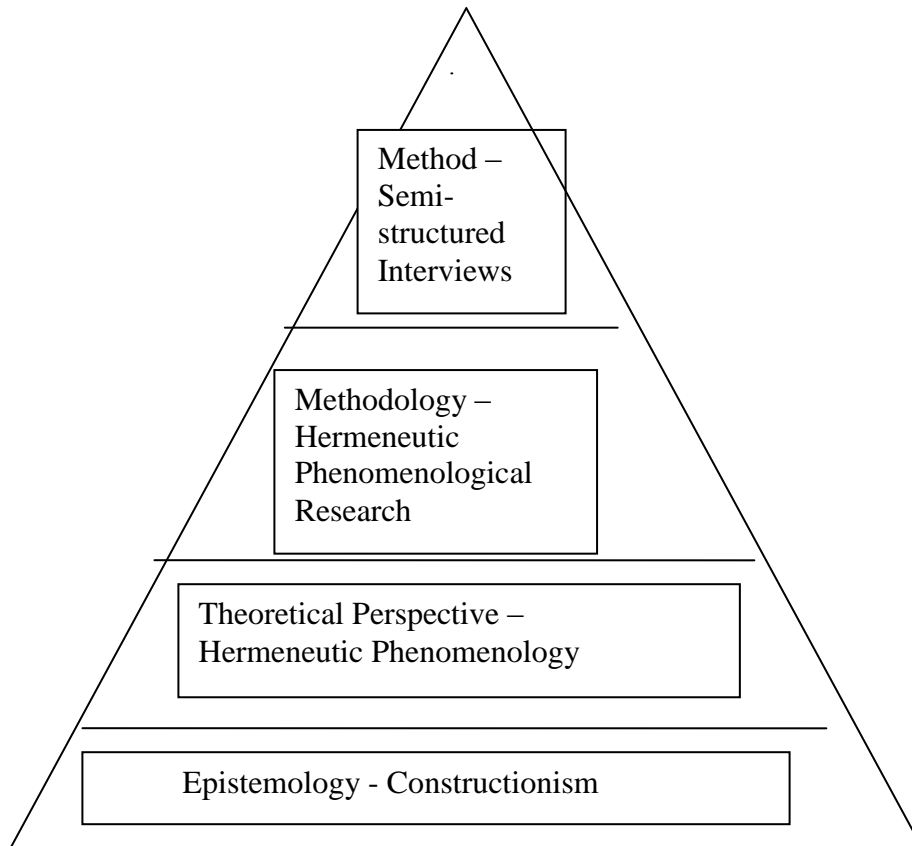
This chapter applies the body of research in children's spirituality, reviewed in the previous chapter, to the implementation of the present research. As demonstrated in the previous chapters, spirituality is "elusive and many layered" (Scott, 2006, p. 92). Hart (2003) described spirituality as "that unquantifiable force, the mystery that animates all things and of which all things are composed... We might recognize that mystery is the power of creation or sense of wholeness, homecoming, or perhaps a truth deeper than words" (p. 7). Spirituality is not a directly observable phenomenon. Therefore, this researcher was aware of the need to apply a methodology which was appropriate for this mysterious and multidimensional construct. The choice was hermeneutic phenomenology. This choice enabled the researcher to apply a method for approaching the problem of bridging the space between the spirituality of the researcher and the children being interviewed through the perspectives of a multidimensional model, based on previous research. Different aspects of children's spirituality were explored in three interviews which respectively addressed - Consciousness, Relationality, and the complex set of dimensions including Roadmap, Identity and Worldview. This chapter sets out the methodological framework and the research methods used in this study.

### Theoretical Framework

This present research used Crotty's (1998) model to describe the elements of the research process. Crotty's model is based on the hierarchical relationships between the four particular elements – epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology and methods. This model provided a "scaffolding," around which to build the research. The model is also like a pyramid, with the most generalized theoretical assumptions of epistemology at its base, and the particulars of methods at

its apex. This model provides consistency in the way the various layers build on the one below.

Figure 2. *Theoretical model for this research according to Crotty (1998)*



Each of these categories and reason for their choice is elaborated below.

#### Epistemology – Constructionism

Epistemology is the branch of philosophy which investigates the origin, nature, methods and limits of human knowledge. It can be argued that knowledge of spirituality, like knowledge of mind, or personality, is accessed indirectly, through the constructions, or meanings that human beings ascribe to observable, sometimes measurable, phenomena. These phenomena, in the case of spirituality, may be, for example, an expressed sense of awe, or an act of kindness. But even “awe” and “kindness” are constructions which attempt to provide meaning to perceptions,

therefore constructionism is the epistemology of choice for this study of spirituality. For constructionism, meaning is not fixed and quantifiable as in objectivism, but “truth , or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world” (Crotty, 1998, p. 8). For constructionism, “all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (p. 42).

In contrast to an epistemology of constructivism, in which meaning of phenomena in the world is known privately and subjectively, or imposed on reality, constructionist epistemology is mediated through the individual’s cultural milieu (Crotty, 1998, p. 58). Just as an objective object, like a tree, has different meanings for a timber worker, a conservationist or an artist, so spirituality can have objective reality, yet also have different meanings such as for an Animist in Borneo, a Medieval mystic, or a non religious university student in Australia in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. For the purposes of this research, the object to be studied is the spirituality of the children who were interviewed. The construction of meaning not only arises out of this methodology, but also from the cultural perspective of the researcher-observer. It is through the socially inherited “system of significant symbols” (p. 54) that people are able to function as meaning-making human beings. These symbols are primarily verbal language, but also include gestures, rituals and the like. The social inheritance which this researcher brought to the meaning-making process of this research included the academic discipline of the body of researchers into children’s spirituality, and the personal life-world of a retired teacher, family member and committed Christian mainly in Protestant and Anglican traditions.

Some key concepts of constructionism include “intentionality” (Crotty 1998). Intentionality means being conscious of *something*, or *reaching out into* the object being studied, emphasiz

-  
-  
Strauss, is “*bricoleur*”, translated as ‘Jack-of-all-trades’, and means “to approach the object in a radical spirit of openness to its potential for new or richer meaning” (p. 51). In contrast with the constructivist traditions, constructionism, as used in this

research took a slightly critical stance towards one's inherited culture, as "found in the critical tradition and in large sections of the phenomenological movement" (p. 60), and the findings of the research, in believing that some aspects of the researcher's worldview, and the phenomenon of the children's spirituality, are more liberating than others.

#### Theoretical perspective – Hermeneutical phenomenology

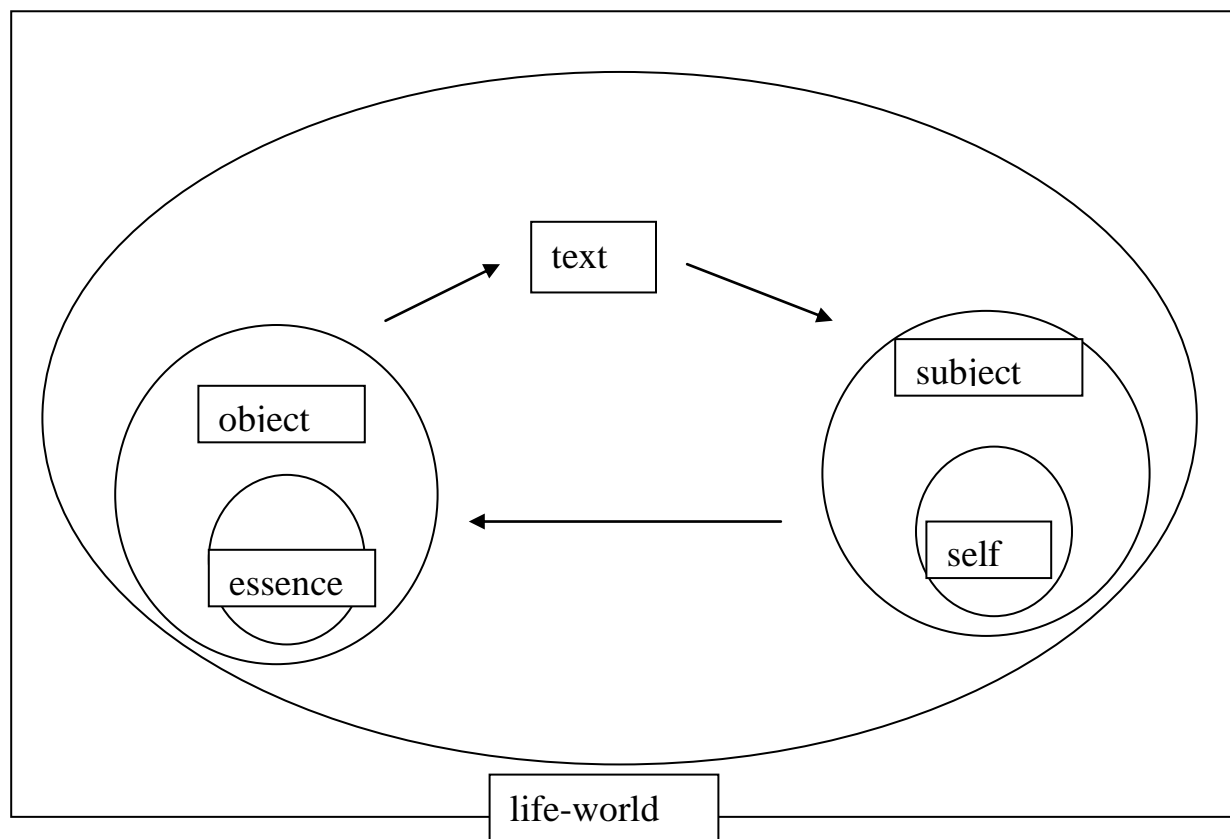
Theoretical perspective provides a "philosophical stance informing the methodology and thus providing a context for the process and grounding its logic and criteria" (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). It provides a framework for starting and justifying the assumptions the researcher inevitably brought to the research task. Through the theoretical perspective of this research the researcher sought to address some fundamental questions, such as the way one understands what another person says, or writes. That is, an epistemological relationship, or interpenetration between the subject/researcher and the object/spirituality of children, was established. James K. A. Smith in *The fall of interpretation* (2000) took the problem a step further back, to ask a theological question, whether the hermeneutic space is between human beings and God. His thesis was that the need for hermeneutics is a feature of the goodness of creation, giving rise to human finitude, i.e. being located in time and space (p. 139). This finitude gives rise to "a plurality of interpretations" (p. 33), made possible by the use of language which is also part of temporal existence (p. 139). It is through language that meaning is constructed.

This research sought to address the way one constructs meaning of the phenomenon of the children's spirituality through the theoretical perspective of hermeneutic phenomenology. Hermeneutic phenomenology is not a method for discovery but a philosophy which "seeks to test prior understandings" through open-minded engagement in a middle space between the research object and the researcher (Sharkey, 2001, p. 17). Phenomenology and hermeneutics began as separate disciplines, which some have sought to combine as a theoretical perspective for engaging in human research (e.g. van Manen, 1990). The researcher's

understanding of the theoretical perspective of hermeneutic phenomenology is outlined below in Figure 3.

The left hand side of the diagram represents phenomenology, with its focus on the object of study, in an attempt to reach the core or essence of that object. The right hand side represents hermeneutics, with its focus on the problem of the subject attempting to interpret the object, across a distance - historical or social. This distance may be bridged by means of texts (according to Ricoeur, 1974), rules (according to Schleiermacher; Husserl, 1962), lived experience (according to Dilthey, 1867/1996; Heidegger, 1980), or “fusion of horizons” (according to Gadamer, 1975). These authors will be discussed below. For some philosophers (such as Heidegger, 1980 and Ricoeur, 1974) the process of interpretation effects an ontological change at the core of the subject, including greater self-understanding.

Figure 3. *Theoretical perspective of hermeneutic phenomenology*



### *Phenomenology*

Phenomenology is the study of phenomena “which present themselves immediately to us as conscious human beings” (Crotty, 1998, p. 78). In early phenomenology, as pioneered by Edmund Husserl, this meant laying aside preconceived ideas, and observing “the thing itself”. That is, phenomenology is also a study of the “essences” of phenomena (Husserl, 1962).

Phenomenology was developed as a descriptive method by Husserl. For Husserl “phenomenology is a discipline which endeavours to describe how the world is constituted and experienced through conscious acts” (van Manen, 1990, p. 184). He used the phrase *Zu den Sachen*, which means both “to the things themselves” and “Let’s get down to what matters!” (1990, p. 184). In his early work Husserl maintained that even mathematics and natural science are not purely “objective”, for all knowledge is abstracted from the “lived world” (Crotty, 1998). However he believed that human sciences, such as phenomenology, should be just as rigorously conducted as natural sciences. Phenomenology offers an account of the world of time and space as we live in it. Underlying this discipline Husserl espoused a number of basic concepts which have been developed by later phenomenologists. For example, in his later work *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology* (1962) Husserl wrote that phenomenology is the descriptive analysis of “essences”, or *eide* in general, and particular phenomena, such as sense perceptions, and also acts of consciousness, which can be “reduced” to an essence. Another concept is *epoche*, the suspension of judgment or “bracketing” of pre-conceptions in order to make the investigation more rigorous (Honderich, 2005). However, later authors, for example van Manen (1990), have disputed the possibility of effective bracketing. van Manen (1990) argued that a good phenomenological description is validated by lived experience, “by inserting one’s self into the tradition of scholarship in such a way that one becomes a participatory member of the tradition” (p. 27).

In Husserl’s early work he advanced a form of transcendental phenomenology in the sense of treating the world as an indivisible unity which encompasses both “I” and an “other” consciousness, part of a prior or cosmic reality. In this case “analytical reflection believes it can trace back the course followed by a

prior constituting act and arrive, in the ‘inner man’...as a constituting power which has always been identical with that inner self” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. x) . However Husserl was aware that connection between the self and another is “paradoxical”, and there are two perspectives, not one, involving outer appearances, and the “dialectic of the Ego and the other himself” (1962, p. xii).

*The objective reality of phenomena*

Merleau-Ponty advanced the work of Husserl in terms of perception, or how one engages with the object of study. In his preface to *Phenomenology of Perception* (1962) Merleau-Ponty summarized the characteristics of phenomenology as: a study of essences, whose starting point is the reality and prior existence of objects, and whose efforts are directed to “re-achieving a direct and primitive contact with the world”, through a process of “rigorous science” (p. vii).

Phenomenology, for Merleau-Ponty, involved the body, as an agent of perception or knowing an object. His work involved the study of the synthesis between “I” and the world, both of which are given realities. For Merleau-Ponty, as a phenomenologist, phenomena such as perception, are “real” objects that have to be “described, not constructed or formed” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p.x). However, dialectic between the Ego and the Alter (p. xii), makes the study of phenomena possible. On the one hand the Cogito, or self awareness, includes awareness of being a body, situated in an objective time and place. On the other hand, there are objects in the world, which can be perceived with the senses, and reflected upon with the mind because the observer (Ego) is embedded in the world. This world “is not what I think, but what I live through” (p. xvi-xvii) which is open to reflection.

*Reflection does not withdraw from the world towards the unity of consciousness as the world’s basis (as in transcendental idealism): it steps back to watch the forms of transcendentalism fly up like sparks from a fire; it slackens the intentional threads which attach us to the world and thus brings them to our notice”. (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. xiii)*

The dialogue between the Ego and the Alter is made possible because both are discrete realities. Merleau-Ponty (1962) wrote at length about the phenomenology of perception to demonstrate the reality of visual objects, such as a red patch in a carpet, where “red and green are not sensations (of the observer), they are the sensed (*sensibles*), ...a property of the object” (p. 4) Nevertheless the red patch is perceived, and analyzed, by the observer into a visual field. When one tries analyze what is perceived, one transposes these objects out there, into consciousness. Nevertheless, “we are caught up in the world and we do not succeed in extricating ourselves from it in order to achieve consciousness of the world” (p. 5). Merleau-Ponty rejected the concept of a transcendental ego, which allows a “thinking subject (to) become fused with the object thought about.” (p. 62). Likewise, he rejected the use of transcendent prior laws or pre-existing reasons, and asserted that phenomenological research is essentially an inductive process, which “can assimilate any experience to the point of taking up and appropriating its whole texture” (p. 63). Crotty recommended “a philosophy” which is not a body of knowledge, but a process of vigilance which always returns to the objects of experience (Crotty, 1998, p. 85).

Merleau-Ponty’s contribution to this research was in emphasizing the need to exercise rigour in searching for the essence of the phenomenon of children’s spirituality through focusing directly on the observable objects of the researcher’s experience – the verbal and physical expressions of the children, and the researcher’s analysis of these expressions – and trying to suspend prior theories about what is observed. This process should offer a greater awareness of the life-world incorporating the researcher and the children, and its meaning. This has an underlying epistemological assumption that these are real, observable phenomena which can be perceived, (directly or indirectly) and ascribed meaning by a process of conscious reflection, since both the researcher and the phenomena inhabit the same life-space.



### *Hermeneutics*

Hermeneutics began as a discipline or method for the interpretation of scripture, based on the premise that these texts are “strange and far off”, making interpretation problematic (Crotty, 1998, p. 90). What began with Schleiermacher as a merely semantic exercise, of applying a set of rules to the grammatical structure of the text in which the interpreter remained aloof, gradually came to accommodate “the intentions and histories of authors, the relationship between author and interpreter, or the particular relevance of the texts for readers” (p. 91). In hermeneutics, means have been devised to bridge the gap between the object or text and the reading subject. The main device for bridging the gap is the “hermeneutic circle”, in which there is a reciprocal reading of a text, where the whole illuminates the parts, and the parts illuminate the whole.

### *Interpretation in the human sciences*

With Schleiermacher, the scope of hermeneutics began to be broadened to encompass not only interpretation and understanding of written texts, but also the spoken word in discourse (Sharkey, 2001). Hermeneutics began to reflect on the phenomenon of human understanding. This process was pursued by Dilthey in his concern with the interpretation of meaningful human action. Dilthey was concerned that the human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*) should be studied with the same rigor as natural sciences (Dilthey, 1996), but he made the distinction that the natural sciences are concerned with “explanation” (*Erklärung*) and the human sciences with “understanding” (*Verstehen*), and require different methods of study. This distinction is somewhat reflected in the contemporary distinction between quantitative and qualitative research methods. Dilthey’s concern was with a “real” world rather than a metaphysical reality, yet the real world will always remain, to an extent, unknowable. However, he believed that “we all have a...worldview that guides our actions (which is) grounded not in the intellect but in life” (Crotty, 1998, p. 94). . “Dilthey argued that to understand the meaning of human action requires grasping the subjective consciousness or intent of the actor from the inside” (Schwandt, 1994, p. 296). In Dilthey’s earlier work he addressed the problem of

understanding history. He described the subjective consciousness as being able to use empathy to re-live the events of the past. However in his later work he acknowledged that a contemporary “worldview” is not sufficient. There is the need to understand the author’s historical and social context through the exercise of the “objective mind”, for people’s “lived experience” is “incarnate in language, literature, behaviour, art, religious, law – in short, in their every cultural institution and structure” (Crotty, 1998, p. 95). Dilthey’s influence on this research is in his emphasis on “explanation” rather than just description in human science, and the need to engage with the “lived experience” of the subjects which includes their social context.

### *Understanding Being*

Heidegger(1962) returned the focus on hermeneutics to a greater focus on phenomenology. He sought to lay aside pre-conceived “interpretative tendencies”, in the effort to access the essence of Being. Heidegger’s concept of Phenomenology is based on the Greek grammatical construction (middle voice) of the word for phenomenon, meaning “shows itself”, or is visible in itself (p. 51). Hermeneutics is not a set of rules nor a methodology but “explication of human existing itself” (Crotty, 1998, p. 97).

A key to understanding Heidegger’s philosophy is in coming to terms with his concept of *Dasein*, which is a kind of feature of the self which approached the world with a pre-understanding in its search for “its own understanding of Being” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 36). Heidegger’s concern went beyond epistemology to ontology, how hermeneutic phenomenological research can manifest to us, not just individual being but Being-itself. Heidegger developed the method of the “hermeneutic circle” by which in one’s quest for Being, one begins with pre-understanding of being and render it explicit and thematic. This grasping of essentials or structures of being leads back to a deeper understanding of Being (Crotty, 1998).

Heidegger’s concept of “world” is the personal world. It is “prior to any separation of self and world in the objective sense... Every entity in the world is

grasped as an entity *in terms of world*.” (Palmer, 1969, pp. 132-133) This world and its objects are usually inconspicuous because human beings are embedded in the world, but in times of enlightenment or “breakdown” the world’s “predicative meaningfulness” appears to people. What was implicit understanding of objects in the world can then be interpreted through language (pp. 133-135).

Heidegger’s work had relevance to the present research in its emphasis on the need to try and overcome the subject/object dichotomy. His concept of *Dasein*, or pre-understanding, was helpful in that the researcher already had experience of being a world which was largely shared by the children, in which phenomena revealed themselves. However the researcher needed to be sufficiently distanced to see the phenomenon. Heidegger’s emphasis on Being encouraged one to look beyond the attributes for the essence of the child’s spirituality. This is why this researcher focused on the individual child, and asked the question “Wherein does the spirituality of this child lie?” However, the phenomenon of spirituality will necessarily remain difficult to access, and Heidegger’s object of directly accessing Being seems to be overly ambitious. Ricoeur (1974) argued that Heidegger took the “short route” to Being, and bi-passed any discussion of method. Ricoeur claimed that he himself took the “long route” to understanding Being, through the hermeneutic study of symbol and language. (Ricoeur, 1974, pp.10-11; Muldoon, 2002, p. 54). This researcher sought to take the long route through the analysis of texts derived from the research interviews.

### *Fusion of horizons*

Gadamer (1975/2002) followed Heidegger’s goal of finding understanding of Being in seeking a means for understanding through “fusion of horizons”. For Gadamer, hermeneutical understanding is historical understanding, which mediates past tradition with present perspective through the process of “fusion of horizons” (Crotty, 1998). Gadamer’s interests were in texts from the past, such as the Bible or Greek writers, and in historical works of art, where temporal distance presents a challenge to understanding. He said that one confronts this challenge by attempting to enter into a dialogue between these two worlds. He stated that “Understanding is

to be thought of less as a subjective act than as participating in an event of tradition, a process of transmission in which past and present are constantly mediated” (Gadamer, 1975/2002, p. 291).

For many scholars, the prejudices of the reading subject are seen to mitigate against such understanding. However for Gadamer prejudice or pre-judgment is the precondition for understanding, since human understanding happens in “a historical and cultural context and the effects of that context cannot be ignored” but needs to be tested for their productivity in providing insight (Sharkey, 2001, pp. 24-25), and their compatibility with received tradition. For Gadamer the method required for understanding consists in “foregrounding” our prejudices, or bringing them to consciousness, and “putting them at risk” by questioning what the text, or another person says to us (Gadamer, 1975/2002).

Gadamer used the metaphor of “horizon” for the process of coming to understand a text. “The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point.” (Gadamer, 2002, p. 301) Understanding occurs when the present perspective of the reader “fuses” with the historical perspective of the text, where “the horizon is... something into which we move and that moves with us” (p. 303). Thus, fusion of horizons provides a larger horizon, in which former horizons may be superseded. In this way the text effects a change, an application, in the reader (Palmer, 1969, p.188). This fusion of horizons is possible because humans inhabit a world, or community of language (1969). According to Gadamer, mediation, or providing a middle space between the researcher in the present and the text or object of research, is achieved through dialogue: that is, “the process of questions and answer, giving and taking, talking at cross purposes and seeing each other’s point” (Gadamer, 2002, p. 361). The research process can be achieved by free-flowing conversation in which the subject matter takes control, and the conversation partners can share their insights (Hyde, 2008, p. 65). Gadamer likened this free-flowing conversation to play. In play, the player “loses himself” in the to and fro of the game, and the end is unpredictable (Gadamer, 2002, pp. 103-105). This is what occurs in a productive research interview.

The significance of Gadamer's thought for this present research is in his "truth" and his "method". His truth is in the concept of "fusion of horizons", where the research goal is to achieve a new understanding through dialogue between the researcher and the subject. The researcher could then utilize her prejudices as a horizon from which to encounter the life-world of the children in order to reach a broader understanding of the phenomenon of spirituality. The method was in the use of a process of both formal questioning and free-flowing conversation. The tools for this operation were the language which both participants in the dialogue share.

### *Understanding through text and language*

Ricoeur's writings on hermeneutics followed three main phases, each of which had an application to the methodology of this research. Therefore, Ricoeur is given more extensive coverage. The three applications are

- a) the role of symbol and language
- b) the role of text in the hermeneutic process
- c) and the formation of narrative identity.

### *Symbol and language*

In Ricoeur's earlier work (1967) he focused on a search for a general theory of interpretation which looked for the meaning of existence through the medium of symbols. For Ricoeur "Language is conceived as a medium in which aspects of being are expressed and disclosed. The linguistic realm is therefore the first but not the final point of inquiry, for phenomenology must strive towards ontology through the interpretation of symbols and texts" (Thompson, 1981, p. 3).

The language in which humans first expressed transcendent, and any sacred experience, was that of symbol. Symbols are opaque and have multiple meanings which are both manifest and hidden (Muldoon, 2002). They operate on two levels, a primary meaning which is literal, and a secondary meaning which is latent, indirect and figurative, and which can only be apprehended through the first meaning (Ricoeur, 1974, p, 12). For example, a candle has a literal meaning of light, but a multiplicity of other meanings, such as enlightenment, celebration and so forth.

Ricoeur (1967) described three sources of symbol – cosmic, oneiric (originating in dreams), and poetic. Cosmic symbols developed because humans first read the sacred on some aspect of the world or the heavens, such as sun, water, vegetation. Ricoeur believed that it was through language that these concrete realities become charged with multiple meaning (1967). The analysis of symbols in dreams (Ricoeur 1970) allows one to access one's own "sacrality" through deciphering the sacred nature of the world. Thirdly, through imagination a poet expresses a symbolic relationship with the world in a new way.

Ricoeur believed that the apprehension of "reality" is mediated by such cultural instruments as language, religion, art and science, all of which rely on symbols to explore and convey meaning, but since symbols are opaque, they require interpretation. Symbol has a hermeneutic function in that its interpretation requires a dialogue between experience of the symbol and philosophical reflection where "the symbol gives rise to thought" (Ricoeur, 1967, p. 348). On the other hand, language is essential for articulation of symbols, and the problem of interpretation of symbols is co-extensive with the problem of interpretation of language itself. "It is in language that the cosmos, desire and the imaginary achieve speech" (1970, p. 16). Symbols are a kind of pre-language which "raise the experience of the world to articulation" (Muldoon, 2002, p. 39). "This is why there are no symbols without the beginning of interpretation: where one man dreams, prophesies, or poetizes, another rises up to interpret" (Ricoeur, 1970, p. 19).

The dialogical relationship between symbol and language had relevance to the conduct of this research. Some of the material gathered from the interviews, such as drawings and gestures, were preverbal and overtly symbolic at times (Moriarty, 2009). Another source of symbolism can be the children's dreams. Verbal language also can frequently have "surplus meaning". Therefore in analyzing the findings the researcher needed to be alert for meanings beyond the immediate and literal. Ricoeur's writings directed the researcher to recognize symbols, and verbal tropes such as metaphor, which could provide access to children's spirituality: their sense of the sacred as they experienced it.

*From discourse to text*

A key to understanding Ricoeur's emphasis on text lies in his concept of discourse. Discourse has the following traits:

- it is an event of speaking in a specific time and place
- it implies the presence of a speaking subject
- it is about something
- it is a dialogue between a speaking subject and one who is addressed.

(Muldoon, 2002, pp. 48, 49).

Discourse also provides a dialectic between an ideal sense "what is said" and a real reference "about what it is said". The reference of discourse connects people with their ontological condition of being in the world (Muldoon, 2002, p. 49).

Ricoeur's concept of discourse became the avenue for exploring its hermeneutic implications through the larger language unit of text. He defined text as a written, structured "work" of discourse (Muldoon, 2002, p. 50). Ricoeur's theory of text may be summarised as follows.

- It is in writing that text acquires its semantic autonomy in relation to the speaker, the original audience and the situation of dialogue.
- The reference of a text is extended to any reader.
- Text implies texture, that is, a process of analysis and literary formation has taken place.
- Text implies inscription, or durability, so it is accessible to reading and analysis over time. (Ricoeur, 1981, p. 37).

The salient feature for interpretation of text is in its property of "distanciation". A written text distances one from what might have been in the author's mind, in favour of the "meaning" of what is actually written. Similarly, the text is detached from the historical dialogical situation of a speaker and listener and extends its audience to a reader in any time and place. Text also distances one from the "ostensive reference" of a speaker, such as gestures and the inflections of speech. These features of distanciation have the effect of freeing the reader from the world of the author and opens up a non-referential "world of the text" (Ricoeur, 1981, p.

202). This introduces Ricoeur's complementary concept of "appropriation". He believed that by appropriation the text changes the reader.

*By 'appropriation', I understand this: that the interpretation of a text culminates in the self-interpretation of a subject who thenceforth understands himself better, understands himself differently, or simply begins to understand himself...in hermeneutical reflection – or in reflective hermeneutics – the constitution of the self is contemporaneous with the constitution of meaning (Ricoeur, 1985, p. 158).*

#### *Interpretation, and validation of interpretation, of text*

The final stage of engagement with a text - that of appropriation - through reflective philosophy, introduces the "problematic" of interpretation. This problem applies whether the text is a Biblical text, a later work of fiction, or of social science. Ricoeur believed that the hermeneutics of social science can be approached in a similar way to literary works, because "meaningful action", the object of social science, has similar properties to discourse, thereby providing a text (Ricoeur, 1981, pp. 204-209).

Following Dilthey's distinction between natural sciences which provide explanation (*erklären*) and human sciences which provide understanding (*verstehen*), Ricoeur (1981) believed that his model of the text provided objectivity for interpretation in the human sciences. Interpretation of texts depends on a method of intuitively "making good guesses", because language is metaphorical and requires an art to decipher its multiple layers of meaning. This presents problems for credibility or validation, which Ricoeur addressed as follows. Validation can largely be achieved by the use of the hermeneutic circle of two-way interpretation between the text as a whole entity and its parts. Other paths to validation include taking account of the specific genre of the text, and examining the text from different perspectives. Another criterion for validation is taking into account the logical probability of a particular interpretation being a valid one, using Popper's (1902/1980) criteria of "falsifiability". Ricoeur also advocated the use of "a depth interpretation through the mediation of the explanatory methods of structural



analysis” (Thompson, 1981, p. 161). Thompson had reservations about the appropriateness of applying the model of the text to an action, which is the subject of social science, due to the lack of objective criteria, such as empirical evidence, for preferring one interpretation over another (p. 161).

J. K. A. Smith (2000) added two criteria for validation: a) phenomenological and b) ethical. Smith situated his justification for the legitimacy of plural interpretations in human creaturehood (p.147). Human Be-ing entails *situationality*, that is, being placed within a tradition (p. 147 ff.), and *undecidability*, which requires the making of a judgment about the merits of different interpretations based on an act of faith (p. 157 ff.). “The very notions of a ‘good’ interpretation and a ‘wrong’ interpretation are themselves interpretations: construals made from a particular locale and from within a situated tradition” (p. 163). Smith based his phenomenological criterion for valid interpretation on the phenomenology of Husserl and Heidegger, for whom “the things themselves” provide limits to possible interpretation; there are “empirical transcendentals” in a world that is given and experienced (pp. 169, 170). Smith referred to Levinas and Augustine for his second empirical transcendental of ethical criteria. For Levinas, the empirical transcendental – “that confronts and disrupts every horizon is precisely the face of the Other, the face that makes me ethically responsible and demands justice” (p. 175). According to Augustine ethical interpretation depends on, “whether our interpretations ‘build up’ love of God and neighbour” (p. 177).

These two criteria of phenomenology and ethics present a challenge for this research. The challenge of “situationality” for the researcher was to be aware of the fact that the interviewees as “the things themselves” were children with limited perspectives due to their age, and their life experiences in limited localities in Australia, and avoid making interpretations from a more experienced adult perspective. The researcher needed to keep referring back to the “texts”. The ethical challenge was encountered in the need to avoid making negative moral judgments about individual children. For example, the researcher was inclined to judge one child as “self-regarding”, and not take into account the traumatic experiences her family might have suffered in their country of origin.

Ricoeur's concept of text was applied to this research in the following ways. The researcher produced an intermediate stage in the process of interpretation following the transcripts of the research interviews with the children in the form of written spiritual profiles of each child, as described later in this chapter. This fitted the model of text as discourse, mediating between the author and the reader. Producing this text had the effect of "fixation of meaning", thereby distilling the key concepts from the other features of the interviews. This provided a text in the genre of a personal profile, structuring it around Elaine Champagne's (2003) *spiritual modes of being* (also detailed later in this chapter). Achieving distancing from the author through a text has the advantage of focusing the reader on the spirituality of that child, without the distraction of ostensive references such as gesture and speech inflection, providing more objectivity. However, in this process some of the subtlety of meaning is lost, and the researcher often needed to refer back to the transcripts and even to the video tape to explore these nuances of meaning.

Ricoeur's aims of interpretation and validation through text were partly achieved in the following ways. Transferring the material to structured written form, and later analysis, involved some intuitive guesses about what material was significant. The principle of the hermeneutic circle was observed in that a child's particular words or statements could be interpreted in the light of the whole sample of dialogue, or the whole text. Alternatively a particular statement or drawing could alter the impression of the whole profile. Different perspectives could be provided by comparing the various profiles, and by going back to transcripts and videotapes. The probability of a particular interpretation being credible could be checked by comparing with the findings of other researchers in the field. Smith's (2000) concept of making an ethical interpretation, encouraged the researcher to check her interpretations by "looking into the face of the Other" (p. 175).

### *Narrative identity*

Ricoeur explored the properties of narrative for "semantic innovation", or meaning making, for the life of an individual person or a cultural group, by "the

inventing of another work of synthesis – the plot – where a temporal unity is created out of a diversity of goals, causes, characters and events” (Muldoon, 2002, p, 63). This led Ricoeur to the concept of narrative identity. He examined the mystery of “self constancy” (Ricoeur, 1985, p. 246), by which a person maintains the same formal identity (such as a name) throughout life. Yet the narrative identity of a person or a cultural group is both constant and changing over time, as the group reads the texts of its heritage, or an individual tells or writes his or her autobiography (1985, pp. 246-248). The construction of a narrative identity, or re-figuring of a life, occurs through a three part mimetic (representational) process of emplotment. “Emplotment (*mimesis 2*), the most important, mediates between our pre-understanding of the world of practical action and events (*mimesis 1*) and the reception of the plot by a reader (*mimesis 3*) (Muldoon, 2002, p. 66).

Ricoeur’s concepts of emplotment and narrative identity led the researcher to examine the way some of the children in the study, and significant others in their lives, appeared to re-figure their history through narrative. The children’s narratives were in a sense “read” by them, as they developed their personal identities. It was also the case that the researcher’s emplotment of the children’s narratives, during the process of analysis, gave her greater insight into their spirituality, in particular, their sense of identity (Moriarty, 2008, p. 53).

### *Summary*

Hermeneutic phenomenology, as presented by a number of authors, attempts to bridge the gap between the researcher, or reading subject, and the object of study. This may be achieved by directed perception (Merleau-Ponty), by reason of sharing the same life-world (Heidegger) or fusion of horizons (Gadamer), or through the mediation of a written text (Ricoeur). Hermeneutic phenomenology is also a two-way process in that it effects a change in the researcher through providing access to the mystery of Being (Heidegger), or to a deeper spiritual understanding by means of appropriation or spiritual reflection on the text (Ricoeur).

The following table is a summary of these contributions to this research.

Table 4. *Summary of the contributions of hermeneutic phenomenology*

<b>Object – Phenomenology</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Links to research</b>
Method for discovering essence	Husserl	scientific method
Objective reality of phenomena	Merleau-Ponty	bodily experience of world
<b>Subject – Hermeneutics</b>		
Interpretation in human sciences	Dilthey	researching lived experience
Understanding Being	Heidegger	focus on the being of the child
“Fusion of horizons”	Gadamer	utilize common perspectives
Mediation of language and texts	Ricoeur	surplus meanings in language distanciation and appropriation creation of narrative

#### Methodology – Hermeneutical Phenomenological Research

Hermeneutical Phenomenological research methodology provided a way to bridge the gap between the horizon of the researcher (Gadamer, 1975) and the spiritual life-world of the children involved in the research. Firstly this was achieved by breaking down this life-world into component parts. Derived from the literature review in the previous chapter, the researcher observed that children’s spirituality can be schematized under the four dimensions of

- a) consciousness, b) relationality, c) identity, and d) roadmap .

This conceptualization was presented in the diagram, Figure 1, in Chapter Three. Consciousness referred to the children’s perceptions of self, the natural world and the transcendent, as expressed in their sense of awe and wonder. Relationality referred to their connectedness with others, the natural world and the

transcendent. Identity referred to the children's expressions of unity of self, their belief systems and their personal story. Roadmap referred to the children's vision for their lives: their resilience, faith in the future, moral responsibility and sense of joy and hope.

Although this schema was revised during the course of the research, as in Figure 4, Chapter Nine, it provided a useful framework for structuring the research interviews. Secondly, the gap between researcher and the object of the research can be overcome in that both the researcher and the children exist in a common existential space or life-world (Heidegger, 1980; van Manen, 1990) (See Figure 3, this chapter). van Manen (1990) summarized the domain of phenomenological research as the study of lived experience, the explication of phenomena and pursuance of their essences, as they present themselves to human consciousness (van Manen, 1990, pp. 9-12). For van Manen "All phenomenological human science efforts are really explorations into the structures of the human life-world, the lived world as experienced in everyday situations and relations" (p. 101).

In developing this research model the researcher structured her examination of the children's "human life-world" (van Manen, 1990, p. 101) based on Champagne's (2003) research into the spirituality of young children. Through using key-word analysis of her transcripts Champagne arrived at a model of three spiritual *modes of being*: sensitive, relational and existential. The Sensitive mode of being is described as the way small children perceive the world through all their senses, and respond with their bodies (such as laughing, running) (p. 45). This can give the researcher access to their spirituality in the way that children are *incorporated* in the world, and is consistent with an Incarnational Theology, or a "Christian spirituality (that) is necessarily embodied (p. 46). The Relational mode of being was observed in the way the children responded verbally and bodily to adults and their peers (such as affirming, negotiating). Their experience of human relationships, or "filiality", opens them to the experience of the mystery of relationship with God (pp. 49-50). The Existential mode of being, for Champagne, referred to the relation to time and space, and to existence itself through daily activities (this last category can include such behaviour as naming one's self, or exercising imagination) (pp. 50,51).

Champagne extended her reflection on these modes of being to their spiritual and theological implications.

The methodology chosen for this research was influenced by Champagne's (2003) *spiritual modes of being*. This model provided a framework by which to arrange the findings thematically and to examine their spiritual significance.

## Research method

### *Designing and preparing for the research*

The research took place in three state primary schools in Victoria: one regional (provincial) city school, one rural school and one metropolitan school. Written permission was sought and given by the Victorian Department of Education and Training to enter a state school. An Ethics clearance was obtained from that department, and from the Australian Catholic University's Human Resources Ethics Committee. Approval for access to particular schools had to be obtained from school principals and the local School Council. This did not prove easy, particularly in the case of School Councils, which were generally anxious to maintain the secular nature of the school. However, by focusing the research as examination of "worldview" rather than spirituality per se, the researcher was able to avoid some of the popular confusion between spirituality and religion. Approaches to particular schools were made after consultation with ACCESS ministries, the acronym for The Council for Christian Education in Schools, which is the body responsible for implementing Christian Religious Education in state schools in most Australian states. This process gave the researcher contact with principals who were supportive of ACCESS ministries. Personal and written approaches were made to the principals. Letters were sent to all parents of students in Grades Three and Four (children aged 8 to 10) in these schools, whether the children participated in the Christian Religious Education program or not. These letters outlined the purpose of the research, seeking permission for the children to participate. From these replies it was anticipated that participants would be selected on an indiscriminate basis. In practice, the number of responses from parents was small in each school, so that there were eight participants in total chosen from each school, in consultation with

the Principal or Year Level Co-ordinator. There were equal numbers of girls and boys, in Grades Three and Four. Interviews were conducted in a place convenient for the school.

A rehearsal of the research interviews was conducted at a small coastal school where the researcher was known, through teaching Christian Religious Education (CRE). The interviews at this school provided some useful findings, some of which have been included in the study. The children at this school who participated were given the following pseudonyms: Ryan, and Bonnie (Grade Three), and David and Aimee (Grade Four).

The first school the researcher visited for the main study was the provincial school where she was known, having taught CRE there for some years. This was a large school in a disadvantaged suburb of a large provincial city. A large percentage of the children were in receipt of the government Education Maintenance Allowance. Interviewing there was a relaxed procedure because the researcher knew all of the participants except one through CRE. This also meant that the children were relaxed in talking about personal issues, and they were willing to explore existential questions. The pseudonyms of these children were Grace, Mary, Kelly and Caleb in Grade Three, and Ruth, Alex, Jordan and Billy in Grade Four.

The second school visited was a combined primary-secondary (P-12) school in a very small rural community. The main industries were dairying and sheep. The school seemed to be the community centre of the district. The researcher spent four days in the classroom before starting the interviews, following Lincoln and Guba's (1985) concept of "prolonged engagement". Even though every attempt was made to put the children at ease, the children did not fit comfortably into the interview situation, especially the first interview where they were asked about unfamiliar topics. The children were very supportive of each other in the group interviews, and seemed to exclude the interviewer by their body language at times. Later discussion with the Principal confirmed that these children were part of a close-knit community, which was not very comfortable in unfamiliar situations. In spite of this, the interviews from this school produced some rich material in spirituality. The

pseudonyms of these children were Bianca, Bailey, Mitchell, Lizzy and Luke (Grade Three), and Olivia, Carmen, Kane, and Jacob (one interview only) (Grade Four).

The third school the researcher visited was in an affluent, eastern suburb of Melbourne which had a reputation for high academic achievement. A large percentage of the parents of children in Grades Three and Four were in professional occupations, and 83 out of 92 parents of children in these grades were born overseas, mostly in Asia. Only 24 of the children at these grade levels had been born in Australia. The researcher spent four days in the classrooms getting to know the children. Although there were more consent forms returned at this school, the selection of participants was not made indiscriminately, for it was influenced by time-table constraints, and some children were ruled out by the Deputy Principal because of inadequate English. The children at this school were eager to participate in a University project. The interviews also revealed a high level of intellectual curiosity and willingness to share their stories with the researcher. However, as some teachers commented, their interaction with each other did not appear to be as rich as at the other schools because of their many different cultural backgrounds, and sometimes their rudimentary English. The pseudonyms for these children were Tom, Finn, Pham and Hahn in Grade Three, and Lucy, Harry, Amanthi and Spencer in Grade Four. These names do not necessarily reflect their ethnicity.

The plan was to select a total of 24 children from the three schools. However extra material was obtained from a child at the rural school who requested to be interviewed at the end of the visit, and from the four children at the coastal school, some of whom provided valuable material, which has been included in the findings. The number 24 is comparable to the sample size of some other qualitative research studies into some aspects of children's spirituality. Hay and Nye (2006) interviewed 38 children, Hyde (2008) interviewed 35 children, and Reimer and Furrow (2001) interviewed 12 children within this age range. When questioning whether 24 is a sufficient number for this study the researcher noted Kvale's (1996) assertion that "the present approach emphasizes the quality rather than the quantity of the interviews", and that a greater number is not necessarily more "scientific" in the context of qualitative analysis (Kvale, 1996, pp. 101-102).



### *Conducting the research*

The research was undertaken by video-recording semi-structured interviews.

#### *Rehearsing the interviews*

The interview guide was rehearsed at a separate school (the coastal school) in August 2006. This was to ascertain whether the activities were appropriate, and whether the questions were understood and generated responses that provided material relevant to the concepts of Consciousness, Relationality, Identity and “Roadmap”. As a result of this rehearsal, the main refinement made was to select shorter activities, such as an easier jigsaw puzzle.

#### *Interviewing*

The design of this study was intended to gain insight and information into the spirituality of Grade Three and Four children (aged 8 to 10) in three state primary schools. These interviews took place at a provincial school in October 2006, a rural school in November 2006, and a suburban school in May 2007. The direction of the interviews was conceptually based on the work of Hart (2003), who classified children’s spiritual experiences as: a) listening for wisdom, b) wonder, c) between you and me, d) wondering, and e) seeing the invisible. The method is largely influenced by Hyde’s (2008) use of group interviews as a means of generating more interactive conversation, and also by using some of his activities, for example, using group activities such as puzzles. A number of researchers have used visual stimuli. McCreery (1996) used pictures, story, and “the big question” as stimulus material with young children. Pearmain (2007) used photographs, and Mountain (2007) used young people’s drawings in their research. Adams (2001) investigated children’s dreams. All of these researchers, and more, have contributed to this research design.

The first two interviews, on the topics of Consciousness and Relationality were conducted with groups of four children, to use their interaction to generate material, such as comparing their “big question” or to observe their mode of co-operating together to complete the jigsaw puzzle. In consideration of Hart’s (2003) observation that children’s spiritual experiences are often misunderstood by adults,

and therefore repressed by children, it was decided that the more intimate topics of identity, and “roadmap” which included values, would be better discussed in a one-to-one context. This was after the researcher and the children had had some opportunity to get acquainted in the group sessions. This proved to be a successful strategy, even with the rural children who were still a little shy. The rural children had particular difficulty with words like “special, unusual, awesome”, and preferred to discuss the ordinary and familiar manifestations of their spirituality, such as their relationships with their family and their pets, and the hardships of life on the farm. At the suburban school, limited knowledge of English made it necessary to limit the conversation with some of the children to the concrete and familiar.

The following table presents a summary of the interview guide used for each of the three meetings with participants.

Table 5. *Interview guide*

Group Meeting 1 “Amazing Things”- (working title for Consciousness)	
Phase 1 – Wondering Activities – (a) a getting-to-know-you game (b) choose a photo of something amazing Possible questions – Why did you choose it/ What does it make you think about? Who is an amazing person for you? What is the most amazing thing that has happened to you?	Phase 2 – The Big Question Activity- use a visual stimulus e.g. photo of a child alone Possible questions – What is this child thinking? What is the biggest question you can think of? If you met someone in charge of the world/universe, what question would you ask?
Group Meeting 2 – “Being together” – (working title for Relationality)	
Phase 1 – group activity – e.g. jigsaw puzzle Observe interaction – video and make notes Possible questions – What things do you like doing with other people? Why? Do you have a special place you like to be together/alone? What makes that place so special?	Phase 2 – Read a story – about family, land, spirits, e.g. <i>The Violin Man</i> Discuss the relationships in the story Possible questions – Who are the most important people, and things in your life? How about people who have died? Are they still important?
Individual Meeting 3- “me and the whole world” (Identity and Roadmap)	
Phase 1 – Identity Activity – make a drawing of yourself, or a concept map of yourself and your world Discuss the drawing. What does it say about you? Possible questions – What makes you special? Is there a special thing you think about, something you have dreamed about, or seen? (Revisit amazing things. Explore the possibility of direct spiritual experiences)	Phase 2 – Roadmap (Values) Stimulus material – a picture of a journey e.g. refugees Possible questions – Where and why are they going? What would you like to happen to them? Would you like to help them? If you had 3 wishes for the world, or people you know, what would they be? Activity – draw yourself on a journey (real or imaginary) - explain the drawing.

Modifications to the guiding interview questions, are given in the working model of the interview schedule in Appendix F.

#### *Collection of research material*

The interviews were recorded using video camera and notes made immediately afterwards. The video tapes recorded conversation, and also non-verbal material such as body language and silences. Transcription of the video-tapes, transferred to DVD, were made of the whole conversations, but organized so that there was a separate transcript for each child. Information was also obtained about the individual school communities. This material provided additional insight when analyzing the material from children from the different school communities. This information was in the form of statistical data about the socio-economic profile of the school community at the provincial and suburban schools. Verbal information was also obtained from senior staff at each school. At the rural school, this was followed up by a return visit to obtain further information from the principal about the characteristics of the school community. This was considered necessary because the researcher had some difficulty engaging these children, and wanted to see how her observations fitted with what the researcher had read about the ethos of rural communities (Smith 2004).

#### *Analyzing the information through texts*

The next step in analyzing the material, after completing each child's transcript was to develop a profile of each child. The purpose of this step was two-fold, and in keeping with the theoretical perspective of this research. Creating a profile, usually about two pages, reduced the material to a manageable length, and also placed this into the form of a text, which provided structure and "distanciation" from the original discourse (Ricoeur 1981, pp. 13-15).

The second purpose in creating the profiles was to present the findings within a recognized spiritual framework, using Champagne's (2003) model of *spiritual modes of being*.

Champagne's article "Being a Child, a Spiritual Child" (2003) was foundational to the analysis of the findings of this research. In her article Champagne addressed both a phenomenological and a hermeneutical approach to the question of the spiritual concept of 'being' for pre-school children. Discussion of the findings in the following chapters called on Champagne's (2003) *Spiritual modes of being – Sensitive, Relational and Existential*. Champagne described these *modes of being* through "keys" of observable behaviour. For example "keys to young children's sensitive mode of being" include verbally and vocally, through pictures and sculptures, physically and with gestures, and through their gaze or facial expression. After describing these behaviours, Champagne went on to discuss what she saw as the spiritual dimension and the theological implications of the various modes of being.

This research attempted to describe the three modes of being as they were manifest in the primary school ages children in this study, in an effort to understand what was revealed about the spiritual dimensions and later, something about the nature of spirituality that arose out of the findings. Champagne described the *sensitive mode* as the way young children actively perceive what surrounds them, and how they express themselves while living in that surrounding. (2003, p. 44). Whereas pre-school children express their *sensitive mode* with their whole bodies, the primary school children in this study were more able to utilize their verbal skills, enhancing their ability to express their consciousness of the world around them. For Champagne, the *relational mode* addressed the quality of children's interactions with significant people in their surroundings (p. 44). In this study some of Champagne's "keys" to young children's relational mode of being were modified to better suit older children. Some of the keys used were bonding (which included Champagne's concepts of affection, and filiation), empathy (the extent to which children put themselves in the place of another), and value formation (the moral and ethical understanding that came through experiencing relationships with others). This study also considered children's relationships with the natural world and the transcendent. The *existential mode*, for Champagne, "refers to the relation to time and space and to the relation to existence itself through daily activities" (p. 50). This study examined

the children's relation to existence through the existential modes of time and space, and their "big questions" relating to life and death, to God, and mysteries of creation and human life. In examining the *modes of being* attention was given to both the children's overt verbal and bodily expressions and also to inferences drawn by the researcher from verbal and non-verbal material. In most cases the texts revealed aspects of each of the three modes.

This process of analysis helped the researcher to distil the findings of spiritual significance from a plethora of material, and to make comparisons between one child and another. Creating individual transcripts and profiles fitted with the researcher's concern that, in studying spirituality as a phenomenon, there could be a danger of losing sight of the very personal nature of spirituality, that children are spiritual beings, not just objects with some spiritual characteristics. Each profile was organized under these headings of Sensitivity, Relationality, and Existential.

Use was made of Champagne's (2003) "keys" to the *Sensitive mode* which included:

- Verbally and vocally (hearing)
- Through pictures and visual experiences (visual and tactile)
- Physically and with gesture: (tactile and kinesthetic)
- Through their gaze and facial expressions (visual) (p. 45).

In contrast with Champagne's pre-school aged subjects, children of primary school age were able to verbalize their *relational mode* with themselves, others, including family members, peers, animals, nature and God. However, the researcher also looked for non-verbal cues, such as including another child by touching or eye contact, and their bodily interactions during the interviews. Clues to their *existential mode of being* were provided in discussions about special times and spaces, their responses to issues like death or the beginning of the world, and their beliefs about themselves and the meaning of life. The children's spiritual profiles were organized around these three modes of being, and concluded with a summary where the researcher asked the question "Wherein does the spirituality of this child lie?" Examples of the profiles are included in Appendix G.

The final step in the analysis of the findings, in Chapters Five to Eight, was discerning the actual characteristics of spirituality which were revealed through the material and the profiles. This proved the most difficult part. This was because the method of hermeneutic phenomenology involved broad interpretive categories rather than those which might become apparent when, for example, using Grounded Theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) where one gradually builds up from simple codes to a core concept. Each of the findings chapters attempted to cover the topics under the headings of: Looking beyond themselves, Looking within themselves, Charting the path (which examines the children's values and aspirations, or world-view), and Footprints (which looked at identity from the perspective of the children and the researcher). The first two chapter headings looked at aspects of the *sensitive and relational modes*. The third chapter examined aspects of "roadmap" or worldview. The final findings chapter examined issues of identity. This chapter was placed last because it seemed to provide a view of where the children's spirituality was heading.

### *Verification*

The concept of *validity* is more appropriately expressed as *trustworthiness* in naturalistic research such as this present study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The positivist standards of internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity are replaced by credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln 1989).

Credibility parallels the internal validity required in positivist research in that the focus has moved (from a presumed objective reality) to establishing a match between the constructed realities of respondents and the researcher. Transferability replaces external validity or generalizability in that transferability is relative and depends on the degree of overlap or match between one study and another. The constructionist researcher facilitates transferability judgments by other researchers by providing as much material as possible, including a description of the time, place, context and culture in which the research took place. Dependability is concerned with the stability of the data over time. In qualitative research changes in human responses over time are inevitable, and the methodology responds to these changes

through increasingly sophisticated constructions. However for dependability to be maintained these changes need to be thoroughly documented and open to a “dependency audit” by others. Confirmability “is concerned with assuring that data, interpretations, and outcomes of inquiries are rooted in contexts and persons apart from the evaluator and are not simply figments of the evaluator’s imagination” (p. 243). Monitoring for these criteria was undertaken throughout the whole research process.

Credibility was demonstrated by

- spending time in the schools to learn the culture before beginning the study,
- rehearsing the interview schedule to check the appropriateness of the concepts and tasks,
- providing a congenial atmosphere during interviews so that the responses would be genuine and spontaneous,
- looking for exceptions as well as trends during analysis,
- triangulation through using a variety of research techniques (in the interviews),
- using peer reviews (such as progress reports and papers at conferences), and where possible checking interpretations with the children while still in the school.

Transferability can be demonstrated by providing sufficiently “thick” data for another researcher to build on or replicate the study.

Since reliability, as understood in quantitative analysis, is not practicable in the more fluid method of naturalistic inquiry, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest the criteria of dependability, and confirmability, which take into account both factors of instability and factors of phenomenal or design-induced change in the research process can be met by means of an “audit trail”. This process entails keeping records of each stage of the research process which are then evaluated by an “auditor”. In this research records were kept of raw data (videotapes and field notes), data reduction and analysis products in the form of transcripts and profiles, and data reconstruction and synthesis products and process notes in the process of writing the findings chapters of the thesis. Each stage was audited by academic

advisers, and some material was audited by administrators at the schools concerned. In some cases the researcher referred back to the principal or vice-principal at the school to check an interpretation regarding a particular student. A short report of the findings at a particular school was sent to every child's parent, giving them the opportunity to comment on the findings. Findings were presented in progress reports to other academic staff and students for evaluation.

#### Limitations of the study

The researcher was able to access more cultural diversity than anticipated. However, because of the need to travel long distances the time spent in each school was less than ideal, less than a full week.

Randomized selection of participants was not possible, because the number of responses was small. However, other studies have used similarly restricted samples, for example (Adams, 2001). The participation rates were probably low because University research, or the topic of "worldview" were not highly regarded by many parents of secular state school students. The topic of the project was not advertised as "spirituality" for that reason. Children, or their parents, usually chose to participate because they were more adventurous, or were interested in University, or in the case of the provincial school, because the researcher already had good rapport with the children through CRE. Therefore they were not very representative of the school population. The school management excluded some children from the study for various reasons, such as timetable constraints.

#### Conclusion

This chapter described this present research, using Crotty's (1990) hierarchical model of the research process. The epistemology of the research was constructionism. The theoretical perspective used was hermeneutical phenomenology. The historical development of this philosophy, and key concepts and their authors were summarized. This was followed by summaries of the application of these key ideas of hermeneutical phenomenology to this research. These key ideas were further summarized in Figure 3. The methodology adopted in



this research was based on the concepts of Champagne's (2003) *spiritual modes of being*. The research method was to gather material from 24 children aged 8 to 10 in three Victorian state schools through video-taped, semi-structured interviews. This material was analyzed using profiles of each child created from transcripts of the interviews, using Champagne's (2003) *modes of being*. The trustworthiness of the research was outlined. Strengths and weaknesses of the research method were discussed.

The following four chapters will present and analyze the findings of the research. Each chapter will discuss one particular finding, and then proceed to analyze the finding using Champagne's modes of being as a tool for reflection.

The findings are analyzed in four chapters as follows.

- 5) "Reaching beyond themselves" examined the children's experiences of awe and wonder in relations to their sense of the transcendent, their attitudes to the beginning and end of life, and their experiences of the wonder in the world of nature, and their relationships with others.
- 6) "Reaching within themselves" examined the children's use of their inner resources, such as the use of meditation, the role of resilience and the imagination to provide spiritual strength.
- 7) "Charting the path" examined the influences of the social and natural environment in shaping the children's spirituality.
- 8) "Footprints" explored the way the children develop moral values and a sense of identity out of their life experiences.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### REACHING BEYOND THEMSELVES

The literature reviewed in Chapter Three indicated that this aspect of relational consciousness - “reaching beyond themselves”, consists of two orientations: transcendence – relating to God, or Something Other; and relating to one’s self, to others and to the world.

#### Transcendence, as relating to God or something Other

This way of defining spirituality was found in earlier research, when spirituality was still seen in the context of religion. Hardy (1979) defined spirituality as “a feeling that ‘Something Other’ than the self can actually be sensed; a desire to personalize this presence into a deity and to have a private I-Thou relationship with it” (p. 131). Helminiak (1996) gave a list of definitions of spirituality, one being “spirituality as *concern for transcendence*: the sense that something in life goes beyond the here and now and the commitment to that something” (p.32). He also defined spirituality as a *lived reality*, which enhances the human spiritual capacity through different religious traditions and individual beliefs and practices. For other writers, spirituality involves being on the cusp between being in this world and another. Champagne (2001) described young children as having “the potential of being an open door to spirituality” and encountering mystery (p.80, 81).

Hay and Nye (2006) were key writers in the area of children’s spirituality. Hay’s contribution to the concept of *reaching beyond themselves* built on Hardy’s (1975) view that “there is a form of awareness, different from and transcending everyday awareness, which is potentially present in all human beings” that has a biological survival function (Hay & Nye, 2006, p. 22). In Hay’s experience, this ability to “reach beyond themselves” increased people’s desire to care for others and be engaged in issues of social justice and concern for the environment. Nye’s extensive research into children’s spirituality has resulted in her concept of *relational consciousness*. This level of consciousness adds a new dimension of understanding, meaning and experiences, and adds value to the quality of each of

their relationships, and meaning to their aesthetic and religious experiences, and their personal responses to mystery and being (p. 109).

Hart's (2003) capacities of wondering and relationships were particularly relevant to the concept of "reaching beyond themselves". Hart noted that the children he interviewed "for the most part, have no conscious experience of a direct and intimate connection with the Divine" (2003, p. 3). This also seemed to be the case in this present research.

Hyde's (2007) work took Hay and Nye's (2006) categories of spiritual sensitivity: *awareness sensing*, *mystery sensing* and *value sensing* as beginning points to derive the characteristics of *the felt sense*, *integrating awareness*, *weaving the threads of meaning*, and *spiritual questing*. These characteristics had some application to this research. *The felt sense* has some application to the engagement of the *sensitive mode of being*, and *integrating awareness* to the *relational mode of being*. The last two characteristics that Hyde identified had application to this research analysis in relation to Transcendence, as relating to God or Something Other.

### *Sense of Wonder*

#### *The children at the suburban school*

This exploration began with the children's sense of wonder because it is where the research conversations began, although Champagne's (2003) analysis gives the *existential mode of being* third and final place, after *sensitive mode* and *relational mode*. The children in this present research used their sense of wonder about the natural world as a means by which to relate to Something Other. This was particularly true for the children at the suburban school, who expressed their sense of wonder through a language of science and technology. This phenomenon was also observed by Hay and Nye (2006), where the authors commented that in this language children were able to find an especially legitimate explanatory framework for expressing ideas and feelings. For scientific ideas and discoveries can be a source of wonder in themselves. The following extracts, from the hermeneutic phenomenological profiles were indicative of this feature.

*Harry wondered “How does the world stand up?” And he wondered about “the circle [sic] of humans and the generations”. Harry wanted to know why coca cola fizzes when you drop a menthol sweet into it. He also watched his father repair the car, to see how the engine and the various tools work. Lucy’s Big Questions were also about solving scientific problems. She wanted to know “how electrical things work, like you know, remote things? How does the car know what to do?” And why does an electric oven heat up slowly rather than instantaneously?*

The children in this school expressed amazement at living creatures, especially small ones, a reaction which was in response to a picture of a newly hatched bird. They discussed what species of bird it might be, and how it could have fitted into the egg. They related their experiences of finding a sick bird, or eggs that had fallen out of the nest, and their efforts to care for them. Most of the children at each school were fascinated by small animals, and described them as “cute”, “magical” and vulnerable. At the suburban school this extended to discussion about the wonder of human birth, which they had witnessed in their families or on television. Amanthi chose a picture of some people in Middle Eastern dress bending over a baby, which she interpreted as “the baby Jesus”. Amanthi came from a Buddhist family which had recently arrived in Australia, but the picture had special spiritual significance for her because she had heard the Christmas and Easter stories in Christian Religious Education at school. She explained that Jesus “gave himself for us”.

This material demonstrated Champagne’s spiritual modes of being in a number of ways. Harry and Lucy were exercising the *sensitive mode* in their visual observations of what they saw in scientific phenomena, such as coca cola fizzing when menthol is dropped into it. The children in this group also used their skills of observation to decide the species of the newly hatched bird. However, they were doing more than just observing; they were exercising the *existential mode of being*. They were trying to discover the mysteries of how things work, such as a car engine, and the spiritual significance of physical phenomena, their deeper meaning. Harry not only wanted to know “How does the world stand up?” but how he fits into the

grand mystery of “the circle of humans and the generations”. This attitude of reverent awe was also demonstrated in their attitude to human birth as they had witnessed it personally or through pictures. Amanthi expressed this awe in religious terms when she related to special significance of the birth of Jesus, as she understood it. These children also expressed their awe in a relational mode, when they associated the picture of the baby bird with past experience of trying to care for a baby bird, and their emotional response of describing the bird as “cute”.

These children were demonstrating spirituality in that they were reaching beyond what they could observe, toward deeper mysteries of how the world “stands up”, and their place within the “circle” of being. As Hart (2003) observed, “Children are natural philosophers. To our amazement, they often wonder about big questions...entertaining the big questions is a way to enter a dialogue with mystery, and with the spiritual.” (p. 91). The children in this group related the mysterious to everyday relational experiences, such as caring for a baby bird, or watching a father repair a car. Amanthi, who loved baby birds and human babies, made a link between the picture of a baby and some understanding of the mystery of the Incarnation. These children seemed to be on the threshold of a theological understanding of transcendent reality and the seeds of faith. For faith has been described as “the conviction of things not seen...(for) by faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible” (Hebrews 11:1, 2).

This material demonstrated children’s spirituality through the *sensitive mode of being* in their heightened consciousness of the physical and the transcendent worlds. In asking philosophical questions they were engaging the *experiential* mode, or in *spiritual questing* (Horell, 2003; Hyde, 2008), in that in a contemporary post-modern world where there are a multiplicity of explanations for the mysteries of life, they are seeking new and authentic ways of connecting with self, others, the earth and God (Hyde, 2008).

*The children at the provincial school*

The children at the provincial school reached beyond themselves, in both the *sensitive* and *existential modes*, in their fascination with beginnings, and the creation of the world, as demonstrated in this extract from Alex's profile.

*Alex described how land animals evolved as follows. "...a bit of the earth was joined together, and that cracked and there was this massive island, like a rock around the world, and that cracked, and then all these monsters, like, really weird dinosaurs just came out of the ocean, and they formed into land ones". Or "maybe they were eggs and they floated up to the top, and maybe the wind blew them onto the land, and they just became dinosaurs." Although Alex didn't express a personal belief in God, he did not believe things just happened by accident, and offered these possible explanations. His explanation for the origin of the Australian aborigines was this. "Although they were just normal people from other countries and they came to Australia first, and maybe they walked into a swamp, and they got all muddy, and they just...walked back out, and they couldn't get the mud off, and they got dark".*

*Alex also had a sense of the "wholeness" of creation. He chose as an awesome picture a photograph of the earth from space. There was some response to the white patches in the photograph, which he interpreted as water, but his main interest was in the idea of representing the whole earth... "different people all over the world, different animals, different houses" and different kinds of electronic games which children might be able to exchange.*

Alex's observations about the view of the planet from space was followed by a group discussion about sporting heroes, and about the recent death of Steve Irwin, an Australian media hero and crocodile hunter<sup>2</sup>. The children were all shocked by his death. In the following conversation quoted from the transcripts they reached beyond themselves in that they were wrestling with the meaning of Steve Irwin's

---

<sup>2</sup> Steve Irwin was an Australian conservationist, who operated a zoo for native animals, particularly crocodiles. He also made a number of wild life documentaries and television programs. His flamboyant personality and his propensity to push the boundaries of safety made him a hero to Australian children. He was killed by a stingray in 2006 while making an underwater documentary, shortly before these children were interviewed.

death, and the really big questions of the origin of the universe, and how they fitted into the universal economy.

*Alex: When I'm playing with my Play Station, I sometimes think 'life's a video game'. It's really strange. It's like aliens from other galaxies are controlling us.*

*Billy: I reckon it's aliens controlling us, us controlling the game, and the game's controlling, and it keeps on going.*

*W (Interviewer): Who started it all? Who do you think is controlling the universe?*

*Billy: God. I think God, because he made the universe.*

*Jordan: I don't believe in God. So I don't think he started it all.*

*W (to Jordan): Who (or what) do you think started it all?*

*Jordan: I don't know.*

*W: It just happened by accident perhaps?*

*Jordan: I think it was a bomb. (Jordan is well read in scientific literature.)*

*W: They say the universe started with a Big Bang, don't they?*

*Ruth had her hand up to speak: I don't think aliens are controlling us, or maybe I wouldn't be speaking right now, because I've got a brain.*

*W: You think you are controlling yourself?*

*Ruth: Yes.*

Alex and his friends demonstrated each of the modes of being, in their exploration of existential questions concerning the earth and its origins through playful use of their imaginations (Hay & Nye, 2006, p. 121). Alex demonstrated the *sensitive mode* in his fascination with the picture of earth from space, in the earlier passage from his profile, where he concluded that the white patches were probably oceans. His imaginative explanations, in the text above, were full of visual images – massive island, monsters, dinosaur eggs, and aborigines walking into a muddy swamp. These images shaped his mode of being as demonstrated in his stories. Alex appeared to connect and communicate with the spiritual realm through his visual sense. In this regard he was “*incorporated in the world*” (Champagne, 2003, p. 46).

Alex revealed the *relational mode* as he studied the picture of the earth. In his imagination he related to “different people all over the world, different animals, different houses”, and children playing electronic games, just like himself. Moreover, in this interview Alex and his friends became absorbed with existential questions. They were concerned with questions of time and the length of evolutionary time caused them wonderment. They wondered about the formation of the continents, the evolution of the dinosaurs, and the origin of the Australian aborigines. They were hazy about the dimensions of earth time, but agreed that the topics under discussion happened “before Christ”, to quote their transcripts.

The existential mode of place occupied them in that they could place themselves in space, looking at earth, but their base for perspectives on the world was Australia. Their relationship to existence was expressed in a number of ways. They were concerned with the origin and purpose of creation and human life. This conversation was again triggered by mention of the death of Irwin, the crocodile hunter. The group discussed whose fault it was that Irwin died. Was the stingray that killed him to blame or was Irwin responsible for his death by getting too close to the stingray? The question was not really resolved, but it did lead to the conversation, from the transcript, recorded earlier in the chapter, where Alex said “When I’m playing with my Play Station, I sometimes think ‘life’s a video game’”. In this interview Ruth grappled with the concept of purpose. Later in the conversation, when the children were again discussing whether God created the universe or it happened “by accident” Ruth commented:

*Maybe there was an accident and an animal got turned into a dinosaur.  
 Maybe it was, like poison from something. And maybe that turned them into a dinosaur...I think, by accident. There’s no point of them if they’re just going to die out. (W: Why make them if they are not going to last?)  
 Everyone’s going to die.*

More was revealed about Ruth’s *existential mode of being* in extracts from her profile. Although Ruth did not openly express a belief in God, she seemed to be grappling with the concept of purpose. Ruth told a (true) story she saw in a movie, about a boy, who had “really, really short legs and he couldn’t walk properly”. This



boy who was rejected by his parents, found meaning in his life when he was able to rescue someone from drowning, but died himself. Ruth explained that “The boy always thought that God had a special purpose for him, that he was meant to be like that because it was something special”. This sense of purpose was complemented by her sense that as humans we are responsible for our actions. She did not accept the idea of being controlled by aliens. “I think we’re controlling ourselves, because if aliens were controlling us then I wouldn’t be speaking right now, because we’ve all got a brain”. Ruth’s two wishes demonstrated both her interest in scientific explanations, and the mystery of the transcendent. One wish was to know “What’s up in heaven?” Her grandmother had recently died, and she believed that she was in heaven. Another wish was to know about individual differences. “How we look the way we are. Why is everyone different? How does it work?...How come you have glasses and I don’t have glasses?” Ruth was revealing aspects of her spirituality in that she was seeking to make meaning in various transcendental mysteries, such as “Was there a divine purpose in the handicapped boy’s life?” “Are we in control of our lives?” “What is heaven like?” and “Why are human beings so different from each other?”

*Summary: Sense of wonder*

The children who took part in this study demonstrated their spirituality through their sense of wonder in a number of ways. Some children at the suburban school expressed their wonder at the mysteries to be investigated through science and technology, that is, through their *sensitive mode*, like how heat is dispersed in an oven. They also expressed their sense of wonder at the mystery of living things, through their *relational mode* when they expressed their sense of wonder at small or newly born creatures. They also reached beyond themselves through their *existential mode*, as well as the other modes, when they discussed their experiences of human birth. For one child this was extended into a religious understanding of the mystery of the birth of Christ. Some children at the provincial school also examined the mysteries of the created world: the beginnings of the earth and its creatures. They explored the existential mysteries of a human perspective of inter-planetary space

and their place as members of the whole human race. They explored the mysteries of time: the beginnings of the earth and its creatures, including human beings. There was also discussion about the purpose of creation and human life: whether we are the victims of chance, controlled by outside forces (“life’s a video game”), or whether there is an ultimate purpose in human life, even the life of a handicapped child. Ruth said, “I have a brain”, therefore she believed that we have at least some control over our destiny. Some of the children, particularly Ruth, had a sense that there might be a heaven, and a God who cared about them.

### *The mystery of death*

Death is an issue that almost universally raises existential questions about what might lie beyond this life, an ultimate exercise in people reaching beyond themselves. The children at each school were interested in the mystery of death and what might happen after a person dies. Discussion about death was usually in the context of reviewing the book, *The Violin Man*, (C. Thompson, 2004) in the second group meeting. In this story Oscar felt the presence in his life of his daughter, Marietta, who had died. The children told stories about the death of family members. Most of the children agreed that after a person died they lived on in the memories of those who loved them. This was particularly the case when a person related to them had died. Most had a vague idea that the soul or spirit went “up” to heaven, and the body decayed. Below are some extracts from the transcripts of a conversation between Alex, Billy, Jordan and Ruth, about what happened to people when they die.

*Ruth: Even if they leave you they can still be your friend because you’ve still got the memory of how they have been to you. My grandma died and went up to heaven. Like my grandmother died and she got cremated, because she died of cancer in her body, in her stomach, and it spread through all her body. She didn’t want to go to hospital...About two years ago.*

*Alex: I’m not really sure, maybe their spirits go up or something, and all their bones and stuff stay in the coffin.*

*Billy: You can still talk to them. Their souls go up. I think. (after a pause)  
I've got a question. Do we actually turn into skeletons?*

*Jordan: I know what happens to you. The worms go through the coffin, suck the air out of it. The body starts to dissolve (and eventually) they turn to skeletons. I found out in the encyclopedia...It's got a picture of a real skeleton in it.*

For a number of children, the mystery of death was the point at which they encountered the transcendent and the possibility of religious faith, particularly if they had had the experience of a loved one who had died. In *The Violin Man* Oscar had no family except his daughter, Marietta who had died, but he continued to feel her presence with him. The children were asked “How could Marietta still be his ‘friend’ if she was dead?” And “What do you think happens to people when they die?” Some children also discussed death in their individual interviews, if someone important to them had died. Champagne’s *modes of being* provided a useful tool for examining the phenomenon of death, as it affected their spirituality.

Some children engaged with death through their *sensitive mode*. Jordan was curious about death, although he did not mention anyone close to him who had died. He concentrated his curiosity on the physical aspects of death – how the body decays. This perspective could be expected in children, who perceive humanity in concrete physical ways, as a body they can see, touch and talk to. Therefore it could be expected that Jordan, who claimed to be an “atheist”, would focus on the sensory aspects of death, or what can be physically observed. “For the atheist answers (to questions about spiritual mysteries such as death) are to be found in the immanent world of nature, rather than in an imaginary transcendent realm populated by divine beings” (Wright, 2000, p. 53).

Lucy, from the suburban school, had a mixture of reactions to death. Her first response was similar to the others in her group. To the question at the end of the reading of *The Violin Man*, “What do you think happens to people when they die?” Lucy replied, “I think the people who love them can actually see them in their imagination, and they still are there...” To a later question, “What happens to their ‘souls’?” Lucy pointed upwards. These responses seemed to arise out of the theme

of the story, and common western views about heaven and hell, and not impinge on her directly. Here is an extract from her transcript, taken from a later individual interview.

*Lucy: I wish no-one would die, that everyone would just live for ever, and they never die.*

*W: What do you think about dying?*

*Lucy: I think it's very sad when someone close to you dies, as my grandma died. And before I was even born my grandpa died.*

*W: So you didn't know him?*

*Lucy: I've seen pictures of him though.*

*W: Have you been to his grave, in (her country of origin)?*

*Lucy: (shakes her head).*

*W: What do you think happens to people when they die?*

*Lucy: Our guide(?) says their spirit is still there. Like, they're still there, like a ghost, but I don't believe in ghosts. I just think, I just think like they're just gone. Like when they die they are not there any more.*

In this extract Lucy responded in her *relational mode* in that she expressed sadness about her grandmother's death, and for the relationship she never had with her grandfather in the flesh. Hay and Nye (2006, p. 119) noted that children like Lucy commonly have a sense of kinship between the living and the dead. The children appreciated the sensory link through photographs of someone who had died. Lucy grappled with the existential meaning of death. She expressed angst about the general question of why people die, and humanity's longing for immortality. She also expressed skepticism about her community's religious belief in ghosts. In the earlier group interviews Lucy demonstrated a fascination with science and scientific method, which popularly, finds no room for the supernatural. These extracts seemed to demonstrate the dilemma of some migrant children, in being torn three ways, between eastern and western religious beliefs, and scientific positivism. Most of the children referred to in this discussion of their reactions to death did not have a close personal relationship with someone who had died, nor did they appear to have a belief in God or a sense of relationship with the transcendent. *Relational modes of*

*being* which reach beyond the physical world, such as with a family member who has died, seem to make a difference to the quality of children's spirituality. This is discussed in a later section of this chapter.

*Summary: The mystery of death*

The children who took part in this study seemed to reach beyond themselves with regard to the mystery of death in three ways. Some exercised their *sensitive mode*, Jordan, for example, in concentrating with fascination on the decay of the body of the person who has died. Others, like Lucy, focused on the ongoing relationship with the deceased through the memories of the living. However, most of the children also had a sense of a transcendent dimension to death, whether as a soul that goes "up" to heaven, a "ghost" that remains, or, as discussed in a later section, as someone who is with God and still watching over the living. Beliefs about life after death seemed to be largely influenced by their cultural heritage. For most of these children, the two subjects in which they were willing to discuss God, or the transcendent, were death and creation.

*Reaching for transcendence in the natural world*

The children at the rural school were very uncomfortable with Big Questions. They preferred to talk about their pets, or problems on the farm. Mitchell was an example of this discomfort with speculation. He avoided discussion about the beginning of the world and God, and about death. During these discussions he looked nervous, fiddling with his fingers. The researcher commented to the group, "I don't think kids at (this school) are into wondering". They all nodded. The group agreed that most of their community was concerned about surviving the drought, how to "get by". Mitchell expressed their concerns as "making sure you've got feed for your animals". Within his own environment, Mitchell was reaching beyond himself to the needs of their livestock.

Some children at the rural school did demonstrate a spiritual consciousness in "reaching beyond themselves". Kane chose for his "awesome" picture The Twelve Apostles, a group of off-shore rocks on the west coast of Victoria. He liked

the ocean in the picture, that it was “all shiny”, and he liked the different shapes of the rocks, and that it was a place with which he was familiar. He also liked being immersed in the cool water of the ocean on a hot day. He volunteered that he admired the eagles in his neighbourhood. He liked watching them fly so high, and then swoop on their prey. Kane’s beautiful self-portrait seemed to illustrate his sense of a world transcending his present one. His self-portrait was drawn quickly, small and in the centre of the page. Then, during the further discussion he filled the upper part of the page with clouds and sky-scrapers, the latter with scores of coloured windows. In the lower part of the picture he drew a path leading the figure to the sky-scrapers. He later confided that his ambition was to be “a house designer”.

Luke also found transcendent experience in the ocean. He has been a skilled surfer since he was able to stand up on a bogie board at the age of three. Currently he used a full sized board. I asked him what he thought about when he’s out in the surf. He said, “It looks good when they (other surfers) are inside a wave”. When asked how he felt when he is inside a wave, he replied “It’s like paradise”. When I asked for clarification he agreed that he felt like he was in another world, where time stopped.

Kane and Luke were not very verbally fluent, but both expressed their spirituality through the *sensitive mode*. Kane was able to enter imaginatively into the visual world of the picture of The Twelve Apostles. He sensed visually the shapes of the rocks and the shiny water as he had seen them when he had been present. He was able to recreate through memory the tactile sensation of cool ocean water. During the interview he also created fantastic shapes with the interlocking felt pens while he was talking. With his visual imagination he created images of beauty, charged with joy, which may symbolize transcendence. These images included the height of the eagle’s flight, and the height, and mass of his sky scrapers. This picture had other features which may be symbols of the transcendent, such as the many coloured windows, as though they were inviting the viewer to enter a transcendent space. The figure of Kane on the path to the skyscrapers was redolent of a symbolic journey. Kane did not verbally explain this journey as any more than his desire to be a “house

designer”, but the drawing spoke of something more, a spiritual journey to a “celestial city”.

Luke’s experience of being inside the wave appeared to be a similar journey through sensory experience to something transcendent. Luke seemed to be “in paradise” because he achieved what could be described as a spiritual unity or connectedness between his action and experience. An interpretation of Luke’s experience may be found in Rudolph Otto’s (1923/1958) concept of the “numinous”, a term he coined to describe transcendent experiences. Otto described two types of numinous experience: *mysterium tremendum* which is “wholly other”, and *fascinans* which is an experience of “something more” (Merkur, 2006, p. 207-208). Luke’s experience in the surf, which he described as being in “paradise”, was for him something more than just being inside a wave. He reported that it had a timeless quality which he did not seek. His experience did not invoke the dread associated with *mysterium tremendum*, but was the beautiful, joyous experience of *fascinans*. According to Otto “the living ‘something more’ of the *fascinans*, the element of fascination” (Otto, 1923/1958, p. 35) may be found in experiences of many different religions, (and presumably) outside of formal religion.

Tom, from the suburban school, also seemed to be trying to describe an experience of “something other” in this conversation:

*Tom: I wish my family had a mansion for a house.*

*W: Oh, why do you wish that?*

*Tom: Because it would be cool if we had a verandah and we lived right next to the sea. And we could look out on the waves....*

*W: What do you like about the sea?*

*Tom: I like it at night when the sun goes down, because that’s what we did once. We got in our car. We went home and had tea and we came back, and then the sun was just about to go down (smile).*

*W: Oh, you saw it over the water and it was lovely!*

*Tom: And then we took a picture- but it’s kind of blurry ...*

In this extract Tom demonstrated the *sensitive mode*, in particular, the visual aspects of his spirituality, his pleasure at looking at the waves, and the special

experience of seeing the sun set over the water. In other parts of his interview he demonstrated other sensory modes, such as the tactile sense of digging in the sand, or being “buried” in sand, and the kinaesthetic pleasure of trying to balance on a boogie board in the surf. For Tom, these experiences seemed to be moments of “an unusual level of consciousness or perceptiveness, relative to other passages of conversation spoken by that child” which Hay & Nye (2006, p. 109) defined as *relational consciousness*. The *relational mode* was demonstrated in his wanting to share with his family the experience of having a house by the sea. He related the shared experience of driving in the car together, having tea, and going back to the beach to see the sun go down, then trying to take a photograph of this special shared event. Tom’s *existential mode* of spirituality was demonstrated in several ways. His experiences of time included wanting to experience some permanence of his enjoyment of the sea, in wishing to own a house on the foreshore. He was also aware of the passing of time, and the way an instant can be precious, in the family going back to the beach to see the moment of sunset. Taking a photograph would be a way of trying to give permanence to that moment. His experiences of the sea gave Tom a special sense of place, for himself and his family. Tom’s narrating of the experience of the sunset demonstrated his sense of awe and wonder, perhaps a glimpse of a transcendent reality. Finally, his regret that the picture was blurry, may show that he was aware that human experience is imperfect and impermanent.

Tom’s experiences of the natural beauty of the sea and the sunset did not appear to be interpreted by him as “spiritual” in that he made no connection with God or any sense of the transcendent, but he did seem to have a sense of connectedness with nature and with his shared experience with his family. Tom’s experiences may be a “natural precursor” to a deeper spiritual awakening. As Crawford and Rossiter (2006) wrote:

*Youth spirituality also includes response to the natural environment and beautiful things as well as personal concerns like fulfilment, happiness and community; if not a part of youth spirituality, these can at least be regarded as natural precursors or pathways to spirituality – avenues to the spiritual to*



*which young people are attuned, or areas to which spirituality can be applied. (p.204)*

Other writers may interpret Tom's experience as essentially spiritual. Ó Murchú (1997) maintained that spirituality is a natural human disposition. Hart (2003) maintained that we should consider ourselves as spiritual beings who have human experiences. Champagne (2003) based her premise that what she was observing in small children was their spirituality, on the theology of the incarnation: that being spiritual is to be "incorporated in the world and not disconnected from it" (p. 46). Tom's experience of the sea and the sunset appeared to be more than awe and wonder at external perceptions and events, and to be part of his *being in himself*. The researcher's overall impression of Tom was that externally he was tough, (the vice-principal reported that he was even violent to his little sister on occasions), very athletic, and not inclined to empathize with other people, but he longed to commune with nature. This latter trait was exhibited in his Journey drawing of himself alone on an island, where he could "do what (he wanted) for once". However, Crawford and Rossiter's (2006) claim provided above, points to issues of the quality of spirituality being encountered in these children. Tom's *sensitive mode* of spirituality could be enriched by the development of his *relational mode*, and a quest for a transcendental understanding of existence. This was demonstrated later in this chapter, in the incident with the sick bird where he did not seem to relate emotionally to the bird in the way that the other children did.

*Summary: Reaching beyond themselves in the natural world*

The children at the rural school demonstrated the phenomenon of "reaching beyond themselves" in the *relational mode of being* in their care for the farms and the livestock in a time of drought. Some of these children, particularly Kane and Luke, expressed their connection with the natural world through their *sensitive mode*, when they expressed their sense of wonder at the flight of the eagle, or the joy of surfing. For Tom, from the suburban school, experiencing the ocean and the sunset with his family also had relational significance. The children's experiences

also had an existential quality. Tom explored the mystery of the passing of time and his desire to catch a magical moment. Luke expressed this moment as being “in paradise”. In his drawing Kane seemed to be expressing his sense of self, on a path to something beautiful, and greater than his present life-experience. These experiences may be described as sensing the numinous (Otto, 1923/1958), or as “natural precursors” to an experience of the divine (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006, p 204).

### *Religious experiences of the transcendent*

Some other children expressed a relationship with the transcendent, with angels or with God. These children did not come from religious families. Their experience had more in common with Hart’s (2003) assertion that spirituality is much broader than religion, and that children “see the invisible” in a way that is often lost as they grow to adulthood. The following extract is from the profile of Mary, a student in the provincial school.

*Mary gave evidence of a numinous experience and an ongoing relationship with the transcendent. She believes in God, as creator. God is in heaven, which is everywhere, so God is with us and takes care of us. She wonders if heaven is a literal place, and asked “Can people walk around in heaven?” She prays for her great grandmother who has died, and she believes she is happy in heaven. Mary suffers from asthma, and thinks about her own death from time to time, as not being able to be with her family any more. Mary also claims to have seen an angel. She was aged 6, and was in hospital to have some teeth filled. When her mother and father left her overnight, she was feeling really scared. Suddenly an angel appeared and said “Don’t be afraid. I’ll stay with you tonight. I won’t leave you tonight. And I’ll be there with you tomorrow.” The angel wore a gold dress and a bright thing on her head. She had wings. Although Mary only saw her briefly, she felt that the angel was still present with her. Significantly, Mary said “That night I wasn’t scared”. Although Mary is given to telling fanciful tales, I find this*

*one credible, because Mary showed in her conversations and her drawings, that she has a deep fear of dying.*

While this extract dealt with an experience of the transcendent, it had all the hallmarks of Champagne's (2003) *spiritual modes of being*. There were elements of the *sensitive mode* in Mary's speculation about what heaven was like. She wondered if heaven could be experienced in a similar way to life on earth, as somewhere one can be bodily present and "walk around". Her description of the angel had a wealth of visual detail – shapes, colours, brightness, and physical features such as wings. She identified the angel as female, and one who spoke to her. Moreover, Mary described an experience which was full of emotional reaction to a physical situation. The hospital made her fearful. Her parents were a comfort to her while they were present, and she felt bereft when they left. The visit of the angel brought her peace and reassurance, first by a visual presence and comforting words, then by a continuing sense of presence even when the angel was no longer visible.

The *relational mode of being* was experienced with her parents, the angel and with God. With each of these beings Mary had a relationship of trust. In her experience there seemed to be a progression of this trusting relationship, beginning with her parents, extending to the angel and then generalizing to God. She believed that God is always present, and caring, like her parents were. She also believed that she had a relationship through prayer with her great grandmother, who was "in heaven".

The *existential mode* was revealed in a number of different ways. Mary marked the event as significant by the place – a hospital, and the time – evening, and when she was 6 years old. She also expressed an existential understanding of who God is. For Mary God was creator, at the beginning of time. God also "inhabited" place for her. On the one hand God was in heaven, but also God was present everywhere, including present with her and caring for her. Mary also expressed a sense of who she was. She was a vulnerable child, afraid of pain, and aware of her own mortality. She was aware of her need of more powerful beings to protect and care for her. She also had a sense of being surrounded by love and care.

At the beginning of her individual interview she introduced herself as “I’m a special person. I have a Mum and a Dad, and some people don’t”.

Kelly was another of the few children who had a personal belief in God. She was very conscious of heaven, which she associated with her stepfather Pete, who had died, and was with God. “Heaven is actually the whole sky, everywhere, all the time. God is watching everyone, like all the relatives.” She had a sense of the transcendent in which she was part of a cosmic family, of which God was the head. For Kelly, God was a benevolent being, who created the universe, and was “really, really good at it”. She also had a sense of her own family extending across many generations, placing herself in a larger frame than her present dysfunctional family. She said “God created the whole world, our mums and dads, because he made Mummy’s mum to have Mum. If my mum wasn’t born I wouldn’t be here right now”. (This material was taken from Kelly’s profile, with some researcher’s interpretations).

Kelly’s experience was less visual than Mary’s, but had a number of features in common. Kelly did not have a very satisfactory relationship of trust with her family, with the exception of Pete, who had died. However, Pete’s death strengthened Kelly’s *relational mode of being* in that she then had a sense of transcendent relationships which extended beyond this world, beyond time and place. That is, her relational experiences drew her into *existential mode*. She felt that she belonged to a transcendental family which included God as head, and people like Pete and her great grandmother who had died. She then had a sense that her family in this world had a larger time scale extending across many generations, and members of each generation had a purpose in God’s plan. This was illustrated when she said “If my mum wasn’t born I wouldn’t be here right now”. This gave her a positive sense of identity, of being accepted as part of the great family, headed by an ever present, all powerful and loving God.

*Summary: Religious experience of the transcendent*

Mary and Kelly each had a sense of their relationship with God and a transcendent domain, where God and the departed are present. This gave them a

sense that they were cared for and loved, that their lives had meaning, and their sense of identity was strengthened. They experienced this sense of relationship with the transcendent through their *sensitive, relational, and existential modes of being*.

Reaching beyond themselves through relating to the earth, others and themselves.

### *Introduction*

In this section, Champagne's (2003) three *modes of being* are further explored and the concept of the *relational mode* is developed further through the researcher's own categories of bonding, empathy and values formation, arising out of children's particular relationships with the natural world, their peers and families, and the transcendent. These are adaptations of Champagne's (2003) "keys" to her *relational mode of being* in a way which may be more appropriate for the children in this research who were somewhat older. "Bonding" is defined here as any "relationship in which people establish a strong emotional attachment to each other", and includes some of Champagne's descriptions such as affectionate, privileged, affirming, referencing, inclusive (p. 48-50). "Empathy" in this discussion refers more to "mentally entering into the feeling or spirit of a person or thing", such as the feelings of a friend or stranger who is hurt, or other people's happiness. Champagne referred to such keys as "forgiving, sympathetic". "Values formation" has some parallels in Champagne's work, such as "forgiving, affirming, internalizing". In the research reported in this thesis values such as helping others, or condemning bullying, or caring for the environment were observed in the children's discussion of their relationships. It was not clear which came first, the relationships or the values, but the two phenomena possibly developed simultaneously.

### *Relating to the earth*

In previous sections of this chapter, the texts of Kane, Luke and Tom showed something of how children "reach beyond themselves" in their relationship with the natural world through their experiences of awe and wonder. Many of the children who took part in the study related to the photographs in this way. A number of the

children chose the picture of Uluru, because of its size and age, its iconic status for Australia and its history. For the children at the coastal school, where the rehearsal of the interviews was conducted, the landscape had significance beyond their own lives. Aimee said of Uluru, (from her transcript) “I always wonder how it got there because it’s so big, and you can see spear marks. Yes, you can tell it’s got tracks all over it – ages ago aborigines have been there”. Aimee related to the rock as having an ancient history which was significant to her as an Australian. Finn, from the suburban school, referred to Uluru as “an Australian icon”. These children seemed to relate to this feature of the landscape as having spiritual significance for Australia’s original inhabitants and for themselves. Aimee had a similar spiritual perspective about the aboriginal heritage of the coastline where she lived. Ryan, from the coastal school, wondered at the beauty of a picture of a pelican flying into the sunrise near his home. He translated this wonder into a concern to preserve the environment. He said, “I don’t believe in God, but I hate what people are doing to his planet”. At the provincial school, Caleb also related care of the environment with God’s purpose. He said, “I reckon God probably made (Uluru) and made it in a certain spot, so the first people in Australia, the Australian aborigines could have it for themselves.”

These children related to features of the earth through their *sensitive mode* in their awe and wonder at the immensity and colour of the rock, and the beauty of the pelican’s flight. They bonded with the rock in the sense that they identified with it as part of their national heritage. They also exhibited bonding and empathy with the original inhabitants of Australia, as when Aimee saw physical evidence of their presence there, and was sensitive to their history and traditional claims to Uluru. Ryan and Caleb followed their *relational mode* a step further, into the existential and ethical domains. Out of their relationship with the earth they came to value its preservation. Although he said that he didn’t believe in God, Ryan expressed regret at what humanity was doing to spoil the Creator’s planet. He expressed a sense of moral obligation to care for the planet. Caleb had a sense that God had a purpose in creating the world, and particular places such as Uluru. He sensed that that purpose was the wellbeing of humanity, and perhaps Caleb had earth’s other creatures in mind too.

This section sought to demonstrate the children's relationship to the earth in their bonding with the land of Australia and its original inhabitants, which gave them a sense of identity as Australians. They showed empathy with the original inhabitants, and the land in their concern about its degradation. They also related to the land in that they value its preservation, especially as they related it with God as Creator who has entrusted the earth to humanity's care.

### *Relating to animals*

Children in each of the schools had a strong relationship to animals, especially their pets. At the suburban school this was particularly apparent. Hahn had a large number of animals at home, which she preferred to human company because "they don't talk". Pham's closest friend seemed to be her dog, which dominated both of her drawings and her conversation. The twins, Amanthi and Spencer, were especially fond of birds, and told stories of rescuing baby birds or eggs that had fallen out of the nest. In almost every group a girl chose the picture of the baby bird as awesome, and this generated discussion about caring for the environment. The following is a transcript of a conversation between Hanh, Finn, Pham and Tom at the suburban school. The children were discussing what they felt about the photograph of a newly hatched small bird, held in a man's hand; what they thought about little birds.

*Pham: I think they are really cute, because, and I actually held a bird at school once. It was a baby bird. I offered it a worm, but it wouldn't eat it.*

*Finn: Also I was there with that bird. I think it had bird flu.*

*W: I don't think so. It was sick, was it?*

*Finn: It was really fluffed up (demonstrates with his hands, and crouching forward).*

*Tom: Oh, that's when they're scared.*

*Finn: It was fluffed up and it was going (makes gasping sniffs through his nose) sort of.*

*W: Oh, it was really sick...it might have fallen out of the nest.*

*(Finn has his fingers in his mouth, looking concerned).*

*(Hahn has her back to the camera, and is watching the speakers).*

*Pham: It couldn't actually fly. It was going (makes flapping motion with her hands) just flapping its wings and then it would just lie there.*

*Finn: It just jumped instead of flying (demonstrates jumping movements).*

*W: Oh, poor little bird. So how did that make you feel when you saw that little bird that couldn't fly?*

*Pham: Um, it made me feel -*

*Finn: Sad.*

*Pham: Um.*

*Finn: Sorry for it.*

*Pham: It made me feel that I wanted to keep that bird.*

*W: And look after it?*

*(Pham nods).*

*Tom looks bored, not joining the conversation, yawns, and sits with hands on his head and his elbows on the table.*

*Finn: When we were at (another suburb) we were at this house, and there was this bird. And you could see its skeleton and all its skin was drying up (touched face, eyes are wide open).*

*Tom looks interested.*

*W: It was a skeleton?*

*Finn: No it was alive, and it was in the house.*

*W changes the topic of conversation.*

This is an interesting episode because it contained a wealth of material on the *sensitive mode of being*. Although the children in the study were older than Champagne's (2003) pre-school children, and were more skilled at verbal communication, they sometimes responded with their whole body. Their responses to the memory of the sick bird were tactile (how it felt to hold the bird), visual and kinaesthetic (the fluffed up feathers and the ineffective efforts to fly). Finn, in particular, responded by imitating the bird's movements, and by facial expressions of his emotions. His verbal responses were both empathetic (he said he felt sad) and also intellectual, in that he tried to explain the condition as "bird flu". It was a



holistic response. The children also demonstrated their *relational mode of being* in this incident. Finn expressed his feeling for the bird. Pham wanted to care for the bird. She tried to feed it worms, and she wanted to take it home and look after it. Hahn seemed to be expressing her empathy with the bird by directing her attention to the speakers, although she said nothing. In various ways, these children were demonstrating empathy with the sick bird. The children's response to the sick bird has parallels with Hyde's (2008) concept of *felt sense*, which Hyde described as follows:

*The felt sense, as a characteristic of children's spirituality identified in my study, entails the attending to physical bodily awareness on the part of the individual. Each child's corporeality seemed to act as a primal source of knowledge which enabled them to draw upon their own bodily wisdom as a means by which to get in touch with the felt sense in a particular situation (p. 88).*

Hyde referred to Gendlin's (1981) concept of *focusing*, which involves attending to the bodily awareness of situations, persons, or events, as a way of getting in touch with the spiritual dimension of *the felt sense* (Hyde, 2008, p. 86). In the conversation given above, the children, particularly Finn and Pham, demonstrated their bodily identification with what was happening to the sick bird. In this identification they were also demonstrating bonding and empathy.

The demonstration of *existential mode* appeared in the children's attempt to explain why the bird was sick. Tom, who displayed very little emotional response, contributed intellectually to the discussion with "facts" about birds. Tom's interest was only rekindled when Finn turned the conversation in a macabre direction. Pham, on the other hand, tried to analyze her feelings about the bird, in considering her desire to care for it.

The following extract from Caleb's profile (from the provincial school) shows a development of the quality of relational consciousness in that he saw caring for animals and for people as part of a divine purpose. His *relational mode of spirituality* seemed to demonstrate formation of values and a rationale for those

values. He believed that it is good to care for animals because they are God's creation.

*Caleb said, "I reckon we should care for birds because God created them to make us respect all living creatures and animals. And we should also give lots of animals water to help them survive as well as us. With the birds, we can also take care of them, like, if they don't know where they are going...like they might fly into a tree or get injured, we can take them to the vet."*

*When confronted with the question of who might be "in charge of the universe", Caleb's response was "I would say 'Hi', nice to meet you – but we are all in charge of the universe, and other people are living here in community too."*

This section sought to demonstrate the children's spirituality in their empathy with animals, especially vulnerable ones. They demonstrated this bonding and empathy through their bodily responses and through trying to find intellectual explanations for animals' sufferings. Caleb expressed this concern in value terms, as a God-given responsibility to care for God's creatures.

#### *Relating to other children*

The sense of belonging to a human community informed the bonding, empathy and value formation of many of the children. Human relationships are more complex than relationships with the natural world. Therefore it was to be expected that *relational modes of spirituality* would be more complex. This was demonstrated in the extracts cited below. The children's peer relationships were marked by caring and a sense of justice. This was expressed most explicitly by some of the girls, and demonstrated by both boys and girls in physical action. Below are some extracts from hermeneutic phenomenological (profile) texts of children at the provincial school, followed by transcripts from the suburban school, which are indicative of this feature.

*Grace described her peer relationships as follows. She said "when Kerry's upset I help her, because I say 'what's wrong? Has anybody hurt your*

*feelings?’ And she talks to me. And I say to that person ‘You should say sorry, and you shouldn’t do that again’. If they don’t listen to me I go to the teacher”* Billy described his friendships in terms of what they did together. He gave a list of the names of his friends, and told how they play football and “chasey” together, and dug in the sand pit.

Pham, at the suburban school, described a negative aspect of peer relationships:

*W: What are bad things people do?*

*Pham (thinks); Well Rachel has been bossy to me. Like, before she liked me, now everything she says, we say OK with her. And now she thinks that we are so easy on her that she hasn’t to do anything.*

*W: Oh, so she takes advantage of you?*

*Pham: Yes, when I almost tripped over on her she said “Why did you push me?”*

Harry, at the suburban school, discussed the operation of friendship on the soccer field.

*Harry: During our soccer one of my team mates got hit by a ball on the back. And when I passed the ball to my friend I just stopped immediately, and then I started running at my friend, running after my friend, and I picked him up, and then I asked him how he was, yes, and then the coach came... (On another occasion) when I got kicked on the face, I fell down and stuff, and I cried. And then most of my team came, and then they put me on the sidelines to heal.*

The children who took part in the study frequently described friendship in terms of helping a peer who was hurt. This was primarily a *sensitive* response to an event like a child falling down and crying. However other children, especially boys like Billy expressed friendship as what they did when playing together. However, these extracts gave more emphasis to the *relational mode of being*. Billy showed his bonding with his friends by naming them. The bonding of friendship occurred in these extracts in the playground, the classroom and the sports field. The children demonstrated empathy in that they responded emotionally to the hurt of their friends, and by running to help. When Harry described going to help his friend on

the soccer field there was a breathlessness and urgency in his language. When Grace helped her friend, she expressed her sympathy to the victim, and outrage to the bully. Pham's language, when relating the loss of a friendship, expressed her pain and confusion. There was a complexity of value formation expressed in these extracts. Most of the children implied that they valued loyalty, and care for their friends' physical and emotional needs. They agreed that bullying was wrong and needed to be addressed by shaming the bully or appealing to a person in authority. Wrongdoers should repent and apologize. They believed that they had a right to appeal to someone in authority to administer justice. Looking at the *existential mode* suggests that these are some universals of human experience which the children were experiencing. Friendship is a rewarding two-way experience, and loss of friendship can be painful. Pain and hurt are universal human experiences. In addition, we live in an orderly society where we expect there is someone in charge to maintain order and administer justice.

In reaching out to their peers these children seemed to demonstrate their spirituality as a sense of connectedness with the Other in their shared actions, and feelings for their peers. de Souza (2003) referred to this aspect of spirituality as "the human person's movement towards Ultimate Unity" (p. 276). In some cases this may be manifest as *integrating awareness* (Hyde, 2008). For example, when Harry was playing soccer, he was concentrating on passing the ball, and was simultaneously aware that his friend was hurt and prepared to go to his aid. For Hyde, this ability to "integrate an emerging wave of consciousness with a previous level" constituted a characteristic of spirituality (p. 105).

The children in this research demonstrated their spirituality in their bonding and empathy through caring for other children, especially when physically hurt, or bullied. Even in the midst of a game, they were aware of the needs of others. In this they demonstrated the values of caring for others, and loyalty to friends. They also valued justice for their friends, and the need for adults to be in charge. Friendships also introduced them to the existential mysteries of love and loss.

### *Relating to families*

This topic was introduced after the reading of *The Violin Man*, where the protagonist had no family except his daughter who had died. The groups were asked “What’s good about having a family? What’s not so good about having a family?” Relationships with family members were commonly expressed in instrumental terms. Mitchell, at the rural school, gave a fairly typical response to the idea of being without a family.

*I’d feel sad and lonely and bored...You get to play with them. They can buy you stuff. (Families) could drive you somewhere, like to a playground or somewhere. Or when you play sport they can drive you to it.*

Alex, from the provincial school, had given the value of his family more thought. Below are extracts from his profile.

*Oscar (in The Violin Man) would be pretty lonely, but he still had his friends. It’s good (having friends) because if you were by yourself, like if everyone was died and you were 10 years old, and you were grown up by yourself, you’d have to ride to school and everything, get a job, somehow buy all your food and everything...*

*Having a family (is special), you’ve got people to look after you. They can help you, talk to you sometimes. (I can ask my mum) stuff about her cancer, and only she’s sick. A sad thing, we have to look after her. She can’t do many things, can’t walk for 400 metres...(I have to) help her, take the bins out, riding home, let her sleep, have to let her have a rest.*

*Alex also told how he was proud of his sister for being a district athletics champion. He also has a great affection for his two nanas, one of whom bakes him cakes and makes him feel special. He wants to mow her lawn for her when he is bigger. Alex has learned to reach beyond himself in his family relationships.*

Finn had some negative as well as positive experiences of family. Below are some extracts and summaries from his profile.

*“Everything is good about your family. Your mum and dad help you get breakfast. Your brother and sister can play with you. And your mum and dad*

*can buy you toys and things. Well, it would be hard for you to do anything – and you'd have to live on the streets.” What is not good about having a family is “when your mum and dad split up, or divorce”...*

*Finn's parents were divorced, and his father lived in another state. He seemed to have his strongest relationship with his father, whom he often quoted to the other children during group activities. A highlight of Finn's life was when his father took him and his sister on a holiday to Malaysia. Finn used many gestures and an excited voice while he told a story about being chased by dangerous monkeys. He said “I went ‘Dad! Dad! Dad! He picked me up. He looked at where the monkey (was) and then, and he picked me up and we ran all the way to the hotel’”. During the interviews Finn expressed a preoccupation with danger and violence, and he seemed to be very angry about his father leaving. At the end of the final interview I asked him “Do you miss your Dad?” He gave an uncharacteristically quiet response “Yes, I miss him very much”.*

Because children are so completely dependent on families for their material and emotional needs, it was predictable that children such as Mitchell, Alex and Finn should first express their relationship to their families through their *sensitive mode of being*, through tangible benefits like food and shelter, and someone to drive them to the football. In the case of Alex, this need for material security was most poignantly expressed, as he was facing the possibility of his mother's death. However, the children's main focus, whatever mode they used, was on their primary social relationship, their bonding with their family. Champagne (2003) spoke of the process of *filiation* by which young children internalize their relationship with their parents or the benevolent adults who care for them. For young children, adults provide the order which allows a child to construct their inner self (p. 47). Hyde (2008) made a similar observation when he said that families provide a sense of identity for children; and “a Collective Self in which the relationship of each to Other was inseparable in defining each other's being” (pp. 131-132). Mary, from the provincial school, expressed this sense of identity as “I'm a special person, because I have a mum and a dad, and some people don't”. For Mary, having an intact and

stable family made her feel uniquely loved, and it also made her aware of her less fortunate friends. Alex observed, when considering Oscar in *The Violin Man*, that friends are valuable for support, but they are not an adequate substitute for a family. He noted the mutual support that he and his mother gave each other, and the mutual support within his wider family, including his grandmothers and his sister. Through these relationships Alex was learning the value of mutual care for the needs of each family member, and forming his identity within the circle of the family.

Existentially, Alex was becoming aware that he was not alone, but part of a web of mutual love. Finn, like Alex, had to cope with loss in his family. On the one hand Finn spoke of a harmonious family, eating and playing together, but he also had to cope with the reality of the parents' divorce and his father's absence. The family split meant he had to reassess his identity as a family member (Hyde, 2008, p.131). He seemed to be compensating for his father's absence through his violent imaginative life, and by constantly referring to his father in conversation. His repetition of the phrase "he picked me up" seemed to be a poignant expression of his continuing bond with his father. That Finn empathizes with other families who have lost their security, in particular, the loss of a father or a son, was reflected in his reaction to the picture of the refugees. He said "They're feeling sad because their son might get hurt, or their husband or something".

Through their relationships with their families these children were learning about the mutuality of family love and protection, and a sense of their own identity. They expressed their awareness of this relationship through their *sensitive* as well as their *relational mode*. As with their friends, but in a more intense way, they were experiencing, in their *existential mode*, how to cope with love and loss.

*Summary: Reaching out through relationships*

Reflection on the children's relationship with the natural world, other people, and indirectly on themselves has given an overview of the way Champagne's (2003) *spiritual modes of being* can give an insight into the way the children's relationships formed their spirituality, in particular, the way they bonded with significant others, how they demonstrated empathy with the situations and feelings of others, and the

way their relationships informed their moral values. In the ordinary events of their relationships the children demonstrated at times a “new dimension of understanding, meaning, and experience... a special sense that added value to their ordinary or everyday perspective” (Hay & Nye, 2006, p. 109). They were demonstrating what Hay and Nye called “relational consciousness”.

### Conclusion

This chapter presented an overview of the children in the study “reaching beyond themselves”. This was expressed in their sense of wonder and awe about the natural world, and existential issues of beginnings and of death and the transcendent. It was also expressed in their relationships with the natural world and with other people. Through the lens of Champagne’s (2003) *spiritual modes of being* this chapter examined the children’s spirituality, their connecting with the world beyond themselves through their senses, their relationships and their reflection on existential mysteries. The children’s curiosity was directed to how the natural world worked, in a scientific sense, and as a reflection of some higher purpose. Although most of these children were not overtly religious they were curious about the possibility of a transcendent realm of God and heaven, and of a purpose in creation and human life. They were also sensitive to the transcendent qualities of the natural world. In their relationships with the natural world, and their friends and families, the children valued caring, protection and justice, and were learning to address the degradation of nature, and the imperfections as well as the joys of human relations.

The following chapter discusses these children’s spirituality as “Reaching within themselves”, where the children demonstrated their inner resources for spiritual growth, using their *spiritual modes of being*, and their capacity for resilience in adversity.



## CHAPTER SIX

### REACHING WITHIN THEMSELVES

#### Introduction

“Spirituality has been described in contemporary literature as a level of connectedness that a person may feel towards themselves, their communities, the world around them and to a ‘Transcendent Other’” (de Souza 2003, p. 271). The previous chapter discussed the children’s capacity to “reach beyond themselves” in awe and wonder. This was manifested in their relationships with the transcendent, the natural world and other people. This chapter looks particularly at findings relating to children’s connectedness with themselves, and their reaching within for spiritual strength.

de Souza pointed out that resilience and a sense of connectedness, which are important for mental, physical, social and emotional well-being are being eroded by “the breakdown of conventional frameworks such as the family and community structures (2003, p. 270) making the nurture of the inner life increasingly important. She described this inner spiritual life as a movement towards Ultimate Unity, “an ever-swirling spiral built with layers of accumulated learning and experiences which span a lifetime” (p. 276). Some of the children in this study demonstrated an interaction or stream between their experiences of the outer world and their inner reflection which, even in their short lives, seemed to fit this spiral model. de Souza and Hyde (2007) reviewed the body of research which indicated that to address the inner as well as the outer lives of students, time must be given to engaging the senses, thoughts, feelings, intuition and imagination.

This chapter explores the way in which the children in the study used their feelings, intuition and imagination to develop their inner lives. Hay and Nye (2006) observed that children have strategies to maintain their sense of the spiritual, to preserve their inner life from assaults from a world that is sometimes hostile to their spiritual dimension. These strategies included “efforts to mentally and physically withdraw from mundane distractions, attempts to consciously focus or concentrate on a particular subject, seeking relation or communication through prayer, seeking

and exploiting aesthetic and sensory experiences, and deliberately ‘philosophizing’” (p. 123)

This chapter particularly examines findings relating to children’s connectedness with themselves, and their reaching within for spiritual strength. The findings in this study are also consistent with many of Coles’ (1990) observation about children who have faced all kinds of adversity. Some examples were Margarita from Brazil (p. 95) whose Christian faith supported her in a life of poverty, Natalie the Hopi child whose inner life was in harmony with her physical environment (p. 152). Ginny, living in difficult family circumstances, described herself as “marching through life” (p. 322), and Eric used his cognitive resources to deal with difficult inner questioning (p. 283). All of those children demonstrated resilience through being able to reach within themselves. Some of the sources of this inner strength which children use include prayer (Mountain, 2004), and development of the imagination (Mountain, 2007). Ken Wilber’s “integral theory of consciousness” explained that consciousness is built up of waves of different levels of consciousness which are integrated into a whole being by the Self (Wilbur, 2001; Hyde, 2008, pp. 41, 42). According to Wilber (2001) the Self system incorporates each new wave of the child’s developing consciousness through a process of fusion, transcendence and integration. Hyde (2008, p.101) witnessed this phenomenon in his research as *integrating awareness*. Examples in this research seemed to demonstrate that the children internalized experiences from their lives in the world to produce a deeper level of resilience and inner strength, a more integrated Self. Champagne’s (2003) *spiritual modes of being* continue to be used to assist in the following analyses.

#### Meditation and Self discipline

The following example of “reaching within themselves” was taken from a variety of observations and texts of the interviews with Harry.

Harry, at the suburban school, was looking for strength to face tension and anxiety rather than adversity. When I first met him he was walking along, stretching his arms. In his self-portrait his arms are stretched out. He explained that he liked to

stretch the muscles in his arms and neck when they became tense and they hurt. He variously explained this tension as due to running about too much at school, or “after a hard day’s work at school”. When I asked him did he worry a lot, he said “only when I might get hurt”. Later he said he worried about “around the world, like anything happens, like any type of sickness, or anything that would happen. You worry about it, like if there’s a bomb (in Iraq or London at the time)”. Harry said he could go to his mother when he was worried, and “she makes good meals and that”. Harry also went to the park to think. For his Journey picture he drew the trees and the grass at the park. Then he drew himself sitting under the tree reading a book. He said that his grandmother sat nearby and waited for him. He said, “Sometimes I lie down and look at the birds and the sky. Then the wind just blows on me, and cools me down, after a hard day at school.” He told the researcher he thought about waterfalls, water in a lake, or about the ocean and fishes. He also thought about “me and my dad kicking a ball around the park. Those are the things that make me happy”. Or, as the researcher suggested to him, where he finds his strength. He said that he is Buddhist, but doesn’t think about it much, but “when I grow up I will.” For Harry religion is something that old people like his grandmother practise. But now, as a child, he seems to be practising meditation and self discipline in a Buddhist way. The researcher said “But still when you need to be strong, you think your own thoughts?” “Yes” he said.

Harry was demonstrating an interaction between his outer environment and his inner life. He was using his *sensitive mode* to connect with the sensations of tension in his limbs, or his visual and tactile sensations when he sat in the park and connected with the cool breeze, the trees and the birds. In his imagination he related with waterfalls and lakes which were not actually present. He used his *relational mode* to integrate his consciousness of his grandmother sitting nearby, or memories of playing football with his father, into a new awareness. His religion seemed to provide a source of inner strength for him, at least through his grandmother’s practice. More importantly, he practised a form of meditation in the park, and of self discipline for his body at school. This was consistent with following some aspects of the Buddhist Noble Eightfold Path (Snelling, 1992). Harry seemed to be carrying out

spiritual exercises consistent with Right Thought (switching from selfish thoughts to more altruistic one), Right Effort (being “aware and awake in each moment...to make each activity of (the) day meditation” (1992, p. 61), and Right Mindfulness and Concentration (not in full-scale meditation, but in quiet and directed contemplation).

### Resilience

Grace, at the provincial school, was another child who demonstrated inner spiritual strength. Here are some examples in extracts from her hermeneutic phenomenological profile.

*Grace was very nervous at the first interview. She would put her hands over her face when she thought she would be asked a question. Her response to a question would be “I don’t know what to say”. She found it difficult to deal with a general or speculative question. But at the third interview she said she enjoyed coming and getting to know me better. There were times when Grace related some really painful experiences, and looked about to cry, but she still persisted with the interviews.*

*Grace suffered from severe asthma and eczema. In early childhood she spent considerable time in hospital. However her family and friends are very supportive, which she appreciated. Grace cared for her friends when they were in trouble. She appeared to compensate for her chronic ill-health by interest in sport and physical achievement. The “amazing” picture she chose was the pole-vaulter. She thought the picture was beautiful, and she admired the athlete for training and doing her best to reach elite level. Grace enjoyed sport and games, when she was able to play, and the highlight of her week was going to the local pool to do water aerobics.*

*Grace struggled academically at school, but persisted. Drawing her portrait was rather demanding, and involved much rubbing out, and getting both legs the same thickness. She spent a lot of time colouring meticulously. She did not think she was pretty, but drew herself wearing mascara, which her allergies usually prevented her from wearing. Death and illness loomed large in her family. She said in one interview that all her uncles had asthma.*

*One uncle died a month previously and she was grieving for him. When the other children were discussing death she folded her arms and looked away. Grace believed that God was really important, because he made us, but she did not make an overt connection between God and her everyday life. Grace agreed that her health has been a dominating issue in her life. The only wish she expressed was to have no eczema or asthma.*

*I asked her what she did when she felt sad. She said “I go to a quiet place...I just sit down and think”. When she was happy she would go to the playground and play with her friends.*

*Grace’s “journey” picture was of herself sitting at a desk, writing stories. She would like to have a room where she could write. This was a shy confession, accompanied by much scratching and wriggling, and nodding to my prompting questions. I got the impression that she felt that her experiences had given her stories to tell, and she said she wanted her books to make people happy.*

Grace demonstrated considerable fortitude and positive attitude in dealing with her life’s disadvantages, such as chronic ill health, the disfigurement of her eczema, and her physical and intellectual limitations. She was not able to articulate to any degree what the sources of her inner strength were, but there were some clues in the text. She seemed to have considerable support from significant people in her life. Her family was with her when she was sick and in hospital. She made positive comments about her family, such as saying that her father was her hero, and that he was a chef who made delicious meals. Her friends at school were considerate of her needs and offered support. This was observed by the researcher as well as reported by Grace. At the first interview Mary sat beside her, used encouraging words, and put her arm around her when Grace appeared uncomfortable in the strange situation. She mentioned two special friends, Kerry, who had been in the same class since Prep, and another friend who had known her “since I was born”. The mutual support between Grace and Kerry was mentioned in the previous chapter. This empathy with other people in distress was demonstrated in her reaction to the picture of the refugees. In her profile it was

noted that “her face expressed real distress that they were escaping from a war”. She said ‘It’s not nice to have wars... We should stop the fighting so they can go back’” Grace had a specific strategy for dealing with negative emotions. She said “I go to a quiet place... I just sit down and I think”. She did not share with the researcher where the quiet place was or what she thought about. Her strategy seemed to be an exercise in “time out”, which is encouraged at the school. For example Billy reported that he took “time out” when he felt angry. The source of Grace’s inner strength, her spiritual strength was largely a mystery.<sup>3</sup>

Literature on resilience can assist one to understand Grace’s inner strength. Medical research makes a link between resilience and family support in children with chronic asthma (Frieze, 2008). Some research suggested that some individuals have a neuro-biological predisposition to resilience to adversity (Harvard Mental Health Letter, 2006) A review of psychological research into resilience (Wright & Masten, 2005) defined resilience as “a pattern of positive adaptation in the context of past or present adversity” (p. 18). Examples of assets and protective factors which contribute to resilience include child, family, community, and cultural characteristics (p. 24).

Child characteristics which may apply to Grace include effective emotional and behavioural regulation strategies, positive view of self (although her self esteem did not always appear high), positive outlook on life, and (possibly) faith and a sense of meaning in life. She did not seem to have the advantage of good cognitive abilities and problem-solving skills. However Grace seemed to have the advantage of family characteristics, including a stable and supportive home environment, and parents who were involved in the child’s education and welfare. Community assets for Grace included an effective school, with well-trained teachers and good support programs. Neighbourhood qualities included affordable housing, employment, and access to recreational centres and health care. The neighbourhood did suffer somewhat from poverty and violence, but these factors have less impact on primary age children than on adolescents. This would indicate

---

<sup>3</sup> The researcher met Grace, at the dentist, in 2009. The change was amazing. Her skin was clear, she had put on weight, and she appeared healthy and confident. Her father, who was with her, said that she had largely overcome her health problems.

than Grace benefited from some protective factors, but not to a high degree. Wright and Masten's (2005) overview indicated that recent research emphasizes the interaction of these various factors, and the importance of "the child's perception and interpretation of his or her experiences" (p. 26) in the development of an individual child's resilience to negative life experiences, such as ill health. Grace indicated that she perceived that she was well supported in developing a positive outlook on life. However, this research material is only an indirect indication of Grace's spirituality, for which concepts like *relational consciousness* (Hay & Nye, 2006) or *spiritual modes of being* (Champagne, 2003) are better indicators.

### Sport and physical activity

Grace was not the only child for whom sport and physical activity were sources of delight and personal challenge. For most of the children who took part in the study, physical activity and sport were sources of wonder and delight for their own sake, and an immediate way of expressing themselves non-verbally. They were also inner resources through which they explored their spiritual potential, and a way of connecting with the earth and other people. Engebretson's (2007) study of the spirituality of teenage boys recorded older boys' sense of joy experienced through sport and physical achievement. She recorded the following examples:

*Playing football and running. Very basic emotions are used when playing football. There's nothing to worry or think about just the game and the ball... The first wave I ever caught while surfing. I dropped into the inside of the wave and was surfing in the inside of the tube. Being surrounded by all that water was the only time I had ever felt fully alive (Engebretson, 2007, p. 171).*

Murphy's cover comment in Cooper (1998) stated that:

*sport cannot equal the sacred traditions as a means of cultivating the inner life. But...sport does possess its own unique genius for revealing and opening to people the spirit's 'gem-like flame'...in its ability to provoke wonder, to elicit deep feeling, to grace our lives with glimpses of timeless beauty and*

*freedom- in these and other ways sport, though not a religion, (is) something religious. (Cooper, 1998, p.1).*

In Cooper's *Playing in the Zone* (1998), he explored the phenomenon of heightened awareness, and the difficulty in communicating that experience, which elite athletes describe as being in the "zone". Some sports researchers use Maslow's (1999) term "peak experience", or Csikszentmihalyi's term "flow" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) to describe being in the "zone", although these terms are not exactly equivalent. Flow can be described as a heightened state of concentration, which can be developed with training and absorption in the moment of the game or activity. Hyde (2008, p. 85) observed this phenomenon in his study. Cooper (1998, p. 32) reported that for an elite athlete the flow state can be reached partly by mental effort and physical preparation, but is partly the kind of spontaneous epiphany which Maslow described as "peak experience". Luke seemed to experience the spontaneous and transcendent quality of "peak experience", when he spoke of being in "paradise" while surfing (as reported in the previous chapter). But experience of being in the "zone" seemed to occur for other children while playing sport. Harry's experience of kicking his second ball in the middle and scoring a goal (see extract below), was one of wonder and delight. David, at the coastal school, seemed to experience time standing still, when he would practise kicking a football in the back yard for long periods. Alex's rigorous training (see below) could prepare him for the "zone", when he achieved a "personal best".

Here are two extracts from the transcripts of Lucy and Harry, at the suburban school, discussing their feelings about sport.

*Lucy: I like sport, especially skipping...I'm not really a football type of person.*

*(W: Is that because it's too rough?) Yes. And I don't like basketball because I get a bit scared of the ball if it hits me. So I don't like that either. And I think basketball is for tall people and I'm really short....I like (skipping) because I can do it by myself. I can do it really, really fast. And then if I do it with other people I can sing rhymes with it.*

*Lucy also likes long jump, roller skating and riding her scooter.*



*Harry: I'm a sporty person...I like soccer. I've got a club, like a team. And sometimes I play footy (Australian Rules football), because I can remember Auskick came to our school. And it was on the oval. And I played one match against my class. At first ball I almost scored, but it spun the wrong way and went out of bounds. And the second shot I got it in the middle. (W: And you got a goal?) Yes.*

Both Lucy and Harry are of Asian origin, and for these children sport not only provides a person challenge and enjoyment, but also is a way of making friends and establishing their identity as Australians, in a culture where sport has such a high priority. These extracts also demonstrated Champagne's (2003) *modes of being*. The *sensitive mode* was employed in their physical participation and enjoyment. They engaged their *relational mode* through teamwork and interpersonal action. Their *existential mode* seemed to be operational in that they achieved a sense of identity as good sportspersons and good Australians.

For children whose families have been in Australia for a long time sport can also be a primary way of expressing their joy and wonder. For Alex, at the provincial school, sport and physical activity played several roles. He enjoyed the pleasure of his bodily sensations. He found in sport an avenue for expressing his inner strength, his resolve and his identity. Sport also provided a focus for his relationship with his family and his friends. Here are some extracts from Alex's transcripts.

*Alex: (I picked the pole vaulter because) first, she's an Australian, and I like her... Pole vaulting is good to watch...I do athletics, and in seniors you can do pole vaulting. We do all sorts of events. Another new thing we do at athletics is hammer throw. It's like shot put, only you spin around and throw. (Alex demonstrates.) (Sport is also amazing) because you meet new friends, you learn things. And because I play soccer and football I might play AFL or World Cup, or I might be in the Commonwealth Games or the Olympics.*

This is from a later conversation.

*W: When are you smiley?*

*Alex: ...When I win an award.*

*W: What have you won awards for?*

*Alex: Athletics. Last year I got the most PBs (Personal Bests)... You do an event and then you do it again. You have a program. Say you did the 800 metres, and I did it again and I beat my time I'd get a PB. And so far (this year) I think I've got 4 PBs, and I've only been going 5 weeks. This is my fifth season... (My sister) Amy's been going for a long time so I thought I'd be doing it. And she's in under 13s this season.*

(His sister Amy participated in field events at district level. This gave Alex pride, as well as opportunities to travel to various venues.)

Sport and physical activity seemed to do more than exercise Champagne's different modes of being. Sport seemed to be a vehicle through which these children integrated their activity in the outer physical world with their inner spiritual lives. It provided a way of "being-in-the-world" (Heidegger, 1980). According to Heidegger, "an authentic understanding of one's own subjectivity is *in truth* (that is, in uncovering the truth about 'who am I?', rather than an objective 'what am I?'),... (and) is *understood in relation to oneself* by the *how* through which one relates (to one's self and to others)" (Webster, 2004, p. 10). Through his sporting efforts Alex came to a deeper understanding of who he was and how he was valued by himself and his sporting and family communities. According to existential philosophy, there is a degree of contingency in all knowledge. On the one hand, knowledge is embedded in one's physical and cultural environment, and on the other hand, "through agency, the individual has some freedom to choose the significance of the relations to his or her own meaning of existence" (2004, p. 11). Alex's spirituality, or his "being-in-the-world", appeared to be demonstrated in his choice to integrate his culture's positive values of personal effort, physical achievement and social solidarity, into his self-image as a competent and valuable individual.

In physical activity and sporting achievement children are given the opportunity to reach within themselves. These activities seemed to enhance the spirituality of these children through their sensory awareness of their bodies and their physical and social environments, by developing their ability to relate to their

team and their families, and by giving them insight into their individual meaning and worth as “beings in the world”.

### Imagination

Imagination was another means by which the children sought spiritual strength within themselves. Imagination, play, intuition are all means by which children engage with spirituality and communicate their spiritual insights and experiences. Champagne (2003) listed imagination as one of the keys to young children’s *existential modes of being*. She wrote that “within time and space, within the existential quest of knowing through games, imitation, symbolism or imagination, lies the unfolding of the child’s existence, of his/her *being-in-the-world*” (2003, p. 51). de Souza (2005) emphasized the importance of allowing children and young people to use their intuitive abilities as part of a learning process which integrates the whole person, mind, heart and soul. One of the major assumptions of Berryman’s *Godly Play* (1991) is the importance of the imagination-in-action as a creative process. For Berryman, “godly play” gives young children room and permission to explore existential questions, and get to know God through their imaginative activities (p.137). According to Hay and Nye (2006) the languages of fiction and play are significant ways in which children “framed their spirituality”. Playfulness allowed a personalized and internal response to a story or situation, provided flexibility to play with an idea, and used language which was natural to the child rather than an alien religious expression (pp. 120-121). The texts below also demonstrate the children’s use of imagination in developing empathy with other people, and moral values, which are markers of authentic spiritual qualities of “being-in-the-world-with-others” (Webster 2004). The children who took part in the research exercised their imagination in a number of these ways to explore and articulate their spirituality.

Sometimes imagination is just a fresh, playful way of perceiving the world. When Lizzy, at the rural school, chose a picture of two rocks standing off the shore she saw in it two pirate ships, and a small cloud between the “ships” became a puff of smoke from their guns as they fired at each other.

Some of the children at the rural school seemed to compensate for lack of first hand experience of the wider world with a rich imaginative life. For example, Bailey was a shy child whose everyday experiences seemed rather limited, but he had a rich imaginative life, which seemed to be fed by television and video games. He enjoyed sport, but was not in a local team, and did not seem to have travelled far from his small community. (Poverty seemed to be a family issue) Although he did not enjoy writing lessons, he told the researcher this story which he wrote in class, with a lot of prompting (as recorded in his profile).

*I wrote this story about two kids. Their names were Kenny and Carl. They were trying to run away from school. They managed to get away and there was this place called Coinland. And there was this petrol station, and they sell hovercars. And then they stole them. They raced along Coinland until they came to another land. And the police were after them...They just had normal cars. (W: And did they catch them?) No, they didn't get them. They got away.*

*Bailey told a number of other stories, from television shows. His most touching story was of what happened on "Meerkat Manor", which the rural children really enjoyed. He told how this meerkat "got bitten by a puff adder, and the venom did something to him. And his flesh was rotting away. And he survived." I asked did that make him a hero. Bailey replied, "Yes, courageous".*

Ruth, at the provincial school, also had a rich imaginative life, and much of her relational experience was fed by books, films and the computer. She was able to draw on this experience to make sense of the world, as well as using her life experience to relate to characters in fiction. She observed that Oscar (in *The Violin Man*) was a little sad when he was alone, but happier when he was with other people. She related a story from a book about a girl who lived an imaginative life in a tree, then Ruth wondered if Oscar had an imaginary friend. "Maybe when he was lonely he had an imaginary friend,...but when he had people he didn't need them." Ruth also related a movie story about a disabled boy, which is quoted below from her transcript.

*I reckon they came deliberately (i.e. dinosaurs were created by God for a purpose even if they were going to die out) because I watched this movie and it was based on a true story. It was about this boy and he had really, really short legs and he couldn't walk properly. And his parents didn't care much about him. One time they were on a bus on the way to school and they came off somewhere and they went into the water. The boy always thought that God had a special purpose for him, that he was meant to be like that because it was something special. And in the end he ended up saving someone's life that he got out of the water, but in the end he died.*

Imagination, stimulated by literature and the popular media, enabled Bailey to explore the possibilities of life beyond the restrictions of his environment, and this exploration seemed to be shaping his values. From the story of the meerkats Bailey seemed to develop empathy with the suffering of others, and the value of courage in the face of suffering. More problematically, he seemed to accept that it was permissible to steal if you can get away with it (as often seems to happen in television drama). Ruth seems to have learned to empathize with real people through her identification with fictional characters. Through a movie she explored existential questions such as possible meanings in suffering, disability and rejection, and of God having a special purpose in people's lives. Through imaginative responses to the media Bailey and Ruth were reaching into themselves to explore new meanings. They exercised their *existential modes of being* to integrate outer experiences into their inner lives.

Not all of the children who were interviewed had a healthy spiritual life emanating from their imagination. Finn's imaginative world was full of violence, and disconnectedness. His favourite game which he played with his sister was *Lord of the Rings*, where he preferred to act as Gimli. "He's the guard with the battle-axe", he explained. He told long and graphic stories, with many gestures and a happy, excited voice, stories of himself in video games, shooting and killing. Finn's self portrait was a small figure of himself in the centre of the picture with a gun in each hand. He was surrounded by a sea of blood, in which was a dead "army man" (not a kid), and at the edge was a large bomb and a ring of cactuses. Finn presented

as an angry little boy. He said, “When I’m angry I start to get smaller. So people can beat me easier...and I’m angry when I’m small”. However, his aggression seemed to the researcher to be confined to his fantasy life. He loved war games because he “usually loves gory stuff”, but he said he would not shoot a real person “unless I’m in a war”. I did not observe any aggressive behaviour toward other children, and he declared that killing or hurting real people is wrong. He showed genuine concern for the plight of the refugees. He said, “They’re feeling sad because their son might get hurt, or their husband or something”. His three wishes were that there would be no such thing as war, that “everyone would never hurt anyone”, and no-one would say bad words. Finn had another escape route in his imaginary world. Several times he mentioned the possibility of passing through the Milky Way, into a parallel universe. It is possible that Finn was trying to work through his anger about being separated from his father (he talked a lot about his father), seeking to resolve it in his separate fantasy life.

In spite of his preoccupation with violent fantasies, Finn seemed to be drawing on the inner resources of his considerable intelligence and his imagination for spiritual strength. He seemed to be exploring violence as an interpersonal value and beginning to reject it. He seemed to be exploring the question “Am I a violent person?” And how to deal with his anger, when he said “When I’m angry I get smaller”. The hurt in his family life seemed to enable him to empathize with other families, such as the refugees, who had suffered loss in their families. Finn seemed to be working to achieve integration in his life through his imagination. Hence he seemed to be achieving spiritual growth.

## Symbols

### *Introduction*

Symbols, like imagination, play, and intuition, can be existential modes of expression of children’s spirituality (Champagne, 2003, Moriarty, 2008). According to Carl Jung, a symbol is an object “that possesses specific connotations in addition to its conventional and obvious meaning...It has a wider ‘unconscious’ aspect that is never precisely defined or fully explained” (Jung, 1964, p. 20, 21). For Jung, the

function of symbols in the personal sphere is to aid growth by providing personal meaning. This occurs in the process of the development of the Self when excess psychic energy is unconsciously transformed into symbolic expressions, some of which appear to be universal to humanity and are termed “archetypes” (Jung, 1960/2001). Examination of the symbols in one’s dreams, stories or art can not only lead to greater self-knowledge and development of personal unity, but can also give a person “knowledge of one’s commonality, the universality of experience, and the creation of meaning from this experience” (Salman, 1997, p. 57). Ricoeur valued symbols for their “surplus meaning”. In *The Symbolism of Evil* (1967) he described three dimensions present in any authentic symbol – cosmic, oneiric, and poetic. Cosmic symbols, which appeared in some of the children’s responses, have according to Ricoeur, developed because humans first read the sacred on some aspect of the world or the heavens, such as sun, water, vegetation. The analysis of symbols through language allows one to express the sacred in one’s own nature through deciphering the sacred nature of the world. (1967). Children’s symbolic representations can enhance their spiritual connectedness with themselves, the world and the transcendent (Relational Consciousness) through the universality of (archetypal) experience, and exploring their symbols can help them develop the meaning-making dimensions of their spirituality.

Three themes which appeared to function as recurring symbols in this research (Moriarty, 2008), were snake, which appeared in some children’s personal stories and dreams, and island and mountain, which mainly appeared in the children’s drawings on the theme of Journey, or quest. In this chapter examples of two of the symbols are summarized.

### *Snake*

In classical mythology the serpent is basically a life-force. It can be a symbol of mythic ancestors (as in the Australian Aborigines’ Rainbow Serpent), a healer and seer, a source of fertility, or a tempter to evil (Cirlot, 1971). For children in Australia, where there are few dangerous creatures, snakes seem to symbolize something both dangerous and fascinating. A number of the children in the rural

school mentioned snakes, which were part of their environment. The following is a summary of their “stories” about snakes, taken from their profiles and transcripts.

Bailey told a story of a television program where a meerkat “got bitten by a puff adder, and the venom did something to him, and the flesh was rotting away. And he survived!” Jacob discussed the snakes on his farm. He said he was afraid of “poisonous things like snakes”. The family kills them if they come around the house or yard, but not if they are in the paddocks. He said, “We always run over them, and then we stop and have a look at them. There was a big brown snake (recently)”. Jacob wants to live in the city “away from poisons”. Luke related a dream about snakes on two occasions. He said “I dreamed that we were killing snakes, and we thought there was a dead one. And then we carried it to the barbeque, and then I saw it open its eyes, and then it came after us”. Luke’s dream and Jacob’s story suggested that snakes were predominantly symbols of death for these children, but in Bailey’s and Luke’s stories, and others not recorded here, there were hints of the serpent being a symbol of life or rebirth, (where the snake came back to life) or fascination and temptation. For these children, the snake appeared to be a symbol which enabled them to explore the existential mysteries of life and death, of good and evil.

### *Mountain*

Different meanings of the symbolism of mountain stem from its shape and height (Cirlot, 1971). Mountains, rising abruptly to meet the Heavens, form a symbol of transcendence, or the home of the gods in classical mythology. The ascent of a holy mountain is often seen as a way to purity or self knowledge. In Hebrew and Christian tradition there are many examples of mountains providing access to God, such as Mt Sinai, or the Mount of Transfiguration. In the modern world mountain climbers are revered as heroes who face great challenges to reach a physical and psychological summit.

Several children drew pictures of mountains, which seemed to have the symbolic meaning of achievement and self-worth. Luke drew his self-portrait with Mt Everest as a background. Luke was a very athletic child, always striving for



greater physical achievement, such as in surfing or swimming. He said that his greatest achievement would be to climb Mt Everest. David, from the coastal school, drew mountains as his Journey picture. In David's picture there are tiny figures snow-boarding over large mountains. This gave the impression of human co-operation and achievement against the vastness of the natural world. David's concept of achievement through co-operation was also depicted in his self-portrait, where David was a small figure on the football field, working as part of the team strategy to achieve a goal.

Carmen, from the rural school, drew a picture of two figures in climbing gear struggling up the mountain together. This was her Journey picture. Carmen said the figures were people trying to break a world record for climbing "the highest mountain". She described how mountains were much harder to climb than hills because there were "rocks and stuff". She came from a country where she had first hand experience of high mountains. Carmen liked daring physical activities, such as carnival rides, and driving her sister's car around the farm, where she lived in a rented house with her mother. She wanted a motor bike, like her friends had. Carmen's symbolic mountain seemed to be more than a symbol of physical challenge. It may also symbolize a wish to climb out of the poverty trap in which her family was caught. Her mother was single, and earned a meager wage, trying to earn enough money to buy a home for herself and Carmen. Carmen had two older sisters, who have left home, and were still socially disadvantaged. One of Carmen's desires was to meet her father one day. Carmen wanted to be an artist when she grew up, not just work in shearing sheds like her mother. When she was drawing her picture of climbing the mountain the researcher commented "That's like life, a bit. Climbing to the top." Carmen smiled and said "Yes." Carmen's picture seemed to be not only symbolic of a desire to transcend her present social circumstances and achieve her life's ambitions, but also reflected her *sensory mode* and her *relational mode* in that the climbers, in their mountain gear, were engaged in physical struggle, but they were climbing together, helping each other get to the top. Unlike the children's stories of the snake, Carmen seemed to be aware of the symbolic nature of her drawing. It seemed to clarify her sense of identity as an

aspiring achiever. It may also have given her a sense of her commonality with other “climbers” who were struggling to achieve a more satisfying life. Her drawing may also have been a sign of her connectedness to the physical world of her former home, and the sense of the transcendence that mountains inspire.

#### Transition or lack of integration

For the children in the study, reaching within themselves did not always result in integration between their outer experience and their inner lives. For example, like the rest of humanity, some had difficulty in reconciling themselves to the existential mystery of death. This was illustrated in recorded conversations with Lizzy and Luke, who were twins in grade three at the rural school. In their first interview, between just the two of them and the interviewer, they discussed the beginning of life on earth, as in the following transcript.

*W: (interviewer) How do you think the world began?*

*Lizzy: It popped up (hand gesture upwards).*

*Luke: I wonder what it would be like to be dead.*

*W: ...have you got some ideas?*

*Luke: No*

*Lizzy: (chants, smiles and waves arms) Going to heaven, going to heaven.*

*W: Yes. What's heaven?*

*Lizzy: Heaven is a place where all the good people go, and hell is where all the bad people go.*

*W: I see. And what are they like?*

*Lizzy: Um, like the leader of hell might be demons and the leader of heaven might be a really good person, like Jesus, God.*

*W: (to Luke) What do you think about heaven and hell?*

*Luke: (head down) I don't know. About the same thing.*

In this extract Lizzy recounted the popularly held religious views about death and the afterlife. Luke, on the other hand, seemed to be preoccupied with the experience of death, and agreed with Lizzy reluctantly. In another part of the interview, Lizzy looked at Luke with disapproval when he did not agree with her

account of Adam and Eve as the first humans. Subsequent material suggested that neither Lizzy nor Luke were able to reconcile what they had been taught about death with the reality of their experience of the recent death of their grandfather. Each one seemed to demonstrate internal tension about the topic in different ways. First is an extract from Lizzy's profile.

*One of Lizzy's strategies for dealing with uncomfortable issues, like death, is by attempts at humour. In both of the group interviews, when death was mentioned, she started waving her arms up and down and chanting "heaven, heaven, heaven," "hell, hell, hell," and "grave, grave, grave". This in contrast with (her brother) Luke's quiet grief... (However) one of her wishes was to never die, and to live into the next century.*

Lizzy's response was very much in the *sensory mode*, with large physical gestures and attempts at humour. This was consistent with Hyde's (2006a) concept of trivializing, where he found instances of children avoiding the confronting of issues of meaning and value in life, and making light of such issues. In the group sessions Lizzy seemed to use this behaviour to distract the other children from a discussion which was probably painful for her. Lizzy did not mention her grandfather's death in any of her interviews.

Luke expressed his experience of death very differently, as indicated by this extract from his profile and transcript.

*Luke thinks about death, especially since his grandfather died a few months ago. When offered three wishes, his first was as follows.*

*Luke: I wish my pop was still alive.*

*W: Oh, How long ago did he die?*

*Luke: I think it was June.*

*W: This year!...Ah, and you miss him?*

*Luke nods.*

*W: Tell me what was special about your pop.*

*Luke: Most all the time I got to see him, and stayed at his house. Where my cousin lives.*

*W: Was he sick, or just died?*

*Luke: He was sick. We had to look after him. And he went to hospital. And then he came back and went again. And then he died (hands tightly pressed in armpits) on Sunday, when I was in (a city 200 kms away).*

*W: So, in the middle of the day?*

*Luke: Yes.*

*W: And what do you think has happened to him now?*

*Luke: I don't know (puts head down on the table).*

*Then followed a conversation about having pictures of his pop, and keeping him in his memory.*

Luke's experience of illness and death was very much in his *relational mode*. He shared with his family the anxiety of his grandfather's illness, and the details of his death. He experienced personal grief and loss, which he also expressed in the interview by body language, such as putting his head on the table, or tightly folding his arms, thus demonstrating his *sensitive mode*. His memories and photographs made him still feel close to his grandfather. However in his *existential mode* Luke placed himself at the intersection of a definite time and place. As he remembered his grandfather's death the time and the place where he heard of his death were significant for Luke. More significantly, he seemed to be trying to cope with the finality and the ineffability of death without the benefit of a religious faith. The earlier interviews suggested that he rejected what he had been taught in CRE (such as the existence of Adam and Eve) and embraced a spirituality which was focused on experience of the natural world, such as his profound experiences while surfing, and his joy in participating in sport. His Journey drawing was of himself against the backdrop of Mt Everest, which he would like to climb one day. This is consistent with Fisher's (2006) findings, that for young people, there is dissonance between what they are taught in school and what they believe and experience, particularly regarding the "God-factor". While Luke demonstrated more spiritual sensitivity than most of the children interviewed, his *nature mysticism* (Wilber, 2001) had not yet provided him with a rationale that could account for death. However, this dissonance, as experienced by Luke and Lizzy, could be viewed positively, as a possible transition to a higher stage of

development of spiritual consciousness; as Wilber expressed it, from an “unconscious Hell to a conscious Hell”, which may pave the way for transcending to a “conscious Heaven” (2001, pp. 48,49).

### Conclusion

This chapter has described how the children in the study expressed their spirituality by “reaching within themselves” in a number of ways. The children utilized their own gifts and their spiritual sensitivities, and also resources available in their natural and social environments, to deal with personal issues and to become more integrated persons. Harry seemed to use self discipline and simple meditation, resources found in his community’s religious tradition, to deal with his anxieties. Grace appeared to utilize the assets of her relationships and her personal attitude to face her health problems with courage. These two children seemed to look within themselves to find spiritual meaning and hope. They also drew on resources in their social environment, such as their families’ emotional support and religious faith. Other children exercised their personal gifts, such as sporting ability, imagination, or the ability to perceive their world through symbols, to reach greater spiritual awareness. These children seemed to be exploring their “being-in-the-world” as they integrated their imaginative experiences through books or television etc, and other people’s perceptions of them, into a robust sense of their self-worth. They were also able to integrate these experiences to develop moral values and empathy with other people and the environment. Some other children seemed to be experiencing cognitive and emotional dissonance between their inner and outer worlds, particularly in dealing with situations of loss in their lives. For example, Lizzy, and Luke, were struggling with the tragedy of death, and Finn, seemed to be trying to reconcile his violent fantasies and his moral values, in an effort to deal with the break-up of his family. Even these children appeared to look within themselves to meet these challenges and to try to achieve inner harmony.

The next chapter “Charting the path” addresses the possible impact of the children’s social influences on their spiritual development.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### CHARTING THE PATH

#### Discussion - Social context of children's spirituality

The previous two chapters examined the children's individual spiritual responses to the world around them by looking outward as "Reaching beyond themselves", and looking inward for their spiritual resources as "Reaching within themselves". This present chapter uses the metaphor of a map to examine the social landscape in which the children were growing up, and how they have negotiated their individual spiritual paths through that landscape. It does this by reviewing the children's values and aspirations, and how they develop within a social context.

"Charting the path" refers to the way in which the children incorporated the influences in the society in which they lived, and how they envisioned their lives. This concept is developed from the literature of the concept of "worldview" in Erricker et al. (1997), who described children's lives as narratives "constructed out of individual experience" (p. 9), which were used by them to construct "an evolving worldview" (p. 10), or "mental landscape, made up of many stories which give it meaning" (p. 12). Coles used a similar metaphor of "young pilgrims marching through life" (Coles, 1990, p. 320). This mental landscape is constructed, not only from the children's subjective individual experience, but also from the external landscape of their social environment. As Scott (2005) wrote "The spiritual will occur in a context of family and community influences, nested in the full range of ecosystems... Any claims for the spiritual must be grounded in the full range of a child's experience and capacity, including their social systems and their interactions" (p. 195). Wilber's (2001) argued for an integral model of spirituality incorporating four quadrants, representing an upper left-hand path of individual, subjective consciousness; an upper right-hand path of individual objective observation of spirituality, as in neurophysiology; a lower left-hand path of subjective, collective phenomena as in the study of culture; and a right-hand lower path of objective study of systems theories involving spirituality (p. 9). This chapter attempts to broaden the horizon to include the collective subjective, and some

consideration of systems theory, in addition to individual subjective spirituality, in some discussion of the children's cultural milieu. This chapter takes in the spiritual dimension of "roadmap", which is one of the researcher's original "spiritual dimensions", discussed in Chapter Three as in Figure 1. *A Conceptualization of the Dimensions of Spirituality*. There the possible characteristics of Roadmap included "faith, moral responsibility, hope, joy". The findings of this research suggest that these characteristics may arise out of an interaction between the children's inner resources, as discussed in the previous chapter, and the contribution made by the children's community to their spiritual development.

This researcher's interest in the cultural influences in children's environment which shaped their landscape, and the values they acquired which helped chart a path of personal meaning in their lives, was stimulated by the analysis of the findings. In the findings it appeared that the values which the children expressed, showed distinct characteristics in each of the school communities in which the research was conducted. That is, the values of the coastal, provincial, rural and suburban school children showed some distinctive features as well as ones they held in common. Although the research material on the communities represented by these schools was incidental and limited, the researcher made use of this material. The primary material for this section was mostly obtained from the children's individual third interviews, which elicited information about their values and aspirations, and is situated in the hermeneutic phenomenological profiles and the transcripts.

### Children's Values

Values Education has become an integral part of public, Catholic and independent school education in Australia, and other countries such as the United Kingdom in the early twenty first century. The National Values Forum Report: "National framework for values in Australian schools" (2005) commissioned by the Australian Government is one such document which addresses this issue. In the English context, Eade quoted Halstead's (1996) definition of values as:

*principles, fundamental convictions, ideals, standards or life stances which act as general guides to behaviour or as points of reference in decision making or the evaluation of beliefs or action and which are closely connected to personal integrity and personal identity. (Eaude, 2008, p 59)*

Eaude continued, “Values are formative and descriptive, aspirational and manifested in conduct. Values both reflect and structure beliefs, as well guiding and being exemplified in actions...” (p.59). “Guiding and structuring beliefs” does not necessarily refer to specifically religious beliefs, but any values affecting spirituality. Value-sensing was one of the key “categories of spiritual sensitivities” investigated by Hay and Nye (2006). Attributes of value sensing which these authors investigated were the emotional qualities of “delight and despair”, the comforting experience of “ultimate goodness” first experienced as the child learning to trust its mother, and the cognitive and emotional process of awakening to “meaning” through life experience (Hay & Nye, 2006, pp. 74-77). Hyde (2008) further explored children’s values and aspirations as expressions of their spirituality, particularly in his concept of *spiritual questing*.

During the interviews information about the children’s values and aspirations was mainly derived from questions about good and bad things people do, whether they have helped anybody or anybody helped them, and from their Journey drawings. The following are extracts from the transcripts of children at the provincial school.

*(Caleb was examining the picture of the refugees. He was asked what could be done to help them.)*

*Caleb: Maybe (someone) could stop the war and end it for ever. I don’t like (wars) because my grandpas, they both died in World War II. Maybe if I was a boy I could build a big war-proof house for them (the refugees). Or maybe I could make a war-proof shield for all of them...*

*W (Interviewer): Have you ever helped anybody?*

*Caleb: Well, in the playground, if somebody fell over and hurt themselves, when they were running away from someone, and they fell over a log, I would help them up and ask if they were OK, and tell the teacher.*



*W: Have you helped anyone?*

*Caleb: I have a play station game called The Fantastic Four...and I helped (my sister) Alice, and showed her how to do it.*

*W: Has anybody helped you?*

*Caleb: When I was playing backyard cricket with Dad and Alice, Dad told me how to bat properly, because I was usually holding the bat the wrong way.*

*W: What good things do other people do?*

*Caleb: People in hospitals help people get better and help them have babies. The police officers, they can stop bad people, like if they robbed a convenience store, or kept a person hostage. And the fire fighters, they can help put out fires, and help cats down from trees.*

*W: What are some good things kids do?*

*Caleb: Do the dishes, clean up when they are not even asked to. Some kids help other kids.*

*W: What are some bad things that kids do?*

*Caleb: Bully, hurt other people, tell lies, be told to do something and they don't do it.*

Caleb was quite an articulate child, and enumerated the range of values that were mentioned by other children. That is, he mentioned caring for other children, helping at home, and being aware of the needs of the wider community. Caleb's values seemed to arise out of his personal experience, as in his care for others who were hurt at school. The values that he had learned at home seemed to be about mutual help and about obedience. His values extended to the world beyond his immediate experience. They appeared to be informed by what he has learned at school and through the media— about hospitals and fire-fighters and criminal activities, and his family's experience of war. In other parts of the interviews he expressed the need to care for animals and the environment. Most of Caleb's values expressed his *relational mode of being*, in his sense of the importance of mutual care and respect for his family, friends and the environment. He also demonstrated care

for the refugees, in relating their experience to those of his grandfather who died in war, and respect for people like fire-fighters who serve the community.

Grace described the mutual help she and her friend Peta gave each other. Grace demonstrated a high degree of empathy with her friend, understanding her friend's emotional as well as physical needs, that is, Grace's values were expressed in the *relational mode*.

*Grace: When Peta, when I fell over and I got this big, big scratch, and it was bleeding, she took me to the sick bay.... When Peta's upset I help her – because I say “What's wrong?” and “Has anyone hurt your feelings?” And she talks to me, and I say to that person, “You should be sorry, and you shouldn't do that again.”*

The children at the rural school also expressed most of their values in the *relational mode*. The following is a summary taken from Lizzy's transcript.

*W: Who have you helped?*

*Lizzy: My little cousin. ...She was crying because we wouldn't give her a lolly...She didn't have money so she couldn't buy any...So I bought a bag for her, ones that she liked.*

*W: And can you think of a time when somebody helped you?*

*Lizzy: When I sprained my ankle at school. I couldn't get up. So my buddy (older student) helped me get up.*

*W: What does your family do to help you?*

*Lizzy: They can get things for you. They keep you warm. They do plenty of things.*

*W: What do you know about the good and bad things that people do?*

*Lizzy: The bad things are they steal, they rob banks, escape from jail.*

*W: You've been watching a lot of TV, have you?*

*Lizzy: Criminal Minds...Watching stuff. And the good things are they support you...If you are in a race they would cheer for you...(at school) They can play with you.*

*W: What about the environment?...*

*Lizzy: Give them (the animals) a better place. Yes, because there's water restrictions. And they should save the elephants, because there's not many Asian elephants left.*

Mitchell expressed values of his rural community from a male perspective.

*W: Tell me about a time when you've helped somebody.*

*Mitchell: (thinks)) My sister, she got her bike caught in another bike chain...I untied the chain off her bike, and got it out...*

*W: What about your family, what do they do to help you?*

*Mitchell: Help on the farm- loading...(My Mum) drives me to the bus (to school). She drives us to (town) for tea sometimes...*

*W: Tell me some good things people do, any people.*

*Mitchell: They help people when they're down (having a bad time).*

*W: What about at school?*

*Mitchell: Like help you with your maths questions.*

*W: What about bad things?*

*Mitchell: No rain.*

Lizzy recounted examples of mutual help and concern from her own life-story. This was typical of the rural community. The children gave examples of caring for family members, especially younger siblings or relatives. They were aware of the physical support their family gave them, in providing food and shelter, siblings to play with, and a mother to drive them to the school bus. Mitchell was also aware of the emotional support that community members gave each other “when they were down”. This mutual caring was also evident at the school. Lizzy and Mitchell mentioned peer support for physical and academic needs, and on the sports field. Some children were concerned with environmental issues, like care for endangered species, or providing feed for farm animals during the drought. J. Smith (2004) outlined a number of features of Australian rural culture which were exhibited in these children's responses. One of these ideals was “mateship” which had roots in the harsh environment of early rural settlement, and lingers today in male social dominance, rugged self-reliance, and the need to support each other in time of need. Rural females express support for their community by volunteering.

Negative features which Smith (2004) mentioned were rural decline in population and income, and sometimes, racism. These conditions were present in the rural school community and affected their values. For the children at the rural school, bad deeds mainly consisted of breaking school or family rules. Lizzy was conscious that bad deeds in the wider world were what they saw on television. The effect of television, and computer games, was indicated in the enumeration of community “bad deeds” by other children. Carmen mentioned robbing banks, hurting people in the street, and breaking windows. The influence of the media was similar in all the schools visited. Kelly, at the provincial school, mentioned killing, stealing and raping. Finn, at the suburban school, was preoccupied with violent computer games and stories.

Responses of the children at the suburban school showed more diversity in their conception of values, just as their family backgrounds were more diverse and their community was less definable. The following two extracts were at the extremes of the range, for most of these children shared similar values of concern for other people. A general observation was that the children at the suburban school tended to offer more stereotypical examples than at the other schools, like “helping old ladies over the road.” They also gave more examples of helping at home than at school, like cooking and washing up. Spencer mentioned that his neighbour had given the family a lot of practical assistance, like lending them his lawnmower. This might suggest that the school had comparatively less influence on values than the home for these children, when compared to the children from the other schools.

This extract from Tom’s profile gives an indication of the complexity of his values.

*Tom’s values and aspirations are interesting. He has some clear moral values. He believes that it is good to give blood or kidneys, and that doctors do good work keeping people alive. He is grateful when someone helps him. But he is struggling with moral ambiguity. He can see good and bad features of graffiti. Graffiti is destructive of private property, but can also be worthwhile art and self expression. He told me about some friends in a country town, “and whenever they do wrong (their parents) would get a whip*

*out!" I asked him, "Would you do that if you were a Dad?" He replied "No, I wouldn't do anything. I'd just put them in the room and talk to them". On the other hand, he sometimes sees violence as a solution. He would help the refugees by stopping the war. "I could get a rocket launcher and go pt, pt, 'Stop this war right now!' And if they don't stop I'd shoot them all." He mentioned other violent fantasies ...*

*His initial response at times was quite materialistic, but it was followed by a different quality of response. For example, when asked how the refugees would be feeling if their house had been burnt down in the fighting, he replied "They paid all that money, and then they lost all of it", but he went on "and they are feeling sad because to walk all that way with that much stuff would be very hard". That is, materialism was followed by real empathy. There was a similar pattern in his "three wishes". The first wish was that "I would be rich, and whenever I bought something my money would always stay the same". The second wish was "I wish all my friends could fly". This was so they could all have fun flying to school. The third wish was "I wish my family had a mansion for a house". As mentioned previously, his reason for wanting a mansion was "because it would be cool if we had a verandah and we lived right next to the sea. And we could look at the waves".*

The following extract is from Hahn's profile. There were difficulties encountered in interviewing Hahn, which no doubt affected the material collected. She did not relate readily to the interviewer, or to the other children, and she had some difficulties with English.

*Hahn...seemed to value animals rather than people. "They don't talk," she said. She showed little visual perception when she viewed the refugee picture, but expressed sympathy for them as "sad" and in need of a warm drink and food, when the picture was explained to her. She could not recollect helping a person herself, but was aware of others helping her in practical ways. For example, her brother used to help her with her homework, and her father helped her mix the food for the dog and the rabbits. She could not think of*

*good deeds in the abstract. Bad deeds included “somebody could kidnap you. They might take you away from your parents. And when you go to school people might harm you.” This indicated a preoccupation with her personal safety, probably against a background of living in different cultures. Her wishes were to have more pets and more teddy bears. When it was suggested that she might like to make a wish for somebody else, she thought for a while then wished that her sister could have a room of her own. Even this wish seemed to be to indirectly benefit her.*

Tom’s expressed values seemed to demonstrate a moral maturity in that he struggled with the ambiguity which is encountered in many adult moral choices, and Tom was trying to deal with hypothetical situations, not just personal experience. He was also aware of wider communal values, such as the virtue of organ donations. He also seemed to experience a conflict between materialism and altruism. His immediate materialist response to the refugees losing their house, their valuable property, was followed by empathy with their emotional plight. His three wishes also showed this vacillation between materialism and altruism. In the group interviews Tom did not demonstrate good rapport with the other children, preferring to pass on information rather than interacting with them. On the other hand he showed sensitivity to the beauty of his sea-side environment. Tom’s valuing the beauty of the natural world seemed to express the *sensitive mode*, and in struggling with moral questions he was functioning in his *existential mode*, rather than the *relational mode*. Hahn also seemed to have difficulty in experiencing values in the *relational mode*, apart from her love of animals. Given the difficulties encountered in interviewing this child, it still seems that Hahn’s values seemed to be largely confined to self-regard. However, consideration needs to be given to possible traumas that this child, or her parents may have experienced before coming to Australia, which may have generated her sense of insecurity. Pfefferbaum’s (1997) review of research into Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) supports this view. Some of the features of PTSD may be relevant to children of refugees such as Hahn are as follows:

- PTSD may become a lifetime disorder

- The response of younger children may be “immobilize or ‘freeze’ and later to dissociate or ‘surrender’
- Lifetime diagnoses may include “depression, anxiety”
- Children are susceptible to ‘parental distress’
- Trauma may “have the potential to disrupt normal development and may influence the child’s adaptation and the subsequent development of cognition and attention, social skills, personality style, self-concept and self-esteem, and impulse control” (Pfefferbaum, 1997).

### Individual development and Dynamic Systems Theory

Investigation of the values of individual children in the study highlighted individual differences in their modes of spiritual expression, and also differences in developmental maturity. The descriptions given above of Hahn’s rather simple egocentricity and Tom’s struggle with moral ambiguity are examples of such individual differences. There are limits to the capacity of Champagne’s spiritual modes of being to explain developmental differences. However Cupit’s (2007) dynamic systems theory (DST) provides a credible and innovative approach to childhood developmental issues, and their impact on spirituality. This theory presents possibilities for describing the individual differences exhibited by children in this study. Cupit’s dynamic systems theory has three parameters – systems parameters, agency and ‘attractors’. Systems parameters are similar to ‘stimuli’, and consist of the influences on child development, such as genetic make-up, and the range of environmental conditions and events in the child’s life. These conditions, according to DST constrain but do not control the trajectory of each child’s development. One of the systems parameters which influence spiritual development, Cupit referred to as “two metaphysical principles”, one expressive of spiritual “good”, and the other expressive of “evil, abuse, disorder”(depending on one’s principles or powers). The integrating, self-organizing nature of spirituality means that their development will proceed in ways which maintains the core of their identity (2007, p. 111). Differences arise because of the effect of ‘agency’, that is, the child’s own choice to accept some influences and resist others. The twins Lizzy

and Luke, from the rural school, demonstrated these parameters. While Lizzy's development as the clever, witty child, and Luke's development as the sensitive sports person could be ascribed to genetic and environmental factors, Lizzy's acceptance of conventional religious beliefs and Luke's rejection of them in favour of a nature based spirituality appeared to be the result of choice, or agency.

'Attractors', in DST are forces within and around children which "push the child toward more developed behaviour" (Cubit, 2007, p. 109), such as from crawling to walking. During a period of 'phase transition' "the child's behaviour becomes erratic. Then it settles down around a qualitatively different attractor" (p. 109). Cupit described the following phase transitions which are relevant to the spiritual development of children in this study.

- a) The emergence of language, with the ability to symbolize, organize and utilize information, which allows the symbolic representation of 'self' and others, of good and bad, true and false.
- b) The ability to critically evaluate information for its truth and behaviour for its rightness, to judge and disagree with the ideas and behaviour of significant adults.
- c) The emergence of personal autonomy (not social autonomy), reflecting the ability to formulate and maintain one's own position on important matters. (Cupit, 2007, p. 114)

Some children's values seemed to indicate a stable developmental phase. For example, for Grace, mutual help was a strong and unquestioned value, and bullying and war were unequivocally bad. Hahn seemed to see moral values in terms of danger and safety. These children seemed to be operating in the symbolic phase described above. Other children in the study seemed to be operating in a transition phase towards more critical judgments. Lucy challenged her spiritual leader's belief in ghosts. Finn, as noted in the previous chapter, struggled to discriminate between different contexts of violence. While he enjoyed killing in computer games, he believed that it is wrong to kill real people, unless you were "an army man". Tom showed the inconsistency of a phase transition in his vacillation between materialism and altruism, as expressed in his response to the refugees. He also exhibited more



maturity in his discrimination between different contexts for graffiti, and his questioning of the morality of corporal punishment in a situation other than his own.

This section was included to demonstrate that children have a variety of spiritual trajectories which are not accounted for by only one model. Champagne's *modes of being* are useful for demonstrating individual differences in the varied strengths of the sensitive, relational and existential modes. Dynamic Systems Theory, with its spiritual lens, is useful as an alternative paradigm, which describes the varied influences of *systems parameters* (the child's history), *agency* (the child's choices), and *attractors* (the phase developments during a child's life). This theory gives an added dimension to this chapter's analysis, another of Wilbur's four quadrants (objective collective phenomena), as described in an earlier section (Wilber 2001).

## Children's Aspirations

### *Introduction*

The children's three wishes partly reflected their moral views, as in wishing for no lies or violent words, but more broadly their aspirations were for themselves, their families and the world. Examined school by school, these aspirations not only indicated the hopes and fears of individual children, but also their communities, and certain contemporary world issues. This material was extracted from the children's profiles and transcripts, and interpreted by the researcher.

### *Regional differences*

At the provincial school the main aspirations were for health, wealth, the environment, and a happy community. Health issues seemed to dominate the concerns of some. Alex wished that his mother would recover from her cancer (she has since died), Grace wished to be free from her asthma and eczema, Kelly wanted to be "born again" without bad skin, and Mary wanted "everyone to not get sick". Allied with this concern was a preoccupation with death. Kelly's first wish was to have Pete, her dead step-father, back again, and Ruth wanted "all dead people to

come alive again”. Other children’s wishes were material. This was in the context of a school community where poverty was widespread. Billy wished to have a dog and to own their own house and have lots of computer games. Mary wanted everyone to “not run out of money”. Jordan was concerned with acquiring consumer goods. An exciting moment for him was when his Auntie gave him a particular *Gameboy* (a type of computer game) he had dreamed about for Christmas. Other children had wider concerns for the wellbeing of the environment and humanity. Alex’s wishes were that no-one would steal and they would all be rich, and that no-one would hurt or annoy his friends, and they would be happy. Ruth wished that “all animals could live in peace”. Caleb wished to help other people, for peace in the world, and for people to be nice to each other.

The children at the rural school had somewhat different concerns and aspirations. Some expressed personal aspirations for their adult lives. Olivia wanted to be an author, Kane a “house designer”, Lizzy wanted to own a pet shop, and Luke wanted to climb Mt Everest. Some had aspirations to be wealthy. Bianca (whose family seemed to be affluent), and Carmen (whose family was not) both wanted to be rich. Bianca could not specify the advantages of being rich, but Carmen wanted her mother to not have to work so hard that she was tired and “boring”, and to own their own house. Most of them had environmental concerns, especially wishing for more rain, and Kane expressed concern about pollution of the earth. Olivia wished for “no wars”. This was in the context of the Iraq War being constantly in the news at that time. These children live in an isolated rural community. Their aspirations reflected both local environmental issues, and thoughts about what they would do when they grew up and left the community.

The children in the suburban school were part of a diverse community, made up of some rather affluent traditional Australian families and a number of children of other origins, mainly Asian. Some of the latter families had been in Australia for some time and were reasonably established, and others who had recently arrived and were struggling financially. A sense of all being Australian appeared to unite the school community. (This sense of all being Australian made a deep impression on the researcher when she attended the school assembly, and witnessed the passion

and beauty of their singing of the Australian national anthem.) The wishes and aspirations of the children who were interviewed were more diverse than at the other schools. Material aspirations were diverse in their expression and rather specific. Spencer wanted a new house and a computer with internet access, as he had quite recently arrived in Australia and his parents did not have employment yet. Harry wanted another computer so he did not have to share with his sister. Hahn, who already had a large number of animals at home, wanted more pets, and more teddy bears than her sister. Tom wanted to be rich. His family already had a holiday house, but he wanted “a mansion” beside the sea. He went on to describe the beauty of watching the sun go down over the sea. This suggested that there was a relational consciousness, where children may relate to the natural world as the primary context of their spiritual consciousness (Hay & Nye, 2006, p, 116).

Conflict was addressed in some of these children’s aspirations, especially those who came from other countries, or had experienced family upheavals. Lucy lived in a blended family. She wished that “everyone would get along and there be no fighting”. Finn, whose parents were divorced, expressed this more broadly. He wanted “no such thing as war. That no-one ever hurt anyone, and no-one would say bad words”. Spencer and Amanthi had come from a country where there was communal violence, and they wished for “no fighting”. Harry’s wishes were for the world at large, that “poor people wouldn’t be left alone, and someone would come to cure their sicknesses”. He also wanted to stop pollution, especially the pollution which happens in war zones. Pham’s wishes were more personal. She wished to become a doctor when she grew up. Her specific wishes were that her brother would not be sick, that her dog would not wake her in the morning, and for a car with no roof. Other children had fantasy wishes too. Two of them wished to be able to fly, with wings. But Spencer wanted to be a pilot and fly jets. Lucy was the only one who wished that no-one would die.

The aspirations of these children seemed to fit their individual stories, both their personal aspirations and their concerns for the wider world. Many of the children at the provincial school had experienced sickness, death and poverty in their personal lives. This was reflected in their wishes for good health and material

security. Some of them were keen to acquire specific consumer goods. Their wishes went beyond themselves to include concern for the welfare of animals, a safe society and the health of the environment. The aspirations of the children in the rural school were focused on their need to leave their secure community when they reached adulthood and pursue a career elsewhere. The children at the other schools did not seem to have thought much about their adult lives, and they were absorbed with immediate experience.

### *Material aspirations*

Material aspirations were expressed by many of the children, in a variety of ways. The threatened financial security of the rural children may also have been reflected in the desire to be “wealthy” as expressed by some of them. For Bianca, who went on expensive holidays, wealth seemed to express status, as she was unable to qualify why she wanted to be wealthy. For other children, like Carmen, Bailey and Mitchell, material aspirations seemed to be related to security, to have a home of one’s own or for the family to be able to afford to feed their stock during the drought. It also impinged on their identity in relation to their peers, such as Carmen wanting a motor bike like the others, or not having to share the one family computer with all their siblings. At the suburban school materialism as an issue of identity was observed in some of the children. Hahn, who seemed to have difficulty in relating to other children, found her identity among her classmates as the one with lots of pets. She also expressed the wish to have more toys than her sister, perhaps as an expression of her identity within her family. Tom, like Bianca, was already well off, but seemed to conceive of wealth as a symbol of social status, or identity. These findings were consistent with Hyde’s (2008, p. 142) observation that “this could be interpreted as children seeking identity and a sense of belonging through their material possessions”. For other children, material aspirations were concerned with the struggles of daily living, such as needing a computer with internet access in a middle class environment.

### *Family influences*

Family stories seemed to be reflected in the children at the suburban school expressing concerns about the wider world. Their concerns about conflict sometimes seemed to be a reflection of their family lives, as in the case of Lucy and Finn, and for some, like Spencer and Harry, this concern extended to the conflicts in war zones around the world. For Spencer this arose out of personal experience of conflict, and for Harry it seemed to have arisen from his grandfather's stories, such as having to wear a gas mask during the war in Vietnam. These children also felt free to exercise flights of fantasy with their "wishes". Lucy's wish to fly may have been just playfulness, or perhaps had some symbolic meaning of wanting to reach spiritual heights.

In a rapidly changing world, the home is still the primary instrument of socialization for children, along with the local community and the media (Edgar & Edgar, 2008). The children were most ready to identify themselves and their interests with their families. By inference it could be seen that their families influenced their values and aspirations. Their attitude to possessions seemed to depend on the family's financial circumstances, and social status. Children of poor families seemed to be more concerned about the necessities of life, and also showed more concern for disadvantaged people in other places. Some children of wealthier families, such as Tom, seemed to see wealth as an instrument of social status and identity. This did not seem to enhance their *relational mode of being*, in that they did not seem to relate readily to the circumstances and needs of the other children.

Family structure was also a factor in their spiritual development. Many of the children came from intact and apparently supportive nuclear families. For Mary, strong family relationships were a source of gratitude, and enabled her to see herself as part of God's family. For some of the rural families, like Luke's, the father was often absent in employment outside the family farm. This was felt as a sense of loss. For Luke, and for many of the children, relationships with grandparents, and other family members provided security, and a variety of relational models. Grandmothers made cakes for them, and uncles took them fishing. For other family

configurations the landscape was sometimes a little bleak. Kelly and Carmen had single mothers who experienced serial relationships. This encouraged Kelly to seek a sustaining relationship outside the family, with God, and her stepfather “in heaven”. Finn tried to cope with his fractured family through fantasy, and he was sensitive to the pain of the refugees in their loss. In different ways the children’s families affected their *sensitive* and *relational modes of being*. Generally speaking, the children who had experienced hardship, sickness or loss were more sensitive to others, as in their reaction to the picture of the refugees, than the children whose circumstances were more comfortable. In a more general way, experiencing home as a happy or a sad place seemed to affect their *existential mode of being* in the world. For example, Mary had a happy home for which she expressed gratitude, and sympathy for children who did not have “a mother and a father”. Finn felt the loss of his father through divorce very keenly, and saw the imaginary world and the actual world as violent places.

#### *Aspirations as “spiritual questing”*

These children’s aspirations were examples of “spiritual questing” (Hyde, 2008). The main themes of their aspirations were security, wider horizons and a clearer sense of identity. Aspirations for security can mean personal security (as in Hahn’s case), or good health and security from poverty (as expressed by children at the provincial and rural schools). Questing for identity as Australians was expressed by children at the suburban school, and some children at the rural and suburban schools saw material success as important to their sense of identity. A sense of identity is an important aspect of spirituality, especially in regard to the relationship with the Self. This can be expressed as a relational mode of being. Tacey (2003) maintained that the Self only comes to know itself through the Other. He also maintained that “the self can be a legitimate doorway into the sacred” (p. 74). Identity can also be explored in the existential mode through seminal questions such as “Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going?” Coles (1990) asked many of the children who took part in his research questions like these in order to explore their sense of identity. He saw them as young pilgrims on a journey. In their

questing for meaning as family members, as Australians, or as investigators of the mysteries of life, death and suffering, these children were trying to discover their place in a confusing and complex world.

Hyde based his concept of spiritual questing on Horell's (2003) exploration of questing post-modernity. Horell saw the main features of post-modern questing as moving away from a meta-narrative such as organizational Christianity, to seeking spiritual grounding in the ambiguity and multiplicity of the influences of the twenty first century. In a post-modern view, social identity is constructed out of a multitude of roles and influences to produce meaning and value. This scenario can provide an opportunity for "imaginative creativity and the pragmatic construction of new patterns and self-identity" (p. 91). For post-modern questers "the current milieu provides opportunities for a freedom to envision more life-giving and life-enhancing ways of being" (Hyde, 2008, p.125). The children who took part in this research demonstrated spiritual questing in their concern for others and the world, and their desire to be part of a hopeful future. During the interviews some of them, such as Mary and Kelly, expressed faith in God and an afterlife. A number of the children expressed their sense of the transcendent, not overtly as in the Hyde study, but through symbols. The aspirational symbol of mountain was expressed in drawing and conversation by Luke, Carmen and David. Lucy, Tom and Spencer all used the symbol of flying, which appeared to have transcendental dimensions for them.

#### A critical evaluation

The present chapter has presented an opportunity to evaluate the children's spirituality a little more critically, in line with a Constructionist epistemology which allows for an evaluation of the society from which this research was taken (Crotty, 1998). The values and aspirations of the children, and by inference, the communities in which they lived, can be an indication of their spiritual health. Crawford and Rossiter (2006), writing about teenagers, stated that "judging what is a healthy and desirable spirituality always takes place within a specific context where there are presumed values and beliefs, whether they are religious or not" (p.

198-199). Their criteria for evaluation include transcendent experience, frame of reference within a community, a sense of social justice, and being able to reflect on one's life and be open to challenges. All these criteria for healthy values were demonstrated by various children. For example Tom and Kelly had a sense of the transcendent in their individual ways. Most of the children valued relationships with other people and the environment, and social justice. Mary and Kelly, for example, were able to reflect on and evaluate their lives. Some, like Alex and Jordan, were challenged by the mysteries of life. The challenge for religious education is to support the healthy values and to challenge less healthy ones, such as materialism and supporting violence. Examining values and aspirations within the context of religious education in schools can add a moral and ethical dimension to phenomenological research into spirituality. Wilber (2001), in searching balanced account of spirituality, gives four definitions:

- a) spirituality involved peak experiences or altered states, which can occur in any stage and any age
- b) spirituality involves the highest levels in any of the lines
- c) spirituality is a separate developmental line itself
- d) spirituality is an attitude (such as openness, trust, or love) that the self may or may not have at any stage" (p. 271).

The last of these definitions shows where values and aspirations are applicable to spirituality, which may be enhanced in an educational setting.

This critical evaluation of spirituality can be referred to Champagne's (2003) *modes of being*. Religious education can have regard to encouraging a balance between the three modes of being in their lives, by helping to enhance other modes of being in individual children. For example, Tom, who showed strength in his sensitive and existential modes of being, could be encouraged to develop his relationships with others. Luke had strong relationships with the ocean and with his family, but he could be assisted to address his existential pain about the death of his grandfather. A number of children in the study, such as Bianca or Carmen, could be encouraged to develop their sense of self-worth, in relationship with themselves and with others, so that their sense of identity is less dependent on materialism (Hyde,



2008). Finally, by enhancing children's being-in-the-world, they may be brought closer to knowing and relating to God (Champagne 2003, p. 52).

### Summary - A Spiritual Path

This chapter revealed that overt spirituality did not seem to loom large in the lives of the children who participated in this research, but in taking Champagne's *modes of being* into account "every situation in daily life can be an occasion for a sensitive, relational and existential perception and response of the child. The modes of being attempt to describe the spiritual dimension of the *being-in-the-world* of the child." (Champagne, 2003, p. 45). This chapter reviewed the influences of the home, school, and wider community on the children's "being-in-the-world" (Heidegger, 1962). It also referred to issues of individual differences and developmental phases, through the Dynamic Systems Theory (DST) model, as outlined by Cupit (2007), and post-modern spiritual questing, as described by Horell (2003) and Hyde (2008). The values and aspirations of the children in the study also may be identified as one of their spiritual dimensions ("roadmap"), along with consciousness, relationality, and identity, as described in Chapter Three of this thesis.

In this chapter the researcher has attempted to demonstrate the way in which wider conditions of the children's social and physical environments helped to shape their spirituality, in particular, their values and aspirations. There were differences in the values of the children in each school community. The children at the rural school primarily valued community solidarity and mutual help during a time of drought. The children at the provincial school valued physical and emotional support for their peers who faced sickness and financial hardship. At the suburban school, which was a more diverse community, the children emphasized their individual family's values. However, the values they all held in common were care for other people – their family members, their friends, and people in others parts of the world – and care for the environment. They were also concerned about observing rules of good behaviour, in themselves and people in the community. The sources of influence in developing these values appeared to be the family, the school, and the media. The children's aspirations, such as desire for material wealth

and status, concern for peace and harmony in the home and the world, and a healthy environment, also reflected their local community and their individual family circumstances. Religious Education in schools can provide an opportunity for children to reflect on their values and aspirations.

The following chapter examines the spiritual dimension of Identity, ways of identifying characteristics of a child's identity, and possible mechanisms for identity formation through the child's reflection on his or her life story.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### FOOTPRINTS

#### Introduction

*Footprints* is the working title for the spiritual dimension of Identity, as outlined in Chapter Three. The previous chapter outlined the relationship between the central dimension of Worldview, and the “outlying” spiritual dimensions of Roadmap and Identity, citing Erricker et al. (1997). These authors described children’s lives as narratives “constructed out of individual experience” (p. 9), which were used by them to construct “an evolving worldview” (p. 10), or “mental landscape, made up of many stories which give it meaning” (p. 12). Just as the previous chapter sought to demonstrate the ways in which social influences helped children construct a meaningful worldview, this chapter seeks to demonstrate something of the mechanisms by which the children in the study used the narratives of their lives to construct a meaningful identity. Continuing the metaphor of journey from the previous chapter, the individual identity of each child is designated as his or her “*footprint*”. The spiritual *footprints*, from the perspective of the researcher, were arrived at as the culmination of writing the hermeneutic phenomenological texts, or profiles, of each child interviewed in this study. At the end of each profile the researcher asked the question “What is the distinctive spiritual strength of this child?” This process was similar to that outlined in Hay and Nye (2006). These authors identified “a fundamental characteristic of children’s spirituality... a markedly individual character that seemed to reflect the unique disposition of each child”, which they refer to as a personal “signature” (p. 94). For Hay and Nye, this signature pertained to specific expressions of the children’s spirituality, as well as the more general features of their conversations and interests. They conceived of a “multidimensional characterization of spirituality” (p. 98) of each particular child, in which his or her psychological make-up has a central role, along with other features such as age and gender. This researcher also included broader features of the child’s landscape such as family relationships, and the influence of the wider community. In the present research a child’s conversation usually contained no

references to religious or transcendent subjects, such as God or heaven, yet the researcher was able to elicit some kind of signature or footprint which expressed the unique spiritual style of each child, where “spirituality” is described implicitly through Champagne’s (2003) modes of being. Four of these *footprints* are summarized below.

#### *Alex*

Alex’s *footprint* could be described as “speculating about the Big Picture”. When Alex chose the picture of the earth from space, it represented for him “different people all over the world, different animals, different kinds of things they (children) might have – Gameboy (etc.) and they could exchange them between countries”. This led to his comment that “It’s very strange, but I think life’s a video game and aliens on other galaxies are controlling us”. Alex also speculated about the origins of dinosaurs, and other features of the earth’s history, like the development of the continents. Even in the events of his own life he tended to see a larger context. His dedication to sport was seen as opening up many possibilities. He said “you meet new friends, you learn things...and because I might play AFL or World Cup or be in the Olympics...You can become famous”. Alex even saw a wider significance in being in a family, when he faced the possibility of losing his family (his mother was very ill), and having to fend for himself. He demonstrated a dark side of himself in dreams he related about him and his family fighting “millions of monsters”, and not always winning. However he always remained outwardly cheerful.

#### *Bianca*

Bianca, from the rural school, was preoccupied with small things, especially with small creatures. On a visit to Fiji she was fascinated by small crabs. The features of pictures that caught her attention in *The Violin Man* were the pictures of little rabbits and a very small cat. She also liked looking after small children, especially her one year old sister. Bianca seemed uncomfortable when confronted with unfamiliar situations, like the interviews, or questions which were not concrete

and specific. She seemed to be concerned to give a “correct” answer, and was reluctant to admit to using imagination or doing something unconventional, like talking to a dog. In the group interviews she looked to her friends for support. Bianca seemed to need the clear boundaries of the familiar, even when her family travelled. Her Journey picture was of an island paradise, but it had a very firm shore-line. She said that one of the bad things children do was to “go out of bounds”.

### *Mary*

Mary’s *footprint* could be “the joy of relationships”. Mary introduced herself to the interviewer as “a special person. I have a Mum and a Dad, and some people don’t”. She idolized her father, and valued the “family times” spent with her mother, two older sisters, and a younger sister, aged two. At school she had many friends, “practically the whole class”. In the group interviews Mary demonstrated her friendship with Grace by offering her verbal and physical encouragement. She helped her friends, by standing up for them when they were bullied. She expressed her relationship with the earth, through detailing the need to care for baby birds, and to conserve water. Mary had some strong relationships with the transcendent. She believed in God. “God is in heaven, which is everywhere, so God is with us and taking care of us”. She wondered if heaven was a literal place, and asked “Can people walk around in heaven?” Her understanding of God was influenced by her concept of the family. “God (made the world) and Jesus, his son, and he looked after it, if he’s not dead”. She prayed for relatives who had died. Mary told of being visited by an angel, at age 6, when she was in hospital. She trusted the angel to look after her, and was no longer afraid. Mary’s personality had a dark side, as demonstrated by her Journey picture. She drew a busy road, with various children in danger, including herself. She also expressed a fear that she might die during an asthma attack. However, Mary’s spiritual strength seemed to come from her strong relationships with her family, friends, the earth and the transcendent.

### Harry

Harry was a complex character, but his *footprint* might be “drawing inner strength from the visible world”. Harry reacted to the visible world with keen senses, an inquiring mind, and strong personal relationships. When he went to the park he liked the cool breeze in his hair. He loved playing soccer and other games with his friends. He watched his father repairing the car to see how it was done. He loved going fishing with his father and uncle, and eating the food his mother prepared. But Harry’s dark side was a tendency to anxiety and bodily tension. His grandfather’s stories about the war in Vietnam seemed to have made him aware of suffering and danger in the wider world. He got tension in his arms and neck at school, which he dealt with by doing stretching exercises. He also dealt with his anxiety by going to the park, sitting alone, and reading a book. He said “Sometimes I lie down and look at the birds and the sky. Then the wind blows on me, and cools me down”. He thought about “waterfalls, water in a lake, or about the ocean and fishes”. He also thought about “me and my dad kicking a ball around the park. Those are the things that make me happy”. Harry demonstrated self discipline in his ability to internalize and draw strength from the joyful things he experienced in the external world.

Each of these children had a unique style for expressing their personality, and in particular their spiritual signature. Alex was expansive, Bianca needed safe boundaries, Mary had strong relationships, and Harry exercised inner discipline. Each child had a dark side of their particular fears and anxieties, and a prevailing spiritual strength. More broadly, these are a few examples of the categories of “reaching beyond themselves” in the cases of Alex and Mary, and Bianca, within her timid limitations. Harry demonstrated the capability of “reaching within himself”, utilizing his experiences of the world around him. These *footprints* demonstrate their spirituality through their *modes of being* (Champagne, 2003) in particular, their existential questions about their identity, as “who am I?” which was expressed in their individual styles. Alex expressed his sensitivity to, and relationship with the planet, and its different peoples. He was concerned with existential questions about his place in the universe and who is “controlling us”.

This filled him with both optimism and fear as he faced his family's uncertain future. Bianca demonstrated her sensitivity and relationship with small, manageable things. She seemed to deal with the big question of "who am I?" by setting boundaries within which she could be comfortable. Mary expressed her sensitivity in her perceptions of her relationships with her family, friends and God. Her existential questions were about what God and heaven are like, and how to face danger and death. Harry expressed his sensitivity in his relationship with the natural world, and how it could be internalized as inner calm for his anxieties. His existential questions about "who am I?" seemed to focus on the joy of being part of a family, and he was concerned about the existence of suffering in the world. The *footprints* of these children expressed their individual psychological characteristics: Alex's expansiveness, Bianca's timidity, Mary's sociability, and Harry's introspection. The *footprints* also seemed to be influenced by gender. Bianca and Mary's worldviews were very people-related. Alex and Harry seemed to be influenced by more masculine characteristics of focus on personal achievement and intellectual problems. As discussed in the previous chapter, their local school and community seemed to have an impact on their sense of identity. Bianca's life was bounded by her family and a small rural community. Alex and Mary lived in a poor provincial community, where illness and crime were not uncommon, and good things happened elsewhere, like through elite sport, or in heaven. Harry's family, and its traditional religion, and being in a school community made up largely of immigrants to Australia were safe havens for him.

### The Role of Story

"Signature", as a clue to identity is useful for someone external to the subject, such as the researcher, but the child's sense of his or her identity is better accessed through story. The children in the study left their footprints through story. They usually did not tell long, coherent stories of their lives as an adult might, but they told many fragments of stories from their own lives, or from their imaginative world: dreams, stories they wrote, or stories recounted from books or television.

These stories revealed to the researcher, and sometimes to the child, significant clues about the spirituality, or meaning in their lives.

Conlon (1994) provided a useful analysis of the role of story, which could be applied to the children in the research.

*Story provides a pattern of meaning, coherence, and unity. The story is the primary vehicle for revealing who we are. Human experience is best portrayed as a narrative. A good story rings true, uniting us to what is sacred. It reminds us of our roots and challenges us to consider our destiny. It increases our capacity for reflection and empowers us to engage more fully in life. When we tell or hear a story, two things happen: We are invited inside some-one's life, and we also open up to receive the other (1994, p. 10).*

Telling the stories of their lives appeared to help the children, as well as the researcher, to find “meaning, coherence, and unity” in their lives. For the researcher this involved looking beyond the four children already mentioned in this chapter, to include other children whose stories were recorded in earlier chapters. Finn’s story of his holiday in Malaysia with his father and sister seemed to be a vehicle for exploring what was significant in his life. As he told the story to the group, and later to the researcher, his eyes were shining and his voice was animated. The family group met exotic and dangerous beasts, such as snakes and monkeys, and shared the discomfort of heat and sunburn. When the family was chased by a “dangerous” monkey Finn cried out “Dad! Dad! Dad!” Finn said, “And he picked me up...and he picked me up and we ran”. This seemed to be a moment of meaning for Finn. His father demonstrated to him that he was loved. For a young boy who was grieving at being separated from his father, who now lived on the other side of the continent, this holiday with his father seemed to be a “sacred event” that showed Finn that he still belonged to his father. This trip also seemed to help him relate to other children better than was usual for him. He twice mentioned enjoying time at “the kids clubs” in Malaysia. As Finn told the story he was sharing something sacred with the listeners. In Conlon’s words it empowered him “to engage more fully in life” (Conlon, 1994, p.10).



Lucy told a “journey” story of her trip to China which reminded her of her roots and may have challenged her to consider her identity as a member of both Chinese and Australian communities. She had an enjoyable time in China meeting her relations. Riding the “bumper cars” at an entertainment centre with her cousin was particularly pleasurable. She also told of the simple pleasure of going to the market on a hot day with her grandmother and eating ice cream on the way home. In her profile the researcher noted the following.

*This is a child caught between two cultures: Chinese and Australian. Her family, her ancestors and her parents’ homeland are important to her. Her recent trip to China was a highlight in her life; she wanted to talk about it at length. Yet even within her family Lucy differentiates herself. She said she is different from her family because, when they eat at a restaurant, she likes her dumplings in the soup, and the rest of the family do not. She adores her cat, but her parents make her keep it outside, and do not provide veterinary care for it.*

Lucy also explored her identity in the final interview, not so much through narrative, but through discussion and analysis, which fits her cognitive style. Here is a discussion about sport.

*W (Interviewer): Tell me about yourself. What you’re like.*

*Lucy: I’m short. I like sport, especially skipping. I don’t really, I’m not really a football (Australian rules) type of person. Football’s just OK.*

*W: Is that because it’s too rough?*

*Lucy: Yes. And I don’t like basketball because I get all scared of the ball if it hits me. So I don’t like that either. And I think basketball is for tall people, and I’m really rather short.*

*W: Do you like games by yourself, like skipping? (Lucy: Yes) Or do you do it with others with the big rope?*

*Lucy: I like it because if I do it by myself I can do it really, really fast. And when I do it with other people I can sing rhymes with it...I’m really good at skipping. I like roller skating. I think I’m good in science.*

In this interview Lucy identified herself in terms of her body image and her competency. She was good at science and skipping. She also seemed to be trying to identify herself in terms of a sport that was appropriate for her. As noted in a previous chapter, sport seemed to be an issue for the children with an immigrant background at the suburban school, such as Harry, and Spencer. Participation and competence in sport was a vehicle for identifying them to their peers, and themselves, as genuinely Australian. For some of the girls, Lucy and Pham, owning a pet was important, which was not part of their Asian culture, and seemed to be something that set them apart from their families as true Australians. Participating in sport and owning a pet were part of their story of being Australian

Conlon (1994) elaborated on the role of story as a means of entering into the life of another as being introduced to a “unique human mystery”, not so much providing a map as a compass, which points us in the right direction, for understanding the life of the story-teller (p.11). As previously mentioned, Bailey, from the rural school, told a story from a television program about a meerkat that survived being bitten by a snake. In telling this story he seemed to be identifying with the courage displayed by this little creature as something he aspired to. Bailey was “little” in the sense of being shy, softly spoken and not very competent, yet his enjoyment of imagining himself as James Bond in his video game, suggested that he compensated by having a grand inner persona. This inner life seemed to find expression in writing exciting stories. Bailey’s stories point to a hidden facet of his identity as hero. They also helped him to interact and share his emotions with other children. This was evident in his animated contribution to the discussion of the television series “Meerkat Manor”.

These are examples of the way in which stories gave the researcher insight into how events in the life of the child demonstrated, or even formed their identity.

#### Narrative Identity

While Conlon’s concept of identity through story helped to demonstrate the expression and formation of the children’s identity, Ricoeur’s concept of “narrative identity” explained the process of forming identity through constructing a life-story.

As discussed in a previous chapter, the children's own sense of identity seemed to be a work in progress. Two of Ricoeur's key constructs which are relevant to this issue are the concept of self-constancy, and the meaning of time. Self-constancy refers to the fact that when we ask of a person "Who is this?" we name that person (Ricoeur, 1985, p. 246). Ricoeur goes on to ask on what basis one designates a person by a proper name "throughout a life that stretches from birth to death". His answer is that self-constancy, or "self-sameness" of identity throughout life rests on the narrative that a person makes of his or her own life, or others construct about him or her. Self-constancy "rests on a temporal structure that conforms to the model of dynamic identity arising from the poetic composition of a narrative text... (therefore) this narrative identity can include change, mutability, within the cohesion of one lifetime" (p. 246).

Ricoeur's extended theory of the phenomenon of time, and its relationship with personal narrative is recorded in his three volume work *Time and Narrative* (1983-1985). A brief summary was presented in Moriarty (2008), with reference to the present research. Ricoeur posits three categories of time: phenomenological, mortal or subjective time; the endless, anonymous cosmic time (scientific/objective time); and historical time "which reinscribes lived time (mortal time) on cosmic time through 'procedures of connection', namely, the calendar, succession of generations, archives, documents and other such traces" (Muldoon, 2002, pp. 64-65). Ricoeur also maintained that the writing of history (which may include an informal personal history) is possible because in the passage of time traces or vestiges of that past are left. These traces may be documents or collective memories, which can give us physical links with the past through which causal links may be explored, or they can give us a sense of the human significance of the past event, which Heidegger described as "having-been-there" (Ricoeur, 1985, pp. 120-121). In the case of the children in the study these traces consisted of their own memories of past events, or what they were told by family, teachers and others. The writing of historical narrative involves "the re-figuration (or re-inscription) of time" (p. 99) by the narrative process of "emplotment" (p. 100). Emplotment, as explained in Book 1 of *Time and Narrative* is part of a cycle of *mimesis*, or representation of human action

through poem or narrative. “Emplotment (*mimesis* 2), the most important, mediates between our pre-understanding of the world of practical action and events (*mimesis* 1) and the reception of the plot by a reader (*mimesis* 3). Emplotment is the process of organising disparate events of two dimensions of time: the episodic (chronological) dimension and the configurational (non-chronological) dimension, into a whole narrative” (Muldoon, 2002, pp. 66-67). The narrative reconstruction of the life of a person, or a historical era also becomes part of a dialectic, the end of which is *narrative identity*. Just as historical actions are re-figured by the author of a text, so also the reader interacts with the character in the text, and the world of the text, so “the world of the text and the world of the reader interpenetrate one another as a ‘fusion of horizons’” (p. 75). The narrative identity of a person or a cultural group is both constant and changing over time, as the group reads the texts of its heritage, or an individual tells or writes his or her autobiography (Ricoeur, 1985, pp. 246-248).

In applying the hermeneutics of Ricoeur, the researcher gained insight into the significance of events which occurred over time for some of the children in the study. Through the telling of these events the children may have constructed their identity through narrative. Likewise, as a listener or reader, the researcher was able to construct an identity for individual children. This chapter explores the narrative of three children (Luke, Kelly and Aimee), where *mimesis* 1 is significant events in the child’s life, *mimesis* 2 is emplotment by the child or his/her family, and *mimesis* 3 is reception by the “reader”, or development of narrative identity by the child. Each cycle of *mimesis* begins with a perception of an objective phenomenon, like a wave in the sea, or a historical event, like birth or death, which provided a field for experiencing time (Merleau-Ponty, 1962).

#### *Luke*

Ricoeur’s (1985, p. 119) concept of trace is illustrated in Luke’s story, where standing up on his boogie board at age 3, has had the lasting effect of defining him as exceptionally athletic. Luke lived on a farm with his parents and twin sister, Lizzy. For the purposes of this analysis, Luke’s birth was significant (*mimesis* 1), in

that Lizzy was born “10 seconds” before him. The emplotment (mimesis 2) of the event of the birth of the twins by the researcher, and to some extent the twins, was as follows. Lizzy dominated their relationship. Her role was the clever one and Luke’s was the sportsman. This is illustrated in an interview with the two siblings together. Lizzy held a rather light-hearted conversation with the interviewer about the beginning of the world, as she understood the Biblical story. Luke, on the other hand, wanted to talk about death, but his voice was not being heard; that is, until he adopted his given role of sportsman.

*W: How do you think the world began?*

*Lizzie: It popped up (hand gesture upwards).*

*Luke: I wonder what it would feel like to be dead.*

*W: ....have you got some ideas?*

*Luke: No.*

*Lizzie: (chants, smiles and waves arms) Going in heaven, going in heaven!*

*W: Yes. What’s heaven?*

*Lizzie: Heaven is a place where all the good people go, and hell is where all the bad people go.*

*W: I see. And what are they like?*

*Lizzie: Um, like the leader of hell might be demons and the leader of heaven might be a really good person, like Jesus, God.*

*W: (Luke) what do you think about heaven and hell?*

*Luke: I don’t know. About the same thing.*

*W: Don’t you think about it much? Does Lizzie do most of the thinking, out of you two?*

*Luke: Um, no (looks defiantly at Lizzy).*

*Lizzie: Yes, probably.*

*W: (points at Luke) And you do most of the playing?*

*Luke: Yes (smiles).*

Luke said he had to look after his mother, who had a medical condition. He was also solicitous towards his sister, who was smaller than him, less coordinated, and she had had a number of accidents and operations. He explained that a motor

bike was too hard for her to hold on rough ground and that she had only started playing netball. This demonstrated another aspect of their differentiated roles, where Luke was the care-giver. It is not clear how much Luke conceptualized this as his narrative identity (mimesis 3).

A “mimesis 1” event for Luke was that at aged only three he was able to stand up on his boogie board in the surf. He was currently a keen surfer, and wanted to be a professional surfer when he grew up. Luke’s feat at age three appeared to be a family narrative. While Luke seemed to have a mental picture of the event, which may be a genuine memory, it is unlikely that he remembered the significance of the event without it being recited over time by his parents. A more obvious example of family emplotment in his life was the story of Luke climbing up to a cupboard, and swallowing a near lethal dose of medicine when he was one year old. During the interview Lizzy and Luke enacted the event of Luke rushing about frantically, bumping into furniture and walls because he was temporally blinded by his overdose of the medicine. This was a gleeful production, not a horrifying spectacle. This would appear to be an “emplotment” of the event by the family, to re-figure a potential tragedy as a comedy.

Luke’s narrative identity (mimesis 3) arising out of his surfing, and other physical exploits was to see himself as physically strong and a good sportsman. His current experience in the surf had a spiritual quality, or being “in paradise” when he was within a wave. This seemed to be incorporated into his narrative identity.

Another significant event for Luke was the death of his grandfather, a few months before the interview. Luke’s emplotment of this event was to try to deal with his grief and loss. In the final interview Luke was “offered” three wishes. His first wish was “I wish my pop was still alive”. He described the day of his grandfather’s death a few months before, after a long illness. He used to spend a lot of time with his grandfather, and he missed him.

I asked “What do you think has happened to him now?” Luke put his head on the table and whispered “I don’t know”. His grandfather’s death not only left him grieving, but faced him with the mystery of mortality. The indications were that Luke’s spiritual resources were in his relationships with his family and the natural

world of the sea. As the earlier transcript indicated, he did not accept conventional religious beliefs. He rejected heaven and hell as “made up”, and God had no relevance for him. He did not yet have a narrative that gave meaning to his grandfather’s death.

### *Kelly*

For Kelly the most significant event in her life was the death of one of her step-fathers, Pete. Kelly’s life was marred by problematic relationships with her family and her peers. In the interviews she alternated between confidential approaches and aggression toward the other children, and the interviewer. She complained that “mostly all the class” were mean to her. Her attitude to her family was ambivalent. She said “I like my family”, and was pleased with the shoes her mother had just bought her, and the family outings to McDonalds. On the other hand she said, with a smile “I hurt Mummy a lot when I was born”, and said “My father left me when I was a baby”. She fought physically with her older sister, and her younger brothers were “mean” to her. On the other hand Pete was “like a father to her”, who cared for her when she was sick. However Pete got sick and died of “sun cancer”. On two occasions she described his illness, and how she used to visit him in hospital and give him drinks.

Kelly tried to re-figure the story of her life and make sense of her relationships. She tried to make sense of Pete’s death by describing how the hospital changed his “good” medication to “bad” medication when he was making good progress, so he died. She believed that Pete was in heaven, but somehow still nearby “keeping watch over us wherever we go”. She summed up her life-situation as follows: “I’d rather be in heaven with Pete right now, in heaven and have a family, and see my great, great aunty, than be down here and get picked on”. She also had fantasies about being like Princess Mary, or “God’s daughter”, to be bowed to and to have lots of servants.

However, Kelly had established a narrative identity which was not all negative and escapist, and had links with the transcendent. She thought a lot about heaven, which she associated with Pete and with God. “Heaven is actually the whole

sky, everywhere, all the time. God is watching everyone, like all the relatives". She wondered what heaven was like, "Do you really see it? Do you walk around it?" God, for Kelly, was a benevolent being, who created the universe, and is "really, really good at it". This gave her a sense of personal destiny, in which God "created the whole world, and our mums and dads, because he made Mummy's mum to have a mum. If my mum wasn't born I wouldn't be here right now".

Kelly was able to "emplot" these events of her life into a meaningful narrative of a person who, in spite of circumstances to the contrary, was loved.

### *Aimee*

Aimee, who lived in a coastal town, had a view of past and future time which connected her with being Australian. An object of significance for her was Uluru. As she studied a photograph she commented that the rock is "huge, really old...and has been there many years." She said "I always wonder how it got there because it's so big. And you can see spear marks. Yes, you can tell it's got tracks over it. Ages ago aborigines have been there." Aimee commented that the coastal landmarks where she lived were also very old, and "could be where aborigines came and lived". Besides a connection with the land, Aimee also indicated a sense of Australia's "European" history.

*Aimee: I like imagining things that happened in literature....like I imagine how people would have felt in the war, when they found out that someone might have got killed or something. And in the future something that could happen, to me and stuff*

*W: Why do you think about bad things that happen in wars and things?*

*Aimee: Because I think it's quite sad that they do this for Australia and they got killed doing it.*

Aimee had two grandfathers who served in the Second World War, which may have been a source of oral tradition for her. Aimee re-figured these icons and stories from the past to fashion a spiritual connection with the land, and its history as an important part of her identity as an Australian.



*Identity as a spiritual dimension*

These three children were taken as representative of the process by which children in this research formed a narrative identity out of events in their own lives and past events in their families and significant communities. At the suburban school there were children for whom events which happened to their families before they came to Australia became part of their personal narratives. For example, Harry seemed to connect some of his anxieties with stories his grandfather told him about the war in Vietnam. Hahn's anxiety about being kidnapped may have had a similar origin.

The formation of a narrative identity by these children gives another perspective of their spirituality. Firstly, it illustrates again their connectedness, or *relational mode of being* (Champagne, 2003). Aimee's story illustrated her sense of connectedness to the land of her birth. She demonstrated a spiritual connectedness to the physical features of Australia's landscape and its aboriginal heritage. She was also aware of the historical heritage of the great wars, which are a central feature of the Australia identity, as epitomized in the Anzac tradition. Luke's sense of self was also connected with the landscape, and the joy of his physical engagement with it through sport. Luke's sense of self was also intimately connected with his relationship with different members of his family, and his role as a family member. Kelly's story demonstrated her struggle to connect with her family and to establish her sense of worth. A significant event for her was her loving relationship with her step-father, and the sorrow she felt over his sickness and death. Out of that experience Kelly seemed to identify herself as part of a transcendent reality which included life beyond death, a sense of the love of God, and of her connectedness with a larger family of successive generations of the living and the departed.

A second feature of the spiritual component of children's narrative identity can be found in their *existential mode of being* (Champagne, 2003), in particular, the relation to time and space (p. 50). This chapter has explored the relationship of some of the children to time; to events in their own past, past experiences of family members, and their historical heritages in Australia, or other countries. Significant space for the children in this research sometimes meant small spaces: such as

Grace's secret place where she took "time out", and Mary's favourite place in the school yard, and Harry's place of peace under the tree in the park. In other instances significant space meant their home, or their bedroom (for Pham). Sometimes the significant space meant the school grounds, or the confines of the whole community in which they lived. This was particularly the case for the children at the rural school, where the school grounds and the district in which they lived provided the boundaries of their social networks within which they felt safe. For Bianca "going out of bounds" was considered a bad deed. For other children a landmark like Uluru, or the country of Australia, provided their sacred space. While no child mentioned a church or religious building, for Pham the Buddhist shrine in her home was a sacred space.

van Manen ((1990) discussed the phenomena of "lifeworld existentials", in particular, four existentials "that may prove helpful as guides for reflection in the research process: *lived space* (spatiality), *lived body* (corporeality), *lived time* (temporality), and *lived human relation* (relationality or communality)" (p, 101). Experience of each of these "life-world existentials" enhances a child's sense of identity. Lived space "refers us to the world or landscape in which human beings move and find themselves at home" (p. 102) For the children in this research this lived space included the children's house where they lived, their country of birth or adoption, or a private space for quiet reflection. Lived space also included corporality, or a sense of their bodies and capabilities. Lived relationships were also experienced through bodily contact and interactions, through which the children also became more self aware (for example, as someone who helped or was helped by another child). Finally, through lived relationships, some of the children became aware of "a sense of purpose in life, meaningfulness, grounds for living, as in the religious experience of the absolute Other, God" (p. 105).

### Conclusion

Using the metaphor of a footprint, this chapter endeavoured to demonstrate the spiritual dimension of identity in the lives of some of the children in this research. Based on Hay & Nye's (2006) concept of "signature", the individual

characteristics of some of these children's identities was described. The metaphor of footprint can be extended to take account of the "sand", or the social environment in which identity was "printed" by these children. The possibilities for exploring meaning, coherence and unity (Conlon, 1994) in a child's life through story were briefly explored. These were anecdotes from their lived experience, or from their imaginative lives, which gave the researcher, and sometimes the children, insight into their identities. Some insight into the mechanism of identity formation was explored through Ricoeur's (1985) concept of narrative identity. The interpretation of past events and influences in the lives of some of the children illustrated the way that they, and significant others in their lives, built up a coherent story of the shaping of their identities. These children's sense of identity was a further demonstration of their spiritual modes of being.

### Reviewing the conceptualization

In the original model for this research (Chapter Three, Figure 1) the numbering of Identity (3), and Roadmap (4) assumed that in the process of spiritual integration to a worldview Identity would precede Roadmap (which was presumed to include such features as resilience, faith, moral responsibility, joy and hope). However, in the course of analyzing the findings of the research in the last four chapters, it appeared to the researcher that a different order emerged. While Consciousness and Relationality remained the primary expressions of spirituality, and were closely interrelated, Identity and Roadmap appeared to be derived, or secondary, dimensions of spirituality, and seemed to develop in the reverse order. Roadmap seemed to develop from Consciousness and Relationality by the processes of "looking beyond themselves" and "looking within themselves", and using their experiences and the perceived values of their personal stories and cultural environments to develop a rudimentary worldview. For example (from the previous chapter), Mary, from the provincial school, called upon her school's and family's values of nurture and care to develop a roadmap dominated by these values of nurture and care, and a faith in God and angels as caring beings. This was in spite of

her anxiety about dangers in the world and her fear of dying from an asthma attack. Mary's sense of identity as "a special person" who had a mother and a father, when some other children did not have that privilege, seemed to arise out of the values of her roadmap. In this present chapter, children such as Luke and Kelly, created a narrative identity out of the significant events in their lives, and the values they learned through their physical and social relationships. Through Luke's nurturing role in the family, and his sporting ability and relationship with the natural world, he identified himself a competent person, who could one day climb Mt Everest. Kelly was able to identify herself as a loveable person, in spite of her difficult personal circumstances, largely through experiencing the love of one person.

This leaves open the significance of worldview in this research. The children did not directly articulate a worldview. However, the observations made in the chapter "Charting the Path" suggest that worldview arises out of interaction between the child's individual formation of Relational Consciousness, and influences of their social and physical environment. This research seems to suggest that the spiritual dimension of personal identity is the culmination of this process. "Who am I?" is answered through the perceptions, relationships, events and social values which constitute the narrative of a child's life.

These findings would suggest that children's developing spirituality is a dynamic process, rather than a number of discrete "dimensions", as suggested in the conceptualization, Figure 1, chapter 3. The dissonance between this original model and the findings of the past four chapters is discussed in the next, concluding chapter. The concluding chapter also discusses the significance of the findings for religious education, and possible further areas for research arising out of these findings.

## CHAPTER NINE

### CONCLUSION

#### Introduction

This chapter examines the significance of the research findings of the previous four chapters, and their application to religious education in Australia. A significant feature of this research is in the dissonance between the original conceptualization of spirituality, which was based on a review of the literature, and a revised conceptualization, reflecting the findings of the present research. This chapter attempts to explain the dissonance in terms of the research methodology and the findings, and to discuss its significance.

#### Summary of the findings of the research

The research findings were described in the previous four chapters. They are summarized below, and were analyzed using Champagne's (2003) spiritual modes of being: *sensitive mode*, *relational mode* and *existential mode*.

#### *Reaching beyond themselves*

The children in this study demonstrated their spirituality in reaching beyond themselves in their heightened sensitivity to the transcendent, the natural world and to significant people in their lives. Reaching towards the transcendent was expressed by their sense of the wonder and mystery of their place on the earth and beyond, and in cosmic time or the beginnings of earth and human history. Some of the children wondered about the purpose of creation and what Harry expressed as their place in "the circle of humans and the generations". Some children tried to understand the mysteries of the natural world through scientific enquiry, others through concern for its vulnerable creatures, and others had a religious sense of heaven and of God as guardian of the earth and themselves. Their discussion of death was an example of the way they used all these forms of enquiry: scientific in what happens to dead bodies, relational in the way they were affected by the death of family members, and religious in their concern about the possibility of life continuing somewhere beyond

death. The children also demonstrated “reaching beyond themselves” in their appreciation of their relationships with significant people in their lives, especially their families and friends. In their exploration of the transcendent they used all their *modes of being*: sensitivity to physical aspects, awareness of their relationships, and an existential exploration of time, place and purpose of their “being-in-the-world” (Heidegger, 1980).

#### *Reaching within themselves*

This finding explored the children’s connectedness with themselves, and the ways in which they drew upon their inner spiritual strength. Some children found their inner resources by withdrawing to a quiet place when they felt anxious or sad. Others found joy and strength through engaging in sport or vigorous physical activity. But the source of the resilience that some children demonstrated in the face of adversity, such as illness or death, remained a mystery. The children in this study generally did not have the resources of religious language with which to express their inner lives, but they were able to draw on their imagination, with the aid of their experience of popular culture such as books, television and computer games to express their spiritual insights. Some of these expressions seemed to take on symbolic form, through drawings and stories. This finding also explored the evidence of inner conflict and dissonance for some children, as they tried to make sense of their lives. This conflict may be evidence of a transitional phase of development, as described in Dynamic Systems Theory (DST) (Cupit, 2007)

#### *Charting the Path*

This finding sought to widen the scope of the analysis by exploring the way that the children in this study seemed to incorporate the influences of their social and physical environments, into a process of envisioning their lives, to form a mental landscape or worldview. This desire to widen the investigation was influenced by Wilber’s (2001) model of four quadrants which different disciplines use to explore the human psyche. This approach was also inspired by the observation that there were some differences in the values and aspirations of the children from the different

schools. These schools were in coastal, provincial city, rural, and metropolitan suburban areas. Exploring similarities and differences in the children's values and aspirations involved examining the apparent influences of the family, and wider influences such as the physical and social environments of each of these communities, so far as the limited information obtained from the children and the school administration allowed. Wider influences, including world events such as war, also appeared to impact on the children's worldviews. The children's values and aspirations were seen as a gateway to their formation of spiritual identity, described by Hyde (2008) as *spiritual questing*.

### *Footprints*

The final findings chapter explored the way that the processes of reaching beyond themselves, reaching within themselves, and incorporating influences in their environment in the process of forming personal values and aspirations, seemed to culminate in a sense of personal identity. This development of a sense of identity could be seen as a spiritual journey. The characteristics of some of the children's identities were analyzed using Hay and Nye's (2006) concept of "personal signature", or the characteristic way in which the child engaged with the world. Characteristically, the children seemed to communicate their sense of identity through personal story. The role of story in the formation of identity was examined with reference to Conlon (1994), and Ricoeur (1985). This was followed by reference to the spirituality of identity formation in the light of van Manen's (1990) "lifeworld existentials" of *lived space, lived time, lived body, and lived human relation*.

### *Summary*

In many cases the children expressed their spirituality as awe and wonder at phenomena in the world outside themselves, and in the wonder of relationships with the natural world or with other people. This kind of expression was found in the chapter entitled "Reaching beyond themselves". In other cases the children's relational consciousness (Hay & Nye, 2006) seemed to rise from within themselves,

a search to express their spirituality by accessing inner resources, hence the chapter heading “Reaching within themselves”. In analyzing interview probes designed to explore the initial dimension of roadmap through questions about the children’s values and aspirations, it appeared to the researcher that their expressions of awe at the world around them, and their ability to access inner resources, were influenced by the particular social and physical environment in which they were growing up, hence the chapter title “Charting the Path”. This meant that the final findings chapter “Footprints” followed rather than preceded the roadmap of the original conceptualization. This findings/discussion chapter seemed to culminate naturally in exploring how the children’s identities – that is, their personal spiritual styles and the way they structure their life stories - seemed to arise out of the life-worlds of their outer and inner environments.

#### Exploration of the dissonance

In this section, the dissonance between the original conceptualization and the research findings is discussed, and explanation for the dissonance offered with reference to

- The possible effects of the research methodology
- The context of the research
- Specific research material.

#### The effects of methodology and method on the dissonance

The progression of the analysis from Consciousness and Relationality, to Roadmap, and then to Identity, was the path followed by both the method of the interview schedule and the analysis of the data. This means that the method may account in part for the dissonance between the original and the modified conceptualization of spirituality presented above.

The underlying theoretical perspective and methodology may also have influenced this result. Hermeneutic phenomenological research was influenced by three authors. Heidegger’s (1980) contribution was the concept of Being-in-the-world, which the researcher applied by concentrating on spirituality as personal



essence, in the context of a world of lived experience. The main influence of Gadamer (1975) was his concept of “fusion of horizons”. The main influences of Ricoeur were in his interpretation of text (Ricoeur, 1974), and his theories about time and its effect on the construction of individual narrative (1985). The influences of Gadamer and Ricoeur are elaborated below.

Hermeneutic phenomenology as the methodology produced fresh outcomes, because, according to Gadamer, “the meaning of a text is always co-determined by both the hermeneutic situation of the interpreter and the horizon that the text projects” (Sharkey, 2001, p. 25). Gadamer compared the hermeneutic process to play, in that the outcome is undecided (Gadamer, 1975, p. 106). This is because it is a process of free-flowing dialogue between the interpreter and the text, which in this research means the person or persons being interpreted. Gadamer (1975) described this process as the “fusion of horizons”. In the case of this research the respective “horizons” were, on the one hand eight to ten year old children of both genders, growing up in the secular, multicultural, and technologically literate twenty-first century, and on the other hand an older woman who grew up in a strictly Christian family during and after the Second World War.

The research method was designed to overcome the distance between these respective horizons, and in the process, developed a conceptualization of children’s spirituality which moved towards an integrated concept of identity. The progression from group interviews to individual interviews assisted in the growth of intimacy between the interviewer and the children. Likewise, the use of materials that required more personal responses, that is, progression from response to photographs and participation in games, to response to a story, then producing drawings of their own concept of self-identity and life-journey, elicited increasingly deeper level of reflections from the children. The use of videotaping allowed the collection of non-verbal material which allowed for “thicker” interpretation of the interviews. The organization of transcript material into textual form also affected the findings, in that the profiles were already a stage of interpretation which was structured. This involved using Champagne’s (2003) *modes of being*, to produce a progressive

individual analysis, beginning with *Sensitive Mode*, through *Relational Mode*, to culminate in *Existential Mode*, which addressed issues of identity and meaning.

The horizon of the researcher influenced this search for the individual child's sense of identity and meaning. The researcher's background as a student of psychology, English literature, and theology, and her spiritual formation in the Evangelical Protestant tradition, inclined her to view spirituality as both individual and progressing. In the Evangelical tradition spirituality is seen as having a beginning at conversion and progressing through the life-long process of sanctification by the Holy Spirit to a final perfection in a life beyond this one. This emphasis on individual spirituality may have been the motivation for writing the profiles, which concluded with the researcher asking the question "Wherein does the spirituality of this child lie?"

The research methodology was also influenced by Ricoeur, in two ways. The researcher's background in Biblical exegesis resonated with Ricoeur's emphasis on the interpretation of text, by letting the texts speak for themselves, as overcoming the distance between ancient texts and the reader as interpreter.

*The very work of interpretation reveals a profound intent, that of overcoming distance and cultural differences and of matching the reader to a text which has become foreign, thereby incorporating its meaning into the present comprehension a man [sic] is able to have of himself. (Ricoeur, 1974, p. 4)*

The researcher sought to overcome the distances of time and culture between herself and the children by spending time in the classroom before beginning the interviews, and by seeking to let the children direct the conversations as much as the interview schedule would allow. This process was designed to promote self understanding in both the children and the researcher.

Ricoeur's (1985) exposition of time, and development of the concept of narrative identity provided a ready framework for analyzing children's spiritual identity in a narrative form, as developed in Chapter Eight, "Footprints" (also in Moriarty, 2008). According to Ricoeur (1985) identity has two significant features. One is self-constancy (p. 246) whereby a person remains identifiably the same throughout a lifetime. The other feature is the phenomenon of constructing one's

identity through refiguring the events of one's life, by a process of "emplotment" into a meaningful narrative, which Ricoeur referred to as "narrative identity" (1985). This implies that a child's identity is both fixed (self-constancy) and constantly unfolding as a narrative. Ricoeur's influence contributed to the dissonance between the two conceptualizations of spirituality in directing the researcher's attention to the children's identity as an unfolding narrative to which Consciousness, Relationality and Roadmap contributed.

### *Summary*

This section discussed the ways in which hermeneutic phenomenology, as expounded by Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur influenced the method of conducting the research, and the outcome of the analysis of the findings. From this discussion it may be concluded that the dissonance between the original research conceptualization of spirituality and the revised conceptualization may be due in part to the choice of hermeneutic phenomenology as the basis for this research. The choice of the research method, which involved an increasing level of self-examination on the part of the children, may also be a factor in an outcome which placed Identity as the culmination of the research analysis. Ultimately, the outcome of the research was due to the collective insights of the children and the researcher.

### *Explanation of the dissonance in terms of the context of the research*

This section explores the differences between the findings of this research and that of others researchers, such as Hay & Nye (2006), Hart (2003) whose research was in other countries, and Hyde (2008) whose research was in Victoria and closer in time to this research, but in different school communities. Differences in time and place of research may account in part for the dissonance.

### *World events*

The timing of the research interviews had a significant effect on the children's responses to certain issues. The war in Iraq was constantly on the television screens, and this had an effect on the children's consciousness of war and

the suffering it causes. This was evident in a general way when some children wished that there be “no wars”. In the third interview the children were shown a photograph of some women fleeing along a train track carrying babies and personal possessions. The purpose was to explore the children’s empathy with the suffering of people they did not know. When the researcher explained that the people were running away from fighting in a war in Kosovo their immediate reaction was empathy with the suffering and danger these people would be experiencing. The phenomenon of war raised the children’s consciousness and developed their relationality in terms of events and people beyond their immediate experience. It also enhanced their values, as demonstrated by their condemnation of the suffering caused by war.

Long-term world phenomena that had a impact on the children were environmental degradation and climate change. A number of children expressed concern for threatened species of animals, such as Asian elephants. Climate change had an immediate impact on the children because south-eastern Australia was experiencing a drought of unprecedented duration. This caused anxiety for the rural children because their families’ livelihood was threatened, causing them anxiety for their livestock and their incomes. The drought also affected city children through the imposition of water restrictions. The children expressed their anxiety about the need to save water in the home and the need to provide water for the birds on hot days. This phenomenon enhanced the children’s consciousness of their relationship with the natural world, and responsibility for it.

A more local event which affected the children was the death of Steve Irwin in September 2006 (Taylor, 2007), immediately before the interviews of the children at the coastal and provincial schools. When Irwin was killed by a stingray, while making a nature documentary, his death “rocked the world” (p. 335). Children and adults over the world idolized Irwin as “the face of Australia” (p. 335), a dedicated environmentalist, and a talented entertainer, whose comical style and daring confrontations with crocodiles and other dangerous creatures made him such a popular hero. In the interviews the children expressed their personal grief about his death, and their sense of loss. Irwin was mentioned in the context of discussions

about death. The children seemed to be shocked by the phenomenon of the death of someone who seemed so invincible. This confronted them with the existential reality of death's inevitability. This phenomenon enhanced the children's Consciousness, in their sense of wonder at the mystery of death, as well as their Roadmap, through their *existential mode of being*.

These are three far-reaching factors which affected the findings of this research. They particularly affected the quality of their relationships with others, and their confrontation with the mysteries of suffering and death.

#### *The Australian context*

A number of authors (Kelly, 1990; Tacey, 1995; Ranson, 2002; Adams, Hyde & Woolley, 2008) have examined the distinctive nature of Australian spirituality. Australia's geographical isolation and short history as a national entity, suggested "an isolated sensitive individuality rather than a universal belonging" (Kelly, 1990, p. 6). Australian spirituality is typically suspicious of religious piety, inarticulate and reticent about deep communication. (p. 15). As "landscape and geography shape spiritual experience" (Ranson, 2002, p. 61), Australian spirituality reflects "the haunting silence of the bush; the daunting silence of the desert; the surrounding silence of the sea; even in the silence of our conversations" (Kelly, 1990, p. 15). However, this silence about the overtly spiritual is still expressed through the imagination in our myths and symbols.

A number of myths of the Australian psyche were apparent in the research findings. One was the myth of "mateship". This myth grew out of the isolation of the early days of European colonization of the land, and was crystallized by the shared hardships of war, beginning with the ANZAC experience. The bonding and mutual support of mateship is primarily a male phenomenon (J. Smith, 2004), and is still exhibited in male sporting clubs. The female equivalent is traditionally found in women's volunteer organizations, such as the Country Women's Association (2004), where women work together to support their communities, their men and each other. The children in the research exhibited this bonding and supporting behaviour. For example, Harry rushed to assist his hurt friend on the soccer field, and Grace and

Mary came to the aid of their friends who were being bullied in the school ground. While this behaviour can be explained in terms of the spirituality of relational consciousness (Hay & Nye, 2006), it also has deep roots in Australian tradition.

A passion for sport is also an Australian tradition which helps to shape national identity:

*Australians are obsessed with sport – almost all sport – to an extraordinary degree. And we succeed beyond what should be a normal country's expectations. We are a dominant nation in cricket, swimming, hockey, basketball, golf, cycling, rowing, netball, rugby league and rugby (Taylor, 2007).*

This list does not include Victoria's greatest passion – Australian Rules Football. The passionate pursuit of sport occurs at all levels, from the local school and community clubs to international competition. The principal of the rural school commented that the local community's sense of identity was expressed through the sporting clubs. She believed that sport had a positive effect on the children's wellbeing and functioning. However, "families in the area who are not interested in sport can feel alienated", she said. The effect of sport on the development of the children's spirituality was discussed in Chapter Six, "Reaching within themselves".

A third myth which forms Australian spirituality is the effect of the landscape. This veneration of landscape applies to icons like Uluru (formerly known as Ayer's Rock), or local features like The Twelve Apostles (a group of rocks off the Victorian coast). These sites were mentioned by the children as having spiritual significance for themselves, and for the aboriginal people. Some children also mentioned the beach as a place where they experienced a heightened sense of spiritual reality. The majority of Australians live along the coastal fringe of the continent (Drew, 1994), so have easy access to the beach. "Surf, sun, and sand – the bliss of the beach is deep in the Australian psyche" (Taylor, 2007, p. 232). For example, it is popularly accepted that on Australia Day, there are no military parades as in some countries, but people go to the beach. Whether this is a safe, tamed city beach like the famous Bondi Beach, or the more remote beaches frequented by surfers, the beach has a long history in Australian culture. The beach represents a

boundary between civilization and nature, safety and freedom (Firske, Hodge, & Horner, 1987). The culture of the surfer, as subverting the dominant culture in the freedom of the waves, has a long tradition (1987). A number of the children from the rural and suburban schools mentioned family visits to the beach, and spiritual experiences of the joy of watching from the shore, and the deep sensory and existential experience of riding the waves.

These features of Australian culture – mateship, sport, and the landscape (especially the beach) were sources of spiritual inspiration, which were expressed through the children’s consciousness of and relationship with their natural and social environments. Their values and aspirations (roadmap) and their sense of identity were also influenced in specific ways by being Australian.

#### Examination of the dissonance with reference to specific research material

It was observed that there was dissonance between the original conceptualization of spirituality : Figure 1, Chapter Three, and the findings of the research as elaborated in Chapters Five to Eight. The chief differences as found in the revised conceptualization were as follows:

- Worldview was not a central feature.
- The input of cultural influences was at all points of the conceptualization, rather than as input to consciousness and relationality only.
- Identity followed roadmap rather than preceding it.

#### *Worldview*

Worldview was not central in the revised diagram because the concept of worldview of the children seemed to be limited to a personal narrative, and was a work in progress. On revisiting Erricker’s (1997) *The Education of the Whole Child*, the researcher has revised her concept of worldview. Rather than worldview being a global concept into which all other dimensions of spirituality: Consciousness, Relationality, Roadmap and Identity feed, Erricker’s concept of the worldview of a

child was “a narrative within (which) they construct meaning” (p. 9). Erricker (1997) spoke of “landscapes within which we map our world and the relationships from which it is constructed” (p. 11). The evolving worldviews of children are the outcome of constructing their notions of reality out the individual narratives of personal lives, growing up within such a landscape (p. 10). In this research the worldview of the child was a narrative developed within the personal experience of the family, the school, but the wider world of ideas and beliefs also had a limited impact. This was in contrast with the more general understanding of worldview as a philosophy for interpreting the whole of life, whether it is world history or civilization, or a general philosophy of aesthetics, language and so forth (Gadamer, 1975). This philosophical understanding of worldview has greater application to youth, who have the capacity “to construct a set of beliefs that help them to think about life” (Hughes, 2007, p. 122). Therefore, it appeared that Erricker’s (1997) concept of worldview was more applicable to the revised conceptualization of spirituality, where worldview was designated at the culmination of the child’s process of forming a narrative identity out of his or her life experiences.

#### *Input of cultural influences*

The input of cultural influences occurred at each of the four dimensions. There was some evidence of cultural influences on the children’s consciousness in their observations of the photographs in the first interview. For example Lizzy imagined the rocks of the Twelve Apostles were pirate ships, and Amanthi interpreted the picture of the baby as the baby Jesus. However, the children more often chose pictures which related to their own experiences or *modes of being* (Champagne, 2003). Girls frequently chose the picture of the baby bird, which was consonant with the dominance of responses in their *relational mode*. The pole vaulter or the surfer was chosen by children who were interested in sport.

On the other hand, social influences were also apparent in the children’s expression of values and aspirations. This was discussed at length in Chapter Seven, where differences between the three main school communities were noted. There were differences in the aspirations of children from each of these communities,



influenced by geography, socio-economic status, and ethnicity. This alerted the researcher to the social influences on the children's spiritual dimensions at the second level of Roadmap and Identity. Values which arose from the family, such as caring for younger siblings, were shared by all groups, though there were some variations, such as the social value of sharing food among children of Asian origin. Values which were influenced by the media – television, books and computer games – did not show regional variations. The media's promotion of valuing material possessions and affluent lifestyle, and the romanticizing of violence were reflected in some of the children's values. These values became a part of the children's Roadmap. However, the children's journey drawings demonstrated that in establishing their identity they sometimes reached beyond these influences on their life's narrative. They seemed to see themselves as flying, driving or climbing to destinations beyond the confines of place, time and community influences.

### *Identity*

A third difference between the two conceptualizations of spirituality was that in the revised diagram Identity follows Roadmap. In the revised conceptualization identity is the conclusion of a spiritual narrative, beginning with Consciousness and Relationality, and proceeding through Roadmap to a self-concept of Identity which included elements of worldview. All of these dimensions of spirituality seemed to come together in the children's sense of "Who am I?" An illustration of this phenomenon was in Mary's statement "I am a special person. I have a father and a mother, and some others don't". The analysis of the Mary's transcript and profile, as discussed in Chapter Eight, indicated that her sense of identity arose out of her strong relationships with her family, which she perceived in family interaction such as in a designated "quality time", so that she saw herself as fortunate in having an intact and loving family. She related this to others by expressing concern for her friends who did not have such good family relationships. She had somehow come to value family relationship highly and reflect social concern for children from broken families. This value was part of her roadmap. This high regard for the family

extended to her relationship with the transcendent, which she conceived of as a celestial family.

There was another thread in Mary's narrative – her fear of death from an asthma attack for herself, and for vulnerable animals. It was also apparent in her Journey drawing of a number of people in danger on a busy road. These threads of fear of death and family care were drawn together in her sense of identity as “a special person”. This was an existential “conceptualization of personal identity which is spiritually embedded in a purpose for one's life” (Webster, 2005, p. 5). For Mary this meant being a loved and loving person.

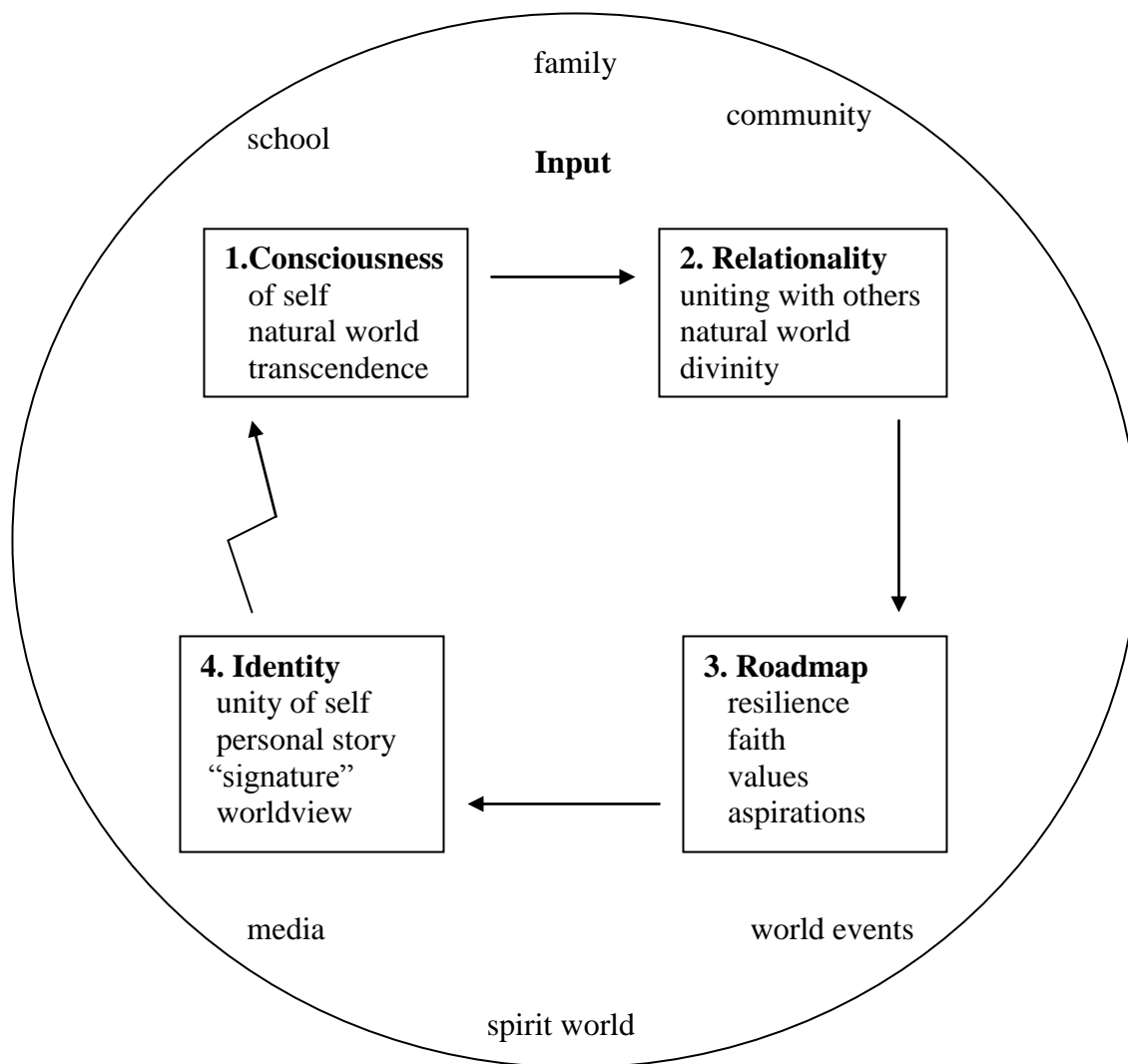
There were other examples in this research of the way in which a narrative of identity was constructed out of the other dimensions of spirituality. However, only a few of the children articulated their sense of identity. Luke's sense of identity as an athletic child was inferred by him from the stories told by his family, and from his own accounts of his sporting achievements and ambitions. He also asserted his identity in his resistance to his sister Lizzy's conventional religious beliefs. These beliefs did not fit with his nature spirituality. Luke's identity seemed to be constructed from his own heightened perceptions of the natural world (consciousness), his relationship with his family, and his community's high value of sport (roadmap).

The diagram below, Figure 4, demonstrates the modifications to the original conceptualization which attempts to reflect the research findings more accurately.

#### Significance of the dissonance

The dissonance may provide some insight into the nature of children's spirituality. The revised conceptualization represents a more dynamic concept of spirituality than the original conceptualization. The original conceptualization represents four dimensions – Consciousness, Relationality, Identity and Roadmap - more or less in equilibrium. On the other hand the revised conceptualization attempts to represent spirituality as a spiral movement where children's spirituality may be represented as a process rather than a state of being.

Figure 4. *A revised conceptualization of the dimensions of spirituality – emanating from the findings of this research*



Hart (2003) defined spirituality as both a worldview (state of being) and a process of development. As a worldview it “located the individual in a multidimensional, sacred universe” (p. 9). As a process of development Hart perceived spirituality as “an ongoing growth process – a process of identity...recognized as integration and wholeness” (p. 9). Webster (2005) also recognized these two aspects of spirituality, and the relationship between them, when he stated that “personal identity is gained by *how* an individual relates to and values his or her relations” (p. 9). Eaude (2005) recognized the two aspects of

spirituality when he suggested that the metaphor of development is inadequate, since children's spirituality also exhibits particular characteristics at different ages. He proposed other metaphors such as "growth, health, integration", suggesting that children can "regress as well as progress", but overall he saw spirituality as "a process, rather than a set of specific experiences" (2005, p. 245). The process of analysis in this research indicated a progression through the four chapters of the findings, which may indicate a process of spiritual development. This progression may provide some insight into the way in which the spiritual relationships with Self and Other are incorporated into a meaningful "narrative identity" (Ricoeur, 1985).

#### Some implications for religious education

The findings of this study have implications for religious education which are

- a) applicable to Christian Religious Education (CRE) in Victorian state schools,
- b) and applicable in a more general way to religious education.

#### *Christian Religious Education in Victorian state schools*

The CRE Curriculum Overview of ACCESS ministries (2009), the official provider of CRE for state primary schools in Victoria, some other Australian states, and New Zealand states that

*The CRE curriculum is Biblically based, educationally sound, student-focused, theologically clear and contextually appropriate. The material is constructed around a theological framework that intersects with **values, students' lives and educational emphases** (emphases in the original text) (CRE Curriculum Overview, Access ministries, 2009, p. 1)*

This research provides some independent findings about the values and lives of some students which could be valuable for enriching the CRE curriculum.

The findings of this research confirm that one may not take for granted that children growing up at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have a connection with the Christian church and its teachings. None of the children who were interviewed had families with church affiliation. The social environment of these children was

secular, and multicultural in the case of the suburban children. Most of the children in the survey attended Christian Religious Education classes, but they gave little indication of the impact of these classes. Most of the children believed in God, but only a few thought God was “important” to them. The children’s beliefs about death included popular notions about heaven and hell, but keeping the deceased person in one’s memory was of deeper experiential significance. A few children had an experiential belief in God and God’s care of them. While the influence of Christianity is waning, there are increasing numbers of children in CRE classes who come from other faith communities. At the suburban school six of the eight children interviewed were from the Buddhist tradition.

While religion did not greatly affect the values and worldview of these children, the mass media in the form of television, books, and computer games was influential, on their imaginative play, and in helping to shape their values and enhance their relationships through presenting role models. Another contemporary social influence was sport, both at elite level as providing role models, and in the positive physical and social benefits of the children’s own participation. Religious Education could make more use of the popular media, not just for arousing their attention, but in exploring the values and relationships inherent in popular books and television programs. In the absence of an inherited religious language the media provide alternative means for the children to develop their spiritual experiences of Consciousness and Relationality through story and symbol, through such activities as role play, art and music.

Importantly, this research revealed many positive aspects of children’s inherent spirituality. The children in this research were open to the wonder and awe of the natural world, the wonder of human relationships and the possibility of a relationship with a transcendent being. Some had a relationship with a personal God. In their relationships with animals, friends and family they demonstrated bonding, empathy and the formation of positive moral values. They were eager to explore existential mysteries, such as death. They accessed their inner resources through times of silence, through imagination and through their relationships, including relationship with the transcendent. The children had positive values which can be

encouraged, and some negative ones that can be challenged, to develop a positive worldview and sense of their own worth and identity. These findings may help teachers (instructors) of CRE to approach their task with a positive attitude, that the children in the class, in spite of their perceived ignorance and waywardness, already have the seeds of faith within them.

Although this section focuses on the context of Christian Religious Education in Victorian state schools, the insights from this research, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, may be applicable to a multi-faith context for Religious Education. As other authors have noted, (Hart, 2003. Hay & Nye, 2006, and others) children's spirituality is a universal phenomenon.

#### The limitations of this research

This research was conducted in a largely unexplored field: the spirituality of children in government schools in Australia. It is valuable as a comparison with Hyde's (2008) similar study in Victorian Catholic Schools. Although the ethos of the schools in the two systems was different, the student populations and the research findings were similar. This would suggest that the home and the wider culture may have more influences on the children's spirituality than the school. The defining spiritual factors were probably within the children themselves.

The main limitation of this study was in the size and range of the group of children in the study. The researcher's resources limited the study to 24 children, with four more in the rehearsal of the project. However the range of schools available for the project was greater than originally anticipated, in that there was a geographical range including rural, provincial and metropolitan schools. While the provincial and rural schools did not provide a wide range of ethnic and socioeconomic factors, these were represented at the suburban school. The limitation of age range to students aged eight to ten (grades three and four) was chosen because of the researcher's wide experience with this age group, and for ease of administration for the schools. Because the number of responses from parents giving permission for their children to participate was small, the group of children interviewed was probably more representative of enthusiastic children and more

socially-aware parents, than of the general school population. Within this group the choice was not “random”, but convenient, taking into account administrative constraints and judgments about the suitability of children, for example, children with very limited English language skills were not included. Another limitation of the study was the short time available for the children to become familiar with the researcher, and be comfortable with the interview situation. This was particularly a factor at the rural school. When questioning whether 24 participants was a sufficient number, and the group was sufficiently diverse, the researcher noted Kvale’s (1996) assertion that “the present approach emphasizes the quality rather than the quantity of the interviews” (pp. 101-102), and that a greater number is not necessarily more “scientific” in the context of qualitative analysis.

A further limitation in the choice of only children aged eight to ten was inability to investigate differences in spirituality at different ages, and the possibility of investigating developmental factors. It is probably significant that the study revealed few instances of the kind of spiritual experiences that Hart (2003) described as “Listening for Wisdom” or “Seeing the Invisible”. Hart described instances where children as young as two to as old as twelve had experiences of being visited by angels, being aware at a distance that someone had died, or seeing “aura”, or lights invisible to other people. Most of Hart’s descriptions were of experiences of very young children. Hart’s daughter, Lucy, was aged six when she reported seeing her angel. The only such instance in the present study was Mary’s report of seeing an angel when she was aged six. Hay’s (2000) research findings showed “the extent to which children are embarrassed by their own spiritual awareness, particularly by the time they reach the age of ten” (p. 39). Hay attributed this “forgetting” of their spirituality by children to the individualism of modern spirituality (p. 37). Hay and Nye (2006) also attributed rejection of their earlier spiritual awareness to the secularization of society with the increasing role of a popular rational scientific judgment and the loss of connectedness with humanity’s spiritual roots. This researcher witnesses this rationalist skepticism in children in grades five and six (ten to twelve year olds), but noted that it began in the eight to ten year old group. However there are positive aspects for spiritual growth in this cognitive maturing in

that the children's fields of wonder are extended to scientific and philosophical questions. The children in the study demonstrated a lively interest in existential questions about the mysteries of the natural world, and of beginnings and ends of life.

#### Areas for further research

The comments above, by Hay (2000) and by Hay & Nye (2006) suggest that there could be further research in Australia in interviewing younger primary school children to compare with the observations of Hart (2003), and Hay & Nye (2006). This might discover whether six year old children still report transcendental experiences, and at what age these experiences might begin to be repressed. Individual interviews with older children asking about retrospective experiences might also be valuable. Some longitudinal studies would be useful for observing developmental changes in spirituality in individual children.

More extensive research into the effects of current mass media, particularly the newer interactive technologies which children now use, would be valuable. This could explore effects of these media on children's spirituality, through their effects on their imaginative life and their relationships with the natural world, other people and the transcendent. Particular interest could be the study of any changes in children's values.

The responses of some of the children in the study, Finn and Hahn in particular, suggest that the effects on spirituality and spiritual development of trauma and post traumatic stress disorder is an area worthy of further study. Goodwin<sup>4</sup>, a Melbourne PhD student, is already researching this topic in relation to Sudanese (Dinka) refugees in the Australian context.

Another area which this study has begun to explore (Moriarty, 2009) is children's use of non religious language, such as symbol and metaphor, to express their spirituality. This could be particularly valuable for application in the classroom

---

<sup>4</sup> Goodwin's research project entitled "Exploring the spirituality and religiosity of Dinka children in Catholic schools in western suburbs of Melbourne, Victoria" is exploring the effects on spirituality of past experiences of living in a country where "civil war, political instability and adverse weather conditions" prevailed (from informal communications, 2009).



where Biblical metaphors and Christian symbols are unfamiliar to contemporary children. Halstead (2005) enunciated four key elements in the process of building metaphors, which could be investigated in relation to children. These elements are

- a) the exercise of the imagination,
- b) the grounding in bodily experience
- c) the exploration of abstract ideas,
- d) the open outcome (p. 139).

These are some areas of investigation which could extend the findings and analysis of this research.

### Summary and conclusion

This chapter examined the dissonance between the original research conceptualization for this research, first presented in the methodology chapter, and a revised model which reflected the findings chapters more accurately. The explanations given for the dissonance were:

- a) the consequence of the methodology and method used, including the theoretical perspective of key exponents of hermeneutic phenomenology, and also the structure of the interview schedule,
- b) the findings of the research, which indicated that the different dimensions of spirituality – Consciousness, Relationality, Roadmap and Identity – were in a dynamic relationship with each other, culminating in the child's spiritual identity.

This chapter also reviewed the limitations of the study, application to Religious Education, and possibilities for further research.

The key contribution of this research is in further exploration of children's spirituality through the dimensions of Consciousness, Relationality, Roadmap and Identity, in the largely unexplored context of Victorian state schools. Another contribution of this research is the observation of relationships between these dimensions which suggest that the spirituality of these children may be conceptualized as a process of development towards as sense of meaningful identity.

APPENDIX A  
ACU National Human Resources Ethics Committee Approval

Australian Catholic University  
Brisbane Sydney Canberra Ballarat Melbourne



Human Research Ethics Committee

Committee Approval Form

**Principal Investigator/Supervisor:** Dr Brendan Hyde Melbourne Campus

**Co-Investigators:** Melbourne Campus

**Student Researcher:** Mrs Wyn Moriarty Melbourne Campus

**Ethics approval has been granted for the following project:**

An investigation of the spirituality (worldview) of children in Victorian state primary schools

**for the period:** 14<sup>th</sup> August 2006 - 30<sup>th</sup> June 2007

**Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) Register Number:** V200506 78

The following standard conditions as stipulated in the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans (1999)* apply:

- (i) that Principal Investigators / Supervisors provide, on the form supplied by the Human Research Ethics Committee, annual reports on matters such as:
  - security of records
  - compliance with approved consent procedures and documentation
  - compliance with special conditions, and
- (ii) that researchers report to the HREC immediately any matter that might affect the ethical acceptability of the protocol, such as:
  - proposed changes to the protocol
  - unforeseen circumstances or events
  - adverse effects on participants

The HREC will conduct an audit each year of all projects deemed to be of more than minimum risk. There will also be random audits of a sample of projects considered to be of minimum risk on all campuses each year.

Within one month of the conclusion of the project, researchers are required to complete a *Final Report Form* and submit it to the local Research Services Officer.

If the project continues for more than one year, researchers are required to complete an *Annual Progress Report Form* and submit it to the local Research Services Officer within one month of the anniversary date of the ethics approval.

Signed:

Date: 16/08/2006

(Research Services Officer, Melbourne Campus)

APPENDIX B  
Approval of Department of Education and Training

---



**Department of Education & Training**

---

Office of Learning and Teaching

SOS003307



Dear Mrs Moriarty

Thank you for your application of 12 June 2006 in which you request permission to conduct a research study in government schools titled: *An investigation of the spirituality (worldview) of children in Victorian State Primary Schools.*

I am pleased to advise that on the basis of the information you have provided your research proposal is approved in principle subject to the conditions detailed below.

1. Should your institution's ethics committee require changes or you decide to make changes, these changes must be submitted to the Department of Education and Training for its consideration before you proceed.
2. You obtain approval for the research to be conducted in each school directly from the principal. Details of your research, copies of this letter of approval and the letter of approval from the relevant ethics committee are to be provided to the principal. The final decision as to whether or not your research can proceed in a school rests with the principal.
3. No student is to participate in this research study unless they are willing to do so and parental permission is received. Sufficient information must be provided to enable parents to make an informed decision and their consent must be obtained in writing.
4. As a matter of courtesy, you should advise the relevant Regional Director of the schools you intend to approach. An outline of your research and a copy of this letter should be provided to the Regional Director.

2 Treasury Place  
East Melbourne, Victoria 3002  
Telephone: +61 3 9637 2000  
DX 210083


GPO Box 4367  
Melbourne, Victoria 3001



5. Any extensions or variations to the research proposal, additional research involving use of the data collected, or publication of the data beyond that normally associated with academic studies will require a further research approval submission.
6. At the conclusion of your study, a copy or summary of the research findings should be forwarded to the Research and Development Branch, Department of Education and Training, Level 2, 33 St Andrews Place, GPO Box 4367, Melbourne, 3001.

I wish you well with your research study. Should you have further enquiries on this matter, please contact Chris Warne, Project Officer, Research on (03) 9637 2272.

Yours sincerely



**John McCarthy**  
Assistant General Manager  
Research and Innovation Division

28/17/2006

enc

## APPENDIX C

### Letter to school principals

Australian Catholic University  
Brisbane Sydney Canberra Ballarat Melbourne



28 November 2006

Australian Catholic University Limited  
ABN 15 050 192 660  
Melbourne Campus (St Patrick's)  
115 Victoria Parade Fitzroy VIC 3065  
Locked Bag 4115 Fitzroy MDC VIC 3065  
Telephone 613 9953 3000  
Facsimile 613 9953 3005  
www.acu.edu.au

Mr Paul Volkering, Principal  
Glen Waverley Primary School

Dear Mr Volkering

This is a follow-up to our recent discussion concerning permission to conduct research in your school. I have been able to obtain permission from the Department of Education and Training, Research Section. A copy is being sent by post.

I am writing to ask you for an interview to make specific arrangements for time and place at your school, for which permission from the Ethics committee of Australian Catholic University has been granted, if you and your council agree to allow the research interviews.

Project details, and a brief description of the project are as follows.

TITLE OF PROJECT - An investigation of the spirituality (worldview) of children in Victorian State Primary Schools.  
PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR – Dr. Brendan Hyde  
STUDENT RESEARCHER – Mrs. Wyn Moriarty  
PROGRAM – Doctor of Philosophy

This study aims to discover something about the worldview, sense of identity and the values of children in grades 3 and 4 in state primary schools. The British educationalist, Clive Erricker, describes “worldview” as the way children construct meaning from their experiences, and he believes that meaning rather than truth or knowledge alone, underpins the education of the whole child (*The Education of the Whole Child, 1997, p. 9*). The present study proposes to study dimensions of spirituality which other researchers describe as components of worldview, namely consciousness or perceptions of reality, relationships with other people and the environment, how children perceive their identity, and what informs their moral values. Spirituality is not synonymous with religion.

The design of this study is to conduct two semi-structured interviews with two groups of four children in each school, followed by one individual semi-structured interview with each child. Interviews would consist of games or stimulus material,

CRICOS registered provider:  
00004G, 00112C, 00873F,  
00885B

followed by discussion by the children of the topics arising from this material, lasting approximately three quarters of an hour. Interviews would be videotaped for detailed analysis, and held in a suitable place and time within the school. As the researcher is not known by the children in your school I would like permission to spend time over 3 weeks in the classrooms before the interviews begin so that the children are comfortable in my presence. Children to be interviewed will be chosen at random from forms giving parental approval.

Permission to conduct this research has been granted by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Australian Catholic University. Letters giving information and asking permission of parents have been drafted, and a copy will be sent for your approval. Conditions of trust, confidentiality and anonymity will be observed. The principal and parents will be informed of the outcome of the research.

Any questions concerning this project can be directed to  
Dr. Brendan Hyde (Supervisor), or Mrs Wyn Moriarty (Student Researcher)  
On telephone number 9953 3000  
In the School of Religious Education  
Australian Catholic University  
Melbourne Campus  
Locked Bag 4115,  
Fitzroy, Vic 3065

In the event that you have any complaint or concern about this study, you may write to the Chair of the HREC, care of the address below.

Chair, HREC  
c/o Research Services  
Australian Catholic University  
Locked Bag 4115  
Fitzroy, Vic. 3065

Thank you for your assistance so far,  
Yours sincerely

(Mrs) Micheline Wyn Moriarty

## APPENDIX D – Letter to the parents and participants

Australian Catholic University  
Brisbane Sydney Canberra Ballarat Melbourne



Australian Catholic University Limited  
ABN 15 050 132 860  
Melbourne Campus (St Patrick's)  
115 Victoria Parade Fitzroy VIC 3065  
Locked Bag 4115 Fitzroy MDC VIC 3065  
Telephone 613 9953 3000  
Facsimile 613 9953 3005  
www.acu.edu.au

TITLE OF PROJECT An investigation of the spirituality (worldview) of children in  
Victorian State Primary Schools  
PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR – Dr. Brendan Hyde  
STUDENT RESEARCHER – Mrs Wyn Moriarty  
PROGRAMME – Doctor of Philosophy

Dear Parent/Guardian

This letter is to give you information about my research project so that you can make an informed decision as to whether you would like your child to participate.

This study seeks to find out what children in grades 3 and 4 in state primary schools think about important issues like their relationships with other people and the environment, how they think about themselves, what are their values and what are the big questions about life for them. This letter seeks permission for your child to be part of this study. Should you give your approval his or her name will be put on a list from which 8 children from their school will be chosen at random to take part in the study.

The purpose of the study is to find out more about what children in the 21<sup>st</sup> century think about important issues for them. The findings of the study will be used to give educators in schools a better understanding of what children value and what they wonder about. It will be of particular value for the teaching of religious education in schools, though the interview topics will not be about religion specifically. Spirituality is not the same as religion. Researchers have found that everybody has something they believe in (that is, they have a spirituality), whether they are religious or not, and this applies to children too. Although this study is being undertaken through the Australian Catholic University, it is not being undertaken for or by the Catholic Church, or the Council for Religious Education in Schools which is responsible for the RE program, but is independent research.

The children who take part in this study will participate in two group interviews of four children, and one interview by themselves. The interviews will take place at the school, during class time, each for about three quarters of an hour. The interview will include games and activities, and the children discussing their ideas with the researcher on topics such as "awe and wonder" and important relationships. The interviews will be recorded on videotape for later detailed analysis.

CRICOS registered provider:  
00004G, 00112C, 00873F,  
00885B

The children taking part in this program should find it a friendly, enjoyable experience. Whatever they say will be treated with sensitivity and respect, and confidentiality. Although some children may wish to talk about sensitive issues like grief or loss, there will be no pressure for them to do so. Should you or your child wish to withdraw from the program at any time you are free to do so, and no reason needs to be given. Your child will not be disadvantaged in any way.

There are a number of ways that your child's confidentiality will be preserved. At the interviews the children will be warned not to repeat what is said outside the interview room. The researcher will not show the videotapes to anyone else. In any records, reports or publications your child's name and the name of the school will be disguised so that other people cannot identify them.

Any questions concerning this project should be directed to  
Dr Brendan Hyde (Supervisor), or Mrs Wyn Moriarty (Student Researcher)  
on telephone number 9953 3000  
in the School of Religious Education  
Australian Catholic University  
Melbourne Campus  
Locked Bag 4115, Fitzroy, Victoria, 3065

When results are obtained from the research project a short report will be sent to the parents of participating children.

This study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University. In the event that you have any complaint or concern about the way your child has been treated during the study, or if you have any query that the Supervisor and Student Researcher have not been able to satisfy, you may write to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee care of the address below.

Chair, HREC  
c/o Research Services  
Australian Catholic University  
Melbourne Campus  
Locked Bag 4115  
Fitzroy, Vic. 3065  
Telephone 9953 3158

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. The participant's parents will be informed of the outcome.

If you agree that your child may participate in this project, you should sign both copies of the Consent Form, retain one copy for your records and return the other copy to the Student Researcher at the Australian Catholic University.

-----  
*B. Hyde*  
Supervisor

-----  
*M. Moriarty*  
Student Researcher



## APPENDIX E

### Parents' and participant's consent form

Australian Catholic University  
Brisbane Sydney Canberra Ballarat Melbourne



PARTICIPANT'S COPY

Australian Catholic University Limited  
ABN 15 050 192 660  
Melbourne Campus (St Patrick's)  
115 Victoria Parade Fitzroy VIC 3065  
Locked Bag 4115 Fitzroy MDC VIC 3065  
Telephone 613 9953 3000  
Facsimile 613 9953 3005  
www.acu.edu.au

#### PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM

TITLE OF PROJECT – AN INVESTIGATION OF THE SPIRITUALITY (WORLDVIEW)  
OF CHILDREN IN VICTORIAN STATE PRIMARY SCHOOLS  
NAME OF PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR – DR BRENDAN HYDE  
NAME OF STUDENT RESEARCHER – MRS WYN MORIARTY

I ..... have read and understood the information provided in the Letter to the Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree that my child, nominated below, may participate in this activity of three videotaped interviews and observed play activities. I realise that I can withdraw my consent at any time. I agree that research data collected may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify my child in any way. I understand that the interviews will be videotaped for later detailed analysis.

NAME OF PARENT/GUARDIAN ..... (block letters)

SIGNATURE ..... DATE.....

NAME OF CHILD.....(block letters)

#### ASSENT OF PARTICIPANTS AGED UNDER 18 YEARS

I ..... understand what this research project is designed to explore. What I will be asked to do has been explained to me. I understand that I will take part in three videotaped interviews and observed play activities. I agree to take part in the project, realising that I can withdraw at any time without having to give a reason for my decision.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT AGED UNDER 18 .....  
(block letters)

SIGNATURE ..... DATE .....

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR..... *B. Hyde* ..... DATE *18/8/06*

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER ..... *M.W. Moriarty* ..... DATE *18/08/06*

CRICOS registered provider:  
00004G, 00112C, 00873F,  
00885B

## APPENDIX F

**Interview Schedule – (version two)****Meeting 1 – Consciousness****Phase 1 - wondering**

Activities – choose a photo of something amazing – spread out on table for selection

Possible questions – Why did you chose this picture? Tell us what you find amazing or unusual.

What does it make you think about?

What do the rest of you think about X's picture?

If you haven't chosen a picture, could you tell us about something amazing for you?

What is the most amazing or weird thing that has happened to you? Perhaps you haven't told anybody about it before.

Have you had a really amazing or weird dream?

Who is an amazing person for you?

**Phase 2 – The Big question** – introduce the title with a cue card

Activity – show the picture of the thinking child

Possible questions – What is this child thinking?

What is the biggest question you can think of?

Is there something you have always wanted to know? Who could you ask?

Is there a hard question you have figured out for yourself?

What do the others think of X's question? Have any of you got some ideas?

If you met someone in charge of the world/universe, (who might that be?) what question would you ask?

**Meeting 2 Relationality**

Phase 1 – group activity – jigsaw puzzle – observe the interaction and strategies used.

Possible questions – Did you enjoy doing the puzzle? Why?

What things do you like doing with other people?

Who do you specially like doing things with?

Do you have a special place that you go with your friends? What do you do there?

Is there a special place where you like to go to be quiet and think, or do your special things?

**Phase 2** – Read the story *The violin man*

Possible questions – Did you like the story? Note the little pink creatures. What might they be?

Was Oscar a sad man or a happy person? What made him happy or sad?

Who were Oscar's friends? What did they do to be friends to him?  
 Does a friend have to be a person? Who are your friends? Do you have other kinds of friends?  
 Who were Oscar's family in the story? Did it matter to him that Marietta was dead?  
 What do you think happens when people are dead?  
 What do you think it would be like to have no living family around, like Oscar?  
 What is it like to be in a family? Who are the most important people in your life?  
 Which places were real (or familiar) for Oscar and which places were not so real for him?  
 What places are real or unreal for you?  
 What did Oscar dream about?  
 Do you have dreams or imagine something you would like to happen?

### **Meeting 3**

#### **Phase 1 – Identity** (take drawing materials etc)

Activity – make a drawing of yourself, or a concept map of your self and your world  
 Possible questions – Tell me about your drawing. What does it say about you?  
 Are you different or the same as other people (your friends, siblings)?  
 Do you think that you are special in some way? What makes you special/different?  
 What do your family/friends think about you? Do you agree with them?  
 Could you tell me a story about something special that you do, or has happened to you?  
 Some people think of God as special. Who do you think of as special?  
 What things do you like to imagine?

#### **Phase 2 – Roadmap**

Activity – show the picture of the Kosovo refugees. Explain the picture as necessary.  
 Possible questions – What is happening to these people? Where are they going?  
 What could be done to help them?  
 Is there anything you could do to help them? Tell me about a time when you helped somebody.  
 Has anybody helped you?  
 What are some good things that people do? What are some bad things that people do?  
 If you had 3 wishes for the world, or people you know, what would they be?  
 Activity – draw a picture of “Your Journey”. It can be anything real or imaginary.  
 Tell me about your drawing.  
 What do you like to happen when you are a teenager, a grown-up?

## APPENDIX G – SOME STIMULUS MATERIAL

The following pictures were used as stimulus material in the interviews with the children. The researcher introduced the first interviews by presenting the children with about eight photographs. The children were asked to choose one picture which he or she found to be “awesome”. This was followed by the children discussing what they found to be awesome in the pictures he or she, and the others in the group, had chosen. The first five of the following photographs were among the most popular choices of the children.

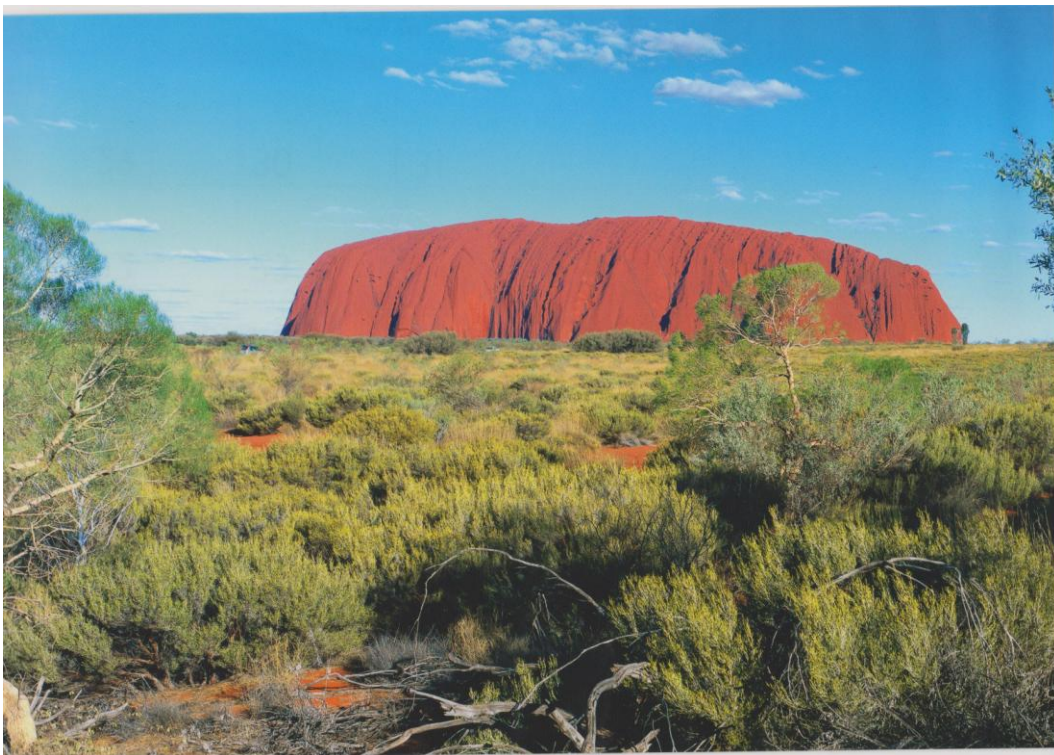
The cartoon picture of a child was used later in the first interviews to explore what for the children was a “big question”. The task was introduced by asking each child what the child in the picture might be thinking. The ambiguity of the picture was able to elicit responses which seemed to reflect the interests or concerns of the children being interviewed

The final stimulus picture included in Appendix G was used in the third interviews to elicit a response which might reflect the children’s values, in particular, their empathy with others they did not know. After the children examined the photograph the researcher explained that it was a photograph of refugees fleeing from the fighting in the war in Kosovo. The children’s experience of seeing images of the war in Iraq informed their responses.

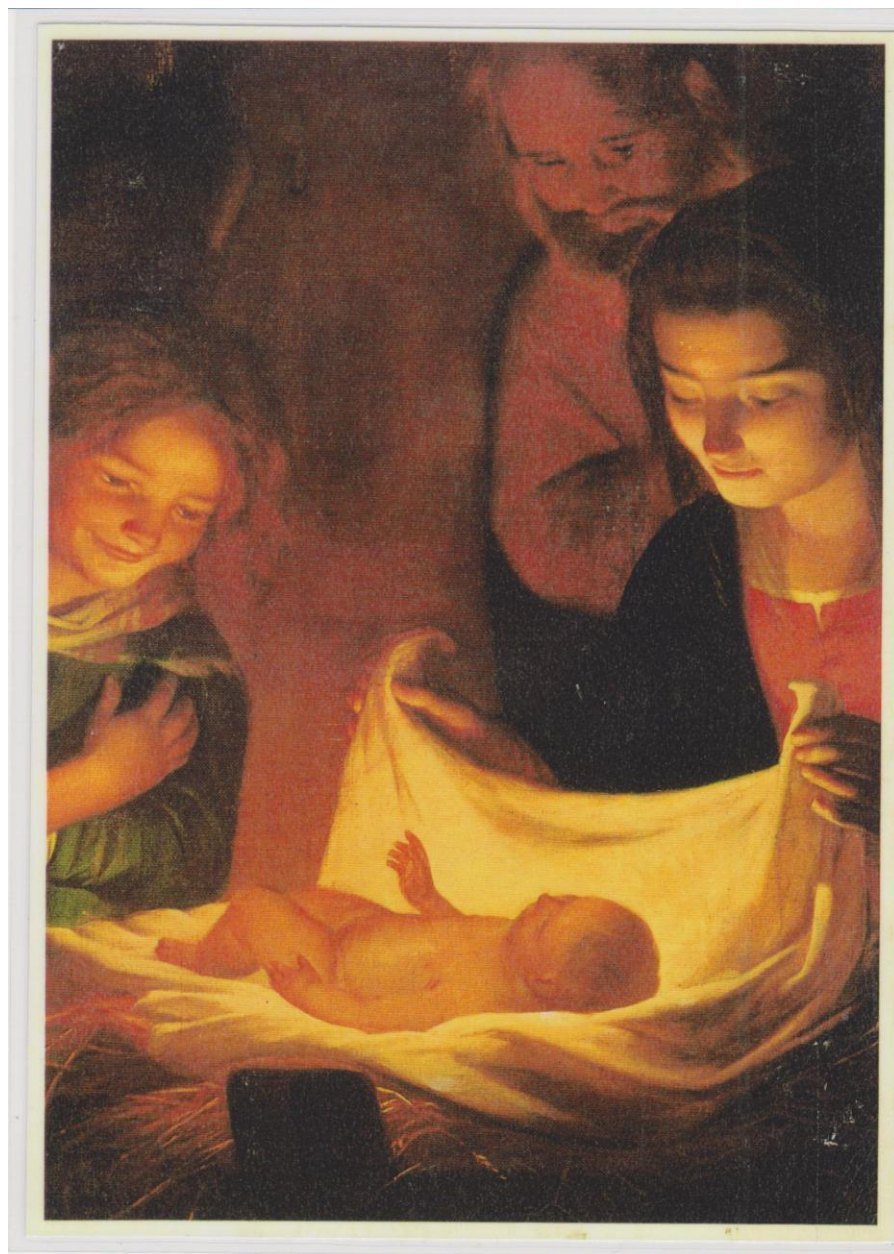
The Twelve Apostles



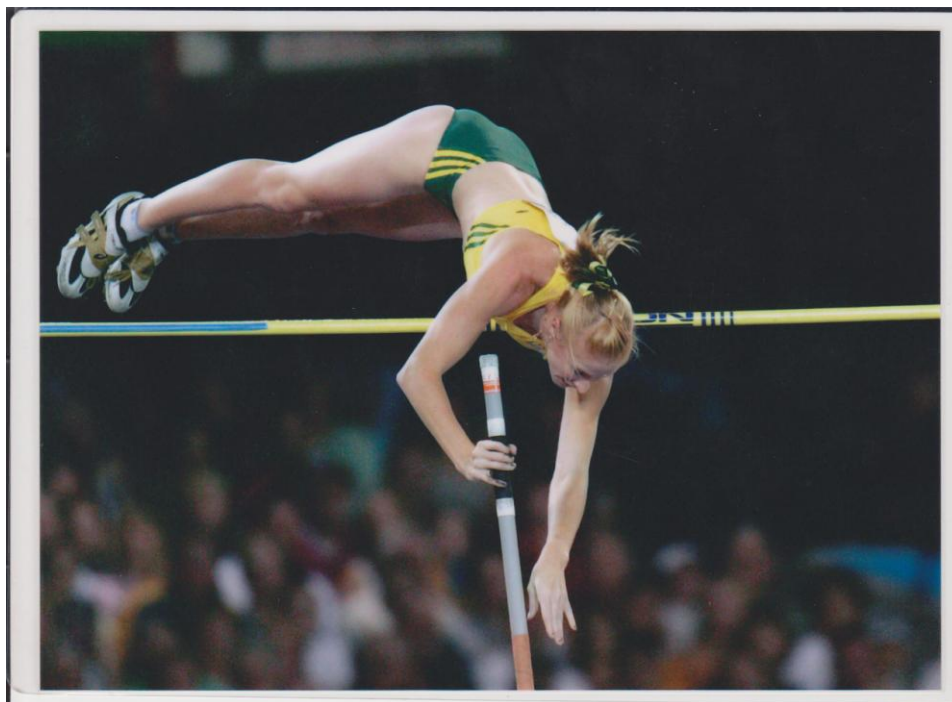
Uluru



Baby



Pole vaulter



Baby bird



Thinking Child



Refugees





## APPENDIX H

### Some profiles of participants

#### *Introduction*

Following is a selection of the hermeneutic phenomenological profiles of interviewees prepared according to Champagne's (2003) *spiritual modes of being*. These profiles provided an intermediate stage of analysis between the transcripts of videotaped interviews and the writing of the thesis.

Originally it was intended to include all 24 of the profiles in the appendix, but this would make the appendices to the thesis excessively long. The researcher has decided to include those profiles which are cited most frequently in the findings chapters. The researcher has also included one profile (Jordan) not directly referred to in the analysis to indicate that the spirituality of children not directly included in the findings chapters does not differ in any major degree from those included in the following profiles.

A total of 13 profiles, approximately half of the total, are included here. They are arranged in alphabetical order of pseudonyms.

## Profile 1

### Alex *Sensitive Mode*

Alex presented in the first interview as a performer, a clown for the camera and the other participants with silly faces and jokes and large hand gestures. As a performer, he was also a story-teller, filling out considerable information about such matters as the origin of the planets and the earth, with a lively imagination. Visually, he responded to colour, such as to the woman pole-vaulter's shoes. His favourite colours were red, which reminded him of fire, and yellow, which reminded him of lightning and the sun. Doing the jigsaw puzzle, he had a good grasp of the total picture and where the different parts fitted. This sense of a whole also occurred in his second "awesome" picture (he chose two), which was a photograph of earth from space. There was some response to the white patches, which he interpreted as water, but his main interest was in the idea of representing the whole world "different people all over the world, different animals" and different kinds of electronic games which might be able to be exchanged. In his self-portrait he drew only his head, and on reviewing it he said "It looks like a potato", so the portrait became "Potato Alex". He demonstrated tactile sense by running his hands over the jigsaw pieces and the completed puzzle, and by giving his friend a gentle punch on the arm.

Like a number of the boys, he chose the pole-vaulter because of his pre-occupation with sport. Again, for Alex this was not just a sensory (kinaesthetic) pleasure, although he described the technique of hammer throwing and tricks with a soccer ball (and the thrill of a "wave ride" at the Gold Coast), but it had many social connotations. He liked participating in athletics, soccer and football because "you meet new friends, you learn things...and because I might play AFL or World Cup or be in the Olympics...You can become famous". Sport also plays a large part in his relationship with his family.

### *Relational Mode*

Alex related well with his peers, which was demonstrated while he was doing the jigsaw puzzle. However, when he got excited, as in the first interview, he

tended to dominate the discussion, causing some frustration among the other participants. But when I pointed this out to him in the next session he showed exemplary restraint and consideration for the others.

Alex's relationship with his family was a revelation of sensitivity and strong bonds, in the face of the situation of his mother being ill with cancer. He spoke about the need to help her in many practical ways, and to show consideration so she could rest. His spontaneous wish was for her to get better. His older sister was also in an athletics club, and participated at district level. This gave Alex pride, as well as opportunities to travel to various venues with his father and sister. He also had strong bonds with his wider family, especially his two nanas, whom he hoped to help with lawn-mowing when he was older.

Outside the family, he regarded the late Steve Irwin as a hero. "I really miss him", he said. In the group discussion he also related to the sting-ray, as trying to protect itself. He remembered the little chickens they looked after in Prep, which he was able to hold. He also liked "big lions".

### *Existential mode*

#### *Identity*

Alex identified himself as sporty, friendly, "loud", and self-reliant. He said, "I do things by myself, I don't need to ask my Dad" and "I'm not annoying" (unlike his sister). This self-reliance was also demonstrated in his answer to the question "What would it be like to have no family?" Alex replied "...if everyone was dead, and you were 10 years old, and you were grown up by yourself, (reaches across the table) you'd have to ride to school and everything, get a job, somehow buy all your food and everything." His next comments were about his mother's car being broken into, and what might have happened. This was interesting in the light of his mother's illness, and seemed to demonstrate anxiety about his future. He said that what was special to him was having his family.

The other dominant feature of his identity was his determination to do well at sport, and his pride in his achievements. He had achieved a number of Personal Bests in

athletics this year. He hoped to graduate to district competitions like his sister. His ultimate ambition was to participate in the Olympics Games in athletics, or the Australian Football League (AFL) in football. He said that he was so busy at sport that he didn't have time to think about God, or when he grew up.

*Big Question (beliefs)*

Alex was fascinated by the beginnings of the earth, animals, aborigines etc. However he was rather confused about the time frames involved. His stories about beginnings were both well informed (in most cases) and imaginative. He described how land animals evolved as follows: "...a bit of the earth was joined together, and that cracked and there was this massive island, like a rock around the world, and that cracked, and then all these monsters, like, really weird dinosaurs just came out of the ocean, and they formed into land ones". An alternative suggestion was "Maybe they were eggs and they floated up to the top, and maybe the wind blew them onto the land, and they just became dinosaurs". Although he didn't specifically believe in God, he did not believe that things just happened by accident, and related a number of possible explanations. His explanation for the origin of the Australian aborigines was this. "Although they were just normal people from other countries and they came to Australia first, and maybe they walked into a swamp, and they got all muddy, and they just...walked back out, and they couldn't get the mud off, and they got dark." (He looked very satisfied with this answer. The consummate showman!) He was interested in ambiguities, as when he related the story of the film "She's a man" (based on Shakespeare's Twelfth Night). He wondered why people are all different, which he explained in environmental terms, with reference to the Australian aborigines. He also sometimes thought that life was a video game, played by aliens (or monsters). Death was also ambiguous. He thought that maybe the spirit went "up", and the body remained in the coffin. The person who has died could still "have a picture" of you.

*Values*

Alex' prime value was helping people, especially his family. His three wishes were: for "Mum to get better; that no-one would steal and they would be rich; and for his friends, that no-one would hurt or annoy them, and they would be happy". Doing his

personal best, especially in sport was important, not only for himself, but because good sports people brought honour to Australia. Heroes, like Steve Irwin, not only did daring things, but they also helped animals and people. Materialism was also valued, such as having the latest computer game or mobile phone. He related a dream about living in a huge castle, with 50 cars. This materialism was related to other values. He explained that if people were rich they would have no need to steal. He noted that the plight of the refugees in the picture was largely due to having no car to get them to safety, and therefore having to carry all their possessions.

*Roadmap/Worldview*

Alex's "Journey" picture was derived from a fantasy TV show. In the show the hero fought a monster, with a variety of weapons. He said "Sometimes I imagine I'm on the show". This theme also emerged in a dream he experienced twice, which he related while he was doing the drawing. His family were in this other world where there were aliens with a number of weapons. His family, and other people, were hiding in a castle that had been bombed. Alex ran out of the castle, but his Dad came running out to get him. Alex armed himself with a dagger, sword and gun, but the aliens had massive weapons. He went out to face millions of these monsters (aliens). "They got us all and we all died". Strangely, Alex did not seem disturbed when he told the story. He seems to me to be arming himself with his clowning, his values, busyness, and Personal Bests to face the monsters in his life.

Note: On inquiring, Alex did not have any suggestions about the meaning of his dream. In fact, the idea that the dream might have some meaning seemed to make him uncomfortable.

## Profile 2

### Bailey

Bailey presented as a shy, softly spoken boy, who was comfortable in the group interviews, where he had a lot of interaction with the other children. However he seemed to be uncomfortable in the individual interview, although he tried to cooperate and answer questions that were difficult for him.

#### *Sensitive Mode*

Bailey's main interest was sport. He chose the pole-vaulting picture, and was well aware of the techniques of pole-vaulting, although he had only seen it on television. His favourite sport was cricket, and he seemed to spend many hours batting in the back yard with his younger brother, where he "makes a century". He was not in a local sporting team. It was not clear why, but he gave the indication that he would like to be. He said "I don't really know much about the teams around here". He also expressed amazement at the skill of trapeze artists, although he had not seen them, except (I presume) on television. He was not able to express how he felt playing sport, apart from "hot", but agreed that it is exciting to play.

Bailey also appeared to be interested in Art, although he was diffident about discussing it. Art was probably not very "cool" among his friends. He drew his hair green, because green was his favourite colour, and because he "just chose it". He drew his portrait with neat, careful strokes. He also expressed interest in the line, composition of the pole-vaulting picture, by tracing it with his finger. When he was doing the jigsaw puzzle he had a good conception of the total picture, and the colour and form on individual pieces.

Other interests of Bailey's were music and cars. He had a lot of CDs which he played at home, but he didn't like school music much. He began discussing the family's cars, and his wish for a new Falcon, but I didn't follow this up. He told an exciting story about riding a 4 wheeled motor bike on the farm, and the wheels locked. He told a story he had written about the adventures of two boys who had "hovercars".

Bailey's everyday experiences seemed rather limited, but he had a rich imaginative life, which seemed to be mainly fed by what he watched on television, and through video games. His "big question" was what to watch at the weekend. Although he generally did not enjoy writing lessons, he told me this story, with a lot of prompting.

"I wrote this story about two kids. Their names were Kenny and Carl. They were trying to run away from school. They managed to get away and there was this place called Coinland. And there was this petrol station, and they sell hovercars. And then they stole them. They raced along Coinland until they came to another land. And the police were after them....They just had normal cars. (And did they catch them?) No, they didn't get them. They got away with it." This story raised some interesting questions about values, which I will discuss later.

Other fantasies were based on television shows, like South Park, from which he imagined he was the King of Samphire. He also liked to imagine himself as James Bond, as in his 007 video games. His most touching story was about a television series called "Meerkat Manor". Both Bailey and Carmen said they never missed it while it was on. Bailey's favourite character was Shakespeare. He told how this meerkat "got bitten by a puff adder, and the venom did something to him. And the flesh was rotting away. And he survived. (W: That makes him a hero. That he survived). Bailey replied, "Yes, courageous". The children then discussed another character in the show, Tosca, who got "thrown out of the family". Bailey responded "I remember an episode once. Tosca was trying to get back into the family. She was desperate." Here Bailey showed that shows and games he watched not only stimulate his imagination with adventure, but also helped him to relate to others, and empathize with their situations. Bailey also admitted to having an "imaginary friend" when he was younger, the before-mentioned King of Samphire.

### *Relational Mode*

Bailey had very supporting relationships with his friends at school. In the first group interview he would whisper asides to Mitchell and the girls. (This is one example of how the children in this small rural school tended to treat the interviewer

as an outsider. Their manner was not hostile, just wary.) Doing the jigsaw puzzle, the group worked very well together, each doing his or her individual parts but being aware of what the others were doing, and all helping each other. In the group Bailey and the others chatted to each other as they worked. While the girls tended to dominate, Bailey and Mitchell were very much part of the team. Bailey had plenty of friends at school, with whom he played sport and a special friend who sometimes played with him at home. He did not give much indication as to how the family related at home, but he played with his younger brother. He had a sister living in the nearby city who had two small children that he specially mentioned.

Bailey lived on a farm, where he occasionally helped in the milking shed by hosing down the concrete floor. He was attached to a black and white cat, which doesn't particularly belong to him. There were two working dogs on the farm. He was born in the city, but liked living on the farm, for the space it provided. He explained to me how to make a silage pit, and other farm activities. He mentioned going fishing with his uncle, and jumping the waves with his brother instead of attending to the fishing.

Bailey's relationships seem to be strongest in his imaginative world. Besides his videogame and TV heroes, he had a number of sporting heroes, mainly in the Australian cricket team. He also had a collection of rocks which he regarded as his "friends".

### *Existential Mode*

#### *Identity*

Bailey gave the impression of being somewhat socially and economically deprived. He had not been to a major sporting event, a circus or a concert, as the other children had. It was not clear why he was not involved in local sporting clubs, which cater well for the children of the district. He had been to South Australia for a holiday "once". Money seemed to be a major concern for him. When the group was asked "what do your families think about?" he said, in a worried tone "The stock and the cattle. Will the bills be paid? Mum and Dad have to pay the bills". If he met whoever is in charge of the universe he would ask "Can I have your money?" His



three wishes were for a new Holden Commodore, some more “leggo” pieces, and a new couch for his brother’s house. A fantasy place for him was “Coinland”.

Bailey found it difficult to deal with a question that required an opinion, and he tended to equivocate. He was more comfortable dealing with facts, or with his stories. He seemed eager to participate in the group discussion, but his voice was very quiet and his manner unobtrusive. For example when he wanted to speak he would raise one finger, not very high. His self portrait was small, but meticulous and colourful. He put the textas (coloured pens) away neatly. He found the individual interview difficult, although he tried hard to participate. He would often look down, sniff, scratch, or pause a long time before answering, if at all. His values were hard to identify. He believed that giving to charity and recycling are good, and fighting is bad. In the story about the kids stealing the “hovercar”, he was glad they “got away with it”. He thought it was “cool”, but admitted that he didn’t “get away” with much. When asked if he had ever helped anyone he gave an unusual answer. He helped a friend by “apologising”, but didn’t want to give details. Bailey did not think about God much, but agreed with Carmen that he made the world, Adam and Eve, and the animals. Apart from those examples, the transcendent did not enter much into his thinking. “Someone who knows everything” would be his Mum who can spell words for him, even when she doesn’t know what the words mean. I did not ask him to do a journey picture because I felt he had had enough interview at that point

### *Roadmap*

Bailey seemed to be trapped in the poverty of his environment, where life was restricted to concrete issues of survival. His ambition when he grew up was to be “a motel cleaner”. In a sense this was appropriate because of his preoccupation with neatness and control, but it demonstrated his limited horizons, and perhaps low self esteem. His spiritual strength seemed to come from his imaginative life, and strong peer support, and some attachment to the land. He showed courage in confronting difficult situations like interviews with a stranger, or apologising to a friend. I hope this courage will lead him to larger places.

### Profile 3

#### Bianca – “Boundaries”

##### *Group Dynamics*

Bianca’s story is best seen against the backdrop of the group that was interviewed with her. All of the group, three in the first interview and four in the second, found difficulty in dealing with questions that were open-ended or had more than one alternative answer. They were more comfortable with specific, concrete questions, like “What pets do you have at home?” rather than “Who is an amazing person?” Terms like amazing, exciting, special, important, wonder, or imagination caused discomfort for all of them. Olivia was the only one who volunteered replies to this type of question. When faced with an ambiguous question the children tended to look to Olivia for guidance as to whether they should try to answer the question. Near the end of the first interview I said, in some frustration, “I get the feeling that the people in “Smallville” are not into wondering. You just get on with living”. Led by Olivia, they all agreed.

There were other common features in the group. For example, for their “amazing” picture they all picked recognisable places: Uluru, The Twelve Apostles, and The Great Wall of China. These pictures not only had “real” subjects, but may have represented the attraction for these children for places outside their area that they like, or would like, to visit. They were all more comfortable talking about familiar topics, like their families, their pets or their farms. Another feature of the group was its cohesion. They all supported each other in what seemed to be a slightly threatening situation. Olivia was particularly supportive of Bianca (even being subversive), by eye contact, whispering comments together, and holding hands under the table. The group of four completed the jigsaw puzzle very quickly (about 14 minutes). This can be attributed to quiet cooperation with each other.

##### *Sensitive Mode*

Bianca found the first two interviews somewhat threatening. She gave few verbal responses. She reacted to group discussion or questions directed to her by

nodding or shaking her head. Her body language was very closed: she sat with her hand on her face, her mouth firmly shut and twisted to one side, and she made very little eye contact with the interviewer. Only in the third, individual interview did she open up by smiling, making eye contact, and giving some decisive answers to questions on familiar topics. For ambiguous topics, like making three wishes, she tried really hard to make an answer, but generally responded with silence, or “I don’t know”. A clue to Bianca’s sensitivity, or her spirituality in a wider sense, seems to be that she had difficulty operating outside clear, familiar situations or concrete facts.

However Bianca did produce enough responses to indicate something of her perceptual mode. She had visited a number of places where she seemed to respond to small creatures or manageable situations. In Fiji she was fascinated by small crabs. At the Melbourne Aquarium her interest was not the sharks, but the ride around the display. The pictures that caught her attention in *The Violin Man* were the little rabbits and a very small cat. She also liked looking after small children, especially her one year old sister.

Bianca seemed to mainly use her visual mode. She liked art, and drew at home as well as school. She commented on the colours in the picture of the Great Wall. Her behaviour while doing the jigsaw puzzle was interesting. She showed great concentration, kept referring to the picture on the box, and worked very systematically and swiftly, finishing much more of the puzzle than the other children. After the task was completed, she looked relaxed, smiling and folding her hands on her lap.

#### *Relational Mode*

Bianca had lots of friends. They played with “bratz” dolls, and such games as tennis or “tiggy”. I noted that she was part of a relaxed social group in class. She said that she was “the same as” her friends (rather than different) because they did the same things. However she was uncomfortable with the idea of unconventional relationships such as imaginary friends (as was all the group), and was reluctant to admit that she talks to her dogs. She was fond of her pets: four dogs, three guinea pigs and 30 fish. She was the oldest child in what appeared to be a harmonious

family. She gave firm responses to questions about her family, and what she did at home. She helped her mother with the cooking and minding her baby sister, who was her favourite sibling. The family seemed to go on lots of holidays and outings. The family owned the farm, and she hoped to be a farmer when she grew up, like Mum and Dad.

Bianca responded sensitively and appropriately to the story of *The Violin Man* and the refugee picture. She said that someone should come in a helicopter and take the refugees, who must be sad and frightened, to a safe place. As mentioned above, her relationship with the interviewer began by her being tightly withdrawn, but ended by her being open, smiling and friendly, in spite of continuing to have difficulty with answering questions. She seemed to struggle to find a correct answer to issues outside her comfort zone. When she did her final drawing of her “journey” I said “Draw the first thing you think of. Don’t think too hard, because that makes it harder if you think too long”. She responded with a smile, and proceeded with her drawing quickly and happily.

#### *Existential Mode*

Bianca could be very closed and withdrawn in unfamiliar situations. Her self portrait was of a simple face which took up the whole page, but it was difficult to find any distinguishing features in it. She saw herself as pretty. Her family regarded her as pretty and clever. She said she was “quite messy” at home, but this might be her mother’s perception, for her mother tidied her bedroom. I observed Bianca putting things away neatly. She liked Maths and Art at school, and enjoyed sporting activities, especially horse riding. She seemed well liked by her peers. Bianca gave no indication of interest in God or the mysteries of life. The discussion of death seemed to make her uncomfortable, and she made no contribution. Her concept of the time of past events was blurry, such as when the family visited various places. However she was clear that the holiday to Hamilton Is. was before her baby sister was born.

Bianca's value system included helping Mum, sharing at school and helping others. She could not give me an example of when somebody had helped her. Her first, and only, wish was to be rich, but she could not specify the benefits of being rich. An example of the bad things people do was "robbing houses", and children going "out of bounds".

*Roadmap.*

Bianca's journey picture was of an island, not any particular island. This was the first indication of her imaginative life. The island had clear boundaries, of water all round. It had a beach, a number of palm trees and two swimming pools, - a happy picture. This picture, and her comment about children going out of bounds gave me a clue to her "signature" which I would describe as "living within the boundaries". She wanted to be a farmer, like her parents. She was happy in her small environment, with her friends, and some family visits to other places. She was uncomfortable in unfamiliar situations or with speculative or unfamiliar concepts. She was reluctant to admit to behaviour or an imaginative life outside what she seemed to see as the social boundaries (like talking to a dog, or giving "wrong" answers). The challenge for religious educators would be to give her a comfortable space in which to explore outside her safe boundaries.

## Profile 4

## Finn – “Through the Milky Way”

*Sensitive Mode*

The first thing I noticed about Finn was his physical activity. In class he was always moving around, always chattering. In the group interviews, most of the time he stood up, instead of sitting down. He would hum, or chant little rhythms to himself, like “a hephalump, a hephalump”, “my Dad is my Dad is my Dad is my Dad.” During the individual interview he constantly made objects with the “textas”, mostly guns, or long poles to try to touch the ceiling. He appeared to be a very intelligent child, who would make quick connections. After being asked “Have you ever helped anyone?” he said “I know what the next question will be, ‘Has anyone helped you?’ ” During the reading of *The Violin Man*, he listened intently to the story, not just noting the pictures like other children, and was the first to respond to questions about the story. He also made imaginative observations about the pictures on the themes in the story. He said “The cat’s dreaming to be a lion, and the dog’s dreaming to be a wolf, and the aeroplane’s dreaming to be an eagle”. When doing the jigsaw puzzle, Finn worked very efficiently, except when he became distracted, choosing pieces by colour and their part of the picture rather than shape. His favourite colour was red, but he liked green as well.

Finn was not involved in sport, unlike most of the boys. He lived in an imaginary world, the sources of which seemed to be books, like *The Lord of the Rings*. He played roles from this book, or Play Station, with his sister. He related how he had been playing one computer game for three days and had reached the “challenge mode, which means I have to play the whole game again...that’s the highest level you can get...Well the highest you can get is Exterminator”. In his games he seemed to be preoccupied with violence. He played his favourite *Lord of the Rings* character, Gimli. “He’s the guard with the battle-axe”, he explained. He told long and graphic stories, with many gestures, and a happy, excited voice, stories of himself in video games, shooting and killing. Finn’s self portrait was a small figure of himself with a gun in each hand in the centre of the picture, where he was

surrounded by a sea of blood, in which was a dead “army man” (not a kid), and at the edge of the picture was a large bomb. The whole picture was surrounded by a ring of cactuses. His imaginary world seemed to be so overwhelming that he could not recall any heroes in the “real” world, the nearest being Superman, and Batman. Finn’s preoccupation with a violent, imaginary world seemed to have implications for his emotional life and his relationships.

### *Relational Mode*

Finn’s strongest personal relationship seemed to be with his father, who lived in another state. His parents were divorced, and his mother, sister and Finn had moved to Melbourne. His father sometimes came to visit him. While doing the jigsaw puzzle Finn kept saying, to nobody in particular, that his father said you should start at the edge and work inward. He repeated little chants about his father, which annoyed Hahn, who was sitting next to him. A highlight of Finn’s life was a holiday to Malaysia, where his father took him and his sister. On that holiday he had exciting adventures with a dangerous snake, and aggressive monkeys. He told a long story about being chased by monkeys, which they had been warned to avoid. He said “My Dad didn’t listen, me and him went, and I was watching the monkeys all the time, and one started to run at us. I went ‘Dad! Dad! Dad!’ He picked me up. He looked at where the monkey, and then, and he picked me up and we ran all the way to the hotel.” (He used many gestures and an excited voice while telling the story). This story typified his love of danger, but its significance seemed to be in his father “picking him up” and rescuing him. Toward the end of this interview I felt he was ready for me to ask “Do you miss your Dad?” He gave an uncharacteristically quiet response “Yes, I miss him very much”.

Finn did not say much about his mother, except that she got his breakfast, and he sometimes helped her do the dishes. His positive comment about families was “Everything’s good about your family. Your mum and dad help you get breakfast. Your brother and sister can play with you. And your mum and dad can buy you toys and things. Well, it would be hard for you to do anything - and you’d have to live on the streets.” What was not good about having a family for Finn was

“when your mum and dad split up, or divorce.” Finn had a younger sister, aged 6. He ridiculed her for being big for her age, calling her “Penelope the Hephallump”. However he shared his imaginative life with his sister, and played hand-ball with her (his only mention of playing sport). He also “taught her to read”. He commented that “we play different games, and watch different shows, but we’re alike. We’re like twins. We should be twins.”

Finn’s relationships with his peers did not seem to be very strong. During the group interviews he engaged in attention-gaining behaviour, like singing, getting up from the table, and interrupting other’s conversations. He commented on Tom’s sporting prowess, with batting gestures, but Tom took little notice. He had more response from Hahn. Among his school friends he mentioned both girls and boys, but his strongest friendship seemed to be with a girl, Carol, with whom he discussed life and death. Finn told me, in some distress, that “Once a friend came to my house. Once in my entire life.” When asked what he and the friend did he replied “Well, everything that I could do. It was so quick I only got 10 minutes (further details suggest it was longer than that), 10 minutes with a friend at my house. It sucks.” His complaint was that when he went to a friend’s house he had to play the games they chose all the time, but he let the friend at his house choose the games. He also complained that kids at school “beat me up. They punch me in the head”. This may be fantasy, but it appeared that he had some difficulty in relating to children other than his sister. Another highlight of his trip to Malaysia was to spend time in three different “kid’s clubs”, which he seemed to enjoy.

### *Existential Mode*

Finn presented as an angry little boy. He said, “When I’m really angry I start to get smaller. So people can beat me up easier...and I’m really angry when I’m small.” When asked “Do you get angry often?” he replied “Well I grow small sometimes but not angry.” There seemed to be a confused connection. However, his aggression seemed to be confined to his fantasy life. He loved war games because he “usually loves gory stuff”, and he told violent stories with great enjoyment. On the other hand he said he would not shoot a real person “unless I’m in a war”. I did not



observe any aggressive behaviour toward other children, and he declared that killing or hurting real people was wrong. He showed genuine concern for the plight of the refugees. He said, “They’re feeling sad because their son might get hurt, or their husband or something”. His three wishes were that there would be no such thing as war, “that everyone would never hurt anyone”, and no-one would say bad words. I’m not a psychologist, but my guess is that Finn was working through his anger, perhaps about losing his father, seeking to resolve it in his, separate, fantasy life. He seemed to be drawing on the inner resources of his intelligence and his fantasy life for spiritual strength.

Finn had also thought about issues of life and death. His friend, Carol, told him that (in the real world, as distinct from Play Station, where you get three “lives” if you get shot) you get two lives. “If you believe in God you get another life, because you’ve been grateful to him. And he’s been grateful to you then... You come back. You’re like reborn (in this world)”. Finn said he did not believe his friend because her idea was “funny”, meaning incredible, but it had impressed him. He did, however, have a sense of family continuity, as in names passed on from grandfather to father, and from father to himself.

Finn had another concept of the transcendent, which might be a source of hope for him. He was fascinated by the Milky Way, which he mentioned on two occasions. While, on the one hand, he thought that it was literally composed of milk, he also believed that the Milky Way might be “a portal to the next solar system” His fourth wish, and his Journey Picture were to take a rocket to see if there was any way through the Milky Way, to “another solar system” beyond.

## Profile 5

## Grace

*Sensitive Mode*

At the first interview Grace appeared very nervous. She would put her hands over her face when she thought she was about to be asked a question, and would relax in relief if she was passed by. Her first response was “I don’t know what to say”. Even when she became more confident in responding to the discussion she found it difficult to answer a direct question, especially if it was expressed in general terms, or required a speculative or imaginative answer. (I have subsequently noticed that her father signed the consent form, but Grace did not). In spite of her apprehension Grace was interested in the research program, and would ask “Why are we doing this?” or “Will we be coming back?” At the beginning of the third interview, on her own, Grace said she really enjoyed coming, especially getting to know me better. There were times, especially in the third interview, when Grace related some really painful experiences, and looked about to cry, but she still persisted with the interviews.

My impression was that Grace has had to overcome difficult problems, especially chronic ill health, and has faced them bravely. She appeared to compensate for her chronic asthma and eczema by interest in sport and physical achievement. The picture she chose for “Awe and Wonder” was the pole-vaulter. She thought the picture was beautiful and amazing, and she admired the athlete for training, and doing her best to reach elite level. Grace enjoyed sport and games herself, and mentioned that the highlight of her week was going to a nearby pool to do water aerobics. (I wonder how much physical exertion she actually did, as her teacher told me her asthma was poorly controlled).

During interviews Grace said little, and most of her responses were kinaesthetic. She covered her face, folded her arms, fiddled with or sucked her headband, yawned and put her head on the desk near the end of the session. She would scratch her arms, cough and blow her nose. She also showed obsessive

gestures, like putting the textas back in the order she found them, and rubbing out her drawing frequently.

Grace showed her visual sensitivity in describing the beauty of water, in lakes, rivers and the sea. When doing the jigsaw puzzle she worked alone on a small area, mainly by colour, with little reference to the whole picture. She had difficulty in orientating her work into the larger picture.

### *Relational Mode*

The other children were very supportive of Grace, especially when she began the interviews by being so self-conscious. Mary put her hand on her shoulder a couple of times to encourage her. On another occasion I spoke to Grace's best friend, who was not in the program, and she seemed to be very aware of Grace's health problems. For example, she said that if Grace fell over, the gravel really made her eczema worse.

There were times when Grace liked to work alone, as with the jigsaw puzzle. She said that working alone meant that "you don't get into fights". Doing the jigsaw puzzle, she eventually got frustrated and asked for help, and then began helping the others. Her response to Oscar in *The Violin Man*, was that he was sad when he was alone, and happy with other people. This seemed to be Grace's choice of operating. She said that when she was sad "I go to a quiet place...I just sit down and I think". She would not share with me where that quiet place was. When she was happy, she said with a smile "I play with my friends. I go and play in the playground".

Grace named a lot of friends, some of long standing. The friend mentioned above, Kerry, had been in the same class with her since Prep. Another friend had known her "since I was born". She showed deep empathy in her friendships. She said "when Kerry's upset I help her, because I say 'what's wrong? And has anybody hurt your feelings?', and she talks to me. And I say to that person 'you should say sorry, and you shouldn't do that again'. If they don't listen to me I go to the teacher". Grace also expressed empathy with the refugees in the picture. Her face expressed real distress that they were escaping from a war. "It's not nice to have wars...We should stop the fighting so they can go back".

Although Grace did not talk a lot about her family, she valued them. Families were people who can take care of you, and you can talk to them. She had an older sister, but didn't discuss her much. Her father was her hero. He was a chef, and made delicious meals. Her family have been particularly significant when she is ill. When she was about four she spent some time in the Royal Children's Hospital having desensitizing injections. Her mother stayed with her, and her father and sister used to visit. The highlight of her time in hospital was playing with other children. Also she got a teddy bear, which was still a comfort to her.

### *Existential Mode*

#### *Identity*

Drawing her portrait was rather demanding, and involved rubbing out, and getting both legs the same thickness. She spent a lot of time colouring meticulously, especially herself in school uniform. She did not think she was pretty, because of her eczema, but drew herself wearing mascara. She liked wearing make-up, but because of her skin condition could only use a little. Grace agreed that her health was a dominating issue in her life. She ascribed this to bad luck. However she felt happy to be alive.

Death loomed large on her horizon. When the other children were discussing death she folded her arms and looked away. She believed that after people die they were in heaven and they could still see you. An uncle died a month previously and she was grieving for him. She mentioned in an earlier interview that her uncles all had asthma. I did not make the connection, but if the uncle died of asthma this would be particularly traumatic for her. She was also interested in life and death as the passing of the generations, and "how we get our (particular) Mum and Dad".

Grace believed that God was really important, because he made us. However this did not appear to be an experiential knowledge, but a response to what she learned in CRE.

According to her teacher, Grace struggled academically, but she said that she enjoyed drawing, and particularly writing. She found it difficult to cope with questions that were very general, or required an imaginative response like "What is

she thinking?" She seemed concerned, at the beginning, about giving a correct response.

### *Values*

Grace had difficulty discussing good and bad without a context, but she demonstrated a strong sense of justice and empathy for her friend, and for the refugees. She condemned war as bad.

### *Roadmap*

Grace could only think of one wish: to have no eczema or asthma. She also expressed a wish, through her Journey picture, where she drew herself at a desk, writing stories. She wanted to have a room where she could write. This was a shy confession. She scratched herself and wriggled a lot, and nodded to my prompting questions. I thought that she felt her experiences had given her stories to tell, and she wanted her books to make people happy.

My impression from these interviews was of a courageous little girl. In spite of her serious illnesses and limited abilities, she wanted to look attractive, be good at sport, help her friends, and to write stories to bring happiness to other people. Grace seemed to have great resources for survival which she seemed to find within herself, rather than through external inspiration.

## Profile 5

## Harry

Harry was a 9 year old boy of Vietnamese extraction. He presented as intelligent, self-possessed, with a strong sense of his identity. He had strong relationships with his nuclear and extended family, and a value system which extended beyond his immediate experience.

*Sensitive Mode*

Harry's visual sensitivity was strong. He was able to complete a number of parts of the jigsaw puzzle simultaneously. He noticed the details in pictures. He interpreted the Refugee picture as people being "evacuating", escaping from a volcano, because they were carrying clothes and a baby, and that the weather was cold, and that the people appeared to be going up hill. In the picture of the Great Wall of China he noted, with humour, that "that man looks like my uncle". He explained that he liked to see the Harry Potter movies before he read the books, because it helped him remember the characters if he had seen them in the movie. Harry is also sensitive to touch. He remembers vividly being afraid of the cold water in the sea, when he was little. When he went to the park he liked the sensation of the cool breeze in his hair. A trip to Vietnam was marred for him by the mosquitoes, which kept him awake at night.

Harry was keen on sport, especially soccer. He played for a junior soccer club. He also watched international soccer games on television, and followed Melbourne Victory in the local competition. He enjoyed other sports, including "football", and cricket, and active games in the school yard, including the popular handball. One of Harry's passions was fishing. (He told his fishing stories with great enthusiasm). He had fished in lakes and the sea with his father and uncle. The enjoyment of fishing for Harry seemed to include the challenge of catching the biggest fish, and the bonding it provided with the other males in his family. In contrast with this enthusiasm for physical activity, in the interview situation he was noticeably calm and still. He mostly sat up straight, with his hands on his lap, and

made plenty of eye contact with the interviewer. Although his language is not completely idiomatic English, he was an eager and fluent conversationalist.

Harry's mode of interaction with the world was strongly intellectual. He had amassed much information about the Great Wall of China, about chickens, and a number of other topics. He was concerned about problem solving and how things work. The Big Questions for his group mainly concerned scientific matters. Harry wondered "How does the world stand up? And, about the life circle (sic) of humans and the generations?" Harry wanted to know why coca cola fizzes when you drop a menthol sweet into it. He also watched his father repair the car, to see how the engine and the various tools worked. He also checked his evidence. At first he said that the baby bird in the picture was a chicken, but when he looked at it again he decided it was too large to be a chicken. He enjoyed Maths in class. He also was absorbed in a computer game called Maple Story. This game had a social component of interaction with players in cyberspace, but also the challenge of progressing to higher levels. He preferred soccer to Australian Rules football, not only for its physical skill, but for the intricacy of the game moves required.

#### *Relational Mode*

Harry had strong bonds with his family members. He helped his mother with computer problems, and went to her for reassurance when he was worried. He played games with his younger sister, like making castles with chairs and sheets in the lounge room, and he helped her with her homework. His father was his mentor and hero. He went fishing with his father and uncle. He watched his father mending the car, and tried to learn how it works. His love of soccer was inspired by his father. He said, "And about soccer, I wanted to go to soccer club, because I see my dad play soccer, not in a real club, but with his friends. From that day, that inspired me to learn to play soccer." His grandparents lived in his household. He told how the children cannot play in the back yard because it was taken over by his grandfather's vegetables and his bonsai plants. He also related how he regularly went to a chicken farm belonging to his grandfather's friend. He was also close to his grandmother. She regularly went to the park with him, and waited while he read a book under a

tree. He also saw his grandmother and his mother as having a nurturing role through the meals they cooked for him. Harry also liked to see his cousins in Vietnam.

Harry had many friends at school, with whom he played active games, like handball. He mentioned a close friend who has been in the same class as him since prep. He had strong bonds with his mates in the soccer team. He liked being able to meet people through his sport. He had some touching stories about how he and his team mates helped each other. Here are two of his stories.

(I help) when my friends get hurt. During our soccer one of my team mates got hit by a ball in the back. And then when I passed the ball to my friend (?another friend) I just stopped immediately, and then I started running at my friend, running after my friend, and I picked him up, and then I asked him how he was, yes, and then the coach came.

When I got kicked in the face. I fell down and stuff, and I cried. And then most of my team came, and then they put me out on the sidelines to heal.

Harry also demonstrated relationship with places. He chose the Great Wall of China as awesome because “it reminds me of Asian countries. My country is Vietnam. It is near China so I can remember. I did travel to China before when I was small...” Another memorable place is a lake near Hanoi. “Most of my cousins live there. I go fishing with them...” He also remembered a beach in Vietnam. He had a special place in Australia, the park he visited with his grandmother, where he liked to spend a quiet time reading or thinking. Each of these places was significant for Harry’s sense of identity.

### *Existential Mode*

#### *Identity*

Harry described himself as a “sporty person”, who had lots of friends. He saw himself as different from his friends in that each one had “different styles of thinking” and different skills. He was able to make generalized statements about the human condition. He said that some children are strong and some are weak. But “we



are all human, and young. We get to learn at school, and when we grow up we get jobs”.

Being an Australian of Vietnamese parents was an important part of Harry's sense of self. He said “Vietnam is my country”, and he indicated that Vietnam and his family had a special place for him. His extended family was influential in shaping his relationships and his values. One example was his perception of the nurturing role of food. The family stories seemed to be an important feature of his life. Fishing was culturally important in Vietnam, where his grandfather had to use a stick for a rod. Harry seemed to be very aware of the hazards of war and the trauma of “evacuation”. He said of the people in the picture, “They feel shocked that their country's at war, I think. So they are evacuating because they don't get in the field of the war. They don't want to get hurt.” He thought they were “going to another border...or they can just camp around in the hills”. His serious face suggested to me family stories of war in Vietnam.

Harry seemed to be very serious about self discipline, and having to deal with his tendency to suffer tension and worry. In his self portrait his arms were stretched out. He explained that he liked to stretch his muscles in his arms and neck when they became tense and hurt. He variously explained this tension as due to running about too much at school, or “after a hard day's work at school”. When I asked him did he worry a lot, he said “Only when I might get hurt”. He worried about “around the world, like anything happens, like any type of sickness, or anything that would happen. You worry about it, like if there's a bomb (Interviewer: like in Iraq?) and in London”. Harry said he could go to his mother when he was worried, and “she makes good meals and that”. He also went to the park to think. For his Journey picture he drew the trees and the grass at the park. Only after I asked him if he had finished did he draw himself under the tree reading a book. He said “Sometimes I lie down and look at the birds and the sky. Then the wind just blows on me, and cools me down, after a hard day at school.” In a short follow-up interview he told me that he thought about waterfalls, water in a lake, or about the ocean and fishes. He also thought about “me and my dad kicking a ball around the

park. Those are the things that make me happy”. I asked him if that was where he found his strength. He agreed that it was. Then I said to him that some people find their strength in religion or something. “Did he?” He said that he was Buddhist, but didn’t think about it much, but “when I grow up I will.” Religion was something that old people like his grandmother practise. “When I grow up my mum will teach me about what to say”, that is the Buddhist prayers. Now, as a child, he seems to be practising meditation and self discipline in a Buddhist way. I said “But still when you need to be strong, you think your own thoughts?” “Yes” he said.

Harry had a clear, if childlike, value system. Good things people do are to help and encourage each other. Bad things include spoiling the environment with graffiti, and bullying at school. His first wish was for a computer each for him and his sister, so they could play more interactive games. His second wish was “that poor people wouldn’t be left alone, and they had one that could cure sicknesses, from their village and stuff”. This wish for community needs outside his present environment seems to reflect his Vietnamese family story. His final wish was to stop pollution. He then talked about the Vietnamese people having to wear gas masks, his grandfather’s present respiratory problems, and that some people in Vietnam died because of toxic gases. He also gave an interesting insight into his concern about dealing with peer pressure, in the first interview. He said of the picture of a Thinking Child, “She’s thinking about whether she will do it. Her friends...maybe a game she’s not good at. So she’s trying to chase them but she doesn’t want to because her mum told her not to run with them”.

### *Roadmap*

Harry appeared to be using his intellectual powers, and his family’s religious and cultural heritage, to deal with the stresses he found in his life. His family and school community had enhanced his sense of wonder at his place in the wider natural and cultural world, and a sense of his own worth and that of the human family.

## Profile 7

Jordan

*Sensitive mode*

At the first interview, Jordan was the first to arrive, and the first to put his hat on and leave at the end. He worked purposely at the jigsaw puzzle, co-operated well with the other children in the group, and entered eagerly into the discussions.

I particularly noticed his hand movements: in tracing round the edge of his chosen picture, tapping the table, and the finished puzzle. His speech was rather fast and monotone, except when the topic was of particular interest to him, like getting a special Game-boy for Christmas, when his voice rose in pitch and animation. Generally he showed little emotion, except for some mild frustration in his face and body when Alex was dominating the conversation. This lack of assertiveness was also suggested in his preference for netball and tennis rather than football. He also liked music and would like to play guitar or drums. Jordan's neatness was seen in his self portrait, and the way he gathered the textas into a cylinder. However, Jordan also had a wry humour, as when he wanted a clone of himself to clean up his room.

*Relational Mode*

Jordan's relationship with some of his peers was problematic. He said, "there is one person I'm not allowed to work with". However he seemed to have a complex family network, which he valued, specifically for emotional support, though he was happier "when Mum and Dad don't fight". He had an intact family of mother, father and 2 younger brothers. He played netball with Mum and sibs, and went fishing with Dad. He spent alternate weekends with Ma and Pa and various cousins in the country. He hoped to go into his grandfather's concrete business when he grew up.

Jordan seemed to have a special relationship with an uncle who lived in Singapore (which he confused with China). For his awesome picture he chose The Great Wall of China because it reminded him of his uncle. This uncle seemed to be both a source of special electronic games and also a window into exotic places, like China and Japan. Another hero for Jordan was the late Steve Irwin, as an

adventurous person who caught crocodiles, who rescued people from crocodiles, and who was a good father who played games with his daughter. Jordan's father was also a hero, who once caught a marlin "as big as this room".

Jordan related to animals – noting that of the chickens they looked after in Prep, some were adventurous and wandered off. He had a special tree he used to climb, which he agreed was his friend. He also liked to play alone in the garage, where there were special toys, or with his electronic games.

Jordan related to the tragedy of the refugees situation in the picture, and expressed horror of war. He also related to family misfortunes. On two occasions he told the story of how his home had been robbed while the family was away at Easter. He spoke of his mother and aunt's dismay, as well as their loss of their motor bikes and other precious things. His "journey" picture was a car with some of his family travelling to Eden in NSW that Easter. His father was travelling in another car, and had an accident. This picture seemed to be significant for his relationship with his family, and also for his interest in travelling to far-off Coffs Harbour in northern NSW.

#### *Existential Mode\_(Identity and Roadmap)*

Jordan's identity seems to be defined by the family (as is usual for his age). However, his ambition to go into his grandfather's concrete business seemed to be at odds with his dream to go to university to study science and his interest in travel and adventure (like the chickens). He only admitted his educational ambitions when I asked him why he volunteered for the interviews. His interest in science was manifested on several occasions, especially when we discussed the Big Question, and death. Concerning death, he gave a detailed description of the process of decay of the body. When we discussed the origin of the universe he said it just happened by chance, "like a bomb". Life on earth was described as an evolutionary process, as when creatures left the sea and evolved into dinosaurs. He gained this detailed knowledge from reading encyclopaedias.

This interest in science was linked with atheism and materialism. He said he was an atheist, and that things like the creation of the earth, happened by accident or chance.

Steve Irwin's death was a terrible accident. When asked about dreams, he looked uncomfortable, but later spoke of his "dream" of receiving a specific game for Christmas being fulfilled. His three wishes were (1) to have a lot of things I really like, to get my motor bike back, (2) to get our favourite game, and (3) for Pop to go China, and to go with him.

#### *Worldview*

Jordan's worldview seemed to be confined by the web of family life and by materialism, both consumer driven and by a positivist scientific approach. However his spirituality seemed to be manifest in his aspiration to transcend his present life through knowledge and travel. There were unexpected glimpses of this spirituality in the interviews. When discussing *The Violin Man* he referred to the deceased Marietta's "spirit", and to the mysterious little pink figures as Oscar's "conscience". He said, "Everyone has a conscience. He might be the only one who can see them". This suggested that conscience might be a spiritual entity. Jordan also referred to heaven as "a fountain of love", also suggesting a spiritual quality. Finally, Jordan's self portrait was of a neat, erect little figure, with arms stretched out wide, perhaps to reach out to something beyond himself.

## Profile 8

Kane

*Interaction with researcher*

The interviews with Kane provided an interesting example of dynamics of the interview situation, of progress from disengagement, even hostility, to giving spontaneous responses about what was important to him in an open, friendly way. The first video-tape frame saw Kane looking embarrassed, sitting back and rolling his eyes. All the children in the group seemed to have difficulty in dealing with speculative or ambiguous questions, and were more comfortable with questions like “What do you do?” rather than “Why do you think?” The culture of these children seemed to be more directed to solving the problems of here and now. When the first interview “seized up” over the Big Question I commented “I think I’m asking the wrong questions. I don’t think people at (this district) are into wondering!” The children nodded in agreement. In the individual interview efforts to engage with Kane included making positive comments about his drawing, and challenging him in a joking way when he kept replying “I don’t know”.

*Sensitive Mode*

For his “awesome” picture Kane chose The Twelve Apostles, a group of off-shore rocks on the west coast of Victoria. He liked the ocean in the picture, that it was “all shiny” and he liked the different shapes of the rocks, and that it was a place he was familiar with. He also liked being immersed in the cool water on a hot day, though he did not surf. He also enjoyed flying kites. He liked animals, not so much as pets, though he had a pet cat of his own, but as something wild and fierce. He volunteered that he admired the eagles in his neighbourhood, in particular he enjoyed watching them fly really high, then swoop on their prey. Another favourite animal was the tiger, I think because it was fierce, but he didn’t articulate his reason very well.

Kane's other keen sensory mode seemed to be kinaesthetic (Often combined with visual). He loved running, and was local cross-country champion three years in a row. Physical education was his favourite school subject, though he did not seem to be so keen on team sports. During Kane's individual interview he spent nearly all the time drawing, or manipulating the textas into intricate shapes. His portrait was drawn quickly, small and in the middle of the page, apparently not an engaging task for him. Then he proceeded, during the following discussion to draw a most intricate picture around the small figure of himself. The upper part of the picture was filled with sky (clouds) and sky-scrapers, the latter with scores of coloured windows. In the lower part of the picture he drew a path leading the figure to the sky-scrapers. His Journey picture was of a two storey house and a garden with a fish-pond. The house was drawn in three dimensions. These pictures seemed significant, because near the end of the interview he admitted that he would like to be a house designer. He had done his research about the relative incomes of architects, builders and "house designers" and decided this was what he wants to do. Kane was also interested in mechanical things. His father was a mechanic, and together they were building powered go-carts. Towards the end of the third interview I commented to Kane that he did his talking with his hands. The comment seemed to resonate with him.

#### *Relational Mode*

Kane said he had "heaps of friends", and liked playing physical games with them at school. During the jigsaw puzzle task he worked well with Luke, who was sitting next to him. During the rest of the interview he was readily distracted by Luke. His relationship with his family seemed more complex. He lived on a farm, but his father worked as a mechanic. The family did not seem to be wealthy, for he was hoping for a second computer for the large family at Christmas. In the last interview he talked about making go-carts with his father. There are four boys in his family, and the only mention of his mother was that she often had to tell them to be quiet. He also mentioned that families were good for providing food, and driving people around. Kane had three older brothers. The oldest was 15 and is intellectually

and physically disabled. Kane was called on to supervise this brother, who spent a lot of time outside on their farm, and was inclined to chase the sheep when he was at home. Kane did not speak negatively of this brother, who seemed to be a burden on the whole family. Kane spoke negatively about his other two brothers. Being the youngest was “really bad ...because my brothers are really mean”. When I suggested that maybe he had ways of “getting back at them” he shrugged, smiled, and reluctantly admitted that he did, without being specific. He did not seem to have a significant extended family. The family had a dog, and a number of cats. Only one cat could be claimed as his own.

The growth of his relationship with the researcher was interesting, as mentioned above. It was not until midway through the third interview that he began to make regular eye contact, and give spontaneous information. My approach was to be mildly challenging to his negative responses, asking about what interested him, instead of following the interview schedule which seemed too abstract, and praising his drawing seemed to help. It is interesting that he volunteered that “a person who helped him” was his teacher, who “helped me with some work, and gave me some ideas.”

Although Kane admitted to only being interested in PE at school he seemed to be quite engaged in the classroom. He had learned about refugees as a school topic, and he responded readily to the Refugee Picture with plenty of factual information, and empathy with the feelings and needs of the refugees in the picture. He was the only one interviewed at that school who had read *The Violin Man*. He did not comment readily on the story, but leaned forward listening, and pointed out many things that interested him in the illustrations, such as the wolf and the eagle in the illustrations of dreams.

Towards the end of the last interview he mentioned his concern for the environment and its degradation, in a global rather than a local sense. He was concerned about rubbish, and about the ozone layer and global warming, which two issues he confused. His chief concern about the effects of global warming was “fires”, which were of direct concern in rural communities.



*Existential Mode*

This mode was hard to access. Kane was reluctant to speak of his self perception, feelings, or speculate about issues. He did most of his communicating through gestures or drawing, until the latter stages of the last interview. When he was really engaged, such as talking about house design, he ceased drawing or fiddling and looked directly at me and smiled. I think he saw himself well “down the pecking order” at home. At school he appeared to be popular when involved in physical activities, like PE. However he did not see sport as a future career option. There seemed to be a sensitive, artistic, and mechanically creative side to his personality which he may have been reluctant to exhibit.

Kane was not given to speculation about the mysteries of life and death. He did not think about God. He said that when people die they go to heaven, and he thinks that heaven is “made up”. He seemed to be aware of the transcendent in the natural world, as shown in his sense of wonder about the ocean, and the eagles. His sky-scraper drawing suggested that he might prefer to live in a city, but he said that there were too many people in the city and he preferred the country. He described a particular house that he admired, belonging to a wealthy person. Big houses or skyscrapers might have had more than an aesthetic and structural interest for him. They could also be symbols of his reaching out to a life with larger possibilities than the one available to him in relative poverty, in a small rural community.

## Profile 9

Kelly – “I wish I was in heaven with Pete”

*Sensitive mode*

Although Kelly presented in a social situation as a rather abrasive child, she displayed some deep sensory appreciation. This sensory appreciation usually seemed to be linked to social or emotional situations.

Kelly chose the baby bird for her “awesome” picture. She marveled at how small and vulnerable the bird looked in the man’s hand. She said it had “probably lost its mother”, and she gave details about how it should be fed and looked after. She showed marked visual sensitivity in a number of ways. Doing the jigsaw puzzle she picked out all the pink pieces to put the pigs together. She also had an eye for the total picture and where the portions that the others were doing fitted together. At the conclusion she was able to give a detailed account of what each person had contributed to the total task. This was remarkable because she seemed to spend most of the time being aggressive – invading the space of others and snatching pieces, saying “that’s mine, how dare you”. Kelly also responded to the Refugee picture immediately and perceptively. She noted that the people were fleeing from their homes, on a train track, in the cold, and they were poor because they had no car. She also noticed hints of fire in the background, which no other child had seen.

Kelly saw colours as having emotional connotations. “I’d rather have a whole world of colour. Except grey, which is “yukky”, she said, and people don’t have any creative colours, preferring grey. She also disliked the white colour of her arms, but liked the blue of her eyes. She supposed that God made Uluru brown to match the skin of its aboriginal owners. She was also knowledgeable about the colour changes that appear on Uluru at sunset.

Her tactile and kinaesthetic senses were demonstrated in a number of ways, also with social connotations. In the third interview, when she was expressing grief for her dead stepfather, Pete, I touched her arm, and she remarked that I had soft skin, like her Nana. She went on to talk about how she missed her Nana, who lives in Queensland. In her grief she gave a shiver, and noted that she feels cold when sad.

Sadness was expressed by rubbing her eyes, looking away, wriggling in her chair, or examining her shoe. Aggression was expressed in the group interviews by sitting back with her arms folded, making faces or whispering behind her hand, or by leaning over and invading the space of others.

### *Relational Mode*

Kelly's interpersonal relationships were problematic. In the group interviews she tended to act aggressively to the other children, and there were hints of trying to undermine the operation of the group. This latter behaviour consisted of giggling, and trying to distract the others from the task, and getting out of her seat and wandering around. However after a while in the first interview, she seemed to become involved in the process, and co-operate. She seemed to alternate between confidential approaches to the others, or repelling them by sitting back and displaying her "superior" knowledge, or being verbally aggressive and invading their space. She seemed to want to own the jigsaw puzzle task, for after it was finished she sat in front of it, and covered it with her arms. In the individual interview she gave two different lists of names of friends. She complained that "mostly all the class" are mean to her, and call her "freckle face" (this will be expanded below), and say that she had no friends. However, I observed her playing with groups in the playground. She had a friend outside the school, whom she had known since kindergarten, and they said to each other "we are like sisters, because we are". Kelly's relationship with the interviewer was also problematic. At the individual interview she was charming rather than aggressive. She hinted that she would like one of my cough lollies. At the end of the interview, for her Journey picture she drew a picture of herself and me at McDonalds, and expressed a desire to visit me at home, which I said was too far away. Kelly shared quite openly about her life, and some of its traumas, but found it difficult to terminate the interview. (I don't think I handled it as well as I could have, and got a bit "sucked in" by her charm and her grief.)

Kelly's relationship with her family is ambivalent. She said "I like my family". She said her mother was her hero. She sometimes referred to her as

“Mummy”, and said that her mother bought her pink sneakers, of which she is proud. On the other hand she related, with a smile, that “I hurt Mummy a lot when I was born”. She said, sadly, “My father left me when I was a baby”. Her first mention of family was to imagine that the “Big Question” girl was thinking of what she would have to do during the day, while her mum’s probably having a rest. “She might be looking after her little brother or sister. She might have to take them to the park. She is thinking about what they would have to wear. Yes, and getting ready with some drinks and food. She’s got to ask her mum. She might yell at her”. Kelly had a 17 year old sister with whom she fought, and they pulled each other’s hair. (This she said with a smile). She has two younger brothers, who are “mean to her”. On the other hand they have family outings, and birthday parties, and all the children play soccer together. “That’s the only time we all get along”.

The most significant relationship for Kelly was with her step-father, Pete, who died about 12 months previously of “sun cancer”. (I got the impression that there had been several step-fathers in her life). She described Pete as “like a father” to her, who cared for her when she was sick. She described, on two occasions, how Pete got sick, and she visited him in the hospital, and gave him drinks and kept him company. She repeated that he was making good progress with his illness on “good medication”, but the hospital changed it to “bad medication”, and he died. In this explanation she seemed to be trying to understand the mystery of his death. Whenever she passed the hospital where he died she pointed out the window to his room, as though he was still there. She believed that Pete was in heaven, but somehow still nearby, “keeping watch over us wherever we go”. She summed up how she felt about her present relationships as follows: “I’d rather be with Pete right now, in heaven and have a family, and see my great, great aunty, than be down here and get picked on”.

However, there do seem to be some positive outcomes from her relational experiences. This was evident when she examined the Refugee picture. Her response was immediate, and perceptive. They are “people without homes, walking the train tracks trying to find where they are trying to go, and they are poor...because they are walking and they don’t have a car, and they’ve got all their clothes and their

children”. She described in detail how she hoped a train, or a bus, would stop and pick them up. She asked was it a real picture, and were they real people. She also identified with Oscar’s loneliness in *The Violin Man*. Kelly appeared to have developed empathy with the sufferings of people she had not met.

### *Existential Mode*

#### *Identity*

Kelly’s self perception was ambivalent. On the one hand she said “I like myself the way I am”. On the other hand she said “When I get older I’ll be beautiful, like I’ll have clear skin. I won’t be ugly like I am.” She took over 20 minutes to draw her portrait, explaining that she didn’t want to look stupid. She drew herself carefully, with long blond hair, blue eyes with mascara on her eyelashes, and an intricately coloured check school dress. Later she added freckles to her face. She had a photo album of herself, from a baby onwards, and offered to show it to me sometime. She believed she was good at sport and singing. The latter was confirmed by her mother. She sang a song for me, which went “I wish I were a punk rocker, with flowers in my hair. I was born too late, into a world that doesn’t care”. She said the song did not apply to her. She thought she was too fat, but would be thinner when she grew up. Her family said it was “puffer fat”, referring to the fish that blows itself up, but then deflates. Her freckles were of serious concern to her, therefore she was particularly vulnerable to teasing about them by her classmate. She had a fearful association of freckles with Pete’s fatal skin cancer.

#### *Beliefs*

Kelly had two explanations for bad things that happen: bad luck, as when one walks under a ladder, and rational explanations, like being given the wrong medication. She was very conscious of heaven, which she associated with Pete and with God. “Heaven is actually the whole sky, everywhere, all the time. God is watching everyone, like all the relatives”. She wondered what heaven was like, “Do you really see it? Do you walk around it?” God was a benevolent being, who created the universe, and was “really, really good at it”. She associated creation with the dinosaurs, and had a confused temporal picture about a person going back in time to

discover the dinosaurs. She also had a circular concept of time, in which animals eat plants, which grow in water, and water comes from the sun, so food comes from the sun. She wondered why God made flesh eating creatures like T. Rex. She also had a sense of destiny, backwards in time, in which God “created the whole world, and our mums and dads, because he made Mummy’s mum to have Mum. If my mum wasn’t born I wouldn’t be here right now”. She also believed in hell, which was under the ground, but she did not think of Pete as under the ground, but watching and caring for her.

### *Roadmap*

Kelly had many fantasies about an ideal world. One of her idols was Princess Mary of Denmark, who met her prince, and had a baby. Kelly also hoped to grow up to be beautiful, and have a boyfriend. She imagined being “God’s daughter”, and having everyone bow to her and say “all hail”. She would have lots of servants, but would let them go, because she didn’t want the servants to be “picked on”. Her greatest wishes were to have Pete back, and for herself to be re-born so that she could look after her skin, and to be with her Nana. Just as Kelly had not yet learned to manage her social relationships without enduring, or creating hostile situations, she had not yet learned to take charge of her destiny, tending to retreat into fantasy. Nevertheless her strong sense of a transcendent sphere, where God and the departed care for her, gave her life strength and meaning.

## Profile 10

## Lucy

Lucy might be described as a realist, with a scientific approach to life, and a lover of animals. She was of Chinese extraction.

*Sensitive Mode*

The first thing I noticed was the way Lucy chose her Awesome picture. First she considered the earth from space, the water drop, the Great Wall of China, and finally asked Harry to swap the little bird for the Great Wall of China because it was “so cute”. The first three were probably chosen for their scientific interest, but finally she made a “relational” choice.

Lucy’s visual sensitivity seemed to be scientific rather than aesthetic. She was not interested in drawing, and did rather hastily executed pictures. She did simple pencil drawings. She drew the head in quite good proportion to the body, and included a few details like very bright eyes, detailed hands with distinct fingernails. Doing the jigsaw puzzle she initially concentrated on the figure of Tigger, but had to rely on shape of the pieces where there were less features. Lucy enjoyed singing, and school music, but had no ambition to be a pop star.

Lucy seemed to operate in a kinaesthetic mode outside of the classroom. She said she was good at long jump and skipping. She skipped alone very fast, but also enjoyed group skipping for the rhymes they used. She liked other individual activities like roller skating or riding her scooter. She was a little afraid of contact sports like football or basketball. She did enjoy the physical sensations of mild danger. Two stories she told were of riding a bumper car in China, and being at the top of a Ferris wheel in Geelong.

Lucy appears to deal with the world in a scientific way. She displayed curiosity, skepticism, and examined evidence before coming to conclusions. When she described to the picture of the newly hatched bird she said, “I don’t see how, the bird is that big, and then the egg is really small”. The group discussed how it had fitted in the egg. She also said “I don’t think it’s a chicken, the colour, and the size,

and the shape”. Lucy also noticed that the “baby Jesus”, in another picture, did not look new-born. She had seen babies born on television, and they look red, and smaller. Her Big Questions were scientific problems (as were most of the questions in this group). She wondered how “electrical things work, like you know, remote control things. How does the car know what to do?” Also, why did an electric oven heat up slowly rather than instantaneously. Her skepticism extended to metaphysical matters. Someone in her Chinese culture (I couldn’t decipher who it was) told her that when people die “their spirit is still there...like a ghost, but I don’t believe in ghosts. I just think...they’re just gone. Like when they die they are not there any more”, she said

Lucy’s intellectual style was also evident when the children were doing the jigsaw puzzle. At the beginning of the exercise Lucy said to the group, “Let’s think up a strategy and we can just do it. You can do that corner (pointing at Harry)” She assigned tasks to the other two as well. I noted that the others had already started their chosen tasks and did not seem to take much notice of Lucy’s direction. However she kept an eye on what they were doing and offered assistance from time to time. Lucy frequently verbalized what she was doing, and liked repeating curious words, like “hephalump”. She worked quickly, and made excited gestures when she succeeded. When the puzzle was finished in record time she said “That’s because we’ve worked together”. It was probably true.

#### *Relational Mode*

Lucy lived in a blended family, with her father, stepmother, sister and step sister, both aged 14. Lucy was 9. Her mother lived in a suburb not far away and she saw her mother approximately weekly. She referred to both her mother and stepmother as “mum”, though they probably have specific titles in Chinese. Her father seemed to make most of the decisions, such as what pets the children could have. She told me she got on well with the step family. However I noticed that when she spoke of her family she looked straight ahead, with a rather expressionless face. Whereas when she told a story of something pleasurable, such as her pet cat, she smiled and made a lot of eye contact. Lucy was born in Australia, but her parents



came from southern China, where her father still had business contacts. Lucy went to China on a family trip last year, where she had a very enjoyable time meeting her cousins. She also told a story of the simple pleasure of going to the market on a hot day with her grandmother and eating ice cream on the way home. She spoke at length about this trip to China, as a highlight of her life. She also demonstrated her relationship with her country of origin in her interest in the Great Wall of China, which she had not yet visited. She took Chinese lessons because her father wanted her to be a good Mandarin speaker.

Lucy's passionate relationship was with her cat. The cat lived outside so she only saw it when the cat chose, but she loved playing with it on her own. The family did have a dog, but I think the father got rid of it. One of her wishes was to have a dog, a little Maltese cross. She chose the little bird picture because it is "so cute", and she enjoyed exchanging conversation in the group about birds. The family does not seem to know how to care for animals in an urban environment, as they were not de-sexed or taken to the vet when sick. Lucy believed it was bad to shoot "innocent animals", and she had reservations about "eating a dead animal", though she was not a vegetarian.

Lucy said she had lots of friends at school, but I did not hear much about them. Her more meaningful relationships seem to be with her family, who are "special", and her cat.

### *Existential Mode*

#### *Identity*

When Lucy was asked to describe herself she said, "I'm short. I like sport, especially skipping...I'm not really a football type of person...and I don't like basketball because I get all scared of the ball if it hits me...And I think basketball is for tall people and I'm really short". This concern about the need to be good at sport, but feeling inadequate may be a desire to be truly Australian. She seemed to be a child caught between two cultures, Chinese and Australian. Her family, her ancestors and her parent's homeland were important to her. Her recent trip to China was a highlight of her life; she wanted to talk about it at length. Yet even within the

family Lucy differentiated herself. She said she was different from her family because, when they eat at a restaurant, she liked to dip her dumplings in the soup and the rest of the family did not. She adored her cat, but her parents made her keep it outside, and did not provide veterinary care, and did not want the dog she had. She said her family got on well, but her body language was stiff when she spoke of them.

On further inquiry about her identity I asked “Would you say you are pretty?” “Yes.” “Would you say you are clever?” “Yes...I’m really good at skipping. I like roller skating. I think I’m good at science”. She then described some model cars they were making in class with some sort of jet propulsion. As indicated earlier, Lucy had a definite scientific approach to life. She also displayed individuality, and leadership qualities.

Lucy displayed her relationship to people as well as animals when we discussed the refugees, and her personal values. Her response to the refugee picture was “People might be, they might have a bad life. They might want to go. They might want to leave...leave their homes and go to a better place...Because they have a lot of things in their hands, and they are just walking away, and maybe they are walking towards another place”. She made practical suggestions about helping them. She said she helped her friends. “Sometimes when people are annoying my friends, I don’t like it, so I just tell them to stop, and I say they are my friends.” However her examples of other people giving help, or doing good deeds, were phrased as hypothetical.

She wished “that everyone would get along and there would be no fighting”. She also wished that “none would die. That everyone would just live for ever, and they would never die. ... I think it’s very sad when someone dies, as my grandma died. And before I was even born my grandpa died”. Although she expressed a rationalistic view of death as objectively final in this interview, when we were discussing *The Violin Man* she said that if you love the person who has died they remain (subjectively) in your memory. Her father was nominally Buddhist but the family were “not really interested” in religion. Lucy expressed a wish to be rich when she grows up, but this materialism had an altruistic objective, “So I can, if my

dad needs money for something I can just give it to him. So that I can share out the money with my family, and if I have any left over I just give it to charity.”

*Roadmap*

Lucy’s worldview was a disciplined positivist, rational one. She wondered how things work but tested the evidence and resisted a spiritual or imaginative explanation. When asked did the refugees in the picture look happy or sad, she examined the picture closely and said she couldn’t tell. Although she seemed caught up in tension between two cultures, and possibly in family tension, Lucy was conscious of her own individuality. She expressed compassion and care in her immediate environment and beyond. Did Lucy have a sense of the transcendent? I think the answer lay in her second wish, and her journey picture. With no particular aim in mind she said “I wish I could fly!”

## Profile 11

## Luke

Luke had a twin sister, Lizzy. For the Sensitivity Interview, they were together, just the two of them. This made for interesting dynamics. Lizzy is much smaller than Luke, but very vocal, very interested in intellectual issues and speculation. Luke was much quieter in this interview. His interests were sport and physical feats, and his body language was restless. For example, he kept flapping his picture. He seemed hesitant about expressing his views, but was very supportive, even protective of Lizzy, who tended to dominate the conversation. Luke showed other sides of his personality in the following interviews. In the second one he was in a group of four, and he made his presence felt by treating the jigsaw pieces roughly, and by distracting interplay with Kane. In the third, single interview he sat quietly, with his hands on his lap most of the time. In this interview, he seemed very engaged with the interviewer, using much eye contact, and his demeanour was quiet self-assurance. He displayed verbal fluency for issues that interested him.

*Sensitive Mode*

Luke seemed to have a range of sensitive modes – visual, auditory, and especially kinaesthetic. When he was doing the jigsaw puzzle, he sought out pieces by their colour and the object they were part of, referring to the picture. He vocalized fairly frequently about what he was doing. He also worked in co-operation with Kane, and the others. But the most striking behaviour was the way he tried to fit the pieces together by pounding them with his fist, instead of turning them around for fit.

Luke was a strong, athletic child, who liked dangerous activities. He played football and cricket with local junior teams. He was a good swimmer, and Ian Thorpe was his role model. But his deepest love was surfing. He related how he learned to stand up on a boogie board when he was only three, and currently used a big board. He wanted to be a surfer when he grew up. I asked him what he thought

about when he was out in the surf. He said, “It looks good when they (other surfers) are inside a wave”. When asked how he felt when he was inside a wave, he said “It’s like paradise”. When I asked for clarification he agreed that he felt like he was in another world, which he came out of when he came out of the wave. (This is the first incident I have found of a “peak experience”)

Luke also liked the danger of surfing, of the possibility of running into rocks. The thrill he found in danger manifested itself in a number of his interests. He was fascinated by Mt Everest, and one of his wishes was the climb it one day. He enjoyed racing around the farm in a truck, tractor or on a motor bike. For his “awesome” picture he chose an enormous truck jumping over an (apparently) very small car. Even swimming had its dangers. He favoured backstroke, and in the country pool there was always the danger of banging into the wall. Luke liked rock music. He had a guitar, and would like to play drums. His “journey” picture was of himself playing drums, flanked by enormous speakers. Drums and loud music seemed to be in character.

#### *Relational Mode*

Luke seemed to have strong emotional bonds with his family, though this was usually indicated indirectly. In the interview with his sister there was much interaction by gesture and verbal asides. They made much of Lizzy being “10 seconds older”, but physically weaker. Luke explained that the motor bike was too hard for her to hold (on rough ground), and that she had only started to play netball. He listened intently, perhaps sympathetically, while Lizzy related the stories of her many minor physical accidents. They discussed together such things as going to their grandma’s house, their pets, and things that interested them on their recent trip to Sovereign Hill. They gleefully related an incident which happened when they were one year old. Luke climbed up to a high cupboard and swallowed some medicine and had to be rushed to the Royal Children’s Hospital. They both enacted the way he was temporally blinded and kept banging into things. This would not be an event they would recall themselves, so it must be an oft-repeated family drama, which they treated as a comedy. When discussing more speculative subjects, like

Lizzy's interpretation of the origin of the world, or her imaginative interpretation of her "amazing" picture, Luke gave passive agreement.

Luke managed to relate quite a lot about the rest of his family. He volunteered the information that their mother had some near fatal medical condition when they were born, and she could not have more children. He indicated that they had to look after her. He related that his father, a part-time farmer and full-time shearer, was away a lot, and he didn't see him often enough. He related in detail, at the last interview, that his grandfather grew ill and died a few months before, and his first wish was to have him back. He said they used to spend a lot of time together and he missed him.

Luke also related to his pets, and his friends. He related to the sea and the mountains, to the tree he fell out of, and his toy lamb, which he shyly admitted that he takes to bed on occasions still. He did not relate to environmental issues in a general, philosophical way.

#### *Existential Mode*

Luke's identity formation can be deduced from a small number of key incidents in his life. Details about his birth, such as his mother's illness, and his being the second twin seemed to give him a caring and supportive role in his family. Being able to stand up on the boogie board at the age of three, seemed to define him as being exceptionally athletic and courageous. His relationship with the surf was a focus for the development of his spirituality, and gave him transcendent experiences. The death of his grandfather appeared to face him with the reality of death and loss, which he was grappling with without the aid of a religious faith or other sources of meaning.

Luke's reservations about God and religious teaching appeared in the interview he shared with his sister. Here is part of the transcript.

Interviewer (W): Is there anything else you've always wanted to know?

Luke: No

Lizzie: Who created God?

W: .....what do you think is the answer?

Luke: All this type of person formed and had a new baby (hand movements in circles)

W: Sort of formed all by himself, you think? Luke: Yes

Lizzie: Adam and Eve created everyone. (looks disapprovingly at Luke, putting him in his place). God created plants and a whole lot of things. (Luke looks subdued, head down)

W: God created Adam and Eve, did he?

Lizzie: And I think that God was created by...

(Luke rubs his eyes, turns to Lizzie) Luke: He probably just...

Lizzie: He probably just came out of the ground or something

W: Just popped up, did he?

Luke and Lizzie: Yes

Luke: Like a bomb

Lizzie: Somewhere we never know. He might have come from another universe.

W: He might have. Yes, I can see you do think about things.

(Luke looks a little bored)

In the third interview, in the context of heroes, the researcher said, "Some people think that God's special. Do you think about God at all?" Luke shook his head and firmly said "No". However, Luke had an imaginary place called Wonderland, where "heaps" of wonderful things exist. He did not want to be specific about what is there, except there would be chocolates to eat.

Luke thought about death, especially since his grandfather died a few months before.

When offered three wishes, his first was as follows.

Luke: I wish my pop was still alive

W; O, how long ago did he die? Luke: I think it was June

W: This year! ...Ah, and you miss him? Luke (nods)

W: Tell me what was special about your pop.

Luke: Most all the time I got to see him, and stayed at his house. Where my cousin lives.

W: Was he sick, or just died?

Luke: He was sick. We had to look after him. And then he went to hospital. And then he came back and went again. And then he died. (hands tightly pressed in armpits) on Sunday, when I was in Geelong

W: So, in the middle of the day? Luke: Yes

W: And what do you think has happened to him now?

Luke: I don't know (puts head down on table).

Then followed conversation about having pictures of his pop and keeping him in his memory.

In a further transcript from the first interview, the twins talked about death. This was before I knew about the grandfather's death. It indicated Lizzie's conventional religious beliefs and Luke's doubts. It also indicated that Luke's opinions might not always be listened to.

Luke: I wonder what it would feel like to be dead.

W: Have you got any ideas about that? Luke: No.

Lizzie: Going to heaven, going to heaven! (chants, waves her arms and smiles)

W: Yes? What's heaven?

Lizzie: Heaven is a place where all good people go, and hell is where all the bad people go.

W: I see. And what are they like?

Lizzie: Um, like the leader of hell might be demons and the leader of heaven might be a really good person, like Jesus, God.

W; (addressing Luke) What do you think about heaven and hell?

Luke: I don't know. About the same thing.

W: Don't you think about them much? Does Lizzie do most of the thinking, out of you two?

Luke: Um, no (looks at Lizzie). Lizzie: Yes, probably.

W: (points to Luke) And you do most of the playing?

Luke: Yes (smiles).

Luke's value system appeared ill defined. He said he was a kind person, but could not recall helping anybody, or being helped. Defining good and bad deeds was confined to helping or not helping people (as a general statement), and killing people



was bad. His reaction to the Refugee Picture was sensory rather than empathetic. He noted the train tracks and the snow and interpreted their situation as missing the train. After some probing he suggested that someone could give them a ride. He thought the refugees would be sad, but particularly, angry that their houses had been burnt down. He demonstrated materialism as a value in a joke that he could be friends with a rock if it was gold, and in his second wish that “everything in the world was free”.

A final interesting feature of this profile was Luke’s dream about snakes, which he told twice. He said “I dreamed that we were killing snakes and we thought there was a dead one. And then we carried it to the barbeque, and then (pointing around his eyes) I saw ?(it open its eyes) and then it came after us”. He also pointed out the snake in a dream picture in *The Violin Man*. While snakes were common and dangerous in the area, and were mentioned by other children, they might be a kind of motif for Luke.

Luke presented as a child who was spiritually aware, though his sensitivity was to specific experiences of the natural world, like the sea and the mountains. His relationality also extended to his family, but not much beyond his immediate experience. He struggled with existential questions as they arose in his life experience, but did not seem to be able to find help in other people, or in conventional religion. Nor did his nature spirituality provide him with a moral code. These issues provide challenges for teachers of CRE.

## Profile 12

Mary

“I’m a special person. I have a Mum and a Dad, and some people don’t”

*Sensitive Mode*

Mary’s sensory experiences seemed to all be related to values, emotions or relationships. Even her description of her “special place” in the school yard, as cool and shady and having steps, was special because it was close to the art room, and her ambition was to be an art teacher. For her “awesome” picture she chose the picture of a drop of water falling onto the surface of water (a beautiful symmetrical picture). Mary chose the picture because it reminded her of the need to save water, in the midst of a drought. She elaborated that “if the water disappears the animals will die and we’ll die, and then there’ll be no-one to look after the animals”. When asked if she liked the picture itself, she replied that she has seen the image on a TV commercial about saving water. “I’ve been practising...The light side (of the picture) means it’s really dry and the other side means that you’ve got more water”. When she was drawing, in the third interview, Mary did not seem to be engaged in the art for itself, but for the stories it told. She explained that her self-portrait showed that she had blue eyes and blond hair, like her father and sisters, and that she was good at smiling. Her “journey” picture told a complex story about the hazards children could face on the roads. Death and danger were recurring themes in her interviews.

Mary showed complex emotional sensitivity, such as being happy and sad at the same time. She believed that Oscar, in *The Violin Man*, felt these ambiguous emotions. She described how sometimes her legs really wanted to run around and have fun, but her head told her she was tired and needed to sleep. Her great grandmother had died very recently, and she felt sad that she had died, but happy because her great grandmother could no longer see, hear or talk before she died, and now she was in heaven with God. She said “I don’t want people to know” about these mixed emotions.

### *Relational Mode*

Relationships, especially with her family were a strong feature of Mary's spirituality. She identified herself as a special person, because "I have a Mum and a Dad, and some people don't". Mary seemed to idolize her father, and in the first interview bragged about his (improbable) sporting feats. He seemed to be at work when some family events happened, but he played with her, flew kites etc, and she fondly remembered drawing him when he was asleep. Her mother seemed to be the organizer of the family. She organized regular "family nights" in which all the children played games together. Mary valued the clothes and toys her mother bought for her, and being picked up from school. There were two older sisters, whom Mary related to, but she complained that they were rather bossy. She had a 2 year old sister, who forgot to turn the tap off. For Mary, families were valued for reciprocal relationships: "you get to look after people...and you also get looked after...you get to read to someone and you can talk to people".

Mary made use of her family relationships in empathizing with other people. When she observed the Refugee picture, she called on her experience of her family having too much luggage to go on a family trip in one car. She hoped that someone would help them carry their belongings, as someone had helped her family. She also used her experience of family death to relate to Oscar in *The Violin Man*, and her little sister wasting water in relation to the Awesome picture.

Other relationships were also strong for Mary. She had many friends; "practically the whole class". She demonstrated her care for her friends in co-operating well doing the jigsaw puzzle, and especially in her physical and verbal support for Grace, who was finding the first interview threatening. Mary related how she helped another classmate who fell over in the playground, and some older children laughed. Mary's response was to tell them "It's not nice to laugh when someone falls over...It's one of my friends, and if you do I'll go and tell the teacher". Mary also felt a close bond with her teacher, and tried hard to please her. She was grateful for the encouragement and the stimulating classes her teacher provided. She had other more fanciful friends, such as animals, a house, and "the

man in the moon”. She believed the earth was a great place to live, and expressed the need to care for vulnerable creatures, such as baby birds.

Mary had some strong relationships with the transcendent. She believed in God, as creator. God was in heaven, which was everywhere, so God was with us and taking care of us. Yet she wondered if heaven is a literal place, and asked “Can people walk around in heaven?” Her understanding of God was influenced by her concept of family succession. “God (made the world) and Jesus, his son, and he looks after it, if he’s not dead. And if he is it’s sad because when Jesus, God, died, he put his son in charge, and if he had a daughter he put her in charge after Jesus died and he would put his wife in charge if the kids were dead.” Mary prayed for her great grandmother who had just died, though she had never met her, and she believed that the grandmother was happy in heaven. She said that Oscar’s dead daughter, Marietta, (in *The Violin Man*) was still with him. Mary suffered from asthma, and thought about her own death from time to time, as not being able to be with her family any more. Mary also claimed to have seen an angel. (This was something that came up in a CRE lesson, which I followed up privately.) She was aged 6, and was in hospital to have some teeth filled. When her Mum and Dad left her overnight, she was feeling really scared. Suddenly an angel appeared and said “Don’t be afraid. I’ll stay with you tonight. I won’t leave you tonight. And I’ll be there with you tomorrow.” The angel wore a gold dress and a bright thing on her head. She had wings. Although Mary only saw her briefly, she knew the angel was still present with her. Significantly, Mary said “That night I wasn’t scared”. Although Mary was given to telling fanciful tales, this story seemed credible, because she had a deep fear of dying.

### *Existential Mode*

#### *Identity*

Mary’s self-portrait was a large, simple pencil drawing of an open, smiling child. She said she had blue eyes and fair hair like her father and sisters. She also resembled her family in liking to wear a T shirt, even on cold days, and in not liking to get up in the morning, like her Dad. She liked her body, and hoped to stay slim

when she grew up, by eating healthy food. Mary had given some thought to what made an individual unique. She said that even if two people look alike, they would behave differently, and different things would happen to them. She also felt special in having the same name as a royal person. Mary was keen to develop skills: for example, she could dress herself better than when she was in grade 1 or 2, and she was pleased that her teacher said she was getting better and better at her work, and she could talk Indonesian well. She saw herself as clever, and good at sport. She sometimes exaggerated her ability, and that of her father, especially for the benefit of the group being interviewed. Her father could jump 6 metres high without a pole, and she could kick a football from the front door, across the street, and into the next street! Her family, or the school, also sponsored 300 children in another country! The day of the individual interview, Mary said she completed the Maths test before any of the other children, because it was really easy, then she was able to help another child. She was apparently bored and unhappy at kindergarten, and was given a test to allow her to start school early. Mary's highest values were caring for other people, and the environment, and avoiding violence.

Mary has had some dark experiences, which were shaping her life. She suffered from bullying at school, especially when she was in grade prep, when on one occasion she was punched and kicked. The next day she stayed home, vomiting, because she was too afraid to go to school. She said she still got picked on at times, but she had an older sister in grade 6 who sometimes protected her. Other traumas in her life consisted of illness, and fear of death. Mary, like her mother, suffered from asthma. She described it as follows: I have asthma as well (as Grace) and my Mum has really bad one. Sometimes if I run 5 or 6 or 7 laps I have to stop and use my asthma pump or I die or something. And I'm not allowed to die this way, my Mum said. Because if I don't have my asthma pump, after a couple of runs I'll start panicking, and I'll get very nervous." But she continued by saying, "Yeah, I had one (asthma heart attack) when I was born, but I'm still alive now and I was lucky". She also described, in gruesome detail, an episode where she had a bad dental abscess. In this context, her vision of an angel makes sense. She seemed to see death of grandparents in the past as part of the grim succession of life, (c.f. her description of

God's "family"), but she was glad that her Nana and Pop "didn't die". Mary's Journey drawing was of a busy road, with a pedestrian crossing, and traffic lights. Her narrative progressed as the drawing proceeded, but the finished piece seemed to read as follows. Mary was about the cross at the lights, but was reading a piece of paper and was distracted. "I wasn't thinking straight". Ben was driving a car towards the crossing, which Mary might not see, so she "might get run over". In the middle of the road Jai was lying, having been tied up by a bully, and crying "Help me!" Bree was standing by the side of the road, carrying a bag, calling out "OK". She was going to try and rescue Jai. Mary further explained "Ben wants to be a giant when he grows up, and Jai, he wants to be nice and caring, and he's not now, but he wants to get nicer". The researcher commented, "So there are lots of different things that can happen to people on the road". Mary nodded.

#### *Roadmap*

Mary's three wishes were:

1. to make everyone alive again,
2. to make everyone have a family, and
3. that everyone can get rich and not run out of money.

The last wish seemed to reflect her family's precarious financial situation. The other two wishes sum up what seemed to be the driving forces of her spirituality: visions of mortality, and the strength of family ties. These forces seemed have generated an awareness of the transcendent; of the benevolent presence of God, of angels and the spirits of the departed; a world modeled on her here-and-now family.

## Profile 13

Tom

*Sensitive Mode*

Tom had an eye for detail, whether it was about facts, about events or an imaginative response. His approach to the jigsaw puzzle was systematic, focused, and showed awareness of the total picture as well as the detail. Tom loved sport, and he and another member of the group confirmed that he was very good at it. He played football, soccer, and was learning to play tennis. He drew himself playing football in an Essendon jumper. He said that in class games of football he got picked for both teams at once, and kicked goals alternatively to each end! He said he could kick a goal from 25 metres. He was also keen on surfing. His family had a holiday house near a seaside town where the surf was good. Tom and his brother liked to surf with boogie boards, and they practised surfing on their father's big board, but it was too heavy for them to go forward on a wave unless they were both on the board together. As well as the physical pleasure of surfing, and other sports, Tom liked to dig big holes in the sand, and play imaginative games with his brother, like pretending to be very tall by having the head of one and the body of the other sticking out, apparently connected under the sand. (another bit of fantasy!) Surfing and sand games also involved a certain amount of danger, which excited him. One of Tom's wishes was to have a house on the foreshore so he could watch the sea. A special pleasure for him was to watch the sun setting over the ocean.

Tom said that he was good at school work, and often helped his class-mates. Like most of the children interviewed at this school, education was a serious matter. He was interested in factual information rather than the spiritual realm. "When people die they get put in a grave...and people remember them". He shows a mature approach to problem solving. He said 'My brother helped me with my homework. Like when I had a hard sum and I asked him if he could help me, and then he did the question in a different way'. Tom was also able to deal in quite a mature way with moral ambiguity. For example, he could say that painting graffiti was wrong when it defaced property, but graffiti could be beautiful and appropriate in certain

circumstances. An example of Tom's intellectual curiosity and pragmatism was as follows. If Tom met "whoever was in charge of the universe" he said "I want to know what he does for a living". He also said "My Dad works for Telstra, and I'd like to know what he does there....In the holidays I can go with him sometimes. And there's a table, and there's this notebook, and I write down what he does. Under the table so he doesn't see me".

Tom was also interested in Art, and liked sketching and cartooning. He enjoyed reading, and had a rich imaginative life. For his Journey picture he drew himself on an island. While he was drawing, in response to questions, he described how he got there (being chased by a shark), the food he would eat, the house he would build and how he would occupy his time. He was able to combine imagination with pragmatism. The latter was displayed in his being aware of the tides when surfing to avoid being swept out to sea.

#### *Relational Mode*

Tom had an older brother and a younger sister. His mother worked for a charity agency and his father for a telecommunications company. His father was very keen on sport. He always read the sports pages of the newspaper, and took the family to AFL (football) matches, when they were not watching it on the television. Tom gave explicit details of the family organization, such as when the children were rostered to do household chores, and their fortnightly retreat to the holiday house. The family has also visited the theme parks at the Gold Coast. In this family much of the children's time was spent playing football and other outside games. However, at one stage Tom said that his brother and sister didn't play with him "because of his (food) allergy". He also related that his parents sometimes administer the wooden spoon to his backside. He thought this was wrong. This may indicate tensions within the family, and/or emerging moral discrimination. (In a discussion with the school vice-principal, she refuted this claim of parental violence. She intimated that Tom was inclined to tell fanciful tales, to manipulate other children through his intelligence, and he had some tendency to violence himself, which he inflicted on his sister at times on the way to school). Tom seemed to identify most with his older brother.



When asked what he wanted to do when he grows up, his first response was to say that Jason wanted to be an engineer. There was rivalry between the brothers over sporting achievement, and Tom seemed to do well because he was nearly as big as his 11 year old brother. As indicated, he was admired for his sporting and academic ability, but he indicated that these were sometimes a barrier to friendship. In the group interviews I noted that there was a lot of interaction between Tom and the other “Anglo” boy, but he largely ignored the 2 girls. Was this because they were Asian or because they were girls? However, in the individual interview he related things that the girls had said. My observation was that he seemed to disengage when the others were discussing their interests. In the individual interview he was first somewhat distant, and gave much attention to his drawing or playing with the textas, but in the second half of the interview he seemed to be fully engaged with the interviewer. We shared a lot of laughter and fantasy. (Was I being manipulated?)

Unlike other children in the group the family did not have any pets. He told the researcher in detail about a dog they had, but “they gave her away after one day”, he said sadly. As already noted Tom related deeply to the sea, and was aware of the beauty and danger of the natural world. When the children were asked who was “in charge of the universe?” Tom replied “The Prime Minister. O no, God, I mean Jesus. He made the sun, he made the moon and then the sun behind the moon (beginning to describe an eclipse). O and my favourite author is Alison Lester, like she imagines, when I grow up.”

### *Existential Mode*

#### *Identity*

Tom described himself as “cool, smart, different and, um, sporty and interactive. I respect people”. This was a positive self-image. His main difference from his peers was in having an allergy to nuts. He described at length how this was discovered when, as a toddler, he helped himself to some nuts in the supermarket. He seemed to see this allergy as alienating him from others. Perhaps he saw it as a sign of weakness, in his otherwise strong self image.

*Roadmap*

Tom's values and aspirations were interesting. He had some clear moral values. He believed that it was good to give blood or kidneys, and that doctors did good work keeping people alive. He was grateful when someone helped him. As mentioned, he seemed to be struggling with moral ambiguity. He could see good and bad features of graffiti. He related how some friends lived in a country town, "and whenever they do something wrong (their parents) would get a whip out!" The researcher asked him, "Would you do that if you were a Dad?" He replied "No, I wouldn't do anything. I'd just put them in the room and talk to them". On the other hand he sometimes saw violence as a solution. He would help the refugees by stopping the war. "I could get a rocket launcher and go pt, pt 'Stop this war right now!'. And if they don't stop I'd shoot them all". He mentioned other violent fantasies. For example "I like to imagine I was in a fight, and then I ran away from them, and then I grabbed a sword and I went (slashing movements and smiling). And then I chopped them up, and then I cooked them for breakfast."

His initial response at times was quite materialistic, but it was followed by a different quality of response. For example, when asked how the refugees would be feeling if their house had been burnt down in the fighting he replied "They paid all that money, and then they lost all of it", but he continued "and they are feeling so sad because to walk all that way with that much stuff would be very hard". That is, materialism was followed by real empathy. There was a similar pattern in his "3 wishes". The first wish was that "I would be rich, and whenever I bought something my money would always stay the same". The second wish was "I wish all my friends could fly". This was so they could all have fun flying to school. The third wish was "I wish my family had a mansion for a house" His reason for wanting a mansion was "because it would be cool if we had a verandah and we lived right next to the sea. And we could look at the waves". He went on to describe watching the sun go down over the ocean. In these examples Tom's materialism seemed to be in tension with his relationships with his friends and with the sea. It is to be hoped that as he grows older, this materialism does not swamp his spirituality. An ominous sign was in his Journey picture. He was on an island, with "funny trees", where he can be

“the only one, just once”, and do “anything I like”. Although this is a bit hedonistic, there seemed to be a desire for communion with himself and his world, but he was wearing “designer” clothes.

## APPENDIX I SOME CHILDREN'S DRAWINGS

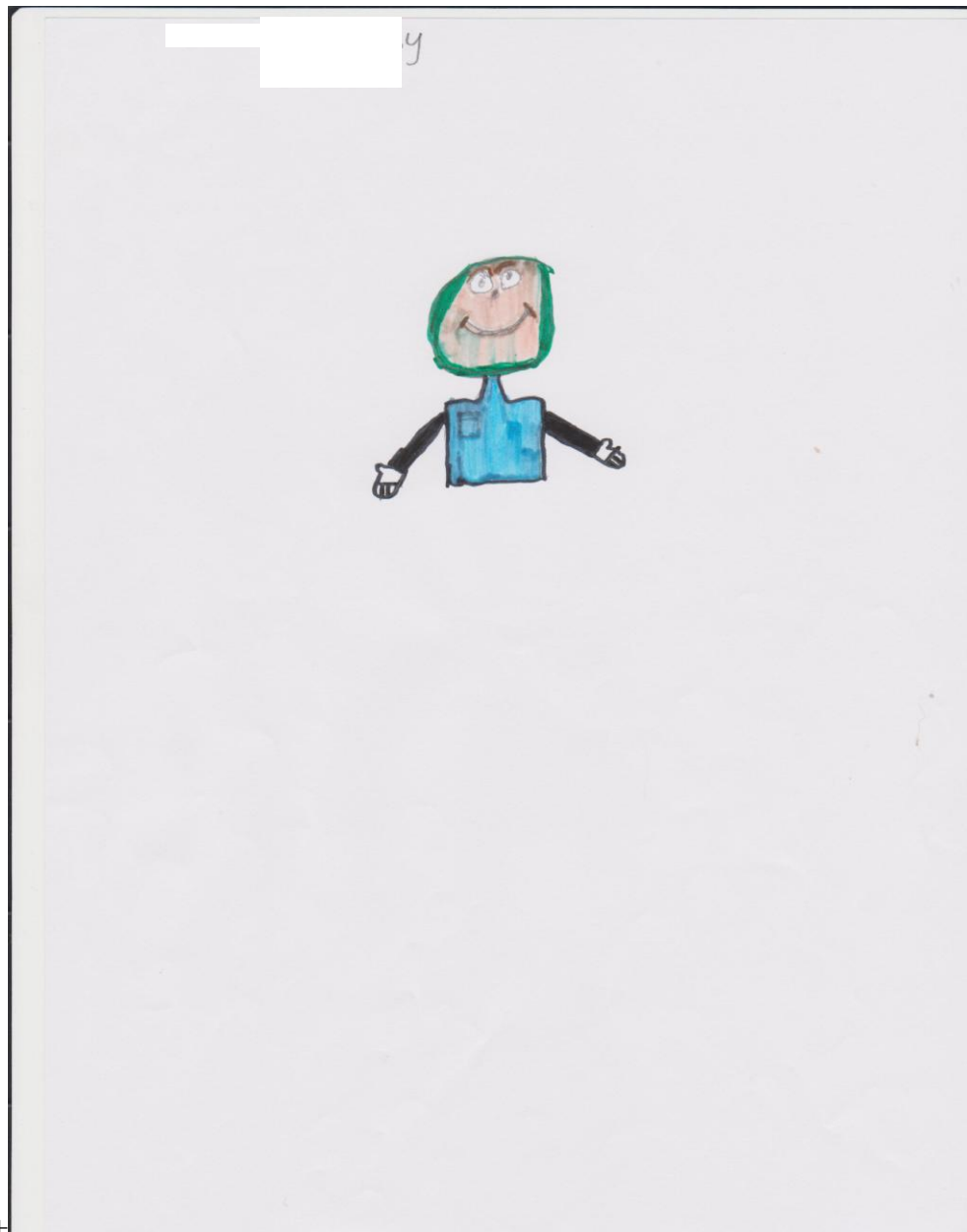
### Introduction

The drawings included in this appendix are samples representing the total number of the children's self portraits and "journey" pictures produced in their individual interviews. The drawings included here were either alluded to directly in the thesis or illuminate some aspect of the child's spirituality.

The portraits represent the children's perceptions of their identity, either as they saw themselves or as what appeared to be unconscious self-representations. For example, Bailey's portrait seemed to represent a tentative self-image (small and incomplete). A number of the girls, represented here by Grace, represented themselves with a glamorous image that many of the girls aspired to. Finn consciously represented the violent images with which he was pre-occupied. A number of the children included features in their portrait which represented their aspirations or allegiances, or treasured objects. For example, Luke included the mountains he hoped to climb as an adult, Tom drew himself wearing the jumper of his favourite football team, and Pham included her dog. Kane's portrait of himself on a path to high buildings could be both aspirational in his interest in building, and symbolic of a will to reach heights of achievement.

The "journey" drawings represent both the concrete and the symbolic. Spencer said his drawing of the jet plane represented both his recent journey from Sri Lanka to Australia, and his ambition to be a pilot. Bianca's drawing represented an island where she had a happy holiday, whereas Tom's island was an imaginary depiction of his longing for a "paradise". Harry represented his "sacred space" where he achieved inner calm. On the other hand, Mary's drawing seemed to represent her inner fears. These drawings seemed to represent different aspects of the children's spiritual journeys beyond or within themselves, as discussed in the thesis.

Drawing 1: *Bailey's Portrait*



Drawing 2: *Finn's Portrait*



Drawing 3: *Grace's Portrait*

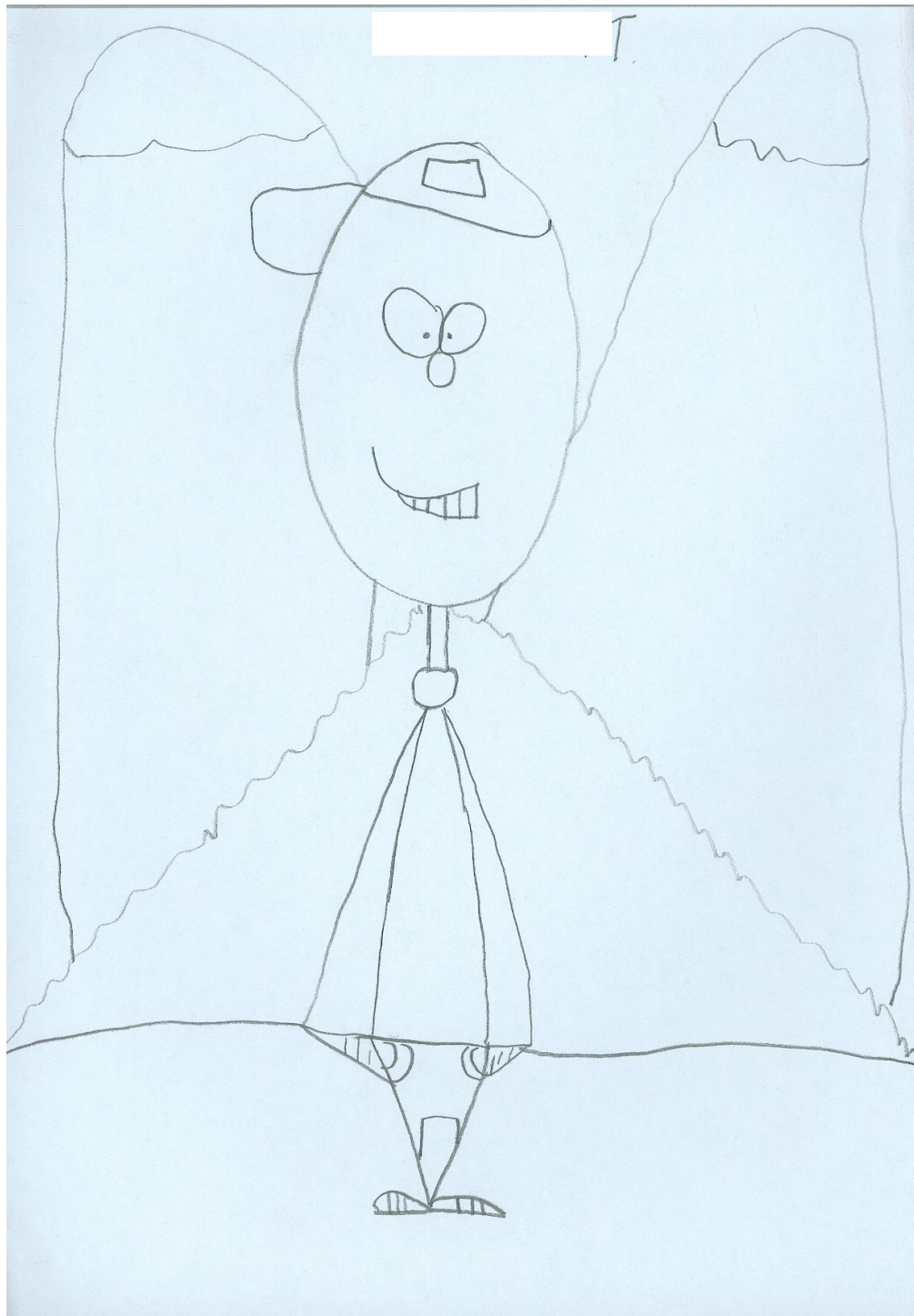


Drawing 4: Kane's Portrait





Drawing 5: Luke's Portrait



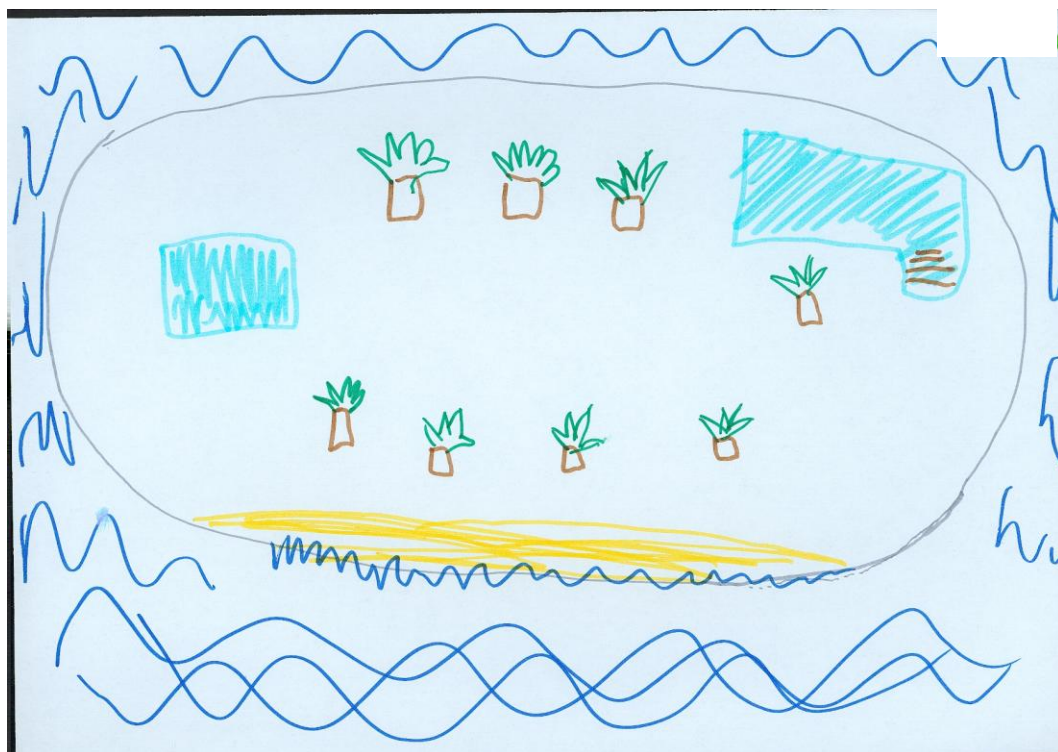
Drawing 6: Pham's Portrait



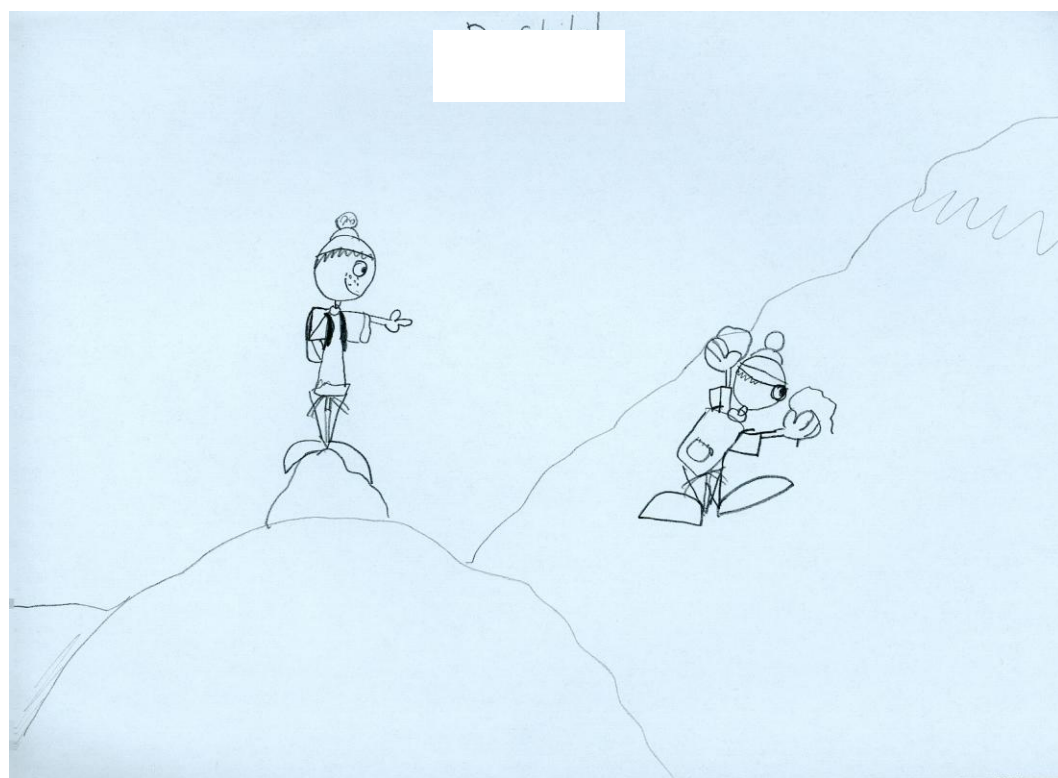
Drawing 7: Tom's Portrait



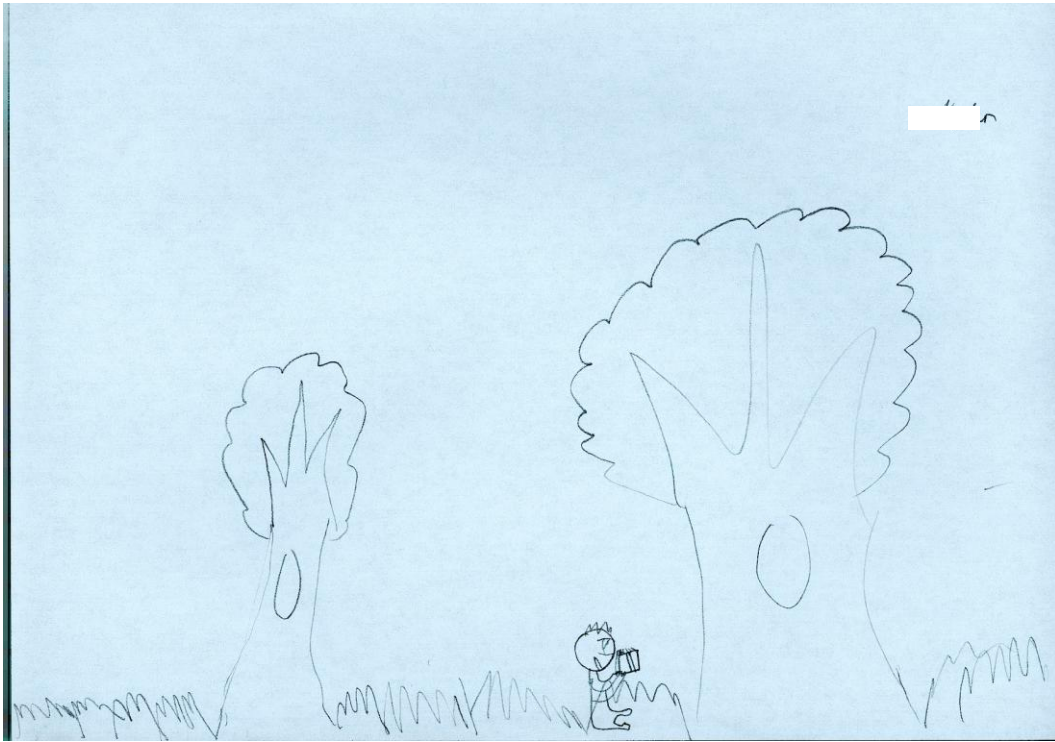
Drawing 8: Bianca's Journey



Drawing 9: Carmen's Journey



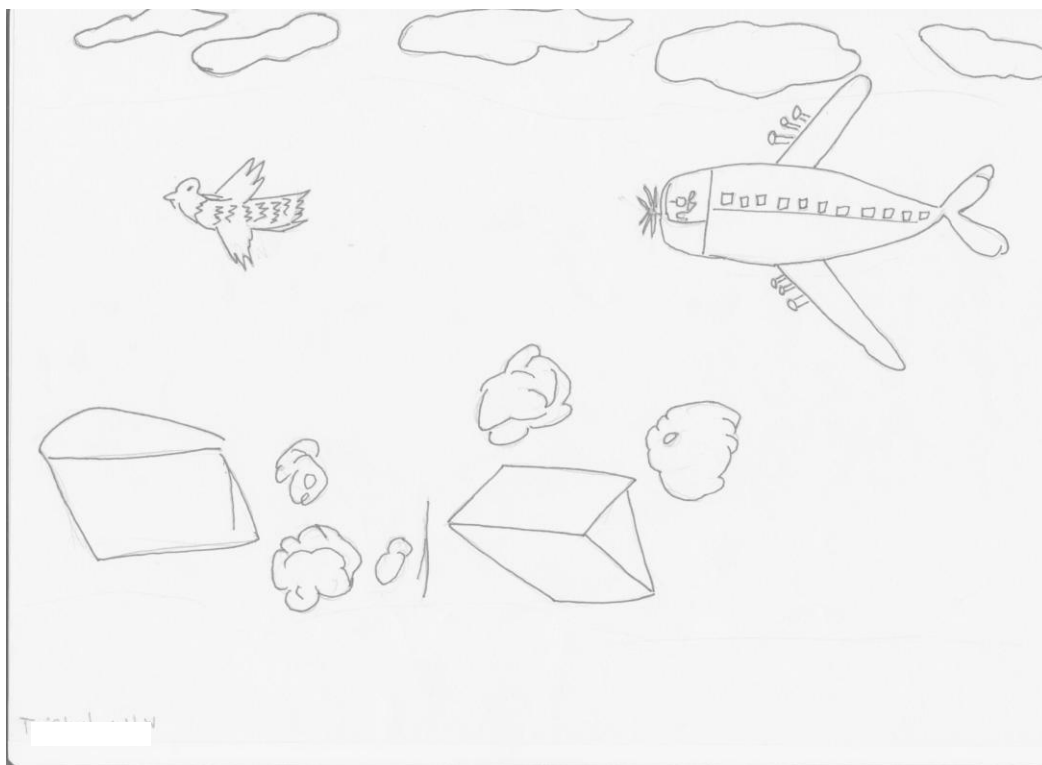
Drawing 10: *Harry's Journey*



Drawing 11: *Mary's Journey*



Drawing 12: *Spencer's Journey*



Drawing 13: *Tom's Journey*



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ACCESS Ministries, (2005). *Review of religion in life ®: Report on CRE focus groups, 2005*. G. Underwood & S. Underwood (Eds.). Melbourne: UC Publishing.
- ACCESS Ministries, (2009). *CRE Curriculum Overview*. [Brochure] Melbourne: The Council for Christian Education in Schools.
- Adams, K. (2001). God talks to me in my dreams: The occurrence and significance of children's dreams about God. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*. 6 (1), 99-111.
- Adams, K., Hyde, B. & Woolley, R. (2008). *The spiritual dimension of childhood*. London: Jessica Kingsley.
- Agarwal, V. (2006). Awakening latent spirituality: Nurturing children in the Hindu tradition. In K. Yust, A. Johnson, S. Sasso, & E. Roehlkepartain (Eds.) *Nurturing child and adolescent spirituality: Perspectives from the world's religious traditions*. (pp. 19-32). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Augustine of Hippo, (1923/1965). *The confessions of St Augustine*. (T. Matthew, Trans., R. Huddleston, Revised Trans.). London: Collins/Fontana.
- Aurobindo, Sri. (1979). From the writings of Sri Aurobindo. In W. Foy (Ed.) *Man's religious quest: A reader*. (pp. 155-165). London: Croom Helm.
- Avard, J. (2007). A way into the future. *EarthSong Journal: Perspectives in ecology, spirituality and education*. 7, 32-33.
- Bancroft, A. (1989). *Weavers of wisdom: women mystics of the twentieth century*. London: Penguin.
- Belcher, C. (2005). The place of worldview in Christian approaches to education. *Journal of Christian Education*, 48 (3), 9-24.
- Berryman, J. (1991). *Godly play: An imaginative approach to religious education*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Press.
- Berryman, J. (2005). *The complete guide to godly play: An imaginative method for presenting scripture stories to children*. (Vol.1). Denver, CO: Living the Good News.

- Bunge, M. (2006). The dignity and complexity of children: Constructing Christian theologies of childhood. In K. Yust, A. Johnson, S. Sasso, & E. Roehlkepartain (Eds.) *Nurturing child and adolescent spirituality: Perspectives from the world's religious traditions*. (pp. 53-68). Lanhan, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Champagne, E. (2001). Listening to...listening for...: A theological reflection on spirituality in early childhood. In J. Erricker, C. Ota & C. Erricker (Eds.) *Spiritual education: Cultural, religious and social differences: New perspectives for the twenty-first century*. (pp. 76-87). Brighton, UK: Sussex Academic.
- Champagne, E. (2003). Being a child: A spiritual child. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*. 8 (1), 43-53.
- Champagne, E. (2005). *Reconnaître la spiritualité des tout-petits*. [Recognition of the spirituality of young children] Quebec, Canada: Novalis.
- Cirlot, J. (1971). *A dictionary of symbols*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). (J. Sage, Trans.). London: Routledge & Keagan Paul.
- Coles, R. (1990). *The spiritual life of children*. London: Harper Collins.
- Collins, P. (1999). *Spirituality for the 21<sup>st</sup> century: Christian living in a secular age*. Dublin: The Columba Press.
- Conlon, J. (1994). *Earth story: sacred story*. Mystic, CT: Twenty-third Publications.
- Cooper, A. (1998). *Playing in the zone: Exploring the spiritual dimensions of sports*. Boston: Shambhala.
- Crawford, M. & Rossiter, G. (2006). *Reasons for living: Education and young people's search for meaning, identity and spirituality*. Melbourne: ACER.
- Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
- Cunningham L. & Egan, K. (1996). *Christian spirituality: Themes from the tradition*. Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press.
- Cupit, G. (2007). The marriage of science and spirit: Dynamic systems theory and the development of spirituality. *International Journal of Children's*

- Spirituality*. (8) 2, 105-116.
- Czikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. New York, NY: HarperPerennial.
- Department of Education and Early Child Development (DEECD). (2007a) *Reference guide for special religious and general religious education*. Retrieved April 20, 2008 from <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/referenceguide/curric/3.22.htm>.
- Department of Education and Early Childhood development (DEECD). (2007b) *Special religious education (Form no. GC 566)*. Retrieved April 20, 2008 from <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/referenceguide/curric/3.22.htm>.
- Department of Education, Science and Training (2005). *National framework for values education in Australian schools*. Canberra: AusInfo.
- Del Prete, T. (2002). *Thomas Merton and the education of the whole person*. Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press.
- de Souza, M. (2003). Contemporary influences on the spirituality of young people: Implications for education. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 8 (3), 269-279.
- de Souza, M. (2005). Engaging the mind, heart and soul of the student in religious education: Teaching for meaning and connection. *Journal of Religious Education*, 53 (4), 40-47.
- de Souza, M. (2008). Education for transformation: Meeting students' needs in changing contemporary contexts. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 13 (1), 27-37.
- de Souza, M. & Hyde. B. (2007). Spirituality of children and young people: A consideration of some perspectives and implications from research contextualized by Australia. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 12 (2), 97-104.
- Dilthey, W. (1996). On understanding and hermeneutics: student lecture notes (1867-68). *Hermeneutics and the study of history*. [electronic version] / *Essays, English Selection*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Donaldson, M. (1992). *Human minds: An exploration*. London: Allen Lane/Penguin.



- Drew, P. (1994). *The coast dwellers: A radical re-appraisal of Australian identity*. Melbourne: Penguin.
- Eaude, T. (2003) Shining lights in unexpected corners: New angles on young children's spiritual development. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 8 (2), 151-162.
- Eaude, T. (2005) Strangely familiar? – Teachers making sense of young children's spiritual development. *Early Years*, 25 (3), 237-248.
- Eaude, T. (2008) Should religious educators be wary of values education? *Journal of Religious Education*, 56 (1), 56-65.
- Edgar, D. & Edgar, P. (2008). *The new child: In search of smarter grown-ups*. Melbourne: Wilkinson Publishers.
- Edwards, J. (1997) *The surprising work of God*. New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House.
- Eliade, M. (1967/1974) *From primitives to Zen*. (Vols. 1-3). New York, NY: Harper & Row.
- Engebretson, K. (2003). Young people, culture, and spirituality: Some implications for ministry. *Journal of Religious Education*, 98 (1), 5-24.
- Engebretson, K. (2007). *Connecting: Teenage boys, spirituality and religious education*. Strathfield, NSW: St Paul's Publications.
- Elkind, D. (1978). *The child's reality: Three developmental themes*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Erricker, C. (2001). Shall we dance? Authority, representation, and voice: The place of spirituality in religious education. *Religious Education*, 96 (1) 20-36.
- Erricker, C. (2007). Children's spirituality and postmodern faith. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 12 (1), 51-60.
- Erricker, C., Erricker, J., Sullivan, D., Ota, K., & Fletcher, M. (1997). *The education of the whole child*. London: Cassell.
- Erricker, J. (2001). Street spirituality: A narrative case of a street community. In C. Erricker & J. Erricker. (Eds.) *Contemporary spiritualities: Social and religious contexts*. (pp. 224-237). London: Continuum.
- Fisher, J. (2006). Using secondary students' views about the influences on their

- spiritual well-being to inform pastoral care. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 11 (3), 347-356.
- Fiske, J., Hodge, B., & Horner, G. (1987). *Myths of Oz*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
- Forrest, J. (1991). *Living with wisdom: A life of Thomas Merton*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis.
- Fowler, J. (1980). *Stages of faith*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Friese, B. (2008). Breathing life into family processes: Introduction to the special issue on families and asthma. *Family Process*, 47 (1) 1-4.
- Gadamer, H. (1975/2004). *Truth and Method*, (J. Weinsheimer & D. Marshall, Trans). London: Continuum.
- Gendlin, E. (1981). *Focusing* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York, NY: Bantam.
- Goldman, R. (1964). *Religious thinking from childhood to adolescence*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Goodwin, D. (2009). *Exploring the spirituality and religiosity of Dinka children in Catholic schools in the western suburbs of Melbourne, Victoria*. Unpublished Doctoral dissertation, Australian Catholic University, Melbourne.
- Grey, M. (2006). The disenchantment and re-enchantment of childhood in an age of globalization. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 11 (1) 11-21.
- Griffiths, B. (1983). *The cosmic revelation: The Hindu way to God*. London: Collins Liturgical Publishing.
- Griffiths, B. (1994). *Universal wisdom: A journey through the sacred wisdom of the world*. London: Harper Collins.
- Guba, E. & Lincoln, Y. (1989). *Fourth generation evaluation*. London: Sage.
- Guba, E. & Lincoln, Y. (1999). Naturalistic and rationalistic enquiry. In J. P. Keeves & G. Lakomski (Eds.). *Issues in educational research*, (pp. 141-149). Amsterdam: Pergamon.
- Hardy, A. (1979). *The spiritual nature of man: A study of contemporary religious experience*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Halstead, J. (1996). Values and values education. In J. Halstead & M. Taylor (Eds.) *Values in education and education in values*, (pp.3-14). London: Falmer.

- Harris, K. (2007) Re-conceptualizing spirituality in the light of educating young children. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 12 (3), 263-275.
- Harris, M. & Moran, G. (1998). *Re-shaping religious education: Conversations on contemporary practice*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox.
- Hart, T. (2003). *The secret spiritual world of children*. Makawao, HI: Inner Ocean.
- Hart, T. (2004). The mystical child: Glimpsing the spiritual world of children. *Encounter: Education for Meaning and Social Justice*. 17 (2), 38-49.
- Harvard Mental Health Newsletter. December 2006. Retrieved 13<sup>th</sup> July, 2008.  
<http://www.health.harvard.edu>
- Hay, D. (1982). *Exploring inner space*. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin.
- Hay, D. (2000). Spirituality versus individualism: Why we should nurture relational consciousness. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 5 (1), 37-48.
- Hay, D. & Nye, R. (1998). *The spirit of the child*. London: HarperCollins.
- Hay D. & Nye, R. (2006) *The spirit of the child*, (Rev. ed.). London: Jessica Kingsley.
- Heidegger, M. (1980). *Being and Time*. (J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson Trans.). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Helminiak, D. (1996). *The human core of spirituality: Mind as psyche and spirit*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Hodder, J., (2007) Young people and spirituality: the need for a spiritual foundation for Australian schooling. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 12 (2), 179-190.
- Hodder, J., (2009) Spirituality and well-being: 'New Age' and 'evangelical' spiritual expressions among young people and their implications for well-being. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 14 (3), 197-212.
- Holmes, U. (1980/2002). *A history of Christian spirituality: An analytical introduction*. Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse.
- Honderich, T. (2005) (Ed). *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Horell, H. (2003). Cultural postmodernity and Christian faith formation. In T. Groome & H. Horell (Eds). *Horizons and hopes: The future of Religious*

- Education*. (pp. 81-105). New York, NY: Paulist Press.
- Hughes, P. (2007). *Putting life together: Findings from Australian Youth Spirituality Research*. Melbourne: Christian Research Association.
- Husserl, E. (1962) *Ideas: General introduction to pure phenomenology*. (W. Gibson, Trans.). New York, NY: Humanities Press.
- Hyde, B. (2003). Lifeworld existentials: Guides to reflection on a child's spirituality, *Journal of Religious Education*, 51 (3), 27-33.
- Hyde, B. (2005a, March). *Integrating awareness: A characteristic of children's spirituality in Australian Catholic primary schools*. Paper presented at the Fourth National Symposium on Religious Education and Ministry: Canberra, Australia.
- Hyde, B. (2005b). Beyond logic – entering the realm of mystery: Hermeneutic phenomenology as a tool for reflecting on children's spirituality, *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 10 (1), 31-44.
- Hyde, B. (2005c). *Identifying some characteristics of children's spirituality in Australian Catholic primary schools: A study within hermeneutic phenomenology*. Retrieved September 19, 2007, from <http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/digitaltheses>
- Hyde, B. (2006a). 'You can't buy love': Trivializing and the challenge for religious education. *Journal of Beliefs and Values*, 27 (2), 165-176.
- Hyde, B. (2006b). Nurturing the spirit in primary religious education classrooms. In M. de Souza, G. Durka, K. Engebretson, R. Jackson and A. McGrady (Eds.) *International handbook of the religious, moral and spiritual dimensions in education*. (pp. 1179-1192). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer.
- Hyde, B. (2008). *Children and spirituality: Searching for meaning and connectedness*. London: Jessica Kingsley.
- James, W. (1902/1928). *The varieties of religious experience: A study in human nature*. New York: Longmans, Green and Co.
- Jinpa, G. T. (2001). "Dimensions of spirituality: The Dalai Lama" In C. Erricker & J. Erricker. *Contemporary spiritualities: Social and religious contexts*. (pp 83-95). London: Continuum.

- Johnson, H. (2006). Difference, exploration, certainty and terror: A view from a Londoner about the formation of children's spirituality as relational consciousness. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 11 (1), 57-70.
- Julian of Norwich (1966/1988). *Revelations of divine love*. (C. Wolters, Ed.). London: Penguin.
- Jung, C. (1960/2001). *On the nature of the psyche*. (R. Hull, Trans.). London: Routledge.
- Jung, C. (1964). *Man and his symbols*. London: Aldus.
- Kelly, A. (1990). *A new imagining: Towards an Australian identity*. Burwood, VIC: Dove Collins.
- Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lee, N. (2001). *Childhood and society: Growing up in an age of uncertainty*. Buckingham, Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Lincoln, Y. & Guba, E. (1985) *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverley Hill: Sage.
- Lonergan, B. (1958). *Insight: A study of human understanding*. London: Darton, Longman & Todd.
- McCreery, E. Talking to young children about spiritual things. In R. Best (Ed.), *Education, spirituality and the whole child*. (pp. 196-205). London: Cassell.
- Mackay, H. (1993). *Reinventing Australia: The mind and mood of Australia in the 90s*. Sydney: Angus & Robertson.
- Mackay, H. (2000). *Turning point. Australians choosing their future*. Sydney: Pan McMillan.
- MacNeilage, P., Rogers, L. & Vallortigara, G. (2009). Origins of the left & right brain. *Scientific American*, July, 2009, 48-55.
- Maslow, A.H. (1999) *Towards a psychology of being*. New York: Van Norstrand.
- Merkur, D. (2006). Interpreting numinous experience. *Social Analysis*, 50 (2), 204-223.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1962). *Phenomenology of perception*. (C. Smith, Trans.).

London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

- Merton, T. (1961). *The new man*. New York: Farrer, Straus & Giroux.
- Merton, T. (1976). *Thomas Merton on Zen*. London: Sheldon.
- Moriarty, W. (2008). Children's experience of time, and how it may shape their personal and spiritual narrative. *Journal of Religious Education*, 56 (1), 52-57.
- Moriarty, W. (2009). Evaluating children's use of symbol in some recent research. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 14 (1), 47-61.
- Mountain, V. (2005). Prayer is a positive activity for children: A report on recent research. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 10 (3), 291-305.
- Mountain, V. (2007). Educational contexts for the development of children's spirituality: Exploring the use of imagination. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 12 (2), 191-203
- Muldoon, M. (2002). *On Ricoeur*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thompson Learning.
- Nakagawa, Y. (2006) The child as compassionate Bodhisattva and as human sufferer/spiritual seeker: Intertwined Buddhist images. In K. Yust, A. Johnson, S. Sasso, & E. Roehlkepartain, (Eds.) *Nurturing child and adolescent spirituality: Perspectives from the world's traditions*. (pp 33-42). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Newberg, A., D'Aquili, E, & Rause, V. (2002). *Why God won't go away: Brain science and the biology of belief*. New York: Ballantine.
- Ó Murchú, D. (1997). *Reclaiming spirituality: A new spiritual framework for today's world*. Dublin: Gill & Macmillan.
- Otto, R. (1923/1958). *The idea of the holy*. (J. Narvey Trans.). London: Oxford University Press.
- Palmer, R.E. (1969) *Hermeneutics: Interpretation theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer*. Evanston: Northwestern Press.
- Pearmain, R. (2007). Evocative cues and presence: Relational consciousness within qualitative research. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 12 (1), 75-82.
- Pfefferbaum, B. (1997). Post-traumatic stress disorder in children: A review of the

- past 10 years. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 36 (11), 1503-1511.
- Popper, K. (1902/1980). *The logic of scientific discovery*. London: Routledge.
- Priestley, J. (2001). The experience of religious varieties: William James and the post-modern age. In J. Erricker., C. Ota., & C. Erricker (Eds.). *Spiritual education: culture, religion and social differences: A new perspective for the twenty-first century*. (pp. 184-194). Brighton, UK: Sussex Academic.
- Raiter, M. (2003). *Stirrings of the soul: Evangelicals and the new spirituality*. UK: Matthais Media.
- Ranson, D. (2002). *Across the great divide: Bridging spirituality and religion today*. Strathfield, NSW: St Pauls.
- Reimer, K. & Furrow, J. (2001). A qualitative exploration of relational consciousness in Christian children. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 6 (1), 7-23.
- Ricoeur, P. (1967). *The symbolism of evil*. (E. Buchanan, Trans.). Boston: Beacon
- Ricoeur, P. (1970). *Freud & Philosophy: An essay on interpretation*. (D. Savage, Trans.). New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Ricoeur, P. (1974). *The conflict of interpretation*. Evanston:Northwestern University Press.
- Ricoeur, P. (1981). *Hermeneutics and the human sciences*. (J. Thompson, Trans.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ricoeur, P. (1985). *Time and narrative*. (Vol. 3). (K. Blamey and D. Pellauer, Trans.). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Robinson, E. (1977). *The original vision: A study of the religious experience of childhood*. Oxford: The Religious Experience Research Unit.
- Rosendale, G. (2007). *Rainbow Spirit theology: Towards an Australian aboriginal theology*. Hindmarsh, South Australia: ATF Press.
- Ruether, R. (1992). *Gaia & God: An ecofeminist theology of earth healing*. San Francisco: HarperCollins.
- Sagberg, S. (2008, January). *Children's spirituality in Norwegian kindergartens:*

- Some hermeneutic reflections*. Paper delivered at the 8<sup>th</sup> Conference International on Children's Spirituality, Australian Catholic University, Ballarat, Australia.
- Salman, S. (1997). The creative psyche: Jung's major contributions. In P. Young-Eisendrath & T. Dawson (Eds.). *The Cambridge Companion to Jung*. (pp. 52-70) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Schleiermacher, F. (1994) General hermeneutics. In K. Mueller-Volmer (Ed.), *The hermeneutics reader: Texts of the German tradition from the enlightenment to the present* (pp. 73-86). New York: Continuum.
- Schwandt, T.A. 1994 Constructivist, interpretivist approaches to human inquiry. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.). *Handbook of qualitative research*, (2<sup>nd</sup> ed). (pp. 118-137). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Scott, D. (2004). Retrospective spiritual narratives: Exploring recalled childhood and adolescent spiritual experiences. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 9 (1), 67-79.
- Scott, D. (2005). Spirituality in young adolescents: Thinking developmentally. In C. Ota & C. Erricker (Eds.) *Spiritual Education: Literacy, empirical and pedagogical approaches*. (pp. 94-108), Brighton, UK: Sussex Academic.
- Scott, D. (2006). Wrestling with the spirit(ual): Grappling with theory, practice and pedagogy. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 11 (1) 87-97.
- Sharkey, P. (2001). Hermeneutic phenomenology. In R. Barnacle (Ed.) *Phenomenology: Qualitative research methods* (pp. 16-37). Melbourne: RMIT Press.
- Shire, M. (2006). Learning to be righteous: A Jewish theology of childhood. In K. Yust, A. Johnson, S. Sasso, & E. Roehlkepartain (Eds.) *Nurturing child and adolescent spirituality: Perspectives from the world's traditions*, (pp. 43-52). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Smith, J. (2004). *Australia's rural and remote health: a social justice perspective*. Croydon, Victoria: Tertiary Press.
- Smith, James K.A. (2000) *The fall of interpretation: Philosophical foundations for a creational hermeneutic*. Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press.



- Snelling, J. (1992). *The Buddhist handbook: A complete guide to Buddhist teaching and practice*. (2nd. ed.). London: Rider.
- St. Teresa of Jesus, (1949). *The complete works of Saint Teresa of Jesus*. (Vol. 1). (E.A. Peers, Trans.). London: Sheed & Ward.
- Strauss, A and J. Corbin. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE.
- Tacey, D. (1995). *The edge of the sacred: Transformation in Australia*. Sydney: HarperCollins.
- Tacey, D. (2003). *The spirituality revolution: the emergence of contemporary spirituality*. Sydney: HarperCollins.
- Taylor, P. (2007). *Why we are Australian: 125 defining men, women and moments over three centuries*. Melbourne: The Five Mile Press.
- Thompson, C. (2004). *The violin man*. Sydney: Hodder Children's Books.
- Thompson, J. (1981). *Critical hermeneutics: A study in the thought of Paul Ricoeur and Jürgen Habermas*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Underhill, E. (1911/1949). *Mysticism: A study in the nature and development of man's spiritual consciousness*. London: Methuen & Co.
- van Manen, M. (1990) *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. London, Ontario: Althouse.
- Webster, R. S. (2004) An existential framework of spirituality. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 9 (1), 7-19.
- Webster, R. S. (2005). Personal identity: Moving beyond essence. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 10 (1), 5-16.
- Wilber, K. (2001), *The eye of spirit: An integral vision for a world gone slightly mad*. Boston: Shambala.
- Williams, R. (1979). *The wound of knowledge: Christian spirituality from the New Testament to St John of the Cross*. London: Darton, Longman & Todd.
- Wright, A. (2000). *Spirituality and education*. London: Routledge/Falmer.
- Wright, A. (2001). Dancing in the fire: A deconstruction of Clive Erricker's postmodern spiritual pedagogy. *Religious Education*, 96 (1) 120-136.
- Wright, M. and Masten, A. (2005). Resilience processes in development: Fostering

- positive adaptation in the context of adversity. In *Handbook of resilience in children*. S. Goldstein and R. Brooks (Eds.), Retrieved <http://www.springerlink.com.exproxy2.acu.edu.au> 27 July 2008
- Yildirim, Y. (2006). Filling the heart with the love of God. In K. Yust, A. Johnson, S. Sasso, & E. Roehlkepartain, (Eds.). *Nurturing child and adolescent spirituality: Perspectives from the world's religious traditions*. (pp. 69-80). Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Yust, K., Johnson, A., Sasso, S., Roehlkepartain, E. (Eds.), (2006). *Nurturing child and adolescent spirituality: Perspectives from the world's religious traditions*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Zohar, D. and I. Marshall. (2000). *SQ. Spiritual intelligence: The ultimate intelligence*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.