

The expressions of spirituality among senior students
in three New South Wales Catholic schools

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Statement of Authorship and Sources

This thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the award, Doctor of Education from the Australian Catholic University.

It contains no material that has been extracted in whole or in part from a thesis that I have submitted towards the award of any other degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

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

All research procedures reported in this thesis received the approval of the relevant Ethics Committee (see Appendix E).

Signed

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of the author.

Paul Lentern

2020

Acknowledgements and Dedication

In submitting this work I wish to acknowledge the enormous contributions of my research supervisors Professor Peta Goldberg RSM and Professor Jim Gleeson. They have worked patiently and consistently with diligence and care to guide me in bringing this work to completion. They have encouraged me to think differently, to ask many critical questions, to be attentive to the data and to be mindful of the reader. I would also like to acknowledge the contribution of Doctor Peter Ivers who generously took time to read the thesis and offer some very pertinent insights which have helped to strengthen the final document.

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Abstract

Understanding the nuanced and varied expressions of spirituality found among young people is a crucial dimension of the work of educators in Catholic schools. The focus of this mixed methods research was to understand the expressions of spirituality found among senior students in three Catholic secondary schools, and to draw on this understanding to allow Catholic schools to more effectively engage their students with spirituality. The reflections of the participants from the senior cohorts of three Catholic schools provided the basis for understanding their expressions of spirituality, their commitment to spirituality and the influences on their spirituality. The study aimed to identify avenues where these Catholic schools could modify their practice to better align programs and initiatives to the diverse expressions of spirituality evident among the student cohorts.

An iterative mixed methods typology was used in this study, drawing on a theoretical framework of complementarity, where the strengths of qualitative and quantitative data analysis were accessed and allowed to mix and merge. The mixed methods research methodology involved the use of data from an online survey with two hundred and sixty one respondents, together with individual and group interviews involving thirty seven student volunteers together with six teachers.

The effectiveness of Catholic schools as a means of engaging students with spirituality is a central question in the minds of leaders of Catholic schools and their auspicing authorities (Catholic Bishops of NSW and ACT, 2007; Catholic Education Office Sydney, 2014b). It is also a central focus for researchers working in this field (Hughes, 2017; Rossiter, 2018).

The findings of this research highlight the relatively secular perspectives held by the student participants across a broad continuum of spirituality profiles, together with the

minimal influence these three Catholic schools are having on the spirituality of their students. Notwithstanding the minimal influence currently in evidence, the expressions of spirituality identified in this study confirm the potential, in some areas, for these Catholic schools to achieve more meaningful and effective engagement with their students in spirituality.

This research has provided contributions to knowledge in the field finding that more than one-third of students, having reached the end point of their experience in a Catholic school, had not been consciously engaged with spirituality during their time at school. Further, this research identified a propensity for students to hold literal views of biblical creation accounts leading to inevitable conflicts with their developing scientific knowledge.

This significance of this research is evident in the context of profound change taking place in the personal, social and religious dimensions of Western societies. The extent of this transformation leads Pope Francis to describe this not as an era of change but as a change of epoch (Pope Francis, 2015b). The steadily declining uptake of Catholic Christianity and the breakdown of the parish and family model of handing on this religious tradition highlight the significant role of Catholic schools in the task of engaging students with spirituality. The significance of this contribution of Catholic schools in the area of spirituality confirms the importance of this investigation.

This research has the potential to assist these three Catholic schools in refining their practice to more effectively engage students with spirituality in the context of an increasingly secular milieu. It provides several critical insights into the expressions of the spirituality of senior students, which can inform and guide strategic decisions in these schools. This may lead to more meaningful and effective engagement with a broader range of students in these cohorts.

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Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACARA	Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority
AITSL	Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership
BBI – TAITE	Broken Bay Institute, The Australian Institute of Theological Education
Coed F	Female survey respondent: Co-educational school
Coed M	Male survey respondent: Co-educational school
CSYMA	Catholic Schools Youth Ministry Australia
ECSIP	Enhancing Catholic Schools Identity Project
GEN Y	Generation Y: Those born in the 1980s and 1990s
HSC	Higher School Certificate
ICSEA	Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage
KU	Katholieke Universiteit (Leuven)
MBTI	Myers Briggs Type Indicator
NET	National Evangelisation Team
NESA	New South Wales Education Standards Authority
NCEC	National Catholic Education Commission
NCLS	National Church Life Survey
NF	Intuitive Feeling Type (Myers Briggs Type Indicator)

QUAL	Qualitative Data
QUAN	Quantitative Data
SSF	Female survey respondent: Single sex school
SSM	Male survey respondent: Single sex school
YCS	Young Christian Students
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction to the research problem

This research is situated in the search for effective ways for Catholic schools to engage young people with spirituality in a post-traditional age where religious affiliation is uncommon and new expressions of spirituality proliferate. In this challenging and rapidly changing environment, the traditional parish and family model of Catholic faith and practice has broken down.

Catholic schools in Australia have long been regarded as an important means of socialising the children of Catholic families into the practice of the Catholic faith. However, the evidence clearly shows that this is not the case (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017a; National Church Life Survey, 2018). Most Catholic families have little or no connection with the Catholic Church beyond their involvement with a Catholic school, and this typically ends when the youngest child finishes school.

The focus of this research is the spirituality of young people at the end point of their experience in a Catholic secondary school, intending to understand how they engage with spirituality and how their Catholic school has contributed to their spirituality.

This introductory chapter identifies the context and background of this research, leading to the defining of the research problem. Following this, the purpose of the research is set out and the research questions identified. The design of the research is briefly outlined, and the importance of the work is discussed before setting out the structure of the thesis chapter by chapter, thus providing an overview of the scope and sequence of this research.

1.2 Research context

The steadily declining affiliation of Australian Catholic families with local parish communities (Dixon et al., 2007; National Church Life Survey, 2018) and the corresponding growth of secularism (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017) present profound challenges to leaders in Catholic schools and the religious authorities who auspice these schools. Despite the decline in parish affiliation, enrolments in Catholic schools continue to grow (National Catholic Education Commission, 2015, 2017a).

Ecclesial authorities continue to look to Catholic schools to evangelise the students in their care and thereby establish or renew their connection with the Catholic faith and their involvement with the local parish community (Catholic Bishops of NSW and ACT, 2007; Catholic Education Office Sydney, 2014b). This is despite evidence that such connections are declining (Rossiter, 2018).

In New South Wales (NSW) Catholic schools operate in the relatively secular Australian environment where few people are formally aligned with a religious tradition and an environment in which religious authority and religious institutions are not highly regarded (Mackay, 2016). Additionally, large metropolitan centres in NSW are very multi-cultural with an accompanying multi-faith dimension (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017).

The three schools participating in this research face similar challenges to other Catholic schools. There is an increasingly secular environment where a small and shrinking proportion of their Catholic students are from families with active involvement in a local parish. Further, Catholic schools are enrolling increasing proportions of students from different faith traditions as well as those of no religious background (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017a).

Despite the trends towards smaller proportions of Catholic students and minimal involvement with Catholic parishes these schools are, nevertheless, expected to meaningfully engage students with Catholic faith and practice as a return on a considerable investment of resources (Catholic Bishops of NSW and ACT, 2007).

Amid the trend towards an increasingly secular Australian society researchers have reported a keen interest in spirituality despite the decline in religious affiliation (Mackay, 2016; McCrindle, 2017). The idea of being spiritual, but not religious, (Fuller, 2001) is widely recognised in the literature (Hughes, 2007b; Mason, Singleton, & Webber, 2007; C. Smith & Denton, 2005; Tacey, 2004). This phenomenon has implications for Catholic schools; however, it is not apparent whether it is a further element of a profoundly challenging secular environment or whether it indicates a fertile area for potential engagement with young people.

In the broader context, Western societies are undergoing rapid and extensive change at a social and personal level which clearly have implications for the ways in which people engage with spirituality and religion and find meaning in their lives. Pope Francis has highlighted the profound nature of this transformation reflecting that “we are not living an epoch of change so much as an epochal change” (Pope Francis, 2015b, p. 2). The emerging adults who are the focus of this study are on the threshold of an adult life, searching for meaning in the midst of this unprecedented change where few of the traditional markers of previous eras are available to guide them. Thus, the role of the Catholic school in nurturing the spirituality of its students has profound significance in providing a framework of meaning which will assist graduates in navigating their way through a world of rapid and escalating change.

1.3 Background to the research

For the past three decades, the researcher has held leadership positions in Catholic schools in NSW with the delegated responsibility for the religious dimension of these schools. Throughout these years the challenges noted above have been evident through direct experience; through anecdotal evidence; and professional engagement with researchers in the field.

The researcher has a clear personal interest in enhancing the work of Catholic schools in engaging students with spirituality, as well as a concern to establish meaningful expectations for this work, given the challenging circumstances described previously. Accordingly, this research arises directly from the professional interest and experience of the researcher and has the potential to impact directly on the researcher's work in Catholic schools.

Such direct personal interest has the potential to introduce bias into the research work. This poses a risk to be managed in the course of the research and also brought to bear in the judgement of the reader concerning the worth of this research. Conversely, this close personal connection has the potential to enhance the effectiveness of the research through the researcher being closely attuned to the nuances of practice in the field, which will provide additional strength to the calibre of this study.

1.4 Identification of the research problem

There is a dissonance evident between the ecclesial expectations of Catholic schools and the outcomes these schools are currently achieving. This dissonance highlights one dimension of the research problem which concerns the capacity of Catholic schools to meet the expectations of their auspicing authorities.

The problem identified in this context is that Catholic schools are not able to meet the expectation of engaging the majority of students in Catholic faith and practice. This has been the case for many years and is increasingly evident in the contemporary context (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006; Rossiter, 2002, 2010a, 2018).

The increasing gap between expectation and achievement in this context creates the additional problem of a lack of clarity for the work of Catholic schools in this area. Legitimate educational goals are blurred with “over the horizon” (Rossiter, 2018, p. 85) aims about faith formation and religious affiliation, leading to confusion and uncertainty among teachers in Catholic schools.

A further dimension of the research problem is the emergence of the spiritual but not religious phenomenon, whereby people are choosing to disassociate themselves from traditional religious expressions while continuing to hold spiritual beliefs and engage with personal and individual expressions of spirituality (Hughes, 2017; Mackay, 2016; Rossiter, 2018). On the one hand, this dimension can be viewed as a confirmation of widespread disengagement from traditional religion, which underscores the enormity of the challenge for educators in Catholic schools. On the other hand, it can also be seen as an opportunity to engage with people in and through their expressions of spirituality, notwithstanding that many of these expressions are non-religious.

For the purposes of this study spirituality is understood as an approach to life, deliberately chosen or unconsciously adopted, which relates to questions of ultimate meaning; of origin, purpose and destiny and which has the potential to shape how an individual relates to others and engages in community. Understood in this way, spirituality is inclusive of a broad range of perspectives which also provide for specific religious expressions of spirituality such as that of Catholic Christianity.

Thus the research problem is identified in the challenges faced by Catholic schools in meaningfully engaging students with spirituality. This includes the corresponding uncertainty regarding the purpose of Catholic schools in an increasingly secular environment where the handing on of Catholic faith and practice has largely disintegrated.

1.5 The purpose of the research

The purpose of this research is to understand how students in three Catholic schools engage with spirituality in order to inform the work of these Catholic schools in this area. This understanding has the potential to contribute to the practice of these schools, assisting them to enhance the relevance and quality of the programs and initiatives they provide, thereby engaging their students more effectively with spirituality.

This research seeks to capture a snapshot of spirituality among the cohorts of three Catholic schools at the end point of their secondary school experience. In doing so, it will have regard for the impact of the full suite of programs and initiatives provided by a Catholic school to foster spirituality among its students. Further, it will indicate a trajectory for each of these young people concerning spirituality as they approach the end of the Catholic school experience which, for many, will also be the end of any regular connection with the Catholic Church.

In addition to understanding expressions of spirituality, this research also focuses on the nature and extent of the commitment these young people hold towards their spirituality. In some cases, there is evidence of a firm commitment to a thoughtfully chosen perspective, however, for many, there is a much more fluid approach and, for some, a lack of active or conscious engagement with spirituality altogether. Through the use of spirituality profiles, a nuanced understanding of diverse approaches to spirituality is possible. This understanding

highlights the need for carefully differentiated programs and initiatives designed to cater for the range of approaches.

This research also considers the influences on spirituality, both in the broader social milieu of the participating students and in the experiences particular to their Catholic school environment. It recognises the prominence of influences, such as family and friends on the spirituality of young people, and the comparatively minor influence exercised by Catholic schools. Notwithstanding the minimal impact of these schools on the spirituality of their students, there are, nevertheless, critical areas where this impact can be enhanced.

Through considering the expressions of spirituality among these students, their commitment to spirituality and the factors that have influenced their spirituality, this research seeks to contribute to the practice of these three schools in their efforts to effectively engage students in this area. The insights from this research have the potential to enhance the work of these schools through recognising the particular expressions of spirituality evident among students and to target programs and initiatives accordingly.

1.6 The research questions

In order to understand how young people are engaging with spirituality and the contribution of these three schools to the spirituality of their students, three research questions are identified. They are:

1. How do senior students at Catholic schools express spirituality?
2. How committed are senior students at Catholic schools to these expressions of spirituality?
3. How do senior students at Catholic schools evaluate the influences on the development of their spirituality?

Individually, these research questions contribute insights into important elements of engagement with spirituality. Together, they establish a clear picture of the spirituality of young people who have volunteered to take part in this research. This, in turn, provides rich insight to enable the participating schools to modify their practice and thereby enhance the effectiveness of their programs and initiatives.

1.7 The research design

This study uses a mixed methods research methodology in a theoretical framework of complementarity, where the strengths of qualitative and quantitative data analysis are brought to bear in an iterative typology (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). This iterative typology provides a framework for the interplay between the qualitative and quantitative data to provide rich insights into the responses of participants.

Three schools participated in this research and from among these schools, 261 students and six teachers volunteered to take part. Among the 261 students, 133 were male 117 were female and 11 did not identify their gender. Data was collected through an online survey and individual and group interviews. The online survey collected both qualitative and quantitative data through a range of open and closed questions. Qualitative data was also collected through semi-structured interviews with 37 student volunteers and with the six teachers. Data collection for this research took place between August and November 2016.

1.8 The importance of the research

The importance of this research arises from the confluence of four important factors. First, the breakdown of the traditional model of parish and family engagement with the Catholic faith. Second, the changing demographics of Catholic school populations. Third, the lack of connection between students attending Catholic schools and the community of the

Catholic Church beyond the school. Fourth, the increasingly secular milieu in which Catholic schools in Australia are operating.

These four factors highlight a critical need to understand how students in Catholic schools are expressing spirituality and how Catholic schools can be more effective in meaningfully engaging students with spirituality, and therefore underline the importance of this research.

The Catholic Church in Australia, in line with other Christian denominations, is experiencing profound if not dramatic numerical decline. While Catholics nominally make up one-fifth of the Australian population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017) only 11.8% were actively engaged with a local parish community on 2016 figures with the trend pointing to further decline (National Centre for Pastoral Research, 2019; National Church Life Survey, 2018). The demographics of the local parish communities are of an ageing population where very few young families are to be found. The traditional model of handing on Catholic faith and practice in the family and parish has all but vanished. If alternatives to this model are not found the future of the Catholic Church in Australia is bleak.

Among the agencies of the Catholic Church in Australia, Catholic schools are uniquely placed to engage students and their families with spirituality; but they have not been effective in doing so. In contrast to the rapidly declining numbers in the parish setting, enrolments in Catholic schools continue to grow. Currently in NSW, over 20% of students are educated in Catholic schools (National Catholic Education Commission, 2015). Families who have children attending Catholic schools usually have a connection to these schools for a considerable number of years. For some, this will stretch over 13 years from Kindergarten until the end of secondary school and for families with more than one child, this period is longer still. Thus, unlike any other agency of the Catholic Church in Australia, there is a

prolonged period of regular connection between the family and the Catholic school for large numbers of people.

It is not envisaged that more effective engagement with spirituality will result in a renewal of the traditional parish and family model, nor will it lead to large numbers of young people connecting with Catholic faith and practice. However, engaging young people with spirituality has the potential not only to inspire them to explore new approaches to meaning making but also to fashion new expressions of intentional communities grounded in spirituality.

This potential for engagement highlights the importance of this research in understanding the phenomenon of spirituality outside of a religious setting. Although traditional religious expressions of spirituality are seldom adopted by young people, the notion of spirituality without religion appears to be flourishing. While the phenomenon of spirituality without religion is rightly understood as a rejection of traditional religious spirituality, it also has the potential to develop into deliberate and meaningful engagement with new expressions of spirituality.

The recognition of the profound changes in Western societies and the rapidly escalating transformation of personal, social and religious dimensions of life further highlight the importance of this research. It also underlines the critical role that Catholic schools can play in the lives of their students through assisting them in developing a framework for making meaning in a time when the traditional guideposts which assisted previous generations have mostly disintegrated.

Catholic schools have the opportunity to engage students in expressions of spirituality which, for many, will fall outside of a religious setting. Without this engagement, students are prone to see themselves as merely rejecting the Catholic Christian expression of

spirituality rather than engaging positively with spirituality in a broader sense. Thus, the search for effective ways of engaging young people with spirituality in a conscious way has profound implications.

1.9 The limitations of the research

While being of profound importance to the work of Catholic schools, four significant factors nevertheless limit this research.

The findings of this research are drawn from the contributions of students and teachers in three Catholic schools from two neighbouring metropolitan dioceses in NSW. Accordingly, they are limited to these particular situations and are not transferable to other contexts. While some of the findings have a strong resonance with the findings of other research, the findings are not generalisable owing to the unique characteristics of this research.

Additionally, the findings are limited by the willingness and capacity of the participants to articulate their expressions of spirituality and are further limited by the researcher's capacity to interpret and explain these expressions. Thus, in effect, the findings are an interpretation of an interpretation of expressions of spirituality, thereby constituting a double hermeneutic.

This research provides an end-point snapshot of the expressions of the spirituality of participants. While this is an intentional element of the research, which has the strength of being able to take into account the full range of experiences provided in attending a Catholic school, this single point in time portrait also limits it.

The recommendations provided at the end of this thesis draw directly on the findings of this research and have been developed as logical responses to the conclusions.

Notwithstanding their direct connection to the findings of the research they are untested and are therefore speculative. There is no certainty that the recommendations, if enacted, would achieve the purpose for which they are intended.

1.10 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is structured into six chapters. Following this introductory chapter, a review of the relevant scholarly literature is included in Chapter Two. The review of the literature is structured according to a five-step framework.

Theme One: The meaning of the term spirituality

Theme Two: The expression of spirituality among young people

Theme Three: The commitment of young people to spirituality

Theme Four: The influences on the spirituality of young people

Theme Five: The contribution of Catholic schools to spirituality

This framework flows into the design of the research, which is set out in Chapter Three. This is also where the mixed methods research methodology is outlined, and the methods of data collection and analysis are explained.

The findings from the analysis of the data are set out in Chapter Four, which focuses directly on the responses of participants and allows the voices of individual participants to come to the fore. The findings are set out in direct correlation to the three research questions concerning the expressions of spirituality, commitment to spirituality and influences on spirituality. Interspersed with the individual responses from participants, and following the

mixed methods research methodology, statistical data is presented to highlight where findings emerging from the qualitative data can be confirmed through statistical analysis.

Chapter Five discusses the findings in more detail and examines the intersections between these and the scholarly literature. This chapter is structured according to three overarching themes which provide direct responses to the research questions and establish principles that have the potential to contribute to the practice of the participating schools.

Conclusions and recommendations are set out in Chapter Six, which draw together the main points from the preceding chapters and outline seven recommendations that arise out of the findings of this research and those of other researchers identified in the literature. The recommendations seek to contribute to the practice of these three schools to enable them to more effectively engage their students in spirituality.

1.11 Conclusion

Through a mixed methods research methodology focused on the experience of senior students in three Catholic schools in New South Wales, this study seeks to provide meaningful insights into their perspectives on spirituality and how these schools are contributing to these perspectives. The analysis of these insights and their intersection with the findings from other scholarly research will provide a valuable portrait of the experience of these students in their Catholic schools. Further, it will provide evidence regarding the effectiveness (or otherwise) of the programs and initiatives provided by these schools.

The culmination of this work will be the proposal of recommendations to these three schools. Based on the findings of this research, these theoretical and practical recommendations have the potential to more effectively engage school students in the area of spirituality.

Chapter Two: Review of the literature

2.1 Scholarly research and the research problem

The research problem set out in the preceding chapter invites inquiry into the effectiveness of Catholic schools as agents that nurture spirituality in their students. Such an inquiry necessitates an understanding of spirituality and its expression by young people; an appreciation of the nature of engagement and extent of commitment to spirituality among these young people, and a recognition of the influences that shape the spirituality of young people, both from within the Catholic school environment and in the broader social milieu in which they live. Accordingly, the review of the literature will survey the scholarly research available in each of these areas and provide a synthesis of the insights therein.

The foci of this research are young people in their final year of secondary school, thus allowing for an end-point analysis of their experience of Catholic schools. Accordingly, the principal focus will be on literature that aligns with the experience of young people transitioning into adulthood.

While the research problem deals with the influence of Catholic schools on the spirituality of students, the pathway to this problem involves a number of guideposts which, when followed, will ultimately provide the basis for addressing the research problem. These guideposts are found in the three research questions:

1. How do senior students at Catholic schools express spirituality?
2. How committed are senior students at Catholic schools to these expressions of spirituality?
3. How do senior students at Catholic schools evaluate the influences on the development of their spirituality?

The literature review will make use of these same guideposts with a preliminary consideration of the meaning of the term spirituality, and a concluding explication of research on the contribution of Catholic schools. Thus, five themes will be explored: the meaning of the term spirituality; the expression of spirituality among young people; the commitment of young people to spirituality; the influences on the spirituality of young people and; the contribution of Catholic schools to the spirituality of young people.

2.2 Structure and conceptual framework

A linear structure, which begins with consideration of the meaning of the term spirituality will be used. This will then progress through to the remaining themes so that the understanding from each theme will contribute to the understanding of subsequent themes.

Thus the sequence is:

Theme One: The meaning of the term spirituality

Theme Two: The expression of spirituality among young people

Theme Three: The commitment of young people to spirituality

Theme Four: The influences on the spirituality of young people

Theme Five: The contribution of Catholic schools to spirituality

The conceptual framework for the review of the literature is sequential and developmental. Beginning with the most fundamental concept of the meaning of the term spirituality, the literature review proceeds to the related topic of the expression of spirituality among young people and then sequentially to the following themes. This gives the effect of

building a framework of understanding through consideration of each theme. A visual representation of this conceptual framework is presented in Figure 2.1.

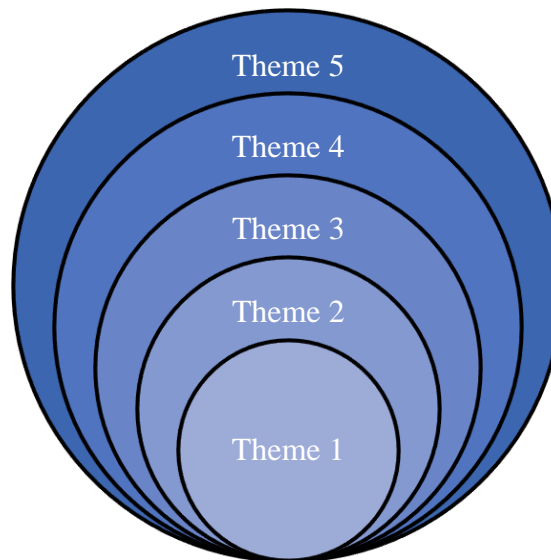


Figure 2.1. Conceptual framework of literature review.

2.3 Theme One: Defining spirituality

A valid and meaningful definition of spirituality is a necessary component of this research; however, settling on such a definition is difficult. Definitions of spirituality in the literature are plentiful (Berry, Bass, Forawi, Neuman, & Abdallah, 2011; Carey, 2018; Collins & Wetherbee, 2017; de Souza, 2003; Harmer, 2009; Jacobs, 2013; Jager Meezenbroek et al., 2012; Lepherd, 2015; Rossiter, 2018; Tacey, 2004). However, agreement is rare, and a consensus is lacking. Despite the volume of work in the field, a definition of spirituality “continues to be elusive” (Gottheil & Groth-Marnat, 2011, p. 452).

2.3.1 History of the term.

Until the mid-twentieth century, spirituality was almost exclusively understood as the interior life of a religious adherent (Mason, Singleton, & Webber, 2010a; Sheldrake,

1992, 2013). Among these religious expressions were strands from within different religious traditions (Melton, 2010; Ohlander, 2011) and within the context of the Christian tradition, there were many expressions of spirituality, including those drawing on the insights of the founders of Catholic religious orders (Hammond & Hellmann, 2003; Leclercq & Seasoltz, 2003; J. Lewis, 2003). It is important to recognise these expressions of spirituality from within the traditions of Catholic religious orders, as these orders were responsible for founding many of the Catholic schools in Australia, which often remain closely aligned to the founding charism and related expressions of spirituality.

More recently though, broader definitions of spirituality have emerged which may or may not relate to religion (Carey, 2018; A. B. Cohen & Johnson, 2017; McQuillan, 2009; Paloutzian & Kirkpatrick, 1995). While many definitions of spirituality arise from the fields of theology and religion (King, 2013; Rossiter, 2010b; Rymarz, 2012), others come from disciplines such as sociology and psychology (de Souza, Bone, & Watson, 2016; Hale, 2017; Paloutzian & Park, 2005; Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2000; Zinnbauer et al., 2015). With the emergence of secular perspectives of spirituality, some researchers have appealed for the preservation of the unique dimension of spirituality as an encounter with the transcendent arising from revelation (Schneiders, 2010).

Barber (2012) examines 17 definitions of spirituality concluding that while there are some commonly proposed elements, there is no substantial agreement evident. Notwithstanding that it is beyond the scope of this study to bring resolution to this issue, it is, nevertheless, important to propose a working definition that appropriately reflects the literature and relates to the purpose and context of this study.

2.3.2 Spirituality and religion.

The relationship between spirituality and religion is complex and evolving, yet it is crucial in the context of this study to describe this relationship clearly. From its original meaning within the framework of religious traditions, spirituality is now often viewed quite independently from any religious tradition. On this point, however, some researchers have suggested that this is only the case in the context of increasingly secularised, western consumerist societies (Anderson, 2012; Dudley, 2016; Schneiders, 2003; Worthington, Hook, Davis, & McDaniel, 2011).

Schneiders (2003) outlines three approaches to explaining the relationship between spirituality and religion. The first is that they are separate and unrelated constructs; the second that they are separate competing constructs; and the third that they necessarily linked as “two dimensions of the same enterprise” (Schneiders, 2003, p. 164). She argues that this third approach is under-utilised and should be further developed. Anderson (2012) sought to contribute to this development by comparing spirituality among those who were religious and those who were not. He sees his conclusion as a confirmation of Schneiders’ partner model where spirituality and religion are inseparably linked.

Another dimension of the relationship between religion and spirituality is found in the emerging positive psychology movement, which adopts a strength-based approach towards personal health and wellbeing (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, & Linkins, 2009). One of the insights promoted in positive psychology is the notion that personal health and wellbeing are enhanced if an individual has a sense of a greater purpose or a purpose beyond themselves. Practices such as mindfulness, and an emphasis on service are incorporated into the approach of positive psychology to highlight this insight. Positive psychology has spawned the related approach, known as

positive education, which is now widely used in the Catholic school context as a framework for Pastoral Care (Positive Education Schools Association, 2017; Seligman et al., 2009).

Through the influence of the positive education movement practices, such as mindfulness, are used within some Catholic school settings where once there would have been an occasion for prayer (O'Farrell, 2016; Stratton, 2015). This practice has the obvious benefit of being able to engage students who do not hold religious beliefs, yet it also has the effect of establishing a different model of the relationship between spirituality and religion. While Schneiders and Anderson discuss separate, competing and partnership models (Anderson, 2012; Schneiders, 2003), the impact of the positive psychology and positive education movements has been to introduce a model where religion is an optional sub-set of spirituality. In this way, mindfulness connects a person with spirituality, and she/he can incorporate a religious dimension to this spirituality if she/he chooses. This aligns with the model taken up by Rossiter who proposes that spirituality, rather than religion or faith, should be the foundational construct in the endeavour of Catholic education (Rossiter, 2018).

Other aspects of the relationship between spirituality and religion are explored by researchers, such as Davie, who examines believing without belonging and others who use the distinction of people being spiritual but not religious (Boeve, 2012; Casson, 2011; Fuller, 2001, 2017, 2018; Mackay, 2016; Mercadante, 2014). While Fuller applies the spiritual but not religious term to people who are actively pursuing spirituality outside of a religious context, Mackay adopts this term for those who do not see themselves as religious but who nonetheless hold beliefs in something beyond this life. Fuller's focus is on those with more intentional spirituality. In Mackay's work, the emphasis is on those who are more casual and less intentional in their connection with spirituality.

One of the challenges in this field is the choice of language used and the meanings attached to various terms (Dudley, 2016; Zinnbauer et al., 2015). Rossiter has argued that the term spirituality should be the foundational term, as this is accessible to all regardless of whether they hold religious beliefs (Rossiter, 2018). Hughes, in contrast to Rossiter, has moved away from using the term spirituality, indicating that it is laden with religious overtones and it has proven to be a difficult term to understand, particularly for young people. Hughes has now adopted the phrase purposeful living to express spirituality in a way he hopes will overcome some of the difficulties noted here (Hughes, 2017).

Studies of the spirituality of young people confirm that the approaches to spirituality among emerging adults in the Western world are diverse and individualised (Bryant, Choi, & Yasuno, 2003; Collins-Mayo & Dandelion, 2016; Holtmann, 2018; Hughes, 2007b; Kimball, Boyatzis, Cook, Leonard, & Flanagan, 2013; Madge, Hemming, & Stenson, 2014; McNamara-Barry, Nelson, Davarya, & Urry, 2010; Murphy, 2014; Rockenbach & Park, 2018). This diversity also highlights the fact that for some spirituality is not connected to a particular religious tradition or to the notion of religion itself (Collins & Wetherbee, 2017; Mackay, 2016; Tacey, 2004). Thus, to be inclusive, spirituality must be understood with sufficient breadth of definition to incorporate non-religious expressions alongside those of a more traditional religious approach.

The focus of this current research is on students at Catholic schools who have been inducted into the idea of spirituality from the particular perspective of the Catholic Christian religious tradition (Faix, 2014; Rossiter, 2010b; Ryan, 2013). Therefore, a key point of reference in their perspective on spirituality will be their experience of the Catholic religious tradition (Ammerman, 2013; de Souza, 2008; Ghosn, 2013) and the understanding of religion and spirituality developed through their formal Religious Education. Notwithstanding that

young people may choose to adopt, adapt or reject a religious expression of spirituality, they will nevertheless have been exposed to a religiously aligned spirituality in their Catholic education, and this religious approach to spirituality will be prominent in the experience of the participants in this study (Engebretson, de Souza, Rymarz, & Buchanan, 2008; Ghosn, 2013; B. H. Smith, 2013).

2.3.3 Secular spirituality

A further, relevant aspect of this discussion relates to the idea of secular spirituality. While the classical definitions of secular refer to life separate from religion (Crossman, 2009; Mills, 2016) discussions of spirituality in recent times have been broadened to include the notion of spirituality apart from religion, which includes concept of secular spirituality (Ashley, 2000; Walach, 2014, 2017). These discussions of secular spirituality are wide-ranging, covering new age spiritualities (Barry, 2014; Tacey, 2004), the idea of being spiritual but not religious (Fuller & Parsons, 2018; Mackay, 2016), implicit religion (Ashley, 2000; Dean, 2010) and the notion of meaning making without reference to a transcendent dimension (Crawford & Rossiter, 1996).

Each of these descriptions has validity and relevance to this current study and each will be revisited in the responses of research participants who express these perspectives in this study. However, it is the understanding of secular spirituality which recognises meaning making devoid of a transcendent referent which is of particular value. Walach argues convincingly that this particular understanding of secular spirituality is necessary if the study of spirituality is to be acknowledged as a legitimate scientific endeavour (Walach, 2014, 2017). Further, it is this understanding of secular spirituality which enables this current research to engage with the views of participants who see his or her life and its meaning, as entirely contained within the experience of mortal life. As Crawford and Rossiter rightly

point out, a recognition of such perspectives is critical in allowing educators in Catholic schools to engage meaningfully with the range of student perspectives present in school cohorts (Crawford & Rossiter, 1996, 2006).

2.3.4 Spirituality and the social sciences.

While it may once have been rare to find studies of spirituality apart from the context of religion, these are now common (Pandya, 2015; Reymann, Fialkowski, & Stewart-Sicking, 2015). The most common of these investigations relate to the role of spirituality in therapy, where health professionals seek to understand how best to care for patients who hold spiritual beliefs (Koksvik, 2017; Morrison-Orton, 2004; Park et al., 2017; Peng, 2015) and how spirituality itself may contribute to the health and wellbeing of individuals (K. S. Barton et al., 2018; Boro & Dhanalakshmi, 2015; A. B. Cohen & Johnson, 2017; Ganga & Kutty, 2013; Gill & Thomson, 2014; Hooker, Masters, & Park, 2018).

While it is important to note the breadth of research into spirituality in the social sciences and the volume of work arising from outside the traditional sphere of religion, the investigation of spirituality by health professionals in connection to their work is only of peripheral interest to this current research. However, the more frequently spirituality is investigated outside of the traditional religious setting, the less likely people will be to think of spirituality only in terms of a religious setting (Ammerman, 2013; Senreich, 2013; Singleton, 2015; Tacey, 2004; Walach, 2017)

2.3.5 Spirituality types.

With the recognition of the diverse settings for the study of spirituality comes the understanding that individuals will relate to spirituality in different ways. Acknowledgement

of these different approaches to spirituality or spirituality types will be critical in developing a rich understanding of how spirituality is expressed.

A prominent discussion of spirituality types in the literature relates to the connection between Jungian typology, religion and spirituality (Jung, 2001; Myers, 1995). The principal interest in this area of research has been how an understanding of Jung's typology can be applied to diverse spiritualities and thereby provide guidance on how best to nurture and sustain these different types of spirituality (G. Hall, 2012; Harmer, 2009; Michael, 1984; Perez, 1998; Richardson, 1996).

Perez's examination of how Jungian typology aligns with different approaches to spirituality is valuable in this context. She describes a dual structure of classical and alternative spirituality (Perez, 1998). Classical spirituality in this context is understood as the spirituality aligned with a particular religious tradition, such as Catholic Christianity. Alternative spirituality refers to a spectrum of non-traditional approaches that includes new age religions and secular spiritualities. She references the Myers Briggs personality types (Myers, 1995), which are based on Jungian typology, against a number of domains including: artistic, intellectual, metaphysics, nature, new age, religious, service, social reforming, spiritual and suffering. Perez uses the four preferences from the Myers Briggs personality types to align each of the domains of spirituality to the type with the greatest resonance. For example, she writes:

Intuitive-Feelings types (NF) on the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) will score higher on being more spiritual and will display a variety of spiritual experiences. In particular, NF's will score higher on the New Age, Nature, Service, Metaphysics, and Artistic domains. (Perez, 1998, p. 62)

Perez's work is particularly helpful in extending the discussion of spirituality types to include examples from those who are not religiously aligned. In doing so she provides an avenue for considering a broader understanding of spirituality and the range of perspectives that people hold in relation to spirituality.

Further developments in the area of spirituality type are found among more recent studies that seek to classify groups of people according to their particular spirituality type. They thereby respond more meaningfully to people of different types through a better understanding of the elements of spirituality relevant to each type. Working in the context of Christian Bible Colleges, Nash and Bradley (2008) attempted to identify different spirituality types in order to assist students in their overall learning and also provide a means through which they can measure the spiritual development of their students. They identify five types among their students. These are: orthodox believers, mainline believers, existential humanists, scientific empiricists and sceptics.

A different structure had been developed by Silver (2013), who focused on types of non-belief, beginning with atheism, agnosticism and non-belief before developing this further into six types. They are: academic atheist, activist atheist/agnostic, seeker agnostics, antitheists, non-theists and ritual atheists (Silver, Coleman, Hood, & Holcombe, 2014). Although Nash and Bradley focus their types on a range of spiritualities from orthodox belief to scepticism, in contrast to Silver's focus on non-belief, both studies present their findings in the form of a continuum of perspectives.

2.3.6 Definitions of spirituality.

Almost all of the studies referenced above provide a definition of spirituality. Given that there is no universally accepted definition of spirituality, researchers are inclined to propose their own.

A review of the definitions of spirituality in the literature reveals that they are most commonly constructed according to a range of constitutive domains, which are explained through a series of continua. One such continuum is found between religious and secular expressions, where some see religion as an essential element of spirituality (Schneiders, 2010; Sheldrake, 1992), while others discuss the emergence of a secular spirituality entirely unrelated to religion (Fuller, 2017; Tacey, 2004). A second domain identifies the areas of consciousness and intentionality, where some argue that “spirituality is our response to life” and that “every human being on this earth has a spirituality, like it or not and recognise it or not” (McQuillan, 2009, p. 77). In contrast to the unconscious element of McQuillan’s view, others see spirituality as a “conscious way of life, based on a transcendent referent” (Mason et al., 2007, p. 25). Questions of transcendence and revelation form the basis for a third domain where defined beliefs such as those of Catholic Christianity (Schneiders, 2010) are contrasted with the notion of “whatever inspires someone” (Mason et al., 2010a, p. 89). A fourth domain is identified between the points of individuality on the one hand and connectedness on the other, where some see spirituality as a “personal and individualistic place within people’s daily life structure” (Tullio, 2010b, p. 71), while others see spirituality as having deeply connected and relational dimensions (de Souza, 2003). Finally, spirituality is also explained through the lenses of transformation and latency, which constitute the fifth domain. While some argue that spirituality must lead to a level of responsive change in the individual (Hughes & Reid, 2011) others suggest that a person’s spirituality might be passive or latent in terms of behaviour or response (C. Smith & Denton, 2005).

Despite the absence of agreement, it is asserted that spirituality can be understood as existing within these five domains, and it may be argued that individual expressions of spirituality are found at different points along the continuums within each these five domains.

Therefore, from the preceding survey of the literature and bearing in mind the context of this study the following definition of spirituality is proposed:

Spirituality is an approach to life, deliberately chosen or unconsciously adopted, which relates to questions of ultimate meaning; of origin, purpose and destiny and which has the potential to shape how an individual relates to others and engages in community.

This definition connects specifically with each of the five domains encountered in the literature and is sufficiently reflexive to be able to accommodate the more prescriptive expectations of religious traditions, as well as the less-structured responses adopted by some young people.

2.4 Theme Two: The expression of spirituality among young people

2.4.1 Overview and scope of research.

The second theme builds on the work of defining spirituality to examine how spirituality is expressed by young people and, in particular, those young people or emerging adults who are at the end point of their secondary school education. In the course of the last twenty years there have been a number of relevant studies in this field. The work of Hay and Nye in the United Kingdom is notable as an early contribution to the field with a focus on the spirituality of children (Hay & Nye, 1998, 2006).

In the United States, O'Connor, Hoge and Alexander sought to understand the impact of formative experiences by follow-up research with a group of adults who had previously participated in research as sixteen-year-olds in the 1970s (O'Connor, Hoge, & Alexander, 2002). While this approach is noteworthy, its usefulness is clouded by the lengthy period between interviews and the changes in society during this period.

In the early 2000s in the United States, Smith and Denton surveyed more than 3500 American teenagers in a study that has proven to be seminal in the field (Dean, 2010; C. Smith & Denton, 2005). In Europe, a nine country study confirmed that young people had an active interest in spirituality with a strong sense of social concern, however, the connections to traditional religious expressions were found to be low and the role of religious authority was generally rejected with a strong emphasis on individual autonomy (Kay & Ziebertz, 2006). This was followed by a study taking a quantitative approach seeking to measure the impact of religiosity on life choices (Tuin, 2009; Ziebet, Kay, & Riegel, 2009).

In the past decade American studies have investigated the place of spirituality and religion among college students with 14,527 surveyed, leading the researchers to conclude that there was considerable evidence of spiritual development in areas such as the search for meaning and purpose together with ethical perspectives including compassion and empathy. Attitudes to religion and religious ideas remained substantially unchanged, however, there was a declining participation in religious services and other rituals (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011; Rockenbach & Park, 2018). Similar findings were evident in studies undertaken in Europe and the UK (Pilkington, Pollock, & Franc, 2018; Robbins & Francis, 2010). The most substantial of these being the “Youth on Religion” project which collected survey data from over 10,000 participants together with interviews of 160 young people (Madge et al., 2014).

In the Australian context, the work of Smith and Denton (2005) in America was adapted for research where approximately 1500 young people were surveyed (Hughes, 2007b; Mason et al., 2007). Additionally, other Australian researchers have made important contributions to the field. Flynn’s longitudinal work is foundational in the quest to understand the culture of Catholic schools and the expressions of spirituality among students at these schools (Flynn, 1979, 1985, 1993; Flynn & Mok, 2002). The works of Leavey (1992) and her

colleagues with girls and Engebretson's work with boys are also noteworthy for their particular gender perspectives (Engebretson, 2002, 2004, 2006; Leavey et al., 1992). Beyond these there a number of researchers who have made multiple contributions to the field, such as Crawford and Rossiter (1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 2006), Rossiter (1998, 2001a, 2001b, 2002, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c, 2011, 2016, 2018), Rymarz (2006a, 2007a, 2007b, 2008, 2010a, 2010b, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2015, 2016a, 2016b; Rymarz & Belmonte, 2017) and McQuillan (2001, 2007, 2009, 2011a, 2011b).

Among the vast array of studies available many different approaches have been adopted. While these are too numerous to provide an exhaustive survey it is nevertheless important to note a small number of examples to highlight the breadth of perspectives. Many studies focus on the relationship between spirituality and Religious Education (Casson, Cooling, & Francis, 2017; de Souza, 2016; Hyde, 2011, 2013; Hyde, Ota, & Yust, 2012; Ota & Chater, 2007), while the connection between spirituality and wellbeing is another widely researched area (Alisat & Pratt, 2012; Büssing, Föller-Mancini, Gidley, & Heusser, 2010; A. B. Cohen & Johnson, 2017; Hooker et al., 2018). Some researchers have sought to identify the factors that influence the development of spirituality (de Souza, 2003; Lee, Pearce, & Schorpp, 2017; Pilkington et al., 2018; Pimlott, 2017; Root, 2018) while yet others have focused on the influence of a particular experience such as World Youth Day (Cleary, 2013; George, 2014; Mason, 2010; Rymarz, 2007b; Singleton, 2011). A major focus of researchers in the United States has been on the impact of college life on religion and spirituality (Astin et al., 2011; Buchko, 2004; Creech et al., 2013; T. W. Hall, Edwards, & Wang, 2015; Hartley, 2004; Hooker, Masters, & Carey, 2014; Reymann et al., 2015; Rockenbach & Park, 2018) while two recent Australian research projects on religion and belief have also provided some insight into how young people are engaging with spirituality (Mackay, 2016; McCrindle, 2017). Additionally, in preparation for the synod on young people, the Australian

Catholic Bishops Conference surveyed approximately 15,000 young people and have subsequently published their report on this survey (Dantis & Reid, 2018). These examples reflect the vast array of investigations into the spirituality of young people undertaken from many different perspectives.

2.4.2 Research methods.

Methods used in the cited studies of youth spirituality typically involved the use of a survey instrument with a combination of closed and open items in conjunction with follow-up interviews, either by telephone or in person (Astin et al., 2011; Madge et al., 2014). These strategies for data collection have the strength of establishing a broad portrait of the field through survey instruments and then using the data from the surveys to focus the questioning in the follow-up interviews. Such approaches are fundamentally sound and are well suited for use in these contexts. (Creswell, 2012; Denzin & Lincoln, 2013).

One problem that emerged in these studies relates to the issues of language and the associations of religion and spirituality in the minds of participants (Ammerman, 2013; Faix, 2014). Related to this problem is the question of how readily young people will respond to direct questioning about faith and spirituality. Hughes and Mason encountered this problem in their Australian study and modified their approach to questioning accordingly (Hughes, 2007b; Mason et al., 2007). A few other studies anticipated this issue and used alternatives to direct questioning in their studies (Maroney, 2008; Mulder, 2014), but overall there is a paucity of discussion in the literature regarding how to ask young people about spirituality.

2.4.3 Selected studies.

A small group of studies stand out as the most important contributions to understanding the spirituality of young people and emerging adults. These studies will be

considered in more detail in this section, and they will also form the basis for the elements of spirituality discussed in the subsequent sections of this theme.

The American study of over 3000 teenagers (C. Smith & Denton, 2005) is foundational to recent work investigating the spirituality of young people. The influence of this study is evident in the work of other researchers including some Australian studies (D'Orsa & D'Orsa, 2010; de Souza, 2008; Hughes, 2007b; Maroney, 2008; Mason et al., 2007). Smith and Denton's distillation of their findings into the notion of "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism" (2005, p. 162) has shaped much of the discussion in recent studies.

Moralistic Therapeutic Deism represents Smith and Denton's assessment of the typical spirituality profile of American teenagers. According to this profile, these teenagers believe God is the source of creation and organises or orders the world. They believe that God is benevolent and watches over and cares for people; however, God remains mostly remote from human life except when there is a need for God's intervention to solve a problem. The goal of human existence is happiness and a sense of personal wellbeing, while also living in a way that is kind towards others. Ultimately, when people die, those who have lived a good life are rewarded with eternal life in heaven. According to this study, American teenagers regard this as what is taught by the Bible, and they also believe that all religions have similar views (C. Smith & Denton, 2005).

While the influence of Smith and Denton's work is evident it is debated whether Moralistic Therapeutic Deism represents a dilution and abandonment of orthodox Christian faith (Mason, Singleton, & Webber, 2010b; Rymarz, 2008) or the emergence of new expressions of and approaches to spirituality (Hughes, 2010; Maroney, 2008). Notably, Mason and Hughes, having begun their Australian study in partnership, ultimately diverged

along these lines and published separate works drawing on the same data (Hughes, 2007b; Mason et al., 2007).

Hughes and Mason were involved in the “Spirit of Gen Y” project, which interviewed approximately 1500 Australian teenagers in 2005. Their study followed Smith and Denton’s work quite closely and even used some of the same questions to collect data. The “Spirit of Gen Y” study has been influential among the Australian research and has led to some follow-up studies (Hughes, 2007a, 2010, 2017; Hughes & Reid, 2011; Hughes, Reid, & Pickering, 2010; Mason, 2010; Mason et al., 2010b). As noted in the previous paragraph, Mason and Hughes disagreed with each other during this research and, as a consequence, the findings were published in two independent works (Hughes, 2007b; Mason et al., 2007). The disagreement arose with processes used in interviews with Mason choosing to omit questions about prayer with young people who said they did not believe in God. Whereas Hughes regarded it as necessary to ask these students if they ever prayed.

Despite their disagreements and the decision to publish independently, there are some important findings from this research that are conveyed in both works and most notably which align well with the findings from Smith and Denton’s study. Smith and Denton (2005), Hughes (2007b) and Mason (2007) found that very few young people held a religious expression of spirituality and that overall they were inclined to see themselves as spiritual rather than religious. They identified that young people were inclined to pick and choose elements of spirituality that resonated with them and that their spirituality was very subjective and individualistic. Finally, they found that young people were entirely self-reliant in their approach to spirituality and seldom engaged with others about their beliefs. Mason was inclined to interpret the findings pessimistically, seeing in them the evidence that Generation Y had substantially rejected traditional religious approaches to spirituality and were virtually

beyond the reach of religious influences (Mason et al., 2007). In contrast, Hughes held a more optimistic interpretation, believing that the study showed that new expressions of spirituality were coming to the fore as young people moved beyond the bounds of traditional religious spiritualities to construct meaning for themselves in deliberate and purposeful ways. He argued that young people were not closed to traditional religious approaches to spirituality; however, he concluded that the onus was on religious communities to embrace new ways of expressing spirituality so that they could connect with young people (Hughes, 2007b).

The findings of Smith and Denton's study (2005) and the follow up work of researchers in the Australian context (Hughes, 2007b; Mason et al., 2007) have been substantially confirmed in other important studies in the past decade (Astin et al., 2011; Collins-Mayo & Dandelion, 2016; Kimball, Cook, Boyatzis, & Leonard, 2016; Madge et al., 2014; Robbins & Francis, 2010; Rockenbach & Park, 2018).

2.4.4 Elements of spirituality for young people.

These studies identify elements of spirituality which are commonly found among young people. These elements provide useful contours by which to navigate expressions of spirituality. Accordingly, the seminal work of Smith and Denton, and that of Mason and Hughes in the Australian context will provide the framework for exploring the elements of expressions of spirituality among young people today. While following these contours, the reference to other works will air voices of clarification, confirmation, qualification and dissent.

The first element in the expression of spirituality is the dichotomy between religion and spirituality in the experience of young people (Dean, 2010; Rockenbach & Park, 2018). While few regard themselves as religious and even fewer have a regular association with

church worship, the majority of young people regard themselves as spiritual (Astin et al., 2011; Hughes, 2010; Kay & Ziebertz, 2006; McCrindle, 2017). The second element relates to the eclectic nature of beliefs and practices that characterise the spirituality of many young people, where picking and choosing among desirable or suitable elements from a range of approaches, philosophies and worldviews is commonplace (Boeve, 2012; Büssing et al., 2010; Casson, 2011; Madge et al., 2014; Maroney, 2008; McQuillan, 2009; Tacey, 2004). The third element relates to the subjective character of the way religion or spirituality is embraced. Such subjectivity is evidence of an “increasing reliance on people’s own experience as their touchstone for truth, authenticity and lifestyle” (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006, p. 181). This element reflects an individualism whereby young people fashion a set of beliefs and values that suit their own needs and circumstances, and readily abandon and adapt beliefs that do not (Pearce & Denton, 2011; Phillips, 2016). The fourth element identifies the shift away from inherited religious ideas to a more self-determined and self-reliant response (Kay & Ziebertz, 2006; McQuillan, 2011a). This occurs while also identifying a great variety of perspectives regarding commitment (King, 2013) and the extent of accompanying reflection (Hyde, 2008).

The fifth element is religious literacy, an element of some discussion in the literature and one that warrants inclusion in an era where fundamentalist views abound, and religion and science often clash in the public discourse (Price, 2010; Shane, Binns, Meadows, Hermann, & Benus, 2016).

2.4.4.1 Spiritual but not religious.

A consistent element across all of the studies cited is the propensity for many young people to see themselves as spiritual rather than religious (Fuller & Parsons, 2018; Mackay, 2016). Many of these young people substantially reject formal religious practice as a

meaningful experience. The numbers of young people who identify themselves as religious or those who regularly attend Church services has been declining steadily (Dixon et al., 2007; Flynn, 1979, 1985, 1993; Flynn & Mok, 2002) and is shown to be consistently less than one-fifth of all young people surveyed (Engebretson, 2006; Hughes & Reid, 2011; Madge et al., 2014; Maroney, 2008; National Centre for Pastoral Research, 2019; National Church Life Survey, 2018; C. Smith & Denton, 2005). On the other hand, well over half of these young people identified themselves as spiritual while still others referred to identifiers such as belief in an after-life or a divine being or force (Lippman & Dombrowski, 2006; Mason et al., 2007).

There is substantial agreement in the literature concerning the reasons for this phenomenon. Many of the young people come from families where religious faith and practice were not highly regarded. This is important given that parental or familial influence is consistently regarded as the most reliable indicator of religious affiliation among young people (Engebretson, 2002; Francis & Casson, 2019; O' Connor et al., 2002; C. Smith & Denton, 2005). Additionally, young people identify very few positive experiences of religious faith and practice during their adolescence (Büssing et al., 2010; Maroney, 2008). Young people also believe their friends to be generally ambivalent and sometimes hostile to religion and therefore it requires considerable courage and conviction for them to embrace a religious affiliation or disposition (Hardie, Pearce, & Denton, 2016; Leavey et al., 1992; Rymarz & Graham, 2006). The theological and ethical teachings of churches in some areas, such as the participation of women in worship and the approach to same-sex relationships, has clearly alienated many young people, and this alienation has been exacerbated by the scandals of sexual abuse involving clergy and other church personnel (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006; Hughes, 2017; Mason et al., 2010b; Rossiter, 2018). Finally, there is evidence that the way young people construct meaning is at odds with the definitive, authoritative stance of Church

representatives. “Young people react strongly when beliefs and practices were thrust upon them. They object to being told what to believe. On the other hand, most enjoy listening to the experiences of people they respect” (Hughes, 2007b, p. 202). Young people are attracted to an idea because of its worth and its relevance to their experience rather than an idea that is imposed by a supposed authority (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006; Small, 2015; Tacey, 2004).

While there is consistent and robust agreement among researchers regarding the tendency of young people to see themselves as spiritual rather than religious (and agreement on the reasons for this trend) views diverge regarding its implications (Fuller, 2017, 2018; Harvey, 2016). Essentially there are two approaches. Some researchers cast it in the negative sense recognising that the substantial majority of young people are rejecting any attachment to traditional religious faith (Mason et al., 2007; Rymarz, Graham, & Shipway, 2008). The alternative view is to see that the majority of young people express spiritual beliefs, thus creating the potential for dialogue and engagement to respectfully nurture and develop these beliefs (Hughes, 2007b; McQuillan, 2011b).

Many have raised the point about the implications for this discussion in Catholic schools (D'Orsa, D'Orsa, & Corridon, 2012; de Souza, 2008; Franchi, 2014; Rossiter, 2010a, 2018). This discussion will be explored in more detail under Theme Three below.

2.4.4.2 Eclectic elements of spirituality.

The literature reviewed shows an evident preparedness on the part of young people to explore spirituality. However, most are not inclined to do so in a way that is strongly connected to their inherited faith tradition, nor in a way that is conformed to a predetermined endpoint, nor is it compliant with an expression of religious authority. When setting out their framework of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, Smith and Denton (2005) recognised that young people were adopting palatable elements of their Christian background while putting aside

other elements that suited them less well. Thus, their spirituality became a personalised version of the Christian religious tradition.

Mason and his colleagues highlighted the eclecticism in these choices with spirituality fashioned from a range of elements that appealed to the young person but did not necessarily make sense to others (Mason et al., 2007). Casson refers to this phenomenon as students exercising their “right to bricolage” (Casson, 2011, p. 207). She argued that students are “actively constructing a religious identity that they understand and can claim as their own” (Casson, 2011, p. 215). Similar to Smith and Denton’s insights, Casson found that the students in her research were drawing on resources present in their Catholic school as a basis for their spirituality. She found no evidence to suggest that other sources of spirituality were replacing their Catholic identity.

For many young people, spirituality is constructed from a variety of eclectic elements drawn from their experience or understanding which have meaning for them. While Casson sees Catholic identity as being substantially retained in the constructed spirituality, others have seen the fashioning of spirituality from more diverse sources leading to a more eclectic mixture of elements (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006; Tacey, 2004). It is not uncommon to find a young person who professes to be Christian yet also holds a belief in reincarnation and rejects the idea that there is only one true God or one true religion (de Souza, 2003, 2016; Holtmann, 2018; Hughes, 2007b). The fact that some of these elements are contradictory is not problematic for the young person who sees their brand of spirituality as compatible with these other elements and who will reject the type of religion that claims otherwise as being rigid and inflexible (Fuller, 2001; Root, 2018; Rossiter, 2011).

2.4.4.3 Individuality and subjectivity.

Closely related to the eclecticism discussed in the previous section is the individual and subjective character of spirituality among young people. The literature reviewed shows a preparedness on the part of young people to explore spirituality. However, they mostly do so on their own terms and in ways that are substantially based on their own experience. They are seldom inclined to adopt the religious affiliation of their parents and are deterred by the perceived coercion associated with formal religious practice (Bowman, Rockenbach, Mayhew, Riggers-Piehl, & Hudson, 2017; Hemming & Madge, 2012; Madge et al., 2014; McQuillan, 2007; Tullio, 2009). The elements of, or approaches to, spirituality that are accepted come directly from personal experience and understanding, and are chosen entirely subjectively to suit the young person's worldview, lifestyle and aspirations (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006; Lee et al., 2017; Lovat, 2010a; Mason et al., 2007).

While the influence of family, friends and media is prominent in the development of spirituality (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006; Francis & Casson, 2019; Hughes, 2010; Power & McKinney, 2013; C. Smith & Denton, 2005), ultimately these and other influences are judged through the lens of personal experience (Arweck, 2016; Büssing et al., 2010; Mason et al., 2007) to construct a highly individualised approach to life which is based principally on the subjective judgements of the young person at the time (Hughes, 2007b; Phillips, 2016). Young people collect elements of spirituality from a range of sources including traditional religion, new age expressions, popular culture and philosophy and ethics. However, the way they construct an approach to life from these influences is quite individualistic. Young people fashion their spirituality by applying their own experience and understanding to the elements they encounter and then judging their worth according to how well they align with this personal experience and understanding (Tacey, 2004). Maroney coined the phrase “morphing

of religion and spirituality” to describe this phenomenon (Maroney, 2008, p. 172). Smith and Denton’s “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism” (2005, p. 162) is the most widely accepted attempt to distil this highly individualistic and subjective approach into a recognisable form.

2.4.4.4 Self-determined and self-reliant spirituality.

The focus on the individual, their experience and their capacity to choose has been foundational to understanding the spirituality of young people. This core element was evident in the work of Smith and Denton (2005) and was equally prominent in the findings from the “Spirit of Gen Y” project in Australia (Hughes, 2007b; Mason et al., 2007). It has subsequently been consistently confirmed in the work of other researchers (Franchi & Rymarz, 2017; Kay & Ziebertz, 2006; Mackay, 2016; Maroney, 2008; Rockenbach, Mayhew, Davidson, Ofstein, & Bush, 2015).

The self-determined and self-reliant character of spirituality among young people inevitably means that they are not connecting with others about spirituality. This is because it is regarded as a profoundly personal element of their lives that they navigate in relative isolation. Very few young people are actively connected with a faith community and, similarly, there is no indication of large numbers of young people connecting in intentional communities around shared understandings of spirituality (Kelly, 2016; Krok, 2015; Pandya, 2015).

In the literature reviewed it is common to find references to an absence of discussion of spirituality among young people (Small, 2015; C. Smith & Denton, 2005) or a difficulty in articulating a perspective on spirituality (Hughes, 2007b; Mason et al., 2007). Conversely, researchers have demonstrated that young people are willing and able to take part in conversations about spirituality if they are confident that the environment is one of openness and acceptance (Engebretson, 2006; Maroney, 2008).

The literature is sparse, however, when it comes to explaining the reticence to discuss spirituality as part of normal interactions. The most deliberate work in this area comes from health professionals seeking to access spirituality as an aspect of therapy (K. S. Barton et al., 2018; Molzahn & Shields, 2008). Drawing on the nursing context Molzahn and Shields (2008) focus on a lack of training in spirituality and the deficiency in the language needed to speak about spirituality as reasons for nurses not feeling confident to discuss spirituality with patients. Barton and her colleagues found it helpful to use the concept of hope to facilitate discussions of spirituality among adolescents and young adults with cancer (K. S. Barton et al., 2018).

Beyond the field of health care, there is a dearth of information in the literature explaining why spirituality is seldom discussed. One fascinating insight is found in the report of an American website called “Soul Secret” (Healy, 2010), which invited readers to anonymously post comments and questions about spirituality. The responses to this website indicated a strong appetite for a conversation about spirituality but also pointed to uncertainty, fear of ridicule and fear of coercion as reasons that people would anonymously post their thoughts on a website, rather than introduce them in conversation with friends.

2.4.4.5 Religious literacy and spirituality.

Religious literacy was not a major focus of findings of Smith and Denton’s American study (C. Smith & Denton, 2005), nor of the Australian “Spirit of Gen Y” research (Hughes, 2007a; Mason et al., 2007), yet it is integrally connected to the findings of these projects. Mason viewed the findings of the “Spirit of Gen Y” project as an indication that young people were rejecting the traditional religious spirituality of their upbringing (Mason et al., 2007). Mason’s views are substantially supported by Casson, whose work found that students were “constructing an identity mainly from the resources present in the Catholic

school and there was no evidence that other forms of spirituality had replaced the Catholic beliefs and teachings” (Casson, 2011, p. 215). A similar idea is found in Smith and Denton’s framing of “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism,” where they found that young people were manipulating and fashioning a spirituality using the basic building blocks of their Christian background (C. Smith & Denton, 2005).

If it is true that many emerging adults intuitively construct their approach to spirituality as either an adoption, modification or rejection of the religious tradition associated with their upbringing, then it is essential to understand the degree of religious literacy that underpins their decisions. Accordingly, an examination of the concept of religious literacy in the literature will provide an important element to the framework of understanding how young people understand and express spirituality.

Immediately evident is the sense that most researchers have concluded that there is a profound lack of religious literacy among young people and emerging adults (Conroy, 2016; Marks, Binkley, & Daly, 2014; Nienhaus, 2013; Prothero, 2007; Rymarz, 2015). In contrast, Hughes found that students were able to speak with some sophistication and clarity about core beliefs of their Catholic religious tradition (Hughes, 2007a), while at the same time expressing a lack of adherence to these beliefs.

The literature examined falls readily into two groups. The first group deals with the idea of religious literacy as awareness of religion in the broad sense, with a focus on the need for communities to learn about a breadth of religious expression in order to promote tolerance and understanding and avoid sectarian conflict. Stephen Prothero’s work in America is widely cited as a prominent example in this group (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012; Nienhaus, 2013; Prothero, 2007; Prothero, Gallagher, Pearson, Robinson, & Stortz, 2016; Revell, 2008;

Sanber et al., 2007). Notwithstanding the importance of such contributions, it is the second group of writings that have more relevance to this current study.

The second group of studies deals with the extent and accuracy of the knowledge an individual has of their religious tradition. These studies deal directly with the question of how well people in general and young people, in particular, understand the beliefs of their religious tradition. The focus of some of these studies has been the religious knowledge of teachers in Catholic schools (Conroy, 2016; Hackett & Lavery, 2012; Marks et al., 2014; Rymarz, 2006b). While other studies have focused on the beliefs of secondary school students, (Engebretson, 2002, 2004, 2006; Maroney, 2008; McQuillan, 2001) few have sought to measure the religious literacy of young people directly (Casson et al., 2017; Flynn & Mok, 2002; Hemmings & Butcher, 2012; Hughes, 2007a).

Since 2005 the Catholic Diocese of Wollongong in NSW and subsequently the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney have been measuring the religious literacy of students through a standardised religious literacy test (Hemmings & Butcher, 2012). Hemmings and Butcher defined religious literacy as “the knowledge of, and ability to understand and focus upon the skills and capacities that are integral to a particular religion” (Hemmings & Butcher, 2012, p. 24). Within this project, four strands of religious literacy were identified: Knowing the tradition – knowledge and understanding; Working with tradition – reasoning skills; Applying the tradition – practical and social skills; and Valuing the tradition – attitudes and values (Sanber et al., 2007). However, the alignment of the religious literacy test with the Archdiocese of Sydney Religious Education syllabus (Catholic Education Office Sydney, 1996) has led to a narrowing of its focus, with a greater emphasis on knowledge and understanding and less emphasis on reasoning skills, practical and social skills, attitudes and values (Sanber et al., 2007). Additionally, with the religious literacy test administered to

secondary school students in year eight, it does little to shed light on the religious literacy of the emerging adults graduating from Catholic schools at the end of year 12.

An important contribution to issues concerned with religious literacy is found in the work of Carswell (2018), who studied the use of scripture in primary school Religious Education syllabi in Australia, England and Wales. In the Australian context, she focused on the texts “To Know, Worship and Love” (Luttick, 2008) which were written to support the “Faithful to God, Faithful to People” syllabus (Catholic Education Office Sydney, 1996). These texts are currently in use in most Catholic Dioceses in NSW. Carswell’s critique of Australian documents identified that they prioritise unit themes and manipulate scripture to fit in with these themes, as well as routinely citing biblical texts out of context and without regard for their literary form. She found that these documents are contributing to the development of fundamentalism through their poor use of scripture. Carswell concludes that the writers had:

Paid no attention to literary form and to the human ways of thinking to be found in the biblical text and, therefore, provided the ideal setting for an interpretation of biblical metaphors for God, which could only be called fundamentalist.
(Carswell, 2018, p. 290)

Carswell’s focus on the inadequate use of scripture highlights a significant contribution to a deficit in religious literacy. While Carswell’s study had focused on documents for primary school Religious Education, the issues she raises are equally prevalent in the parallel documents for secondary schools.

Of particular interest to this current research work is the relationship between religious literacy and scientific literacy. Australian studies have made passing reference to conflicts between religious and scientific understandings (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006; de

Souza, 2010; Flynn & Mok, 2002; Mason et al., 2010b; Rossiter, 2018) without investigating these directly. American studies have focused on the impact of fundamentalist religious beliefs on scientific literacy (Price, 2010; Sherkat, 2011), whereas studies in the United Kingdom have recognised and investigated the type of perceived conflict relevant to this current research (Billingsley, 2013; Brickhouse, Dagher, Letts, & Shipman, 2000; Hokayem & BouJaoude, 2008). In a 2016 UK study, 61 students between the ages of 12 and 17 were questioned on how they saw the relationship between scientific and religious understandings on the origin of the universe and life (Billingsley, Brock, Taber, & Riga, 2016). In this study, 25 of the 61 students said the accounts “were contradictory, describing the relationship as a definite conflict” (Billingsley et al., 2016, p. 472). A further 22 confirmed the conflict but indicated that it “might be possible to fit them together” (Billingsley et al., 2016, p. 472). The remaining 13 either saw no conflict or could not form a view. While this UK research team did not investigate the particular nuance of the religious understanding held by the students, the examples cited in their report do not show any indication of students recognising the use of symbolic and metaphorical imagery in biblical accounts. Instead, all the students quoted seemed to be referencing a fundamentalist or creationist understanding.

A final helpful distinction for this study is found in Goldberg’s discussion of Religious Education in Australia where, following Green and Boys, she identifies three dimensions of religious literacy: the operational, the cultural and the critical (Boys, 2004; Goldberg, 2008; B. Green, 1988). The first two of these dimensions, the operational and the cultural, align with the four strands of the religious literacy project from the Catholic Diocese of Wollongong (Hemmings & Butcher, 2012; Sanber et al., 2007). Of particular interest here, however, is the critical dimension that Goldberg proposes is necessary for emerging adults to deal adequately with the questions and challenges they experience. She argues that students need to develop a critical literacy where they are able to dialogue effectively with different

worldviews (Goldburg, 2008). Thus, when confronted with issues, such as human suffering and injustice or the questions arising from scientific knowledge, they will be better able to engage with the questions and integrate their approach to spirituality with the complexities of their life experience.

Critical literacy involves the recognition of the way in which language and literature are used to reinforce or maintain particular worldviews and structures of power (Janks, 2013; Luke, 2000, 2012). Research in critical theory and critical pedagogy, such as the seminal work of Paulo Freire, has focused on the liberating and transformative dimensions of critical literacy and the integral relationships between individual experience and corporate power (Freire, 1970). Freire writes of the crucial importance of the “understanding of subjectivity, experience and power” (Leonard & McLaren, 2002, p. 10). The field of critical theory has continued to expand through engagement with the predominance of eurocentric and androcentric tendencies in literature.

McLaren identifies an array of categories in which critical theory is based. Among these categories are those of language, race, culture, religion, gender, age and social status (McLaren, 2002). He outlines the role of hegemony in determining and preserving certain worldviews and highlights the role of critical pedagogy in challenging these constructs. He writes: “Critical pedagogy asks how and why knowledge gets constructed the way it does and why some constructions of reality are legitimated and celebrated by the dominant culture and why others clearly are not” (McLaren, 2002, p. 72). In the Australian context, Green identifies a duality in approaches to literacy (P. Green, 2001). She affirms that literacy can be a liberating force for the student but, contingent upon choices and context, it can also have a limiting effect.

When critical literacy is applied to the domains of spirituality and religion it necessarily requires a critique of structures and practices of ministry and liturgy along with issues of participation in worship, particularly with regard to women's participation and the ecclesial responses to a range of contentious moral issues, especially those relating to sexual morality.

2.5 Theme Three: The commitment of young people to spirituality

One area of paucity in the literature relates to the question of how much thought and reflection a young person has given to their expression of spirituality and how committed they are to their particular perspective. The evidence in this area is found principally within responses to other questions rather than direct investigation of this point. (Hemming & Madge, 2012; Hughes, 2007b; Mason et al., 2007; C. Smith & Denton, 2005).

Typically, young people are seen as exploring spirituality without any pre-commitment to traditional beliefs or a strong inclination to reach a point of finality and commitment (Luetz, Dowden, & Norsworthy, 2018; McQuillan, 2011a; Tullio, 2009). They are very reticent to accept the idea of an absolute set of values, beliefs or practices and are inclined to reject any attempts to push them towards such certainty and finality. Tacey comments on young people being involved in the process of exploration and experimentation, on one hand while at the same struggling "against firmly established religious tradition with a view to shrugging off the demands and attitudes of the tradition" (Tacey, 2004, p. 114).

Smith and Denton (2005) found that young people often went about their lives with little or no conscious awareness of God, except in times of need when they would pray and expect God to intervene on their behalf. The "Spirit of Gen Y" project found that young people were not inclined to be committed to spirituality, as this may hinder their potential for discovering something new, or limit their responsiveness to a new trend or fashion. In other

words, they lived their lives with a view to something new that might be just over the horizon and therefore, were not inclined to commit to anything in the present (Hughes, 2007b; Mason et al., 2007; Voas, 2016).

The nature of engagement with, and extent of commitment to, spirituality among young people has not been widely researched and warrants further investigation to gain a clearer picture of the degree of intentionality and commitment involved. It will be important to understand whether the spirituality profile of a young person is the result of a sense of drifting into an approach to life or whether it is a result of considered thought and reflection. It will also be valuable to gain a sense of how fixed or committed young people might be in their convictions about spirituality, given the suggestions that their perceptions are strongly experiential in origin and fluid in nature.

2.6 Theme Four: The influences on the spirituality of young people

The literature indicates a steady and consistent decline in the uptake of inherited or familial religious faith and practice, which is being replaced by an individually constructed, self-made approach to life. This may or may not include elements of the inherited religious tradition (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006; Tacey, 2004). Within this construction, some important influences were found. The literature consistently shows that the influence of parental attitude and action is the strongest of the factors (Flynn & Mok, 2002; Francis & Casson, 2019; Hardy, White, Zhang, & Ruchty, 2011; Mason et al., 2007; O' Connor et al., 2002; C. Smith & Denton, 2005). The second-most important influence is that of friends (Leavey et al., 1992; McReynolds, 2015) and the third-most important is the influence of media (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006; Maroney, 2008). A range of other influences is also cited, including music, popular culture, travel, nature and social concerns. The influence of family, friends and media will be examined in the following sections 2.5.1, 2.5.2 and 2.5.3. The influences associated

with the work of Catholic schools, such as retreats and volunteering experiences, will be considered in Section 2.6.3.

2.6.1 The influence of family on spirituality.

There is a strong consensus in the literature that family is the most significant influence on the spirituality of a young person (Flynn & Mok, 2002; Francis & Casson, 2019; Hay & Nye, 2006; Hughes, 2007b; Mason et al., 2007; C. Smith & Denton, 2005). While the influence is most active in the younger years and becomes increasingly muted during adolescence, it is, nevertheless, the strongest of all influences in the lives of young people as they transition to adulthood (Collins-Mayo & Dandelion, 2016; Crawford & Rossiter, 2006; Madge et al., 2014; Maroney, 2008).

Reflecting on the uptake of the Christian religion Mason notes “a young person whose mother attends weekly or more often is 4 to 5 times more likely to be an active Christian than someone whose mother attends only one or a few times per year” (2007, p. 151). Smith and Denton make the same observation and conclude that: “The best way to get most youth more involved in and serious about their faith communities is to get their parents more involved in and serious about their faith communities” (C. Smith & Denton, 2005, p. 267). Notwithstanding the strength of parental influence, it is still evident that many young people resist the uptake of an inherited religious tradition regardless of the attitudes or actions of their parents (Büssing et al., 2010; Francis & Casson, 2019; Hughes, 2007b).

2.6.2 The influence of friends on spirituality.

The influence of friends and peers was cited as the second most important influence and the one that has grown most over time. Longitudinal studies show the influence of friends

to be relatively stronger than in previous decades (Flynn, 1979, 1985, 1993; Flynn & Mok, 2002; Gunnoe & Moore, 2002; T. W. Hall et al., 2015; Kimball et al., 2016).

Although religion and spirituality are seldom topics of conversation, even among like-minded young people (Maroney, 2008), friendships are nevertheless important factors influencing the lives of young people in the development of their spirituality. Many studies affirm the importance of this influence, although they provide little insight into how this influence is exercised (Flynn & Mok, 2002; Hughes, 2007b; Lee et al., 2017; Mason et al., 2007; C. Smith & Denton, 2005).

2.6.3 The influence of media on spirituality.

Media in the traditional sense of television, radio, newspapers and magazines is recognised by researchers as an important influence on spirituality (Cragun, 2017; Crawford & Rossiter, 2006; Fuller, 2018; Gunnoe & Moore, 2002; Mason et al., 2010b). However, in the last decade, media has changed dramatically with streaming services and social media becoming the media of choice for young people, while traditional media are seen as largely irrelevant. With the rapid changes in the media landscape, there is yet to be comprehensive research undertaken to provide adequate insight into the influence of these new media on the spirituality of young people. Notwithstanding the relative paucity of studies, there are some important contributions to be noted.

Rossiter has long commented on the pervasive effects of media and has continued to provide commentary on the impact of social media (Rossiter, 2006a, 2018). His central thesis on this area is that the influences are profound; researchers need to invest in understanding the nuances of this influence and learn how to engage effectively in this space. Gillespie, Greenhill and Herbert (2013) are among a growing group of researchers who are calling for the more effective use of social media as a means of promoting religious ideas. This approach

sees the online world as an open marketplace that can be filled with all kinds of ideas. Such an approach leads Dilg to recognise a new opportunity to connect people with religious ideas who might not be linked to religious communities in traditional ways (Dilg, 2013).

Some researchers have identified the risks of over-use of social media as detrimental to the health and wellbeing of young people and related risks to spirituality. One study confirmed the relationship between spirituality and psychological health among young people and went on to show that social media may impact negatively on both: “Higher social media intrusion may have the ability to decrease specific aspects of spirituality, which may, in turn, negatively impact psychological adjustment” (Wood, Center, & Parenteau, 2016, p. 972).

While acknowledging the potential for misuse and harm, Yust (2014), focused on the potential for social media to enrich spirituality through social networking which she saw as being a mostly untapped resource that educators and health professionals could explore.

Overall, there is a consensus about the importance of media as an influence on spirituality and a recognition that the changing media landscape is both challenging and exciting. However, the research at this stage lags behind the social trends that limit its contribution to the discussion. By the time researchers had begun to investigate the phenomena of Facebook, Twitter and Youtube, platforms like Instagram, Snapchat and Spotify had become the media of choice for young people.

2.6.4 Summary of influences on spirituality.

The literature clearly shows that family, friends and the media are the most critical influences on the spirituality of young people. Beyond these widely accepted influences, there are many others that have varying degrees of influence on young people. While listening to music might be a reflective experience for one group of young people, another

group would find similar engagement with spirituality in the natural world. Social concerns inspire some young people, while another group might find it meaningful to travel and engage with other cultures. All of these influences and many others are evident in the research reviewed, but none emerge as strongly or consistently as the influences of family, friends and media.

2.7 Theme Five: The contribution of Catholic schools to spirituality

This theme focuses on the role played by Catholic schools in nurturing the spirituality of students. In part, this involves an examination of the effect of different programs and experiences offered to students. However, it also involves more complex questions concerning the purpose of Catholic schools and their specific goals in the area of spirituality. The second point brings to light matters of evangelisation and catechesis (Rymarz, 2007a, 2015), dialogue and context (de Souza et al., 2016; McGrath, 2012; McQuillan, 2011b), as well as questions of the Catholic faith, values and identity (Engebretson, 2014; Lovat, 2010a; Luetz et al., 2018).

Given the small numbers of Catholic families involved with local parish communities in Australia (in proportion to the number of young people attending Catholic schools), there is a need to understand the contribution of Catholic schools in developing the spirituality of young people. The importance of research in this area cannot be easily overstated. Some researchers have made entirely legitimate connections between the contribution of Catholic schools and the future of Catholic community life in Australia and elsewhere (D'Orsa et al., 2012; Engebretson, 2014; Franchi, 2016; Sharkey, 2015). Not surprisingly, therefore, the literature is abundant in this field. This level of ongoing interest among researchers confirms the value of this current research, which seeks to understand the contribution of Catholic schools to the spirituality of young people. There are also important

practical implications for work in this field, which may guide Catholic schools into future directions. These developments should adequately address the goal of nurturing spirituality and in so doing, make ongoing contributions to Catholic faith and life (Groen, 2017; McQuillan, 2011b; Priest, 2011). The task of understanding how young people explore spirituality (Casson et al., 2017; Crawford & Rossiter, 2006; Hughes, 2007b, 2017; Rossiter, 2018) and what Catholic schools can do to support this exploration has profound implications both at a theoretical and practical level.

The review of the literature on the contribution of Catholic schools will be presented in three sections. The first section (2.7.1) focuses on the purpose of Catholic schools. The second (2.7.2) considers the nature of curriculum in Catholic schools, while the third section (2.7.3) examines the literature related to various programs and experiences provided by Catholic schools, with the intention of developing the spirituality of students.

2.7.1 The purpose of Catholic schools.

The literature on the purpose of Catholic schools highlights both the complexity of the question and the divergence of opinion concerning the answer. Broadly, it reflects two schools of thought which, while not mutually exclusive, are nevertheless clearly different in emphasis. The first school of thought represents the view that Catholic Schools exist to pass on the Catholic faith to successive generations of young people. Accordingly, effectiveness of Catholic schools is most appropriately measured by examining the uptake of Catholic faith and practice among current students and graduates. In this light, the Catholic Bishops of NSW and the ACT are able to say:

We look to those involved in our schools to ensure that their very significant resources achieve, as far as possible, what the Catholic community rightly expects: young men and women of character and faith whose individual gifts are nurtured to

the highest potential so that they can contribute effectively to Church, society and culture. (Catholic Bishops of NSW and ACT, 2007, p. 20)

The second school of thought calls for greater sensitivity to the context and recognises the need for respectful dialogue with a profoundly diverse and multi-faith community in an increasingly secular society (Boeve, 2012; Cragun, 2017; de Souza, 2016; Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010, 2014). An effective Catholic school from this perspective would be one where students and graduates can engage constructively in society, bringing perspectives of faith, spirituality and values to bear on important social issues. It would also be a place where individuals can meaningfully relate their search for meaning to the call of the Gospel (Chenot & Kim, 2017; Crawford & Rossiter, 2006; Rossiter, 2018).

The literature in this area is drawn from two distinct sources. First, there is the work of those who auspice Catholic schools and who regularly comment on their intention and purpose (Catholic Bishops of NSW and ACT, 2007; Catholic Education Office Sydney, 2014b; Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998, 2013, 2014, 2017; National Catholic Education Commission, 2015, 2017b; Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977). Second, there is the work of researchers who offer commentary on the relevance and efficacy of Catholic schools in their particular context (D'Orsa & D'Orsa, 2010; Engebretson, 2014; Franchi, 2014; Groome, 2014; Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010, 2014). It is noted that those who auspice Catholic schools are principally ecclesial authorities with responsibility for Catholic worship and practice in the parish setting, and therefore carry a vested interest in the translation of the Catholic school experience into active and committed parish life.

2.7.1.1 Statements from ecclesial authorities.

While consistently maintaining the expressed view that Catholic schools exist to provide formation in Catholic faith and life for their students (Fogarty, 1959; McLaughlin,

2005; National Catholic Education Commission, 2000), ecclesial statements can be seen to reflect the theological insights of successive Popes and the prevailing circumstances of their pontificate. This alignment can be seen in Pope John Paul II's response to the declining presence of religious orders in Catholic schools (1983) and Pope Benedict XVI's focus on the idea of a new evangelization in the face of increasing secularisation in the west (2008b). The idea of the new evangelization has been a strong feature of Catholic life for the past 30 years (Pope John Paul II, 1990) and prominent in the response of local authorities in NSW (Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney, 2013; Catholic Bishops of NSW and ACT, 2007). Accordingly, it will be treated separately in section 2.7.3. The pontificate of Pope Francis has seen a shift in emphasis with almost no mention of the new evangelization in his first encyclical letter on the proclamation of the Gospel, *Evangelii gaudium* (Pope Francis, 2013) nor in the post synod exhortation to young people *Christus vivit* (Pope Francis, 2019).

Similarly, recent statements from the Congregation for Catholic Education have focused on engagement and dialogue in line with the Pope's theological insights (2013, 2014, 2017). This change in perspective challenges the notion that Catholic schools exist principally to effect the transfer of the Catholic faith to successive generations. Notwithstanding the change in emphasis in the statements from the Congregation for Catholic Education, there is little indication of any change from the emphasis on the new evangelization among ecclesial authorities in NSW (Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney, 2013; Catholic Education Office Sydney, 2014a, 2014b).

2.7.1.2 Findings from research.

The extent of the work by researchers on Catholic education is quite substantial with coverage from many perspectives including, among others, the idea of Catholic identity (Convey, 2012; Gleeson & O'Neill, 2017; Rossiter, 2013a; Sharkey, 2015), the role of the

Principal (Coughlan, 2009; Striepe, Clarke, & O'Donoghue, 2014), the formation of teachers (Freathy, Parker, Schweitzer, & Simojoki, 2016; Hackett & Lavery, 2012; Pshuk & Pototska, 2015; Rymarz, 2006b), the teaching of values (Pascoe, 2005; Toomey & Lovat, 2009) and the role of Catholic social teaching within the curriculum (Chenot & Kim, 2017; Grace, 2013; Groen, 2017). Some researchers have broadly aligned themselves with the focus of the new evangelization and have sought to explain how Catholic schools can be more effective in handing on the Catholic faith to students (Fisichella, 2012; Rymarz, 2010b, 2012, 2015). Meanwhile, others, mindful of the changing context, have called for a re-thinking of the approach of Catholic schools (de Souza, 2003; Gill & Thomson, 2014; Hyde, 2013; Rossiter, 2010a, 2013b, 2018; Rummery, 2001; Stern, 2018).

Among the many works examined, two projects stand out as being particularly noteworthy in the Australian context. The Mission and Education series of publications from the Broken Bay Institute (BBI-Taite) represent an important step in integrating the disciplines of missiology and education (D'Orsa & D'Orsa, 2010, 2015; D'Orsa et al., 2012; D'Orsa, D'Orsa, & Neri, 2013; Gowdie, 2017; Hindmarsh, 2017; Sharkey, 2015). Missiology is the discipline of examining how the Gospel is most appropriately communicated in contemporary contexts. Costas describes it as the “critical reflection at the point where cultures, ideologies, religious traditions, and social, economic, and political systems confront each other, and where the gospel seeks to cross the frontier of unbelief” (Costas, 1982, p. xiv). This approach has the benefit of applying principles of missiology, such as dialogue and engagement, to the work of Catholic schools with the aim of re-contextualising their identity and function (Boeve, 2012; Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014). It represents an essential step in guiding Catholic educators into understanding and embracing the theology underpinning *Evangelii gaudium* (Pope Francis, 2013) and equipping Catholic schools to respond more authentically to the contemporary context. At the same time, it places questions of mission

and Catholic identity firmly in the centre of the discussion about the purpose of Catholic schools and provides reassurance to those who have felt that this is under threat.

The second important project is a joint undertaking of the Katholieke Universiteit, Leuven, (KU) Belgium with the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria and now in use in South Australia, Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory. The work is known as the “Enhancing Catholic Schools Identity Project” (ECSIP). This project has involved research with Catholic school students, parents, teachers and administrators across primary and secondary schools throughout Victoria since 2006. It made use of scales developed by KU to analyse empirical data plotting the perceptions of the participants and analysing the profiles of individual schools and sub-groups within schools, as well as developing a sector-wide portrait of Catholic identity. The scales used in ECSIP (Gilroy, 1998; Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010, 2014), focus on the responses of participants in terms of their own beliefs, as well as their perceptions of the Catholic identity of their school and the ideal position for their school. The beliefs of participants are mapped on the “Post-Critical Belief Scale” (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010, pp. 194-198) which uses a horizontal delineation between belief and disbelief in conjunction with a vertical delineation between literal and symbolic belief to create four typologies – literal belief, external critique, relativity and post-critical belief (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010, p. 195). KU holds that post-critical belief is the “most fruitful for the development of identity of Catholic schools in a pluralising society” (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010, p. 197). Such a stance is important in helping to develop clarity regarding the type of faith and expressions of spirituality that Catholic schools seek to nurture among their students. The post-critical expression of faith also aligns well with the principles of dialogue and engagement discussed in the preceding paragraph.

Beyond the work on belief positions, KU has also employed instruments focusing on current and ideal perceptions of Catholic identity in the school setting. The project used two related scales known as the “Melbourne Scale” (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010, pp. 199-204) and the “Victoria Scale” (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010, pp. 205-208) to allow researchers to understand the perspectives of students, parents, teachers and administrators. The five types of the Melbourne scale represent a spectrum from “confessionality,” described as a dominant culture of active Catholic faith and practice, to a “secularisation” type, where the intention to develop or maintain a Catholic identity is abandoned (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010, p. 204). The preferred type, according to ECSIP is “recontextualisation” which seeks to find a “renewed Catholic profile in and through conversation with plurality” (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010, p. 202). The Victoria Scale sets out the perspectives of participants on the options available to them in terms of pursuing Catholic identity in a pluralising context (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010). Of the four types identified, “ECSIP” advocates the “Dialogue School,” where maximal Christian identity and maximal solidarity are sought as the preferred type (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010, p. 207).

Thus ECSIP works at the intersection between missiology and education insofar as it emphasises a rediscovery of Catholic identity in Catholic schools in and through dialogue with the vastly disparate voices of contemporary society. While this is hardly a new insight, the relevance of this work is the emergence of such thinking from within the framework of auspicing authorities for Catholic schools. Previously, such thinking was almost exclusively found among the realm of theologians. Therefore, it marks an important shift and, given that Catholic schools in jurisdictions outside Victoria are currently using the ECSIP instruments, it may well prove to be a far-reaching development.

2.7.2 Curriculum in Catholic schools.

The extent to which curriculum in Catholic schools relates to and engages with the life experiences of its students is a reliable indicator of the potency of its formative influence on these students (D'Orsa et al., 2012; Franchi, 2016; Hughes, 2017; Hughes & Reid, 2011). How teachers in Catholic schools approach the various subject disciplines will also have an important influence on whether these areas of study are seen to have meaning beyond the immediate implications of assessment marks and employment opportunities (Ditchburn, 2012; Gleeson, 2015).

Grace (2013) argues that by making Catholic social teaching a central component that permeates all subject disciplines, it will be possible to engage students in a more fruitful way within the Catholic school curriculum. Research among Catholic school teachers in Queensland showed a positive attitude among most towards the inclusion of aspects of Catholic identity, particularly those relating to Catholic social teaching, across the curriculum. However they “favoured the use of spontaneous teachable moments over formal planning” (Gleeson & O’Neill, 2017, p. 130). Despite this finding from over 2000 Catholic school teachers some other challenging aspects emerged from the same research. The study demonstrated a strong relationship between the personal faith disposition of the teachers and the importance they placed on the Catholic dimension of their work. However, it also found that a disproportionate number of these favourably disposed teachers were in the senior age range with far fewer of the early career teachers showing the same level of commitment. Further, they found that while these teachers are “enthusiastic about integrating social justice issues in their curriculum planning, they find the inclusion of a faith-based rationale challenging, due, inter alia, to their underdeveloped levels of theological and religious literacy” (Gleeson & O’Neill, 2017, p. 131).

The study concludes that there is a growing challenge for schools to engage and retain teachers who are committed to the Catholic dimension of their work. There is also a strong need to focus on the theological education and religious literacy of teachers in order to ensure that the Catholic dimension of their role is taken on with confidence and competence.

Beyond the importance of the teacher in this endeavour, others focus on the content suitable for the Religious Education curriculum in Catholic schools. Hughes proposes an outline for a curriculum with a focus on educating for purposeful living (Hughes, 2017), an approach which is endorsed by Rossiter in this subsequent work (Rossiter, 2018). These dimensions, which form part of the broader curriculum of Catholic schools, can be overlooked in discussions about the Catholic identity of the school, yet, clearly, they have considerable standing alongside other dimensions, such as ritual and symbol (Convey, 2012). They are at the heart of discussions around the “Catholic curriculum” (Askew, 2013; Cronin, 1996; D’Orsa et al., 2012; R. Davis & Franchi, 2013) which seek to identify what the essence of having “a ‘Catholic curriculum,’ as opposed to taking the school curriculum as largely circumscribed by the public curriculum, with the ‘Catholic’ part dealt with in Religious Education, a range of faith development activities and social justice initiatives” (D’Orsa et al., 2012, pp. 3-4). The authenticity of the “Catholic curriculum” is crucial to the integrity of the mission of Catholic schools and fundamental to the task of engaging with the lives of young people (D’Orsa & D’Orsa, 2010).

2.7.2.1 Catholic school culture.

An integral part of the discussion of the curriculum of Catholic schools is the question of Catholic school culture. The literature points out on one hand that Catholic schools are expected to produce “young men or women of character and faith whose individual gifts are nurtured to the highest potential so that they can contribute effectively to

Church, society and culture” (Catholic Bishops of NSW and ACT, 2007, p. 20). Yet, at the same time, it is recognised that the majority of Catholic school students and their families are not represented in this portrait. Over a quarter of students attending Catholic schools are from families whose faith tradition is other than Roman Catholic (Canavan, 2006; Chambers, 2012, 2015; McQuillan, 2011b; National Catholic Education Commission, 2015), and this increasingly includes students of no religious background. Moreover, the majority of Catholic students attending Catholic schools are not aligned with a faith community beyond the school (Engebretson, 2014; Hughes & Reid, 2011). Thus, it is evident that only a small number of students at Catholic schools identify strongly with the Catholic faith. Most recent studies suggest that these religiously affiliated students and families make up less than 15% of the Catholic school population (Engebretson, 2002, 2014; Hughes, 2007b; Hughes & Reid, 2011; National Centre for Pastoral Research, 2019; National Church Life Survey, 2018; Rossiter, 2018). This situation gives rise to the question about how well Catholic schools cater to these “core Catholic youth” (Rymarz & Graham, 2006, p. 80).

While there is a close correlation between the religious activity of a teenager and that of their closest friends (C. Smith & Denton, 2005), there is also evidence that “discussions of religious faith did not occur frequently in peer and friendship groups” (Maroney, 2008, p. 167) and that “peer support for the religious outlook on life is weak” (Leavey et al., 1992, p. 162). Students from devout Catholic families may see religious faith as a familial rather than a personal matter. As a result they are seldom involved in conversations with their peers about their beliefs and occasionally are made to feel awkward because their stance is unusual among their peers (Franchi, 2014; Pilkington et al., 2018; Rockenbach & Park, 2018; Rymarz & Graham, 2006). Young people are inclined to keep their beliefs to themselves or to disclose them only to those whom they know hold similar views. For the majority, spirituality and beliefs are simply not topics of conversation.

Some have observed that the culture of Catholic schools does not always support the faith and religious practice of their students because the religiously committed are in the minority, and like any minority group they can be made to feel isolated and vulnerable (Franchi, 2014; McQuillan, 2011b; Rymarz & Graham, 2006). This is not necessarily a product of the school environment, though in reality it reflects the situation in a broader social context among adults and youth alike, where religious commitment is viewed as an oddity and something that does not fit into normal social intercourse (Cook, Kimball, Boyatzis, & Leonard, 2015; Ipgrave, 2012). There is little evidence of active negativity towards such religiously committed students from other students; however, this is more to do with the privacy surrounding their commitment rather than the open acceptance of their peers (Hughes, 2007b; Mason et al., 2007).

2.7.3 Catholic school programs, initiatives and spirituality.

The following sections will consider the literature relating to programs and initiatives provided by Catholic schools with a view to developing the spirituality of their students. These include: formal Religious Education, school retreats, volunteering and service experiences as well as school prayer and liturgy. This examination will be followed by some observations of the literature concerning the new evangelization, contemporary forms of youth ministry, as well as Catholic school approaches to Pastoral Care and wellbeing (Y. Barton & Miller, 2015; Ipgrave, 2012; McQuillan, 2009; Root, 2018; Wuerl, 2013). Volunteering and service experiences and school retreats are seen to be prominent influences (Groen, 2017; Hughes, 2017; Maroney, 2008; Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009; Webber, 2012), whereas the formal Religious Education curriculum, as well as experiences in prayer and liturgy, appear to lack such influence, despite their prominence in school life. (Cooling, 2015; Edie, 2015; Hardie et al., 2016; Hyde, 2013).

2.7.3.1 Formal Religious Education and spirituality.

The literature attests to an ongoing debate about the efficacy and relevance of the formal Religious Education curriculum within Catholic schools (Copley, 2008; Franchi, 2016; Stern, 2018). Alongside this debate is a second concern about the purpose of Religious Education, which is variously discussed in terms of religious literacy, formation, evangelisation and catechesis (D'Orsa et al., 2012; de Souza, 2008; Gill & Thomson, 2014; Groome, 2014; Hyde, 2013; Rossiter, 2018). The relevance debate centres on the changing demographics of Catholic school cohorts and the rapidly changing social milieu of the students juxtaposed with the call to hand on the traditions of the Church. The debate affirms that “the classroom cannot produce the sort of socialisation that can be delivered by family, peer groups or the local faith community” (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006, p. 426). On the other hand, it acknowledges that “classroom study of religion can make contributions to young people’s overall education, which are not possible within a family or parish” (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006, p. 426). The same debate highlights the role of Religious Education in developing theological and religious literacy, religious identity and faith.

The concerns about the perceived value and overall quality of formal Religious Education have been a focus of the work of many researchers (Boeve, 2012; Conroy, 2016; Cooling, 2015; Crawford & Rossiter, 2006; D'Orsa et al., 2012; Engebretson, 2014; Flynn, 1979; Flynn & Mok, 2002; Ghosn, 2013; Goldberg, 2008; Hyde, 2011; Leavey et al., 1992; McQuillan, 2011b; Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010; Rossiter, 2001a; Rymarz, 2007a; Rymarz & Belmonte, 2017; Sharkey, 2015). This literature indicates several different foci for a critique of formal Religious Education, none of which provide a very positive outlook. One critique identifies an issue with student engagement, which is seen to have a snowballing effect that leads to disinterest, boredom and ultimately behavioural issues (Chi & Wylie, 2014; Harris,

2011; Macklem, 2015). Further critiques focus on the sense of meaning attached to the content which is often seen by students as having neither relevance to their future study, nor their career paths, nor their current experience (Agathangelou, Charalambous, & Koutselini, 2016; Daniela & Abens, 2014; Laur, 2013). Additionally, researchers point to the unclear objectives associated with formal Religious Education, together with confused pedagogies and the observation that some teachers of Religious Education are poorly qualified, in comparison to other subject areas, and that they would prefer not to teach Religious Education (Freathy et al., 2016; Hackett & Lavery, 2012; Horner & Tucker, 2013; Rymarz, 2006b).

In addition to the work of researchers in this area there are important ecclesial documents that have helped shape this discussion (Catholic Bishops of NSW and ACT, 2007; Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998, 2013, 2014, 2017; National Catholic Education Commission, 2017b; Pope John Paul II, 1983; Pope Paul VI, 1965; Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977). There is a dissonance in NSW between the emphasis provided by ecclesial authorities and the work of researchers in this area. Rossiter's (2018) criticisms of "Catholic Schools at a Crossroads" (Catholic Bishops of NSW and ACT, 2007) and the new Religious Education course "Studies in Catholic Thought" (Sydney Catholic Schools, 2018) are indicative of this disconnect, which is also reflected in the work of other researchers (Boeve, 2012; Hyde, 2011, 2013; Lombaerts & Pollefeyt, 2004; McLaughlin, 2005).

Two contributions from Hughes (2017) and Rossiter (2018) independently set out to synthesise decades of their work in this field and to propose a framework for future endeavours. Importantly, despite the independence of their projects and the differences in their contexts, they arrive at remarkably similar conclusions. They lament the fact that the goals of Religious Education remain blurred with "over the horizon hopes" (Rossiter, 2018,

p. 15) about personal faith and religious adherence, rather than being clearly expressed as specific and accessible education outcomes. Rossiter argues that too much ecclesial emphasis has been given to the role of Religious Education in socialising students into religious practice at the expense of the reality that only a very small proportion of students in Catholic schools are from families who regularly attend church. He sees this disconnect as a fundamental obstacle preventing Religious Education from being meaningful and effective. Hughes draws on similar insights in proposing that Religious Education needs to be tailored, first and foremost, to the social and cultural realities of the students, which are mostly secular, and to a considerable degree alienated from traditional religious practice (Hughes, 2017). His use of the term purposeful living directly tackles the problem of language, where terms such as formation and spirituality are laden with religious overtones. In addition to these helpful contributions, the work of the “Enhancing Catholic Schools Identity Project” ECSIP (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010, 2014; Sharkey, 2015) provides some sound approaches through their discussion of “post-critical belief” (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010, p. 197) and “recontextualisation” (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010, p. 200). While these publications from ECSIP present valuable theory to guide Religious Education, there is yet to be a practical shift in curriculum focus in Catholic education in NSW. While now in use in several jurisdictions in Australia, ECSIP has not been adopted in NSW. The recently developed Religious Education course for senior students in NSW “Studies in Catholic Thought” (Sydney Catholic Schools, 2018) maintains a narrow Catholic focus and catechetical intention. This intention neither aligns well with the call for “post-critical belief” (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010, p. 200) in the “Enhancing Catholic Schools Identity Project,” nor with Hughes’ emphasis on educating for purposeful living (2017), nor Rossiter’s focus on context and spirituality (2018).

2.7.3.2 Catholic school retreats and spirituality.

While school influences on the spirituality of young people are limited, the impact of the school retreat is consistently affirmed (Flynn & Mok, 2002; Hughes, 2007b; Mason et al., 2007; McQuillan, 2011a; Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009). Researchers have widely recognised the value of retreats for students at Catholic schools, however, it is the work of Tullio (Tullio, 2006, 2009, 2010a, 2010b; Tullio & Rossiter, 2009, 2010a) and Rossiter (Rossiter, 2016) that has been most influential in examining Catholic school retreats and identifying the elements that contribute to their success.

The value of the school retreat is found in its invitational nature with a focus on mindfulness, belonging and respect for the other. It is presented in a supportive environment conducive to exploring more profound questions in community with peers (Hackett & Lavery, 2012; Tullio & Rossiter, 2010b). Retreats provide an occasion for the thoughtful consideration of matters, which may not surface consciously amidst the normal daily routine (Tullio, 2010a). They also provide an opportunity to develop reflective approaches to important life questions, which have the potential to stay with the person well beyond their school years (Hughes, 2010; Tullio, 2010b). It is crucial that retreats are conducted in an environment where most of a young person's closest friends are present and where structures do not limit the interaction among friends (Maroney, 2008; Rossiter, 2016; Tullio & Rossiter, 2010a).

The environment of school retreats provides many of the ingredients that are conducive to a positive exploration of spirituality among the young people involved. Retreats invite young people to wrestle with life questions in a non-judgemental way where teacher mentors value responses that are sincerely offered. This approach supports the idea that young people are attracted to approaches to life that build meaning rather than those that have

meaning ascribed to them (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006; Mason et al., 2007). The retreat environment avoids the idea of a correct answer or final fixed point in its reflections. The reflections are genuine explorations, rather than guided paths that lead inexorably to a desired response. This insight aligns with the findings that young people overall reject the idea of a final fixed point to which they are expected to aspire. Instead, they see life as a more open palate of experiences and possibilities from which they will construct their spirituality (Hughes, 2007b; Maroney, 2008).

Retreats draw on the experience of the participants and, in this way, they connect well with the approach of young people, in that their own experience is the touchstone by which to measure the worth of any approaches to spirituality (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006; Madge et al., 2014; Rossiter, 2016). The teachers and leaders who accompany students on retreats attempt to step away from their role as authority figures and experts to enter into the exploratory character of the retreat (Tullio & Rossiter, 2010b). Inevitably, this shift is incomplete both from the perspective of the teachers who retain their duty of care and from the students who recognise the teachers as the potential disciplinarians should they transgress. However, at least to some degree, an attempt is made to move away from the notion that the teacher is the expert and authority figure who possesses the required knowledge. Studies have shown emphatically that young people reject the notion of authority in terms of spirituality and, by and large, will only accept or adopt an approach to life that they see as having intrinsic value, not because an authority figure or expert has proposed it (Mason et al., 2007; C. Smith & Denton, 2005).

Importantly, liturgical experiences, such as Eucharist and Reconciliation, also feature positively in student perceptions of school retreats. This data is noteworthy as the students do not give the same positive endorsement to experiences of liturgy in the formal

school or parish setting (Maroney, 2008; Mason et al., 2007; Rossiter, 2016). Apart from the retreat environment, students typically report liturgical experiences as boring, irrelevant and alienating (Cook et al., 2015; Creech et al., 2013; Hughes, 2010). The difference in perception among young people stems from a few crucial factors. First, liturgy on retreats takes place in a community setting where relationships are well developed and where there is usually a strong sense of communal identity among the participants (Tullio, 2009). Second, there is a deep sense of shared experience among the participants, which creates an immediate relevance to the gathering (McQuillan, 2011a). Third, the environment in which the liturgy takes place has an open and invitational character, rather than a formal and dogmatic one (Hughes, 2010). Fourth, there are usually ample opportunities for direct participation in the liturgy with detailed planning and preparation, which leads to a sense of ownership by the students (Maroney, 2008). Finally, concerning liturgical expressions of reconciliation, there is a clear relevance and immediacy derived from the focus on the restoration of relationships, which has a strong resonance with the adolescent journey. Thus, such a liturgy is seen as something relevant and appropriate to their stage in life (Tullio & Rossiter, 2010b).

2.7.3.3 Volunteering, service experiences and spirituality.

Studies have found a strong sense of engagement among young people with regards to experiences of service and volunteering (Dean, 2010; Groen, 2017; Webber, 2011). In promoting an alignment to Catholic social teaching (Meilaender, Werpehowski, Hauerwas, & Bennett, 2007) and the particular charism of the Catholic school, a range of volunteering activities, community placements and immersion experiences are typically provided. These seek to engage students practically within a program or agency that espouses an ethos similar to that of the Catholic school (Maroney, 2008; Toomey & Lovat, 2009). The literature shows

that students respond enthusiastically to these opportunities and regard them as important aspects in leading them to engage with questions of deeper meaning (Hughes & Reid, 2011; McGarry et al., 2011; Small, 2015; Webber, 2012). Tudball notes “when given opportunities to engage with issues of relevance to their lives and the lives of others, and take action for a better future, students respond with enthusiasm” (2007, p. 396).

Given that students respond positively to these experiences, which are fundamental to Catholic faith and life, schools see this as something of a golden opportunity to nurture the spirituality of their students. Despite the mutual enthusiasm of schools and students towards these experiences, certain vital questions are not well addressed in the literature. It is clear, indeed, that students respond well to the experience of volunteering (Flynn & Mok, 2002; Mason et al., 2007). It is also quite clear that students recognise that these experiences are part of the active expression of the Christian faith (Hughes & Reid, 2011). What remains unclear is the degree to which participating students see the relationship between these active expressions of Christian faith and the transcendent dimension (Groen, 2017; Hughes, 2010; Madge et al., 2014). It is not clear how well schools are managing the preparation and debriefing of students, nor how well they are situating the volunteering experiences in the cycle of reflection and action (Groome, 2014). It could well be too easy for schools to be caught up with the energy of a well-supported volunteering program without giving adequate attention to translating the meaning of the experience into the broader Christian context (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010).

A further question, also substantially unaddressed in the literature, is how well such experiences translate into a broader interest and allegiance to the Catholic faith even when appropriate attention is given to the meaning-making process in the school setting. While students see the alignment of their volunteering experience to the practice of the Catholic

faith, they are also able to see other community expressions of volunteering, which have the same practical dimension but without appealing to a religious dimension for motivation (Small, 2014; Webber, 2011).

Related to the area of volunteering and service is the notion of values education. This is worthy of mention given its place in educational discourse (National Catholic Education Commission, 2000; NSW Board of Studies Teaching and Educational Standards, 2007; Pascoe, 2005; Tudball, 2007). Schools in general, and Catholic schools in particular, are placing increasing emphasis on values education and values integration. These are seen as mechanisms to assist in the positive socialisation of young people and provide a supportive framework for families and other socialising agencies (Aspin & Chapman, 2007; Lovat, 2010a; Pascoe, 2002; Robinson & Keckes, 2010). There is a close relationship between the approaches to values education and the practices associated with volunteering and service learning. Lovat believes that these two elements, along with quality teaching, work in concert to achieve important effect in the development of values in school students (Lovat, Toomey, Clement, Crotty, & Nielsen, 2009). In contrast, Pollefeyt and Bouwens warn of the risk in the focus on the horizontal dimension of values education where the Catholic faith is reduced to a broadly universal ethical code (2014).

2.7.3.4 School prayer, liturgical experiences and spirituality.

Among the programs and initiatives provided in Catholic schools, the experience of school prayer and liturgy appears to be quite poorly regarded by students (Edie, 2015; Fuller, 2018; Hughes & Reid, 2011; Maroney, 2008; Mason et al., 2010a). The notion that students in Catholic schools should be inducted into traditional prayer and liturgical experiences fits well with a confessional model of Catholic schools where the majority are committed Catholic adherents, and Catholic faith and life are the norm (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014).

Such an approach would include the preparation for and reception of sacraments of initiation. It is clear that such schools have not existed for a very long time (Flynn, 1979; Fogarty, 1959) and are not likely to flourish in a modern pluralist society with increasing secular influences (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010). Despite the change in context, there remains a strong inclination to see Catholic schools as the means of preserving traditional Catholic culture and inducting young people into Catholic life and practice (Catholic Bishops of NSW and ACT, 2007; Rymarz et al., 2008; D. White, 2011). Traditional prayers, such as the Angelus along with Eucharist, Reconciliation and Adoration, feature strongly in approaches being promoted in many schools (Catholic Diocese of Broken Bay, 2019; Catholic Diocese of Parramatta, 2019; Sydney Catholic Youth, 2019). The current context of declining religious practice in parishes and the growing popularity of Catholic schools in an increasingly secular society means that, in no small degree, the future of the Catholic life and practice depends on the capacity for schools to pass on the Catholic faith to students (Canavan, 2006; Engebretson, 2014). In this context, the focus on traditional prayer and liturgical experiences are hardly surprising.

In contrast to the research related to traditional prayer experiences, there is some evidence that young people do respond well to invitational experiences of prayer and religious rituals, such as rites of reconciliation (Maroney, 2008; McQuillan, 2011a; Tullio, 2009). The key to these experiences seems to be their invitational character, in contrast to mandatory participation. It is also the opportunity to shape the ritual or prayer themselves rather than merely participating in a fixed form (Hughes et al., 2010).

2.7.4 Approaches to youth ministry.

In the last decade, there has been a substantial increase in the resources allocated to youth ministry for students in Catholic Schools (Catholic Diocese of Broken Bay, 2019;

Catholic Diocese of Parramatta, 2019; Sydney Catholic Youth, 2019). The impetus for this development has come from two sources. First, the lead up to the staging of World Youth Day in Sydney in 2008 and second, the publication of a pastoral letter by the Bishops of NSW and the ACT (2007). The former required a great deal of organisational energy and the latter called for a stronger commitment from schools to be “centres for the New Evangelization” (Catholic Bishops of NSW and ACT, 2007, p. 13). The focus of Youth Ministry Coordinators has primarily been in the promotion of World Youth Day as well as other national events, such as the Catholic Youth Festival (Catholic Youth Festival, 2016, 2017, 2019) and other festival like events at the local level (Catholic Diocese of Broken Bay, 2019; Catholic Diocese of Parramatta, 2019; Sydney Catholic Youth, 2019). There is a clear emphasis through the network of Youth Ministry Coordinators on providing a series of events that will create a nurturing and encouraging environment for young people in the development of their Catholic faith. There is a deficit in research on the effectiveness of an event focus such as this. The closest correlation seems to be the work done concerning the experience of World Youth Day itself (Cleary, 2013, 2016; Mason, 2010; Rymarz, 2007b), which suggests a positive and affirming experience for those who are already engaged with the Catholic faith but little impact on others. While this holds value for students who are actively interested in the Catholic faith (Rymarz & Graham, 2006), it raises questions about engagement with other students and the broader value of this approach to youth ministry (Dugan, 2019; McQuillan, 2009, 2011b; Root, 2018).

Catholic independent schools, with strong links to Religious Congregations, have used approaches to youth ministry as a means of fostering their founding charism through gathering students in a wide range of events from cross-cultural immersions, to leadership development and even sporting and cultural events (Australasian Mercy Secondary Schools Association, 2019; Marist Youth Ministry, 2019).

Further approaches to youth ministry are evident in the work of organisations seeking to provide formative experiences for school students. The first example is the National Evangelisation Teams (NET) or NET Ministries, formed initially from the Emmanuel Covenant Community in Brisbane as part of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. These now function in Sydney under the auspices of Catholic Youth Services (NET Ministries, 2019). Their work in schools is principally concerned with running school retreats and reflection days as well as work with youth groups and is similar in focus to the diocesan youth ministry initiatives discussed previously.

Catholic Schools Youth Ministry Australia (CSYMA), originating in Canberra, seeks to integrate the experience of youth ministry into the formal Religious Education curriculum (CSYMA, 2019). It provides curriculum resources for Years 10 and 11, which seek to connect the theoretical content of the Religious Education curriculum with the experience of active youth ministry. Similar to the diocesan youth ministry structure, CSYMA seeks to provide opportunities for young people of faith to gather to support one another and to develop skills in ministry (CSYMA, 2019). It is expected that students will elect to be part of a CSYMA program and therefore it is likely to appeal to those who already have an openness or interest in the Catholic faith. However, it is unlikely to attract those who are indifferent.

Some dioceses in NSW have systematically taken on the CSYMA program and are seeking to implement it throughout their secondary schools. The effect of creating an identifiable group of youth ministry students in the school is seen as potentially having divergent outcomes. On the one hand, it creates a normalising effect concerning the practice of the Catholic faith among young people, who are reassured by the overt presence of others of similar faith (Rymarz & Graham, 2006; B. H. Smith, 2013). On the other hand, it has the

potential to create cultural divisions among groups of students and set up certain students for victimisation because of their public faith (Carter, Flanagan, & Caballero, 2013; Hughes, 2007b). This division is particularly likely where the youth ministry students are held up as something to aspire to by teachers.

The third organisation is the Young Christian Students Movement (YCS) which has existed internationally since the early twentieth century. YCS was very widespread in Australia, especially in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, however, in NSW it only operates in the Diocese of Parramatta where it was re-established in the mid-1980s (Parramatta Young Christian Students, 2019). YCS continues to operate in Parramatta Diocese with a small number of groups today. It uses a formation methodology known as “review of life” (Australian Young Christian Students, 2019), which seeks to bring the lived experience of young people into a dialogue with Christian faith through a process of “See, Judge and Act” (Australian Young Christian Students, 2019). YCS aims to bring together the reflective and active aspects of life experience into an integrated spirituality of faith and justice. It has the advantage of being an ongoing experience, rather than an events-based approach. It also has the strength of a focus on justice, beginning with the life experience of young people rather than beginning with a point of intended allegiance as evident in other approaches to youth ministry. This approach seems to align well with the type of exploration of spirituality by young people found in studies of young people’s spirituality (Hughes, 2007b; Madge et al., 2014; Mason et al., 2007; C. Smith & Denton, 2005). Despite the potential, YCS seems to be in decline with diminishing numbers of groups around Australia and shrinking resources as dioceses invest in other approaches to youth ministry.

None of the approaches to youth ministry discussed here have been investigated explicitly by researchers, although there are a number of studies of youth ministry that

highlight some of the points noted above (Cook et al., 2015; Dantis & Reid, 2018; T. W. Hall et al., 2015; Hughes et al., 2010; McQuillan, 2009; Pimlott, 2017; Schweitzer, 2017). The two most pertinent points arise from the context of Catholic schools today, which is one of a pluralised, increasingly secular culture where most students have spiritual inclinations but are not consciously religious. In most cases they are not actively involved in a parish community. First, while the majority of the youth ministry initiatives cited above will provide some appeal and encouragement to the minority of students who are religiously inclined, they will, by and large, miss connecting with the majority of students. Second, as most young people engage with spirituality in an exploratory way, programs that have an overt focus on evangelisation and discipleship are likely to disenfranchise the majority of students.

2.7.5 The new evangelization.

Evangelisation has been an integral part of the Christian tradition from the outset, in recent decades the references to evangelisation can be traced to the Documents of the Second Vatican Council. In particular to the decree on the missionary activity of the Church *Ad gentes* (Flannery, 1996) and other post-conciliar statements, such as Pope Paul VI's *Evangelii nuntiandi* (1976) and Pope John Paul II's *Redemptoris missio* (1990). While these documents preserve the classical understanding of evangelisation as the preaching of the gospel to "peoples, groups and socio-cultural contexts in which Christ and his Gospel are not known" (McGrath, 2012, p. 284), they also speak of a "new evangelization" (Pope John Paul II, 1990 no 33) which is required in the context of the modern world. The new evangelization, or re-evangelisation, has a particular focus on those who have "lost a sense of the living faith or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church" (Pope John Paul II, 1990 no 33). The goal, as Rymarz notes, is "the personal conversion of those who have lost an active sense of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus" (2010b, p. 282). Pope

Benedict XVI added further emphasis in 2010 by creating a Pontifical Council with the specific task of promoting the new evangelization (Fournier, 2010). The emphasis on personal conversion and the focus on formerly Christian societies in the West has been maintained in the work of the council (Fisichella, 2012; Sylva, 2013), where they regard secularism to have “eclipsed the sense of God” (Sylva, 2013, p. 13). The commitment to the new evangelization has arisen from the challenge of the disintegration of the handing on of the Christian faith, especially in the Western cultural context and most pointedly in Europe (O’Laughlin, 2007).

In the Australian context, the idea of the new evangelization has primarily been used to focus on work in schools and with young people. It was used as the centrepiece for the challenge set out by the Catholic Bishops of NSW and the ACT “Catholic Schools at a Crossroads” (2007). It was also at the heart of Australia’s hosting of World Youth Day in Sydney in 2008 and has subsequently been aligned with the promotion of World Youth Day (Cleary, 2013; A. Fisher, 2008; Mason, 2010). These factors have brought the idea of the new evangelization sharply into focus. The Bishops’ statement has provided the basis of a framework of accountability for Catholic schools in terms of their Catholic identity (Catholic Education Office Sydney, 2014a; Catholic Schools Office Broken Bay, 2012). World Youth Day provides a particular focus for the galvanising of intent and the deployment of resources to the extent that it has become synonymous with the new evangelization in the Australian context (Cleary, 2013; A. Fisher, 2008; Rymarz, 2007b; D. White, 2011).

Despite the enthusiasm showed by the Bishops in NSW, the emphasis on the new evangelization is waning. It hardly finds mention in the writings of Pope Francis (2013, 2015a, 2019), nor is it taken up in recent writings of the Congregation for Catholic Education (2013, 2014, 2017). Furthermore, it stands at odds with the preferred models proposed by

Katholieke Universiteit (KU), Leuven, Belgium in the “Enhancing Catholic Schools Identity Project” undertaken with the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010). Notwithstanding this shift in emphasis, the promotion of flagship events, such as World Youth Day and the Catholic Youth Festival, indicate that the idea of the new evangelization still holds considerable sway in some dioceses (Catholic Diocese of Broken Bay, 2016; Catholic Education Office Sydney, 2016b; Catholic Youth Festival, 2016, 2017).

To date, despite the resources expended and the priority given, there is little evidence concerning the impact of the new evangelization on the spirituality of young people. Some studies have focused specifically on World Youth Day (Cleary, 2013; A. Fisher, 2008; Rymarz, 2007b; Singleton, 2011) and some have addressed the area of the new evangelization more broadly (McGrath, 2012; Rymarz, 2015). However, the impacts of evangelistic events and the appeal of traditional Catholic practices have not been well researched to this point. Despite a high degree of optimism among some writers (Cleary, 2013; A. Fisher, 2008), there does seem to be a considerable dissonance between the focus on the new evangelization and the ways in which young people typically explore spirituality (Hughes, 2007b; Madge et al., 2014; Mason et al., 2007; C. Smith & Denton, 2005). It seems unlikely, in light of the research into the exploratory nature of the spirituality of young people, that the resources provided for Catholic youth ministry endeavours (in support of the new evangelization) will have a notable impact. Those most likely to be engaged in such endeavours are those who are already religiously affiliated, and those who are not religiously affiliated will remain mostly unaffected by these initiatives.

2.7.6 Pastoral care and wellbeing.

Catholic schools have long had a strong emphasis on the wellbeing of students and, accordingly have invested heavily in programs of Pastoral Care that frequently involve the

work of counsellors and year advisors. In many ways, the pastoral programs have been regarded as separate or parallel to the Religious Education programs of the schools, however, a growing body of evidence has been providing links between different aspects of wellbeing and the matter of meaning-making and spirituality (Boro & Dhanalakshmi, 2015; J. Fisher, 2013; Ganga & Kutty, 2013; James & Fine, 2015; Japar & Purwati, 2014). Researchers have found that young people with a sense of faith or spirituality have more desirable levels of mental health and wellbeing than those who do not (Kaldor, Hughes, & Black, 2010; Krok, 2015; Lau, Hui, Lam, Lau, & Cheung, 2015).

The emergence of the evidence linking wellbeing and spirituality has sparked an interest among those responsible for Pastoral Care in Catholic schools. In particular, it has led to an interest in using the positive psychology approach arising from the work of Martin Seligman (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) which consists of a strengths-based approach to wellbeing and includes, among other aspects, a strong emphasis on meaning-making and the sense of a higher purpose in life. Initially developed for use in therapy, the approach of positive psychology has been adapted for educational settings with the new label of positive education (Seligman et al., 2009). Subsequently, it has been taken up widely by Catholic schools as the preferred approach to Pastoral Care (Positive Education Schools Association, 2017). One of the strong attractions for Catholic schools has been the centrality of spirituality and meaning-making to the approach of positive education. It has provided a means for schools to begin to see the religious dimension and pastoral dimension of the school as an integrated whole rather than parallel dimensions.

In practice, positive education makes important use of the concept of mindfulness, which religious educators readily recognise as an adjunct to prayerfulness (Y. Barton & Miller, 2015; Cobb, Kor, & Miller, 2015; Ergas, 2014). The use of practices, such as

mindfulness, outside of the explicitly religious setting has the potential to engage young people who might otherwise have been reluctant to participate. The balance between the invitation to mindfulness and meaning-making in the positive education approach and the risk of sidelining the transcendent dimension of prayer (Schneiders, 2010) is one that needs to be carefully monitored in the years ahead. While there is considerable evidence linking the areas of spirituality and wellbeing (Hooker et al., 2018; Kaldor et al., 2010; Martin, 2000; Pearce, Uecker, & Denton, 2019) and important work on the benefits of positive education and positive psychology (M. White & Murray, 2015), there is yet to be any work published on the effects of a positive education approach on the development of spirituality among students.

2.8 Conclusions

This literature review has followed a five-step framework, beginning with the task of defining spirituality before examining the literature on the elements of the spirituality of young people, their commitment to spirituality, the influences on the spirituality of young people and the contribution of Catholic schools to the spirituality of students (see Figure 2.1).

The first theme addressed the literature seeking to define spirituality. A brief history was provided, together with references to spirituality in the religious domain, as well as those of other disciplines, particularly in the social sciences. Spirituality types were explored before finally considering the definition of spirituality to be used in this current study. This exploration found broad agreement among researchers about the general nature of spirituality, but there was a lack of consensus on a precise definition of spirituality. This lack of an agreed definition is a deficit in the current body of research in the area of spirituality.

The expressions of spirituality among young people was the second theme explored. The important work of researchers, such as Smith and Denton (2005), Hughes (2007b, 2017), Mason, Singleton and Webber (2007), were used in conjunction with the work of others

(Casson, 2011; Crawford & Rossiter, 2006; Flynn & Mok, 2002; Rockenbach & Park, 2018; Rossiter, 2018) to navigate the contours of the spirituality of young people, which was found to be increasingly secular, eclectic, individual, subjective, self-determined and self-reliant. In light of the focus of this current study among Catholic school students, particular emphasis was also given to the relationship between spirituality and religion and the issue of religious literacy. The review of the literature identified numerous important contributions to understanding the spirituality of young people and emerging adults. The deficit in this area of research is in the understanding of different spirituality types and how such types shape engagement with spirituality in the life of the young person.

The third theme, commitment to spirituality, highlighted the paucity of research that directly addresses this point. It was found that, where present, discussions of the commitment of young people to spirituality were framed as an adjunct in response to other research questions. The lack of detailed work in this area is therefore highlighted as a deficit in the current body of knowledge and recognised as an area for further work.

Section 2.6 examined the literature relating to the influences on spirituality. The focus was principally on the influence of family, friends and media which, by consensus, were regarded as the most important influences in the literature. Other influences, such as music, nature, travel and social concerns, were also recognised as being of importance in a variety of ways to different young people. While the influences on the spirituality of young people have been widely documented, the deficit in this area of research is the nuanced understanding about these influences. This is particularly so in light of the different spirituality types and the diverse ways that young people with different spirituality profiles engage with spirituality.

The final theme considered the contribution of Catholic schools to spirituality, including an examination of the purpose of Catholic schools, some discussion of Catholic culture and the curriculum of Catholic schools. This was followed by a review of the literature concerning some programs and initiatives in Catholic schools, such as the formal teaching of Religious Education and other dimensions of the religious life of the school such as, school retreats, volunteering and service experiences as well as school prayer and liturgy. It concluded with some research on the new evangelization, approaches to youth ministry and works in the field of Pastoral Care and wellbeing. The body of research relating to Catholic schools and spirituality is quite substantial and considerable in its breadth. The deficit in knowledge here relates to the particular ways that Catholic schools are responding to the particular needs of the diverse cohorts of students in their care.

The deficits identified under each of these themes provides the impetus for further investigation. It is not within the scope of this current research to achieve a consensus on the meaning of spirituality; however, a definition has been proposed that will guide this current study. The understanding of different types of spirituality, the impact of these on engagement with spirituality and the diverse ways in which influences come to shape the spirituality of young people will be fruitful areas for investigation. The context of the Catholic school as a basis for this research will provide a particular point of reference for the study. This will both draw on and contribute to the understanding of the role that Catholic schools play in the spirituality of their students.

Chapter Three: Research design, methods and data analysis

3.1 Theoretical framework

This study uses a mixed methods approach that draws on both interpretivist and positivist paradigms. Thus, the theoretical framework is one of complementarity (Greene, Caraceli, & Graham, 1989), seeking to bring together the strengths of quantitative and qualitative study, while at the same time recognising the limitations of both (Creswell, 2018a; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). Mixed methods research allows “the data from one source (to) enhance, elaborate or complement data from the other source” (Creswell, 2014a, p. 555). This approach takes advantage of the potential for the use of both quantitative and qualitative data and the benefits of the interplay between them (Creswell, 2018b; Nastasi, Hitchcock, & Brown, 2010). At its simplest level, mixed methods research is a methodology that involves gathering, analysing and merging both quantitative and qualitative data. More profoundly, the use of mixed methods provides the theatre for the interplay between theories of knowledge and approaches to interpretation. These have historically been regarded as incompatible (Miles, 1994) yet, rightly understood mixed methods research provides for a new paradigm to be explored with rich potential in the quest for understanding.

3.1.1 Interpretivist paradigm.

The interpretivist paradigm recognises the principal role of the researcher in distilling meaning from the articulated experience of the participants. This paradigm draws on an epistemology of constructionism, which proposes that meaning is necessarily socially constructed through the interplay between the person as subject and their experience of the object, event or individual they are seeking to understand (Creswell, 2012, 2018b). In other words, meaning is socially constructed (Crotty, 1998). Constructionism was well suited to this study, as it facilitated the researcher’s engagement with the meaning-making processes

used by the students in order to develop an understanding of these expressions of spirituality. These processes of meaning-making, as articulated by the students, provided the basis for the analysis and interpretation on the part of the researcher.

Within the epistemology of constructionism, the theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism was chosen because of its close alignment with the paradigm of interpretivism and its usefulness in the processes of analysing qualitative data. Symbolic interactionism has a clear link in recognising that the construction of meaning by individuals takes place in and through their social interactions with reference to culturally derived symbols (Crotty, 1998; O'Donoghue, 2006).

The theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism was important to this study in a number of ways. First, through recognising the need to understand how the participants viewed certain people, objects and events in order to more fully understand their interaction with these experiences. For example, comments offered on activities, such as school prayer or involvement in volunteering, needed to be viewed according to how the student regarded such experiences, as such regard would have shaped the meaning they constructed from it. Second, through being attentive to the social milieu in which the individuals construct meaning. For example, while there is an overt religiosity evident in Catholic schools and a clear intention to foster Catholic Christianity, there are also elements of this social milieu that are indifferent to and in some instances, hostile towards matters of spirituality (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006; Hughes, 2007b, 2017; Mason et al., 2007; Rymarz & Graham, 2006). Further, the impact of media, especially the use of social media, were recognised as prominent dimensions of the social milieu in which these emerging adults are constructing meaning. Third, there is the understanding of the way that meaning is adjusted in the light of further experience, which led to a focus on the value of reflective experiences provided in the context

of Catholic schools. In particular, the role of the senior school retreat (Hughes, 2017; Hughes & Reid, 2011; Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2006, 2009, 2010b) and the benefits of volunteering and service experiences were also important in this regard (Lovat, 2010a, 2010b; Lovat, Dally, Clement, & Toomey, 2011; Lovat et al., 2009).

3.1.2 Positivist paradigm.

The positivist paradigm proposes that it is possible to objectively measure and study aspects of life through quantitative data analysed for statistical significance. Positivism highlights the path of objectivity and detachment, which allows truth to be discovered in an unfiltered way (Thomas, 2009). In this study, the positivist paradigm has provided a complementary dimension to the qualitative data analysis. This has enabled the researcher to recognise, measure and confirm patterns of responses leading to a breadth of understanding beyond the scope of qualitative data. Within the positivist paradigm, understanding is derived from the statistical analysis of numerical data drawn from a large group of participants. The numerical data collected from the online survey in this study were interrogated according to a range of questions pertinent to this research focus (Hobby, 2015; Schadewaldt, 2015). Some of these questions included differences aligned to spirituality profiles, changes in perspective during adolescence, and the relative importance of different programs and initiatives offered by these three schools.

The gathering of quantitative data in this study has allowed the researcher to collect survey responses from over 90% of the available cohort, compared to the more restricted numbers available for interviews. The availability of this data allows analysis through various filters, such as gender, religious background and expression of spirituality. Further, it provides a measure of the strength of influences on spirituality. This has highlighted the relative importance of different factors in the experience of participants. The use of statistical

analysis within a positivist paradigm has brought to light some statistically significant features in the data.

3.1.3 Mixed methods research.

The decision to employ mixed methods in the research was taken in order to maximise the potential to recognise, interpret and explain how emerging adults in Catholic schools express spirituality and the factors that are influencing these expressions. While there are definite advantages in being able to draw independently on both quantitative and qualitative data, the more profound value of the mixed methods approach is found in the interplay between the different types of data (Creswell, 2018b; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003, 2010). In this study, the quantitative and qualitative data intersected through a number of important iterations. In the first instance, survey questions captured data on expressions of spirituality, influences and commitment. This data then helped to shape the interview processes by ensuring that the most critical areas were addressed. A further iteration of this interplay occurred when quantitative data were analysed in light of the themes found in the qualitative data to determine whether the findings from the qualitative analysis were generalisable to the broader cohort of participants. Additionally, with some important themes having been identified, the research instruments were further modified to include the opportunity to verify these themes through further questioning. Finally, when the processes of analysis were nearing completion, return visits to the participating schools were undertaken to seek feedback on the preliminary findings from school leaders and mission personnel.

Within the field of mixed methods research, a number of design types or typologies have been explored by researchers. However, as mixed methods research is a relatively recent field of study, there is yet to be any consensus concerning the delineation of these types and the defining characteristics of each (Creswell, 2018b; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

In discussing types of mixed methods research design, Creswell has set out four prominent examples (Creswell, 2014b). These are known as Convergent Parallel Design, referred to as triangulation in earlier versions, Embedded Design, Explanatory Design and Exploratory Design. On reflection, it seemed that this research contained elements of all four and did not directly align with any. Closer alignment to this current study is found in the Iterative Typology discussed by Tashakkori and Teddlie (2010), as one of their seven applications of a mixed methods approach wherein:

Mixing occurs interactively or iteratively at all stages of the study. At each stage, one approach [e.g., QUAN] affects the formulation of the other [e.g., QUAL], and multiple types of implementation [i.e., QUAL & QUAN data collection, analysis, and inference] processes occur. (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010, p. 320)

The quantitative and qualitative aspects of this current study have mixed and merged through various iterations in the course of the design of data gathering instruments, patterns of analysis, validation of themes and investigation of statistical significance. Thus, among the various expressions of mixed methods approaches, this study aligns most closely with the Iterative Typology. Figure 3.1 below provides a graphic representation of the research design.

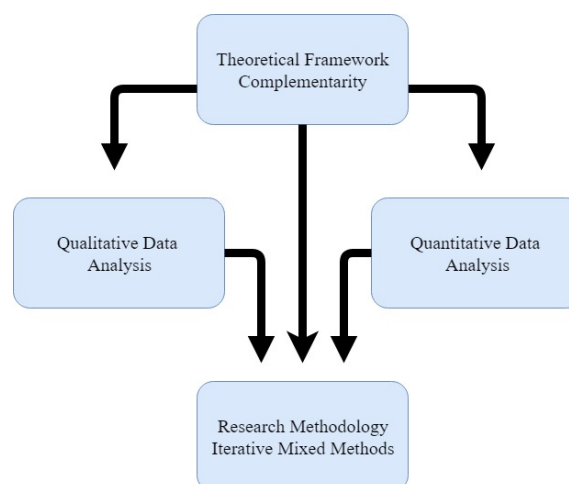


Figure 3.1. Graphic representation of research design.

3.2 Methods

Two main methods of data gathering were used in this study. An online survey was used as the first phase of data gathering, while the subsequent phases involved both group and individual interviews with students and individual interviews with staff.

3.2.1 Development of data gathering instruments.

In preparing for data gathering, particular care was taken to ensure that the instruments were well suited to their purpose. This consideration included attention to the accessibility of language, the length of surveys, duration of interviews and the types of questions used (Berg & Lune, 2014; Creswell, 2014a; Merriam, 2014; O'Donoghue, 2006). With this in mind, the survey instruments were developed through a number of iterations. Preliminary versions of the instruments were used with a group of volunteers to test a variety of question types and approaches. Through this process, it was found that participants did not relate well to direct questions such as “describe your spirituality” or “explain your spirituality”. This difficulty mirrored that experienced by Hughes in his research when he found participants were unable to respond to direct questions about where they found meaning in life (Hughes, 2007b). In contrast, when participants were asked to respond to various written and visual stimuli, they were able to speak about spirituality more comfortably and in more depth. The approach of using stimuli rather than direct questions has been well tried in the context of school retreats (Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009) and has also been used to good effect in previous research on spirituality among school-aged participants (Maroney, 2008).

This testing also found that participants were more engaged when a variety of stimuli and question types were used. When there were long sequences of similarly structured

questions in a survey format, they reported that it was hard to maintain focus and that they tended to lose interest.

One of the stimuli used in interviews was a collection of individual spirituality profile descriptions reflecting a range of different approaches to spirituality. These spirituality profiles were derived from the findings of prior research, which had identified various expressions of spirituality evident among emerging adults (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006; Hay & Nye, 1998, 2006; Hughes, 2007b, 2017; Koenig, 2015; Mackay, 2016; Maroney, 2008; Mason et al., 2007; Mason et al., 2010a; Mayhew, 2004; Singleton, 2015; C. Smith & Denton, 2005; Spurr, Berry, & Walker, 2013).

The spirituality profiles were constructed to convey a breadth of approaches to spirituality evident in the literature (Davie, 1994; Hughes, 2007b; Mackay, 2016; Mason et al., 2007; McCrindle, 2017) Thus, in all, twelve spirituality profiles were created for use in the interviews. These profiles represented different points along the continuum between religious and secular perspectives. For the online survey, four spirituality profiles were used; namely a religious expression of spirituality, a secular expression, defined spiritual expressions and non-defined spiritual expressions.

3.2.2 Pilot study.

In the light of the testing of data collection instruments, second versions of the instruments were developed. These were then used in a pilot of the study conducted in 2015. Two main issues emerged from the pilot study. First, it was found that some of the language used in the survey instrument was not sufficiently precise to guarantee that responses were addressing the intent of the question. Second, it was recognised that the number of spirituality profiles to be used as stimuli were too extensive to be effectively used in the interview processes. The survey and interview instruments were refined in light of these factors in

preparation for formal data gathering work to be undertaken. The final versions of the survey and interview instruments are included in Appendix A.

Notwithstanding the issues noted above, the pilot study demonstrated that participants would be able to contribute substantial information about their expressions of spirituality, the factors that had influenced their spirituality, including their experience of attending a Catholic school, and their degree of commitment to their expression of spirituality.

3.2.3 Data gathering instruments.

The third iteration of the research instruments was prepared in readiness to begin the formal data collection. These included the online survey, group interview process, individual interview process and staff interview process together with the various stimuli that were to be used in these processes.

The survey instrument consisted of 16 questions. Three questions collected demographic information, including age, gender and religious background. Five questions invited participants to align themselves with pre-chosen categories based on the findings of previous research in this area (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006; Hay & Nye, 2006; Hughes, 2007b; Maroney, 2008; Mason et al., 2007; C. Smith & Denton, 2005). Three questions sought to establish agreement or disagreement with a range of statements and five questions sought open responses from participants. An additional eight comment boxes were provided for students to contribute open responses.

The student survey data were collected primarily to inform and shape the interview process to ensure that the most important themes were appropriately examined in the interviews. These themes were then explored in the interviews to ensure that the related

research questions were addressed. These data also had the secondary purpose of being available for statistical analysis in order to test whether important themes discussed during interviews were transferable to the broader cohort of survey respondents.

The student survey data informed and shaped the interview process in two areas. First, in the survey instrument, students were asked to align themselves with one of four spirituality profiles. These had been constructed to reflect different expressions of spirituality that had been identified in other research.

In their 2005 research, Smith and Denton identified three categories among American teenagers. These were: Spiritual Seekers, The Disengaged, and Religiously Devoted Teens (C. Smith & Denton, 2005). Another approach was taken by Mason and his colleagues in the Spirit of Generation Y research among young people in Australia. This involved the use of four categories; Traditional (Christian), New Age, Secular, and Other which were cross referenced with the labels of engaged and unengaged (Mason et al., 2007). Earlier research by Leavey and her colleagues made use of four typologies; Integrated, Independent, Antithetic, and Rebellious (Leavey et al., 1992). Other examples of the use of categories of spirituality are found in Perez's alignment of spirituality types with the Myers Brigg personality types (Myers, 1980; Perez, 1998), a study of the different types of Christian beliefs held by Bible College students (Nash & Bradley, 2008) and studies of different types of unbelief (Silver, 2013; Silver et al., 2014).

In deciding on the spirituality profiles to be used in this research three criteria were applied. First, the spirituality profiles had to reflect sufficient breadth to ensure that the responses of all participants could be accommodated within the spirituality profiles used. Second, that the spirituality profiles themselves were reflective of the responses of young people involved in initial testing of questions and the later pilot study. Third, that the number

of spirituality profiles used would be restricted to as few as possible to facilitate data analysis. With these criteria in mind it was ultimately decided to use four spirituality profiles in the survey instrument: Secular, Non-defined Spiritual, Defined Spiritual, and Religious.

Three examples of student responses are provided below to show how the spirituality profiles were used in the interview processes. In some cases, such as shown in example one, participants aligned themselves quite closely with one of the profile descriptions provided.

Example One: I think I'm a bit like Ben, I believe in God. I don't really go to church much, but I go at least once, twice a month, and I think... [chuckle] When we do die that we go to heaven and that, or if you live a good life and everything.

Profile of Ben: I believe in God but I don't really go to church or anything like that. I don't really think about God much but I believe God helps out when bad things happen. I think God expects us to be kind to others. I think when we die, those who have lived a good life will go to heaven.

In other cases, such as in example two, students mixed and merged elements from different profile descriptions to help express their spirituality.

Example Two: I used to be of a combination between Emily and Samantha. So first off, like Samantha, where I believed in God and I would go to the school chapel, and pray, or in mass, I used to be a server. And then it became Emily, because some things didn't make sense to me. There were things that I found out which I did not believe, and it just grew to ... Because with the Big Bang Theory, nothing can't just explode like that, so it made sense to me that there had to have been something there. But now I don't believe there's anything beyond, spiritually.

Profile of Emily: I don't believe in anything specific but I think there must be something more than this life. Maybe some kind of spiritual being or spiritual power. I don't really know but it makes sense to me that there would be something more.

Profile of Samantha: I believe in God but I don't really go to church or anything like that. I don't really think about God much but I believe God helps out when bad things happen. I think God expects us to be kind to others. I think when we die, those who have lived a good life will go to heaven.

In other cases, such as example three, a participant identified him/herself with one of the spirituality profiles but then framed his/her own expression of spirituality without any direct reference to the profiles.

Example Three: I'm probably most similar to Rebekah as well. I don't think that there is a God. I can't reconcile that within myself that there's predetermined fate, or that someone has a path for me or any of that. I think that our lives are largely on our own hands, and it's up to us to make the most of it. And I think that human connection is probably the closest thing that I can believe in that would relate to a God. It's the power of connecting with people and ... Yeah. That's the best way to put it.

Profile of Rebekah: I don't believe there is anything more than what we have in this life. No special purpose, no spiritual force or being, nothing happens after we die. Once we die we're gone, that's all there is to it.

The second way in which the survey data shaped the interview processes was in the area of influences on spirituality. The survey asked participants to respond to 28 statements

regarding possible influences. The data from these responses were then reviewed to see which were the most prominent areas of influence. Table 3.1 below shows the 28 items ranked according to the percentage of respondents who agreed with the statement.

In the interview processes, influences were tested in two sets. The first set included a combination of school-related influences and broader social influences. Students were asked to comment on up to five of these according to what they regarded as the most important influences. However, the time available in the interview process meant that discussion was usually limited to three or four influences. Participants were also asked to comment on the importance of some selected influences, such as liturgy and prayer, which were chosen not for their prominence in student responses but because of their importance in Catholic schools. The purpose of mixing school influences and broader influences in this first set was to allow for some measurement of the relative importance of school influences in comparison to broader social influences.

The second set of influences for exploration in the interviews was made up entirely of school-related influences. This structure was used to identify which school-based influences were most important when treated separately from other broader social influences. Once again, elements, such as liturgy and prayer, were included owing to their importance in Catholic schools rather than their prominence in student responses. In responding to this second group of influences, participants identified volunteering experiences, school retreats and classes other than religion classes as important influences. Aspects of school life, such as liturgy and school prayer, were regarded negatively by most students.

From among the 28 items used in the survey instrument the only prominent influence that was not carried over into the interviews was that of ‘my own thoughts’ as this

was judged to be an internal factor more aligned with the sense of constructing an expression of spirituality rather than external influence on the expression of spirituality.

Table 3.1

Influences on Spirituality - all respondents (n = 248) Percentage agreement

Rank	Option	% Agreement
1	My own thoughts	79
2	My parents	77
3	Serious things that have happened to me	58
4	My friends	49
5	Inspiring people / events	47
6	How people close to me have been treated	46
7	Being part of my school community	43
8	Other people's responses to serious things in their lives	43
9	Music	41
10	The internet	41
11	Things I have learned in my religion class	40
12	Other role models	39
13	Volunteering to help others	38
14	Nature	38
15	Things I have learned in classes other than religion	36
16	My school retreat / reflection day	35
17	The media	35
18	Religious events within my school	32
19	Meditation/reflection	31

20	My teachers	31
21	My Church / Mosque / Synagogue / Temple	29
22	An immersion experience with another culture	29
23	Religious stories	28
24	Environmental concerns	27
25	Strongly religious people	25
26	My involvement in an organised group / club	19
27	Religious events outside of school	14
28	Alcohol and/or other substances	13

Another aspect of the interview processes made use of visual stimuli to invite participants to reflect on the developmental pathway leading to their expression of spirituality, as well as to facilitate reflection on the degree of commitment held to the particular expression of spirituality. The first of these stimuli depicted a pathway weaving through a forested area; the second was a cartoon image of children playing on or near a large tree. In addition, a visual stimulus with quadrants labelled physical, social, spiritual, mental and emotional was used as an explanatory tool in each interview to help explain the purpose of the research in relation to spirituality. Student interview processes and stimulus materials used are included in Appendix A.

The process for the interviews with teachers did not involve the use of any stimulus material or any of the profiles developed for use with the students. Instead, teachers were asked to reflect on times, experiences or events where they had accompanied students which, in their opinion, they judged to be important influences on the expression of spirituality among the students. Teachers were asked to choose a time, experience or event to explain what was involved and then to share their observations of the students and any changes

identified in the student following the experience. This process was repeated in each teacher interview until time had elapsed. The interview process used with teachers is included in Appendix A.

In addition to the primary use of the student survey data to inform and shape the interview processes, some secondary uses of these data were available. First, the open responses to survey questions were coded and analysed as qualitative data for use alongside the student responses to the interview questions. Second, the survey data provided demographic information to help create a profile of the group of participants and allowed for some comparisons on points, such as gender and religious background. Third, the survey provided other quantitative data that could be analysed for statistical significance.

3.2.4 Stages of data gathering.

Data gathering took place in two main phases that were repeated in each of the three participating schools. The first phase involved students in the senior cohort of each school completing an online survey that gathered quantitative and qualitative data using a combination of closed and open response questions. Following the completion of the online survey in each school, an initial analysis of the quantitative data was undertaken to identify the most prominent aspects. This was done in order to inform the interview processes to ensure that the most important aspects identified in the online surveys were followed up with appropriate questioning during the interviews. The qualitative data collected from the online surveys were filed for later analysis at the same time as the interview data. The second phase of the data gathering involved three types of interviews. Small group interviews and individual interviews were held with students, and individual interviews were held with teachers.

3.3 Participants

The selection of participants for this study was governed by factors such as alignment to the methodology and purpose of the study, accessibility and availability of resources (Creswell, 2012). An invitation was issued seeking the participation of three Catholic Schools from NSW to take part in the study. The study was a convenient sample, limited to three schools owing to the intensity of the research process and the extent of the resources required to collect and analyse data (Creswell, 2014a). Within each of the three schools, the entire senior cohort was invited to participate; however, given the voluntary nature of the study, not all students chose to. The three schools included a single-sex girls' school, a single-sex boys' school and a co-educational school.

The formal data gathering processes took place in August, September and November 2016 beginning with the single-sex girls' school (School A), followed by the co-educational school (School B) and then the single-sex boys' school (School C). All students and teachers who participated in this research did so as volunteers who had been informed of the nature and focus of the study. In School A, 61 students completed the online survey out of a cohort of 67, three teachers participated in interviews, ten students volunteered for group interviews, and three students took part in individual interviews. In School B, 111 students completed the online survey out of a cohort of 118. This was made up of 44 male students, 56 female students and 11 students who did not identify their gender. Two teachers participated in interviews, 11 students (six female and five male) participated in group interviews, and three students (one male and two female) took part in individual interviews. In School C, 89 students responded to the online survey out of a cohort of 92. One teacher participated in an interview while ten students took part in group interviews.

Overall, 261 students volunteered to take part in the online survey consisting of 133 male students, 117 female students and 11 students who did not identify their gender. Interviews were held with six teachers. Thirty-one students (15 male and 16 female) participated in group interviews while six students (five female and one male) volunteered for individual interviews. The teachers who participated in interviews all had experience in accompanying students involved in activities intended to foster or nurture spirituality of students. These activities included school retreats, volunteering and outreach programs, liturgy and prayer. Some were involved in teaching formal courses in Religious Education. Some held positions of responsibility, such as Youth Ministry Coordinator or Assistant Dean of Mission. In each case, participating teachers were those who could be expected to provide meaningful insights into the responses of the students involved in the various programs and activities.

Table 3.2

Survey respondents by school and gender n=261

School	Female	Male	Total
School A	61	0	61
School B	56	44	111
School C	0	89	89
Total	117	133	261

Note: 11 students in School B did not identify their gender

Table 3.3

Interview participants by school and gender n=37

School	Female	Male	Total
School A	13	0	13
School B	8	6	14
School C	0	10	10
Total	21	16	37

Each of the three participating schools was located in a middle-class suburb of a large city. In socio-economic terms, the three schools are quite similar. All three have an Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) slightly above the average of 1000. School A has the highest, 1125 School B has 1107, and School C has 1083 (ACARA, 2018). Each is a long-established Catholic school with clear links to the founding charism of the school derived from a particular religious congregation. The three schools commit significant resources, financial and personnel, to the area of faith and identity development consistent with the expectation of Catholic School Systems in NSW.

3.4 Context

3.4.1 School context.

Before undertaking data collection in the three schools, it was confirmed that no critical incidents had occurred that may have had a bearing on the responses of participants.

3.4.2 Social context.

While no critical factors were identified at the school level, there were, however, some broader social factors at play that may have had some impact on participant responses.

First, the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse was conducting hearings at the time that data collection was taking place (Commonwealth of Australia, 2017). These hearings included a focus on a range of institutions including religious groups, such as the Catholic Church, the Anglican Church and Salvation Army together with others such, as Scouts Australia and YMCA NSW. During the period of data collection, daily media reports were highlighting scandalous conduct on the part of official church personnel, including members of the Roman Catholic Church.

Second, the discussion of marriage equality was also prominent in public discourse in Australia. The Federal Government had proposed that a plebiscite on the issue of marriage equality would take place, which ultimately took the form of a national postal survey in 2017. While the postal survey had not yet occurred during the period of data collection, there was, nevertheless, significant public discussion on the issue of marriage equality taking place. During this discussion, church spokespersons were frequently portrayed in the media in a negative light for their stance against changes to marriage laws.

It is not possible to determine how much the public discussion of these issues at this time affected the response of participants. However, it is clear that the issues of sexual misconduct on the part of the clergy, religious and other church employees, and the perceived lack of compassion and acceptance on the issue of marriage equality, were important in the eyes of some participants.

3.5 Analysis of data

An iterative approach to data analysis was employed with this research which, in effect, meant that there was no clear separation between the phases of collecting and analysing data, as these two components of the research evolved and informed one another throughout the research project (L. Cohen, 2018; L. Cohen et al., 2011). The processes

involved in gathering data and analysing this material took place concurrently during the study (Creswell, 2012).

The process of constant comparative analysis (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994) was used to test the qualitative data, as it was gathered for agreement, or otherwise, concerning previously gathered data. In the course of analysis, a refinement of the coding process took place through unitising, analysing, labelling and grouping. The processes of data analysis were necessarily attuned both to recognising and interpreting consistent themes while remaining open to surprising or unexpected responses.

3.5.1 Steps in the analysis of qualitative data.

In this research Creswell's "Data Analysis Spiral" (Creswell, 2007, pp. 150-151) was used to guide the process of analysis of qualitative data through four key phases as shown in Figure 3.2. Qualitative data had been collected through group and individual interviews as well as through responses to open questions in the online surveys.

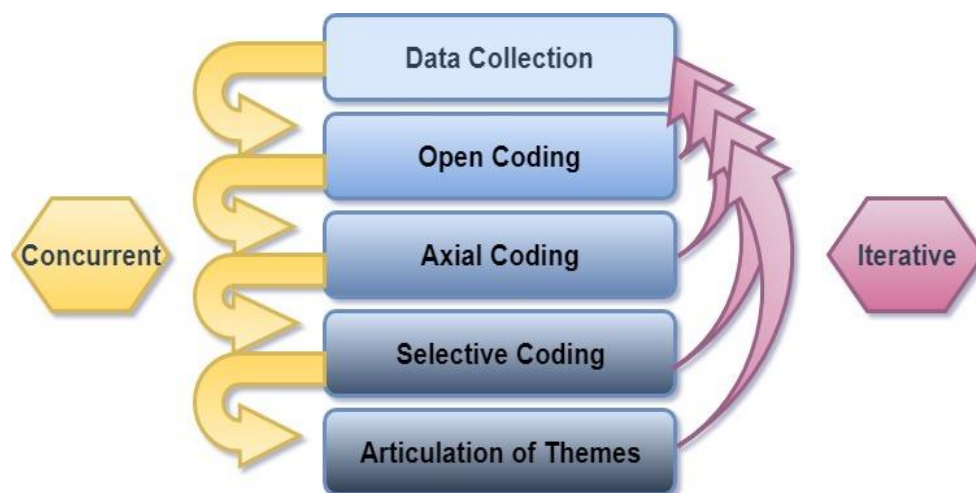


Figure 3.2. Qualitative data analysis cycles using constant comparative method.

3.5.2 Data management.

With the use of QSR NVivo 10 software, a research database was established to store, organise and manage the data. All data files were labelled for identification indicating the school, the gender of the participant and the source of the data (survey or interview). The label also included a reference code to identify the individual; however, no names or other identifying features were included. Audio files were labelled and stored as well as being transcribed, labelled and stored in text format. Quantitative data were also collated and tabulated for later use.

3.5.3 Coding.

Organised data were coded with names or labels to help identify the particular units of data so that they could be related to other data. Coding such as this allowed the researcher to manage the data through the identification of themes, patterns of their recurrence and their relationship to other themes and patterns (L. Cohen, 2018; L. Cohen et al., 2011; Creswell, 2007, 2012; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Three types of coding were used with qualitative data in this research, open coding, axial coding and selective coding.

3.5.3.1 Open coding.

Each segment or unit of datum was given a label or code to classify or describe it. Labels were chosen to reflect either the language used by participants or terms found in the literature. Following the constant comparative approach, this labelling or coding was applied until the point of saturation had been reached. In the course of this coding process, 147 labels were used to classify the data. This part of the coding process is known as open coding (Neuman, 2003, 2011). A sample of the open coding process is included in Appendix B.

3.5.3.2 Axial coding.

As saturation was reached, the coded data were grouped or categorised through a process designed to reduce the number of labels or codes to a more workable number (Creswell, 2012). Open codes were organised around a label that identified a shared component or common basis within the data. This part of the process is referred to as axial coding (Neuman, 2003, 2011). A total of 39 categories were identified in this axial coding process. The categories used in the axial coding process relate directly to the elements of the research questions. Throughout the process of axial coding verification and adjustments were taking place progressively as new data were gathered. As with the open coding process, there was a constant repetition and refinement in the process of axial coding while new data were being added. A sample of the axial coding process is included in Appendix B.

3.5.3.3 Selective coding.

Data categories were then examined to determine links and identify intersections with a view to connecting and integrating categories to form insights and articulate themes. The 39 categories previously identified were refined and integrated through selective coding (Creswell, 2007, 2012; Neuman, 2003, 2011) into a subsequent group of 21 categories, which enabled themes to be identified. Six of these categories applied to the first research question, four categories applied to the second research question and 11 categories applied to the third research question. The iterative nature of the constant comparative method required that this process continue simultaneously with the data collection process until the point of saturation had been reached. A sample of the selective coding process is included in Appendix B.

3.5.3.4 *Articulation of themes.*

Throughout the process of data analysis, patterns and connections were being identified from the responses of the participants. These patterns and connections were then used to provide guidance for the subsequent phases of data collection and to begin to identify themes that were evident in the data. These themes, in embryonic form, were considered and reviewed during subsequent data collection phases and were either confirmed or discarded as further data were gathered. In this way, insights and explanations of the phenomenon were articulated. The description of the themes identified in the data is accompanied by vignettes from the data to “bring in the voice of the participants in the study” (Creswell, 2007, p. 182). The strands of data that have been separated, coded, grouped and compared were reconstructed into themes drawn directly from the data and connected to the research questions and purpose of this study.

3.5.4 Analysis of quantitative data.

In addition to providing data to help shape and guide the interview processes, the online survey gathered a range of quantitative data that were analysed for statistical significance. Participants in this research were volunteers who responded to an invitation to take part as members of the senior cohort at one of the participating schools. Therefore they constitute a convenient sample. The survey sample of 261 participants represents 94% of the available cohort, providing a reliable basis for the transferability of findings from the sample to the whole cohort (Greenberg & Weiner, 2014; Rea, 2014). Survey questions were optional, and not all participants completed each question. Nevertheless, the sample remains a reliable indicator with a minimum of 83% response rate for any given question. Additionally, the number of participants overall readily satisfies the size required for the reliable use of the normal distribution as “the properties of the normal distribution assume that the sample sizes

in the distribution of sample means are sufficiently large – 120 or more” (Rea, 2014, p. 158). In some cases, calculations have been made using sub-groups of the survey respondents, and in these cases, where the sample size was smaller than 120 appropriate adjustments were made using a T-distribution.

When making comparisons using demographic data and analysing themes from other quantitative data, the following methods of statistical analysis were used. Anovas (analysis of variance) were used to measure if the differences in the range of observed data were due to chance alone or whether they could be attributed to factors such as gender, religion, and spirituality profile. Correlation tests were used to clarify the relationships between two groups of data. T-testing was used to compare the means of two groups, and Odds Ratios were used to measure the variance of each score to the overall mean in order to determine the relative importance of each item on the scale. From this statistical analysis, some findings emerged that were regarded as statistically significant. The confidence level used to ascribe statistical significance to findings is $p < 0.05$ confirming that the null hypothesis is true in less than 5% of instances (Dick & Tevæarai, 2015; Greenberg & Weiner, 2014; Rea, 2014). Samples of statistical calculations used are provided in Appendix C.

3.6 Additional questions – validation of themes

The use of a constant comparative approach to qualitative data analysis has allowed for insights gained from initial analysis to be tested for validity in subsequent data gathering work. Accordingly, in this study, the data from School A had begun to be analysed before the data from School B were collected. Similarly, the data from School A and School B was in the process of being analysed before data were collected from School C. This constant comparative approach to data collection and analysis provided the opportunity to recognise themes evident in initial phases of data analysis. It also allowed for testing and validation of

these themes through the modification of data collection instruments in the latter phase of the data collection. Thus, having identified some important themes in the data collected from Schools A and B, the data collection instruments were modified for use in School C.

The modifications to the data collection instruments for School C involved adding 11 statements to the online survey and inviting participants to choose an option of agree, disagree or unsure for each thus providing a means to validate the themes articulated from the previously analysed data. An open response option was also provided to allow participants to comment. In the interview process, a number of the same statements were proposed, although due to time constraints it was not possible to discuss all eleven statements during the interviews. The survey response data were analysed for patterns of alignment or non-alignment with the initial insights and the open comments from the survey were coded and analysed along with the other qualitative data collected in the interviews.

The opportunity provided by the constant comparative method to modify the data collection instruments created a sound pathway for testing and validating the themes evident in the earlier phases of data collection and analysis.

3.7 Reliability and trustworthiness

When dealing with constant comparative data analysis in qualitative research, issues of trustworthiness relate mostly to how well the research methods have been applied to identify themes from within the data. On the other hand, the types of verification associated with quantitative data analysis include those of sampling, transferability and whether the findings can be replicated through further study (Creswell, 2007, 2012; Merriam, 2014). The literature attests to considerable variety in how the trustworthiness of qualitative data analysis can be affirmed through the use of constant comparative analysis. Creswell proposes that there are 10 points on which the trustworthiness of constant comparative analysis rests

(Creswell, 2007, 2012), while Padgett proposes a helpful composite list of six measures that have formed the basis of the trustworthiness measures in this research (Padgett, 2008). These are prolonged engagement, triangulation, peer debriefing/support, member checking, negative case analysis and audit trail. Further to these six points, the additional check of potential researcher bias was also used due to its relevance to this study.

3.7.1 Verification of quantitative data.

The quantitative data used in this study has played a complementary role to the qualitative data. The researcher does not seek to claim that the findings of this study are generalisable or necessarily transferable to other contexts. Thus, the threshold for verification of the use of the quantitative data is confined to the accuracy of the calculations used and the size of the sample involved. Section 3.5.4 above sets out the range of statistical calculations used and how the *p*-value measurement was applied to determine the extent of the statistical significance. Where applicable, examples of the statistical analysis have been included to accompany commentary on the findings. Additionally, representative samples of tables and related calculations are provided in Appendix C, and the full suite of tables and calculations are accessible through links provided in this appendix.

3.7.2 Potential researcher bias.

Potential researcher bias was recognised as an important challenge to the trustworthiness of this research. As a practitioner in the field, it was inevitable that the researcher would bring to the study existing views and propositions that had the potential to influence the course of the study at many levels. It was important, therefore, that this potential bias was recognised and managed throughout the research process. The potential of researcher bias was managed in the following six ways: first, through supervision, where research supervisors were able to challenge the researcher on the issue of bias at each stage of

the research process. Second, through the use of peer debriefing and support where teachers working in the field, as well as those undertaking observations, had the opportunity to question processes and challenge potential bias. Third, through member checking where research participants had the opportunity to review the records of the data for accuracy (Creswell, 2007, 2012; Padgett, 2008). Fourth, through the validation process used with the introduction of additional questions to confirm the reliability of the preliminary findings. Fifth, through return visits to participating schools where preliminary findings were discussed with teachers. Sixth, through the acknowledgement and explanation of this potential bias, as set out in chapter one, thereby allowing the reader to assess its effect on the study.

3.7.3 Prolonged engagement.

In this study, the processes of data gathering took place over four months. This period was determined principally by the availability of the participants during their senior year of secondary school. The repetition of the cycles of data gathering through each of the phases in each of the three schools allowed for progressive analysis to take place and for emerging themes to be taken into account, thereby informing subsequent phases of the data collection.

In addition to the four months of work involved in the formal data collection process, additional time was spent with data collection in the pilot study in the preceding year. The use of the pilot study and the period between it and the formal data collection phases meant that the fieldwork stretched out over almost 16 months with a considerable intervening period to allow for the refinement of data collection instruments and reflection on emerging themes.

Additionally, after the data had been analysed the preliminary findings were discussed with leaders and mission personnel at the participating schools to allow for

questioning and comment. To facilitate this process, a feedback instrument was developed for use in these return visits to schools. The comments collected in this process provided another layer of data to be considered. Thus, from the initial contact with the pilot study, through the formal data gathering process and the return visit to schools, the period of engagement stretched to over two years.

3.7.4 Triangulation.

Triangulation of data was used to develop precision in the analysis of the findings identified in the data. This triangulation occurred in a number of different ways. First, through the intersection of the different data gathering instruments, student surveys, teacher interviews, student group interviews and individual student interviews. The overlay of the different instruments addressing similar areas provided substantial confirmation of findings (Thomas, 2009) and the analysis of the quantitative data for statistical significance was able to confirm the validity of a number of important findings. Second, the comparison of the themes from one school to another provided some evidence of the strength of each theme beyond a single context. Third, the relationship of themes arising from the formal study to those identified in the pilot study added a further layer of confirmation and clarity. Fourth, the introduction of additional items into the survey and interviews for School C allowed for direct testing and validation of themes. Fifth, the process of returning to the schools before finalising the process of data analysis allowed for further checking and confirmation of findings.

Each participant school had at least one teacher who had an active involvement in the research in a site coordination role. These teachers also had a role in the development of the data gathering instruments, particularly in terms of the inclusion of school-based items and providing context for themes identified in the data. Some teachers from each school were

also interviewed as participants in the study, and these teachers were able to provide valuable input.

Return visits to each school were arranged to allow for a critical discussion of the findings with key school personnel as part of the validation process. These included Principals, Director of Mission, Religious Education Coordinators, Youth Ministry Coordinators and Mission Team members. All the people consulted in the return visits have particular responsibilities for the Catholic life and identity in the schools and therefore have high levels of interest and expertise in the focus of this research. In preparation for these return visits, a feedback instrument was constructed to allow teachers to respond to and comment on the preliminary findings. This instrument is included as Appendix D. During the return visits, teachers in each of the participating schools were able to view synopses of the data. These return visits provided a forum where questions could be asked, and points of interest discussed before the analysis of the data had been completed. Thus, the return visits served as an essential dimension of the triangulation of data. Through these distinctive forms of triangulation, it is clear that there is sufficient “corroborating evidence” (Creswell, 2007, p. 266) to support the findings of this study.

3.7.5 Member checking.

Each participant in the interview processes was provided with a transcript of his/her interview to verify the accuracy of the record. Additionally, return visits to the participating schools provided the opportunity for some teachers to comment on the interpretations of the data during the data analysis phase of the study. Member checking provided a vital method of ensuring that the voices of the participants have been heard in a way that is meaningful to them and consistent with their understanding. It is, therefore, a crucial element of the trustworthiness of the research.

3.7.6 Negative case analysis.

Another measure of the trustworthiness of this study is how contrary or disconfirming data were treated in the study and how this is conveyed in this report (Padgett, 2008). The notion of a negative case analysis emerges when the researcher is required to provide an analysis of data that seems to negate the identified themes or provide a contradictory voice to the themes that are recognised most strongly or consistently in the data. In this research, disconfirming data was evident in the responses of Alex, who presented views that were stridently critical of the perspectives held by others, particularly those holding religious beliefs. He says:

I don't want to give anyone offence, but I feel kinda sorry for people who have a constant desire for religion, 'cause I feel like, because they're missing something in life, they're missing something in themselves, so they look for something else, someone else to fill that gap.

This perspective stood out in contrast to the tone of acceptance of other perspectives, which strongly characterised the responses of other participants such as Shaun who echoes the views of the others in saying "everyone's entitled to their own belief. That's what part of being human is. You can believe whatever you want, just as long as you can back it up. You truly know what you believe and not some distorted view."

On the one hand, views such as those expressed by Alex are challenging to incorporate into the broader tone of responses. On the other hand, such contradictions sit quite well with the overall sense of the spirituality of young people, which is eclectic and self-styled without always having an internal consistency evident to the outsider (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006; Hughes, 2007b; Mason et al., 2007).

While it has not been possible to provide precise explanations for all of the points of unanticipated or disconfirming data, it is nevertheless important to recognise its existence and to provide whatever insight is possible through its careful analysis.

3.7.7 Audit trail.

The quality of the audit trail provided helps determine the degree to which the findings of the study can be relied upon and regarded as an authentic interpretation of the data gathered (Creswell, 2012). To this end, detailed records of each aspect of the research process have been maintained. The process of development of the data gathering instruments has been clearly explained, and the final instruments have been provided as an appendix to this study. Each survey response has been stored as have all audio files from interviews, along with their written transcripts. Samples pages of coding have been included for the reader and comprehensive records of all coded documents have been kept on file. Moreover, documentation provided in Appendix B shows the progress from initial open coding through subsequent stages of axial coding and selective coding. All calculations used in the statistical analysis of quantitative data has also been stored for access as needed. These are provided through Appendix C. This documentation provides an audit trail so that each claim in the research conclusions can be traced back to the interpretation placed on particular data. The data management and coding practices set out in Section 3.5 ensured that the audit trail is clear and detailed.

3.8 Ethical issues

In the course of this study, the following ethical issues were anticipated: the personal involvement of the researcher; provision of voluntary participation; informed consent; potential harm to participants; anonymity; and confidentiality (Berg & Lune, 2014; Merriam, 2014). The issues were appropriately managed in the ways set out below.

3.8.1 Personal involvement of the researcher.

Concerning the personal involvement, it is noted that the researcher's school was not involved in the study. Further, no school at which the researcher has previously worked took part in the study. Students participating in the study have not had any prior relationship with the researcher and teachers were not in any direct working relationship with the researcher beyond the research work itself.

The researcher's own experience and reasons for undertaking this study have been explicitly stated, and careful validation of themes through triangulation have been undertaken to ensure that the researcher's perspective has not unduly influenced the findings.

3.8.2 Voluntary participation and informed consent.

All participants were invited to take part in the study to ensure that their involvement was voluntary. Information was provided about the nature of the study and the potential time demands before participants were asked to volunteer. Participants were informed that they could choose not to respond to any particular question and that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time. All participants in interviews were required to complete a written consent form. Student participants were required to sign an agreement to participate, and the signed consent of their parents was also required. Information and consent forms are included in Appendix E.

3.8.3 Risk of harm to participants.

Given that the subject matter of this research was non-controversial, it was anticipated that participants would not be exposed to any significant risk of harm. Nevertheless, to ensure that follow up support was available, school counsellors were briefed

about the research and participants were advised to see the counsellor if they experienced any distress as a consequence of participation in this research.

3.8.4 Confidentiality.

Confidentiality of participants was ensured by removing any actual names from the data gathered and using codes and pseudonyms instead. Each participant was allocated a unique code. This code was then recorded on the data collected from that individual and then stored separately in secured environments. Where vignettes of participant responses have been used in this report, pseudonyms have been used to maintain confidentiality.

3.8.5 Anonymity.

Generic descriptions of school communities have been used without any precise identifying feature, and no specific information has been included in the study that can directly identify one of the participating schools.

3.9 Limitations

The study has been limited to the experiences of students in the senior cohort of three Catholic schools in two neighbouring dioceses in NSW, and accordingly, the researcher does not claim that the findings of this study are generalisable or necessarily transferable to another context.

Further, the study is limited to the experience of senior students in their final year of secondary school in order to provide an endpoint and retrospective reflection on their experience. In doing so, provision has been made for reflection on the most complete set of experiences from within the cohort. Further limits have been placed on the participation of school personnel in the study so that only those directly involved with the initiatives and

activities relating to the goals of developing spirituality have taken part in the study. This was done to elicit the appropriate expert information and observations only possible through the knowledge and experience of these personnel.

This study was also limited by the willingness and capacity of participants to articulate their experience truthfully and coherently as well as their capacity to articulate their perspectives on spirituality. This limitation has been addressed by the use of interview strategies designed to put the participant at ease and facilitate honest and open communication.

The use of multiple data gathering instruments and the capacity for triangulation of data as described in 3.7.3 served to enhance the understanding of the experience as told by participants and assisted in gaining a strong sense of the expressions of spirituality and the relevant influences as articulated by the participating students.

3.10 Overview of Research Design

This study follows a complementary theoretical framework drawing together interpretivist and positivist paradigms through a mixed methods approach (Figure 3.1). Data were gathered from each of three participating schools using student surveys, teacher interviews, student group interviews and individual student interviews.

Qualitative data analysis was undertaken progressively during the data collection phase using the constant comparative method (Figure 3.2). Quantitative data were analysed for statistical significance. Data from each school were analysed independently and in comparison with data from the other participating schools. In order to enhance the trustworthiness of the research, triangulation of the data was used in conjunction with collegial feedback, participant checking of data, return school visits and acknowledgement of

the potential impact of researcher bias. Figure 3.3 provides a graphic representation of the research design.

A range of ethical considerations was managed in the course of this study. These included the personal involvement of the researcher, the voluntary nature of participation, obtaining informed consent, guarding against any harm to participants and ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of those involved (Berry et al., 2011).

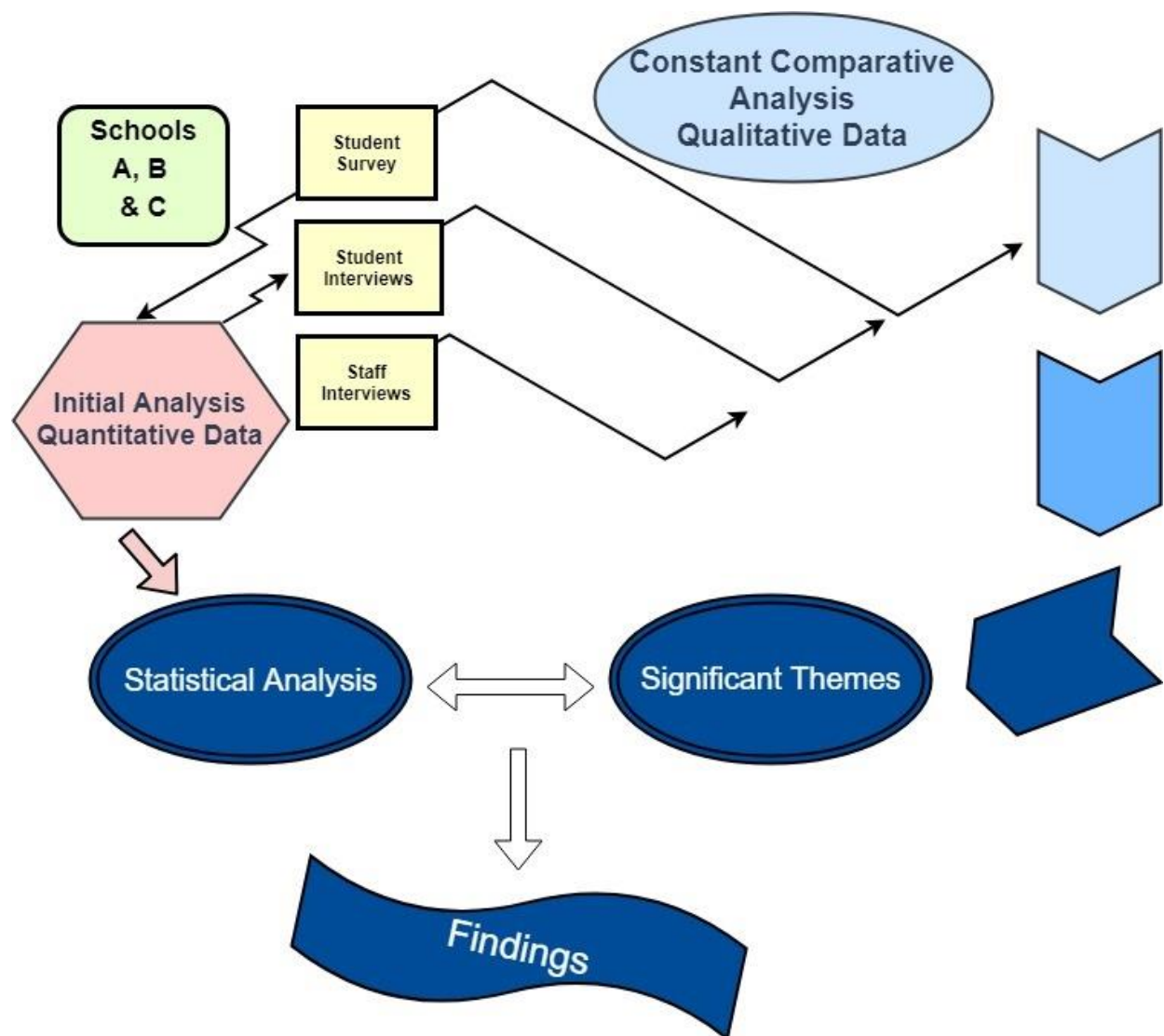


Figure 3.3. Overview of research design.

Chapter Four: Findings

4.1 Overview

The chapter sets out the main themes found in the data. These themes are presented in response to the three major research questions:

1. How do senior students at Catholic schools express spirituality?
2. How committed are senior students at Catholic schools to these expressions of spirituality?
3. How do senior students at Catholic schools evaluate the influences on the development of their spirituality?

This study has identified that students express spirituality predominantly as an acceptance or rejection, partially or completely, of their family religious tradition. Six important elements have been recognised in the responses of students which characterise these expressions. Commitment to spirituality was found to be moderate with considerable variation according to spirituality profiles. Influences on spirituality were most prominently found in the broader social context rather than in the school setting.

When presenting the findings concerning expressions of spirituality, three specific terms will be used. The term expression of spirituality is used to refer to the spirituality of an individual participant as articulated in the responses of that student. The term element is used to explain a particular characteristic of an expression of spirituality. The data show that the expression of the spirituality of each participant has several elements contributing to it. Thus, it can be said that an individual's expression of spirituality might include elements such as personal experience, individualism and self-construction.

Additionally, it is recognised that while each expression of spirituality is unique to an individual participant, there are, nevertheless, similarities among these. When discussing groups of students with similar perspectives on spirituality, the term profile is used. For example, one group of students will be discussed according to a secular spirituality profile, while another group will be discussed according to a religious spirituality profile.

In order to address the three research questions, the findings have been arranged into three corresponding areas. First, the elements contributing to the students' expressions of spirituality; second, the commitment to their expressions of spirituality; and third, the influences contributing to their expressions of spirituality, including the impact of school-based factors.

The analysis of elements contributing to expressions of spirituality draws primarily on the qualitative analysis of interview data and the open responses to survey questions. These data provide evidence of how the student participants are constructing meaning for themselves in the light of their personal experience. Quantitative data has been used in a complementary way to determine whether the patterns found in the qualitative data were also evident in responses of the broader group of survey respondents. The analysis of data regarding the commitment to the expressions of spirituality also began with qualitative analysis while, in this context, quantitative data were used to complement the analysis of the qualitative data to provide a more complete picture of the participants' commitment to spirituality.

The analysis of data regarding influences on spirituality began with the initial analysis of quantitative data to help determine the focus of interview questions and then moved to an analysis of the qualitative data. Statistical analysis of quantitative data was then used to determine the strength of different influences on the expressions of spirituality. This

statistical analysis was particularly crucial in determining the relative importance of school-based factors in comparison with broader social factors.

Section 4.2 outlines the findings related to expressions of spirituality. Section 4.3 presents the findings concerning the commitment to these expressions of spirituality, while the findings pertaining to the influences on these expressions of spirituality are found in sections 4.4 and 4.5. Section 4.6 sets out the data arising from the validation processes used.

4.2 The main expressions of spirituality among the students

This study found that the expressions of spirituality among participating students are characterised by six distinctive elements: Experiential and self-constructed spirituality; Personal, individual and self-reliant spirituality; Inclusive spirituality; Fluid and adaptable spirituality; Religiously referenced spirituality; and literally expressed spirituality.

The expressions of spirituality identified in the data are varied. In the open coding process, 147 codes were identified, each reflecting one aspect of the expression of spirituality identified (see Appendix B Coding Samples). Subsequent axial coding determined 39 categories, each representing a distillation of common themes found among the original 147 codes. The further process of selective coding reviewed each of the 39 categories and produced the six main elements contributing to the expressions of spirituality outlined below (see Appendix B Coding Samples).

The coding processes used are illustrated below through the example of “Experiential and self-constructed spirituality,” which is one of the six elements contributing to expressions of spirituality identified in the data. Data from student interviews highlighted personal deliberation on the part of the students in choosing what they believed and how those beliefs fitted into their lives. These comments were coded during the open coding

process. Following the open coding, the axial coding process identified that many of the coded comments conveyed a strong sense of agency and determination to construct a spirituality that appropriately reflected the view of the world and the approach to life of the participant. Thus, from among the 147 codes, some categories were established, which conveyed the idea of a self-constructed spirituality (see Appendix B Coding Samples). Among the 39 categories arising in the axial coding process, the sense of an experiential and self-constructed spirituality was prominent in at least 26 cases. Finally, the selective coding process drew together strands from these categories reflective of this element under the heading of experiential and self-constructed spirituality. Similar processes were used to determine the six elements through which the findings are presented.

The six elements are:

1. Experiential and self-constructed spirituality
2. Personal, individual and self-reliant spirituality
3. Inclusive spirituality
4. Fluid and adaptable spirituality
5. Religiously referenced spirituality
6. Literally expressed spirituality

Further detail of the coding processes can be seen in Appendix B.

In the following sections the citations included from student interviews are attributed through the use of a pseudonym, while survey respondents are identified according to one of the following labels – SSF (Female, Single-Sex School), SSM (Male, Single-Sex School),

CoedF (Female, Co-educational School) CoedM (Male, Co-educational School). The number included in the label indicates the participant's survey number from that cohort.

4.2.1 Experiential and self-constructed spirituality.

The data frequently reflect spirituality as something constructed by the individual with an integral connection to their personal experience. This sense of agency is evident even when there is close alignment to a religious tradition, such as Catholic Christianity.

The experiential and self-constructed element of the expression of spirituality is seen in James' observation: "You are your own person at the end of the day, you're gonna be the one living with it". Similarly, Joshua, a student with clearly defined beliefs, has a sense of constructing or fashioning his expression of spirituality. He says: "I'm able to connect dots, and I don't have to believe in everything that's told to me. I can choose what to believe in and justify it, and all of that stuff." This idea is also found in the comments of one survey respondent who identifies with a secular perspective. She placed considerable emphasis on being able to choose what she believes. She wrote: "I decided to choose to become an atheist after a long time of consideration and understanding all forms and religious perspectives as well as scientific explanation." (SSF#59).

The experiential dimension of this self-constructed spirituality can be best explained by focusing on two opposite perspectives. First, in the case of Chantelle, the affirming and nurturing experience of growing up in the Catholic Christian environment has shaped her approach to life. This has led her to equate spirituality with an affirming and nurturing dimension where God will sustain her through all things and guide her lovingly onto a path of wellbeing and contentment. A contrasting perspective is found in Chiara's story. Her experience of encountering difficulty and feeling abandoned has led her to the perspective that she is alone in the human struggle and that she must develop her resilience and strength

of character herself. She explained the circumstances that led her to choose a secular perspective:

If there was a God, I do not believe he would've been treating people who, and not just me, but people who did not deserve those things to happen the way that everything panned out ... the only thing that got me through those times was my efforts and my ability to be resilient. My attempts to fix everything that was going on around me or me looking after everybody else because everything was just going horribly awful. And it wasn't a God that got me through that, it was me.

Chiara's secular perspective contains strong echoes of a sense of being on her own and having to survive through her resilience, which is now a key motif in her approach to life.

Further evidence of this experiential and self-constructed element of spirituality is found among students who have substantially adopted the religious tradition of their upbringing. Siobhan is one such student who, despite indicating that she had mostly adopted the beliefs of her family, found that she was now looking critically at her expression of spirituality. She says:

I'm quite open to incorporating other religious beliefs into my own life. I don't wanna just take the good bits and kind of leave the rest, and just be in my own little thing and be a part of each religion, but I think there's definitely merit in a lot of the other religious teachings. And especially, because I have a few issues with the Catholic teachings, it's interesting to see other perspectives and learn about the other ones.

Within this questioning, the personal choice highlights Siobhan's sense of agency even though, in her case, the matter is not concluded.

Finally, this experiential and self-constructed spirituality is evident in the responses of those who are the least certain of their perspective. James affirms the importance of being able to construct beliefs according to his own experience. He says: “If you want to believe in something you’re gonna believe in it and if you believe in it fully that’s how you become connected to it.” This is similar to Shaun’s perspective, he says: “Everyone’s entitled to their own belief. That’s what part of being human is, you can believe whatever you want, just as long as you can back it up. You truly know what you believe and not some distorted view.”

Whether viewed from the perspective of those with firmly held beliefs or those who are less certain, and whether from a religious expression of spirituality or a secular perspective, there is strong evidence highlighting the element of an experiential and self-constructed expression of spirituality.

4.2.2 Personal, individual and self-reliant spirituality.

Participants consistently saw spirituality as a personal and individual matter with the evidence from the data highlighting their individuality in the process of making meaning. Frances says that: “beliefs are very much a personal thing as well for an individual” and Stewart echoes this idea: “Belief’s a more personal thing that you can follow for yourself. You don’t have to go to church and whatever. It’s more individual.” Although closely following the religious allegiance of her family, Sophia nevertheless confirms the personal nature of spirituality; she says: “Belief’s always a personal thing, but I guess I’ve been brought up to believe in one true God, Jesus Christ died for us, the Holy Spirit. It’s just been how I’ve been brought up.” Similarly, Serena has adopted the beliefs of Catholic Christianity but with a personal nuance. She says: “I do believe in the Holy Spirit and Jesus and all that. But I do believe that beliefs are a personal thing as well. So, in my own faith, there’s some Christian beliefs that I value more than others.” Some students highlighted the aspect of

personal choice by rejecting the idea that someone else could tell them what to believe. James is one such example; he says: “It’s ridiculous to think that someone can tell you what religion is and drill it into you.”

As well as the element of individual and personal choice, spirituality is regarded as a very private matter and is characterised by self-reliance. Spirituality is seldom spoken about among peers, and many of the students are not aware of the spirituality of their friends. Anthony explains that: “It’s tucked away, like hidden ... no one even talks about it.” In some cases, interview participants commented that it was only in the group interviews that they had come to learn about the spirituality of their peers.

Notwithstanding the self-reliant element of spirituality expressed by students in this study, there was no evidence of any reluctance to speak about these perspectives in the group interviews where participants were invited to share their perspective in the presence of their peers. It was observed that participants entered into the process readily and seemed to be quite comfortable in sharing their perspectives. Similarly, comments made by students about the experience of sharing these perspectives on their school retreat provides evidence that such conversations are welcomed and enjoyed by many of these students. Joanne spoke about how affirming this was for her. She says:

We were talking about all our thoughts on, ‘Does God cause the good things, the bad things?’ and it just kind of reassured me where I was in my position with God ... I found it interesting, the fact that for a lot of them we were pretty scattered.

The idea that students do not commonly know their friends’ views about spirituality is borne out in the quantitative data from the student surveys, which show differences in a student’s spirituality when this is compared to that of his/her friend. Many students have their

closest friends among their school cohort, yet as shown in Table 4.1, they saw their friends as less religious and more secular than themselves.

Table 4.1 shows a marked difference between the student's own spirituality and their perception of their friend's spirituality. Forty-three per cent of students saw their friend as neither religious nor spiritual, whereas only 27% of the students identified themselves as neither religious nor spiritual. A similar disparity is evident for the item "more religious than spiritual" where the self-identification of the students shows a percentage almost double that of their perception of their friend.

Table 4.1

Student's spirituality (n=235) compared with perception of friend's spirituality (n=246) shown as a percentage.

Option	Self % n=235	Friend % n=246
Not religious and not spiritual	27	40
Equally religious and spiritual	21	20
Religious but not spiritual	6	7
Spiritual but not religious	9	13.5
More spiritual than religious	18	11.5
More religious than spiritual	9	5
Total	100	100

The data in Table 4.1 confirms that students in this research regarded their friends as relatively less religious and relatively more secular than themselves. Given that many of

these friends were also, very likely, participants in this research, there is some quantitative evidence that students are drawing unreliable conclusions about the spirituality of their friends. This complements the evidence from the qualitative data about the absence of conversation about spirituality among friends.

4.2.3 Inclusive spirituality.

Aligned to the element of spirituality as a personal and individual matter was an emphasis on acceptance of the perspectives held by others, thus highlighting the inclusive element of expressions of spirituality. While students are constructing an approach to spirituality that resonates with their own worldview and personal experience, they are also open to others holding different perspectives and are respectful of these alternative views. This inclusive approach was evident in the comments of almost all interview participants. The only exception was the case of Alex, who expressed stridently anti-religious views and spoke with contempt for those who held religious perspectives. He says:

I don't want to give anyone offence, but I feel kinda sorry for people who have a constant desire for religion, 'cause I feel like, because they're missing something in life, they're missing something in themselves, so they look for something else, someone else to fill that gap.

However, Alex's views contrast with those of other interview participants who expressed acceptance of different perspectives. For example, Adrian says: "I don't have anything against people with religion, as long as they don't really bring me into it."

The inclusive element was expressed with similar commitment regardless of the individual's perspective on spirituality. Joanne's comment is indicative of this, reflecting on

her school retreat, she says: “It’s nice to think that everyone has their own view like that. And everyone accepted that. I think it was a good, comfortable place.”

The data confirm that for most of these emerging adults, there is no universal or definitive approach to spirituality to which all aspire. Even those who hold confirmed religious or secular beliefs see these as suited to themselves but not necessarily to others. Recognition of the personal and individual element of spirituality saw participants reflecting an inclusive and accepting perspective on the views of others. In contrast, coercive, narrow and judgemental views on spirituality were sharply criticised. Overall, the rejection of these narrow, judgemental and coercive approaches was coded 65 times during the analysis of interview data as can be seen in the following examples. Hannah rejects judgemental aspects of her Religious Education class: “I think it turns people away ... Especially when they are harsh and strict in their teaching,” a view which is echoed by Stewart: “people see all these views and everything that they’re pushing out ... It goes to show, I think, that some people, when they disagree, and it pushes them away from religion.” Caterina makes the same point from the opposite perspective; she says: “We can see all the other faiths, and everything, around the world, and not just being restricted to that one view.”

In a broader context, Julia refers to exclusive and judgmental perspectives on religion, observing that “there’s lots of hate and there’s lots of judgement,” whereas Lisa reflects a more inclusive approach found among her peers: “I have more of an understanding through actually knowing people of different faiths.”

4.2.4 Fluid and adaptable spirituality.

Interviewees frequently explained that spirituality is a fluid and adaptable notion rather than something fixed or static. The close connection between the construction of spirituality and the meaning taken from life experience leads inevitably to the idea that

spirituality may change as new experiences are encountered and processed among these young people. Stewart sums this up in the following terms: “It’s always changing and evolving. Every new book that I read or new concept that I discover changes it and shapes it into something new. It is ever-changing.” Similarly, Caitlin says:

It’s always changing, I’m not gonna lie. When I was younger it was very religious, and then early years of high school it was tending towards more secular. But as I’ve gotten into my senior years I’ve sort of really enjoyed having that comfort in my life and really valued it. So I’d say I’m tipping back more towards religious than secular. But I’d say it’s always changing for me.

While this fluid and adaptable element is not commonly found among those who have actively adopted or strongly rejected a religious style of spirituality, it is nevertheless a crucial dimension of the spirituality of the majority of participants (60%) who occupy the middle ground between these two points on the continuum. In Oscar’s case, he is torn between what he would like to believe and what he feels is more realistic. He says: “I feel that ... I don’t think there would be a heaven, but I’d like to think there’d be a heaven. So, I don’t actually think there is, but I’d really like to think that.”

Similarly, Vanessa expresses a lack of certainty in her approach. She says: “I’m kind of on the fence. I feel like there’s not sufficient proof.” Peter highlights the fluidity of his perspective with the observation that circumstances can lead to either a consolidation or a threat to the perspective on spirituality. He says:

When serious things happen to you, it deepens your understanding of the world and anything that might exist that we can’t see, like God or whatever. And when serious things happen to us, we can either gain faith or lose faith, depending on the circumstance.

This fluid element is also evident, though to a lesser degree, in the comments of participants who identify as secular and religious. Frances' reflection provides an example of this fluid and adaptable element from the religious perspective. She says: "although I may do things in my life 'cause that's how I was taught, I feel like I'm questioning whether I believe in them or not." Leslie, who holds a secular perspective, is nevertheless open to what the future might bring for her. She says: "I'm interested in spirituality, not so much religion but spirituality, and I love learning about it, and I can't say what I believe now is what I'm gonna believe in five years."

While the fluid and adaptable elements of spirituality are evident among many of participants in this study, it is not true of all participants. Chantelle holds a definite perspective on spirituality and is convinced that this will not change in the future. She says:

I know for the rest of my life, I'll be a Catholic. And it's partly because of how I've been brought up and different influences on my life, but also because that's what I believe. And my religion is an important part of my life and I think I ... I think I will remain that way for the rest of my life.

Alex is also quite definite but from a secular perspective. He says: "I can't have the ability to believe in something that allows for suffering in this world."

4.2.5 Religiously referenced spirituality.

The evidence in the interview data indicates that in the minds of the participating students, spirituality and religion are seen as virtually the same thing. Thus, the construction of their perspective on spirituality is a consequence of the extent of their acceptance or rejection of different aspects of religion. There is little evidence of any students constructing

a personal perspective on spirituality that is not substantially referenced against a religious perspective.

Among those who hold a secular perspective, there is a sense of rejection of aspects of religion with little indication of a positive choice to adopt a secular perspective for its own worth. There is a similar dynamic evident among those who hold a religious perspective, although, the emphasis is obviously on the acceptance of the religious perspective as a meaningful expression rather than its rejection as per the secular perspective. James is a student who has accepted much of his Catholic Christian upbringing and while not a regular churchgoer, he connects his spirituality to the Christian community. He says: “I do think I’m a believer ... I do believe in God. I probably don’t go to church just as much as I should.” A similar connection to Catholic Christianity is found in Leslie’s reflection; however, unlike James, she has chosen to reject this element. She says:

I’d always questioned it, but a large part of it was probably being in a Catholic school and learning about all the beliefs and the morals and judgements, and I really didn’t wanna subscribe to a lot of that. I thought that we could be more self-governed.”

Jacinta is another who connects her spirituality to her religious upbringing. She says:

I do believe in God, and I think it is important to go to church, but I have a lot of conflicted ideals about how what the church represents, so it’s like I don’t know if I wanna be a part of that, but I still wanna be part of the religion and God.

There is also a more nuanced version of this element evident among those who identified with either a non-defined spiritual or defined spiritual perspective. Joshua has a defined spiritual perspective. He has sought to fashion his own perspective because he sees religion as being challenged by scientific knowledge. He says: “I do believe in God and

everything, but I like having proof, and I like being rational.” He also has gradually come to reject the value of religious ritual, such as Eucharist, which he now finds to lack meaning, and he wants to disassociate himself from some church teachings related to morality, which he regards as “controversial.” Ella is another example of someone who is looking critically at the Catholic Christian perspective. She says:

I believe in God, but I don’t necessarily believe in everything that comes with it. I feel like there’s something higher, and there’s something more to what there is here. But yeah, I’m not really sure what it is, or ... And I don’t know if I necessarily believe ... Jesus Christ is the Son of God who died for us. It’s not that I don’t believe all that, but I guess it just doesn’t really relate to me.

Such patterns are less evident among the group who identify themselves as non-defined spiritual. In many cases, their perspectives do not lead to any firm conclusions. There were some examples, however, such as with Shaun where the processes of discernment had followed a similar pattern to those of Joshua’s in the preceding paragraph. Shaun had grown up in a family who held strong religious perspectives; however, Shaun found the experience of attending church alienating and resented being required to attend. In part, his current perspective reflects a rejection of this religious practice. He also found challenges in his scientific learning, which he regarded as a contradiction to the religious perspective. He says: “When I was a lot younger, I tried to kind of mix them,” however, he has come to be sceptical about religious perspectives on matters such as creation and evolution. Finally, for Shaun, the rejection of a religious perspective is fuelled by the value he places on acceptance and open-mindedness, which he finds lacking in some religious people. He says: “I have met some incredibly religious people in the past, and quite a few of them, sometimes, they’re really close-minded.” While Shaun has substantially rejected a religious perspective, he has

not rejected the idea of spirituality and describes himself as a spiritual person but not from a religious perspective. He says: “I’m spiritual but I don’t really believe in the whole Catholicism and stuff like that. Don’t follow it that closely.”

While there are examples of students who offered particular perspectives on spirituality that were not closely referenced to a religious perspective, these were not very common and mostly arose among students who identified with new age perspectives. For example, Elizabeth spoke of her belief in “natural healing things like Chakras, Law of Attraction, all that kind of thing,” while Vanessa said: “I believe in reincarnation and stuff like that ... Believe in Tarot cards and all of that.” These examples notwithstanding, it is difficult to find instances where students have chosen a perspective on spirituality that is not closely referenced against a religious perspective.

4.2.6 Literally expressed spirituality.

The data indicate that some students have a literal understanding of religious ideas and a simple form of religious literacy. This element comes to light in two ways. First, as students comment on their developing scientific understanding and its incompatibility with a religious understanding and second, in the meaning they take from challenging personal experiences, such as the death of a loved one. For some students, these two areas, viewed through the lens of a literal understanding, have contributed to their decision to reject a religious perspective on spirituality.

The first example of a literal understanding is found in response to the impact of scientific knowledge for some students. In over 30 instances coded in the data, scientific knowledge was cited as a factor that challenged the student and led them to question their religious understanding. This was evident in the context of scientific theories of evolution where direct contradictions were seen between the scientific theories and the Genesis creation

accounts. Students consistently saw this as an area of conflict which they were not able to reconcile. Alex, for example, expressed the view that “Science is meant to contradict religion’s views and give us actual grounds to build up understanding.” All but one of the students who discussed this issue saw it as a conflict between theories of evolution and creationist theories. None of the students seemed to be aware that Catholic teaching does not support creationist accounts and is not in conflict with theories of evolution overall. In almost all instances for students in this group, scientific learning was regarded as more convincing. There was only one exception found to this pattern where Joanne had decided to affirm a biblical creationist belief despite her study of evolution. She says: “I believe in the Genesis story. I accept that we have to learn that (evolution) and that’s a theory some people believe in, but I believe in the Genesis story, myself.”

The lack of critical religious literacy evident in this context has meant students in this group are, in effect, working out of a literal religious understanding, which in turn leads them to reject a religious perspective based on its incompatibility with their scientific learning. The data show this phenomenon consistently with only one interviewee providing an alternative perspective. Caitlin says “I’m trying to find that balance between science and religion and whether to believe it literally, or whether to take it in like a metaphorical sort of sense.” However, Caitlin remains tentative in her reflection, which she describes as a personally driven search for balance. Even though she is beginning to ask critical questions in her reflection, Caitlin nevertheless does not show any understanding of Catholic teachings on the themes of creation and evolution.

A second aspect that demonstrates a literal understanding is the response to challenging life experiences, which had caused participants to question the nature and the existence of God. Encountering challenging personal experiences has affirmed spirituality for

some and led to its abandonment for others. In both these cases, there is a literal understanding of religious ideas present. When life experiences go well students are affirmed and identify God as helping them, guiding them, or blessing them. When things go badly, they question whether God is as benevolent as they had imagined or whether God exists at all.

In the interviews, some participants spoke about challenging experiences in areas such as family breakdown, health and relationships. They spoke about looking to God for help and praying but became disillusioned because circumstances had not turned out in their favour, and they were left to cope with the difficulties themselves. Benjamin says:

I don't believe because I went through a period of time where my grandmother was sick and I prayed many times for her to get well, and my whole family did as well, and she still passed away then I questioned myself about why do these diseases, what did my grandmother do to deserve all her suffering.

Other students also saw the relationship between positive experiences and their spirituality. Peter, for example, says: “when a family member's sick or something, and then they just get better suddenly, that deepens your faith.”

Regardless of whether life's circumstances have been favourable or not, there is evidence that many of these students hold, or have held, a literal religious understanding resulting in underdeveloped levels of religious literacy. There was no evidence of students reflecting on and relating to an image of an incarnate God, a teaching which is at the heart of Catholic theology; instead, they articulated a literal understanding, which lacked the depth to deal meaningfully with challenging experiences in life.

4.2.7 Expressions of spirituality summary.

The data have shown considerable breadth in the expressions of spirituality; however, as indicated above, there are some common elements that were found among participants. The most prevalent of these were the elements that related to the individual construction of spirituality based on an interpretation of personal experience. Student responses expressed respect and acceptance of the views of others and a rejection of narrow, judgemental and coercive views. While most students spoke with confidence and clarity about their spirituality, they also conveyed the sense that it was adaptable and likely to change in the future. Spirituality was seen as a private matter, seldom discussed with others, and interview participants referenced their perspective on spirituality to that of Catholic Christianity. Further, as students explained their perspectives on spirituality, it was evident that many held a literal understanding of religious truths and exhibited low levels of religious literacy.

The data collection instruments provided a structure for students to align themselves with a range of spirituality profiles. Tables 4.2 and 4.3 show the alignment of the student participants with the four spirituality profiles used as well as data on gender and school type. The data show that those aligned with the religious spirituality profile were the smallest of the four (16.6% of survey respondents). The largest group were those who had a non-defined spiritual perspective (31.9% of survey respondents). The second and third largest were the defined spiritual profile group and the secular profile group (28.1% and 23.4% of survey respondents respectively). Interviewees followed a broadly similar pattern with non-defined spiritual and defined-spiritual being the largest two profile groups. The notable difference among the interview participants was the more substantial proportion of students aligning with a religious profile of spirituality (18.9% compared to 16.6% of survey respondents) and

the smaller proportion of students identifying with a secular spirituality profile (18.9% compared to 23.4% of survey respondents).

From an overall perspective, it is noted that those aligned with the religious profile of spirituality are few in number compared to other groups and, in particular, are only half the proportion of those with a non-defined spiritual profile. Similarly, those aligned with a secular spirituality profile are relatively few in comparison with other groups, comprising less than a quarter of the cohort (23.4%). These observations are important given the findings noted in section 4.2.5, which show that students are expressing their spirituality as either an acceptance or rejection, partial or complete of Catholic Christianity. The majority of students (60%) have identified themselves as somewhere between the two poles on a continuum between complete acceptance or complete rejection of Catholic Christianity.

Table 4.2

Spirituality profile of interview participants n=37

	Secular	Non- Defined Spiritual	Defined Spiritual	Religious	Total
Female (Single-sex School)	4	2	4	3	13
Female (Co-ed School)	0	3	2	3	8
Male (Single-sex School)	3	4	3	0	10
Male (Co-ed School)	0	3	2	1	6
Total	7 (18.9%)	12 (32.4%)	11 (29.7%)	7 (18.9%)	37* (99.9%)

Note: Owing to rounding to one decimal point total percentage = 99.9

Table 4.3

Spirituality profile of survey respondents n=235

	Secular	Non- Defined Spiritual	Defined Spiritual	Religious	Total
Female (Single-sex School)	8	14	22	16	60
Female (Co-ed School)	10	14	19	9	52
Male (Single-sex School)	21	33	18	8	80
Male (Co-ed School)	16	14	7	6	43
Total	55 (23.4%)	75 (31.9%)	66 (28.1%)	38 (16.6%)	235 (100%)

4.3 Commitment to spirituality

4.3.1 Overview.

Analysis of the data pertaining to commitment to spirituality showed moderate levels of commitment based on limited amounts of deliberate engagement with spirituality on the part of student participants. However, when viewed through the lens of the spirituality profiles considerable variation was evident both in terms of the extent of commitment and the basis on which such commitment was held.

Research question two focused on the participants' commitment to spirituality. The findings concerning the commitment to spirituality draw on both quantitative survey data and qualitative data from interviews and responses to open survey questions. Survey data show that a small number of respondents had given "a lot of thought" (Survey Question Seven) to this area of their lives (28.9%) and similarly few were found to have reached a definitive perspective, which they expected to retain throughout their adult lives (29.8%). As noted in section 4.2.3, there were indications in both the qualitative and quantitative data that spirituality was seen as a relatively fluid concept that was open to change in light of new experiences.

The following examples are illustrative of interview participants who are undecided and uncommitted. Frances expresses her uncertainty saying: "I think I'm still trying to find my spirituality." Similarly, Vanessa says: "I feel like I'm in a questionable stage, and I don't really know for sure ... I don't really know, but it makes sense to me that there would be something more." This lack of certainty is also found in Caterina's comment. She says: "Whether or not the spiritual world impacts on the real world, or whether there's an afterlife, that's what I don't really know." Further evidence of this lack of commitment is found with Julia who says: "I am involved and connected with spirituality, but I kinda sit back and have a look, and relax with my spirituality, I guess." Finally, David says: "I do believe that there is some kind of spiritual power in this world, though I do not believe in any specific God."

This general pattern of uncertain commitment to a fluid approach to spirituality masks the diversity of perspectives on these questions, as well as the considerable variations according to gender and variations according to the spirituality profile of the individual. To illustrate this diversity, the following sections will set out the findings on the commitment to spirituality through the different lenses of the four spirituality profiles used in the survey

previously noted in Section 4.1. Differing gender perspectives will also be discussed under each of the four headings below.

4.3.2 Commitment to the secular perspective.

As shown in Tables 4.2 and 4.3, of the 37 interview participants, seven identified most closely with the secular perspective (18.9%), which was less than the proportion noted in the survey responses (23.4%). This group was characterised by rejection or abandonment of other perspectives on spirituality, especially those associated with religion. Interview participants with a secular perspective showed conscious and deliberate choices leading them to their particular expression of spirituality. Accordingly, the commitment to a secular perspective was more definite than others, with this group reflecting a more purposeful and deliberate construction of spirituality than found among the other groups. The commitment of these students was often conveyed as being based on firm evidence, which they saw as being in line with the empirical sciences. Sebastian, for instance, bases his rejection of religious perspectives on the perceived conflict between religion and science: “Like there’s this proof for the Big Bang, there’s not (sic) proof for God creating the world ... Science proves that there was a Big Bang and that’s just how it is.” Thus, Sebastian is quite definite in his perspective. Interview participants identifying with the secular spirituality profile referred to definite processes of thought and deliberation at a higher rate than found in the other three groups. In most cases, they have settled on a particular perspective, having rejected elements of other perspectives, particularly religious elements. Adrian describes his decision to reject religious beliefs. He says: “Sort of stopped around the age of ... When I started high school, I stopped believing. I think my mind, it’s more open to other views of the world ... It’s my view on religion.”

When analysing the quantitative data, considerable differences were evident according to gender. Female students were less definite than their male counterparts in the perspective they hold; but, they indicated that they had given relatively more thought to the process of choosing this perspective than the males in this group (see Tables 4.4 and 4.5).

Tables 4.4 and 4.5 compare the secular spirituality profile group (Table 4.5) with the whole cohort of survey respondents (Table 4.4). Two sets of contrasting statements were proposed to determine how definite students were in their views on spirituality and how much thought they had given to this area.

Those aligning with a secular spirituality profile are more definite in their views (40.7%) than the overall group of survey respondents (29.8%). Additionally, these tables show that the students from the secular profile group had given relatively more thought to the idea of spirituality than the cohort overall (40.7% compared 28.9% overall). The opposite pairs of statements, however, show some divergence. Forty per cent of the cohort overall indicated that they had not made up their mind about spirituality compared to 22.2% of the secular spirituality profile group. There is also a divergence in the final statement with 37.5% of all survey respondents agreeing that they had not given much thought to spirituality, whereas 45.4% of the secular spirituality profile group agreed with this statement. This is in contrast to the inverse proportions who indicated that they had given “a lot of thought” to this area.

Table 4.4

Statement of commitment to spirituality. All respondents. Percentage agreement n=235

	Male %	Female %	Overall %
My spirituality is something I have reached a definite view about	32.5	26.7	29.8
My spirituality is something that I haven't really made up my mind about	39.7	40.5	40
My spirituality is something I have thought a lot about	28	51.2	28.9
My spirituality is something that I haven't really thought much about	45.8	28.2	37.5

Table 4.5

Statement of commitment to spirituality. Secular spirituality profile.

Percentage agreement n=55

	Male %	Female %	Overall %
My spirituality is something I have reached a definite view about	48.6	23.5	40.7
My spirituality is something that I haven't really made up my mind about	27	11.7	22.2
My spirituality is something I have thought a lot about	29.7	55.5	40.7
My spirituality is something that I haven't really thought much about	48.6	38.8	45.4

These data suggest that while the secular spirituality profile group is more definite in their views on spirituality than the cohort overall, a proportion of these have formed a view without having given much thought to the area. This divergence is most apparent among female survey respondents with 38.8% from the secular profile group, indicating that they had not thought much about spirituality. Whereas females in the overall group of survey respondents recorded a much lower level of agreement with this statement (28.2%).

4.3.3 Commitment to the non-defined spiritual perspective.

Those identifying with the non-defined spiritual profile constitute the largest of the four groups comprising 31% of survey respondents and 44% of interview participants. Tables 4.4. and 4.6 confirm that survey respondents identifying with a non-defined spiritual perspective were the least committed to their chosen perspective, with only 16% (compared to 29.8% overall) indicating that they had reached a definite view about spirituality. They have also given relatively less thought to the area of spirituality than those in other groups (24% compared to 28.9% overall).

Table 4.6

Statement of commitment to spirituality. Non-defined spiritual profile.

Percentage agreement n=75

	Male %	Female %	Overall %
My spirituality is something I have reached a definite view about	17	14.2	16
My spirituality is something that I haven't really made up my mind about	53	57.1	54.6
My spirituality is something I have thought a lot about	21.2	28.5	24
My spirituality is something that I haven't really thought much about	50	42.8	47.3

Table 4.6 shows the percentage agreement with statements about commitment to spirituality from the non-defined spiritual profile group. As noted above, only 16% of respondents agreed that they had reached a definite view about spirituality. This is contrasted with 40% from the secular profile group and 29.8% of respondents overall (see Tables 4.4 and 4.5). Table 4.6 also shows that 54.6% of this non-defined spiritual profile group had not made up their mind about spirituality, which is substantially higher than the 40% for all respondents shown in Table 4.4.

The interview participants from the non-defined spiritual group were primarily characterised as not knowing or not being sure about spirituality. Shaun reflected this uncertainty throughout his interview. He says:

Don't follow it that closely ... it just kind of makes you think about everything ...

It's kind of made me question whether they're actually being true Christians ... I tried to kind of mix them ... try to figure out how to mix both of them, stuff like that.

This questioning inevitably leads to a lack of attachment or commitment to an expression of spirituality. Benjamin finds himself constricted by a lack of certain proof. He says: "no one really knows this life, there's no real 100% truth so ... And I'm trying to find. I believe there's something there but I don't know what it is." While this group affirmed the belief that there must be something more than their mortal life, they had no particular sense about what this might be and what it might mean to them.

Notwithstanding the comparatively low levels of commitment to spirituality, interview participants identifying with the non-defined profile provided some evidence of a considered response to spirituality arising from their own experience. Rebekah shared her journey of questioning the Catholic beliefs of her parents and struggling with challenging experiences, which led to further questioning. She sums up the point she has reached by saying: "I think it's not necessarily a negative thing, but just looking for answers in a different place, maybe."

This non-defined spiritual profile group represents almost one-third of the participating students (31%). Almost half of this group (47.3%) indicated that they had not given much thought to their spirituality (see Table 4.6). Only 16% of this group indicated that they had reached a definite view about spirituality (see Table 4.6). Within this group, more females than males had thought a lot about spirituality (28.5% female – 21.2% male) while more males indicated that they had not given much thought to the area (50% male – 42.8% female).

Table 4.6 confirms that more than three-quarters of the non-defined spiritual profile group, the largest of the four spirituality profile groups, had not thought a lot about spirituality close to the end point of their time at a Catholic school.

4.3.4 Commitment to the defined spiritual perspective.

Indicative of the commitment found among the defined spiritual profile group, Siobhan reflects a process of wrestling with her spirituality. She says: “I kinda have a middle ground. I’m also quite spiritual, but also I do believe in God, in the Christian God, if you want to call it that. But at the same time, I am quite struggling with ... ”

The defined spiritual profile group is more diverse and eclectic than any of the other groups with a little under one-third of the interview participants and a little over one-quarter of the survey respondents identifying with this perspective (see Tables 4.2 and 4.3). There is a slightly higher representation of females among the interview participants from this group, six out of 11 and a similar proportion among the survey respondents. Within this group, the breadth of expression is so diverse that three sub-groups were identified. The first sub-group represents a small number of participants who identified themselves with aspects of new age spirituality. A second sub-group was classified owing to a very self-styled, personalised and often eclectic combination of different elements used to construct their spirituality. The third sub-group was made up of those whose spirituality substantially aligned with the Catholic Christian religious tradition but who had disassociated themselves with the Catholic Church for a variety of reasons. These ranged from ethical and doctrinal questions, to negative perceptions about religious personnel, to a sense of alienation with religious rituals. Caterina is a student who finds herself challenged by the inflexibility of Catholic Christianity as she feels that spirituality needs to be reflexive. She says that spirituality “has to be changing. Has to adapt. Can religion do that? Not really.” She has also found herself challenged by

important experiences that raise questions about the existence of God. She says: “If something bad happens, I question spirituality and say, Why would that happen? It doesn’t make sense. If it was God, or whatever, why would that happen?”

Consistent with the diversity within the group, the quantitative data shows there was considerable variety evident in the level of commitment people in this group held towards their chosen perspective. Overall, fewer than one in five of these survey respondents indicated that they had reached a definite view on spirituality (18.1%) and more than half said they had not made up their mind (50.7%). However, there are pronounced differences according to gender, with females much less likely to have reached a definite view than their male counterparts (14.6% female – 24% male). Conversely, in this group, females were almost twice as likely to have given more thought to this area than the males (53.6% female – 28% male). The data for this spirituality profile group are set out in Table 4.7.

The 18.1% of respondents in this defined spiritual profile group who held a definite view about spirituality is contrasted with 29.8% of respondents overall (see Table 4.4). There is also a divergence on the point of respondents not having made their mind up with Table 4.4, showing 40% of respondents overall compared to the 50.7% of this group shown in Table 4.7. The data show that students in the defined spiritual profile group are not firmly committed to their expression of spirituality and are relatively less committed than many of their peers (18.1% compared to 29.8% of all survey respondents). It is also clear that despite the absence of commitment, participants have given much thought to this area, relatively more so than many of their peers (43.9% compared with 28.9% of all survey respondents).

Table 4.7

Statement of commitment to spirituality. Defined spiritual profile.

Percentage agreement n=66

	Male %	Female %	Overall %
My spirituality is something I have reached a definite view about	24	14.6	18.1
My spirituality is something that I haven't really made up my mind about	45.8	53.6	50.7
My spirituality is something I have thought a lot about	28	53.6	43.9
My spirituality is something that I haven't really thought much about	44	24.3	32.5

4.3.5 Commitment to the religious perspective.

The group who identified with the religious expression of spirituality is the smallest of the four spirituality profile groups, comprising 16.6% of survey respondents (see Table 4.3). Only one of the 16 male students interviewed identified with this perspective and a similar gender difference is evident in the survey data (64% female - 36% male). As seen in Table 4.8 below, more than half of this group indicated that they had reached a definite view about spirituality, and less than one-quarter indicated that they had not made up their mind.

Table 4.8

Statement of commitment to spirituality. Religious spirituality profile.

Percentage agreement n=39

	Male %	Female %	Overall %
My spirituality is something I have reached a definite view about	42.8	60	53.8
My spirituality is something that I haven't really made up my mind about	21.4	24	23
My spirituality is something I have thought a lot about	50	68	53.8
My spirituality is something that I haven't really thought much about	35.7	16	23

These patterns show a much stronger attachment to an expression of spirituality than that found in the overall group of survey respondents (see Table 4.4). Of this group, 53.8% indicated that they had reached a definite view on spirituality compared with 29.8% of all survey respondents. A similar claim can be made about the extent of thought being given to the area of spirituality among members of this group (53.8%) which, according to survey data, is higher than found among the overall group of survey respondents (28.9%). See Table 4.8 in comparison with Table 4.4.

While these patterns from the survey data indicate definite commitment arising from considerable thought, evidence was found among interview participants, which runs counter to this portrait. Interview participants among the religious profile group, such as Frances spoke about having been brought up in a practising Catholic family environment, which they had carried into their emerging adulthood. She says: "I do believe in those things, but I just

don't think they're very prominent or dominant in my mind. Although I have been brought up with ... That's what I do believe in." Sophia expresses a similar idea; she says: "I think it's very much the environment. You mimic the environment that you're brought up in." In effect, this group has, by and large, adopted the family religious tradition with little deviation and this is now regarded as their own. Hannah says:

I was brought up in a Christian household. I went through all the sacraments and stuff, and I guess I just stuck with it. I didn't really think of changing religions or anything like that. It just hasn't crossed my mind.

While this in itself does not cancel out the patterns of thought and commitment noted above, it does provide nuance to understanding their perspective, which became quite clear during the interview processes.

As noted above, seven of the 37 students interviewed identified themselves as holding a religious perspective; six females and one male. During the interviews, with one notable exception, those who identified with the religious perspective spoke of relatively seamless assimilation into their family's Catholic tradition without identifying any particular elements of reflection or decision making, which led them to adopt this perspective definitively. Sophia, one of the students who conveyed this sense of merely adopting the family tradition, says:

And yeah, belief's always a personal thing, but I guess I've been brought up to believe in one true God, Jesus Christ died for us, the Holy Spirit. It's just been how I've been brought up ... And I think, sometimes, it's hard to think about the opposite of what your family has taught you to believe in, or maybe how someone else thinks of something, because it's different from how you were taught ... I'm not too curious. I don't really have any

questions, I just believe in what I believe in ... It's almost like learning your ABCs, it's just sort of... Just a habit, I reckon. You've just known it all your life.

Finally, Rebekah recognises her choice but also affirms how her family tradition had left a compelling impression on her perspective. She says:

Growing up in a Christian household and going to church, that was kinda how I was brought up, so that's kinda stuck with me. But then it was my choice if I kept going with it. But definitely my parents, how they brought me up, really put me in the direction.

The single exception to this pattern of adoption is Chantelle. While experiencing a similar induction and socialisation into the Catholic faith as indicated by Sophia, Frances, Hannah and Rebekah, Chantelle articulated a much more definite process of assessing and affirming her religious perspective in the context of challenging experiences and social pressures. Chantelle speaks of "high school (as) a difficult time, in terms of the big changes and things like that" as well as missing out on social outings. She says:

I know lots of my friends don't go to church and at times, they've gone out and I haven't because I've gone to church and, at the time, I might be a bit, not upset, but a bit disappointed I couldn't go. I'm grateful that I decided to go to church and not to go out with them because I know I can go out with them any other time, and it's just an hour in my week that I feel is really beneficial for myself and for my family as well.

Thus, while the patterns among this group of survey respondents show relatively stronger levels of commitment and relatively more thought about spirituality than the full

cohort, the explanations of the interview participant present a different picture. Based on the interview responses, the evidence suggests that this group has a substantially unreflected commitment, which has not been tested by challenging external factors. In other words, most of these students have adopted their family's religious perspective as a natural part of their socialisation in their family unit, and that they have not seen any need or had any inclination to critique this against alternative perspectives.

4.3.6 Summary findings on commitment.

Overall, the commitment to spirituality can be described as moderate. Similarly, the extent of thought and reflection involved in arriving at a perspective on spirituality is not extensive. There are indeed some students who have articulated a strong and deliberately chosen perspective; however, these are quite uncommon. Most students presented themselves as being in an exploratory context with varying degrees of adherence to an array of elements that constituted the expressions of spirituality. There is a distinct sense, among the majority of these students, that their view on spirituality was a particularly personal perspective which changes and develops as they change and develop.

The different perspectives on spirituality may be understood as being on a continuum with the religious profile at one end and the secular profile at the other. The evidence indicates that those on either end of the continuum are more committed to their perspective than those of the groups in between. It is also evident that the nature of the commitment is extremely different for those at either end of the continuum. Typically, those identifying with a secular perspective have reached this position through the deliberate rejection of a religious perspective. This group seems to equate spirituality almost exclusively with its religious expression and consequently, the decision to reject a religious perspective has led them to similarly reject any notions of spirituality. Those holding a religious

perspective have adopted this from within the family context, and for some, this does not seem to have involved a great deal of deliberation or reflection. The two ends of the continuum, however, represent a minority of the participants with 40% in these two groups combined (see Table 4.3). The higher proportion of 60% of the participants is found along the intermediate points of the continuum, ranging from the unsure and uncertain image of the non-defined spiritual profile through to the diverse and varied perspectives of the defined spiritual group. These groups are more strongly characterised by an absence of commitment, although there is not necessarily an absence of thought and engagement with the area.

4.4 Influences on spirituality

4.4.1 Overview.

This study has found that the influence of school-based programs and initiatives is inconsequential when compared to stronger influences found in the broader social context. The influence of family and friends are the strongest of these social factors while the role of experience is paramount in the process of discerning meaning on the part of the students. Some school-based experiences, such as retreats and volunteering in a context of service, are regarded as positive influences, however, other school-based experiences, such as formal Religious Education classes and compulsory attendance at liturgical celebrations, are seen as counter-productive influences on the spirituality of young people.

Sections 4.4 and 4.5 focus on the influences on spirituality identified by participants in this study. These sections address research question three and consider the main influences contributing to the development of the expressions of spirituality discussed in section 4.2. Section 4.4 sets out the findings regarding 11 important influences identified in the data. Section 4.5 focuses on the influences particular to Catholic schools and their relative importance in comparison to broader social influences.

Responses to survey questions about influences on spirituality were used to determine which items would be raised within the interviews. The most prominent items from the survey responses were then included in the interview processes. In addition, some items were included in the interviews because of their importance in Catholic school life, even though they did not feature prominently in survey responses. The 11 areas set out in the following pages were all included in the interview schedule except for the item on human suffering. The topic of human suffering was not part of the planned questions but arose incidentally in the explanations given by interview participants regarding their choices about spirituality. Because the issue of human suffering arose in the reflections of a number of interview participants it has been included as an item below.

4.4.2 Parents.

The influence of parents featured prominently in both surveys and interviews. There were no examples in the interviews where participants claimed that their parents had not influenced them, even in situations where the participants had ultimately chosen to take a different course with their lives.

The influence provided by parents was described as a form of socialisation where the young person has grown up and developed according to the pattern of the parental example and expectation. This influence is stronger in childhood when it is unquestionably accepted, whereas as a person moves through adolescence, these influences are increasingly tested and challenged through the growing understanding and independence of the adolescent. Caterina provides an example of how her religious upbringing was called into question during adolescence. She says:

I was brought up in a Christian family, and specifically a Catholic family. And I went to a Catholic primary school and went through all the Sacraments. But I think

that influenced me to maybe question Catholicism more, and to maybe revolt a little bit against that. But I think my parents have definitely influenced me in having some sort of spirituality, whether or not it fits into a specific box.

In Siobhan's case, there has been a strong influence, through family discussion of important issues. She says:

In issues that have arisen within the family, or even just talking about ethical issues that you see on the news, they definitely draw their ethics from the Catholic teachings or the Christian teachings. And yeah, to see them draw their ethics from there has definitely influenced me to do something similar.

Joshua's comment reflects a similar type of deliberate influence. He says: "they always encourage religion, always talk about it."

In other cases, a religious upbringing has mainly gone unquestioned and seems to have been adopted seamlessly. Joanne explains:

As a child, my family would always go to church every Sunday, and I was baptised, had my reconciliation, communion, confirmation. So being brought up in a very religious and spiritual environment. And whenever, if I did something naughty as a child, it'd be kinda related, 'Follow your Commandments,' and everything. So I have been influenced by my family to follow that kind of path.

Similar reflections on parental influence are found in the comments of Frances, who says: "I guess they passed it on to me and my sister. They've always told us to be with God, and respect him, and pray to him, and go to church," and also with Sophia, who says: "it's hard to think about the opposite of what your family has taught you to believe in."

It is likewise true that a young person brought up in an environment where spirituality is not consciously embraced is unlikely to choose such a perspective of their own volition. Elizabeth says of her parents: “They’re not very religious and so I never really grew up within a specific kind of, I wouldn’t say label, but I never was really a part of a faith or a group, or anything like that.” While some interview participants spoke about adopting a perspective different from that of their parents, this seemed in most cases to be a decision to reject a religious way of life or a set of religious beliefs in favour of either a secular perspective or a more personalised type of spirituality.

Notwithstanding the importance of family influence on the young person’s choices, there is clear evidence indicating that students are choosing a perspective that can be broadly described as less religious than their parents. Of the 19 students interviewed who identified with either a secular or non-defined spiritual perspective, 14 had been brought up in families with some level of Christian faith or practice. In most cases, these 14 students had moved away from the perspective held by their parents at some stage during secondary school. While in some cases there is evidence of an outright rejection of family religious values in favour of a secular perspective, there is also a pattern of young people from religious families choosing to move away from the practice of religion while maintaining a strong connection with core beliefs or openness to different expressions of spirituality. Jacinta provided a detailed reflection on this process. She says:

Probably from year nine and ten was when I started to really think, and develop my idea of spirituality. Before then any idea that I had about religion had all just come from my parents. I went to a Catholic primary school, but it didn’t really impact. I just learned the basic stuff like what the Bible and what Jesus wanted us to do, and yeah, I didn’t really have an understanding of what it was. I just followed what

everyone else told me to do at school. How we had to just progress our beliefs, and how there's one God and all that. But I think it was probably year nine and ten, it's when it started at school, we started to go more in depth of what actually religion meant, and what spirituality meant, and what it meant to us. And we started to do more religious things in reflection days, and yeah, it's when I sort of developed an idea that it's your faith, and what you see, and the morals and how you just perceive the world based on what you gathered from your religion. And yes, so year nine and ten is when I realised that, and it's like when I realised there was a lot of different aspects to religion as well, that's when it changed it I wasn't sure if I wanted to be a part of it.

Quantitative data from survey respondents also highlight a secularising trend. Tables 4.9 and 4.10 below show a comparison between the spirituality of the participant and the spirituality of their family. In these tables, four items indicate that students see themselves as less religious than their family. The remaining two items "Spiritual but not religious" and "More spiritual than religious" show the students identifying at higher rates than for their family. Thus, these two items provide further evidence of a secularising trend of students away from their family upbringing.

Tables 4.10 and 4.11 show further evidence of the same trend. At the time of beginning secondary school, there is a close alignment between the individual and the spirituality of their family. However, when compared to Tables 4.10 and 4.11, Table 4.09 shows a shift away from religious expressions of spirituality towards more secular expressions of spirituality. There is an increase evident in the "Spiritual but not religious" and "More spiritual than religious" items. Conversely, the items "Religious but not spiritual" and "More religious than spiritual" are lower.

Table 4.9

Spirituality of all respondents shown as a percentage. n=246

Spirituality	Total %
Not religious and not spiritual	27
Equally religious and spiritual	21
Religious but not spiritual	6
Spiritual but not religious	19
More spiritual than religious	18
More religious than spiritual	9
Total	100

Table 4.10

Spirituality of family for all respondents shown as a percentage. n=235

Spirituality	Total %
Not religious and not spiritual	25
Equally religious and spiritual	29.5
Religious but not spiritual	9
Spiritual but not religious	8.5
More spiritual than religious	11
More religious than spiritual	17
Total	100

Table 4.11

Spirituality of all respondents at the beginning of secondary school shown as a percentage.

n=246

Spirituality	Total %
Not religious and not spiritual	30
Equally religious and spiritual	31
Religious but not spiritual	11
Spiritual but not religious	7
More spiritual than religious	6
More religious than spiritual	15
Total	100

Table 4.9 shows the perspective of survey respondents nearing the end point of their time in a Catholic school. Table 4.10 shows how the survey respondents regard the spirituality of their family. Table 4.11 shows how the survey respondents recall their spirituality at the beginning of secondary school. The points noted in the paragraphs preceding these tables highlight comparative aspects between the respondents now and their families as well as with themselves at a younger age. The comparisons clearly show that the respondents view themselves as more secular and less religious than their families, and similarly, they view themselves as more secular and less religious than they were at the beginning of secondary school.

Three particular factors stand out in the qualitative data as reasons for this shift. One relates to disagreement with aspects of church teaching, which participants find harsh and judgemental. In particular, issues of sexual morality and same-sex relationships seem to be at the forefront of this pattern. The second reason is a feeling of alienation from what is seen as

empty rituals of worship, where the young person feels stifled and unable to connect in any meaningful way. Finally, the impact of scientific learning leading to questioning or rejection of the family's religious perspectives.

4.4.3 Friends.

While students in interviews readily acknowledged the influence of friends, this influence comes to the fore in different ways. Alan reports a thoughtful approach to the influence of a friend on his spirituality. He says:

I kind of take in what he has to say and maybe look at it from his point of view and see how that could influence him in the decisions he makes. And also, maybe I could try to adapt myself to his spirituality and religion.

There is no doubt that young people are influenced by what their friends think about a whole range of issues. Siobhan is one who spoke about the influence of a close friend. She says:

My best friend ... her mum's quite religious, but her dad's not so much. The whole family would go for Christmas and things to church, but her mum would go more regularly, not every Sunday, but more regularly. And she is extremely spiritual. She's not very religious but she's bit of a hippie in a way. Yeah, she's had a massive influence, 'cause she's very pondering about and questioning about the set teachings of, not only the religions, but of governments and everything. She likes to go against that, 'cause she's trying to find her own faith as well. Kind of watching her develop her own perspective on religion and especially, that kind of hurt. Not really turning away, I think, she believes in a higher being. She's told me that. She believes in a

higher being but she's not sure it's the being that all the religions talk about, kind of thing.

Lara also speaks about the influence of friends on her spirituality "I don't call myself an atheist, I just lack spirituality. I probably wouldn't be as much as I am now, if I hadn't have been influenced by my friends, so I think that's interesting." Despite examples such as Lara, Siobhan and Alan, it is evident that perspectives on spirituality are seldom discussed. Some participants commented in group interviews that this was the first time they had talked about these ideas with friends and that they had enjoyed learning about what their friends thought about questions of spirituality.

Fewer than one in five students in this study hold an actively religious approach to spirituality (16.6% of survey respondents and 18.9% of interview participants). Among interview participants, some challenges were reported in holding their religious views publicly, and these students sometimes experienced difficulties when their religious obligations impact on social life with their friends. James reflects on the influence of friends as being problematic for him. He says:

The influence of my friends can sometimes be a bit negative. Some people may not understand your views, and therefore chastise you about it a little bit. For a teenage sort of sense it's not the most popular view. But that's all depending where you're from and what you've got through your life. But for me, showing my faith is not very ... popular decision.

This challenge is also reflected in Chantelle's experience where her decision to attend church has impacted on her opportunity to socialise with her friends. However, she is comfortable with her decision, saying: "I'm grateful that I decided to go to church and not to go out with them because I know I can go out with them any other time."

The survey data shows that students perceive their friends to be less engaged with spirituality than they see themselves. As noted in Section 4.2.2, 27% of survey respondents identified themselves as neither spiritual nor religious, yet 43% regarded their closest friend as being neither spiritual nor religious. While the data is not detailed enough to be conclusive on this point, it does, nevertheless, suggest a gap in perception regarding the spirituality of peers. It appears that as the area of spirituality is generally not discussed among peers, many young people assume that their friends are not at all engaged with spirituality. Accordingly, these young people then keep their perspectives on spirituality private, which in turn feeds the perception that young people overall are not engaged with spirituality.

During interviews with teachers, some comments were made about how students are reluctant to discuss matters of spirituality, even when their experience has been a positive one. This reluctance stems from and contributes to the perception of their friends' engagement with spirituality. One teacher observed that it could be difficult for students with religious faith to comfortably express their spirituality in a school environment where few of their peers share this perspective. She said:

I think that that's one of the things people who have a strong faith struggle with, in a school like this, quite eclectic school like this is, is that you'd find that it's harder to find peers that are like-minded.

4.4.4 Important life experiences.

For many young people, challenging things that have happened to them, or those they are close to, have been a most important influence in their choices regarding spirituality. This influence leads to two opposite responses which have been clearly articulated in the interview processes. On the one hand, these important experiences can lead to consolidation and strengthening of spirituality, but on the other hand, it can be the factor that leads a young

person to abandon spirituality altogether. Hannah and Peter both reflected on this possibility, with Hannah observing that “something happened that could influence you very positively, or negatively,” while Peter makes a similar observation that “When serious things happen to us, we can either gain faith or lose faith, depending on the circumstance.” The kinds of important experiences that emerged in interviews were situations such as illness or death, the experience of family breakdown and the fracturing of personal relationships.

It is not clear in the data how important personal experiences will lead to the consolidation of spirituality in one person and the destruction of spirituality in another, but this is the pattern among those interviewed. Joanne says:

I feel when there's a loss in the family, if someone's sick or something and they get better, just to know God's there through all those times and He has a plan for all of us. I feel like that kinda keeps me strong through life.

Rebekah provides a similar reflection; she says:

Things have happened, say in my life, that I've had to look to God for help, or just to have someone there, say to talk to. And for me, it has worked in a positive way. I've seen people that I've prayed for, say get healed or something like that.

In contrast, Caterina has a different reaction: “if something bad happens, I question spirituality and say, Why would that happen? It doesn't make sense. If it was God, or whatever, why would that happen?” Similarly, Hannah says:

I know someone that believed in God and everything, and Christianity, whatever, and then his grandmother passed and then he was questioning like, I was praying for her, this and that, Why did this happen? And then he turned atheist, he just didn't believe in anything.

The differences in the responses arising from these experiences seem to relate to the way God is understood or perceived. In some cases, God is blamed for creating the situation; in other cases, God is blamed for not rescuing people from the situation. In both these cases, a negative view of God is formed, and spirituality is rejected on the basis that a God who instigates such calamity or allows it to wreak its havoc is not worthy of association. In other instances, the perceived lack of divine intervention is used to determine that there is no God.

While the outcomes may be entirely different, there is a similar understanding evident among some participants who have found their spirituality consolidated through difficult experiences. Peter says:

So, when a family member's sick or something, and then they just get better suddenly, that deepens your faith and makes you thankful for what happens. And then positive things, when they happen, they make you feel good and everything, and then you say thank you for that good thing that happened.

Similarly, Rebekah has been strengthened through such experiences. She says:

And for me, it has worked in a positive way. I've seen people that I've prayed for, say get healed or something like that, along those lines. So, when serious things like that happen that to me, I look to my religion and my spirituality.

In some cases, participants reflected on the meaning of such experiences and had constructed a framework of understanding these experiences as part of the meaning-making dimension of their lives. Rebekah weighs up the possibilities of positive and negative experiences for her spirituality. She says:

There are times where, when I've been very sick or my family's been very sick, I've sort of questioned my faith and questioned the reasoning behind why things happen

the way they do, especially ... And I guess when you hear things even happening around the world, and you sort of have to question why things are the way they are. But at the same time, when something beautiful happens, or if it's important, something serious, and a life is saved or something happens, you feel like someone had to play a part in that. So, it sort of can go either way ... I think as humans, we sort of look for reasons. So, when something bad happens we look for reasons, and when something good happens we look for reasons. So, that's how I see it.

4.4.5 The question of human suffering.

The question of human suffering was not proposed as a point for discussion in either the survey or interview processes. Despite this, it emerged in the responses of participants in interviews and therefore warranted inclusion in the influences on spirituality. While some participants reflected on the impact of important experiences on their own lives, others raised the related but broader question of human suffering. Antonia was troubled by this saying: "In third-world countries though. It's like these people have done nothing in their life that's bad. And there are children dying from starvation and lack of water." Emma raises a similar point in her reflection:

I don't think it's fair on the people that have died to say, it's part of a plan. Your suffering is a part of a plan. Nobody ... Innocent people, especially babies, who have cancers and can't breathe, that shouldn't... I don't understand why people justify that as being part of a plan. 'Cause it's suffering.

Some questioned why or how God could allow suffering in the world and others viewed suffering as an act of God through vindication, punishment or some other such purpose. Whichever the case, the issue of human suffering has caused some participants to question the nature or existence of God. Alex has relatively strong views on this question.

Notwithstanding the bluntness of his language, he reflects the kind of views held by others on this issue. He says:

What God would allow such suffering to such innocent beings? You know what I mean? And why would I want to believe in something that allows for pain in this world? And it's all justified, the reason for pain and testing and sacrifice, but watching people die from diseases intended by God, if they say that, or things intended by God, and how God is the one and only being, is like it makes it pretty much impossible for me to believe that anything is in the future.

Siobhan is another student who poses questions arising from the reality of suffering in the world. She reflects on a visit to a third-world country saying:

Just to see the hardships, I just take everything so much for granted and I started questioning, Why am I in this situation and they're in that situation? What makes me deserve this? And so it's kind of side questioning like, Who gets to decide that? And then like, God, kind of thing. I don't know, to a degree he obviously maps out pretty much your life path, and obviously we have free will, but he kind of initiates that.

While in most cases, the impact of human suffering seemed to impede the development of spirituality, there were cases, such as the example of Joshua, who found this to be a transforming element for his own life. He says: "It's like made me appreciate things a lot more and not take things for granted. So, it kinda did help my faith a little bit, because they are so religious over there and they are always thankful and hospitable."

Like the findings in Section 4.4.4 about important personal experiences, the view on human suffering seems to be predicated on a person's understanding of the Catholic tradition. In Alex's case, cited above, he seems to be reflecting an image of God that denies any divine benevolence, any empathy with the human condition and any recognition of human freedom. In his case, the God he is rejecting is unrecognisable in the Christian tradition, yet it is on this basis that he makes a judgement about God and religion together.

4.4.6 Scientific learning.

One of the more common factors that has influenced participants to question or abandon spirituality is the impact of scientific learning on their perspective of biblical or religious truths. Typically, these participants see scientific learning as evidence-based, rigorous and reliable while in contrast, they see biblical accounts, which are based on religious truth, as fundamentally unreliable owing to a lack of evidence.

In some cases, the development of scientific knowledge is used as an argument against religion and spirituality. Alex sets up the juxtaposition between science and religion very clearly in his mind. He says:

Without science, there's no religion and without religion, there's no science. They're both meant to be there to contradict each other and build up our understanding of the world. And when we can't understand how we were created, I guess religion's a jumping point. And without religion, we wouldn't have science 'cause science is meant to contradict religion's views and give us actual grounds to build up understanding.

In other cases, participants seem more inclined to try and reconcile scientific and creationist perspectives, such as in Joanne's case where she speaks of parallels between the

two views: “they try to match it up with the creation story, with there was light, and the Big Bang.” It is instructive to realise that even as they reach the end of their period in Catholic schools, almost all the interview participants who commented on this issue seemed to think that Catholic teaching proposes a creationist perspective and thus sets up a juxtaposition between a scientific and religious understanding of creation. It has been many decades since Catholic teaching formally put aside any perceived conflict between scientific theories of evolution and the religious understanding of creation conveyed in the Genesis accounts. Despite this, there seems to be little indication that this understanding is being effectively conveyed to these students in Catholic schools. The only indication contrary to this in the interviews is in a reflection offered by Caitlin when she broaches the idea of symbolic meaning in Scripture. She says:

I became really involved in science and science was a big part, it’s my favourite subject. And it just got me questioning things, even more to do with my spirituality and what I believe in. I think to this day, I’m trying to find that balance between science and religion and whether to believe it literally, or whether to take it in like a metaphorical sort of sense.

While Caitlin seems to be at least part of the way towards developing a sophisticated level of religious literacy, it seems that she is developing it through her reflections rather than through being taught this at school.

4.4.7 Religious Education classes.

All students interviewed were undertaking classes in Religious Education for the NSW Higher School Certificate. In some cases, they were undertaking the Studies of Religion I or II Course developed by the NSW Board of Studies, now the NSW Educational Standards Authority (NESA), which provides for a study of a variety of world religions from

an educational rather than a faith-forming perspective. In NSW the Studies of Religion I and II Courses are taught in government as well as private schools. In other instances, students were undertaking a Catholic Studies Course, developed by Diocesan authorities and endorsed by NESAC, which adopts a particularly catechetical approach in both content and intent. While choice may exist regarding which of these courses is studied, it was nonetheless mandatory for the students to undertake a formal course in the area of Religious Education for their Higher School Certificate.

Few participants spoke with any enthusiasm about their experience of Religious Education classes regardless of which course they were studying. Some expressed annoyance that it was a compulsory requirement for them, others spoke with appreciation for some of the things learnt in these classes, but overall there did not seem to be any sense that these classes had been a positive influence on spirituality among the participants. Those who held a secular perspective were more inclined to complain about having to study Religious Education. Hannah's comment is typical of those who resent being required to undertake this study. She says:

We were sitting in there and I feel like they were trying to brainwash us. And we merged classes and then they started saying that the only way you can get into heaven is to be baptised, and the only way you can do all this, like live a good Christian or a spiritual life, is to be baptised. And I just thought that was complete baloney.

A more moderate view is found in Sophia's reflection where she identifies how some interesting areas of study are covered, but overall, there is no strong sense of being influenced by what has been studied. She says:

In some cases, maybe, there's a world issue or something that has happened and we're talking about it in religion class in relation to a different religion, but I don't think that really most of, for the majority of the time, it doesn't impact your own beliefs.

A similar idea is found in Julia's comment where she says: "we've been looking at Islam and Judaism, and that's kind of opened my eyes a little bit, I guess, to other cultures." Mitchell has also had the experience of being exposed to other ways of thinking through his Religious Education class. He says: "Religion class does open your eyes to that, but then only to a certain extent."

Leslie speaks about how the discussions and exposure to different ways of thinking in her Religious Education classes had led her to reconsider the way she viewed aspects of her religious upbringing. She says:

I think religion classes actually changed my ... 'Cause when I was little, I obviously went to a Catholic school, and I was always one for following the Bible, and God was real, and Jesus was real, and all that. And when I got to high school, and we went to religion classes and listening to other people's opinions in class discussions, that really made me rethink my views and stuff like that.

Apart from the indifference of most of the participants to their study of Religious Education, it should also be noted that nearly all students who commented on their study of Religious Education in comparison to other areas of study regarded Religious Education as less reliable than subjects they would regard as evidence-based. Shaun, for example, cites the evidence related to evolution as a means of discounting the learning from his Religious Education classes. He says, "Cause there's generally evidence, strong evidence, that supports it such as the theory of evolution." Further, as noted above, the study of Religious Education

does not seem to have equipped participants with developed levels of religious literacy to understand and respond to questions that arise in terms of scientific knowledge and ethical questions (see Sections 4.2.6, 4.4.4, 4.4.5 and 4.4.6).

4.4.8 Media and internet.

Interview participants were very keen to speak about the media as an influence and, in particular, the internet, which is a major area of engagement for secondary school students. Most interview participants felt that the media had not influenced them profoundly and they were quick to point out that they were approaching the media with a critical eye, being well aware of vested interests and the likelihood of bias. Joshua believes he is critically aware in his engagement with the media. He says:

A lot of people get influenced by the media, but once again I have a rational mind and I know the media has an agenda, just to make money and don't really care what they say. So they say a lot of bad things about the Catholic Church and religion and all that, and I just disregard it. If there's a claim I go research external sources and try and justify it, but it doesn't really influence me directly.

For most young people, traditional sources of media (such as radio, television broadcast media, newspaper and magazine print media) play little role in their lives. Their source of news, information, entertainment and opinion is predominantly the online world. Social media sites are the preferred way of communicating and interesting sites found online are frequently shared through new and evolving social media platforms.

Despite claiming a perspective of critical engagement, some participants spoke about the many hours spent trawling the internet for anything of interest. Elizabeth acknowledges the unusual ideas encountered in her internet browsing. "I know I've spent hours in that weird

side of YouTube watching videos about these spirituality kind of things ... And all this other stuff, just weird stuff like that.” However, she also recognises the potential for positive influences she says: “So I feel like if you go looking for the right stuff on the internet then it can influence you. And like, for example, just like veganism. How many people have been influenced to turn vegan through the internet.”

Another dimension of the internet experience for many young people is the chat room phenomenon where they can engage with strangers in relative anonymity. It is in these environments that young people are introduced to an extensive range of alternative ideas.

Mitchell identifies the influence of these chat room environments on his spirituality.

He says:

I think I’ve actually been very influenced by the internet, mainly through chat forums and everything online where ... I know I’m talking to strangers on the internet, but just talking about what we believe and stuff, and sharing ideas, and I think that’s influenced me ‘cause you get all these different perspectives.

Adrian recognises that the variety of views expressed on the internet and how media seek to promote specific points of view have had an impact on him. He says:

I guess I have been influenced by the media, not in the good way, though. They’ve influenced me to see some things as bad that probably aren’t, but over time, now that I understand that the media say things just to grab your attention, aren’t necessarily true. Same with the internet. But yeah, they’ve probably influenced me in a bad way.

Vanessa sees the potential for more positive and inspiring interactions through the internet which can open her mind to new possibilities. She says:

Yeah, that's what I was like ... Believe in reincarnation and stuff, I don't believe in it, I just think it's really interesting, so I go and look up stories about it and I just think it's so interesting. So that's kind of ... I don't know believe in it, but I think that it can happen, yeah.

Quantitative data collected from the online survey showed that while the internet is an important influence for young people generally, there is a distinct difference when viewed between males and females. For males, the influence of the internet ranks sixth highest among the 28 options, while for females, the internet rates 16th on the list of influences.

4.4.9 Strongly expressed religious views.

The experience of encountering people with strongly expressed religious views seems to be universally detrimental to the development of spirituality, according to those who commented on this in the interviews. Individuals with strong religious views are typically regarded as narrow and judgemental with an inclination to push their views onto others. Encounters with such views were identified particularly in religious settings at an event where a speaker or person in authority conveyed ideas that were considered to be harsh and judgemental. One survey respondent put it very succinctly: "After an experience promising fire and brimstone if I didn't believe, I didn't believe" (Co-ed M #80). Stewart's reflection provides a simple but clear summary of the way the impact of strongly religious people is perceived. He says: "I think strongly religious people have, in more instances than not, actually pushed people away from religion ... When they disagree, and it pushes them away from religion." Benjamin expresses a very similar thought. He says: "The more people I met that were strongly religious, the more it pushed me away from that religion."

Other examples are found in the comments of some participants. Zara reflects on her experience with zealous evangelical Christians, saying: "I really, really dislike people

who believe that conversion is a good idea.” Similarly, Jacinta voiced her concern about how people who strongly express religious ideas can create a negative impression for the whole of a religious group. She says:

You get these people who are very narrow-minded. They could be Catholics. They could be Anglican. They could be anything. But like you can’t pinpoint these specific people as a sign to represent the whole religion by. And yeah that’s just really got to me.

Antonia is affronted by the intentions of those who try and manipulate her into accepting their religious perspective. She says: “Those that are really, really religious that they try and force your religion needs.”

In some instances, such as Anthony’s comment, teachers are seen as trying to coerce students into believing what they are teaching. He says: “Religion teachers force (it) down your throat. It’s just like, if we don’t wanna believe, we don’t wanna believe it.” Finally, Jacinta is critical of a priest’s views of homosexuality expressed as part of a school liturgy. She says: “He’s like ‘I wasn’t trying to force my beliefs.’ I actually think the quite opposite.”

4.4.10 Volunteering experiences.

The experience of volunteering is one influence directly related to school life, which was held in high esteem by students. Volunteering was also an area commented upon favourably in interviews with teachers. All the participating schools provided immersion experiences where some students travel to communities overseas or in remote areas of Australia for a more intensive period of engagement. While volunteering experiences are made available to all students, the immersion experiences are only available to small groups within the cohort.

All students who commented on their volunteering experiences did so quite positively, expressing warmth and enthusiasm for the experience. In some cases, the students spoke of the experience as being transformative, such as in Joshua's reflection where he says: "I recently went to Philippines, I volunteered to help at a kinder school and it just changed my whole view on the world." The transformative dimension arises when the volunteering experience exposes the student to a starkly different reality, which causes them to reflect seriously on their own situation. Often this reflection brings with it the realisation that happiness and meaning in life are not equated with material wealth. Joshua's reflection continues: "Like how they have nothing, but they're so happy. And not everything is how we have it in Australia, it's very different circumstances and it's influenced my views quite a bit."

During interviews with teachers, all but one chose to speak about accompanying students on volunteering experiences. One teacher explained the benefits of a residential volunteering experience, which included a communal dimension with other schools. He says: "I really was heartened to see the students from our school really put a human face to disadvantage and it became so much more real for them." He recognised that an experience such as this provided a way for young people to express spirituality in a concrete way, such as: "Now I know what I can do to express my faith or my sense of ... my purpose in life." He described the transformation as being one where students moved from being more self-centered to being more aware of others. He says:

So that they were, in a sense, more egotistical, I think, before, but then they were more open to and talking about their contributions to others after the fact. So they were very concerned about themselves, but then they were concerned about others after the fact. So that's another comparison or contrast between before and after.

Another teacher reflected on an experience drawing on a social justice dimension that invited students to consider spirituality from the perspective of Indigenous Australians; an experience which also drew favourable comment from students in interviews. The teacher indicated that this experience had the dual dimensions of raising justice issues within Australia as well as introducing students to some particular spiritual perspectives on life. She observed:

I think with that they definitely had to find their spirituality. They definitely ... I think they learnt so much about indigenous spirituality, it then led them to discover their own, or if not, elements of their own and grow in it. And even things like being able to sit still and reflect, and think on one particular thing. And for some kids that's really hard. But yeah, they definitely grew ... I think because a lot of them haven't seen that before or experienced it, it was a genuine curiosity.

She was able to see a distinct attitudinal and behavioural change as a result of this experience. She says:

Their involvement, their respect, their cooperation and eagerness to help and facilitate and anything like that, was just out of this world ... I think it's planted a very important seed in all of their hearts about Aboriginal spirituality, their spirituality, and what their role is in society, and what the decisions are being made and why the decisions are being made.

The connection between volunteering and spirituality was also evident in some of the student interview responses. For some students, the volunteering experience has a direct bearing on spirituality, such as in Lisa's case where she says:

The kid I was working with really influenced me, she was this lovely young Muslim girl, and she just ... Her faith was so beautiful to her, and I think it was so important to her life. And I've never, or at least up until then, hadn't really felt like faith was a massive part of my life, but I think made me look at things a different way, because she just used it in every aspect of her life, and it was lovely.

Similarly, Zara found her spirituality enriched through a volunteering encounter: "I think that strengthened my spirituality, just meeting a range of very, very different people and seeing a different way of life. Not so much my religion but more so my spirituality."

While volunteering has a positive impact on most students and a clear connection with spirituality for some of these students, the link with spirituality is not always evident. Some students spoke about volunteering as an enjoyable and enriching experience, but one that did not have any particular bearing on their spirituality. Leslie speaks of her volunteering experience positively, but she says: "I was impacted, but not in a religious sense. It was just that charity. Doing good 'cause I wanted to, and I wanted to help people." In cases such as Leslie's, the value of volunteering is evident without the context of spirituality.

It is apparent that the experience of volunteering is a positive one and that in some circumstances, it can have an impact on the spirituality of the person concerned. Although some participants spoke of the value of volunteering without the context of spirituality, there were no instances found where it could be said that the experience of volunteering had led to a negative impact on a person's spirituality.

4.4.11 School retreat.

Among students interviewed in this research, there was a notably mixed reaction regarding school retreats. A spectrum of views was expressed from the warmly positive to the

harshly critical. Most of the teachers interviewed also reflected on retreat experiences and did so in a mostly positive manner with only some questions about the suitability of the retreat experience for all students. The study did not focus directly on the type of retreat offered by each school; however, interview data show that there were a range of different retreat experiences offered across the three schools and also within two of the schools themselves.

Students from the single-sex female school and the co-educational school were generally positive in their assessment, while students from the single-sex male school were generally negative, thus highlighting differences in the retreat experiences at different schools. At the positive end of the scale were responses such as Rebekah's, who found the retreat at the co-educational school to be open and inclusive. She says:

I actually enjoyed retreat. They did ... It was faith-based but it wasn't, say, just Catholic, it was faith as a whole. And that really catered for the people on my retreat. And they did lots of different things that could suit different people to get everyone involved. They catered for different people, so that everyone could get involved.

Caterina also related positive experiences from her school retreat at the all-girls school. She says:

After the retreat, everything that you did on there that was religious, it affected you in a really positive way, and it also made you think of what decisions you can make further on in your life because of what you were taught on the retreat.

At the other end of the scale, Alex's experience on retreat at the all-boys school was far from positive. He says:

I reckon that's completely fake, 'cause they always try and push stuff onto you. And they say it's spiritual, but it's not spiritual, it's just there for the sake of it. They try

and make it a spiritual event, but it turns out to be boring and people sitting around in a group and half of them despise it ... don't wanna be there, and half that are completely, I don't care, and some of them like it. When you have such many contradicting views in one room, trying to push them to all to have the same views, it's very irritating and aggravating for everyone.

Between these two poles, there was a range of responses that were more tempered. Some spoke of the retreat as being a good concept but not particularly well presented. Others found value in the relational elements of the retreat where they were able to spend time reflecting with their friends. Elizabeth recognised the value of this relational dimension of her school retreat, she says:

A lot of people repair the old damage, and got rid of differences that they had, and then it brought everyone closer. Then for me, that was just something that was really positive, and I got a lot out of it in terms of re-evaluating what's important.

However, the aspects of the retreat that focused more overtly on spirituality were not so well received by some. Adrian's reflection illustrates this point clearly, he says:

I reckon like a retreat, like it is sort of forced on, the spirituality part of it. But I reckon they could improve it in other ways that would engage students. A lot of the stuff was really Catholic and Christian-based spirituality, which is probably why it put a lot of the students off.

Some clear patterns are evident from the comments of interviewees. First, there is a relationship between the perspective of the individual and the value she/he found in the retreat experience. Those who are more positively inclined towards spirituality typically spoke of the retreat as a positive and affirming experience. Conversely, those who held a

secular perspective or those who had chosen to reject a religious expression of spirituality typically presented negative views of being coerced and feeling disengaged. Second, there was general acceptance of the relational dimensions of the retreat even from some who otherwise felt disengaged. Third, there were mostly positive views expressed about experiences, which allowed for an open exploration of ideas and perspectives, such as Joanne's reflection:

I found it interesting, the fact that for a lot of them we were pretty scattered. It's nice to think that everyone has their own view like that. And everyone accepted that. I think it was a good, comfortable place.

Finally, there was strong resistance expressed to parts of the experience where people felt coerced, as Julia notes:

I found that when you're sort of, again I don't want to use the word forced, but when you're pushed into doing something, or encouraged strongly to do something, I find it has less impact. I think things tend to work better when it comes from people, people in personal situations.

The teachers' reflections on the retreat experience were positive overall. Each of them spoke about the positive dimensions of this for the students, though, to varying degrees, they recognised mixed reactions and attitudes among the students. This observation aligned well with the data collected in student interviews. Typically, they identified clear benefits for students who had a positive perspective on spirituality and also for those who were open to exploring spirituality. However, they also recognised that some students were not engaged in the retreat processes that focused on a spiritual dimension. One of these teachers spoke about three groups of students: the religious ones; the non-religious ones; and the ones in between. She explained that they responded to the retreat processes in different ways in line with the

perspective they brought to the retreat. In her reflections, she remarked on students who had undergone conversion in the retreat process. She said:

There would be a very, very, very few who would ... Who we've converted. Who we would have ... Who would have come in very negative and not wanting to be compliant, and not being interested, and we have converted. That's a very few. However, to me, that ranks very high, because I have done something. We've converted somebody or we've managed to have a change of heart. And I guess that's part of what evangelisation is.

None of the other teachers referred to experiences of conversion; however, there was a sense of being able to win students over and to have them take part positively in the retreat process. One teacher reflected on a recent retreat experience saying:

We had a very mixed bunch of kids, at obviously all different levels of faith and experiences and stuff. And some of them came and were openly not in agreeance with the retreat, but they came because they had to be. And we said, 'You just give it a go. Just give it a go. Give each activity a go, and see how you go.' And little by little with each game or each talk or each small group session, they came around.

Some of the teachers questioned the impact on those who were not positively disposed to participating in the retreat and wondered whether it was a counter-productive experience for them. One teacher suggested that retreats should not be mandatory events and that students should be given a choice whether to attend. She said: "It's probably not for everyone. And I don't know if it has to be compulsory ... Well, I'm beginning to realise that it doesn't need to be compulsory." This view, however, was not shared by others. One teacher commented:

I think it's absolutely crucial that all kids go on a retreat, a senior retreat. As much for their spirituality as well as their finding themselves and their place in the world, and their relationships with their peers and their teachers.

Some teachers commented on a reluctance of students to articulate their experiences of spirituality even when their retreat experiences have been quite positive. One teacher observed that:

It's not an overt response, so, the ones, in terms of coming back. The ones that have really made that connection to their spirituality will often be the ones that will then volunteer to look further or go to a Mission Mass ... or the twilight sessions ... And that's where you start to see that, but there's still that hesitancy to be vocal about it within the whole year group.

Another teacher made a similar observation about students returning from a positive retreat experience. She said:

It's interesting because I find that the students don't talk about retreat that much when they come back ... It's almost as if they've all had a personal encounter with God or with each other, and then they want it to remain there. They want it to remain as something that's personal.

4.4.12 School prayer and religious ritual.

Participants were asked to comment on the experience of regular prayer in the school environment, such as daily prayers and stopping at midday to pray the Angelus. With very few exceptions students were highly critical of these experiences. Elizabeth has some strongly worded criticisms of the practice. She says:

It's so stupid because I feel like it's making it compulsory, and when something's compulsory, people don't wanna do it ... You're making people pray who don't necessarily want to, who may not believe in the faith and then it's just like, I don't know, I feel like ... prayer is supposed to be a pretty personal spiritual, powerful thing like you're doing a conversation with God like in the Catholic faith. And then if you just have a bunch of people there who are just not doing it or laughing or giggling or just not really making the most of it, then I feel like it just becomes redundant.

Sophia is concerned at the lack of respect shown for prayer. She believes it is unacceptable for people to disrespect the prayer even if it is not something that attracts them. She says:

With the fact of teachers not even stopping sometimes to say the Angelus ... That's almost offensive. Not offensive, it's just rude because I don't feel like that if it was a different religion they would do the same thing.

Despite the overwhelmingly negative perceptions, there were some alternative views expressed during the interviews. For example, Joanne finds the daily prayer routine helpful and nurturing. She says:

I think it's influenced me by praying every day and praying in the daily notices in the morning before school. I think that has influenced me just in the way, just by a little bit, by just stopping and praying and thinking of just stopping. Not thinking of school work, just thinking, praying to God and making that connection between me and God stronger has just enhanced my beliefs, I think.

Chantelle is another student who reflects positively on the experience of daily prayer at school. She says:

I think it's important that as a school, we can, especially as a Catholic school, we just stop for those couple of minutes and just say the Angelus or say the prayer in morning homeroom. And I think the Angelus, I used to say that in primary school, so that's something that continued on with me ... It's just second nature to me and the same with the prayers, I think. I always try to say a prayer each day and the prayers in daily notices, I just feel they're a good way to start the day. I just feel calmer and more centralised with myself, and feel that, yeah, it's just a better way to start the day with a prayer. It's just something that I feel.

Notwithstanding Joanne's and Chantelle's positive reflections, the majority of comments were not favourable. Rebekah contrasts the experience of the regular daily prayer with the response of her school community to the past death of a student. She says that the daily prayer "doesn't feel spiritual or special, it feels routine." She then goes on to reflect on the experience following the death of a student:

I think one of the most beautiful examples of communal prayer that I can remember at our school, was when the girl passed away. I won't name her, but the girl passed away, she was in year nine. And I think it was really beautiful, because everyone, even people that weren't Catholic, people that weren't religious at all, everyone really banded together and prayed together. And I think that is where communal prayer definitely should have a place. And I think the Angelus, it just loses its meaning.

Similar to school prayer, the comments on religious rituals were substantially negative with most participants describing school religious rituals as remote and alienating

experiences, which did little to engage them and provided scant nourishment for their spirituality. The compulsory nature of these events was one of the more notable objections, especially from those participants who did not share in a religious perspective. This negativity is reflected in Luke's comments about an unwillingness to participate. He says:

Well, most people don't want to be there, so they won't participate in all the prayers and the songs and everything like that, so it's mainly just the priests and the teachers and very select few kids that will do what they should be doing there.

Some students commented more favourably on the communal nature of such occasions and the importance of sharing in a spiritual experience with peers. Chantelle's comments highlight these positive elements from someone holding a religious perspective. She says:

I think it's the fact that everyone sits together, prays together, sings together, the sense of unity brings everyone together. And I think that knowing, by sitting together, just knowing that people are there to support you, will always be there for you and God is in there with you and Jesus.

While Chantelle has an optimistic view of the impact of religious rituals on her peers, it seems more likely that these compulsory experiences are reinforcing a negative perspective towards the religious dimension in some students. Even when this is not the case, there is more often than not an attitude of indifference towards these occasions.

4.5 Influences on spirituality – Catholic school

4.5.1 Overview.

While the evidence shows that some programs and initiatives offered by Catholic schools play an important role in the development of spirituality among some students, it is also evident that, overall, the extent of the influence of Catholic schools is small in comparison to broader social factors, such as family and friends. Section 4.4 included findings regarding six areas of influence that relate directly to Catholic schools; however, these were not the most prominent influences overall, nor were they consistently recognised by students. In some cases, such as scientific learning discussed in Section 4.4.6, there was a clear indication that the school-based factor contributed to a rejection of religiously oriented spirituality and possibly of spirituality altogether. Additionally, in some other instances, factors, such as retreats, Religious Education classes, school prayer and religious ritual contributed negatively in the view of some participants.

The use of a mixed methods approach in this research allows for a nuanced understanding of the influences of these Catholic schools on the spirituality of the students, with quantitative data providing statistical support to the qualitative insights drawn from the students during interviews.

Through the analysis of quantitative data, it was possible to measure the relative strength of different influences on survey respondents in a statistically reliable manner. The survey data allows for a comparison of the extent of the influence of various factors. This measurement was done through establishing the mean for the percentage of agreement with the statement in the survey and then using odds ratios to measure the relative strength of agreement between statements. For example, at a simple level, it is evident that friends (49% agreement) are a more important influence than religion class (40% agreement); however, the

odds ratio calculation in Table 4.12 below confirms that the influence of friends is 1.67 times stronger than that of religion class.

Table 4.12

Odds ratio comparing influence of friends with influence of religion class n=248

Friend to religion class	Odds Ratio	$p < .05$ Y or N	Confidence Interval
Male	2.41	Y	1.35-2.48
All	1.67	Y	1.09-2.54
Female	1.10	N	0.58-2.08

This odds ratio calculation shows that based on the mean for each of the two items, the influence of friends on spirituality is 1.67 times stronger than that of religion class. With the p-value being less than .05, the calculation shows this to be true in more than 95% of cases and is therefore regarded as statistically significant. This calculation also shows difference according to gender with males having a more pronounced strength of influence of friends in comparison to religion class. However, in this calculation, the confidence interval for females does not meet the threshold for statistical significance.

Table 4.13 shows the relative strength of these two influences with comparisons according to spirituality profile. From this table it is evident that the influence of friends, in comparison to religion class, is stronger among those who are not aligned with a religious or defined spiritual profile, however, in three instances the odds ratio does not meet the threshold for statistical significance.

Table 4.13

Odds ratio comparing influence of friends with influence of religion class including spirituality profile n=248

Friend to religion class	Odds Ratio	$p < 0.05$ Y or N	Confidence Interval
Non-defined spiritual	2.24	Y	1.07-4.69
Secular	2.23	N	0.92-5.37
All	1.67	Y	1.09-2.54
Religious	1.21	N	0.37-3.95
Defined spiritual	1.17	N	0.47-2.89

This calculation shows that the secular and non-defined spiritual profile groups are more strongly influenced by friends in comparison to religion class than those of the religious and defined spiritual profiles. However, in this calculation only the overall group of survey respondents (All) and the non-defined spiritual profile group are shown as statistically significant. Nevertheless, it is clear that friends are a more important influence than religion class overall and that this importance is more pronounced for some when viewed through the lens of their spirituality profile.

These findings from the quantitative data support the evidence from the interview responses affirming the influence of friends (Section 4.4.3), whereas many students were either critical of or indifferent towards their Religious Education classes (Section 4.4.7).

While the direct comparison of individual items provides some worthwhile insights, more valuable insight is found through considering the overall influence of school factors in comparison to the overall influence of broader social factors. Table 4.14 below shows the

strongest five school influences collectively in comparison to the strongest five of the outside or broader social influences.

Table 4.14

Odds ratio comparing outside influences with school influences n=248

Outside influences with school influences	Odds Ratio	$p < .05$ Y or N	Confidence Interval
Male	1.8	Y	1.54-2.1
Secular	1.63	Y	1.29-2.06
Non-Defined Spiritual	1.6	Y	1.31-1.96
All	1.43	Y	1.28-1.59
Religious	1.17	N	0.88-1.57
Defined Spiritual	1.16	N	0.93-1.44
Female	1.12	N	0.95-1.31

In these comparisons, the overall strength of broader social influences is 1.43 times stronger than the overall strength of school influences (All). Once again, as with the previous examples in Tables 4.12 and 4.13, there is a clear difference when viewed from the perspective of gender as well as spirituality profile. While the calculation for the group as a whole (All) satisfies the threshold of the confidence interval, this is not so for some of the sub-groups. Therefore, from the point of view of statistical significance, it can be asserted that the overall influence of broader social factors is 1.43 times greater than the influence of school factors. However, the claims regarding these influences among sub-groups of participants cannot be made with confidence in all cases.

As with the previous example comparing single areas of influence, the interview comments affirmed that factors such as family, friends and important life experiences were far more influential on the development of their spirituality than school-based factors, such as Religious Education classes, volunteering experiences and school retreats. The clear impression formed during the interviews was able to be confirmed through the analysis of the statistical data from the surveys.

4.5.2 Catholic school influences and spirituality profiles.

The detailed presentation of the findings in Section 4.4 highlighted the degree of diversity that exists among the students and their evaluation of school programs and initiatives. Within this diversity, however, there is a clear relationship between the spirituality profile of an individual and the extent to which they accept or reject the programs or initiatives offered by their school. For example, someone who is religiously orientated such as Chantelle, values her Religious Education classes. Whereas Hannah, who does not share Chantelle's religious perspective, says: "I feel like they were trying to brainwash us."

It is not necessary to repeat the detail from above to recognise this juxtaposition in evidence about the areas of school retreats (Section 4.4.11) and with school prayer and religious ritual (Section 4.4.12). However, it is evident that school retreats are more widely affirmed than school prayer and religious ritual. In particular, it was noted that most students, regardless of their spirituality profile, affirmed elements of retreats which are regarded as more community focused, allowing for times with friends. Whereas the overtly religious elements of retreats were not well regarded by those holding secular perspectives on spirituality.

Among the areas set out in Section 4.4, the areas of volunteering experiences, as well as encounters with strongly expressed religious views and scientific learning, are

important regardless of gender, religious background and spirituality profile. All students warmly regarded the experience of volunteering. Such experiences were seen as both challenging and rewarding and often provoking students to think deeply about life questions. This positive evaluation was provided by all students regardless of their perspective on spirituality. However, some students, such as Leslie, noted that the value they saw in volunteering was a purely humanitarian one and not because it could be related to spirituality.

In contrast to the area of volunteering, situations where students had encountered strongly expressed religious views, drew negative responses. In most cases, students were referring to someone who had spoken at a school event, although, in other instances, they were referring to others known to them personally. In either case, the strongly expressed religious views were regarded as judgemental and narrow and were universally rejected by the students who spoke about these experiences.

The final area for comment is the area of scientific learning. It was noted clearly in Section 4.4.6 above that the development of a scientific understanding in the absence of a developed religious literacy is contributing to the rejection of religion and spirituality with some students. The impact of scientific learning is a factor for students regardless of the perspective on spirituality they hold. For someone like Alex with a stridently secular perspective, scientific learning provides an intellectual justification for his approach. However, for Caitlin, scientific learning without the necessary religious literacy is a challenge to her religious perspective and one she struggles to reconcile.

4.6 Validation processes

Two types of validation were undertaken in this research. The first type of validation involved the use of additional questions in the data collection. This was done for School C, the single-sex male school, as a means of testing the findings that had emerged from the

initial analysis of data from Schools A and B. The second type of validation involved return visits to participating schools to provide them with a synopsis of the findings and seek their feedback on the findings from their school. A detailed outline of these validation processes was provided in Section 3.6 and 3.7 of the previous chapter.

4.6.1 Additional questions – school C.

This prominence of an experiential and self-constructed spirituality was revisited in the validation process used with School C along with the importance of holding a personal and individual expression of spirituality. These core aspects of the findings, presented above in Sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.2, were emerging clearly in the initial analysis of the data from School A and School B. In order to validate these findings, students in School C were asked to respond to additional statements, which either affirmed or contradicted these core findings. The four highest-ranking responses in the data affirmed these findings, while the four lowest-ranking responses affirmed a contrary perspective. See Table 4.15 below.

The data presented in Table 4.15 confirm that for most of these emerging adults, there is no universal or definitive approach to spirituality to which all should aspire. Even those who hold confirmed religious or secular beliefs see these as their personal perspective but not necessarily of value to others. To seek to impose an expression of spirituality on others is considered to be entirely inappropriate. In response to survey questions, only six per cent of School C students agreed with statements proposing that there was an absolutely right way to think about spirituality and 76% agreed that there is no absolutely right way. These are among the strongest indications for any of the survey questions and provide strong support to the evidence recognising the personal and individual expression of spirituality constructed in light of personal experience. The triangulation of this data from the validation process with the survey data from School A and School B, and the qualitative data from

interviews, provided an emphatic confirmation of the personal, individual, experiential and self-constructed character of spirituality among these students.

Table 4.15

Statements testing validity of findings. Highest to lowest percentage agreement n=86

Statement	Agree %	Disagree %	Unsure %
1/ There is no absolutely right way to think about spirituality it is different for everyone	76	9	15
2/ Spirituality is something I have to work out for myself	69	15	16
3/ The type of spirituality which is right for others is not necessarily right for me	66	13	21
4/ Other people can't tell me what I should think about spirituality	60.5	15	24.5
5/ There is an absolutely right way to think about spirituality but it is up to me to find it	17.5	51	31.5
6/ I find it helpful to be guided towards a definite type of spirituality	12	57	31
7/ There is an absolutely right way to think about spirituality which other people can teach me	9	59	32
8/ There is an absolutely right way to think about spirituality which is the same for everyone	6	68.5	25.5

When an odds ratio calculation was applied to the first and last of the statements in Table 4.15, it revealed that the agreement with the first statement was more than 95 times stronger than the agreement with the eighth statement (see Table 4.16).

Statement one: There is no absolutely right way to think about spirituality; it is different for everyone

Statement eight: There is an absolutely right way to think about spirituality, which is the same for everyone.

Table 4.16

Odds ratio comparison of statement one and statement eight from Table 4.15 n=88

Statement one with statement eight	Odds Ratio	$p < .05$ Y or N	Confidence Interval
Non-defined Spiritual	250.00	Y	21.12-2958.81
Secular	105.00	Y	8.55-1290.11
All	95.88	Y	29.71-309.41
Religious	62.33	Y	2.13-1822.63
Defined Spiritual	56.33	Y	5.16-614.9

The odds ratio calculations presented in Table 4.16 show the relative strength of agreement between the two statements. Students were 95 times more likely to agree with statement one than with statement eight overall. When viewed according to spirituality profiles it can be seen that the agreement with statement one is up to 250 times stronger than the agreement with statement eight, as is the case of those from the non-defined spiritual profile group. The lowest difference is among those from the defined spiritual profile group who were 56 times more likely to agree with statement one than with statement eight. In each case there is much stronger agreement with the statement one: “There is no absolutely right way to think about spirituality; it is different for everyone” in comparison to statement eight: “There is an absolutely right way to think about spirituality, which is the same for everyone.”

In all instances, the confidence interval has been satisfied. Therefore, these findings are confirmed to be statistically significant.

This data from the validation process in School C provides a strong confirmation of the findings set out in Section 4.2: that participants in this study view spirituality as an inherently personal and individual matter.

4.6.2 Return visits to schools.

Following the completion of the data analysis, return visits were made to the participating schools. In this context, 12 teachers in the participating schools were provided with a synopsis of the findings from the data and asked to respond to 15 items on a validation tool to gauge their response to the findings. The validation tool is included as Appendix D. In each school, the Religious Education Coordinator or Director of Mission took part in this process. The Principal of the co-educational school also took part. Other participants included Religious Education teachers and youth ministry coordinators. All of those who took part had some particular responsibility for the religious dimension of the school. Two of the teachers involved in the return visits had also been interviewed as part of the data collection process.

The items on the validation tool were intentionally stated in direct and straightforward terms such as: “Students express spirituality as a form of acceptance or rejection of the Catholic Christian tradition.” Staff were asked to respond on a five-point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Each of the 15 items expressed an aspect of the findings related to one of the three research questions.

Overall, staff at the participating schools affirmed the findings with more than 85% selecting either agree or strongly agree. When staff did not agree or strongly agree it was usually on the basis that the statement was overly simplistic and lacked the nuance they

regarded as important. In most cases, they were not disagreeing with the focus of the comment but were questioning whether it was valid for all students.

The most prominent level of disagreement was found with Item L: “School programs and initiatives do not have a significant influence on spirituality.” Approximately 25% of staff regarded this as an overly negative statement, however, everyone agreed with the proposition that school programs and initiatives did not have the same degree of influence as broader social factors, including family and friends. A similar, though a slightly smaller proportion of staff, also disagreed with Item O: “Students relate negatively to experiences of formal prayer and liturgy,” citing examples of engaging experiences in prayer and liturgy at their school and also objecting to the universal nature of the claim.

Perhaps the most critical discussion in these return visits arose concerning Item R: “Students are unable to distinguish between scientific and religious truth.” Few of the teachers disagreed with this statement overall; however, there was considerable surprise regarding the findings of creation and evolution as identified in Sections 4.2.6 and 4.4.6.

When the lack of awareness of Catholic teaching concerning theories of evolution was raised during these return visits, it provoked considerable comment from teachers, as all the schools are committed to teaching biblically literate perspectives of creation in accordance with Catholic doctrine. Teachers were quite surprised and perplexed to hear that their students held literal understandings of the Genesis creation stories. Considerable discussion ensued about the teaching of science and media depictions of Christian perspectives. However, without further investigation, it was not possible to attribute a cause to this phenomenon.

4.7 Summary of findings

The findings set out in this chapter indicate that these students are articulating their spirituality in predominantly personal and individualised ways, drawing on personal experience to construct a perspective of spirituality that aligns with their view of the world. Overall, students are not firmly committed to their articulated expressions of spirituality. Many see this as likely to change in light of new experiences. Important personal experiences have strongly influenced the development of these expressions of spirituality along with socialising influences of family and friends. School factors, especially volunteering and retreat experiences, do have some influence, but these are less important than the broader social factors.

The six elements of expressions of spirituality identified in this study were found to be clearly evident across the cohorts of the three participating schools. They did not vary greatly among students regardless of whether they held a secular perspective, a religious perspective or another perspective somewhere in between these two ends of the continuum.

Differences among spirituality profile groups were more evident when examining their commitment to spirituality and the influences on spirituality. In these two areas considerable variations were noted, however, it remained the case, across all spirituality profiles, that the influence of school programs and initiatives are minimal in comparison to influences on spirituality found in the broader social milieu. Additionally, when viewed from the perspective of gender, considerable differences were noted, especially in the way females and males expressed commitment to spirituality and the degree of intentionality evident in their choices.

Chapter Five: Discussion of the findings

5.1 Overview

The findings of this study indicate a lack of conscious engagement with spirituality among many of the students in these three Catholic schools. It is quite clear that programs and initiatives provided in these Catholic schools have minimal influence on the spirituality of these students when compared with broader social influences, such as family and friends and the increasingly secular character of Australian society. The confluence of pervading elements of spirituality, such as self-reliance, a lack of religious literacy and the conflation of religion and spirituality, is leading many to disengage from a conscious perspective on spirituality. Some programs and initiatives, such as Religious Education, school prayer and religious ritual, are not well regarded by students, especially by those who do not hold religious perspectives on spirituality.

These findings are framed in the context of a rapidly changing social milieu in Western societies in which the place of traditional religious expressions of spirituality has been profoundly challenged by increasingly secular perspectives and the phenomenon of spirituality without religion (Fuller & Parsons, 2018; Mackay, 2016). The extent of this social change is so extensive that it has led Pope Francis to describe it as a change of era rather than merely being an era of change (Pope Francis, 2015b). The role of Catholic schools in the context of the Australian Catholic Church is particularly crucial in the light of the disintegration of the traditional model of religion based on parish and family yet the findings of this study show that these three Catholic schools are having very little success in engaging the majority of their students with spirituality.

Notwithstanding this bleak outlook, there were some findings in this current study that suggest areas for fruitful engagement with spirituality. Very few of the students held

formal commitments to spirituality and thus many were open to possibilities. Most students saw spirituality as a fluid dimension of their lives, which was likely to change in light of new experiences. Overall, students were open to exploring spirituality and willing to engage in discussions about spirituality in an appropriate context. Social media and the online world were found to be areas of untapped potential for the exploration of spirituality. Finally, students spoke with warmth and enthusiasm about some school programs that could potentially be enhanced to engage more effectively with a broader range of students.

The main elements of expressions of spirituality were found to be common among most students regardless of their spirituality profile. However, marked differences were evident among students regarding commitment to spirituality and influences on spirituality. These differences were closely aligned to the spirituality profiles of the students. The four spirituality profiles are, therefore, integral to the discussion of these aspects of the findings and will assist in highlighting the diversity found among participants. This diversity underlines the need for appropriate differentiation in work undertaken by these schools to develop spirituality among their students.

In the preceding chapter the findings identified through the analysis of survey and interview data were aligned with the three research questions:

1. How do senior students at Catholic schools express spirituality?
2. How committed are senior students at Catholic schools to these expressions of spirituality?
3. How do senior students at Catholic schools evaluate the influences on the development of their spirituality?

The discussion in this chapter is structured around three main themes which, in concert, provide a substantive response to the three research questions. The themes for

discussion in this chapter are chosen on the basis of their contribution to practice in the field. In some instances, findings from this research have the potential to contribute new insights. In other cases, the findings offer perspectives different from the body of knowledge found in the literature. Other aspects of the findings call for further investigation. The themes chosen for discussion do not exhaust the possibilities from the findings, however, some findings from this research will not be discussed as they have been substantially addressed in other research.

The first theme focuses on how some distinctive elements of spirituality are combining to diminish engagement with spirituality among the participants of this study. This theme is called “A recipe for rejection”. The second theme, “A continuum of spirituality profiles,” explores the diversity of responses through the lens of four spirituality profiles and highlights particular points of potential engagement with spirituality through targeted responses. The third theme examines the impact of particular programs and initiatives offered by the three Catholic schools in this study. It recognises that some aspects of these programs and initiatives are contributing directly to disengagement from a conscious expression of spirituality while also identifying the potential for them to be reshaped or reimagined with more fruitful outcomes. This theme has been named “A kairos for Catholic schools” to reflect the challenges and opportunities evident in the findings from this study. These three themes function interdependently as though cogs in a mechanical apparatus, each exerting influence on the others. When viewed together, they provide rich insights into why many students are disengaging from conscious expressions of spirituality as well as indicating possible changes in practice as a response. The framework for the discussion of these three themes is represented visually in Figure 5.1.



Figure 5.1. Conceptual framework for discussion of the findings – interconnected cogs.

In the previous chapter, six elements of spirituality, as articulated by participants in this study, were used to convey the findings regarding expressions of spirituality. Prominent among these were the elements of individual expressions of spirituality constructed in light of personal experience. These expressions were accompanied by clear affirmations of openness and acceptance of the views of others, yet participants also conveyed a strong sense of self-reliance regarding their expression of spirituality. Many participants regarded their spirituality as fluid and open to change. With very few exceptions, participants expressed their spirituality in terms of acceptance or rejection of Catholic Christianity and many expressed their beliefs in a very literal way. This literal expression was widely evident among participants regardless of whether they were accepting or rejecting Catholic Christianity. The discussion in Section 5.2 will show how these elements, operating in concert with one another, contribute to a substantial lack of intentional engagement with spirituality.

While this study identified considerable diversity among participants, it also showed that there was a strong alignment between the participants' spirituality profiles and the way they engaged with spirituality. The four spirituality profiles used in this study each revealed particular characteristics about spirituality and the recognition of these characteristics provides the potential for tailoring programs and targeting initiatives more effectively to the

range of perspectives found among participants. The discussion of the continuum of spirituality profiles in Section 5.3 will draw out these implications more completely.

The challenges set out in Section 5.2, and the opportunities recognised in Section 5.3, lead to the discussion of the particular programs and initiatives provided by the three Catholic schools in Section 5.4. While not as influential as social factors, such as family and friends, there are, nevertheless, clear indicators of how some particular programs and initiatives are impacting on student engagement with spirituality. The findings include some confronting elements for leaders in these schools, yet they also show considerable potential for more fruitful exploration of spirituality.

5.2 A recipe for rejection

Among the elements of expressions of spirituality identified in the previous chapter, there is substantial discussion in the literature of elements such as the personal, individual, experiential and self-constructed nature of spirituality among emerging adults (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006; Hay & Nye, 2006; Hughes, 2007b, 2017; Rossiter, 2018; C. Smith & Denton, 2005). These do not need to be explored further here. Alongside these well-attested findings, this study has identified three particular areas that are not discussed extensively in the literature reviewed. These are: the relationship between religion and spirituality from the perspective of these students; the students' apparent lack of critical religious literacy; and their propensity for self-reliance regarding their perspective on spirituality, even to the exclusion of their friends.

While each of these three areas is important in its own right, it is the combination of the three that has a profound impact on student engagement with spirituality in the three schools. Thus these three areas are the ingredients which, when blended, are contributing directly to the recipe of rejection that has prevented substantial numbers of students in this

study from consciously engaging with spirituality. This phenomenon is depicted visually in Figure 5.2. A more detailed discussion of these three elements will, therefore, provide a richer understanding of the spirituality of participants in this research and the impetus for further investigation of these critical points.

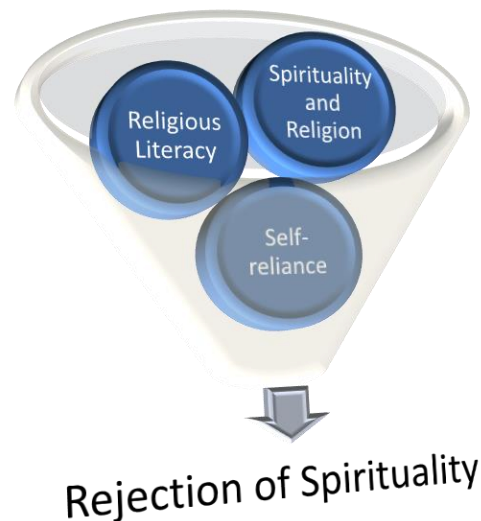


Figure 5.2. A recipe for rejection – three critical elements in combination.

5.2.1 The relationship between spirituality and religion.

In this study, spirituality is defined as an approach to life, deliberately chosen or unconsciously adopted, which relates to questions of ultimate meaning, of origin, purpose and destiny, and which has the potential to shape how an individual relates to others and engages in community. Originally, the meaning of spirituality was closely related to religion and emerged from religious contexts (Sheldrake, 1992, 2013). Some researchers advocated that this connection be maintained (Schneiders, 2010) while others focused on secular expressions of spirituality (Tacey, 2004).

This research intended to capture the breadth of the individual expressions of spirituality found among participants, which were expected to be “relatively secular, eclectic, subjective, individualistic and self-reliant” (Rossiter, 2018, p. 127). While mostly secular in their outlook it was nevertheless anticipated that the students would be familiar with religiously aligned expressions of spirituality, such as that of Catholic Christianity through their experience in a Catholic school. The language used in explaining the purpose of the research to the students and the language used in the interviews themselves was carefully chosen to avoid a bias towards religious understandings of spirituality (see Appendix A: Data Collection Instruments). It was anticipated, however, that students would recognise the researcher’s interest in how the religiously aligned dimensions of their school experience were influencing their spirituality. This recognition was evident in participant responses when some students offered apologies for not being very religious or for being critical of school activities that did not resonate with them.

It was surprising to see that almost all the students interviewed spoke about their spirituality in reference to at least some aspects of Catholic Christianity. While some students used the word spirituality in their responses, almost all spoke about God, faith, religion and church in explaining their perspectives. This was the case regardless of whether the student held a religious perspective, a secular perspective, or something in between. In effect, they were conflating concepts of spirituality and religion, using the terms without distinction and strongly referencing their spirituality against the framework of Catholic Christianity. The conflation of spirituality and religion by students in this current research is a phenomenon which is not evident in the literature reviewed and thus has the potential for providing new insight into the field.

Students referenced their spirituality against a Catholic Christian framework in a way that provided a continuum of perspectives ranging from the religious to the secular. At one end of the continuum were those who aligned themselves closely with their Catholic Christian upbringing. These are the students who identified with the religious spirituality profile and who essentially accepted or adopted the beliefs and practices of Catholic Christianity. At the other end of the continuum were those who identified with the secular spirituality profile. The students did not so much express their secular perspective as a meaningful choice they had made but usually expressed it as an outright and absolute rejection of the Catholic Christian tradition. Thus, even for students identifying with a secular perspective, Catholic Christianity was seen as something of a benchmark and, accordingly, they expressed their spirituality in terms of how thoroughly they had rejected this Catholic Christian perspective. Other students, who did not identify with either the religious spirituality profile or the secular spirituality profile, can be plotted somewhere along the continuum according to the degree of their acceptance or rejection of Catholic Christianity. This element reflects the findings of other researchers such as Boeve (2012) and Casson (2011), who have recognised different degrees of acceptance and rejection of religious perspectives in the responses of young people. Figure 5.3 provides a graphic representation of the continuum of spirituality profiles identified in this research.

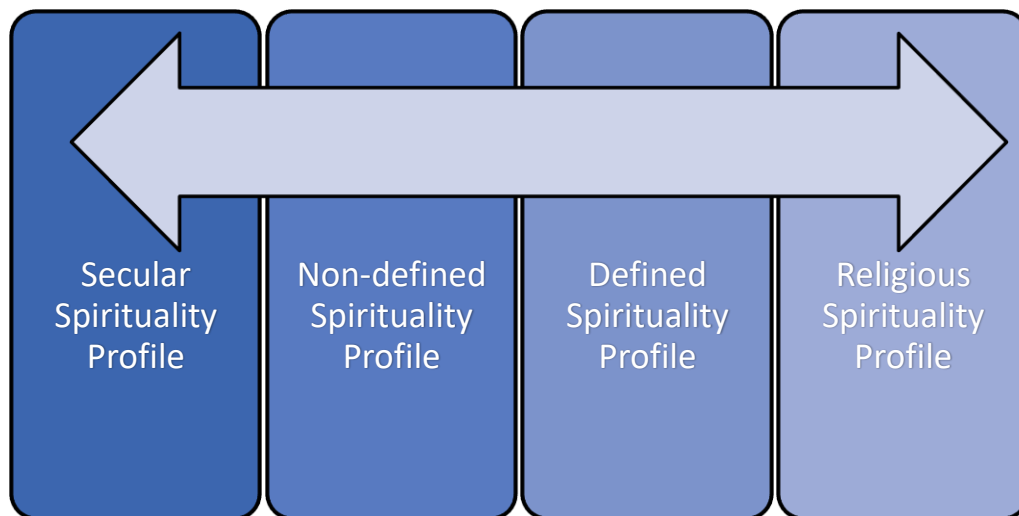


Figure 5.3. A continuum of spirituality profiles.

It was evident that students in this study did not differentiate between religion and spirituality and, with only a couple of exceptions, they showed no indication of understanding spirituality outside of its religious setting. Thus, when expressing dissatisfaction with their Catholic Christian upbringing, these students were likely to reject the notion of spirituality altogether as they seemed unaware of different ways of engaging with spirituality.

The literature discussing the relationship between spirituality and religion is quite extensive, including empirical studies (Berry et al., 2011; D. E. Davis et al., 2015) and diverse studies in the field religion and spirituality (Cook et al., 2015; Gottheil & Groth-Marnat, 2011). Historically, there has been an integral connection between spirituality and religion (Sheldrake, 2013). While this remains the case in the majority world, the growing secularisation in western consumer societies has led increasingly to a separation of these constructs (Schneiders, 2003) and the developments of views that see spirituality and religion either as unrelated or in competition with one another (Anderson, 2012). The growth in interest in positive psychology and positive education (Seligman et al., 2009) and its increasing prevalence in Catholic schools is highlighting spirituality through practices such as

mindfulness. In doing so it is framing a model where spirituality is the core concept and religion exists as an optional element within this broader sphere. Thus, from its original understanding in the religious context, spirituality is increasingly understood more widely, especially in the context of secular Western cultures.

The increasing emphasis on spirituality, rather than religion, in these contexts is something that would be welcomed by Rossiter who has long argued that spirituality ought to be the focus in Catholic schools, rather than religion or faith, out of respect for the diversity of backgrounds and perspectives found in Catholic schools today (Rossiter, 2006a, 2010a, 2018). Similarly, Hughes is advocating a broader, more inclusive approach to spirituality, which he prefers to call purposeful living (Hughes, 2017). Additionally, the literature includes examples of the phenomenon of people holding religious beliefs without associating themselves with a particular religious tradition (Boeve, 2012; Davie, 1994; Gottlieb, 2012; Jones, 2013). This separation of spirituality from religion may apply to those who are actively pursuing spirituality outside of a religious context (Fuller, 2001) as well as those who are less intentional in their approach but still hold beliefs of a spiritual nature (Mackay, 2016; McCrindle, 2017). However, the phenomenon evident in this research, whereby students appear to be conflating the concepts of spirituality and religion into a single reference point, is not evident in the scope of the literature reviewed.

The alignment between spirituality and religion found in this research and the implications associated with this insight are more clearly conveyed through considering the proportions of students at different points on the continuum between the religious spirituality profile and the secular spirituality profile. As seen in Table 4.3, the two groups at either end of the continuum were the smallest with the religious spirituality profile group accounting for 16.6% of the participants, while 23.4% identified with the secular spirituality profile. The two

groups at the intermediate points on the continuum made up 60% of the participants (non-defined spiritual profile 31.9% and defined spiritual profile 28.1%).

There are important implications in this data given the understanding of spirituality and religion evident in this research. Almost two-thirds of the males in this study had either entirely or substantially rejected Catholic Christianity by the end of their secondary school experience. While the corresponding figure for females is only a little over one-third it does, nevertheless, paint a pessimistic picture of how well Catholic schools are managing to call young people into a relationship with Christ (Catholic Bishops of NSW and ACT, 2007). Other data in this study show that fewer than one in five young people are leaving these schools with a commitment to Catholic Christianity and in the case of males this was only 11.4%.

This research has the potential to make a meaningful contribution to practice in the field through the recognition of the diversity of student perspectives on spirituality and through highlighting the importance of differentiated approaches designed to cater for the needs of diverse groups of students. The three schools in this current research appear to be offering largely undifferentiated programs and initiatives aimed at engaging students with spirituality, which do not address the different perspectives on spirituality found among students. This study clearly shows a need for a review of these programs and initiatives in the light of these points.

In the context of this conflation of spirituality and religion, it is evident that a failure to engage meaningfully with Catholic Christianity is, for most of these students, the catalyst for altogether abandoning a conscious expression of spirituality.

There are also implications concerning the students who are in the intermediate points of the continuum. While these students have not expressed meaningful engagement

with Catholic Christianity, they are to be regarded differently to those who have entirely rejected a religious expression of spirituality. Sixty per cent of students in this current study identify with either the non-defined spiritual profile of spirituality or the defined spiritual profile. For these students there remains a possibility of meaningful engagement if appropriate strategies are employed.

The recognition of students at different points in a continuum of expressions of spirituality calls upon educators to give serious thought as to how to best cater for the diverse group of students attending these Catholic schools. Further, the conflation of spirituality and religion evident among students in this study makes it all the more critical to engage these students meaningfully with spirituality during their experience at a Catholic school. This is further underlined by the probability that these students will not maintain any meaningful contact with the Catholic Christian community after leaving school.

5.2.2 Religious literacy and spirituality.

Prominent among the findings of this research, and integrally linked to the relationship between spirituality and religion, is the recognition of a deficit in religious knowledge and understanding among participants. This deficit was particularly evident in the relationship between religious knowledge and scientific knowledge. However, it was also found in the way interview participants reflected on important life experiences using very naïve views of prayer and divine intervention. The evidence regarding scientific knowledge was found in four areas: the prevalence of literal understandings of some religious truths; the perceived dissonance between scientific knowledge and religious knowledge; the lack of regard for formal Religious Education; and the low levels of engagement with much of the religious dimension of their school experience. The evidence concerning important life experiences was found in the reflections on prayer and the expectation of divine intervention

when faced with challenging circumstances such as personal ill health, family breakdown or the death of a loved one. This evidence indicates an under-developed religious literacy that is not adequate in equipping students to engage meaningfully with important life questions.

The literature in the area of the spirituality of emerging adults is replete with discussion of religious literacy. One strand in this discussion focuses on the value of broad religious literacy as a means of developing tolerance and social cohesion (T. A. Lewis, 2015; Prothero et al., 2016; Sanber et al., 2007). However, more relevant to this research is the approach to religious literacy, particular to a specific religious tradition, which provides for the intergenerational transfer of religious knowledge and which equips the individual adherent with the depth of understanding needed to navigate life's complexities (Boys, 2004; Goldberg, 2008). Researchers have focused on this area in the course of broad-based studies of the spirituality of young people and emerging adults (Hay & Nye, 2006; Hughes, 2007b; Koenig, 2015; Mackay, 2016; Mason et al., 2007; C. Smith & Denton, 2005). Additionally, considerable attention has been given to this question within the context of faith-based schools (Engebretson, 2014; Engebretson et al., 2008; Flynn, 1979, 1985, 1993; Flynn & Mok, 2002; Hughes, 2010, 2017; Hughes & Reid, 2011; Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010, 2014; Rymarz, 2016b). Further still, there has been intensive discussion on the nature, purpose and effectiveness of formal studies in Religious Education (Boeve, 2012; Conroy, 2016; Cooling, 2015; Crawford & Rossiter, 2006; de Souza, 2010; Engebretson, 2014; Ghosn, 2013; Goldberg, 2008; Rossiter, 2001a, 2010a, 2018; Rymarz, 2007a, 2013, 2016b; Rymarz & Belmonte, 2017). While this current study has not investigated the religious literacy of teachers, it is, nevertheless, relevant given the integral link between the quality of the teachers in general and the learning outcomes of the students (Agathangelou et al., 2016; Baurain, 2012; Fordham, Burn, Chapman, & Counsell, 2012). Researchers have concluded that the religious literacy of teachers in Catholic schools is not well-developed and that this

impacts on the capacity for Catholic schools to pass on elements of Catholic faith and life to their students in a meaningful way (Engebretson, 2014; Rymarz, 2006b). This concern seems to be well-founded in light of findings from this current study that show an under-developed level of religious literacy among participating students and the impact of this on spirituality overall.

While other researchers have previously identified concerns regarding the quality of religious literacy among young people, this current study has provided a further level of insight into three crucial aspects. First, it has identified the tendency for these students to hold literal or fundamentalist understandings, which results in a direct conflict for them between religious knowledge and scientific knowledge. Second, it has found that these students have very simplistic and somewhat child-like understandings of prayer and expectations of divine intervention. Third, it is evident that the perceived conflict with scientific knowledge and the disappointments associated with prayer and divine intervention are prominent catalysts for the rejection of religious belief. These three points culminate with a critical insight, which shows that this lack of religious literacy, coupled with the conflation of spirituality and religion discussed in Section 5.2.1, is leading directly to a number of these students completely disengaging with a conscious expression of spirituality.

This study found evidence of an under-developed religious literacy in a number of aspects of student responses. The first of these relates to the literal understanding of religious truth. Data presented in the previous chapter clearly showed that students drew on literal understandings when referring to the Genesis creation stories and based their acceptance or rejection of religious truths on these literal understandings.

In his work on subject-specific literacy, Green proposes three dimensions of literacy which he names as operational, cultural and critical (B. Green, 1988). Following Green's

three-tiered classification of literacy (1988), Goldberg (2008) identifies that among the operational, cultural and critical forms of religious literacy, critical religious literacy is required for an individual to deal adequately with the complexity of life's experience. Students must develop a critical literacy where they "are encouraged and enabled to identify, examine and critique problematic, contradictory and multiple ways of viewing the world" (Goldberg, 2008, p. 266). Thus, when confronted with issues, such as their developing scientific knowledge, they ought to be able to engage with the complexities of questions that arise, drawing on a more sophisticated and nuanced religious literacy rather than being trapped within simplistic and literal understandings of religious truths.

In order to engage meaningfully with important life questions, emerging adults must have more than a basic operational level of religious literacy, yet this was lacking among participants in this research. In this current study, there was no evidence of students drawing on a contextual understanding of scripture, which would indicate either a cultural or critical religious literacy that recognises the use of metaphor and symbolic language in sacred texts. This is despite their teachers claiming that they had taught these concepts from a perspective of biblical literacy, drawing on a contextual understanding and applying hermeneutical principles. This deficit in biblical literacy among participants was not limited to those of the secular spirituality profile group who had chosen to reject a religiously aligned spirituality, but was also evident in the responses of those from the religious spirituality profile group who had affirmed a religious faith.

It has been noted by some researchers that current "Catholic Studies" syllabi in Religious Education in NSW focus mostly on knowledge attainment and recall without the opportunity to develop depth of understanding and capacity to apply the knowledge to life situations (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006; Hughes, 2017; Hughes & Reid, 2011; Rossiter, 2018).

This type of knowledge based, on comprehension and recall, does not contribute well to meaning making and connecting learning to life experience. Thus, even when effectively taught, this content-based approach is not well suited to developing critical religious literacy.

Related to and emerging from the point about biblical literacy and literal understandings of the creation accounts is the perceived conflict with scientific knowledge. Students who had rejected a religious approach to spirituality frequently cited the perceived conflict between religious truths and scientific theories as a major factor in their choice. In most cases, they were referring in particular to creation and evolution. The teachers at the participating schools confirmed that formal Religious Education focused on developing a nuanced understanding of the use of symbol and metaphor in sacred texts. They sought to emphasise that official Catholic teaching accepts scientific theories of evolution, stating that there is “no opposition between faith’s understanding of creation and the evidence of the empirical sciences.” (Pope Benedict XVI, 2008a, p. 1). Clearly, there is a gulf between what teachers intend to teach and what students learn.

Students from the secular profile group, in particular, commented on the differences they saw between their learning in science and their learning in Religious Education. They regarded their learning in science as evidence-based and reliable, whereas they regarded their learning in Religious Education as subjective and unsubstantiated.

While this conflict between religion and science was most prominent among those from the secular profile group, this was not exclusively the case. In particular, one student who identified with the religious spirituality profile spoke about dealing with this conflict and choosing to believe the creation story rather than the scientific theory of evolution. This instance highlights the literal nature of the understanding of religious truths about creation, even among those who hold a religious perspective.

In his discussion of the characteristics of religious knowledge among students, Hughes (2007a) argues that students make distinctions between different types of knowledge, such as scientific knowledge and religious knowledge. Therefore, a question about the existence of gravity would be seen as different to a question about the existence of God. While not doubting the veracity of this claim it should also be recognised that the study of a religious tradition, from the perspective of the adherent, allows religious truths to be investigated, understood and affirmed with clarity and confidence regardless of the student's personal disposition towards these ideas. Thus, it does not follow that knowledge of a religious tradition and its beliefs and practices should be viewed any differently to the study of a scientific theory, its rules and application.

The difference arises when students are asked to make meaning from their learning and relate this to their life experience. While it is clear that many students do not readily find meaning and relevance in their religious knowledge, this does not serve to explain why their religious knowledge itself is underdeveloped. Hughes found that students' understanding of their learning in their Religious Education classes was "sophisticated and nuanced" (Hughes, 2007b, p. 192). However, this is reflective of a focus on knowledge attainment, which is mostly catechetical and aligned with operational and cultural levels of religious literacy. While Hughes found that students could readily articulate that their school had taught them about "God as creator and about God's revelation in Jesus and God's expectation that they would follow Jesus" (Hughes, 2007a, p. 142). He notes, however, that when students were required to make personal connections and draw meaning for themselves from what they had learnt they responded with confusion and uncertainty (Hughes, 2007a).

Further work on literal belief is found in the research by Katholieke Universiteit (KU) Leuven in the Australian context through the "Enhancing Catholic Schools Identity

Project,” where the idea of literal belief is discussed as part of the Post Critical Belief Scale (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010, 2014). This discussion identified literal belief as interpreting “religious metaphors and truths of faith” (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010, p. 195) in an objective and literal manner while also noting that “biblical texts are mostly read literally and just accepted” (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010, p. 195). While Pollefeyt and Bouwens highlight rigidity, intolerance and fanaticism as risks associated with literal belief, the findings of this study show that literal understandings also result in issues of credibility. Under-developed religious literacy is challenged by scientific knowledge leading, which leads to the rejection of a religious expression of spirituality. In their analysis, Pollefeyt and Bouwens call for the development of a “post-critical belief,” which is best suited to “a pluralising society” (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010, p. 197). In the Post Critical Belief Scale, literal belief is understood as a conservative or defensive response to threats arising from the challenges of a secular society and changing values. Among the participants of this current study, however, there was little evidence indicating that students used literal belief as a conservative or defensive stance in support of a religiously aligned spirituality.

The evidence relating to religious literacy has been a prominent feature of the findings of this current study and has a bearing on each of the three research questions. Students’ expressions of spirituality are characterised by the absence of critical religious literacy. The lack of a developed religious literacy is also evident in the way the students are committing themselves to spirituality. Finally, the perceived dissonance between religious knowledge and scientific knowledge was presented by students as having a strong influence on spirituality.

The findings from this current study relating to a perceived conflict between learning in Religious Education and Science should provide the impetus for these three schools to

examine how areas of potential conflict, such as creation and evolution, are dealt with in the respective disciplines and from the perspective of interdisciplinary links. The evidence from this study shows that students perceive there to be a conflict and it would be important for these schools to look into how this perception has arisen.

Further evidence of a deficit in religious literacy is seen in the way in which students in this study relate to challenging life experiences, such as personal ill health, the illness or death of a loved one or a breakdown in family relationships. Students spoke of such experiences either as an instance of affirming their religious faith or challenging it. While Catholic Christianity teaches of an incarnate Christ and the inevitability of challenging life circumstances, students in these research interviews seemed to be relating to a much more simplistic understanding, where God would insulate them from or rescue them from challenging personal experiences. They spoke of praying in the face of challenging circumstances and having their faith affirmed because of a favourable outcome. Conversely, they spoke of praying and feeling abandoned or betrayed because the situation was not favourably resolved. Through such encounters with challenging life experiences and, in light of simplistic understandings of prayer and divine intervention, some participants in this research had abandoned their previously held religious beliefs. Even those who had found their belief affirmed by positive outcomes from challenging life experiences have, in effect, set up a framework with a deficit of religious literacy that will leave them vulnerable to disappointment when future experiences are not resolved favourably. This vulnerability is exacerbated by the conflation of spirituality and religion, which inevitably means that a failure in religious beliefs equates to a failure of spirituality altogether.

Notwithstanding the developmental stages of moving from adolescence to adulthood (Fowler, 1981; Kohlberg, 1984; Piaget, 1928) and the associated implications for religious

literacy, it should be expected that the level of religious literacy developed by the end of secondary school will be comparable to the literacy required in other subject areas. For example, students are expected to understand text type, literary forms and genre in the study of English, to undertake source criticism and documentary study in Modern History or Society and Culture and to develop and apply theories and processes of scientific investigation in Biology, Chemistry or Physics (NSW Educational Standards Authority, 2018). These subject-specific literacies are comparable to those required in the NSW Studies of Religion I and II courses. However, this current study has shown that despite the intention to provide a sophisticated level of religious literacy, the result has fallen well short of this. As a consequence, some young people are making decisions to reject a religious approach to spirituality because it seems to lack credibility and relevance. Moreover, some researchers have argued that the development of critical literacy ought to be undertaken from the early years primary school education and that critical literacy is an approach to practice rather than a level of achievement requiring a certain prior level of maturity (Comber, 2001, 2006; Exley, Woods, & Dooley, 2013).

While this study did not set out to measure religious knowledge or religious literacy per se, the indicators from the responses of students regarding knowledge of biblical literacy and incarnational theology indicate profound deficits. With this in mind, other questions arise about how these students might understand concepts such as original sin, redemption and resurrection among others.

The lack of religious literacy evident in student responses has profound repercussions in three areas. First, it raises concerns about how well students with such limited understanding will be able to dialogue meaningfully with complex philosophical and moral questions in the future. Second, if they are rejecting spirituality outright because of

their mistrust of religious ideas, how well equipped will they be to create meaning and find purpose in a life devoid of conscious spirituality? Finally, if they do maintain a connection to a religiously aligned spirituality, what type of religious understanding will they hand on to subsequent generations?

These three concerns have important implications for the practice of developing religious literacy among students in Catholic schools. The evidence from this study suggests that current practices in these three schools are not adequately addressing the challenge of developing critical religious literacy among students and, accordingly, alternative approaches ought to be examined to establish more effective practices.

5.2.3 Self-reliant spirituality.

The third element in the recipe for rejection is that of self-reliance in spirituality, which was commonly found among the expressions of spirituality of participants in this current study. Self-reliance in spirituality is a factor identified in some earlier studies (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006; Hughes, 2007b; Mason et al., 2007). Accordingly, the confirmation of this as an element of spirituality in this current study is not surprising. However, this current study identified strength and exclusivity in this aspect of self-reliance, which warrants further discussion.

Notwithstanding that students cited their friends as an important influence on their spirituality, the findings set out in the previous chapter indicated that friends seldom discussed spirituality with each other. The evidence from the survey data suggests this self-reliance contributes to participants in this study not having a very accurate understanding of how their friends view spirituality. The lack of conversation about spirituality was brought up on a few occasions by students during interviews with students confirming that they saw spirituality as a personal and private matter, which they did not discuss with others. However,

more commonly it arose as part of a debrief after the interview had concluded where students remarked that they did not realise that their friend held such beliefs or that they had not previously discussed spirituality with their peers in this way.

Despite students remarking on not having previously discussed spirituality with their peers in this way, there was no indication of a reticence to do so in the context of the group interviews. On the contrary, students were quite enthusiastic and forthcoming in these discussions. This willingness to discuss spirituality was especially true for female students with the males tending to be more circumspect. Further evidence of openness to discussing spirituality was found in some of the comments about school retreats, which affirmed that students saw value in sharing their views with their peers and listening to the perspectives of others on important questions.

The literature on why spirituality is seldom discussed among friends is quite sparse. There is some discussion among health care researchers as an adjunct to patient care (K. S. Barton et al., 2018; Molzahn & Sheilds, 2008) though little else was found. However, in other contexts researchers have demonstrated that young people are prepared to discuss spirituality if they believe the context to be supportive, accepting and non-judgemental (Engebretson, 2006; Maroney, 2008). This preparedness was evident with this current study where students engaged in the interview processes openly and willingly. While students in this study were self-reliant in their spirituality and maintained privacy about their spirituality in their day-to-day lives, there was no reluctance to enter into conversations about spirituality during the interview processes.

A parallel with the findings of this current study was found in the literature concerning a website “Soul Secret,” which invited people to anonymously discuss spirituality in an online environment (Healy, 2010). While not a scholarly undertaking, the “Soul Secret”

project provides some interesting parallels with the findings of this study. The “Soul Secret” website invited people to contribute their ideas with the suggestion that individual beliefs are often different from what people were brought up to believe, and it can often be difficult to share what you really believe with others. Healy’s discussion of the “Soul Secret” website highlights fears about ridicule and judgement as key reasons behind a reluctance to speak about spirituality openly. The “Soul Secret” site invited responses saying: “Here is your opportunity – say what you really believe and do it anonymously” (Healy, 2010, p. 1). The fact that this opportunity was well-received echoes the comments of participants in this current study who referred to the online world of social media and chat rooms as a place for exploring ideas with the security of anonymity.

The willingness of students to discuss their spirituality in this current research, and the success of the “Soul Secret” website in inviting responses, highlights the possibility that open discussions on spirituality could be included in the experiences offered by these three schools. The evidence from this current study and the literature reviewed suggests that open discussions on spirituality would be a welcome and effective development in practice in these three schools.

One of the consequences of self-reliance in spirituality is that young people make assumptions about what their friends think. The assumptions about their friends not being engaged in spirituality, accompanied by a lack of conversation about spirituality, may contribute to people feeling that their own interest and engagement in spirituality is unusual and lead to further suppression of their ideas. Thus, there is the potential for a cycle of discouragement to emerge where, in the absence of conversation about spirituality, individuals assume that their friends are not engaged with spirituality, which leads them to question their own engagement. Further, because spirituality is not normally discussed among

friends an individual may feel reluctant to introduce the topic into a conversation and thus reinforce the element of self-reliance in spirituality.

A further consequence of self-reliance in spirituality is the lack of opportunity for the development of an individual's understanding of spirituality. In other areas, such as when considering a moral dilemma, the opportunity for dialogue about the issue can contribute to the development of understanding through listening to the perspective of others. The absence of dialogue about spirituality means that such opportunities for development do not arise and potentially individuals will not have the occasion to extend and develop their understanding of spirituality. Thus, self-reliance in spirituality may leave them with an understanding of spirituality arising from childhood or early adolescence that is not sufficiently sophisticated to be meaningful to them in adult life.

A third consequence associated with self-reliance in spirituality is the lack of an opportunity for spirituality to be nurtured and encouraged in a communal setting. This lack of opportunity is particularly relevant for the 84.4% of survey respondents who are not connected with a parish community. Once these students have completed their education at a Catholic school very few will have any ongoing experience of a Christian community. This separation from a religious community, coupled with the lack of conversation about spirituality among their friends, means that these emerging adults are unlikely to have any readily available means to receive communal support and encouragement in developing their spirituality. The wisdom of community and the opportunity for this wisdom to inform and enhance their spirituality will be substantially lacking if there is no ongoing connection with a community of faith and no occasion for sharing perspectives on spirituality with others. Similarly, when faced with challenging personal experiences these young people will not have natural avenues for guidance, solace and support in the realm of spirituality. Thus, it

will be more difficult for them to see spirituality as a valuable resource at these times and it may lead to their spirituality losing meaning and relevance.

Self-reliance in spirituality is not a new concept in this area of research. It is clear, however, that the reasons for this phenomenon are not well understood, and given the potential impact of self-reliance on the development of spirituality, it is an area that should be thoroughly investigated. This current study has identified a strong sense of self-reliance, even to the exclusion of close friends. Further, it has shown how self-reliance can lead to misconceptions about engagement with spirituality and can also hinder the development of spirituality for the individual. Notwithstanding these points, this study has also confirmed that young people are willing and able to engage in conversation about spirituality if the environment is conducive to doing so.

These insights into the self-reliance in spirituality among participants in this current study have important implications for the practice of these schools and perhaps beyond. Such insights lead to questions about how these schools can modify their practice, relating to spirituality, so that self-reliance is not so resolute and the willingness to engage in conversation about spirituality is facilitated into a more frequent and open dialogue. In doing so, there is potential for students to see spirituality as a more regular and natural part of their experience, which can be discussed without risk among their peers.

5.2.4 Recipe for rejection summary.

The preceding Sections, 5.2.1, 5.2.2 and 5.2.3 have focused on three separate yet related elements of expressions of spirituality identified among participants in this research. The first of these, the relationship between spirituality and religion (5.2.1), highlighted that for all but a small number of participants in this research, spirituality was not distinguished from religion. When asked to speak about spirituality, students almost exclusively referenced

their responses against elements of the Catholic Christian religious tradition, such as faith, church and prayer. Using this framework they typically described their perspective as an acceptance or rejection of this Catholic Christian tradition. For some the acceptance or rejection was total, for others it was partial, thus leading to the use of a continuum image to discuss how these students expressed their spirituality.

Section 5.2.2 considered the aspect of religious literacy. The data had clearly shown that students in this current research were expressing religious ideas in a literal way and were drawing on naïve images of prayer and divine intervention in their spirituality. For some of these students, the lack of critical religious literacy when compared to scientific literacy had led them to abandon intentional spirituality altogether. Similarly, students' understanding of prayer had resulted in some of them rejecting spirituality when challenging circumstances did not end well. While religious literacy is only one dimension of the much broader field of spirituality, it is particularly important given the conflation of spirituality and religion in the minds of students, which is discussed in Section 5.2.1. If, in the minds of the students, there is no distinction between spirituality and religion then the absence of a well-developed religious literacy becomes a critical concern.

The third discussion point deals with the area of self-reliance in spirituality (5.2.3). The implications related to this propensity to maintain privacy about spirituality are crucial and certainly worthy of further research, especially in light of the paucity of evidence in the literature. In this current study, students remarked informally that they had not previously known the perspectives of their friends on spirituality and that spirituality was seldom, if ever, a topic of conversation. Additionally, in the online survey, students were asked about the spirituality of their friends and responded in ways that indicated some misconceptions about the degree of engagement with spirituality among their friends. The absence of

conversation about spirituality and the lack of understanding about the degree of engagement with spirituality may be contributing to cycles of discouragement among peers. It may also be contributing to an insular and isolated type of spirituality, which does not provide for communal support and encouragement. This is particularly important as these young people leave the Catholic school environment and in most cases do not maintain an ongoing connection with a religious community.

While each of these elements provides crucial insights into the expressions of spirituality among participants in this study, the most important insight arises from their combined impact. The conflation of spirituality and religion, a lack of critical religious literacy and resolute self-reliance in spirituality are working in concert to affect the engagement with spirituality among students in this study. Accordingly, these three elements have the combined impact of creating a recipe of rejection for these emerging adults. Thus, when a student chooses to reject their Catholic Christian upbringing, this often amounts to a complete disengagement with a conscious expression of spirituality.

5.3 A continuum of spirituality profiles

Integral to the design of this current research project was the use of spirituality profiles as a lens through which to view participant responses. The particulars of the development and use of these spirituality profiles are set out in Chapter 3.2. The spirituality profiles serve as a typology of spirituality, which allows for a nuanced understanding of distinctive expressions of spirituality, of commitment to spirituality and the influences on spirituality. This rich understanding has the potential to influence practice in the schools through the development of more appropriately targeted programs and initiatives, differentiated according to the needs of particular groups of students.

The findings of this study, drawing on these spirituality profiles, indicate a continuum of responses to spirituality, ranging from religious to secular, as shown in Figure 5.3. These responses are framed mainly in terms of degrees of acceptance or rejection of Catholic Christianity. In and through the use of these spirituality profiles in this study, it has been possible to identify aspects of spirituality, particular to specific groups of students, which allow for a more precise and nuanced understanding of their approach to spirituality.

The recognition of these diverse perspectives on spirituality, aligned to a spirituality profile, is not unlike the insights arising from a study linking Myers Briggs personality types to different domains of spirituality (Perez, 1998). It also has some resonance with Harmer's four strand taxonomy of spiritual beliefs (Harmer, 2009), insofar as he sought to recognise the impact of a range of spirituality types on different beliefs.

There is an important difference, however, in the use of spirituality types in other research and the spirituality profiles used in this current research. In all other research reviewed regarding spirituality types, researchers have analysed the data collected and then assigned a type to each of the participants in their research. Usually, this has been through the use of a questionnaire with responses grouped in combinations, which lead to a designated type. Thus, when the participant completes the questionnaire, she/he is assigned a type according to his or her responses. This current research took a different approach by inviting students to align themselves to a profile through reading descriptions and choosing the profile best suited to them. Additionally, participants had the opportunity of mixing components of different profiles to create a better fit for themselves or to construct their own profile description (see Chapter 3.2). Thus, this current research offers the possibility of understanding the spirituality of students according to profiles they have chosen themselves rather than through types assigned to them.

The diversity among the spirituality profiles is most clearly evident in the different ways the participants engage with spirituality, their intentionality and their commitment to spirituality. These distinctive elements are discussed under headings for each of the four main spirituality profiles; secular; non-defined spiritual; defined spiritual; and religious.

5.3.1 Secular spirituality profile.

Participants who chose the secular spirituality profile were indicating an approach to life that had no acknowledgement of a divine or supernatural force or being, no sense of a special purpose in life and no expectation or consideration of life after death. It is, therefore, a very precisely defined and closed classification where participants saw their mortal life as the totality of existence with no sense of transcendence.

Overall, 23.4% of participants aligned themselves with the secular spirituality profile (see Tables 4.2 and 4.3). More than half of the students from the secular profile group indicated that there had been some element of religious faith in their family. Similarly, more than half of these students indicated that they held some level of religious faith when they began secondary school. Thus, it is clear that for this group there has been a shift away from religiously aligned spirituality and towards a more secular perspective during their secondary school years. While some of the reasons for this shift include broader social factors beyond the realm of school influence, there is, nevertheless, evidence of some impact associated with the experience of attending a Catholic school. The factors that lead some young people to adopt a secular spirituality, despite the religious affiliation of their family, warrant closer examination. This need is particularly relevant in areas where some elements of their Catholic school experience are contributing to this decision.

The decision, by these students, to adopt a secular approach to spirituality was almost entirely conveyed as a rejection of a religious or spiritual perspective, most often that

of Catholic Christianity. Four common themes emerged as the catalyst for the rejection of religiously aligned spiritualities. The first of these catalysts was the perceived dissonance between scientific knowledge and religious literacy (see Section 5.2.2). Typically, participants in this profile group regarded their religious knowledge as implausible in the face of scientific evidence (Maroney, 2008; Mason et al., 2010b; Tacey, 2004). Encompassed in this perspective is the view that religious studies lack evidence and credibility in the face of scientific studies. This lack of credibility is particularly evident when the young person equates the religious perspective with a biblical fundamentalist approach, such as creationism, a view that was commonly found among participants in this study.

The second of the catalysts for rejecting religious perspectives concerns the processing of challenging life experiences. Faced with such experiences some students had felt disappointed in the outcome, having turned to God in prayer when confronted with circumstances such as illness or family breakdown. As noted in Section 5.2.2, a naïve understanding of prayer and divine intervention has led students to conclude either that God does not care about them or God does not exist. Related to this point about challenging personal experiences is the concern about human suffering on a broader scale, the injustice of poverty and the apparent randomness of severe illness or catastrophes impacting innocent people.

The third catalyst is the disagreement with religious perspectives on contemporary social issues, such as marriage equality and the related sense that traditional religious perspectives were narrow and judgemental. In Section 4.2.3 of the previous chapter, it was noted that students in this current research valued an inclusive approach to spirituality, which celebrated diversity and welcomed different perspectives. The counter-point to this, however, was the utter rejection of narrow, judgemental and coercive views that excluded others. This

element of inclusive spirituality and rejection of exclusive perspectives is a strong aspect in the disagreement with some religious views.

Finally, a further catalyst for rejecting a religious perspective and aligning with the secular spirituality profile is the sense of remoteness and alienation felt by some participants about religious ritual. They were also frustrated with the compulsion and coercion they felt with being required to attend school liturgies and to participate in experiences of prayer. Some young people conveyed a strong sense of resentment towards these experiences, which contributed to their decision to align themselves with a secular perspective.

Among these four catalysts for the rejection of Catholic Christianity, there is scope for schools to contribute in more constructive ways to engage these young people with spirituality and thereby, for some, to avoid this outright rejection of intentional spirituality. Most importantly, the development of critical religious literacy among these students has the potential to ameliorate the effects of some of the challenging questions faced.

While the engagement with the secular profile of spirituality is reactive or responsive, the intentionality and degree of commitment associated with this perspective are substantial in comparison to the rest of the cohort. Tables 4.4 and 4.5 in the previous chapter showed the relative strength of commitment of the secular spirituality profile group. More so than the other spirituality profile groups, the members of the secular spirituality profile group indicated that they had undertaken a conscious and deliberate decision-making process, which has led them to reject the notion of religion and spirituality and to adopt a secular perspective. Many of these regarded their decision as having been made from scientific evidence that they saw as irrefutable. Thus, overall, the members of the secular profile group are quite definite in their decisions about spirituality and are firmly committed to their secular perspective.

5.3.2 Non-defined spiritual profile.

The non-defined spiritual profile relates to participants who affirmed a belief in something beyond their mortal existence but who did not have any definite sense of what this might be and how it might intersect with their lives. By its nature, this spirituality profile does not include any distinguishing characteristics beyond the sense of ambiguity and uncertainty. This was the largest of the four spirituality profile groups (31.9%). Participants from this spirituality profile group were very general and non-specific in their responses and were also frequently quite brief and circumspect in their comments during interviews. This phenomenon is in contrast to other groups who were prepared to speak at length about their particular perspectives. Interview participants in the non-defined spiritual profile group tended to revert to brief comments that chiefly dwelt on the theme of not knowing and not being sure.

These participants referred to a wide range of factors in their choice of the non-defined spiritual profile. Similar to the reasoning related to the secular spirituality profile many of the factors were elements of rejecting a religious or spiritual perspective. Some pointed to the impact of scientific knowledge, others to the media and in particular the internet, while others still cited the emptiness of religious rituals. The inflexibility of religious ideas and the judgemental character of some religious people also influenced the commitment of the non-defined spiritual profile group. There is an inference among some in this group that religion and spirituality might have value, but the possibilities are tarnished by the negative experiences associated with its strongest advocates who present religious ideas forcefully and coercively.

Unlike the experiences cited by the secular spirituality profile group, there was no indication that significant personal issues, such as illness or family breakdown, had played a

role in the spirituality of the non-defined spiritual profile. Overall, there did not seem to be a particular factor or combination of factors that drove people in this group to align themselves with the non-defined spiritual profile. Instead, there seemed to be a general sense of dissatisfaction with the other possibilities coupled with a sense that there must be more to this life, thus implying a belief in transcendence. While there is an optimistic dimension to this perspective seen in the notion that there must be something more, there is a counter-point to this optimism in the sense that this something more does not seem evident or accessible in any meaningful way (Alisat & Pratt, 2012; Ammerman, 2013).

In addition to being characterised by a lack of definition, the non-defined spiritual profile group also seems to be characterised by a lack of commitment and intentionality. Not surprisingly, the data indicate that these students are the least committed to their spirituality. Comments from interview participants in this group highlighted the general nature of the non-defined spiritual profile group and the absence of certainty and conviction among them confirmed the data from the surveys.

It is difficult to provide more than a basic insight into this profile group owing to their uncertain and often very brief responses to interview questions. However, two related points stand out concerning their engagement with spirituality and their place in the cohort overall. One point concerns the size of the non-defined spiritual profile group, while the other relates to the low levels of commitment evident in comparison to the rest of the cohort. The non-defined spiritual profile group makes up almost one-third (31.9%) of the participants in this research. The evidence that students in this group have not given much thought to the area of spirituality raises questions about how they have managed to reach the end point of the experience in a Catholic school without having consciously engaged with spirituality. It also raises questions about the appropriateness and effectiveness of programs and initiatives

that are designed to facilitate this engagement. On the other hand, it highlights the potential to facilitate open exploration of spirituality among this quite large proportion of the cohort. The recognition that the minds of these students are not yet made up suggests a fertile opportunity to explore different types of engagement. The second point relates to the low levels of commitment indicated in this group. The relatively large size of this group and their comparably low levels of commitment distort the picture for the cohort overall.

The data highlight the need for differentiated approaches to developing spirituality, which recognise the diverse nature and degree of commitment among the different profile groups. It is evident that programs and initiatives offered by the schools in this study have not been successful in engaging this relatively large non-defined spiritual profile group. This highlights the need for further investigation. This need is especially so given the small numbers in this group have reached a definite view on spirituality at the end point of their experience in a Catholic school.

5.3.3 Defined spiritual profile.

The defined spiritual profile group is the most diverse of the four spirituality profile groups with three distinct sub-groups. This spirituality profile group includes all participants who had a definite spiritual or religious perspective but who did not align themselves with a particular religious tradition. The first of the sub-groups within the defined spiritual profile group is made up of those who articulated beliefs aligned to those of new age spiritualities. This sub-group, potentially diverse in itself, includes the few students who specifically aligned their spirituality with new age expressions, such as chakras, numerology and tarot cards as part of their interest in the exotic (Büssing et al., 2010; de Souza & Rimes, 2010). The second sub-group encompasses those who held personalised and often eclectic beliefs commonly expressed in a pseudo-Christian framework (Francis, Croft, & Pyke, 2012;

Maroney, 2008; McCrindle, 2017). These students typically referred to themselves as Christian in character but did not accept or agree with a substantial amount of orthodox Christian belief. The third sub-group expressed beliefs that were substantially aligned to the Christian tradition but did not find value or meaning in formal Christian or Catholic life and practice. In essence, for most of these participants, orthodox Christian beliefs were generally accepted or adopted but without the practice of regular Sunday worship (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006).

Students choosing the defined spiritual profile make up the second largest (28.1%) group of participants. These students have made purposeful decisions about spirituality, and while most of them still reference their decisions against Catholic Christianity, they are, nevertheless, engaging with spirituality outside of the intentional Catholic community. In doing so, they are forging personal and individual responses to spirituality. These responses have the potential to go beyond the dynamic of merely accepting or rejecting Catholic Christianity, which is characteristic of most participants in this research. Such personal and individual responses also have the potential to engage others in the meaningful exploration of spirituality. However, to realise this potential, schools would first need to address the resolute self-reliance in spirituality found in this study, which would currently work against the open exploration of spirituality.

Most students in the defined spiritual profile group were evenly divided between the pseudo-Christian and non-affiliated Christian sub-groups with only a few aligning with the new-age sub-group. Each of the three sub-groups is discussed separately below in order to recognise the differences in the way students are engaging with these particular perspectives in their spirituality.

5.3.3.1 Defined spiritual profile – New Age sub-group.

While expressions of new age spirituality are indisputably growing in popularity, the specific references to new age spiritualities in this study came from only three students overall. The responses of these students suggested that they were more attracted to these ideas as exotic beliefs that reflected an openness to new experiences rather than as an approach to life, which they found particularly meaningful. These students intermingled terms, such as chakras, numerology and tarot cards as though they were different elements of the same belief system rather than seeing them as distinct approaches in their own right. This created the impression that they did not have a strong understanding of these terms and similarly were unlikely to be deeply committed to following them. This sub-group was most strongly characterised by a curiosity in unusual expressions of spirituality, which stood out as quite different from the traditional approach of Catholic Christianity.

5.3.3.2 Defined spiritual profile – pseudo-Christian sub-group.

The second sub-group from the defined spiritual profile expressed highly personalised or individualised and sometimes eclectic beliefs that seemed to align with their experiences and their view of the world. In this sub-group, there are strong echoes of Smith and Denton's Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (C. Smith & Denton, 2005), which refers to a benevolent, though somewhat remote deity, an expectation of moral living characterised by kindness to others and a belief in an ultimate reward in the afterlife.

Students in this sub-group typically expressed beliefs that were broadly Christian, including elements such as belief in God, an ethical approach to life based broadly on the commandment of love and an expectation of eternal life in heaven. At the same time, there was no specific alignment with more particular Christian beliefs, such as salvation through

Jesus Christ or the belief in the Trinity. Nor were there any connections between their personal beliefs and the worshipping community of Christians.

The degree of commitment to spirituality in this sub-group varied widely. Some students expressed a very loose affiliation with a collection of assorted beliefs that were likely to change with new experiences. In contrast, other interviewees gave indications of a deliberately constructed spirituality that fitted well with their view of the world to which they were firmly committed. However, given the prominence of personal experience in constructing these expressions of spirituality, it is likely that even the most strongly committed student in this sub-group would be inclined to change their perspective in light of new experiences. In between those who were loosely affiliated and those who were strongly committed, a range of different types of engagement was evident, confirming that this is the most diverse and individualised of the four spirituality profile groups.

More so than any of the other groups, this pseudo-Christian sub-group used their personal experience as the barometer with which to measure the worth of spirituality. The emphasis on experience is a feature widely recognised among participants in this research, which has been most prominent among members of this sub-group.

5.3.3.3 Defined spiritual profile– non-affiliated Christian sub-group.

Members of this sub-group are, in effect, professing substantially Christian beliefs but without the connection to a church community. In interviews, students in this sub-group gave expression to orthodox Christian beliefs while also affirming that they found it more meaningful to give personal expression to their spirituality in their own way rather than through a church community with its rituals and practices.

Some students in this sub-group had taken deliberate decisions to disassociate with the church community over issues of teaching and practice. Most commonly the issue related to church teaching about sexual morality, and in particular, homosexuality and same-sex marriage. There were also some more generalised comments about the church being judgemental and inflexible without highlighting a specific issue. It is quite evident that the perceived rigidity of church teaching is an important factor in members of this sub-group choosing to remain separate from the church community (Dixon et al., 2007; Gottlieb, 2012).

A further strand in this sub-group relates to some students who, while not expressing any particular objections to church practices, found that these practices did not resonate with their experience, and accordingly, they chose to stay away. For many, formal Christian worship, whether in a school or parish context, was a remote and alienating experience (Hughes, 2007b; Mackay, 2016; Mason et al., 2007; McCrindle, 2017).

As with the discussion in Section 5.3.3.2, there are a variety of forms of engagement evident among members of this sub-group. There is a somewhat casual affiliation evident in those who choose not to associate with a church community because it does not resonate with them (Mackay, 2016; McCrindle, 2017). However, there is a more purposeful commitment among those who are expressing opposition to a particular teaching or practices and, similarly, those who have found it more meaningful to nurture their spirituality outside of the church community seem to have made definite and deliberate choices to which they are wholly committed.

5.3.3.4 Defined spiritual profile group summary.

The nature of engagement is different for each of these three sub-groups. Those in the new age sub-group seem to be basing their interest on the attraction of something that is different to their primary reference point of Catholic Christianity. For those in the pseudo-

Christian sub-group, the engagement is with the meaning provided through particular beliefs. In most cases, this was a distillation of the Christian message into a few more palatable sentiments that resonate with the life experience of the individual.

A different type of commitment is evident among the members of the non-affiliated Christian sub-group. They are more definite in their beliefs but have been swayed away from religious affiliation owing to some of the factors noted above. This group is substantially Christian in belief but estranged from the practice of the Christian community. Among the three sub-groups, the students of the non-affiliated Christian sub-group seem to have traversed a much more deliberate path than the others, usually in terms of trying to reconcile their personal beliefs, their family traditions and the contradictions they find with aspects of church life.

The fact that members of this group hold definite beliefs yet, do not associate themselves with a community of believers, makes them vulnerable to the challenges of insularity and isolation as discussed in Section 5.2.3. Accordingly, when faced with new experiences they do not have the benefit of shared wisdom and community support to assist them in processing these new experiences, which they must do in an individual and isolated way. Thus, while commitment to spirituality appears to be quite strong among some in the defined spiritual profile group, it remains open to change in the future.

5.3.4 Religious spirituality profile.

The religious spirituality profile group includes those who have expressed substantially orthodox Christian beliefs, coupled with a level of commitment to the church community, through regular church attendance. While it was feasible to find participants from religious traditions other than Christianity in this study, none were evident in the interview processes. The religious profile group sits at the opposite end of the continuum to

the secular profile group and is characterised by the acceptance of the Catholic Christian religious tradition, while the secular spirituality profile group has utterly rejected this perspective.

The religious spirituality profile group accounted for 16.6% of participants in this study. It is notable that while the religious profile group is the smallest of the four spirituality profile groups, it is the group for which the programs and initiatives of these Catholic schools are most closely tailored. The spirituality of the religious profile group is, in effect, the default position to which other students are expected to aspire, and the programs and initiatives of these Catholic schools are largely fashioned to guide students towards this religious perspective. This emphasis creates an inevitable disconnect with many of the students who do not share in this religious perspective and who subsequently disengage with spirituality.

Overwhelmingly, the most prominent feature among the religious spirituality profile groups is the alignment with family and, in particular, parental perspectives. Regardless of other factors contributing to their commitment to a religious expression of spirituality, the members of the religious profile group had all adopted the religious practice of at least one of their parents. While other factors, such as school retreats and volunteering experiences, are positive influences on their spirituality, it was apparent that these have consolidated the commitment to the religious expression of spirituality adopted from the family environment rather than being a driving force in their own right. There were no examples found of participants adopting a religious perspective without having a religious family background. These data underline the strength of family influence cited widely in the literature. In his longitudinal study of Catholic schools in Australia, Flynn consistently found students citing family as their most important influence (Flynn, 1979, 1985, 1993; Flynn & Mok, 2002).

Mason and his colleagues found that a young person whose mother attended church frequently was four-to-five times more likely to be an active Christian than others (Mason et al., 2007).

The degree of commitment evident among the religious profile group, however, is not entirely clear with contrary indicators in different sources of data. Survey data show that there is a high level of commitment found among the religious profile group. Tables 4.4, 4.9 and 4.10 in the previous chapter indicated that those in the religious profile group were relatively more committed to their spirituality than the overall group of survey respondents, and also that they were comparably more committed than any of the other profile groups. Despite the relatively strong commitment evident in the survey data, the interviews conveyed a different picture. Participants in interviews, with one exception, spoke about seamlessly adopting the religious perspective of their parent or parents as though this were a natural or inevitable path for their lives. They spoke about it being a simple and obvious step that had not required any particular thought or deliberation and something that they merely adopted without question, as though it were a normative dimension of their family experience.

Seven of the students interviewed had aligned themselves with the religious spirituality profile. Among these, only one young woman spoke about a process of active and deliberate discernment, wrestling with difficult experiences and relating to friends with different views. While in this one case, the individual was still clearly aligned with the religious perspective of her parents, she had reached this view following a process of active reflection. For the other six, it appeared as though they had merely drifted into alignment with their parents' religious perspective without much thought or discernment. While these six students conveyed a definite commitment, it was expressed mainly in terms of their religious spirituality being natural and self-evident.

Given that the commitment to the spirituality of these six students stemmed from an apparently unreflected socialisation into a familial tradition it is possible, that when challenging experiences inevitably arise, young people such as these will find their religious spirituality under threat. While it is not appropriate to disregard the evidence in the quantitative data which confirms a relatively strong commitment to the religious spirituality profile, the qualitative data bring a perspective to the discussion that calls into question the solidity of a commitment made without purposeful reflection and discernment. Further, it raises the question about how well equipped some of the students in the religious profile group will be to deal meaningfully with challenging experiences later in life.

5.3.5 Spirituality profiles – summary.

The preceding discussion in Section 5.3 explained the diverse ways in which participants engaged with spirituality, and how their commitment to different approaches to spirituality had emerged during their years at a Catholic school. These aspects were carefully examined using the lens of the four spirituality profiles. As set out in Section 4.3 of the previous chapter, the data show the commitment of these participants to be determined by experience and open to change in the light of new experience. It was also found to be moderate in strength overall. When viewed through the lens of the four spirituality profiles, this commitment is revealed to be quite diverse and nuanced.

The image of a continuum has been used to explain the type of engagement and extent of commitment to spirituality with the two ends of the continuum being occupied by those identifying with the secular and the religious profiles respectively (see Figure 5.3). While the members of the secular spirituality profile group are quite deliberate and purposeful in their commitment to a secular expression of spirituality, most of those in the

religious spirituality profile group seem to have adopted their family religious affiliation with little reflection or discernment.

Different types of engagement also characterise the two spirituality profile groups on the intermediate points along the continuum. Those of the non-defined spiritual profile group are the least committed of the four groups, and they are also the least certain of their perspective. The defined spiritual profile group are the most diverse of the four groups with varied types of commitment evident among the identifiable sub-groups within this broad profile.

Four points emerge as particularly noteworthy from this discussion. First, there is a substantial proportion of students, identified as the non-defined spiritual profile group, who do not seem to have consciously engaged at any meaningful level with their spirituality, despite spending a number of years at a Catholic school. Second, the relatively uncommitted nature of the participants in this research suggests considerable potential for open exploration of spirituality in their school contexts through appropriately differentiated approaches. Third, the students who have aligned themselves with the religious spirituality profile show little evidence of reflection and discernment in their decision to adopt the religious tradition of their parents. Fourth, while the religious profile is the default perspective towards which programs and initiatives are directed, the majority of students align with other spirituality profiles, and are therefore likely to disengage from these programs.

5.4 A kairos for Catholic schools

In this final part of the discussion of the findings, the focus will be on the opportunities for these Catholic schools to influence how their students engage with spirituality. This study has shown, as has other research, that the most critical influences on spirituality among young people are those such as family and friends, which sit outside the

direct purview of Catholic schools. Thus, the capacity of these Catholic schools to shape the spirituality of their students is quite limited. However, this study has also found that there is scope for these Catholic schools to exercise some influence and indeed they have the opportunity to mitigate some of the factors that are undermining meaningful engagement with spirituality.

This situation is a *kairos* moment, a moment of both crisis and opportunity for these Catholic schools (Perschbacher, 1990). They face the profound challenge of waning interest in spirituality among their students and an increasing propensity for them to reject, in part or in full, the tradition of Catholic Christianity. It is also clear that there is a willingness among students to engage with and explore spirituality in a suitable environment. This current study suggests that there is much about the environment of these Catholic schools that is not conducive to the exploration of spirituality; however, the findings also point to some ways in which this situation might be fruitfully addressed.

The discussion in this section looks closely at some of the crucial factors that are influencing spirituality among participants and highlights where the potential exists to modify programs and initiatives to better effect. Alongside the broad social influences, such as family and friends, this current study set out findings concerning some influences that are directly related to Catholic schools. These were: volunteering experiences; school retreats; formal Religious Education classes; Science classes, and school prayer and religious ritual. The impact of strongly expressed religious views was also found to be an influence on spirituality. While this was not necessarily related to Catholic schools, the examples cited by students in the interviews were mostly from guest speakers invited to the schools or from clergy involved in school liturgies. Therefore, in the context of this study, these encounters with strongly

expressed religious views will be considered as part of the influence of Catholic schools on spirituality.

The broader social influences, such as family and friends, have been thoroughly investigated by earlier research (Hay & Nye, 2006; Hughes, 2007b; Koenig, 2015; C. Smith & Denton, 2005), and the findings of this current study underline the work done by other researchers who identify these as the primary and most important influences on the spirituality of young people and emerging adults. Rather than revisit this well-traversed field, the discussion in this chapter will focus on some of the other areas of influence that relate to new insights.

This section begins with further consideration of the data showing the relative strength of Catholic school influences in comparison with broader social influences. Following this, four important school influences are discussed. These are school retreats, volunteering experiences, formal Religious Education, and school prayer and religious ritual. The influence of science classes will be touched on briefly when considering formal Religious Education, and the influence of strongly expressed religious views is considered in the context of the discussion of school prayer and religious ritual.

Prominent among the findings regarding the influences on spirituality are the differences identified among the four spirituality profiles used in this study, and the way those who identify with these profiles are impacted differently by each area of influence. This divergence is evident when looking at the relative strength of Catholic school influences in comparison with broader social influences, and it is also apparent when examining particular school-based influences, such as school retreats or formal Religious Education classes. With this comes the opportunity to understand more precisely how different groups of students, according to their spirituality profiles, are responding to elements of programs

and initiatives offered by their Catholic schools, and how these schools might modify their practice accordingly.

5.4.1 Relative strength of school influences on spirituality.

When students were asked during interviews to identify the things that had most strongly influenced their spirituality, they commonly referred to family and friends along with important life experiences. They also spoke about the impact of human suffering on their thinking and the influence of media and, in particular, social media. It was rare for students to mention a school-related experience as one of their most important influences. When they did, it was either school retreats or volunteering experiences. The exception to this pattern was a group of students who identified with the secular spirituality profile, citing their Science classes as a crucial influence. It had caused them to be sceptical about religious ideas and ultimately led to them choosing a secular perspective.

Notwithstanding the example of scientific studies, it was very apparent in the interview processes that the influence of school programs and initiatives was far less important than broader social influences, such as family and friends. School influences had been important, however, when they served to consolidate and support an approach to spirituality that already existed and that aligned closely with the religious perspective of the family. Accordingly, those from the religious spirituality profile group were inclined to recognise and affirm school influences more strongly than those from other spirituality profile groups.

The analysis of quantitative data from the survey responses provided a clear and unequivocal confirmation of the sense that social factors, such as family and friends, had a more important influence on spirituality than school programs and initiatives (see Table 4.16). When viewed through the lens of spirituality profiles these quantitative data showed

that those of the religious and defined spiritual profile groups were more strongly influenced by school-based factors than those of the secular and non-defined spiritual profile groups. However, these differences among the four profile groups do not change the overall finding that broad social influences, such as family and friends, are considerably more influential than Catholic school influences. This finding is the case for the cohort overall and for each of the four spirituality profile groups, though to differing degrees.

The realisation that these Catholic schools have little prospect of influencing the spirituality of their students against the tide of broader social influences highlights the implausibility of some expectations placed upon Catholic schools. For example, in 2007 the Catholic Bishops of NSW and the ACT called for Catholic schools to be centres for the new evangelization (Catholic Bishops of NSW and ACT, 2007) and again in 2014 the Sydney Catholic Education Office published a charter for Catholic schools articulating similar expectations (Catholic Education Office Sydney, 2014b). While both of these documents recognise the primary role of parents in the task of education, they do not acknowledge the “relatively secular” (Rossiter, 2018, p. 127) character of students attending Catholic schools as well as the similar perspective held by many of their parents.

Notwithstanding the strength of broader social influences and the limited capacity of schools to go against these influences, some points emerging from this current study could serve to enhance the effectiveness of these Catholic schools in developing spirituality, albeit in a limited way. Central to these is the insight into the differences found among the four spirituality profile groups, which call for more diversified programs and initiatives. The absence of definite commitment and the openness to explore spirituality also suggest possibilities for fruitful engagement with spirituality in the school setting. Mitigating aspects of spirituality, such as the lack of critical religious literacy, narrow perspectives, and resolute

self-reliance in spirituality, are areas where these schools could make a considerable difference.

The limited influence of Catholic schools in an increasingly secular society has also been addressed in the “Enhancing Catholic Schools Identity Project” (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010, 2014; Sharkey, 2015), which calls for some rethinking of how Catholic schools seek to operate in this environment that so radically challenges traditional models of Catholic education.

In the sections that follow, four school programs and initiatives will be discussed to help identify the nature and extent of the influence they provide, and also to recognise the different ways that students with different spirituality profiles relate to these programs and initiatives.

5.4.2 Influence of school retreats on spirituality.

Students interviewed in this research presented widely divergent views on their experience of school retreats, ranging from strongly critical to enthusiastically supportive. These responses stood out as different from the evidence from other research on retreats, which has consistently found that students were well engaged with retreats and found them to be worthwhile, meaningful and enjoyable experiences (Hughes, 2017; McQuillan, 2011a; Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009). Further investigation suggests that the quality of their particular retreat experience in one instance may have been the issue rather than the experience of retreats per se.

While there was an apparent issue of quality with one of the school retreats in this study, there was, nevertheless, some consistency in the comments affirming certain aspects of

retreats while rejecting others. Additionally, there were some obvious parallels between these comments about retreats and the spirituality profile of the students.

Most students warmly affirmed certain aspects of retreats. These included; the opportunity for some time out away from the stresses of Higher School Certificate studies, the opportunity to spend some quality time in the company of friends and the chance to explore important ideas openly and inclusively. This affirmation was consistent among students with different spirituality profiles. Rossiter's research broadly aligns with these findings; however, he also found that occasions of teacher sharing were highly valued (Rossiter, 2016). In this current research, no comments were noted about the value of teacher sharing during a school retreat.

The affirmation of retreats in this current study relates to an environment that is relaxed, communal, open and inclusive. It is evident that students felt comfortable and accepted in this environment, and accordingly, their comments were favourable. Those students who have a secular spirituality profile, and those of the non-defined spiritual profile, did not find themselves challenged or threatened by these aspects of the school retreat. Similarly, those who have a defined spirituality profile, and those with a religious spirituality profile, saw value in relaxing times spent with friends and affirmed the open and inclusive nature of discussions about important issues.

Divergent views, however, were found relating to aspects of retreats that are overtly religious, such as sessions relating to images of God and experiences of prayer and liturgy. It is with these elements of school retreats that some students felt they were coerced into believing something that was foreign to them. Not surprisingly, it is the students from the secular spirituality profile group who felt the most alienated by these aspects of school retreats. Those students at the opposite end of the continuum, namely students who have a

religious spirituality profile, were affirming of such aspects of retreats. Those from the defined spirituality profile group were also mostly affirming of these dimensions, although there were some concerns expressed about religious rituals on school retreats. These religious rituals often involve a sacramental Rite of Reconciliation and Eucharist presided over by a priest who has not been part of the overall retreat process, and who has just arrived at the retreat venue to preside at these rituals. The risk is that the priest may not be able to continue the tone of informality and openness that characterises other aspects of school retreats. This risk may impact, in particular, on those from the defined spiritual profile group who may have otherwise been supportive of the overtly religious dimensions of their school retreat.

Students from the non-defined spiritual profile group also reacted negatively to these overtly religious aspects of the school retreat; however, their comments reflected a lack of relevance or lack of connection with their experience rather than a sense of resentment at the perceived coercion as expressed by those of the secular spirituality profile group.

Interviews with teachers also referred to the diversity of attitudes and perspectives that students bring to the school retreat experience. Some teachers reflected on the challenges associated with this diversity, and one even suggested that retreats should be optional. In their reflections on retreats, some of the teachers spoke about bringing students on board, or bringing them along, suggesting that students who were initially reluctant were gradually brought into a stronger level of engagement with the retreat experience. This perspective is different from that of the students.

The value of school retreats, so widely recognised in the literature, is broadly affirmed in this current study. However, there are substantial grounds for considering how to respond more appropriately to the diversity of spirituality profiles found among students in this study. Overall, about 45% of students, those of the religious and defined spiritual profile

groups, seem well served by their school retreat experience in this study. However, the experience is mixed for the majority of students who identify either with the secular or non-defined spiritual profile. In particular, there is a need to consider how the overtly religious dimensions of school retreat can be presented in ways that are not seen as coercive, exclusive or irrelevant by these two spirituality profile groups.

5.4.3 Influence of volunteering experiences on spirituality.

The students who commented on the influence of volunteering experiences did so from a positive perspective. Similarly, teachers were positive about their experience of accompanying students on such occasions and indicated that these were important influences on the spirituality of the students. Among all the programs and initiatives discussed in this research, the influence of volunteering experiences is unique in the universally positive comments offered by students.

While students were warm and affirming in their comments about volunteering experiences, there were apparent differences in how students reflected on and connected these experiences to their spirituality. The differences noted are closely aligned to the spirituality profiles of the respective students. Students in the religious and defined spiritual profile groups spoke about the profound impact of the volunteering experience on their lives and related this explicitly to their spirituality. In other instances, students spoke of particular volunteering experiences as an important influence on their spirituality but were not explicit in how this experience impacted on them. Finally, some students spoke highly of their volunteering experience as something meaningful and relevant in their lives but also commented that this did not have anything to do with spirituality. In this final instance, the students were from the secular spirituality profile group who saw the volunteering experience

as important from a humanitarian perspective but who did not attach any further meaning to the experience.

While many students spoke with considerable warmth about the importance of their volunteering experience, there is no indication of such experiences being the catalyst for students changing their perspective on spirituality. Instead, the volunteering experiences played a consolidating or affirming role.

Although volunteering experiences provided the opportunity for students to engage with and reflect on existential questions, such as the meaning of suffering, it was apparent that when students raised the issue of human suffering in interviews, they were usually speaking in global terms and not relating this reflection to their own experience of encountering people experiencing disadvantage.

The value of the volunteering experience for students has been in the broadening of their perspectives through an encounter with communities whose lives were very different to their own. In some cases, a strong relational element was evident where students reflected on their encounter with particular individuals. Other experiences provided for an inter-faith or inter-cultural exchange, which allowed students in this study to reflect on aspects related to their faith and culture. Finally, the volunteering experiences led to students questioning their own consumerism and materialism as paths to finding meaning in their lives.

The most profound influence of volunteering experiences is evident among those students who were able to reflect meaningfully on their service and to re-examine their perspective on spirituality through this lens. This insight highlights the importance of meaningful briefing and debriefing processes associated with the volunteering experiences. Appropriate briefing and debriefing processes can help to ensure that students gain the most

benefit from their volunteering experiences and assist them in connecting the experience with their own spirituality (Webber, 2011, 2012).

None of the students interviewed offered any comments connecting their volunteering experiences to other aspects of their Catholic school experience. Despite the possibilities, there were no connections expressed between the volunteering experience and Religious Education classes or between these experiences and school prayer or liturgy. The opportunity for connection to other aspects of school life through a service learning model has the potential to enhance the volunteering experience for students as well as to provide some valuable reference points to other areas of school life and potentially to their spirituality (Lovat et al., 2009).

While students highly valued the volunteering experiences associated with these three schools, their influence on spirituality is consolidating rather than transformative, particularly for those from the religious and defined spiritual profile groups. The influence of the volunteering experience may be enhanced by ensuring that appropriate briefing and debriefing is undertaken with students and by providing more substantial links between the volunteering experience and other important dimensions of school life, such as Religious Education classes and school prayer and liturgy.

5.4.4 Influence of formal Religious Education on spirituality.

Although formal Religious Education classes are a central element of the curriculum of the three Catholic schools involved in this study, it is evident that the students do not value these classes highly. Very few positive comments were recorded in comparison to the broader chorus of negative comments from interview participants. Some students regarded formal Religious Education as irrelevant, both in terms of their aspirations for further study and its connection to their life experience. Additionally, some students reported an unfavourable

climate in their classes where factors, such as compulsion and perceived coercion, contributed to behavioural issues. A few students spoke positively about their experience of formal Religious Education referring to some interesting discussion and the importance of understanding a range of religious traditions. However, notwithstanding these examples, the predominant stance was a negative one. Additionally, some students referred to a perceived lack of credibility and lack of worth of religious knowledge, which diminished their perception of formal Religious Education when compared to the content of other subjects in their curriculum.

Regardless of their spirituality profile, most students offered negative comments about compulsion, coercion, lack of interest, relevance and credibility. Not surprisingly the strongest of these were from students identifying with a secular spirituality profile, while the occasional positive comment came from students with either a religious spirituality profile or defined spiritual profile. Some students from the defined spiritual profile group were particularly vehement in their comments, criticising elements of coercion and judgement associated with their formal Religious Education.

Comments from students in this study are not unlike findings from other research (de Souza, 2010; Hughes, 2007a, 2017; Rossiter, 2018), which highlight negative student perceptions about the quality and relevance of their formal Religious Education. Students report that Religious Education classes can be coercive, trying to persuade students to believe in the Catholic Christian tradition. They also dislike the fact that they are compelled to undertake formal classes in Religious Education classes when, apart from English, they can choose subjects for themselves.

Overall, the negative perceptions and the perceived lack of credibility related to formal Religious Education inevitably impact on the quality of the learning outcomes.

Students who are reluctant to engage with the subject will not develop a strong knowledge of the content (Chi & Wylie, 2014; Harris, 2011; Macklem, 2015). Questionable or meaningless content will not be assimilated into the students' framework of knowledge (Agathangelou et al., 2016; Daniela & Abens, 2014; Laur, 2013). Finally, study with unclear objectives and confused pedagogies, taught by non-specialist teachers who may themselves be indifferent to the subject, cannot be expected to yield strong learning outcomes (Hackett & Lavery, 2012; Horner & Tucker, 2013; Rymarz, 2006b).

There is a dissonance evident in the literature relating to formal Religious Education. Ecclesial authorities in NSW expect that Catholic schools will be "centres of the new evangelization" which "achieve high levels of Catholic religious literacy and practice" (Catholic Bishops of NSW and ACT, 2007, p. 2), with the goal of "encouraging students' participation in and commitment to ... the life of the parish, including the Sunday Eucharist" (Catholic Education Office Sydney, 2014b, p. 2). In contrast, prominent researchers are calling for a focus on spirituality rather than religion (Rossiter, 2018) and the goal of exploring purposeful living rather than religious practice alone (Hughes, 2017). This dissonance contributes to a lack of clarity and certainty for Religious Education teachers, which inevitably impacts on the experience of students.

The findings from this study highlight the poor standing of formal Religious Education while also revealing a distinct lack of religious literacy among participants. It is not surprising, therefore, that attempts to explore religious truths in sacred texts in a nuanced way, with attention to metaphor and symbolic language, have not been successful. It is also unsurprising that students lack the critical religious literacy needed to engage meaningfully with learning from other areas of study and also with challenging life experiences. The experience of Religious Education for students has a direct impact on their approach to

spirituality with the evident lack of critical religious literacy being an important factor in students rejecting religious expressions of spirituality and choosing to disengage with intentional spirituality overall.

While it is within the purview of these three Catholic schools to examine specific aspects of formal Religious Education within their contexts, the more foundational discussion about the philosophy and intention of Religious Education and the choice of appropriate pedagogies sits outside the scope of individual schools and needs to be considered by ecclesial authorities and school systems.

5.4.5 Influence of school prayer and religious ritual on spirituality.

Among all the areas discussed in interviews with students, the experience of school prayer and religious ritual evoked the most substantial criticism. Very few students commented favourably on these experiences and those who did seemed unaware of the attitude of most of their peers. Those who did speak positively about the experiences of school prayer and religious ritual were exclusively from the religious spirituality profile group. These students regarded school prayer and religious ritual as important communal occasions expressing shared faith. These comments, though, were clearly at odds with the views of the majority of students who expressed strong criticism at many different levels.

Students were most vehement in their criticism of the compulsory nature of school prayer and religious ritual and the sense that school prayer and religious ritual were intended to convert students to a religious expression of spirituality aligned with Catholic Christianity.

Students who hold a secular perspective on spirituality were especially resentful of this compulsion and perceived coercion. Some of these students, from the secular spirituality

profile group, cited school prayer and religious ritual as one of the factors in their choice to reject religious expressions of spirituality.

Furthermore, students criticised situations in which they were confronted with stridently expressed religious ideas. While students were often quite clear about their own spirituality they expressed very strongly that spirituality ought to be inclusive, and they firmly rejected the notion of a narrow and judgemental perspective on spirituality that would exclude some people. In this current study, students found that school prayer and religious ritual were sometimes occasions when strongly expressed religious views offended their sense of an inclusive spirituality.

Some students were less severe in their criticism but commented on the experience of school prayer and religious ritual as a remote and alienating experience, which left them feeling bored and frustrated. This sense of alienation was particularly the case for students who were not aligned with a religious expression of spirituality. Even among those who identified with the religious spirituality profile were some criticisms associated with the experience of school prayer and religious ritual. For these students, the concerns were mostly related to the indifference and lack of respect they felt from fellow students and from teachers whom they believed were not taking the experience seriously and were, therefore, diminishing the experience for others.

Irrefutably, the evidence from this research is overwhelmingly negative regarding the experience of school prayer and religious ritual. While this is not at odds with the findings of other researchers (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006; Flynn & Mok, 2002; Hughes, 2010), it does seem to have been expressed extremely strongly among participants in this current study.

The vehement criticism about school prayer and religious ritual in this study poses profound dilemmas for the three schools involved. It is evident that school prayer and

religious ritual are doing little, if anything, to nurture spirituality among students of these schools and, on the contrary, they seem to be important factors in the choice of some to consciously disengage with spirituality altogether. The celebration of Eucharist in these schools is a key element of the practice of prayer and religious ritual, yet it appears to be an alienating and negative experience for many. Of course, for most of the students in these cohorts, the only time when they share in the celebration of Eucharist is in the school setting. Thus, a lack of familiarity with the rituals and practices would inevitably contribute to the negativity surrounding this experience.

5.4.6 Summary of influences on spirituality.

The preceding discussion of influences on spirituality in Section 5.4 highlighted, first and foremost, the relatively minor influence of these three Catholic schools on the spirituality of their students when compared to the stronger influence of broader social factors, such as family and friends. Where these Catholic schools have been able to influence students, it is most notably among those of the religious spirituality profile group who are closely aligned to the spirituality of their parents. In these cases, the influence is seen as consolidating and supporting an existing perspective.

This study affirms that relatively few students in these Catholic schools align themselves with the religious spirituality profile (16.6%), and the majority of students (55.3%) identify with the secular and non-defined spiritual profiles. Thus, the environment among students in these three Catholic schools is mostly secular and the challenge for these schools to meet the ecclesial expectations are clearly enormous.

Among the four particular areas of influence discussed in this chapter, school retreats and volunteering experiences were highly regarded by students, whereas formal Religious Education and school prayer and religious ritual were not. When examining the

more positive aspects of school retreats and volunteering experiences it was noted that even though they were widely affirmed, the evidence pointing to engagement with spirituality was not widespread. It usually amounted to affirming and consolidating the existing approaches to spirituality held by those in the religious and defined spiritual profile groups. There was no evidence that the school retreat or volunteering experiences have had a transformative effect, where a student adopted a religious or defined spiritual perspective that they had not previously held. There are, however, grounds for suggesting that a more carefully differentiated approach to school retreats, and some well-targeted preparation and debriefing programs associated with volunteering experiences, may lead to greater engagement with spirituality for some students. Additionally, these could lead to a recognition of the connection between their volunteering experience and other dimensions of school programs, such as formal Religious Education and school prayer and liturgy.

In this current study, the evidence regarding the influence of formal Religious Education, as well as school prayer and religious ritual, is quite bleak. Affirming comments about these two areas and, in particular school prayer and liturgy, were few and far between. These came exclusively from within the group of students aligned with the religious spirituality profile and were in stark contrast to comments from others who were sharply critical of these experiences. Similarly, the experience of formal Religious Education was widely criticised and seldom affirmed.

Given the centrality of formal Religious Education and school prayer and religious ritual to the life of these three Catholic schools, there are some very serious questions to be considered about the compulsion, coercion, relevance and credibility highlighted in the criticisms of the students interviewed. The influence of formal Religious Education, along

with school prayer and religious ritual, appears to be overwhelmingly negative and much more likely to lead to disengagement of students with spirituality.

5.5 Conclusions

This chapter has provided a detailed discussion of findings from this research undertaken in three Catholic schools in NSW. The discussion is framed according to the three central themes of expressions of spirituality, commitment to spirituality and influences on spirituality aligned with the three research questions that have guided this study. Rather than attempt an exhaustive discussion of all the findings from this study, this chapter has focused on a number of key findings, which stand out as potential contributions to the body of knowledge on the spirituality of young people and emerging adults. These findings may reasonably be expected to contribute to practice in the three participating schools.

The use of the four spirituality profiles, secular, non-defined spiritual, defined spiritual and religious, has provided a crucial lens through which to view the findings. This lens has served to highlight subtle and nuanced aspects of student comments as well as emphasising the divergence of comments among students, which were often found to align with the respective profiles.

While the four spirituality profiles were particularly useful in illuminating aspects of the commitment to spirituality and the influences on spirituality, they were less helpful in considering expressions of spirituality. This study found that the expressions of spirituality often transcended the four spirituality profiles with the same elements of spirituality being prominent regardless of the spirituality profile of the student. Therefore, the elements of the relationship between spirituality and religion, spirituality and religious literacy and self-reliant spirituality (Section 5.2) were found to be quite similar in the expressions of spirituality articulated by students regardless of their spirituality profile. However, when

examining the commitment to spirituality and the influences on spirituality the four spirituality profiles became a far more prominent feature and provided considerable insight into these areas.

5.5.1 Conclusions – expressions of spirituality.

The discussion of expressions of spirituality focused on three distinct yet related areas. The first part of this discussion on the relationship between spirituality and religion highlighted the finding that students in this study made little if any distinction between the concepts of spirituality and religion and often conflated them in their comments. This conflation was evident in student comments, despite attempts in this study to frame spirituality in broad terms and to use language carefully chosen to avoid implicit alignment between spirituality and religion. An important element of this finding is that when students chose to reject a religiously aligned approach to spirituality, they also usually disengaged from any conscious expression of spirituality. Thus, this limited understanding of spirituality and its relationship with religion constituted the first ingredient in the recipe leading to a rejection of and disengagement with spirituality on the part of many participants in this study.

The lack of critical religious literacy was the second ingredient in the discussion of expressions of spirituality. The discussion in this section highlighted a generally underdeveloped religious literacy founded on literal understandings of religious truths, particularly concerning the Genesis creation stories, as well as simplistic, child-like understandings of prayer and divine intervention. These literal and naïve understandings were found to be lacking in sophistication compared to other areas of knowledge, such as scientific learning, and were inadequate in equipping students to deal meaningfully with challenging life experiences. The lack of critical religious literacy is an important element in the choice of some students to reject religiously aligned approaches to spirituality. Given the tendency to

conflate spirituality and religion noted in the previous paragraph, this rejection of religion often amounted to outright abandonment of intentional spirituality.

The final discussion point on the expressions of spirituality focused on the aspect of self-reliance, noting that students in this research seldom discussed spirituality even with their closest friend. It was also observed, however, that students discussed their spirituality freely and openly in the context of interviews for this study. This strictly self-reliant approach to spirituality has a number of implications. First, it leads to likely misconceptions among friends about attitudes to spirituality and the sense for the individual that his/her interest in spirituality is unusual. Second, it contributes to an insularity that does not allow the individual to access support when faced with challenging circumstances. Third, it prevents individuals from engaging in dialogue that helps him/her to mature and develop in his/her understanding of spirituality.

The self-reliant approach to spirituality provided the third ingredient in the recipe for rejection. This approach, alongside the conflation of spirituality and religion and the lack of critical religious literacy have combined, in the experience of many of the students in this study, to create an environment hostile to meaningful engagement with spirituality. While each of these factors has potential, in its own right, to undermine engagement with spirituality, their effect when combined is particularly potent.

5.5.2 Conclusions – engagement with and commitment to spirituality.

In line with other research in the field, this current study observed relatively moderate levels of commitment to spirituality overall. Despite these broad findings, the more valuable insights were to be found when the findings were examined through the lens of the four spirituality profiles; secular, non-defined spiritual, defined spiritual and religious.

When viewed from the perspective of the four spirituality profiles some important insights emerged in terms of the nature of engagement with and extent of commitment to spirituality. Those at either end of the continuum, students identifying with the secular and religious spirituality profiles, were found to have the strongest levels of commitment to spirituality. Despite this, however, the nature of the engagement found among these two profile groups contrasted distinctly. Those in the secular spirituality profile group were characterised by deliberate and purposeful choices about spirituality usually framed in light of personal experience. In contrast, with one exception, those in the religious spirituality profile group appeared to have drifted into adopting the religious perspective of their parents without any process of deliberation or discernment. For these students, adopting a religious spirituality profile was seen as a normal and natural part of their upbringing.

Students in the defined spiritual profile group were the most diverse of the four profiles falling into three distinct sub-groups. One sub-group, aligned with new age perspectives, seemed to have a very casual commitment based mostly on curiosity and interest in something different from their family background. The other two groups, identified as pseudo-Christian and non-affiliated Christian, were found to be quite purposeful in their engagement, having gone through a process of rejecting elements of their Catholic Christian upbringing and making deliberate choices about what to reject and what to retain in their self-constructed spirituality.

The non-defined spiritual profile was the most difficult to discuss as these perspectives were typically vague and uncertain. These students often gave very short responses in interviews, usually expressed in terms of not knowing or not being sure. Notwithstanding the challenges associated with these brief and uncertain comments, the non-defined spiritual profile group represent a crucial element in understanding the commitment

of spirituality among these students overall. The non-defined spiritual profile group represents almost one-third of the participants in this study and as such their lack of engagement with spirituality, as they reach the end of point of their experience in a Catholic school, can be seen as both a major challenge and an important opportunity to those leading these schools.

While the overall levels of commitment among these students was found to be relatively moderate, the openness to explore spirituality and the likelihood of spirituality changing in light of experience were seen as areas of considerable potential for these three schools to explore. With a critical awareness of diverse perspectives on spirituality, these schools are better placed to provide well-targeted opportunities for their students to engage with spirituality in an open and exploratory way.

5.5.3 Conclusions – influences on spirituality.

The discussion of influences on spirituality in this chapter confirms the findings showing the relatively minor influence of these Catholic schools on the spirituality of their students in comparison with broader social influences, such as family and friends. Where the influence of these schools was noted it was found to be mostly among those of the religious spirituality profile group, who found their spirituality affirmed and supported through their Catholic school experience. However, this was only the case when it aligned with the influence of their parents.

Among the particular school programs and initiatives discussed, school retreats and volunteering experiences were generally well received without providing any recognisable transformative effects on the spirituality of the students in this study. Those aligned with the religious spirituality profile usually experienced a strengthening and consolidation of their spirituality through their school retreat, while those of other spirituality profile groups were

usually supportive of the communitarian nature of the retreat while being sceptical about some of the more overtly religious aspects of their retreat experience. While volunteering experiences were affirmed as worthwhile and meaningful by all students there was not a strong indication that these were connected to the spirituality of many students. Some students from the secular profile group made a particular point of recognising the worth of volunteering experience on humanitarian grounds and indicating that these experiences did not need to relate to spirituality to be worthwhile and meaningful.

The aspects of formal Religious Education and school prayer and religious ritual were also discussed with a strong sense that students in these schools placed a very low value on these experiences, which they often associated with compulsion and coercion and regarded them as irrelevant and lacking in credibility. While the most substantial comments about these experiences came from those in the secular profile group, the breadth of criticism across the four spirituality profiles was compelling. Similarly, the strength of negative comment on these aspects stood out among all the areas considered in this study. Accordingly, these areas of formal Religious Education, together with school prayer and religious ritual, are noted as important challenges for these schools to address as they strive to engage their students with spirituality.

The evidence from this study on the different ways students respond to these programs and initiatives, aligned with their spirituality profile, provides these schools with the insights to enable them to fashion more effective programs to meet the diverse needs of their students. The key to this challenge is the appropriate differentiation of approaches in order to engage meaningfully with students across the continuum of spirituality profiles. While this might be readily achieved in areas such as retreats and volunteering experiences,

the challenges associated with formal Religious Education and school prayer and religious ritual are much greater.

There is no doubt that these schools face an enormous challenge in engaging the majority of their students with spirituality as the most influential factors are beyond their control. However, at this critical or kairos moment, there are also important indicators from the findings of this study that point to the potential to enhance school programs and initiatives, thereby creating an environment far more conducive to engaging students with spirituality.

5.5.4 Conclusions – summary.

While the findings of this study are not transferable beyond the participants in this study in the three Catholic schools, they nevertheless provide some insights that have the potential to contribute to the body of knowledge about the spirituality of young people and emerging adults, as well as the practice of Catholic schools in this field. These findings are particularly pertinent to the current situation of rapid social change in the context of Western societies which as seen the disintegration of traditional models of religious affiliation largely replaced by secular perspectives and the notion of spirituality without religion.

The use of the four spirituality profiles as a lens through which to view the data has provided a level of nuance and sophistication regarding the nature of engagement and extent of commitment to spirituality, and the particular ways that different groups of students are being influenced by programs and initiatives provided by these three Catholic schools. The expressions of spirituality discussed were found to apply to students in this study at all points of the continuum of spirituality profiles from religious to secular.

The key findings from this research as discussed in this chapter can be distilled into three main points. These three key points will form the basis for the recommendations in the following chapter.

First, an underdeveloped religious literacy coupled with some unsatisfactory school experiences is leading a substantial number of these students to reject religious approaches to spirituality. Along with this, the tendency to conflate spirituality and religion among these students, as well as with the implications of their strict self-reliance in spirituality, means that when students choose to reject religiously aligned expressions of spirituality, they often reject the idea of spirituality altogether.

Second, it was found that almost one-third of students in this study, those in the non-defined spiritual profile group, seem to have not consciously engaged with spirituality at all as they reach the end point of their experience in a Catholic school. In contrast, students in the secular profile group and the defined-spiritual profile group indicate that they have made deliberate and purposeful choices in constructing their perspective on spirituality. While students in the religious spirituality profile group indicate a strong level of commitment to spirituality, this commitment appears to have been made without conscious deliberation and discernment. Students in this group seem to have drifted into following the religious spirituality of their parents. Notwithstanding the level of commitment expressed, most students recognise that their spirituality is open to change in light of new experiences.

Third, it is recognised that the influence of these Catholic schools on the spirituality of their students is minimal in comparison to broader social factors, such as family and friends. Where these Catholic schools have had an influence, it has been to consolidate and affirm the religiously aligned spirituality of some students who have adopted the religious spirituality of their parents. While school retreats and volunteering experiences are regarded

positively by most students in this study, their influence on spirituality seems to be limited to affirming the religiously aligned spirituality of a small number of students. Formal Religious Education, along with school prayer and religious ritual, were mostly found to be unhelpful in developing spirituality. In most cases they have elicited strongly negative comments from students, which indicated that these areas are an essential challenge for the three schools to address.

Overall, these findings highlight the evident limitations of Catholic schools in their quest to nurture the spirituality of their students yet they also indicate a number of areas where there is potential for fruitful engagement with spirituality. The recognition of current limitations and the potential opportunities are critical elements in enabling Catholic schools to be more effective in the goal of nurturing spirituality. This is all the more urgent when framed in the context of the enormous personal and social changes occurring in Western societies and the need for young people to develop a framework for making meaning that will enable them to traverse this uncertain and shifting terrain.

Chapter Six: Conclusions and recommendations

6.1 Conclusions

The focus of this research is how three Catholic schools nurture spirituality among their students. In particular the research has provided a snapshot of expressions of spirituality among the students of these three school at the end point of their secondary school experience. The findings of the research have identified important elements in the expressions of spirituality, as articulated by the students, along a continuum of spirituality profiles. Further, this research has uncovered significant aspects of the way these students engage with and commit to spirituality as well as recognising the relative importance of different influences on the spirituality of these students.

The foci of the research into expressions of spirituality, commitment to spirituality and influences on spirituality are reflected in the three research questions.

1. How do senior students at Catholic schools express spirituality?
2. How committed are senior students at Catholic schools to these expressions of spirituality?
3. How do senior students at Catholic schools evaluate the influences on the development of their spirituality?

This research has uncovered several important findings which are drawn together in this chapter. According to the evidence cited in this study, these three Catholic schools are having minimal impact on the spirituality of their students. Where an impact is evident, it is either in the form of consolidating a familial, religious affiliation or acting as a catalyst in its rejection. Personal experience is integral to the spirituality of these students and the influence of family and friends surpasses all other influences (see Section 4.5).

The most noteworthy aspects of the findings concern the absence of critical religious literacy and the limited understanding of spirituality evident among these students in their final year of secondary school. It is similarly compelling to note that one-third of the students surveyed have not meaningfully engaged with spirituality despite attending a Catholic school (see Table 4.4).

These findings are of profound significance for Catholic schools in the context of enormous change in Western societies which has seen the wholesale breakdown of the traditional parish and family model of Catholic Christianity. Research has consistently shown that well under one-fifth of Catholic families in Australia have any formal affiliation with the church apart from their connection with a Catholic school (Dixon et al., 2007; National Centre for Pastoral Research, 2019; National Church Life Survey, 2018). Despite this enrolments in Catholic schools remain strong (National Catholic Education Commission, 2015, 2017a). The pattern of strong enrolments in Catholic schools in the broader context of the disintegration of traditional religious affiliation, the increase in the prevalence of secular perspectives and the phenomenon of spirituality without religion (Fuller & Parsons, 2018; Mackay, 2016), highlights the unique opportunity Catholic schools have to provide an environment conducive to the development of spirituality.

When viewed through the lens of spirituality profiles, it is apparent that the programs and initiatives provided by the three schools are tailored towards the interests of students closely aligned with the religious spirituality profile. These students comprise less than one-fifth of the cohorts. By focusing only on students who align with a religious spirituality profile the needs of the majority of students, who align themselves with other spirituality profiles, are not addressed. While students affirm the value of some programs and initiatives, such as school retreats and volunteering experiences, there is no evidence that

these programs are conducive to developing conscious engagement with spirituality other than for those who already hold a religious perspective.

This concluding chapter is structured in three main parts. Sections 6.2, 6.3, 6.4 and 6.5 set out contributions to knowledge and practice arising from the research, limitations and areas warranting further investigation. Sections 6.6 and 6.7 set out the recommendations from the study. Section 6.8 provides overall conclusions. Among the findings of this research, two areas stand out as contributions to knowledge and four areas are identified as contributions to practice. Additionally, two areas have emerged where further research is warranted. Seven recommendations are made as strategies to realise the contributions to practice.

6.2 Contributions to knowledge

The two important contributions to knowledge arising from this study are:

1. The prevalence of literal understanding of biblical creation accounts
2. The proportion of students not consciously engaged with spirituality

6.2.1 Literal understanding of creation accounts.

Students in this research consistently expressed literal understandings of the biblical creation accounts, which set up a conflict between their religious knowledge and their scientific knowledge (see Section 4.2.6). The propensity to hold literal views of biblical texts was a clear aspect of the findings of this study. While such literal understandings are not unique, the prevalence of these views in this current research sets it apart from other research reviewed. In this study, only one student expressed a view that reflected an understanding of symbol and metaphor in the Genesis creation accounts. The closest parallel to this finding arises from a UK study investigating conflicts between scientific and religious knowledge where, 25 out of 61 students affirmed such a conflict (Billingsley et al., 2016). While there

are parallels between this current research and the UK research, it is noted that the UK study focused only on the perception of conflict and did not investigate the nature of the religious understanding held by participants. Further work in the UK has also pointed to the need to engage students in complementary understandings of phenomena to facilitate the development of more sophisticated engagement with intersecting elements of religion and science (Astley & Francis, 2010; Francis, Astley, & McKenna, 2019). Carswell's (2018) work on the approaches to the use of scripture in Religious Education curricula in Australia provides an important insight into one likely factor contributing to the deficit in religious literacy found in this current study.

The prevalence of literal understandings found in this study is not evident in the literature, related to spirituality, that was reviewed in this study. Furthermore, this finding was regarded as surprising and perplexing by staff in the participating schools who believed that they had taught religious concepts in a sophisticated and nuanced way with regard to the use of metaphor and symbolic language in sacred texts. This is illustrative of a divergence between what teachers think they teach and what students learn. This divergence, leading to the prevalence of literal understandings, is recognised as an important contribution to knowledge from this research.

6.2.2 Absence of engagement with spirituality.

Quantitative data from this study affirms that more than one-third of students in these three schools have not given much thought to spirituality at the end point of their experience in a Catholic school. Table 4.4 shows that 37.5% of students overall express this view with male students agreeing in much higher proportions than females (45.8% males, 28.2% females). While the literature attests a range of views and responses to spirituality

from secular to religious, this current study has made the significant finding that, on the whole, spirituality is not part of the consciousness of a large proportion of these students.

Based on the evidence, there are implications in this finding for the practice of these schools, in that they have not managed to meaningfully engage some of their students. The proportion of the cohort who are apparently not consciously engaged with spirituality is noteworthy as a contribution to knowledge.

6.3 Contributions to practice

The most important implications of this research work are found in the potential contributions to practice. These contributions to practice, specifically how to enable students to engage with spirituality, form the basis for the recommendations set out in Section 6.6. Thus, in this section, four areas of potential contribution to practice will be noted briefly in anticipation of further consideration as recommendations.

The four important contributions to practice are:

1. The development of a broader understanding of spirituality among students
2. Responses to a lack of critical religious literacy among students
3. The need to differentiate school programs focusing on spirituality
4. The recognition of key aspects of school programs with potential to influence spirituality

6.3.1 Developing a broader understanding of spirituality.

Students in this study did not appear to make any distinction between the notions of religion and spirituality. The findings indicate that students expressed their spirituality almost entirely as an acceptance or rejection, partial or complete, of a Catholic religious perspective.

Thus, recommendations for how to broaden this understanding of spirituality and provide students with more diverse avenues through which to consciously engage with spirituality, are important contributions to practice. This areas of potential contribution to practice is discussed further in recommendation one in Section 6.6.1.

6.3.2 Investigating the absence of critical religious literacy.

A prominent aspect of the findings of this research is the students' lack of critical religious literacy and its impact on student engagement with spirituality (see Sections 4.2.6 and 4.4.6). There are several areas where this finding leads to potential contributions to practice. One such area is the quality and effectiveness of formal Religious Education. Another is the potential for an interdisciplinary approach to teaching some content areas, such as creation and evolution. Additionally, there is a need to create opportunities for students to meaningfully reflect on important life experiences in order to overcome naïve expectations surrounding prayer and divine intervention. Recommendations relating to the development of critical religious literacy are set out in 6.6.2.

6.3.3 Differentiation of school programs and initiatives.

The core element of the findings arising from the use of spirituality profiles in this research concerns the lack of differentiation of school programs and initiatives and the failure of these programs to respond to the needs of the diverse range of students in the cohorts (see Sections 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5). The potential contributions to practice relating to differentiated programs and initiatives are set out in recommendations three, four and five in Section 6.6.

6.3.4 Recognising the capacity for influence.

This study has indicated that the capacity for these Catholic schools to influence the spirituality of their students is minimal in comparison to broader social factors, such as

family and friends (see Sections 4.4 and 4.5). Accordingly, the potential for contribution to practice is in the recalibration of expectations to allow these schools to focus on areas where fruitful engagement is likely and to mitigate the negative influences currently associated with some programs and initiatives. The objectives of recalibrating expectations and enhancing areas of potential engagement are encompassed in all the recommendations put forward in Section 6.6.

6.4 Areas for further research

From an overall perspective, it is anticipated that this research will provoke further investigation of the main findings. This will be an essential and necessary step to establish how the important findings, particular to the three schools in this study, are applicable to other contexts.

Moreover, from the immediate perspective of this current research, two areas are identified that indicate a need for further research. These two areas have emerged as important aspects in the findings; however, owing to limitations on the scope of this research, they have not been investigated in great depth.

These are:

1. The nature of the influence of friends on spirituality
2. The potential of social media as a tool for exploring spirituality

6.4.1 The influence of friends on spirituality.

The scholarly literature consistently indicates that friends are an important influence on spirituality and this study has confirmed similar findings. However, this study also found that young people are resolutely self-reliant in their spirituality and seldom, if ever, discuss

spirituality among their friends. Other evidence in the data also suggests that these students do not have accurate perceptions of how their peers regard spirituality (see Table 4.1). Despite this, the same students, affirm that friends are a strong influence on their spirituality, surpassed only by the influence of their parents (see Section 4.4).

There is a profound incongruity evident between the importance of the influence of friends and the resolute self-reliance in spirituality which warrants further investigation. Given the importance of friends in the perspectives these young people hold on spirituality such research is of considerable significance.

6.4.2 Social media as a tool for exploring spirituality.

The rapidly growing and evolving world of social media is an important area of focus for researchers. Although a relatively new phenomenon, it is already attracting considerable research interest. Among the many dimensions of potential research relating to this current study is the use of the anonymous chat room and forum environments on social media platforms (see Section 4.4.8). Students in this research commented on their interest in exploring the online world for new ideas and interesting connections. They also spoke with enthusiasm about discussing beliefs with strangers via chat rooms and forums.

These findings relate to two important themes that intersect in the online environment. The first theme is the active interest in exploring spirituality, which was affirmed by many students if this is done in an open and non-judgemental way. The second concerns the self-reliant element of spirituality, which was a strong feature of the findings of this study.

It appears that students find the opportunity for anonymous discussion of spirituality through online platforms as a happy convergence of their interest in exploration and their

preference for self-reliance. Thus, the online environment seems to provide a fertile opportunity for engagement with spirituality. While findings from this study seem to affirm this opportunity, the scope of this research did not allow for a direct focus on this area and accordingly it is identified here as an area for further research.

6.5 Limitations

While the evidence arising from this study is clear and compelling, it is nevertheless limited by three factors. First, the study uses data collected from students and teachers in three Catholic schools, in two neighbouring urban dioceses in NSW, and accordingly the findings are limited to the context of the cohorts of these three schools and are not generalisable, nor transferable to other contexts. Second, the data collected represents a snapshot of one point in time and accordingly the findings cannot be regarded as predictive of subsequent times. Third, the study is limited by the willingness and capacity of participants to articulate their expression of spirituality.

Additionally, while the recommendations from this study flow directly from the findings, they are as yet untested and accordingly, there is no guarantee that their implementation will lead to the intended outcomes.

6.6 Recommendations

The recommendations set out in this section draw on the most prominent findings from this research and are related directly to the three research questions through expressions of spirituality, commitment to spirituality and influences on spirituality. These recommendations identify areas of practice in these three schools that could be reviewed and modified in light of the findings from this research. Appropriate adjustments in these areas of

practice have the potential to enhance the effectiveness of these three schools in engaging their students with spirituality.

In light of the findings discussed, the following seven recommendations are proposed. The schools in this study should:

1. Facilitate a category shift from religion to spirituality to be inclusive of students who do not identify with a religious expression of spirituality
2. Develop a focus on engaging parents to facilitate a shared approach to the nurturing of spirituality
3. Review approaches to the teaching of formal Religious Education to enhance relevance and to more directly address the needs of the students
4. Develop strategies to engage students with critical religious literacy
5. Investigate the development of interdisciplinary approaches in the teaching of sensitive areas
6. Develop and extend the use of reflective practices to provide links between programs and initiatives in the schools and to allow students to become accustomed to drawing meaning from experience
7. Modify school programs and initiatives them to include a continuum reflective of spirituality profiles so as to be responsive to the diverse needs of students

A critical point underpinning some of these recommendations is the evidence that a significant proportion of students have not been seriously engaged with the area of spirituality throughout their time in a Catholic school. Although the outcome of this engagement cannot be determined it ought to be a goal of Catholic schools to ensure that students have every opportunity to engage meaningfully with expressions of spirituality during their secondary school years.

While the scope for schools to influence the spirituality of their students is limited, the recommendations proposed in this study provide significant potential for enhancing this influence. The recommendations draw directly on the findings of this research, however, as they are as yet untested in the contexts of these three schools their effectiveness cannot be guaranteed.

Some of the following recommendations also have resource implications, especially if they are to be implemented strategically and systematically in a school environment. While acknowledging such implications, it is beyond the scope of this research to comment on the use of school resources and the determination of priorities within the school environment. It is also acknowledged that regulations regarding public funding of Catholic schools prevent schools from diverting public funds into programs that are outside of the traditional context of secondary school education in the public sector. Nevertheless, income derived from school fees could be used to resource programs and activities arising from the recommendations of this study.

6.6.1 Recommendation one: a category shift from religion to spirituality.

This study has shown that students are predominantly drawing on narrow perspectives of spirituality closely aligned to the framework of the Catholic Christian tradition. Thus, their responses to spirituality are mostly framed as either acceptance or rejection of this Catholic perspective. Given that fewer than 20% of students are aligning themselves with the Catholic Christian tradition, the majority are engaging with spirituality from the perspective of rejecting the Catholic Christian tradition rather than as a positive choice in response to the human search for meaning.

The first recommendation, therefore, is that these schools shift the primary focus of their work from an exclusively religious perspective to a broader, more inclusive

understanding of spirituality, which is accessible to a range of students along the continuum of spirituality profiles. This recommendation extends the work of researchers such as Hughes (2017) and Rossiter (2018) who have presented persuasive arguments for this category shift to be embraced. Hughes believes the term spirituality is too laden with religious overtones and therefore he prefers to use the term purposeful living. Both Hughes and Rossiter argue that the movement away from an exclusive focus on religious spirituality is essential for more effectively engaging the majority of students who are not well served by current practice. They also argue that the use of this broader category does not prevent the exploration of spirituality within a religious setting and nor does it prevent religiously affiliated schools, such as these three Catholic schools, from leading their students in a rigorous study of selected religious worldviews.

In this study, the shift from religion to spirituality is important for several reasons. First, it moves the focus from an exclusive perspective adopted by only one-fifth of students to an inclusive perspective opening up the potential to engage all students. Second, it is universal in design, allowing students to dialogue about issues and concerns without one perspective being privileged over other perspectives. Third, it introduces students to broader ways of thinking and reflecting that has the potential to break the nexus between religion and spirituality found in this research. Fourth, it facilitates students making positive choices about spirituality rather than the current situation, where most students are expressing spirituality as rejection, in part or in full, of Catholic Christianity. Fifth, it allows the claims of any religious worldview, including that of Catholic Christianity, to be considered on merit and without prejudice.

In the light of the findings of this study regarding spirituality profiles it is critical that the category shift from religion to spirituality is actioned in a manner which is respectful of and attentive to the alignment with different spirituality profiles evident among the cohorts of

students in these schools. Accordingly, programs and initiatives must be developed with awareness of the spirituality profiles so that they are responsive to the particular characteristics of each of the spirituality profile groups. It will not be sufficient to develop a generic construct of spirituality to be used in these schools. The understanding of spirituality adopted must be nuanced and reflexive in line with the continuum of spirituality profiles reflected in the findings of this study and the fluidity evident in the way these students engage with spirituality.

6.6.2 Recommendation two: a focus on engaging parents.

In the light of the compelling evidence about the significance the role of parents in the development of the expressions of spirituality of their children, it is appropriate that schools focus on developing strategies to engage parents in this particular dimension of life. Ecclesial documents highlight the role of parents as the primary educators of their children (Pope Paul VI, 1965). Schools and school systems frequently speak of school – parent partnerships (Ang, 2014; Catholic Education Office Sydney, 2014a, 2016a; Catholic Schools Office Broken Bay, 2012). However, there is little explicit reference to the development of spirituality among parents and few, if any, resources allocated to this area. Without a doubt this is a very significant field with a vast territory to be considered. Typically, schools have not ventured into this territory as it has been considered to be a parish responsibility. However, given that so few adults are actively engaged with a local parish and that for many Catholic school parents the school is effectively the only expression of Church they encounter, it is incumbent upon schools to take action in this regard. The Archdiocese of Sydney had initiated a program of Parent Educators in primary schools as an attempt to venture more purposefully into this field (Catholic Education Office Sydney, 2016a), however, this is very limited in scope. Schools and school systems have taken significant steps to engage parents across a

range of areas, including adolescent mental health and cyber safety. It would certainly be appropriate for this engagement to extend to the area of spirituality as well.

The second recommendation is, therefore, that these three schools explore avenues for engaging parents with spirituality. The most appropriate place to begin this process would be at the time of enrolling the student and inducting the family into the school community. These schools should consider mandatory induction experiences that engage parents with spirituality through the founding charism or particular identity of the school.

Mindful that most families are not actively involved with a local parish, there is scope for considering how the liturgical seasons of the Church year can be celebrated with families through the connection with the school community. This may include, for example, school-based commemorations of the Easter Triduum or linking the Season of Advent with the end of the school calendar year. Other occasions such as Mother's Day and Father's Day provide natural connections between the school and family, which could be occasions for engaging parents with spirituality. Similarly, occasions such as a school feast day or patron's day could include family involvement in order to engage the family more closely with this expression of spirituality.

Given the value that students place on volunteering experiences, schools could devise programs which involve parents in some service opportunities alongside their children. With appropriate briefing and debriefing provisions, such occasions may be able to provide meaningful engagement with spirituality whereby the connections between the service activity and spirituality are explored at a family level. In this way the school, through providing the service opportunity and the framework for reflection, becomes the catalyst for engagement with spirituality in the family context.

6.6.3 A focus on developing critical religious literacy.

This study has identified a lack of critical religious literacy among students, which is leaving them ill-equipped to dialogue meaningfully with important questions and challenges that arise in life, and consequently, has seen some abandon any intentional connection with spirituality (see Section 4.4). While some studies have shown that students have a relatively sophisticated and nuanced understanding of some doctrinal questions (Hughes & Reid, 2011), this has not contributed to the development of images of God beyond childish caricatures, nor has it led to a biblical literacy that allows students to see beyond literal interpretations of the sacred texts.

In the light of this lack of critical religious literacy, four recommendations are offered. They are:

1. Review approaches to the teaching of formal Religious Education to enhance relevance and to more directly address the needs of the students
2. Develop strategies to engage students with critical religious literacy
3. Investigate the development of interdisciplinary approaches in the teaching of sensitive areas
4. Develop and extend the use of reflective practices to provide links between programs and initiatives in the schools and to allow students to become accustomed to drawing meaning from experience

6.6.4 Recommendation three: a review of formal Religious Education.

It is beyond doubt that the formal Religious Education programs provided by these three schools are poorly regarded by students and ineffective in contributing to the development of critical religious literacy. Therefore, it is recommended that these schools

review their approaches to the teaching formal Religious Education in order to address these deficits. In doing so, these schools should be mindful of the evidence concerning the range of different spirituality profiles found among their students and the need to provide differentiated programs that are more appropriately tailored to the needs of different students.

The shift in the core focus from a study of one religion to a study of spirituality would be integral to the review of formal Religious Education courses. Such a shift will enable formal Religious Education courses to align with other dimensions of school programs and initiatives. Within the study of spirituality, however, it would be crucial to retain an emphasis on the formal investigation of religious worldviews, such as that of Catholic Christianity. In this context, it is important to distinguish between the courses in Catholic Studies which have a broadly confessional and catechetical approach (Sydney Catholic Schools, 2018) and the NSW Studies of Religion Courses (NSW Educational Standards Authority, 2018) where an educational approach is intended. The review recommended in this study is principally related to Catholic Studies courses and the way they are undertaken in these three Catholic schools.

The scholarly literature confirms that concern about the quality and effectiveness of formal Religious Education are widespread and certainly not limited to these three schools. Accordingly, as part of the review of formal Religious Education, these schools should consider the findings of relevant research, such as that of Hughes (2017) and Rossiter (2018), whose findings converge along similar lines and that resonate strongly with the data from these particular schools.

One of the challenges that will be faced by these schools in reviewing their approaches to formal Religious Education is that auspicing authorities mandate curricula of Religious Education and Catholic schools are expected to implement this curricula. This is

particularly the case with formal programs for the Higher School Certificate, such as the “Studies in Catholic Thought” program (Sydney Catholic Schools, 2018), which is now the only authorised Catholic Studies course available for senior students in Catholic schools in NSW. Similarly, it would be difficult for a Catholic school to teach a Religious Education program different from that endorsed by a diocesan authority in other year levels. However, these schools could review their approaches to teaching these courses which would at least provide a mechanism for closer alignment to other school programs and initiatives. The availability of a program such as that offered by Catholic Schools Youth Ministry Australia (CSYMA, 2019) also provides some opportunity for alternative approaches; however, this faith-based model is not likely to have appeal to the majority of students who align themselves with non-religious perspectives on spirituality.

Notwithstanding the limitations of system requirements, there are other ways in which these schools might be able to enhance the effectiveness of their formal Religious Education programs. One option would be to explore project-based learning approaches, which could allow for some choice and flexibility in the way students undertake their formal Religious Education classes while still attending to the broad scope of the mandated courses. Such models would allow students to engage with contemporary issues and social concerns from the perspective of religious worldviews and different cultural understandings.

Additionally, work could be undertaken to provide connections between other school experiences, such as volunteering, school retreats and school prayer and religious ritual. If the formal classes in Religious Education, together with these additional experiences, were encountered within a framework of exploring contemporary issues, it may serve to overcome the negative attitudes towards compulsion, coercion and narrowness that feature so strongly in student responses.

Finally, interdisciplinary approaches such as those discussed in Section 6.6.6 offer further opportunities for these schools to develop more engaging, differentiated approaches to teaching Religious Education which will be more effective in developing critical religious literacy among students.

6.6.5 Recommendation four: engaging with critical religious literacy.

The findings of this study have shown that these senior students have a significantly under-developed quality of religious literacy which, on one hand is leading them to form judgements based on erroneous understandings and, on the other hand, is leaving them ill-equipped to meaningfully engage with complex life questions. In order to overcome this deficiency, it is recommended that three schools directly engage students with a critical approach to religious literacy which will challenge them to rethink and critique the catechetical emphasis of the prescribed curricula in Catholic Studies.

The recommendation to engage students with a critical approach to religious literacy will be challenging on a number of levels. First, it requires a degree of theological competency on the part of the Religious Education teacher that will enable her/him to dialogue with complex questions in a way which is respectful of student perspectives while at the same time being able to present religious perspectives in a nuanced and sophisticated way. Recent research among teachers in Queensland Catholic schools indicates that such theological competency is rarely present (Gleeson & O'Neill, 2017). Second, it will require courage on the part of Religious Education teachers and the leaders of these schools to provide an opportunity for dialogue on controversial issues in the knowledge that the views of the majority of students is likely to be at odds with established ecclesial teaching. Third, it will require a deliberate and purposeful engagement of theological principles with contemporary social issues so that learning experiences in Religious Education are integrally

connected with important life experiences rather than merely focusing on recall and comprehension of prescribed content.

In order to move from the basic and operational levels of religious literacy and to engage with critical religious literacy (Goldburg, 2008), teachers will need to be prepared to engage with contentious questions of power in the ecclesial domain. Luke (2000) identifies critical literacy as an analysis of “the relations and fields of social, cultural and economic power” (Luke, 2000, p. 451). In the broad sense, developing critical literacy involves developing a conscious awareness of how language and literature are used to convey the worldview and perspective of the producer and indeed how such perspectives serve to circumvent alternative worldviews, to silence contrary voices and to maintain a situation of power (Comber, 2015; Janks, 2013; Luke, 2000, 2012). The task of the educator is both “consciousness-raising about the discourses of dominant culture and taking action to resist, expose and overturn these discourses” (Comber, 2001, p. 74).

When applied to the area of theology and religion the critique of power inevitably includes a focus on clericalism and the participation of lay adherents, particularly women, in the ministerial and liturgical life of the religion as well as responses to moral issues, particularly those related to sexual morality. Critical approaches to theology are not new to the Catholic Christian tradition with some well-established approaches to theologies of liberation (Boff, 2011; Gutiérrez, 1990), as well as feminist theologies (Radford Ruether, 1993; Schüssler Fiorenza, 1983) and critiques of liturgical language and practice (Dinges, 1987). Additionally, researchers have noted that changes to the way that texts are created and shared in the digital age predisposes emerging generations to notion of textual criticism. “New forms of text making: mixing, mashing, cutting, pasting and re-contextualising are taken-for-granted practices of the net-generation” (Janks, 2013, p. 152).

Strategies for engaging students with critical religious literacy should be embedded in the Religious Education curriculum at all levels rather than waiting for students to reach a supposed level of maturity to enable them to deal with complex questions (Exley et al., 2013). Comber argues that critical literacy is a matter of “social practice rather than developmental attainment” (Comber, 2001, p. 75). Using primary school classes as a focus, she demonstrates a number of approaches which, while age appropriate, serve the purpose of developing critical literacy as an established practice (Comber, 2001, 2006). One such example is found in an example of manipulating images conveyed in a text where children are asked to first draw a picture of the witch similar to the one from the story and then to draw a different witch. In the context of Religious Education such strategies could be used to engage children with alternative images of God or symbols of healing or reconciliation which help to expand their perspective beyond traditional images and symbols and encourage them to critique ideas from their own experience.

The most immediate opportunities for students to engage with critical religious literacy will be in the field of social justice where their own sense of what is right intersects with challenging social situations of poverty, discrimination and oppression (Comber, 2015). However, it is important that teachers of Religious Education actively explore other points of engagement including the use of ritual and symbol, the morality of healthy relationships and the paradox of suffering and personal growth.

6.6.6 Recommendation five: development of interdisciplinary approaches.

In the course of this research, frequent references were made by students to a perceived conflict between religious knowledge and scientific knowledge, particularly around issues such as creation and evolution. Further, these conflicts were among the more prominent reasons students cited for their decision to reject religious perspective on

spirituality and in many cases to reject spirituality altogether (see Section 4.6). While the review of approaches to teaching formal Religious Education discussed in Section 6.6.4 will have some impact on overcoming literal interpretations of biblical texts and developing critical religious literacy, there is a further dimension to be considered in the teaching of science.

Thus, the fourth recommendation is that these schools consider interdisciplinary approaches to teaching important concepts, such as creation and evolution, to ensure that there is consistency in messaging and that a Catholic perspective on scientific theories is appropriately presented. In this way the alignment of Catholic perspectives with those of creationism can be avoided and students will be able to recognise that there is no conflict between the Catholic understanding of the biblical creation accounts and scientific theories of evolution.

An interdisciplinary approach is defined as:

A process of answering a question, solving a problem, or addressing a topic too broad or complex to be dealt with adequately by a single discipline or profession (it) draws on disciplinary perspectives and integrates their insights through construction of a more comprehensive perspective. (Klein & Newell, 1998, p. 3)

An interdisciplinary approach has the potential to impact on the broader culture of the Catholic school environment where learning in general terms is undertaken through the particular lens of religious worldviews. This interdisciplinary approach is understood as different from a cross-disciplinary approach where intersecting areas of study are explored across two or more disciplines so that the learner is exposed to potentially different perspectives. It is also different from a trans-disciplinary approach where a “dialogue between two disciplines or frameworks may lead to a development of both through a process

of each internally appropriating the logic of the other as a resource for its own development” (Fairclough, 2005, p. 53).

Thus, when teaching areas such as theories of evolution and the biblical creation stories the respective teachers of Science and Religious Education would work together to provide students with an integrated perspective that addresses the scientific and religious questions in a synthesised conceptual framework.

While this recommendation has particular relevance to the perceived conflict between religious knowledge and scientific knowledge it has the potential to contribute to practice in much broader ways. There are numerous examples in the syllabi of secondary school subjects where intersections with a Catholic worldview are relevant and appropriate. Among these would be moral issues considered in the Physical Development Health and Physical Education Courses (NSW Catholic Education Commission, 2007), connections between courses such as Science and Geography, and Catholic teaching on environmental ethics, the relationship between studies in Economics, Business and Commerce with Catholic teachings such as the principle of the common good and many others.

Taking an interdisciplinary approach provides a Catholic perspective outside of the formal Religious Education classes and also provides the opportunity for enhancing the credibility of Religious Education courses by showing their integral connection to other courses that appear to be more highly valued by students. Additionally, they will assist students in making real world connections between concepts arising in their Religious Education courses, other areas of study and their interests and concerns.

An interdisciplinary approach calls for a dialogue between the learning undertaken within different disciplines so that the work of each can be drawn together into a holistic framework reflective of the human person rather than a fragmented or disconnected

perspective which may arise in segregated approaches to learning. In this context the school seeks to provoke a dialogue with a religious understanding that can be placed as one element of an exploration of important philosophical and social concerns (D'Orsa et al., 2013; Gleeson & O'Neill, 2017). This would align well with the findings of this study that suggest that students are prepared to explore spirituality provided that this exploration is done openly and inclusively. Interdisciplinary approaches to the study of important concepts allow Religious Education to sit within a broader framework of social and cultural enquiry, which facilitates respectful dialogue and engagement with different perspectives (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2013).

The development of a truly interdisciplinary approach is likely to present significant challenges to these schools. Among these is the very serious question of how well equipped teachers in these three Catholic schools would be to effectively implement such an approach and the related question of how much time could be provided for teachers to develop the requisite skills to teach in an interdisciplinary environment. It is recognised that the achievement of authentic interdisciplinary work would be the culmination of a number of phases of development beginning with the mapping of areas of study across different disciplines followed by the use of cross-disciplinary approaches in intersecting areas of study before ultimately moving to an interdisciplinary approach.

The exploration of an interdisciplinary approach has resonance with the missiological dimension discussed in the Mission and Education series of publications. (D'Orsa & D'Orsa, 2010, 2015; D'Orsa et al., 2012; D'Orsa et al., 2013; Gowdie, 2017; Hindmarsh, 2017; Sharkey, 2015). It can also contribute to the “re-contextualisation” advocated in the “Enhancing Catholic Schools Identity Project” (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010, 2014) and in the “Identity and Curriculum in Catholic Education Project” (Gleeson & O'Neill, 2017). This

emphasis on the aspect of mission is also a prominent feature of the recent framing paper on Religious Education from the National Catholic Education Commission (2017b).

6.6.7 Recommendation six: development of reflective practices.

While much of the impact of a lack of critical religious literacy is found in the intersection between science and religion, there is also a second important element that relates to naïvety in understanding prayer and divine intervention. This is evident in the data from this research as students reflect on their experience of confronting challenging life circumstances, such as personal illness, the death of a loved one, and family breakdown. In these instances, students frequently conveyed a naïve and simplistic approach, whereby a positive outcome to prayer in challenging circumstances resulted in a consolidation of religious faith and a negative outcome resulted in an abandonment of religious faith.

Students in this study show a lack of informed reflection on the meaning of challenging personal circumstances in light of the Catholic Christian doctrine of incarnation. This leads to the sixth recommendation, which calls upon these schools to create opportunities where such informed reflection is facilitated. One way of achieving this could be to adopt an interpretive model of Religious Education such as that proposed by Jackson (1997) which seeks to develop a “more personal and flexible model allowing for the uniqueness of each person while giving due attention to the various influences which help to shape any individual’s sense of personal and social identity” (Jackson, 2004, p. 88). The interpretive model proposed by Jackson has close connections to dialogical models which focus particularly on the agency of the young person, which would be a critical dimension in fruitful exploration of important questions in a spiritual context (Ipgrave, 2003; Leganger-Krogstad, 2011; Tan, 2010; Weisse, 2013). In the Australian context, the work of KU Leuven (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010, 2014) regarding dialogue schools provides worthwhile aspects

for consideration. Additionally, Hughes' proposed curriculum for education for purposeful living (Hughes, 2017) provides a staged approach which sets out age appropriate points of reference to develop engagement with spirituality at different points in an adolescent's development.

Facilitating reflection within interpretive and dialogical approaches would call for a particular skill on the part of the teacher who has to move from the position of teacher to one of facilitator. It would require being inclusive of different perspectives on the one hand and, on the other hand, it would need to provide a perspective on the incarnational aspect of the Catholic Christian tradition where challenging circumstances in life are viewed as integral to the human journey rather than an aberration. Recent research in the Australian context suggests that teachers of Religious Education are generally not well-equipped to dialogue meaningfully with faith-related aspects of life experience (Gleeson & O'Neill, 2017).

While purposeful reflective processes can assist in developing critical religious literacy the processes also have the potential to contribute to the practice of these schools in other areas. One such area is in the processes of preparation and debriefing in the context of volunteering experiences, using a social justice or humanitarian focus which have the potential to assist the participating students to recognise a deeper purpose in the volunteering experience than merely that of its immediate context. Such reflection will also be useful in creating an environment for an open dialogue on aspects of spirituality, which will contribute to moving students beyond the resolute self-reliance that was found in this study. This would also help to overcome erroneous perceptions about the perspectives of their peers and assist in breaking down the current stigma surrounding spirituality which prevents it from being discussed among friends.

In addition to the potential use of reflective processes in the context of formal Religious Education and volunteering experiences, there are numerous other areas where

these processes could be used. The context of the school retreat is one such example, and the value of this retreat reflection could be extended by the use of other reflective occasions, such as lunchtime gatherings and twilight events. Reflective processes could also be used as a part of the work of pastoral care, particularly in the context of a positive education model with its emphasis on meaning-making and the value in identifying purpose beyond one's self (Positive Education Schools Association, 2017; Seligman et al., 2009).

6.6.8 Recommendation seven: enhancing school programs and initiatives.

While it has been shown that school programs and initiatives have minimal influence on the spirituality of students, it is nevertheless essential to consider how to enhance these programs and initiatives, particularly in the light of the recommended shift in focus from religion to spirituality. Further, given the insights arising from the use of spirituality profiles in this study, it is critical to consider how programs and initiatives can be better targeted to this diverse range of perspectives. This could be achieved by offering greater variety in programs and the opportunity for student choice within these programs as well as applying a principle of universal design in core programs to allow students with different spirituality profiles to access programs from multiple perspectives.

The principle of universal design calls for programs and activities to be designed in such a way that they are accessible to all students (Lieberman, 2017). This is in contrast to an adjustment model where access is provided by making adjustments to a standard program or activity to allow students with different needs and abilities to take part. When applied to programs in the domain of spirituality, the principle of universal design would require that the broad concept of spirituality would be foundational element rather than the more narrow concept of religion. In this way, students who do not identify with a religious expression of spirituality would be able to access the program or activity in a meaningful way. Similarly,

students who do have a religious perspective on spirituality would be included in the breadth of the understanding of spirituality. Within this broader framework of spirituality it would still be possible to provide for the study of specific expressions of spirituality, such as that of Catholic Christianity, however, this would no longer be an exclusive focus of such programs and activities.

Programs and initiatives offered by these three schools have not had a transformative effect on engaging students with spirituality; however, they have been shown to have a consolidating influence for those who are following the religious inclination of their parents. On the other hand, there is also evidence that some of these programs and initiatives are contributing to students' decisions to reject religious approaches to spirituality and in doing so to disengage from spirituality altogether.

The seventh recommendation in response to these findings is that the three schools review their range of programs and initiatives offered in light of the diverse perspectives evident in the use of spirituality profiles. This review should be seen as the opportunity to transition from a focus on religion to a focus on spirituality as proposed in recommendation one (see Section 6.6.1). The following five sections (6.6.8.1 – 6.6.8.5) discuss particular enhancements to some important programs and activities currently provided in these three Catholic schools.

6.6.8.1 Integrating school programs and initiatives.

While there is potential for particular enhancements to be made to discrete programs and initiatives, there is also considerable value in developing the connections among programs, such as liturgy and outreach work, thereby creating a more integrated suite of experiences that draw from and contribute to each other. For example, when gathering for a school liturgy, students will be able to hear echoes of their experience of volunteering with a

disadvantaged community. Similarly, the work undertaken in formal Religious Education classes will incorporate analysis of the social issues affecting such communities, and reflective processes used in retreats and elsewhere will help students in making meaning from the realities of suffering and injustice.

An integrated approach not only has the potential to enhance the effectiveness of individual programs and initiatives but will also lead to a more consistent engagement with spirituality across the range of experience. In this way, consistent dialogue with spirituality can be pursued, which allows students to see spirituality as a connecting thread throughout all of these programs.

6.6.8.2 Differentiating experiences and outcomes.

The schools would be well advised to plan for differentiated experiences and intended outcomes for students within programs and initiatives. This differentiation is particularly important given that students are coming to these experiences with a wide variety of perspectives on spirituality as indicated through the lens of spirituality profiles.

Differentiation is something that schools are well accustomed to implementing across other curriculum areas, but it is a dimension that appears to be lacking with regard to spirituality. In current practice, programs and initiatives have the default position of catering towards the religious perspective of Catholic Christianity, which is not the perspective of the majority of students. The professional standards for teachers in Australia have, as its first point, the imperative to know the students and how they learn (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2011) with the implicit notion that there is diversity among the student body and that individual students have different needs and learn differently. While teachers in Catholic schools are likely to be well-versed in theories of adolescent development and changing cultural contexts, they are much less likely to have investigated the dimensions of

spirituality among students and therefore are not well-equipped to provide appropriately differentiated programs for their students. There have been some attempts to provide religious studies programs for more actively committed Catholic students in some schools (CSYMA, 2015) and some tailoring of retreat programs to meet different interests of students (Rossiter, 2016). However, it remains the case that schools, by and large, provide undifferentiated programs in a kind of one size fits all approach, which does not seem to recognise the variety and diversity of perspectives present among the student body.

Differentiated programs should offer the possibility of avoiding some of the alienating experiences that have been identified in the course of this study, which can lead to a sense of resentment towards and rejection of spirituality. It also offers the possibility of nurturing and developing particular areas of interest and passion among students who are already well engaged in the area of spirituality.

6.6.8.3 Enhancing retreat experiences.

While school retreat experiences are generally well regarded, it is clear that this is not the case for some students who find them to be coercive and manipulative experiences that lead to resentment and rejection among some students. The value of retreats is well documented (McQuillan, 2011a; Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2010a); however, there are areas where improvements can be made. The first of these relates to the core aspects of retreat programs. School retreats typically focus on one or two central sessions where students are asked to reflect on aspects of spirituality. Commonly this is done through asking students to consider their image of God and then to engage with this through activities, which may include drawing, sculpting, writing and sharing. Asking students directly to consider their image of God is an exclusive activity that is only meaningful for those students who have an

image of God. This directly excludes those who hold a secular perspective, which is almost 20% of students in this study.

Additionally, it may present obstacles to students who identify with a non-defined spiritual perspective, which is almost one-third of students in this study. It is not recommended that schools abandon this element of the retreat program, but instead they look at reframing the activity, so that it allows meaningful access to all students regardless of their expression of spirituality. For example, rather than focusing explicitly on images of God students could be presented with a range of spirituality profiles with an invitation to choose the one that they identify most closely with and to use these profiles as a starting point to speak about their perspective on spirituality. This method was used as one of the strategies for collecting data in this research and it was found that students responded well to the invitation to align themselves with a spirituality profile and spoke freely about their perspective on spirituality. Such an approach provides an open and inclusive experience that would allow for students to participate meaningfully regardless of their perspective on spirituality. Therefore, a reframing would be an integral part of the category shift from religion to spirituality proposed in Section 6.6.1.

A second enhancement for the school retreat experience would be the training of teachers as facilitators of the retreat processes. In particular, retreat team members need to develop skills in facilitating the exploration of meaning for young people while avoiding the inclination of shepherding students towards a desired endpoint or conclusion. In this context, the dialogical approaches identified in Section 6.6.5 will be important to consider (Hughes, 2017; Igrave, 2003; Jackson, 1997, 2004; Leganger-Krogstad, 2011; Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010, 2014; Tan, 2010; Weisse, 2013).

Coercive management of retreat processes by retreat facilitators is readily identified by students and leads some to become disengaged from the experience. A skilled facilitator would appreciate the importance of providing reflective experiences in which the students feel free to explore their perspective and those of others without the sense that they are being manipulated to reach a predetermined outcome.

One of the teachers interviewed for this study offered the thought that retreats ought to be optional experiences with students having the choice of whether to attend or not. This was based on the observation that students are coming to the retreat experience with a range of different personal perspectives on spirituality, some of which are not compatible with the approaches used on the retreat in that particular school. While there may be merit in allowing students to opt out of an experience they find alienating or confronting, an alternative would be to reframe some of the retreat experiences to provide for the diversity of expressions of spirituality among the students in a cohort.

6.6.8.4 Adding value to volunteering experiences.

It has been clearly indicated in this study and elsewhere that the experience of volunteering is highly valued and appreciated by students (Lovat et al., 2009; Webber, 2011, 2012), however, it is also evident that while it has the capacity to affirm and nurture spirituality, this is not always the case. While it can never be guaranteed that a volunteering experience will have the effect of developing spirituality, this is more likely to happen when volunteering experiences with social justice or humanitarian foci are actioned within a social analysis framework and accompanied by appropriate briefing and debriefing experiences. In particular, briefing and debriefing should seek to equip the students with tools for reflection that can help them to understand their motivation for volunteering and to make meaning of the experience beyond its immediate context. It is clear from the comments of students in this

study that volunteering experiences evoke a thoughtful response and therefore it would be important to ensure that the preparation and follow up of experiences includes ways that this reflection can traverse the dimension of spirituality. This will not be a meaningful dimension for all students, as some in this study have indicated that they see the value of volunteering without the context of spirituality, however, for many, it is a fertile moment where engagement with spirituality is likely to occur.

Further opportunities to enhance volunteering experiences with social justice or humanitarian connections are to be found in relating them explicitly with other programs and initiatives, including formal Religious Education, school retreats and school prayer and religious ritual. The intention in this step is to frame volunteering activities as part of an integrated suite of experiences that resonate with one another in the process of meaning-making. In this way, the dimension of spirituality will be more evident in the volunteering experiences, leading students into processes of more profound thought and reflection on the meaning of their experience.

6.6.8.5 Creating relevance in school prayer and religious ritual.

The experiences of school prayer and religious ritual were sharply criticised by most students in this study who cited compulsion, coercion and lack of relevance as factors affecting their experience. This is one of the more challenging areas for these schools to address as they are bound, in some instances, by formal requirements and liturgical rules that are beyond their purview. Further, when celebrating Eucharist or the Sacrament of Penance, the schools are mostly dependent on the presiding clergy and their willingness and capacity to engage with a large congregation of adolescents.

Notwithstanding these significant challenges, there are several ways that occasions of school prayer and religious ritual can be made more relevant to the experience of these

students. The category shift from religion to spirituality has the potential to alter the way students view liturgical experiences. If they no longer feel that the school is attempting to persuade them to adopt the views of Catholic Christianity, then they may no longer feel a sense of being coerced in the context of a liturgy.

For some students, the experience of gathering for Eucharist may be framed as a participant observer experience rather than a devotional occasion. This could be comparable to the way that Catholic school students might currently have the experience of joining in a religious festival of another tradition, for example, sharing in the Puja of a Diwali festival. The study of Eucharist using educational methods would further support this shift with a focus on understanding the symbolism and ritual involved. If this study is inclusive of religious rituals from traditions other than Christianity, then the sense of coercion will be further diminished.

The relevance of school prayer and religious ritual could be enhanced through the intentional connection to the experience of students. As noted above, there could be clear echoes of volunteering experiences included in liturgical gatherings. Symbols used in such gatherings could be chosen to draw connections between partner communities and the school community. The direct involvement of students in preparing for and contributing to the religious ritual will also facilitate a sense of connection and ownership that will help to enhance the relevance of the gathering.

6.7 Summary of recommendations

In summary, the recommendations arising from this study are:

1. Facilitate a category shift from religion to spirituality to be inclusive of students who do not identify with a religious expression of spirituality (see Section 6.6.1)
2. Develop a focus on engaging parents to facilitate a shared approach to the nurturing of spirituality (see Section 6.6.2)
3. Review approaches to the teaching of formal Religious Education to enhance relevance and to more directly address the needs of the students (see Section 6.6.4)
4. Develop strategies to engage students with critical religious literacy (see Section 6.6.5)
5. Investigate the development of interdisciplinary approaches in the teaching of sensitive areas (see Section 6.6.6)
6. Develop and extend the use of reflective practices to provide links between programs and initiatives in the schools and to allow students to become accustomed to drawing meaning from experience (see Section 6.6.7)
7. To enhance the effectiveness of particular school programs and initiatives through modifying them to include a continuum of spirituality profiles and to be responsive to the diverse needs of students (see Section 6.6.8)

6.8 Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the expressions of spirituality among senior students in these three Catholic schools are predominantly non-religious. Despite this, the Catholic Christian expression of spirituality remains the foundational point of reference

for these expressions of spirituality, which are frequently conveyed as rejections, in part or in full, of Catholic Christianity. The continuum of spirituality profiles emerging from this research confirms that those at either end of the continuum, namely those with distinctive religious or secular expressions of spirituality, are in the minority, while 60% of students identify with intermediate points along the continuum.

Only 16.6% of students in this study aligned themselves with a religious perspective on spirituality, yet it is to the religious perspective of Catholic Christianity that the programs and initiatives of these three schools are tailored. This focus contributes to significant disengagement with spirituality for some students who feel that their perspective on spirituality is not addressed in their Catholic school experience.

These findings lead to the key recommendation arising from this study: the call for a category shift from religion to spirituality. This has the potential to engage students who currently feel excluded by the focus on religious expressions of spirituality. This is supported by the recommendation to encourage open dialogue about spirituality through reflective processes as well as in and through an integrated approach to school programs and initiatives.

Discrete, though related recommendations are made to invest in developing critical religious literacy, which will require a significant review of formal Religious Education programs, a focus on the attainment of subject specific literacy, an interdisciplinary approach to religious knowledge and prudent use of the reflective processes discussed. These recommendations arise from the findings that many students lack critical religious literacy with some holding literal understandings of religious truths and others reflecting naïve expectations about prayer and divine intervention.

The influence of school programs and initiatives on spirituality has been shown to be minimal in comparison to influences found in the broader social milieu. However,

notwithstanding this situation there are clearly ways in which school programs and initiatives can be enhanced to more appropriately respond to the students along the continuum of spirituality profiles. Students in this study demonstrated an openness and willingness to engage with spirituality in an appropriately open and inclusive environment and the five areas highlighted in recommendation seven have the potential to support that engagement through appropriate recalibrating.

The two contributions to knowledge and the four contributions to practice emerging from this research identify potential for these schools to engage more effectively with their students in the realm of spirituality. The seven recommendations set out in this chapter provide clear strategies to facilitate the realisation of this potential and thereby to enrich the experience of students in these three Catholic schools.

The implications associated with these findings are potentially far reaching given the critical context in which Catholic schools exist in Australia. This context is characterised by rapid and unprecedented social change leading to profoundly challenging circumstances for religious institutions. This context has seen the substantial breakdown of the traditional expressions of Catholic Christianity centered on the parish and the family. It has seen growth in secularism and the new expressions of spirituality without religion. Despite the extent of these changes, Catholic schools remain an important element of the religious landscape in Australia. For most young people in this study, the Catholic school is the only formal connection with the church that they experience. Similarly, most of the families of these young people are only affiliated to the Catholic Church through their connection with the school. Thus, Catholic schools are uniquely placed to contribute to the development of spirituality among their students and accordingly it is all the more critical that these schools make the most of these opportunities.

The findings of this study provide important insights into the spirituality of young people in these three Catholic schools. They show some significant areas where programs and initiatives are currently failing to provide for the needs of the majority of the students in these cohorts, yet they also point to important opportunities to enhance their work. The seven recommendations offered provide clear and strategic paths through which these schools can more effectively realise their potential to engage students with spirituality.

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Appendix A: Data collection instruments

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Online survey form

Welcome to our survey

Thank you for taking time to answer these questions. This is an anonymous survey. Your most open and honest answers are appreciated.

This survey will take about 20 minutes to complete.

All questions are optional, leave the question blank if you choose not to answer

SECTION I

This section asks you to think about your approach to life

1. Q1 Please read the four profiles below. Each outlines a different way of expressing spirituality. Think about how you would describe yourself

Simon has a humanist approach to life. He is not a spiritual person or a religious person. He says; "I don't believe there is anything more than what we have in this life. No special purpose, no spiritual force or being, nothing happens after we die. Once we die we're gone, that's all there is to it."

Jason has a generally spiritual approach to life but is not specific in his beliefs. He says; "I don't believe in anything specific but I think there must be something more than this life. Maybe some kind of spiritual being or spiritual power. I don't really know but it makes sense to me that there would be something more."

Dominic has a spiritual approach to life with some clear beliefs but he is not a religious person. He says; "I believe in God but I don't really go to Church or anything like that. I do think about God sometimes and sort of pray, especially when I need to know what to do. I think God is looking after us and helps out when bad things happen. I think God wants us to be kind to one another and that when we die, those who have lived a good life will have eternal life."

Michael has an approach to life which is both spiritual and religious he says; "I believe there is one true God who created everything and I believe that Jesus Christ is the son of God who died to save us from our sins. I believe that the Holy Spirit lives in our lives to guide us and help us live according to God's will. I believe that after we die we have eternal life with God. I think it is important to go to Church to pray in the Church community and to learn more about God."

I am most like:

- ☐ Simon
- ☐ Jason
- ☐ Dominic
- ☐ Michael
- ☐ I am not really like any of these people

If you wish you can include an outline of your own spirituality.

--

2. Which one of the following best describes you?

- ☐ Not religious and not spiritual
- ☐ Equally religious and spiritual
- ☐ Religious but not spiritual
- ☐ Spiritual but not religious
- ☐ More spiritual than religious
- ☐ More religious than spiritual

Other (please specify)

3. Which one of the following best describes your family?

- ☐ Not religious and not spiritual
- ☐ Equally religious and spiritual
- ☐ Religious but not spiritual
- ☐ Spiritual but not religious
- ☐ More spiritual than religious
- ☐ More religious than spiritual

Other (please specify)

4. Which one of the following best describes your closest friend?

- ☐ Not religious and not spiritual
- ☐ Equally religious and spiritual
- ☐ Religious but not spiritual
- ☐ Spiritual but not religious
- ☐ More spiritual than religious
- ☐ More religious than spiritual

Other (please specify)

5. When you began secondary school were you?

- ☐ Not religious and not spiritual
- ☐ Equally religious and spiritual
- ☐ Religious but not spiritual
- ☐ Spiritual but not religious
- ☐ More spiritual than religious
- ☐ More religious than spiritual

6. Would you like to say something more about your spirituality?

SECTION II

This section asks about your thought processes.

7. Please choose a response for each of the following statements:

	Agree	Unsure	Disagree
My spirituality is something I have reached a definite view about	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My spirituality is something I have thought a lot about	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My spirituality is something I haven't really made up my mind about	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My spirituality is something I haven't really thought much about	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My spirituality is something that doesn't really matter much to me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My spirituality is something quite important to me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My spirituality is something that just seems obvious to me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My spirituality is pretty much the way I have been brought up	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

8. Is there anything else you would like to add about how your attitude to spirituality?

SECTION III

This section asks about things that might have influenced you.

9. Thinking about experiences that have influenced your thinking about spirituality please respond to the following:

I have been influenced by

	Agree	Unsure	Disagree
The media	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My parents	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My teachers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other role models	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
An immersion experience with another culture	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Being part of my school community	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Religious events with my school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Nature	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Things I have learned in my religion class	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Things I have learned in classes other than religion	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The internet	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Strongly religious people	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My Church / Mosque / Synagogue / Temple	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My own thoughts	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Volunteering to help others	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Environmental concerns	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Meditation / reflection	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Agree	Unsure	Disagree
Music	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Religious stories	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Inspiring people / events	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Alcohol and/or other substances	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My involvement in an organised group / club	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Religious events outside of school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My school retreat / reflection day	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Serious things that have happened to me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other people's responses to serious things in their lives	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How people close to me have been treated	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please specify)			
<div></div>			
10. Would you like to add anything more about these influences?			
<div></div>			

SECTION IV

This section asks you to think about how your approach to life impacts on other things.

**11. Thinking about how your spirituality impacts on your decisions and actions
please respond to the following:**

My spirituality impacts on;

	Agree	Unsure	Disagree
My moral decision making	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My decision to take part in an immersion experience with another culture	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My connection with my school community	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My involvement in religious events with my school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My appreciation of nature	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My participation in my religion class	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My choices about what to read /watch/listen to	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My approach to relating with my friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My approach to prayer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My involvement in groups at Church/Synagogue/Mosque/Temple	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My approach to meditation/reflection	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My choices about the music I listen to	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My choices about volunteering	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My response to concerns about the environment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My participation in religious services	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My decisions about using alcohol and other substances	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Agree	Unsure	Disagree
My choices about the kind of organised groups I go to	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My choices about going to religious events outside of school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My participation in school retreats / reflection days	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My response to serious things that have happened to me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My response to serious things that have happened to other people	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My response to the way people close to me have been treated	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

12. Would you like to make any further comments about how your spirituality impacts on your decisions and actions?

Section V

This section asks for your views on a number of statements about spirituality

13. Please respond to the following statements

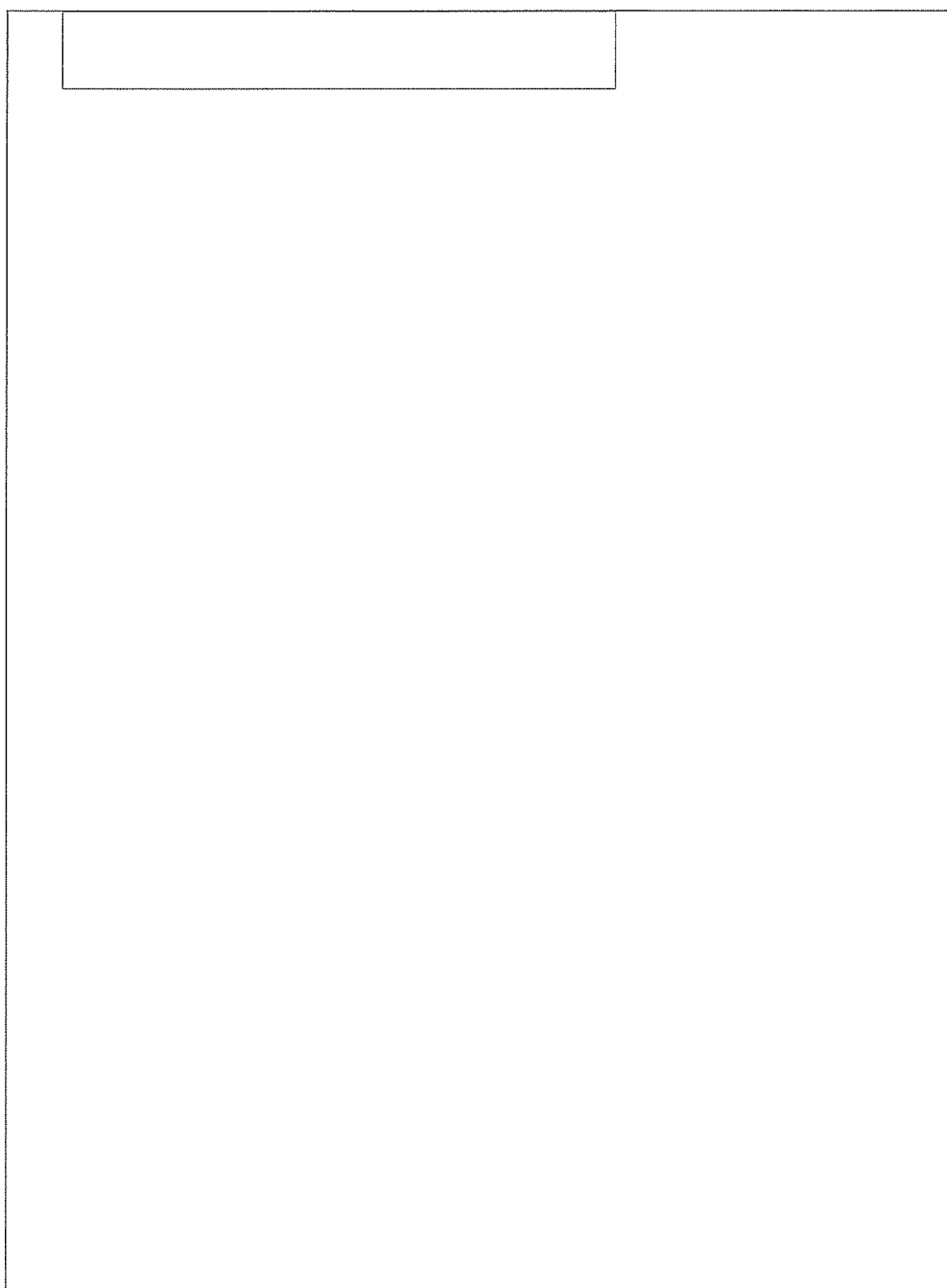
	Agree	Unsure	Disagree
Spirituality is something I have to work out for myself	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other people can't tell me what I should think about spirituality	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There is no absolutely right way to think about spirituality it is different for everyone	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There is an absolutely right way to think about spirituality but it is up to me to find it	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There is an absolutely right way to think about spirituality which other people can teach me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Section V

This section asks for your views on a number of statements about spirituality

13. Please respond to the following statements

	Agree	Unsure	Disagree
Spirituality is something I have to work out for myself	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other people can't tell me what I should think about spirituality	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There is no absolutely right way to think about spirituality it is different for everyone	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There is an absolutely right way to think about spirituality but it is up to me to find it	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There is an absolutely right way to think about spirituality which other people can teach me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



SECTION VI

This section asks for information about your age, gender and religious background.

14. What is your age?

- ☐ 15
- ☐ 16
- ☐ 17
- ☐ 18
- ☐ 19
- ☐ Other (please specify)

15. What is your gender?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

16. What is your religious background?

- ☐ Anglican
- ☐ Baptist
- ☐ Buddhist
- ☐ Catholic
- ☐ Hindu
- ☐ Jewish
- ☐ Orthodox Christian
- ☐ Muslim
- ☐ No religion
- ☐ Pentecostal
- ☐ Sikh
- ☐ Uniting Church
- ☐ Other (please specify)

17. Thank you for completing this survey - please add any additional comments here.

GROUP INTERVIEW PLAN

Introduction: (1 minute)

1/ Thanks for taking part in this group discussion. We are looking at important aspects of people's lives. We know that human beings are very complex beings made up of a range of dimensions including physical, cultural, moral, spiritual, emotional and intellectual dimensions,

This picture represents the idea of the different dimensions that make up a human person.

Today we are going to focus on the spiritual dimension. There are no right or wrong answers. We're trying to get the most honest and complete picture that we can.

2/ This discussion will last about 45 minutes and I'd like to record it if that is okay with you. The discussion is anonymous and confidential, We don't use your names when recording the information. We allocate each group member as an id code so we can keep track of the information but we don't use your names.

3/ During the group discussion I will raise a number of points for discussion and I will invite you to spend a few minutes discussing the point among yourselves. I would like to encourage you to discuss it among yourselves rather than directing your answers to me as you would in an interview.

3/ Do you have any questions?

Profiles (5 minutes)

4/ I have here a list of profiles representing different types of spirituality. I'd like you to look at these and see whether any are close to the way that you see things. Please take a minute to read over these.

5/ I'd now like you to choose the one which is closest to your own spirituality and put a spot next to it. Remember, there is no right or wrong answer. It is just about how you see things.

6/ I would now invite you to share your responses with one another and maybe talk a little about whether you felt you fitted well with one description or whether you were a combination of two or more or maybe if you felt that none of them really suited you.

General Influences (10 minutes)

7/ I'd now like to ask you about things in your life that have had an impact on your spirituality,

I have a list of things that may or may not have influenced you. I'd like you to choose the 5 most important influences and we'll talk about these in the next part of our discussion

Please use the coloured spots to indicate you five choices. If there is something important that is not included on the list you can add it.

I'm also giving you one black spot— please use this to indicate the item which you think has had the least influence on your spirituality

8/ I'd now like to ask you to share your thoughts about some of these items. I'll point out one of the items and then we can discuss this as a group — to see whether your experience is similar or different to others. Remember, we're not trying to get to one particular "right" answer. We're just talking about how it is for each of us.

9/ We'll take one item at a time until we've talked about the three items which came out most strongly in our survey. Then, we'll talk about the item which had the least influence according to our survey.

10/ Before we move on I'd like to ask if there are any other items that you would like to talk about that have not been covered so far.

School Influences (20 minutes)

11/ I'd now like to ask you about things at school that have had an impact on your spirituality.

I have a list of things that may or may not have influenced you. I'd like you to choose the 5 most important influences and we'll talk about these in the next part of our discussion

Please use the coloured spots to indicate you five choices. If there is something important that is not included on the list you can add it.

I'm also giving you one black spot — please use this to indicate the item which you think has had the least influence on your spirituality

12/ I'd now like to ask you to share your thoughts about some of these items. [I'll point out one of the items and then we can discuss this as a group — to see whether your experience is similar or different to others. Remember, we're not trying to get to one particular "right" answer. We're just talking about how it is for each of us.

13/ We'll take one item at a time until we've talked about the three items which came out most strongly in our survey. Then, we'll talk about the item which had the least influence according to our survey.

14/ Before we move on I'd like to ask if there are any other items that you would like to talk about that have not been covered so far..

Narrative (10 minutes)

15/ I'd now like to invite you to look at an image and see whether we can use these to help express ideas about our spirituality. The image is of children climbing on or playing near a tree. If you imagine that the tree represents spirituality where are you?

16/ I now invite you to talk about the image and where you see yourself, As you talk with one another, try and help each other to understand what is behind your choice.

Conclusion

17/ Are there any questions you would like to add or is there anything you would like to say about your approach to life that hasn't come up in this discussion?

After recording

Thanks again for taking part. If you have any questions or you want to know more about the research trial please speak with



Nathan: I don't believe there is anything more than what we have in this life. No special purpose, no spiritual force or being, nothing happens after we die. Once we die we're gone, that's all there is to it.

Jake: I don't believe in anything specific but I think there must be something more than this life. Maybe some kind of spiritual being or spiritual power. I don't really know but it makes sense to me that there would be something more.

Luke: I believe there is a spirit world which impacts on our world. I think our lives are connected to the spirit world and that at the end of our lives we become part of this spirit world. I think our lives have a greater purpose which is tied to the spiritual world.

Ben: I believe in God but I don't really go to Church or anything like that. I don't really think about God much but I believe God helps out when bad things happen. I think God expects us to be kind to others. I think when we die, those who have lived a good life will go to heaven.

Matthew: believe in God and I think it is important to go to Church and keep the commandments to live a good life. I pray sometimes and think about God, especially when I need to know what to do. I believe God is looking after us helps out when bad things happen and I think when we die, those who have lived a good life will go to heaven.

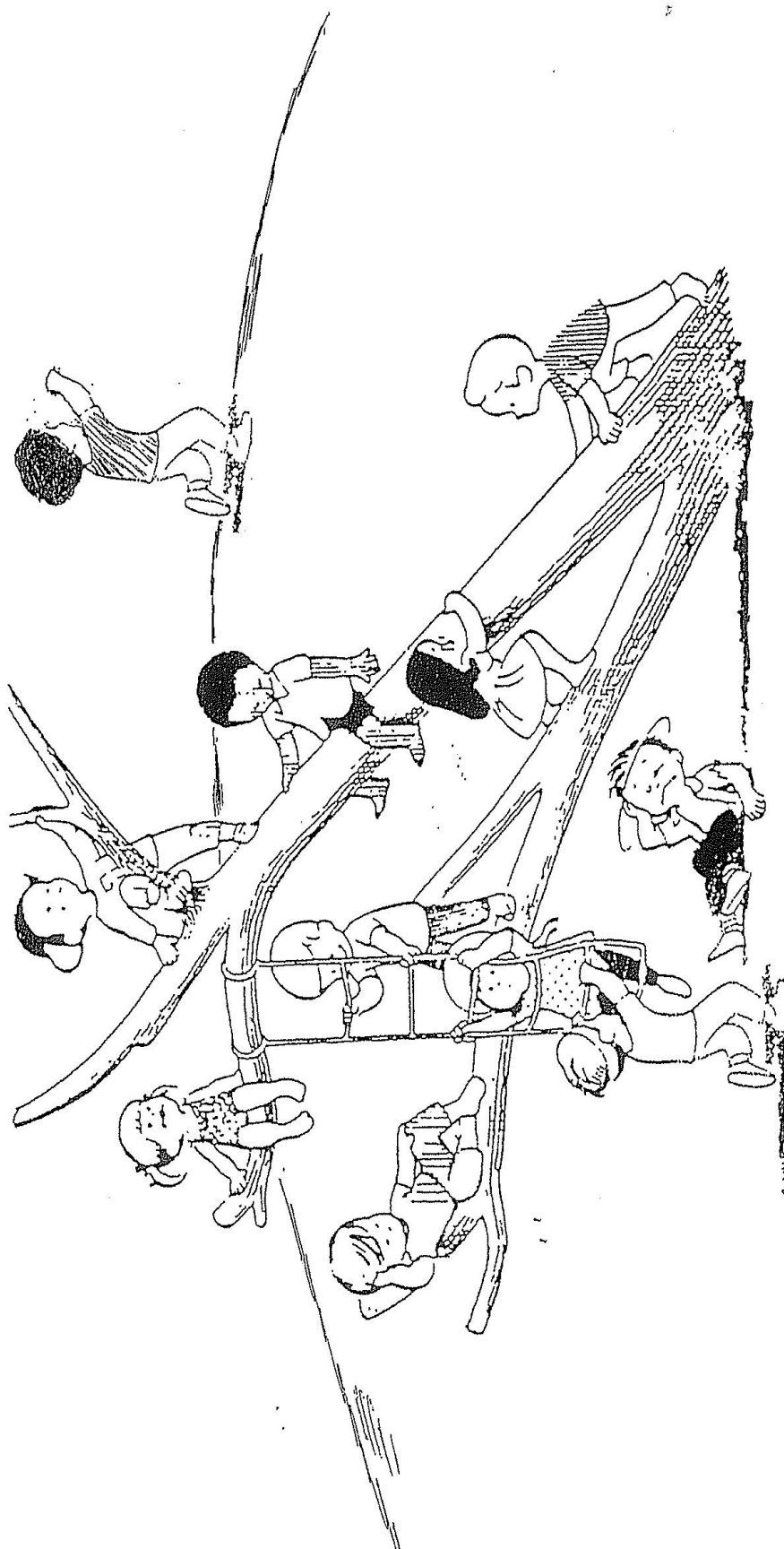
James: Is similar to Matthew however he says "I don't think going to Church is very important. Beliefs are more of a personal thing that I can follow for myself.

Daniel: I believe there is one true God who created everything and I believe that Jesus Christ is the son of God who died to save us from our sins. I believe that the Holy Spirit lives in our lives to guide us and help us live according to God's will. I believe that after we die we have eternal life with God. I don't think going to Church is very important. Beliefs are more of a personal thing that I can follow for myself.

Joshua: Is similar to Daniel however he says "I think it is important to go to Church to pray in the Church community and to learn more about God."

I have been influenced by the media	I have been influenced by internet/ online material	I have been influenced by my parents
I have been influenced by strongly religious people	I have been influenced by making moral decisions	I have been influenced by serious things that have happened to me
I have been influenced by serious things that have happened to people I know	I have been influenced by my friends	I have been influenced through the experience of volunteering.
I have been influenced by what I have learned in my religion class	I have been influenced by what I have learned in my other classes	I have been influenced by my school retreat / reflection day
I have been influenced by religious events at school	I have been influenced by religious services such as Mass	I have been influenced by religious events outside school

I have been influenced by being part of my school community	I have been influenced by prayer at school	I have been influenced by St Paul's Day
I have been influenced by an immersion experience with another culture	I have been influenced by my teachers	I have been influenced through the experience of volunteering.
I have been influenced by what have learned in my religion class	I have been influenced by what I have learned in classes other than religion	I have been influenced by my school retreat / reflection day
I have been influenced by Mental Health Month	I have been influenced by religious services at school such as Mass	I have been influenced by guest speakers at school



Individual Interview Plan

Introduction: (1 minute)

1/ Thanks for taking part in this interview. We are looking at different approaches of life chosen by young people and how they arrive at these choices. There are no right or wrong answers. We're trying to get the most honest and complete picture that we can.

2/ This interview will last about 45 minutes and I'd like to record it if that is okay with you. The interview is anonymous and confidential. We don't use your name when recording the information. We allocate each interview an id code so we can keep track of the information but we don't use your name.

3/ Do you have any questions?

Profiles (5 minutes)

4/ I have here a list of descriptions of different approaches to life. I'd like you to look at these and see whether any are close to the way that you see things. Please take a minute to read over these.

5/ I'd now like you to put together a description like this for yourself. You can ignore all of these and be totally original, or you can just choose one of these or you can mix and match bits and pieces from some of these and/or your own ideas

6/ I'm starting the voice recorder now and I'd like you to read your id code and then give your description. Are you ready?

Narrative (10 minutes)

7/ (pause recording) I'd now like you to talk about how you came to choose this approach to life and whether you think it is something definite or something that might change.

8/ Look at the pathway in this picture and imagine this represents your approach to life. The furthest point on the pathway represents where you are now and everything before that represents your life up to this point. Take a few minutes to think about what things / people / events / ideas have helped you to work out your approach to life. Write a few notes, or draw symbols on the sheet to help you remember. In a few minutes I'll ask you to tell me about these influences.

9/ For the last few minutes you've been thinking about your approach to life and the things that have influenced you in choosing this approach. Please tell me all you can about these influences and how important they are: (resume voice recording pause when completed)

General Influences (10 minutes)

10/ I'd now like to ask you some more about things in your life that have had an impact on your approach to life.

I have a list of things that may or may not have influenced you. I'd like you to choose the 5 most important influences in order and we'll talk about each one of these.

You can choose things from the list or add your own if you prefer.

11/ Please tell me about your first choice, in what ways has it influenced you and how strong has the influence been.

12/ Please tell me about your second choice, in what ways has it influenced you and how strong has the influence been.

13/ Please tell me about your third choice, in what ways has it influenced you and how strong has the influence been.

14/ Please tell me about your fourth choice, in what ways has it influenced you and how strong has the influence been.

15/ Please tell me about your fifth choice, in what ways has it influenced you and how strong has the influence been.

School Influences (10 minutes)

16/ I'd now like to ask you some more about things at school that have had an impact on your approach to life.

I have a list of things that may or may not have influenced you. I'd like you to choose the 5 most important influences in order and we'll talk about each one of these.

You can choose things from the list or add your own if you prefer.

17/ Please tell me about your first choice, in what ways has it influenced you and how strong has the influence been.

18/ Please tell me about your second choice, in what ways has it influenced you and how strong has the influence been.

19/ Please tell me about your third choice, in what ways has it influenced you and how strong has the influence been.

20/ Please tell me about your fourth choice, in what ways has it influenced you and how strong has the influence been.

21/ Please tell me about your fifth choice, in what ways has it influenced you and how strong has the influence been.

Conclusion

22/ Are there any questions you would like to add or is there anything you would like to say about your approach to life that hasn't come up in this discussion?

After recording

Thanks again for taking part. If you have any questions or you want to know more about the research trial please speak with

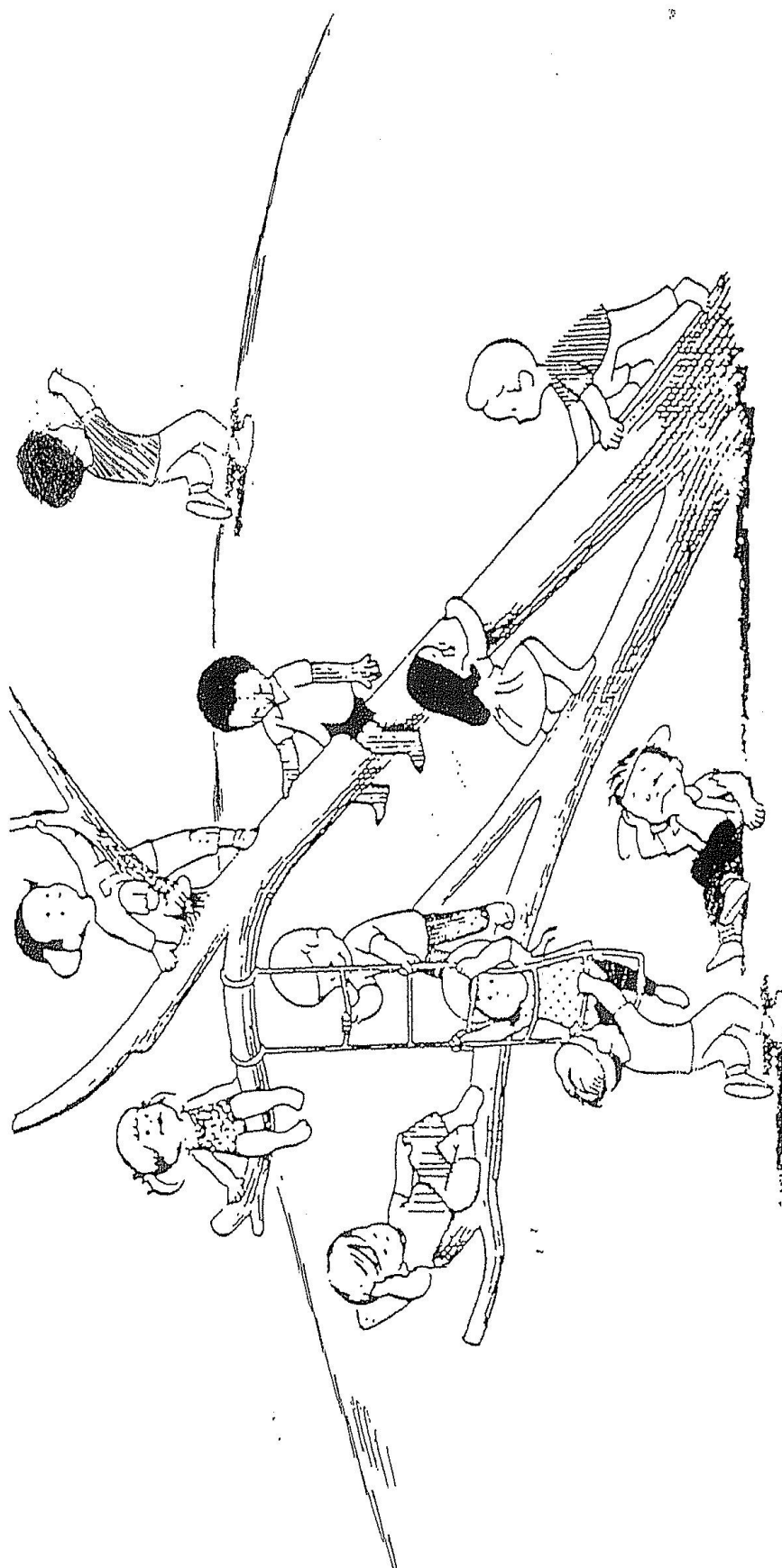


Nathan: I don't believe there is anything more than what we have in this life. No special purpose, no spiritual force or being, nothing happens after we die. Once we die we're gone, that's all there is to it.
Jake: I don't believe in anything specific but I think there must be something more than this life. Maybe some kind of spiritual being or spiritual power. I don't really know but it makes sense to me that there would be something more.
Luke: I believe there is a spirit world which impacts on our world. I think our lives are connected to the spirit world and that at the end of our lives we become part of this spirit world. I think our lives have a greater purpose which is tied to the spiritual world.
Ben: I believe in God but I don't really go to Church or anything like that. I don't really think about God much but I believe God helps out when bad things happen, I think God expects us to be kind to others. I think when we die, those who have lived a good life will go to heaven.
Matthew: I believe in God and I think it is important to go to Church and keep the commandments to live a good life. I pray sometimes and think about God, especially when I need to know what to do. I believe God is looking after us helps out when bad things happen and I think when we die, those who have lived a good life will go to heaven.
James: Is similar to Matthew however he says "I don't think going to Church is very important. Beliefs are more of a personal thing that I can follow for myself.
Daniel: I believe there is one true God who created everything and I believe that Jesus Christ is the son of God who died to save us from our sins. I believe that the Holy Spirit lives in our lives to guide us and help us live according to God's will. I believe that after we die we have eternal life with God. I don't think going to Church is very important. Beliefs are more of a personal thing that I can follow for myself.
Joshua: Is similar to Daniel however he says "I think it is important to go to Church to pray in the Church community and to learn more about God."



I have been influenced by the media	I have been influenced by internet / online material	I have been influenced by my parents
I have been influenced by strongly religious people	I have been influenced by making moral decisions	I have been influenced by serious things that have happened to me
I have been influenced by serious things that have happened to people I know	I have been influenced by my friends	I have been influenced through the experience of volunteering.
I have been influenced by what I have learned in my religion class	I have been influenced by what I have learned in my other classes	I have been influenced by my school retreat / reflection day
I have been influenced by religious events at school	I have been influenced by religious services such as Mass	I have been influenced by religious events outside school

I have been influenced by being part of my school community	I have been influenced by prayer at school	I have been influenced by St Paul's Day
I have been influenced by an immersion experience with another culture	I have been influenced by my teachers	I have been influenced through the experience of volunteering.
I have been influenced by what I have learned in my religion class	I have been influenced by what I have learned in classes other than religion	I have been influenced by my school retreat / reflection day
I have been influenced by Mental Health Month	I have been influenced by religious services at school such as Mass	I have been influenced by guest speakers at school



Staff Observation Interview

Thank you for offering to be part of this research project. We are interested in investigating how young people are understanding and expressing spirituality and how schools are contributing to this process. Alongside the information we are collecting from the young people themselves we are also interested in gathering the observations of teachers who have accompanied students during some of their school experiences.

Your contributions will be used in a de-identified way to ensure your confidentiality. I would like to record our conversation for accuracy if that is okay with you.

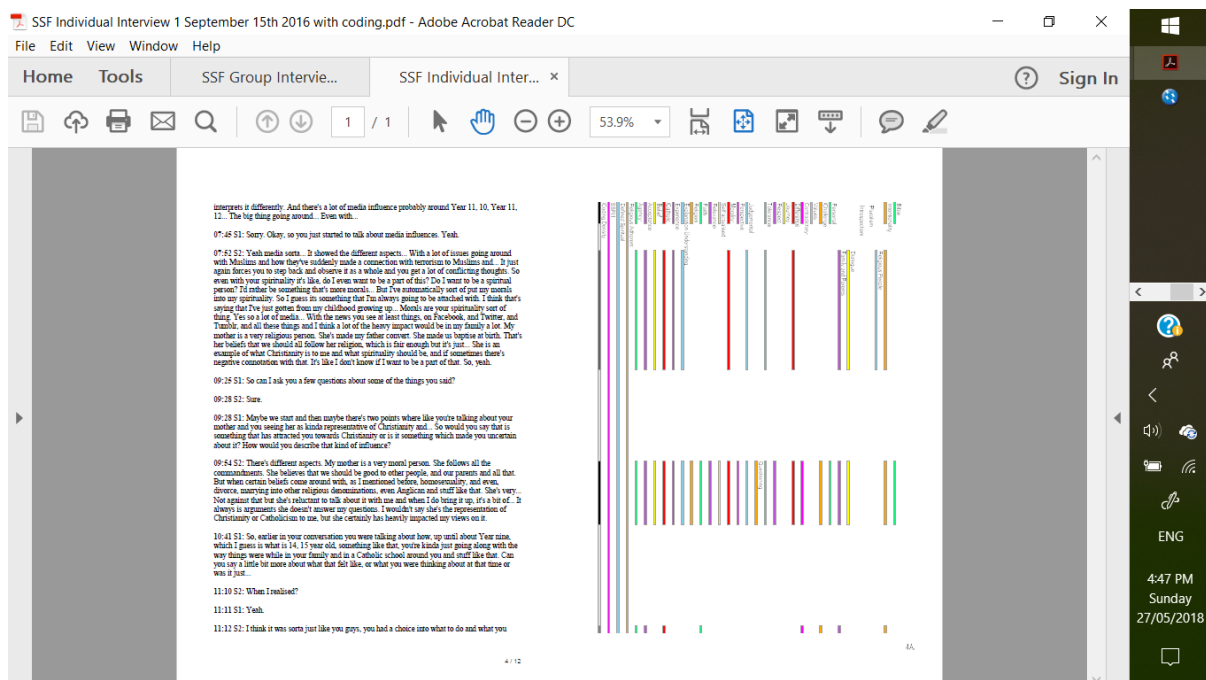
1. Schools seek to provide a range of experiences which, it is hoped, will nurture the development of spirituality among students. Can you please briefly outline the experiences of this type where you have accompanied students. (This is just to set the scene and get a sense of the scope or breadth of the staff member's experience)
2. Please begin by speaking about an occasion where you have accompanied students on a school experience. Please provide as much detail in your recollection as possible.
3. Please describe the exact nature of the experience in more detail — what it was, how students came to participate, what was expected of them etc.
4. Please give any further description about the attitude / disposition of the students before taking part in this experience.
5. Please explain the particular ways in which the students articulated their attitude / disposition before taking part in this experience.
6. Please give any further description about the attitude / disposition of the students while taking part in this experience.
7. Please explain the particular ways in which the students articulated their attitude / disposition while taking part in this experience.
8. Please give any further description about the attitude / disposition of the students after taking part in this experience.
9. Please explain the particular ways in which the students articulated their attitude / disposition after taking part in this experience.
10. What conclusion about how this experience may have affected the students who took part?
11. What evidence can you identify that support this conclusion?
12. Please share anything else about your observations of students in this experience that you can recall.

Appendix B: Overview of Coding

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1/ Screenshot of coded transcript page



2/ Sample of interview transcript

Note: Interview transcript presented entirely as transcribed other than at 2:02 where the interviewee identifies her school. This part has been blacked out to comply with confidentiality and anonymity requirements.

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00:02 Speaker 1: Okay, so I'm recording now, and I've given you a series of profiles of different approaches to spirituality. And I wanted to invite you now, using those words or your own words, to respond in terms of how you would describe your own approach to spirituality.

00:19 Speaker 2: I think I'm like Annabelle, with how she believes that there's one true God who created everything. And all the other beliefs that are listed here, and how it is important to go to church, and to pray in the church community and to learn more about God. Because that's... Partly because that's how I've been brought up and also because that's what I believe. I think it's important to go to church because we all can come together, and we've all got similar thoughts and beliefs and to share them with other people. And it can expand our thoughts and our beliefs as well. And I think it's just important to take time out of our busy schedules and everyday life to just have a moment to sit and think about different things going on in the world or people who don't have as much as we have. Just to thank God that we're in the position we're in, and we're lucky enough to have what we have. Yeah, that's what I think.

01:23 S1: Okay. You referred to beliefs that are listed there. So could you just say what they are for you? Or you can read them if you wish, but just so that we have that on the recording as well.

01:35 S2: Sure. The one true God who created everything. I believe that Jesus Christ is the son of God who died to save us from our sins. I believe that the Holy Spirit lives in our lives to guide us and help us live according to God's will. And I believe that after we die, we have eternal life with God.

01:53 S1: Okay. Thank you very much. Is there anything else you wanted to add from your own perspective on that?

02:02 S2: Just with the guidance, I think that... I think God has a plan for each of us and we might not always feel that we like it or... But I think it's important for... I know in my life, I feel that God has

a plan for me to become a primary school teacher. I just... Ever since I've been little, that's just all I've ever said I wanted to do. And I think that he has put that in my life and made it such a strong part. Especially in Catholic schools, I feel that I have... I've been so lucky with my primary school, 'cause I went to Catholic school. And to just to impart the knowledge that I've been given, even like... And here, at [REDACTED] as well. And I just think it's important, 'cause obviously God has that plan for us for a reason. And to put it in place is just... It's gonna benefit, not only myself but others. And I just think that's important just to remember that. We can't always control it, but there's a reason that God has put these certain obstacles in our life.

03:07 S1: Okay. I'm gonna pause the recorder for a minute.

03:09 S2: Yeah.

03:10 S1: Recording again. So I've given you a picture of a road or a path and I'm just going to ask you now if you can use that as a symbol or an image to just tell your story, from as early as you'd like right up to the present in terms of the things that have shaped or influenced you, in terms of your spirituality. Okay?

03:30 S2: Okay. So when I was born, I was baptised to Catholic and I was baptised in the same parish that I still go to church in now, and the same with my younger brother. And it's also the church where my parents got married, so we have like a long connection with that church and that parish. I then went to the primary school that's connected to that parish. And I made my reconciliation there and my communion, and my confirmation. And I remember when I was confirmed, the teacher read, "The Footprints in the Sand" and that just has really stuck with me and I think this image... That was the first thing I thought of that God is always walking with us and guiding us, and when things get tough, like I've experienced loss, death in the families and that, and I think those times... It was hard, but definitely I feel that God carried me and helped me, and definitely guided me through that time.

04:42 S2: And then I've come to high school and I still go to that parish, and I still feel that connection with the "Footprints in the Sand". And high school is a difficult time, in terms of the big changes and things like that. And I think it's important... Most weeks we go to church on a Saturday night and it's important, I feel for myself, to go, just to take that time out and to thank God for helping me get through that week and to guide me through the next. Just to reflect on my week and what I could've done differently or things that have happened. And I think that for the rest of my life... Well, I know for the rest of my life, I'll be a Catholic. And it's partly because of how I've been brought up and different influences on my life, but also because that's what I believe. And I know I've got friends that their parents are Catholic, but they're not Catholic because that's not what they feel they're connected with, but I feel I am and that's important. And my religion is an important part of my life and I think I...

06:03 S1: Excuse me.

06:04 S2: I think I will remain that way for the rest of my life, yeah.

06:11 S1: I'll pause again. So I've given you a grid that's got a number of possible areas of influence on it, would you like to just pick one, maybe, that you think has been the strongest influence to start? And just tell me about how that has helped to shape you or impact on you.

06:32 S2: I think the influence by my parents is probably the biggest one. My mum is Catholic and my dad, he doesn't have a religion, but he still comes to church with us because he knows how important it is to my mum. And my brother and I are both... Have been baptised as Catholics. And he also thinks that it's important for us to have that same upbringing. And I think, to a certain extent, they've been the biggest influence because they've taken me to church and, to a certain point, sort of enforce that I have to go to church and... But as I've gotten older, it's been more of an option for myself. However, I still choose to go to church, because that's just what I know.

07:28 S2: And I know lots of my... With the influence by my friends, I know lots of my friends don't go to church and at times, they've gone out and I haven't because I've gone to church and, at the time, I might be a bit, not upset, but a bit disappointed I couldn't go. But when I'm sitting in church, I'm grateful that I decided to go to church and not to go out with them because I know I can go out with them any other time, and it's just an hour in my week that I feel is really beneficial for myself and for my family as well. 'Cause it brings us closer together in a way because we're all there together, praying. And we go with my grandparents as well, and that's just that time in the week where we all reflect and just... I always feel we come out of church closer, not that we're distant, but I just feel that God brings us together. Yeah.

08:35 S1: You mentioned friends in there. Was that one of the things that you put as an influence, or are you just making an observation about that?

08:45 S2: They've been an influence to an extent. Not really... Not much of an influence, but I have... One of my friends is Christian, and she's had an influence on me, in a way. Because I was always... Going to a Catholic primary school, I sort of had that Catholic mindset, that it was... I didn't really see the bigger picture that there were other denominations in a way and she just sort of accentuated that there's other faiths that are different but have the same sort of ideas. And she is... Just different things we bounce off each other, with different ideas. And my other friends, sometimes they're not as understanding with... That I can't go out 'cause I'm going to church, but she understands it and it's sort of that as long as someone understands where I'm coming from, that makes it better. So I think she's influenced on me a bit as well, yeah.

10:01 S1: Okay, what would be... Well, you picked your parents as the most important influence, what would you say is your next important one? Or you can just pick any one of the other ones to talk about if you're not sure.

10:19 S2: I'd say probably after my parents, it's a combination of things that have happened to me and to people I know, as well as the retreat we went on. The retreat we just came back from, that really ignited my faith a bit more, I guess, just that serious three days of not worrying about anything else, just on my faith and that. And I think that that has helped me because, I sort of not lost sight,

but I was a bit pre-conceived with all of... Preoccupied with all of my other stuff that was going on, like the school work and that, and starting year 12. So I think that was really beneficial.

11:06 S2: And then the events that... Like serious things that have happened to me and to people I know, just again with the "Footprints in the Sand". I really think that is something that affects all... Like all of us have it, but we don't always recognize it or going through difficult times. I know at retreat, there was a story shared where an event happened and the individual thought that God had left them, it was very... I immediately thought of "Footprints in the Sand" again. And then at the end, the person said, "But then I realized that God was with me the entire time and it was just something that He had planned for me." And I think that's true for all of us. We've all got different things planned for us and, again, we may not like it, but there's a reason that different things happen to us.

12:06 S1: Okay, thank you. Were there other things that you thought were important influences? Is there another one you'd choose?

12:13 S2: The internet and the media. It's got both positive and negative. I mean in a way, it highlights different events. And I personally, to an extent, don't let them... Because I know with different events, the media is not always trustworthy and that. They are just saying their opinions, really, and as long as I'm happy with what I believe and where I stand, then I think that's all that matters. And with the internet, I know with social media, different people, what they do or... In terms of religious activities, there's people who go to Bible groups and that, and I think that has influenced, you know why? Because it has opened my mind to that again, like to sit down and read a Psalm or instead of going on my phone or something, I think that's influenced me as well. Yeah.

13:24 S1: And was there something on the list that you think just doesn't influence you or not significant at all?

13:40 S2: No, I think they've all influenced me in a way. Just some more than others or some I haven't really realized they've influenced me. But if I looked back and thought hard enough, there would be something that would come up that has definitely influenced the way I am today.

14:02 S1: Okay, I'm gonna pause the recorder for a minute again. Okay. So now I've given you a list of school-based factors that may or may not have an influence on you. So would you like to maybe choose the one that you think has had the strongest influence and talk about that a little bit?

14:24 S2: I think praying the Angelus and the prayers in Daily Notices. I think it's important that as a school, we can, especially as a Catholic school, we just stop for those couple of minutes and just say the Angelus or say the prayer in morning homeroom. And I think the Angelus, I used to say that in primary school, so that's something that continued on with me. I know for some of my friends, it was a big difference, like it was a bit strange for them to stop in the middle of the day to say the prayer. But because that was how I've been brought up, it's just second nature to me and the same with the prayers, I think. I always try to say a prayer each day and the prayers in Daily Notices, I just feel they're a good way to start the day. I just feel calmer and more centralized with myself, and feel that, yeah, it's just a better way to start the day on with a prayer. It's just something that I feel.

15:37 S1: Okay, thank you. And would there be something else that you'd pick as being important?

15:43 S2: The retreat again. And reflection days. I've always found them beneficial. The reflection days, the retreat as well. They just... I know some people don't appreciate them. And they find them like a bludge day or they just don't bother to come, because that's not how they've been brought up or different things like that, like they've got their own influences that make them think that way. But I find them useful and, again, I feel that they're just a good way to sort of refresh in a way, just to think about our faith and what we have and how we can put that into practice and live like Jesus would like us to.

16:42 S1: Okay. And is there anything else as a strong influence?

16:47 S2: I think my religion classes have influenced me. Not necessarily what I personally believe, but my understanding of my faith with sort of the history aspect of it and how far we've come, and the challenges that have been faced by those that... By other people in my faith. And I think that, it's also in a way, I guess, influenced my beliefs, but not to a point where I would say it would be as important as the Angelus and the prayers. But it's definitely helped me gain a clear understanding of my faith and what it entails, in a way.

17:39 S1: Are there any points on that list that you feel are just not being of any impact? Not had any impact?

17:52 S2: I don't think so. I think they've all influenced me. I think sometimes different people's opinions, whether they're positive or negative, can influence your beliefs. But again, I think if you've got your beliefs, then they're yours and no one can tell you they're right or wrong. So yeah, that's...

18:21 S1: Okay, thank you. I'll just pause the recorder again. Actually, before I do, are there any other things in terms of influence that we haven't spoken about that might be important for you? Or do you think you've had a chance to talk about everything?

18:38 S2: No, I think I've had a chance to talk about everything. Thank you.

18:41 S1: Okay, I'll just pause the recorder for a minute. So I've given you now a picture of children climbing all over a tree and we're gonna use the tree as a symbol of spirituality, and I'm inviting you now just to see if you can identify yourself on the tree somewhere and explain why you would put yourself in the picture at that point.

19:07 S2: I think I'm the girl sitting on the branch, looking up. I think 'cause I'm happy where I am in my faith journey so far, but I'm always looking for ways to expand on it and different things that can guide me. Also, I like to share my journey with other people, so I think I'm that girl, but I'm also with other people and I think that's important for myself. I like to do community work and group work and... Yeah, I think I'm... Yeah, I think she represents me. Yeah.

20:00 S1: Okay, I'm gonna pause the recorder again.

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3/ Open coding labels and frequency coded

Note: Each part of the participant interview was given a label or code to classify or describe it. See Section 3.5.3.1. Labels were chosen to reflect either the language used by participants or terms found in the literature. This process was undertaken until saturation had been reached. A total of 147 labels were used. These are shown in the table below together with a score showing the frequency coded for each label.

Open Coding Label	Frequency
Acceptance	437
Accuracy	12
Age Demographic	21
Agency	279
Agnosticism	105
Anecdote	7
Appreciation	186
Atheism	104
Atmosphere	78
Balance	61
Belief	912
Benevolence	71
Bias	16
Bible	90
Catholic	605
Certainty	165
Challenge	370
Change	107
Chastise	18
Christian	581
Church	266
Clergy	25
Comfort	325
Commandments	40
Communication	281
Community	298
Confident	91
Connection	539
Contradictory	340
Control	200

Creation	52
Creationism	34
Death	49
Defined Spiritual	60
Destiny	103
Dialogue	276
Difference	361
Environment	66
Expectations	143
Experience	624
Explanation	383
Faith	831
Family and Parents	284
Fate	85
Friends	138
Fulfilment	109
God	443
God's Will	130
Golden Rule	32
Guidance	329
Heaven	34
Hierarchy	3
History	100
Holy Spirit	20
Honesty	30
Humanitarian	180
Identity	172
Immersion	80
Inspiration	212
Intentionality	192
Internet	39
Introspection	267
Jesus Christ	54
Journey	365
Judgemental	332
Justice	182
Kind	56
Logic	115
Love	41
Mary	2
Mass	40
Media	96
Mental Health	13
Morality	210
Nature	66
Nature	17

Negative Influences	205
New Age	16
Non Defined Spiritual	166
Non-Religious	155
Obstacle	244
Omnipresence	23
Opportunity	162
Origin	42
Other Subjects	52
Parish	25
Passion	45
Paying Attention	42
Peace	91
Personal	671
Perspective	623
Pluralism	56
Pope Francis	11
Positive Influence	161
Prayer	152
Pressure	167
Privacy	37
Protection Help	64
Purpose	449
Questioning	568
Reassurance	89
Reflection	316
Relationship	221
Relevance	483
Religion	891
Religion Class	185
Religious Adherent	136
Religious Lifestyle	157
Religious People	302
Research	94
Respect	377
Retreat	100
Sacraments	26
Saints	4
Salvation	46
Satisfaction	206
Scandal	20

School	425
School Mass	36
Science	65
Secular	127
Secularism	136
Self-actualised	320
Sex Sexuality	12
Signs	66
Sin	31
Social Media	23
Spiritual	600
Spiritual Force or Power	249
Spiritual World	355
Struggle	170
Suffering Punishment	70
Support	168
Teachers	176
Time Busyness	22
Tolerance	291
Traditions	46
Understanding	445
Universe	40
Values	383
Vatican	18
Volunteering	90
World	270
World religions	159
Worship	82
Youth	7
Youth Groups	7

4/ Axial coding labels

Note: Open codes were organised around a category that identified a shared component or common basis within the data. See Section 3.5.3.2. A total of 39 categories were identified in the axial coding process.

Community	Connectedness	Constructed
Developing	Eclectic	Established
Evidence	Example	Experience
Experiential	Familial adoptive	Family
Friends	Image of God	Immersion
Intentional	Intentionality	Lifestyle
Liturgy	Liturgy/Prayer	Logic
Media	Philosophy	Prayer
Reactive	Rejection	Relevance
Responsive	Retreat	School Culture
Science	Self-Determined	Stable
Suffering	Theology	Unreflected
Values	Volunteering	Witness

5/ Axial coding labels with associated open coding labels

Note: This table shows the 39 categories identified in the axial coding process aligned with the relevant items from among the 147 labels identified in the open coding process.

Community	Connectedness	Constructed
Acceptance, Atmosphere, Catholic, Christian, Church, Community, Confident, Connection, Contradictory, Difference, Experience, Friends, Identity, Immersion, Parish, Personal, Perspective, Pluralism, Relationship, Relevance, Respect, Retreat, School, Support, Tolerance, Understanding, Volunteering, Youth Groups	Acceptance, Appreciation, Atmosphere, Balance, Catholic, Christian, Church, Communication, Community, Confident, Connection, Dialogue, Difference, Expectations, Experience, Friends, Fulfilment, Honesty, Humanitarian, Identity, Immersion, Inspiration, Intentionality, Internet, Journey, Justice, Kind, Logic, Love, Other Subjects, Parents, Parish, Personal, Perspective, Pluralism, Pope Francis, Positive Influence, Prayer, Protection Help, Purpose, Questioning, Reassurance, Reflection, Relationship, Relevance, Respect, Retreat, Science, Secular, Secularism, Self-actualised, Social Media, Spiritual, Spiritual World, Struggle, Support, Tolerance, Understanding, Universe, Values, Volunteering, World, World religions,	Agency, Anecdote, Belief, Comfort, Connection, Contradictory, Control, Destiny, Dialogue, Difference, Expectations, Experience, Explanation, Faith, Family, Fate, Friends, Fulfilment, God, God's Will, Golden Rule, Guidance, Heaven, Honesty, Humanitarian, Identity, Immersion, Inspiration, Intentionality, Internet, Introspection, Jesus Christ, Journey, Justice, Kind, Logic, Love, Morality, Nature, New Age, Non Defined Spiritual, Non-Religious, Personal, Perspective, Pluralism, Positive Influence, Prayer, Pressure, Privacy, Protection Help, Purpose, Questioning, Reassurance, Reflection, Relationship, Relevance, Religion, Religion Class, Religious People, Research, Respect, Retreat, Satisfaction, Scandal, School, Science, Secular, Secularism, Self-actualised, Social Media, Spiritual, Spiritual Force or Power, Spiritual World, Tolerance, Understanding, Universe, Values, Volunteering, World, World religions,

Developing	Eclectic	Established
<p>Acceptance, Age Demographic, Agency, Balance, Belief, Benevolence, Bias, Bible, Catholic, Change, Christian, Church, Community, Connection, Destiny, Expectations, Experience, Explanation, Faith, Family, Fate, Friends, Fulfilment, God, God's Will, Golden Rule, Guidance, Holy Spirit, Honesty, Humanitarian, Identity, Immersion, Inspiration, Intentionality, Internet, Introspection, Jesus Christ, Mental Health, Morality, Opportunity, Other Subjects, Parents, Personal, Perspective, Pressure, Purpose, Questioning, Reassurance, Reflection, Relationship, Relevance, Respect, Retreat, Science, Self-actualised, Sex Sexuality, Social Media, Tolerance, World Religions,</p>	<p>Agency, Agnosticism, Anecdote, Balance, Belief, Bias, Bible, Catholic, Contradictory, Control, Creation, Creationism, Death, Defined Spiritual, Destiny, Dialogue, Difference, Explanation, Faith, Fate, Friends, God, God's Will, Golden Rule, Guidance, Heaven, Holy Spirit, Humanitarian, Identity, Internet, Journey, Media, Nature, New Age, Non Defined Spiritual, Non- Religious, Obstacle, Omnipresence, Parents, Peace, Personal, Perspective, Pluralism, Purpose, Questioning, Reassurance, Science, Secular, Secularism, Self-actualised, Signs, Sin, Social Media, Spiritual, Spiritual Force or Power, Spiritual World, Suffering Punishment, Understanding, Universe, Values, World, World Religions,</p>	<p>Bible, Catholic, Certainty, Change, Christian, Church, Commandments, Communication, Community, Confident, Defined Spiritual, Experience, Faith, Family, God, God's Will, Golden Rule, Guidance, Heaven, Holy Spirit, Intentionality, Jesus Christ, Logic, Love, Morality, Nature, Negative Influences, Non-Religious, Omnipresence, Parents, Parish, Purpose, Questioning, Reassurance, Reflection, Relationship, Religion, Religion Class, Religious Adherent, Religious Lifestyle, Religious People Research, School, Science, Secular, Secularism, Suffering Punishment, Traditions, Understanding, Universe, Values,</p>

Evidence	Example	Experience
Accuracy, Agnosticism, Atheism, Belief, Bias, Bible, Certainty, Contradictory, Control, Creation, Creationism, Death, Defined Spiritual, Destiny, Experience, Explanation, Faith, Humanitarian, Logic, Media, Other Subjects, Paying Attention, Questioning, Reassurance, Relevance, Religion, Religion Class, Research, Science, Secular, Secularism, Social Media, Suffering Punishment, Universe,	Acceptance, Anecdote, Bias, Chastise, Clergy, Commandments, Contradictory, Control, Experience, Explanation, Faith, Family, Hierarchy, History, Humanitarian, Judgemental, Justice, Media Negative Influences, Parish, Passion, Pope Francis, Positive Influence, Relevance, Religion, Religion Class, Religious Adherent, Religious Lifestyle, Religious People Scandal, School, School Mass	Acceptance, Age Demographic, Agency, Agnosticism, Anecdote, Atheism, Atmosphere, Balance, Belief, Bias, Bible, Catholic, Certainty, Challenge, Change, Chastise, Christian, Church, Clergy, Comfort, Commandments, Community, Connection, Contradictory, Control, Creation, Creationism, Death, Defined Spiritual, Destiny, Dialogue, Difference, Environment, Expectations, Experience, Explanation, Faith, Family, Fate, Friends, Fulfilment, God, God's Will, Golden Rule, Guidance, Heaven, Hierarchy, Honesty, Humanitarian, Identity, Immersion, Inspiration, Intentionality, Internet, Introspection, Journey, Judgemental, Justice, Kind, Logic, Love, Mass, Media, Mental Health, Morality, Negative Influences, New Age, Non Defined Spiritual, Non-Religious, Omnipresence, Origin, Other Subjects, Parents, Parish, Passion, Paying Attention, Peace, Personal, Perspective, Pluralism, Pope Francis, Positive Influence, Prayer, Pressure, Privacy, Protection Help, Purpose, Questioning, Reassurance, Reflection, Relationship, Relevance, Religion, Religion Class, Religious Adherent, Religious Lifestyle, Religious People, Research, Respect, Retreat, Satisfaction, Scandal, School, School Mass,

		Science, Secular, Secularism, Self-actualised, Sex Sexuality, Siblings, Signs, Social Media, Spiritual, Spiritual Force or Power, Spiritual World, Struggle, Suffering Punishment, Support, Teachers, Time Busyness, Tolerance, Traditions, Understanding, Universe, Values, Volunteering, World, World Religions, Worship,
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Experiential	Familial adoptive	Family
Acceptance, Agency, Appreciation, Bias, Chastise, Contradictory, Control, Expectations, Experience, Explanation, Faith, Family, Fate, Golden Rule, Guidance, Humanitarian, Immersion, Judgemental, Justice, Kind, Love, Negative Influences, Personal, Perspective, Positive Influence, Pressure, Privacy, Protection Help, Purpose, Questioning, Reassurance, Reflection, Relationship, Relevance, Religion, Religion Class, Religious Lifestyle, Religious People, Retreat, Science, Social Media, Suffering Punishment, Tolerance, Understanding, Values, Volunteering,	Belief, Connection, Experience, Faith, Family, Friends, God, God's Will, Guidance, Heaven, Identity, Parents, Parish, Personal, Perspective, Religious Adherent, Religious Lifestyle, Sacraments, School, Siblings, Traditions, Values,	Acceptance, Age Demographic, Agnosticism, Atheism, Belief, Catholic, Christian, Church, Clergy, Comfort, Commandments, Connection, Contradictory, Expectations, Experience, Faith, Family, Fate, Friends, God, Guidance, Honesty, Identity, Inspiration, Journey, Mental Health, Morality, Nature, Non Defined Spiritual, Non-Religious, Obstacle, Omnipresence, Opportunity, Origin, Other Subjects, Parents, Parish, Personal, Perspective, Positive Influence, Protection Help, Reassurance, Reflection, Relationship, Religious Adherent, Religious Lifestyle, Respect, Sacraments, Satisfaction, Secular, Secularism, Siblings, Spiritual, Support, Traditions, Understanding, Values, Youth

Friends	Image of God	Immersion
<p>Acceptance, Age, Demographic, Agency, Agnosticism, Anecdote, Appreciation, Atheism, Balance, Belief, Change, Comfort, Communication, Community, Connection, Dialogue, Difference, Experience, Explanation, Faith, Family, Fate, Friends, Fulfilment, God, God's Will, Golden Rule, Guidance, Heaven, Honesty, Humanitarian, Identity, Immersion, Inspiration, Intentionality, Internet, Introspection, Journey, Judgemental, Justice, Kind, Mental Health, Morality, Negative Influences, New Age, Parents, Personal, Perspective, Pluralism, Positive Influence, Prayer, Pressure, Privacy, Protection Help, Purpose, Questioning, Reassurance, Reflection, Relationship, Relevance, Religion, Religion Class, Religious People, Respect, Retreat, School, Secular, Secularism, Self-actualised, Sex Sexuality, Siblings, Social Media, Spiritual, Spiritual Force or Power, Spiritual World, Struggle, Suffering Punishment, Support, Tolerance, Traditions, Understanding, Universe, Values, Volunteering, World World religions, Youth,</p>	<p>Agnosticism, Atheism, Bible, Catholic, Christian, Church, Commandments, Creation, Creationism, Death, Destiny, Faith, Fate, God, God's Will, Golden Rule, Heaven, Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ, Mary, Mass, New Age, Omnipresence, Origin, Parents, Parish, Prayer, Questioning, Reassurance, Reflection, Relevance, Religion, Religion Class, Religious Adherent, Religious Lifestyle, Religious People Retreat, Sacraments, Saints, Salvation, Science, Secular, Secularism, Sin, Spiritual, Spiritual Force or Power, Spiritual World, Suffering Punishment, Traditions, Understanding, Universe, Values, World religions,</p>	<p>Acceptance, Challenge, Change, Community, Confident, Contradictory, Dialogue, Difference, Environment, Experience, Explanation, Faith, Humanitarian, Identity, Immersion, Inspiration, Journey, Justice, Love, Opportunity, Peace, Personal, Perspective, Purpose, Questioning, Reassurance, Reflection, Respect, Tolerance, Understanding, Universe, Values, Volunteering, World World religions,</p>

Intentional	Intentionality	Lifestyle
<p>Acceptance, Agency, Agnosticism, Atheism Atmosphere, Belief, Christian, Contradictory, Creation, Creationism, Destiny, Difference, Experience, Explanation, Faith, Family, Fate, Friends, God, God's Will, Golden Rule, Guidance, Identity, Immersion, Inspiration, Intentionality, New Age, Personal, Perspective, Pluralism, Privacy, Purpose, Questioning, Reassurance, Relevance, Religion, Religion Class, Respect, Retreat, School, Science, Secular, Secularism, Self-actualised, Spiritual, Spiritual Force or Power, Spiritual World, Suffering Punishment Tolerance, Understanding, Universe, Values,</p>	<p>Agency, Anecdote, Belief, Comfort, Connection, Contradictory, Control, Destiny, Dialogue, Difference, Expectations, Experience, Explanation, Faith, Family, Fate, Friends, Fulfilment, God, God's Will, Golden Rule, Guidance, Heaven, Honesty, Humanitarian, Identity, Immersion, Inspiration, Intentionality, Internet, Introspection, Jesus Christ, Journey, Justice, Kind, Logic, Love, Morality, Nature, New Age, Non Defined Spiritual, Non-Religious, Personal, Perspective, Pluralism, Positive Influence, Prayer, Pressure, Privacy, Protection Help, Purpose, Questioning, Reassurance, Reflection, Relationship, Relevance, Religion, Religion Class, Religious People, Research, Respect, Retreat, Satisfaction, Scandal, School, Science, Secular, Secularism, Self-actualised, Social Media, Spiritual, Spiritual Force or Power, Spiritual World, Tolerance, Understanding, Universe, Values, Volunteering, World, World religions,</p>	<p>Age Demographic, Balance, Internet, Mass, Media, Obstacle, Opportunity, Origin, Other Subjects, Parish, Personal, Pressure, Privacy, Purpose, Questioning, Relevance, Religion, Religious Lifestyle, School Mass, Science, Secular, Secularism, Social Media, Time Busyness, Tolerance, Volunteering, World religions, Worship, Youth Groups</p>

Liturgy	Liturgy/Prayer	Logic
Age Demographic, Balance, Internet, Mass, Media, Obstacle, Opportunity, Origin, Other Subjects, Parish, Pressure, Privacy, Purpose, Questioning, Relevance, Religion, Religious Lifestyle, School Mass, Secular, Secularism, Social Media, Time Busyness, Tolerance, Worship, Youth Groups	Age Demographic, Balance, Internet, Mass, Media, Obstacle, Opportunity, Origin, Other Subjects, Parish, Personal, Pressure, Privacy, Purpose, Questioning, Relevance, Religion, Religious Lifestyle, School Mass, Science, Secular, Secularism, Social Media, Time Busyness, Tolerance, Volunteering, World religions, Worship, Youth Groups	Agnosticism, Atheism, Belief, Bible, Catholic, Certainty, Challenge, Christian, Church, Contradictory, Experience, Explanation, Faith, God, Logic, Personal, Perspective, Pluralism, Purpose, Questioning, Reassurance, Relevance, Religion, Religion Class, Secular, Secularism, Suffering Punishment, Understanding, Universe, Values,

Media	Philosophy	Prayer
<p>Accuracy, Bias, Catholic, Church, Clergy, Internet, Media, Negative Influences, Paying Attention, Questioning, Relevance, Religion, Religious People, Scandal, School, Science, Secular, Secularism, Sex Sexuality, Social Media, Suffering Punishment, Understanding,</p>	<p>Agency, Agnosticism, Anecdote, Balance, Belief, Bias, Bible, Catholic, Contradictory, Control, Creation, Creationism, Death, Defined Spiritual, Destiny, Dialogue, Difference, Explanation, Faith, Fate, Friends, God, God's Will, Golden Rule, Guidance, Heaven, Holy Spirit, Humanitarian, Identity, Internet, Journey, Media, Nature, New Age, Non Defined Spiritual, Non-Religious, Obstacle, Omnipresence, Parents, Peace, Personal, Perspective, Pluralism, Purpose, Questioning, Reassurance, Science, Secular, Secularism, Self-actualised, Signs, Sin, Social Media, Spiritual, Spiritual Force or Power, Spiritual World, Suffering Punishment, Understanding, Universe, Values, World World religions,</p>	<p>Age Demographic, Balance, Media, Obstacle, Opportunity, Origin, Other Subjects, Personal, Privacy, Purpose, Questioning, Relevance, Religion, Youth Groups</p>

Reactive	Rejection	Relevance
<p>Agnosticism, Atheism, Atmosphere, Belief, Bias, Bible, Catholic, Certainty, Chastise, Christian, Clergy, Commandments, Contradictory, Control, Creation, Creationism, Expectations, Experience, Explanation, Faith, Family, God's Will, Golden Rule, Heaven, Hierarchy, Honesty, Judgemental, Logic, Mass, Media, Negative Influences, Obstacle, Other Subjects, Parents, Parish, Prayer Pressure, Relevance, Religion, Religion Class, Religious Adherent, Religious Lifestyle, Religious People, Research, Retreat, Scandal, School Mass, Science, Secular, Secularism, Sex Sexuality, Sin, Social Media, Suffering Punishment, Worship,</p>	<p>Accuracy, Agnosticism, Atheism, Belief, Bias, Bible, Certainty, Contradictory, Control, Creation, Creationism, Death, Defined Spiritual, Destiny, Experience, Explanation, Faith, Humanitarian, Logic, Media, Other Subjects, Paying Attention, Questioning, Reassurance, Relevance, Religion, Religion Class, Research, Science, Secular, Secularism, Social Media, Suffering Punishment, Universe,</p>	<p>Agnosticism, Atheism, Belief, Bias, Bible, Catholic, Change, Christian, Church, Clergy, Connection, Contradictory, Creation, Creationism, Difference, Experience, Explanation, Faith, Fate, Friends, Fulfilment, God, Golden Rule, Guidance, Humanitarian, Immersion, Judgemental, Justice, New Age, Parish, Pluralism, Pope Francis, Positive Influence, Purpose, Questioning, Reassurance, Relevance, Religion, Religion Class, Religious Lifestyle, Religious People, Retreat, School Mass Science, Secular, Secularism, Sex Sexuality, Sin, Social Media, Spiritual, Spiritual Force or Power, Spiritual World, Traditions, Understanding, Universe, Values, Volunteering, World World religions, Worship,</p>

Responsive	Retreat	School Culture
<p>Acceptance, Agency, Agnosticism, Atheism Atmosphere, Belief, Christian, Contradictory, Creation, Creationism, Destiny, Difference, Experience, Explanation, Faith, Family, Fate, Friends, God, God's Will, Golden Rule, Guidance, Identity, Immersion, Inspiration, Intentionality, New Age, Personal, Perspective, Pluralism, Privacy, Purpose, Questioning, Reassurance, Relevance, Religion, Religion Class, Respect, Retreat, School, Science, Secular, Secularism, Self-actualised, Spiritual, Spiritual Force or Power, Spiritual World, Suffering Punishment, Tolerance, Understanding, Universe, Values,</p>	<p>Acceptance, Appreciation, Atmosphere, Balance, Belief, Bible, Catholic, Change, Chastise, Christian, Comfort, Communication, Community, Connection, Contradictory, Control, Difference, Environment, Expectations, Experience, Faith, Friends, Fulfilment, God, Honesty, Humanitarian, Inspiration, Intentionality, Journey, Judgemental, Justice, Love, Mass, Opportunity, Peace, Personal, Perspective, Pressure, Purpose, Questioning, Reassurance, Reflection, Relationship, Relevance, Religion, Religious People, Respect, Retreat, Support, Teachers, Time Busyness, Tolerance, Understanding, Values,</p>	<p>Acceptance, Belief, Bible, Catholic, Challenge, Change, Chastise, Christian, Church, Clergy, Community, Connection, Contradictory, Control, Creation, Creationism, Difference, Environment, Expectations, Experience, Explanation, Faith, Friends, Fulfilment, God, Golden Rule, Guidance, Immersion, Inspiration, Judgemental, Justice, Mass, Opportunity, Other Subjects, Parents, Parish, Paying Attention, Prayer, Pressure, Purpose, Questioning, Reassurance, Reflection, Relationship Relevance, Religion, Religion Class, Religious People, Research, Respect, Retreat, School, School Mass, Science, Secular, Secularism, Suffering Punishment, Support, Teachers, Tolerance, Traditions, Understanding, Values, Volunteering, World religions, Worship,</p>

Science	Self-Determined	Stable
<p>Agency, Agnosticism, Belief, Bias, Bible, Catholic, Contradictory, Control, Creation, Creationism, Defined Spiritual, Destiny, Difference, Explanation, Faith, Fate, Friends, God, God's Will, Golden Rule, Guidance, Heaven, Holy Spirit, Humanitarian, Identity, Internet, Media, Nature, New Age, Non Defined Spiritual, Non-Religious, Obstacle, Omnipresence, Parents, Personal, Perspective, Pluralism, Purpose, Questioning, Reassurance, Science, Secular, Secularism, Self-actualised, Signs, Sin, Social Media, Spiritual, Spiritual Force or Power, Spiritual World, Suffering Punishment, Understanding, Universe, Values, World World religions,</p>	<p>Agency, Anecdote, Belief, Comfort, Connection, Contradictory, Control, Destiny, Dialogue, Difference, Expectations, Experience, Explanation, Faith, Family, Fate, Friends, Fulfilment, God, God's Will, Golden Rule, Guidance, Heaven, Honesty, Humanitarian, Identity, Immersion, Inspiration, Intentionality, Internet, Introspection, Jesus Christ, Journey, Justice, Kind, Logic, Love, Morality, Nature, New Age, Non Defined Spiritual, Non-Religious, Personal, Perspective, Pluralism, Positive Influence, Prayer, Pressure, Privacy, Protection Help, Purpose, Questioning, Reassurance, Reflection, Relationship, Relevance, Religion, Religion Class, Religious People, Research, Respect, Retreat, Satisfaction, Scandal, School, Science, Secular, Secularism, Self-actualised, Social Media, Spiritual, Spiritual Force or Power, Spiritual World, Tolerance, Understanding, Universe, Values, Volunteering, World, World religions,</p>	<p>Accuracy, Age Demographic, Atheism, Belief, Certainty, Challenge, Change, Christian, Church, Confident, Connection, Contradictory, Control, Creation, Creationism, Experience, Explanation, Faith, Family, Fate, Friends, God, God's Will, Golden Rule, Humanitarian, Other Subjects, Parents, Questioning, Reassurance, Reflection, Religion, Religion Class, Religious Adherent, Religious Lifestyle, Religious People, Science, Secular, Secularism, Suffering Punishment, Tolerance, Traditions, Understanding, Universe, Values,</p>

Suffering	Theology	Unreflected
<p>Accuracy, Agnosticism, Atheism, Belief, Bias, Bible, Certainty, Contradictory, Control, Creation, Creationism, Death, Defined Spiritual, Destiny, Experience, Explanation, Faith, Humanitarian, Logic, Media, Other Subjects, Paying Attention, Questioning, Reassurance, Relevance, Religion, Religion Class, Research, Science, Secular, Secularism, Social Media, Suffering Punishment, Universe,</p>	<p>Agnosticism, Atheism, Bible, Catholic, Christian, Church, Commandments, Creation, Creationism, Death, Destiny, Faith, Fate, God, God's Will, Golden Rule, Heaven, Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ, Mary, Mass, New Age, Omnipresence, Origin, Parents, Parish, Prayer, Questioning, Reassurance, Reflection, Relevance, Religion, Religion Class, Religious Adherent, Religious Lifestyle, Religious People Retreat, Sacraments, Saints, Salvation, Science, Secular, Secularism, Sin, Spiritual, Spiritual Force or Power, Spiritual World, Suffering Punishment, Traditions, Understanding, Universe, Values, World religions,</p>	<p>Acceptance, Age Demographic, Certainty, Confident, Connection, Contradictory, Destiny, Experience, Explanation, Faith, Family, Friends, God's Will, Intentionality, Paying Attention, Personal, Perspective, Pluralism, Reassurance, Reflection, Relevance, Religion, Religion Class, Research, Respect, Retreat, Science, Secular, Secularism, Siblings, Social Media, Spiritual, Spiritual Force or Power, Spiritual Suffering Punishment, Understanding,</p>

Values	Volunteering	Witness
Acceptance, Appreciation, Balance, Belief, Benevolence, Catholic, Christian, Church, Clergy, Comfort, Commandments, Contradictory, Control, Expectations, Experience, God's Will, Golden Rule, Guidance, Humanitarian, Immersion, Inspiration, Judgemental, Justice, Kind, Love, Morality, Nature, Peace, Personal, Perspective, Pluralism, Pope Francis, Pressure, Privacy, Protection Help, Purpose, Questioning, Reassurance, Reflection, Relationship, Relevance, Religion, Religion Class, Respect, Retreat, Science, Secular, Secularism, Sex Sexuality, Sin, Suffering Punishment, Tolerance, Understanding, Universe, Values, Volunteering, World World religions,	Acceptance, Challenge, Change, Community, Confident, Contradictory, Dialogue, Difference, Environment, Experience, Explanation, Faith, Humanitarian, Identity, Immersion, Inspiration, Journey, Justice, Love, Opportunity, Peace, Personal, Perspective, Purpose, Questioning, Reassurance, Reflection, Respect, Tolerance, Understanding, Universe, Values, Volunteering, World World religions,	Acceptance, Anecdote, Bias, Chastise, Clergy, Commandments, Contradictory, Control, Experience, Explanation, Faith, Family, Hierarchy, History, Humanitarian, Judgemental, Justice, Media Negative Influences, Parish, Passion, Pope Francis, Positive Influence, Relevance, Religion, Religion Class, Religious Adherent, Religious Lifestyle, Religious People Scandal, School, School Mass

6/ Selective coding – axial codes aligned with research questions

Note: In the selective coding process categories were examined to determine links and identify intersections with a view to connecting and integrating categories to form insights and articulate themes. See Section 3.5.3.3. The 39 categories previously identified were refined and integrated through selective coding into a subsequent group of 21 categories, which enabled themes to be identified. Six of these categories applied to the first research question, four categories applied to the second research question and 11 categories applied to the third research question.

Research Questions

1. How do senior students at Catholic schools express spirituality?
2. How committed are senior students at Catholic schools to these expressions of spirituality?
3. How do senior students at Catholic schools evaluate the influences on the development of their spirituality?

1. How do senior students at Catholic schools express spirituality?

- Community
- Constructed
- Developing
- Eclectic
- Established
- Evidence
- Experiential
- Image of God
- Intentional
- Lifestyle
- Logic

- Philosophy
- Reactive
- Responsive
- Self-Determined
- Stable
- Suffering
- Theology
- Values
- Witness / Example

2. How committed are senior students at Catholic schools to these expressions of spirituality?

- Developing
- Established
- Familial adoptive
- Intentionality
- Rejection
- Stable
- Unreflected

3. How do senior students at Catholic schools evaluate the influences on the development of their spirituality?

- Connectedness
- Example
- Experience
- Family

- Friends
- Immersion
- Intentionality
- Lifestyle
- Liturgy
- Media
- Prayer
- Retreat
- Relevance
- School
- School Culture
- Science
- Suffering
- Values
- Volunteering
- Witness/Example

7/ Selective coding – refinement of axial codes into categories

Note: In the table below each of the categories from the selective coding process is shown in relationship to the relevant items from the axial coding process and these are presented under each of the research questions.

1. How do senior students at Catholic schools express spirituality?

Axial Codes	Categories
Constructed, Developing, Eclectic, Evidence, Experiential, Intentional Logic, Reactive, Responsive, Self-Determined, Suffering,	Experiential and self-constructed spirituality
Community, Constructed, Eclectic, Evidence, Image of God, Intentional Philosophy, Self-Determined, Theology, Values	Personal, individual and self-reliant spirituality
Community, Constructed, Eclectic, Evidence, Experiential, Image of God, Lifestyle, Logic, Philosophy, Reactive Responsive, Self-Determined, Suffering, Values, Witness / Example	Inclusive spirituality
Developing, Eclectic, Evidence Experiential, Lifestyle, Philosophy, Reactive, Self-Determined	Fluid and adaptable spirituality
Community, Evidence, Experiential, Image of God, Intentional, Logic, Philosophy, Suffering, Theology, Values, Witness / Example	Religiously referenced spirituality
Constructed, Eclectic, Evidence Experiential, Image of God, Reactive Responsive, Self-Determined, Suffering, Theology, Values,	Literally expressed spirituality

2. How committed are senior students at Catholic schools to these expressions of spirituality?

Axial Codes	Category
Established, Intentionality, Rejection, Stable	Secular
Developing, Unreflected	Non-defined spiritual
Developing, Established, Familial adoptive, Intentionality, Rejection, Stable, Unreflected	Defined spiritual
Established, Familial adoptive, Intentionality, Stable, Unreflected	Religious

3. How do senior students at Catholic schools evaluate the influences on the development of their spirituality?

Axial Codes	Category
Connectedness, Example, Experience Family, Lifestyle, Liturgy, Prayer, Relevance, Suffering, Values, Witness/Example	Parents
Connectedness, Experience, Friends, Immersion, Lifestyle, Liturgy, Media, Retreat, Relevance, School, School Culture, Values	Friends
Connectedness, Example, Experience Family, Friends, Immersion, Intentionality Lifestyle, Prayer, Relevance, Science, Suffering, Values, Volunteering Witness/Example	Important life experiences
Experience, Immersion, Lifestyle, Liturgy, Media, Prayer, Relevance, Science, Suffering, Volunteering, Witness/Example	Human suffering
Intentionality, Media, Prayer, Relevance, School, Science, Suffering	Scientific learning
Example, Experience, Friends, Lifestyle, Media, Prayer, Relevance, School, School Culture Science, Suffering, Values, Witness/Example	Religious Education classes

Example, Experience, Intentionality Lifestyle, Media, Prayer, Relevance, School, Science, Suffering, Values, Witness/Example	Media and internet
Experience, Lifestyle, Liturgy, Media, Relevance, School, School Culture, Values, Witness/Example	Strongly expressed religious views
Connectedness, Example, Experience Friends, Immersion, Intentionality Lifestyle, Media, Relevance, School, School Culture, Suffering, Values, Volunteering, Witness/Example	Volunteering experiences
Connectedness, Experience, Friends, Intentionality, Liturgy, Prayer, Retreat Relevance, School, School Culture Values,	School retreat
Experience, Friends, Liturgy, Prayer, Retreat, Relevance, School, School Culture, Witness/Example	School prayer and religious ritual

8/ Articulation of themes – aligned with research questions

Note: This section identifies the themes, which had been derived from the analysis of the data, set out under each research question. See Section 3.5.3.4.

Research Questions

1. How do senior students at Catholic schools express spirituality?

- Secular
 - Defined as negative of religion/spirituality
- Non defined spiritual
 - Generic - undeveloped
- Defined Spiritual
 - Eclectic
- Religious
 - Conforming rather than constructing

2. How committed are senior students at Catholic schools to these expressions of spirituality?

- Secular
 - Mostly intentional and committed – not hostile towards religion & spirituality but seen as irrelevant
- Non defined spiritual
 - Mostly not intentional, very casual and unconsidered
- Defined Spiritual
 - Very mixed – some clearly intentional, some casual
- Religious
 - Mostly mildly intentional, have continued with familial tradition with some reflection, not strongly committed

3. How do senior students at Catholic schools evaluate the influences on the development of their spirituality?

- Family (both secularising and nurturing)
- Friends (frequently assumed perspectives rather than discussed)
- Personal experience (mostly secularising – failure of God, hypocrisy of religious people, judgemental / rigid perspectives)
- Media (some debate – recognised as pervasive yet negated by critical awareness)
- Volunteering experiences (seen as positive especially in terms of values but not necessarily formative in a spiritual or religious sense)
- School influences marginal in comparison with other areas of influence
- Mixture of formative and secularising influences
- Formative influences
 - Volunteering
 - School culture / ethos
 - Immersions
 - Retreats
 - Inspiring people (teachers)
 - Religious studies (world religions)
- Secularising influences
 - Formal liturgical / prayer experiences (boring, disconnected)
 - Scientific knowledge (seen as real, in conflict with religion – e.g. creation)
 - Judgemental rigid perspectives
 - Teachers who “don’t believe it”

- No instances of anyone moving from secular to spiritual / religious
- Formal liturgical / prayer experiences mostly rejected
- Religious doctrine mostly rejected when seen to be at odds with real subjects
- Values based experiences generally well accepted but not valued from religious / spiritual perspective (embrace values such as compassion etc. but religion / spirituality not seen as necessary element)
- Retreats regarded as worthwhile but not really formative – other than confirming existing beliefs – some scepticism (not genuinely explorative)

Appendix C: Samples of statistical calculations using quantitative data from online survey

This appendix contains representative samples of the tables and calculations used in this research arranged in six sections. Owing to the number of calculations involved only a representative sample is provided. The full suite of statistical calculations can be accessed at the sites indicated.

Contents

Section 1	Samples of tabulated data from survey questions shown as a percentage	440
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Full set of tables available at:

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1lqImr793HV0apF6CBZT8WLJ3ZKIRLbIY>

Section 2	Samples of chi square computations	452
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Full set of chi square computations available at:

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=15d0raISDX3rTnPztn4C5Sx4Vj1yb-G0b>

Section 3	Samples of ANOVAS (analysis of variance)	457
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Full set of ANOVAS available at:

https://drive.google.com/open?id=1-I21E1LUL4_hzWL8L1fwXyBAF6d6J4-L

Section 4	Samples of odds ratio calculations	463
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Full set of odds ratio calculations available at:

Group A: https://drive.google.com/open?id=1B_VFkNCP8sKIUMCjHjvjUAqZJNTZrTUi

Group B: <https://drive.google.com/open?id=1io9jSFXWIFNnx0J87HM9RZLN56TKzDLx>

Section 5	Samples of T-testing calculations	465
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Full set of T-testing calculations available at:

https://drive.google.com/open?id=1WpUEmKUqcoGkChJZuEXXjZ1vnt_RKOlg

Section 6	Samples of T-testing calculations	471
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Full set of correlation testing calculations available at:

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1ZVtxdPi6-6jGSEv6K71E5T8GYv6dfPTk>

Section 1: Samples of tabulated data from survey questions shown as a percentage

Table 1 - Spirituality Profile of Respondents by Gender (n =235)

	Secular	Non Defined Spiritual	Defined Spiritual	Religious
Female (n=112)	7.5	12	17	11
Male (n=123)	15.5	20	11	6
Total (n=235)	23	32	28	17

Table 1 - Spirituality Profile of Respondents by Gender (n =235)

My Spirituality is pretty much the way I have been brought up	Female (n=112)	Male (n=123)	Total (n=235)
Secular	7.5	15.5	23
Non-Defined Spiritual	12	20	32
Defined Spiritual	17	11	28
Religious	11	6	17

Table 6 - Influence of Upbringing of 'Religious' on Spirituality by Gender (n = 39)

My Spirituality is pretty much the way I have been brought up	Agree	Disagree	Unsure
Female (n=25)	48.5	5	10.5
Male (n=14)	15	10.5	10.5
Total (n=39)	63.5	15.5	21

Table 8 - Question 9 Influences on Spirituality - all respondents (n =248)

	Agree	Disagree	Unsure
My parents	76.5	12.5	11
The internet	41	34	25
Religious Events outside of school	32	44	24

Table 12 -17 Percentages will not apply as 'all respondents' data is included other categories.

Table 12 Question 9 Responses - Influences of Parents.

	Agree	Disagree	Unsure
All respondents (n=248)	190	31	27
Catholic (n=143)	110	19	14
Other Christian (n=55)	38	9	8
No Religion (n=39)	31	4	4

Table 18 - Spirituality profile of family - all respondents (n=235)

	Female (n=112)	Male (n=123)	Total (n=235)
Not religious and not spiritual	6.5	18.5	25
Equally religious and spiritual	15.5	14	29.5
Religious but not spiritual	7	2	9
Spiritual but not religious	3	5.5	8.5
More spiritual than religious	7	4	11
More religious than spiritual	9	8	17
Total	48	52	100

Table 19 - Spirituality profile of friend - all respondents (n=246)

	Female (n=116)	Male (n=130)	Total (n=246)
Not religious and not spiritual	11	32	43
Equally religious and spiritual	11	9	20
Religious but not spiritual	4	3	7
Spiritual but not religious	7	6.5	13.5
More spiritual than religious	9.5	2	11.5
More religious than spiritual	4	1	5
Total	46.5	53.5	100

Table 20 - Spirituality profile when beginning secondary school - all respondents (n=249)

	Female (n=117)	Male (n=132)	Total (n=249)
Not religious and not spiritual	6	24	30
Equally religious and spiritual	14.5	16.5	31
Religious but not spiritual	8	3	11
Spiritual but not religious	3	4	7
More spiritual than religious	4	2	6
More religious than spiritual	11	4	15
Total	46.5	53.5	100

Table 33 - Agreement with statements - all respondents (n = 86)

Answer Options	Agree	Disagree	Unsure
There is no absolutely right way to think about spirituality it is different for everyone	76	9	15
Spirituality is something I have to work out for myself	69	15	16
The type of spirituality which is right for others is not necessarily right for me	66	13	21
Other people can't tell me what I should think about spirituality	60.5	15	24.5
I find it helpful to explore spirituality in an open way with no fixed expectations	45	27	28
There is an absolutely right way to think about spirituality but people can find it in different ways	27	35	38
The more I think about spirituality the less sure I am about what I believe	25	37.5	37.5
There is an absolutely right way to think about spirituality but it is up to me to find it	17.5	51	31.5
I find it helpful to be guided towards a definite type of spirituality	12	57	31
There is an absolutely right way to think about spirituality which other people can teach me	9	59	32
There is an absolutely right way to think about spirituality which is the same for everyone	6	68.5	25.5

Table 38 - Spirituality profile of respondent - all respondents (n=246)

	Female (n=116)	Male (n=130)	Total (n=246)
Not religious and not spiritual	7	20	27
Equally religious and spiritual	11	10	21
Religious but not spiritual	4	2	6
Spiritual but not religious	8	11	19
More spiritual than religious	11	7	18
More religious than spiritual	6	3	9
Total	47	53	100

Table 42 - Spirituality profile of respondent - all respondents by gender - now and family

	Family All (n=235)	Now All (n=246)	Family Female (n=112)	Now Female (n=116)	Family Male (n=123)	Now Male (n=130)
Not religious and not spiritual	24.5	27	13	15.5	35	37
Equally religious and spiritual	30	21	33	24	27	18.5
Religious but not spiritual	9	6	14.5	8	4	4.5
Spiritual but not religious	8.5	19	6	17	11	20
More spiritual than religious	11	18	14.5	22.5	8	14
More religious than spiritual	17	9	19	13	15	6
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Table 49 - Spirituality profile of all respondents - comparison of Year 7 to now

more spiritual than religious	Year 7 (n=44)	Now (n=130)
All	34	34
Female	25	20
Male	9	14
Catholic	23	23
Other Christian	7	7.5
No religion	2	1.5
Total	100	100

Table 55 - Spirituality profile of family-all respondents by religion (n=223)

	Catholic (n=137)	Other Christian (n=49)	No Religion (n=37)	Total (n=223)
Not religious and not spiritual	16	22.5	57	24
Equally religious and spiritual	31.5	41	8	30
Religious but not spiritual	10	10	0	8.5
Spiritual but not religious	7	4	19	8.5
More spiritual than religious	12	8	13.5	11
More religious than spiritual	23.5	14.5	2.5	18
Total	100	100	100	100

Table 60 - Influences on Spirituality - all respondents (n = 248)

Rank of all respondents	Answer Options	Agree
1	My own thoughts	79
2	My parents	77
3	Serious things that have happened to me	58
4	My friends	49
5	Inspiring people / events	47
6	How people close to me have been treated	46
7	Being part of my school community	43
8	Other people's responses to serious things in their lives	43
9	Music	41
10	The internet	41
11	Things I have learned in my religion class	40
12	Other role models	39
13	Volunteering to help others	38
14	Nature	38
15	Things I have learned in classes other than religion	36
16	My school retreat / reflection day	35
17	The media	35
18	Religious events within my school	32
19	Meditation/reflection	31
20	My teachers	31
21	My Church / Mosque / Synagogue / Temple	29
22	An immersion experience with another culture	29
23	Religious stories	28
24	Environmental concerns	27
25	Strongly religious people	25
26	My involvement in an organised group / club	19
27	Religious events outside of school	14
28	Alcohol and/or other substances	13

Table 61 - Influences on Spirituality - female respondents (n = 116)

Rank of all respondents	Answer Options	Agree	Rank of female respondents
1	My own thoughts	81	2
2	My parents	83	1
3	Serious things that have happened to me	63	3
4	My friends	42	12
5	Inspiring people / events	53	4
6	How people close to me have been treated	52	6
7	Being part of my school community	52	5
8	Other people's responses to serious things in their lives	47	9
9	Music	40	17
10	The internet	41	16
11	Things I have learned in my religion class	48	8
12	Other role models	36	19
13	Volunteering to help others	50	7
14	Nature	41	15
15	Things I have learned in classes other than religion	39	18
16	My school retreat / reflection day	46	10
17	The media	35	20
18	Religious events within my school	21	13
19	Meditation/reflection	44	11
20	My teachers	26	24
21	My Church / Mosque / Synagogue / Temple	21	14
22	An immersion experience with another culture	35	21
23	Religious stories	34	22
24	Environmental concerns	29	25
25	Strongly religious people	31	23
26	My involvement in an organised group / club	17	27
27	Religious events outside of school	21	26
28	Alcohol and/or other substances	11	28

Table 62 - Influences on Spirituality - male respondents (n = 132)

Rank of all respondents	Answer Options	Agree	Rank of male respondents
1	My own thoughts	77	1
2	My parents	71	2
3	Serious things that have happened to me	53	4
4	My friends	55	3
5	Inspiring people / events	41	8
6	How people close to me have been treated	42	7
7	Being part of my school community	36	12
8	Other people's responses to serious things in their lives	39	10
9	Music	42	5
10	The internet	42	6
11	Things I have learned in my religion class	33	15
12	Other role models	40	9
13	Volunteering to help others	29	17
14	Nature	36	11
15	Things I have learned in classes other than religion	33	14
16	My school retreat / reflection day	27	18
17	The media	35	13
18	Religious events within my school	23	21
19	Meditation/reflection	20	23
20	My teachers	33	16
21	My Church / Mosque / Synagogue / Temple	17	26
22	An immersion experience with another culture	23	20
23	Religious stories	23	22
24	Environmental concerns	24	19
25	Strongly religious people	19	25
26	My involvement in an organised group / club	20	24
27	Religious events outside of school	8	28
28	Alcohol and/or other substances	15	27

Table 60b - Influences on Spirituality - all respondents (n = 248)

Answer Options	Inside School Factors Agree
Being part of my school community	43
Things I have learned in my religion class	40
Volunteering to help others	39
Things I have learned in classes other than religion	36
My school retreat / reflection day	35
Religious events with my school	32
My teachers	31

Table 60c - Influences on Spirituality - all respondents (n = 248)

Answer Options	Inside School Factors Agree
Being part of my school community	43
Things I have learned in my religion class	40
Volunteering to help others	39
Things I have learned in classes other than religion	36

Table 66 - top 5 influences of spirituality by gender

Answer Options	Agree females	Agree male
My own thoughts	81	77.5
My parents	83	71
Serious things that have happened to me	63	53
My friends	43	55
Inspiring people / events	55	41

Table 67 - top 5 influences of spirituality by religion

Answer Options	Agree catholic	Agree other Christian	Agree no religion
My own thoughts	78.5	78	87
My parents	77	69	79
Serious things that have happened to me	60	56	41
My friends	49	47	49
Inspiring people / events	52	43	25.5

Table 68 - Influences on Spirituality - by gender

Answer Options	Female (n=116)	Male (n=132)
My own thoughts	81	77
My parents	83	71
Serious things that have happened to me	63	53
My friends	42	55
Being part of my school community	52	36

Table 69 - Influences on Spirituality - by religion

Answer Options	Catholic (n=143)	Other Christian (n=55)	No religion (n=39)
My own thoughts	94	78	87
My parents	96	69	79
Serious things that have happened to me	73	56	41
My friends	49	47	49
Being part of my school community	60	44	23

Table 70 - Influences on Spirituality - by spirituality

Answer Options	Secular (n=53)	Non- Defined (n=78)	Defined (n=66)	Religious (n=40)
My own thoughts	85	76	86	78
My parents	68	65	88	90
Serious things that have happened to me	49	53	65	80
My friends	43	53	52	53
Being part of my school community	23	35	56	75

Table 71 - Influences on Spirituality - by spirituality

Answer Options	Secular (n=56)	Non- Defined (n=78)	Defined (n=66)	Religious (n=40)
The internet	42	41	42	35
Things I have learned in my religion class	25	32	52	65
Volunteering to help others	27	31	48	60
Things I have learned in classes other than religion	39.5	40	32	32
My school retreat / reflection day	14	26	52	64
Religious events with my school	18	22	36.5	67.5
Meditation / reflection	21	31	38	42.5
My Church / Mosque / Synagogue / Temple	11	12	36.5	80

Table 72a - Statements 1 and 11 about Spirituality by religion

Statements about spirituality	catholic	other Christian	no religion
There is no absolutely right way to think about spirituality it is different for everyone	84.5	46	68.5
There is an absolutely right way to think about spirituality which is the same for everyone	4	0	13

Table 72b - Statements 1 and 9 about Spirituality by religion

Statements about spirituality	catholic	other Christian	no religion
There is no absolutely right way to think about spirituality it is different for everyone	84.5	46	68.5
I find it helpful to be guided towards a definite type of spirituality	14	8	6

Table 72c - Statements 2 and 9 about Spirituality by religion

Statements about spirituality	catholic	other Christian	no religion
Spirituality is something I have to work out for myself	77	46	62.5
I find it helpful to be guided towards a definite type of spirituality	14	8	6

Table 72d - Statements 6 and 11 about Spirituality by religion

Statements about spirituality	catholic	other Christian	no religion
There is an absolutely right way to think about spirituality but people can find it in different ways	27	31	31
There is an absolutely right way to think about spirituality which is the same for everyone	4	0	13

Table 72e - Statements 2 and 4 about Spirituality by religion

Statements about spirituality	catholic	other Christian	no religion
Spirituality is something I have to work out for myself	77	46	62.5
Other people can't tell me what I should think about spirituality	62	46	75

Table 72f - Statements 8 and 10 about Spirituality by religion

Statements about spirituality	catholic	other Christian	no religion
There is an absolutely right way to think about spirituality but it is up to me to find it	21	8	13
There is an absolutely right way to think about spirituality which other people can teach me	9.5	8	13

Table 72g - Statements 2 and 10 about Spirituality by religion

Statements about spirituality	catholic	other Christian	no religion
Spirituality is something I have to work out for myself	77	46	62.5
There is an absolutely right way to think about spirituality which other people can teach me	9.5	8	13

Table 72h - Statements 1 and 10 about Spirituality by religion

Statements about spirituality	catholic	other Christian	no religion
There is no absolutely right way to think about spirituality it is different for everyone	84.5	46	68.5
There is an absolutely right way to think about spirituality which other people can teach me	9.5	8	13

Table 72w - Statements 1 and 10 about Spirituality by spirituality profile

Statements about spirituality	secular	non-defined	defined	religious
There is no absolutely right way to think about spirituality it is different for everyone	66.5	78	76	100
There is an absolutely right way to think about spirituality which other people can teach me	0	13	12	25

Table 72x - Statements 2 and 11 about Spirituality by spirituality profile

Statements about spirituality	secular	non-defined	defined	religious
Spirituality is something I have to work out for myself	71	62.5	76	87.5
There is an absolutely right way to think about spirituality which is the same for everyone	5	6	6	12.5

Table 72y - Statements 10 and 11 about Spirituality by spirituality profile

Statements about spirituality	secular	non-defined	defined	religious
There is an absolutely right way to think about spirituality which other people can teach me	0	13	12	25
There is an absolutely right way to think about spirituality which is the same for everyone	5	6	6	12.5

Table 72z - Statements 1 and 2 about Spirituality by spirituality profile

Statements about spirituality	secular	non-defined	defined	religious
There is no absolutely right way to think about spirituality it is different for everyone	66.5	78	76	100
Spirituality is something I have to work out for myself	71	62.5	76	87.5

Section 2: Samples of chi square computations

Table 18 Spirituality profile of family - all respondents (n=235)

OBSERVED		
	TOTAL	
Not religious and not spiritual	58	9.92293E-11
Equally religious and spiritual	70	11.07049769
Religious but not spiritual	21	
Spiritual but not religious	20	
More spiritual than religious	26	
More religious than spiritual	40	
Total	235	

The P-Value is < 0.00001. The result is significant at $p < 0.05$.

CHI-SQUARE COMPUTATION					
OBSERVED	EXPECTED	O-E	(O-E)^2	(O-E)^2/E	
58	39.16667	18.83333333	354.6944	9.05602837	
70	39.16667	30.83333333	950.6944	24.2730496	
21	39.16667	-18.1666667	330.0278	8.42624113	
20	39.16667	-19.1666667	367.3611	9.37943262	
26	39.16667	-13.1666667	173.3611	4.42624113	
40	39.16667	0.833333333	0.694444	0.0177305	
235					
		chi-square	55.57872		
		Chi square official value			
		p=0.05	df=5	11.0704977	

Table 20 Spirituality profile when beginning secondary school - all respondents (n=249)

OBSERVED		
	TOTAL	
Not religious and not spiritual	74	2.69049E-18
Equally religious and spiritual	77	11.07049769
Religious but not spiritual	28	
Spiritual but not religious	17	
More spiritual than religious	15	
More religious than spiritual	38	
Total	249	

The P-Value is < 0.00001. The result is significant at $p < 0.05$.

CHI-SQUARE COMPUTATION					
OBSERVED	EXPECTED	O-E	(O-E)^2	(O-E)^2/E	
74	41.5	32.5	1056.25	25.4518072	
77	41.5	35.5	1260.25	30.3674699	
28	41.5	-13.5	182.25	4.39156627	
17	41.5	-24.5	600.25	14.4638554	
15	41.5	-26.5	702.25	16.9216867	
38	41.5	-3.5	12.25	0.29518072	
249					chi-square 91.8915663

Chi square official value		
p=0.05	df=5	11.0704977

Table 22 Spirituality profile of friend - secular respondents (n=54)

OBSERVED		
	TOTAL	
Not religious and not spiritual	32	2.44632E-15
Equally religious and spiritual	11	11.07049769
Religious but not spiritual	4	
Spiritual but not religious	4	
More spiritual than religious	3	
More religious than spiritual	0	
Total	54	

CHI-SQUARE COMPUTATION					
OBSERVED	EXPECTED	O-E	(O-E)^2	(O-E)^2/E	
32	9	23	529	58.7777778	
11	9	2	4	0.44444444	
4	9	-5	25	2.77777778	
4	9	-5	25	2.77777778	
3	9	-6	36	4	
0	9	-9	81	9	
54					chi-square 77.7777778

Chi square official value		
p=0.05	df=5	11.0704977

Table 25 Spirituality profile of friend - non defined spiritual respondents (n=74)

OBSERVED		
	TOTAL	
Not religious and not spiritual	40	7.56172E-16
Equally religious and spiritual	7	11.07049769
Religious but not spiritual	4	
Spiritual but not religious	14	
More spiritual than religious	4	
More religious than spiritual	5	
Total	74	

CHI-SQUARE COMPUTATION					
OBSERVED	EXPECTED	O-E	(O-E)^2	(O-E)^2/E	
40	12.33333	27.66666667	765.4444	62.0630631	
7	12.33333	-5.33333333	28.44444	2.30630631	
4	12.33333	-8.33333333	69.44444	5.63063063	
14	12.33333	1.666666667	2.777778	0.22522523	
4	12.33333	-8.33333333	69.44444	5.63063063	
5	12.33333	-7.33333333	53.77778	4.36036036	
74				chi-square	80.2162162

Chi square official value

p=0.05	df=5	11.0704977
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Table 30 Spirituality profile of family - religious respondents (n=38)

OBSERVED		
	TOTAL	
Not religious and not spiritual	2	1.16164E-05
Equally religious and spiritual	17	11.07049769
Religious but not spiritual	5	
Spiritual but not religious	0	
More spiritual than religious	4	
More religious than spiritual	10	
Total	38	

CHI-SQUARE COMPUTATION					
OBSERVED	EXPECTED	O-E	(O-E)^2	(O-E)^2/E	
2	6.333333	-4.33333333	18.77778	2.96491228	
17	6.333333	10.66666667	113.7778	17.9649123	
5	6.333333	-1.33333333	1.777778	0.28070175	
0	6.333333	-6.33333333	40.11111	6.33333333	
4	6.333333	-2.33333333	5.444444	0.85964912	
10	6.333333	3.66666667	13.44444	2.12280702	
38					
				chi-square	30.5263158

Chi square official value		
p=0.05	df=5	11.0704977

Section 3: Samples of ANOVA (analysis of variance) testing

Table 1 - Spirituality Profile of Respondents by Gender (n = 235)

	Secular	Non Defined Spiritual	Defined Spiritual	Religious
Female (n=112)	18	28	41	25
Male (n=123)	37	47	25	14
Total	55	75	66	39

Anova: Two-Factor Without Replication

<i>SUMMARY</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Sum</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Variance</i>
Female	4	112	28	92.66666667
Male	4	123	30.75	205.5833333
Secular	2	55	27.5	180.5
Non Defined Spiritual	2	75	37.5	180.5
Defined Spiritual	2	66	33	128
Religious	2	39	19.5	60.5

ANOVA

<i>Source of Variation</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>F crit</i>
Rows	15.125	1	15.125	0.084912281	0.789734	10.12796
Columns	360.375	3	120.125	0.674385965	0.623017	9.276628
Error	534.375	3	178.125			
Total	909.875	7				

Table 2 - Spirituality Profile of Respondents by Gender (n = 235)

My Spirituality is pretty much the way I have been brought up	Female (n=112)	Male (n=123)	Total
Secular	18	37	55
Non-Defined Spiritual	28	47	75
Defined Spiritual	41	25	66
Religious	25	14	39

Anova: Two-Factor Without Replication

<i>SUMMARY</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Sum</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Variance</i>
Secular	2	55	27.5	180.5
Non-Defined Spiritual	2	75	37.5	180.5
Defined Spiritual	2	66	33	128
Religious	2	39	19.5	60.5
Female	4	112	28	92.66666667
Male	4	123	30.75	205.5833333

ANOVA

<i>Source of Variation</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>F crit</i>
Rows	360.375	3	120.125	0.674385965	0.623017	9.276628
Columns	15.125	1	15.125	0.084912281	0.789734	10.12796
Error	534.375	3	178.125			
Total	909.875	7				

Table 3 - Influence of Upbringing on Spirituality by Gender (n = 248)

My Spirituality is pretty much the way I have been brought up	Agree	Disagree	Unsure
Female (n=116)	38	35	43
Male (n=132)	44	51	37
Total (n=248)	82	86	80

Anova: Two-Factor Without Replication

SUMMARY	Count	Sum	Average	Variance
Female (n=116)	3	116	38.66666667	16.33333333
Male (n=132)	3	132	44	49
Agree	2	82	41	18
Disagree	2	86	43	128
Unsure	2	80	40	18

ANOVA

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Rows	42.66666667	1	42.66666667	0.703296703	0.489939	18.51282
Columns	9.333333333	2	4.666666667	0.076923077	0.928571	19
Error	121.3333333	2	60.66666667			
Total	173.3333333	5				

Table 7 - Influence of Upbringing on Spirituality by 'Religious background' (n = 236)

My Spirituality is pretty much the way I have been brought up	Agree	Disagree	Unsure
Catholic (n=142)	48	40	54
Other Christian (n=55)	17	20	18
No Religion (n=39)	10	23	6

Anova: Two-Factor Without Replication

SUMMARY	Count	Sum	Average	Variance
			47.33333333	49.33333333
Catholic (n=142)	3	142	3	3
			18.33333333	2.333333333
Other Christian (n=55)	3	55	3	3
No Religion (n=39)	3	39	13	79
Agree	3	75	25	409
			27.66666666	116.3333333
Disagree	3	83	7	3
Unsure	3	78	26	624

ANOVA

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Rows	2048.222	2	1024.111111	16.3566992	0.01187	6.94427
Columns	10.88888	9	5.444444444	0.08695652	0.91840	6.94427
Error	250.4444	4	62.61111111			
Total	2309.555	6				

Table 15 Question 9 Responses - Influences of parents. Comparison of Female and Male respondents (n =248)

	Agree	Disagree	Unsure
Female	96	12	8
Male	94	19	19
Total	190	31	27

Anova: Two-Factor Without Replication

<i>SUMMARY</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Sum</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Variance</i>
Female	3	116	38.66666667	2469.333
Male	3	132	44	1875
Agree	2	190	95	2
Disagree	2	31	15.5	24.5
Unsure	2	27	13.5	60.5

ANOVA

<i>Source of Variation</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>F crit</i>
Rows	42.66666667	1	42.66666667	1.924812	0.299699	18.51282
Columns	8644.333333	2	4322.166667	194.985	0.005102	19
Error	44.33333333	2	22.16666667			
Total	8731.333333	5				

Table 16 Question 9 Responses - Influences of the internet. Comparison of Female and Male respondents (n =248)

	Agree	Disagree	Unsure
Female	47	46	23
Male	55	39	38
Total	102	85	61

Anova: Two-Factor Without Replication

<i>SUMMARY</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Sum</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Variance</i>
Female	3	116	38.66666667	184.3333
Male	3	132	44	91
Agree	2	102	51	32
Disagree	2	85	42.5	24.5
Unsure	2	61	30.5	112.5

ANOVA

<i>Source of Variation</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>F crit</i>
Rows	42.66666667	1	42.66666667	0.675462	0.497541	18.51282
Columns	424.3333333	2	212.1666667	3.358839	0.229419	19
Error	126.3333333	2	63.16666667			
Total	593.3333333	5				

Section 4: Samples of odds ratio calculations

Calculating the relative strength of outside school influences for gender, religious background and spirituality profile

Outside School Influences	Odds ratio	Significance x 2	Confidence Interval
no rel	2.06	Y	1.54-2.77
M	1.8	Y	1.54-2.1
sec	1.63	Y	1.29-2.06
non def	1.6	Y	1.31-1.96
All	1.43	Y	1.28-1.59
cath	1.29	Y	1.11-1.5
oth ch	1.23	N	0.98-1.55
reli	1.17	N	0.88-1.57
def	1.16	N	0.93-1.44
F	1.12	N	0.95-1.31

Comparing the relative strength of the influence of friends to the influence of religious education class for gender, religious background and spirituality profile

F to rel class	Odds ratio	Significance x2	Confidence interval
no rel	3.41	Y	1.19-9.77
M	2.41	Y	1.35-4.28
non def	2.24	Y	1.07-4.69
sec	2.23	N	0.92-5.37
All	1.67	Y	1.09-2.54
oth ch	1.57	N	0.63-3.93
reli	1.21	N	0.37-3.95
cath	1.20	N	0.66-2.16
def	1.17	N	0.47-2.89
F	1.10	N	0.58-2.08

Comparing the relative strength of the influence of music to the influence of friends for gender, religious background and spirituality profile

Music to Friends	Odds ratio	Significance x2	Confidence interval
cath	0.74	N	0.42-1.3
sec	0.72	N	0.31-1.69
F	0.63	N	0.34-1.19
All	0.61	Y	0.4-0.92
M	0.59	N	0.33-1.04
non def	0.57	N	0.28-1.19
def	0.52	N	0.22-1.23
reli	0.49	N	0.15-1.59
oth ch	0.47	N	0.19-1.17
no rel	0.36	N	0.13-1.02

Comparing the relative strength of the influence of the internet to the influence of friends for gender, religious background and spirituality profile

Internet to Friends	Odds ratio	Significance x2	Confidence interval
no rel	1.12	N	0.4-3.14
sec	0.95	N	0.41-2.19
non def	0.72	N	0.34-1.5
M	0.67	N	0.37-1.19
oth ch	0.62	N	0.26-1.5
All	0.60	Y	0.4-0.92
F	0.56	N	0.3-1.05
cath	0.56	Y	0.32-0.98
def	0.40	Y	0.17-0.93
reli	0.29	Y	0.09-0.92

Section 5: Samples of T-testing calculations

Table 60a - Influences on Spirituality - all respondents (n = 248)

Answer Options	social Agree
My own thoughts	196
My parents	190
Serious things that have happened to me	143
My friends	121
Inspiring people / events	116
How people close to me have been treated	115
Other people's responses to serious things in their lives	107
Music	102
The internet	101
Other role models	96
Nature	96
n=11	
mean	125.7273
stdev	35.90568
var	1289.218

Table 60b - Influences on Spirituality - all respondents (n = 248)

Answer Options	school Agree
Being part of my school community	107
Things I have learned in my religion class	100
Volunteering to help others	96
Things I have learned in classes other than religion	89
My school retreat / reflection day	88
Religious events with my school	80
My teachers	78
n=7	
mean	91.14286
stdev	10.52661
var	110.8095
vars	

Unpaired *t* test results

P value and statistical significance:

The two-tailed P value equals 0.0258

By conventional criteria, this difference is considered to be statistically significant.

Confidence interval:

The mean of Social minus School equals 34.5844400

95% confidence interval of this difference: From 4.7492027 to 64.4196773

Intermediate values used in calculations:

$t = 2.4574$

$df = 16$

standard error of difference = 14.074

Review of data:**Group**

	Social	School
Mean	125.7273	91.14286
SD	35.90568	10.52661
SEM	10.82597	3.978685
N	11	7

Table 61a - Influences on Spirituality - female respondents (n = 116)

Answer Options	social Agree
My own thoughts	94
My parents	96
Serious things that have happened to me	73
My friends	49
Inspiring people / events	62
How people close to me have been treated	60
Other people's responses to serious things in their lives	55
Music	46
The internet	47
Other role models	42
Nature	47

mean	61
stdev	19.02104
var	361.8

Table 61c - Influences on Spirituality - female respondents (n = 116)

Answer Options	school Agree
Being part of my school community	60
Things I have learned in my religion class	56
Volunteering to help others	58
Things I have learned in classes other than religion	45

mean	54.75
stdev	6.70199
var	44.91667
vars	44.91667

Unpaired *t* test results

P value and statistical significance:

The two-tailed P value equals 0.5396

By conventional criteria, this difference is considered to be not statistically significant.

Confidence interval:

The mean of Social minus School equals 6.2500000

95% confidence interval of this difference: From -15.1813885 to 27.6813885

Intermediate values used in calculations:

$t = 0.6300$

$df = 13$

standard error of difference = 9.920

Review of data:

Group	Social	School
Mean	61	54.75
SD	19.02104	6.70199
SEM	5.735059	3.350995
N	11	4

Table 62a - Influences on Spirituality - male respondents (n = 132)

Answer Options	social Agree
----------------	-----------------

My own thoughts	102
My parents	94
Serious things that have happened to me	70
My friends	72
Inspiring people / events	54
How people close to me have been treated	55
Other people's responses to serious things in their lives	52
Music	55
The internet	55
Other role models	53
Nature	48

mean	64.54545
stdev	18.17891
var	330.4727

Table 62c - Influences on Spirituality - male respondents (n = 132)

Answer Options	school Agree
Being part of my school community	47
Things I have learned in my religion class	44
Volunteering to help others	38
Things I have learned in classes other than religion	44

mean	43.25
stdev	3.774917
var	14.25
vars	14.25

Unpaired *t* test results

P value and statistical significance:

The two-tailed P value equals 0.0406

By conventional criteria, this difference is considered to be statistically significant.

Confidence interval:

The mean of Social minus School equals 21.29545000
95% confidence interval of this difference: From
1.05433848 to 41.53656152

Intermediate values used in calculations:

$t = 2.2729$

$df = 13$

standard error of difference = 9.369

Review of data:

Group	Social	School
Mean	64.54545	43.25
SD	18.17891	3.774917
SEM	5.481148	1.887459
N	11	4

Section 6: Samples of correlation testing

Q2 to Q5	249	246	117	116	132	130
----------	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

	Year 7 (All)	Now (All)	Year 7 Female	Now Female	Year 7 Male	Now Male
Not religious and not spiritual	30	27	13	15.5	45	37
Equally religious and spiritual	31	21	31	24	31	18.5
Religious but not spiritual	11	6	17	8	6	4.5
Spiritual but not religious	7	19	7	17	7	20
More spiritual than religious	6	18	9	22.5	3	14
More religious than spiritual	15	9	23	13	8	6
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

	Row 1	Row 2
Row 1	1	
Row 2	-0.1508	1

t test??? -0.30509

Q2 to Q5 249 246 117 116 132 130

	Year 7 (All)	Now (All)	Year 7 Female	Now Female	Year 7 Male	Now Male
Not religious and not spiritual	74	66	15	18	59	48
Equally religious and spiritual	77	52	36	28	41	24
Religious but not spiritual	28	15	20	9	8	6
Spiritual but not religious	17	46	8	20	9	26
More spiritual than religious	15	44	11	26	4	18
More religious than spiritual	38	23	27	15	11	8
Total	249	246	117	116	132	130

	Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4	Column 5	Column 6
Column 1	1					
Column 2	0.543106	1				
Column 3	0.628764	-0.16321	1			

Column 4	0.232705	0.651077	0.127027	1		
Column 5	0.931793	0.74166	0.303618	0.225837	1	
Column 6	0.564505	0.936759	-0.26046	0.344267	0.813277	1
testing the significance						
	<i>Column 1</i>	<i>Column 2</i>	<i>Column 3</i>	<i>Column 4</i>		
Column 1	1					
Column 2	1.293627	1				
Column 3	1.6172	-0.33086	1			
Column 4	0.478547	1.715592	0.25613	1		
Column 5	5.13397	2.211349	0.63732	0.463652	1	
Column 6	1.367785	5.353282	-0.53953	0.733363	2.795353	1
	<i>Column 1</i>	<i>Column 2</i>	<i>Column 3</i>	<i>Column 4</i>	<i>Column 5</i>	<i>Column 6</i>
Column 1	1					
Column 2	-1	1				
Column 3	1	-1	1			
Column 4	-1	1	-1	1		
Column 5	1	-1	1	-1	1	
Column 6	-1	1	-1	1	-1	1
	<i>Row 1</i>	<i>Row 2</i>	<i>Row 3</i>	<i>Row 4</i>	<i>Row 5</i>	<i>Row 6</i>
Row 1	1					
Row 2	-0.05016	1				
Row 3	-0.67581	0.656275	1			
Row 4	-0.04299	-0.98636	-0.64092	1		
Row 5	-0.5234	-0.74179	-0.26992	0.833091	1	
Row 6	-0.76327	0.615907	0.989517	-0.57865	-0.1508	1

Appendix D: Validation tool

Summary of Research Findings

Having analysed the data collected from surveys with 261 students and interviews with 37 students and 6 staff I have arrived at a number of broad conclusions. I am now seeking to determine whether these points are consistent with your experience of senior students and spirituality. Please respond to the scale after each point and provide an explanation in cases where you have indicated “Somewhat Agree” “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree”.

Spirituality of Senior Students

- a) Students express spirituality as a form of acceptance or rejection of the Catholic Christian tradition.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Comment: 				

- b) Students see spirituality as personal, individualised and constructed in the light of personal experience.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Comment: 				

- c) Students are in an exploratory stage in their expression of spirituality.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Comment:				

d) Students see spirituality as fluid and open to change.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Comment:				

e) Students seldom disclose their perspective on spirituality to others.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Comment:				

f) Female students are more likely than males to align themselves with the Catholic Christian tradition.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Comment:				

g) Female students are more likely than males to express clearly defined spiritual beliefs.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Comment:				

h) Male students express an outright rejection of the Catholic Christian tradition more frequently than females.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Comment:				

i) Male students are less likely than females to express clearly defined spiritual beliefs

Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Comment:				

j) Students do not give much thought to spirituality.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Comment:				

k) Students' spirituality is most strongly influenced by their family and friends.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Comment:				

l) School programs and initiatives do not have a significant influence on spirituality.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Comment:				

m) Students relate positively to experiences of volunteering.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Comment:				

n) Students relate positively to school retreat experiences.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Comment:				

o) Students relate negatively to experiences of formal prayer and liturgy.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Comment:				

p) Students react negatively to official Church statements.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Comment:				

q) Students are negatively influenced by media reports of abuse by clergy and religious.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Comment:				

r) Students are unable to distinguish between scientific and religious truth.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Comment:				

s) Students see social media as an opportunity to engage with spiritual ideas.

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STUDENT PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LETTER

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/3X3BHBQ>

PROJECT TITLE: The expression of spirituality among senior students in Catholic Schools

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Professor Peta Goldberg

STUDENT RESEARCHER: Paul Lentern

STUDENT'S DEGREE: Doctor of Education

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in the research project described below.

What is the project about?

The research project investigates the ways senior students in Catholic schools in NSW view the area of spirituality and how their schools contribute to the development of spirituality. Through this research we aim to improve our understanding of how young people see these matters and allow schools to enhance the quality of the work they do in this area.

Who is undertaking the project?

This project is being conducted by Paul Lentern and will form the basis for the Doctor of Education Degree at Australian Catholic University under the supervision of Professor Peta Goldberg.

Are there any risks associated with participating in this project?

This study will be conducted confidentially to ensure that the identity of participants is not revealed and the information provided is not able to be linked to individual participants. Participants in the study will be anonymous and their responses will be treated confidentially to avoid any risk to those participating. Additionally, participants may choose to withdraw from the study at any point or to skip any question or part of the study if they wish to do so. This measure protects participants from any feelings of discomfort from their participation in this research.

What will I be asked to do?

The research will involve an anonymous online questionnaire and the option of taking part in either a confidential small group discussion or individual interview.

The online questionnaire will ask participants to identify aspects of their approach to life by choosing the option that most closely suits them. Each question will also have space for participants to add their own comments if they choose.

Those who choose to join a small discussion group will be invited to share their thoughts about the things which have influenced or contributed to their approach to life.

Those who choose to take part in an individual interview will also be asked to share their thoughts about the things which have influenced or contributed to their approach to life.

An audio recording of the small group discussions and the individual interviews will be made to allow for accurate records of participants' contributions. Small group discussions and individual interviews will take place at the school in a room provided for that purpose.

How much time will the project take?

The online questionnaire will take about 20-30 minutes to complete depending on how many individual comments are added.

The small group discussion will last approximately 45 minutes.

The individual interview will last between 30 and 45 minutes.

What are the benefits of the research project?

The benefit of this research project is to help develop a clearer understanding about how young people approach the area of spirituality. We hope that this improved understanding will allow schools to develop programs etc. that are more closely suited to the life experience of their students.

Can I withdraw from the study?

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are not under any obligation to participate. If you agree to participate, you can withdraw from the study at any time without adverse consequences. During any part of the study you can choose to skip or not respond to a question if you prefer.

Will anyone else know the results of the project?

All the information collected in the study will be kept separate from the names of participants so that the identity of the participants will remain confidential. Survey responses are anonymous and those participating in small group discussions and individual interviews will be identified by a code rather than their name. During the study all information collected will be stored in a secure location. The final results of the study will be published through the Australian Catholic University website. The names of individual participants and their schools will not be used in any published material.

Will I be able to find out the results of the project?

Participants will be offered a copy of the transcript of their contributions to verify the accuracy of the record. A summary of the information without any identifying information will be made available to the participating schools. Once completed a copy of the final report will be provided for participating schools and will also be published on the Australian Catholic University Website. At no stage will the identity of the participants be made public.

Who do I contact if I have questions about the project?

Should you have any questions about the project you may contact the Principal Researcher Professor Peta Goldburg peta.goldburg@acu.edu.au (07) 3623 7303 or the student researcher Paul Lentern plentern@msben.nsw.edu.au (02) 9980 0413.

What if I have a complaint or any concerns?

The study has been reviewed by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University (review number 2014 328Q). If you have any complaints or concerns about the conduct of the project, you may write to the Manager of the Human Research Ethics Committee care of the Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research).

Manager, Ethics
c/o Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research)
Australian Catholic University
North Sydney Campus
PO Box 968
NORTH SYDNEY, NSW 2059
Ph.: 02 9739 2519
Fax: 02 9739 2870
Email: resethics.manager@acu.edu.au

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

I want to participate! How do I sign up?

If you would like to complete the online questionnaire simply go to the following weblink;
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/3X3BHBQ>

After completing the questionnaire you will be given the opportunity to take part in a small group discussion or individual interview if you choose.

If you would like to participate in either the small group discussion or individual interview you must complete and return the information and assent form attached. You must also have the permission of your parent or guardian to take part. A parent or guardian must complete and sign the permission form to enable you to participate. These forms should be returned to XXXXX at your school.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Lentern



PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM
Copy for Researcher / Copy for Participant to Keep

Group Interview

TITLE OF PROJECT: The expression of spirituality among senior students in Catholic Schools

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR (or SUPERVISOR): Professor Peta Goldberg

STUDENT RESEARCHER : Paul Lentern

I (the parent/guardian) have read (or, where appropriate, have had read to me) 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 small group discussion of approximately 45 minutes. I agree that an audio recording can be made of the discussion. I realise that I can withdraw my consent at any time without adverse consequences. I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify my child in any way.

NAME OF PARENT/GUARDIAN:

SIGNATURE:.....

DATE:

NAME OF CHILD

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR (or SUPERVISOR):

DATE:

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:

DATE:

ASSENT OF PARTICIPANTS AGED UNDER 18 YEARS

I (*the participant aged under 18 years*) understand what this research project is designed to explore. What I will be asked to do has been explained to me. I agree to take part in this small group discussion of approximately 45 minutes. I agree to allow an audio recording to be made of this discussion. I realise that I can withdraw at any time without having to give a reason for my decision.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT AGED UNDER 18:

SIGNATURE:.....

DATE:

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR (or SUPERVISOR):

DATE:

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER :.....

DATE:



PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM
Copy for Researcher / Copy for Participant to Keep

Individual Interview

TITLE OF PROJECT: The expression of spirituality among senior students in Catholic Schools

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR (or SUPERVISOR): Professor Peta Goldberg

STUDENT RESEARCHER: Paul Lentern

I (the parent/guardian) have read (or, where appropriate, have had read to me) 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 interview of between 30 and 45 minutes. I agree that an audio recording can be made of the interview. I realise that I can withdraw my consent at any time without adverse consequences. I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify my child in any way.

NAME OF PARENT/GUARDIAN:

SIGNATURE.....

DATE:.....

NAME OF CHILD

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR (or SUPERVISOR):

DATE:

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:

DATE:.....

ASSENT OF PARTICIPANTS AGED UNDER 18 YEARS

I (*the participant aged under 18 years*) understand what this research project is designed to explore. What I will be asked to do has been explained to me. I agree to take part in this interview of between 30 and 45 minutes. I agree to allow an audio recording to be made of this interview. I realise that I can withdraw at any time without having to give a reason for my decision.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT AGED UNDER 18:

SIGNATURE:.....

DATE:.....

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR (or SUPERVISOR):

DATE:.....

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:

DATE:.....



TEACHER PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LETTER

PROJECT TITLE: The expression of spirituality among senior students in Catholic Schools

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Professor Peta Goldberg

STUDENT RESEARCHER: Paul Lentern

STUDENT'S DEGREE: Doctor of Education

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in the research project described below.

What is the project about?

The research project investigates the ways senior students in Catholic schools in NSW view the area of spirituality and how their schools contribute to the development of spirituality. Through this research we aim to improve our understanding of how young people see these matters and allow schools to enhance the quality of the work they do in this area.

Who is undertaking the project?

This project is being conducted by Paul Lentern and will form the basis for the Doctor of Education Degree at Australian Catholic University under the supervision of Professor Peta Goldberg.

Are there any risks associated with participating in this project?

This study will be conducted confidentially to ensure that the identity of participants is not revealed and the information provided is not able to be linked to individual participants. Participants in the study will be anonymous and their responses will be treated confidentially to avoid any risk to those participating. Additionally, participants may choose to withdraw from the study at any point or to skip any question or part of the study if they wish to do so. This measure protects participants from any feelings of discomfort from their participation in this research.

What will I be asked to do?

Staff participants in this research project will be asked to provide observations of student responses on selected occasions such as school Retreats and service learning opportunities.

These staff participants will be provided with a recording schedule on which to note their observations.

Subsequently these staff participants will be invited to discuss these observations in an interview.

An audio recording of the interviews will be made to allow for accurate records of participants' contributions. Interviews will be held at the school in a room provided for this purpose.

How much time will the project take?

Staff participants will be asked to provide their observations on events that they would ordinarily be part of. Accordingly there are no additional time demands for this part of the observation. Secondly, staff participants will be asked to record their observations. This is expected to take approximately 30 minutes. Finally staff participants will be invited to take part in an interview to discuss their observations. This interview will take between 30 and 45 minutes.

What are the benefits of the research project?

The benefit of this research project is to help develop a clearer understanding about how young people approach the area of spirituality. We hope that this improved understanding will allow schools to develop programs etc. that are more closely suited to the life experience of their students.

Can I withdraw from the study?

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are not under any obligation to participate. If you agree to participate, you can withdraw from the study at any time without adverse consequences. During any part of the study you can choose to skip or not respond to a question if you prefer.

Will anyone else know the results of the project?

All the information collected in the study will be kept separate from the names of participants so that the identity of the participants will remain confidential. Staff participant observations will be identified by a code rather than their name. During the study all information collected will be stored in a secure location. The final results of the study will be published through the Australian Catholic University website. The names of individual participants and their schools will not be used in any published material.

Will I be able to find out the results of the project?

Participants will be offered a copy of the transcript of their contributions to verify the accuracy of the record. A summary of the information without any identifying information will be made available to the participating schools. Once completed a copy of the final report will be provided for participating schools and will also be published on the Australian Catholic University Website. At no stage will the identity of the participants be made public.

Who do I contact if I have questions about the project?

Should you have any questions about the project you may contact the Principal Researcher Professor Peta Goldburg peta.goldburg@acu.edu.au (07) 3623 7303 or the student researcher Paul Lentern plentern@msben.nsw.edu.au (02) 9980 0413.

What if I have a complaint or any concerns?

The study has been reviewed by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University (review number 2014 328Q). If you have any complaints or concerns about the conduct of the project, you may write to the Manager of the Human Research Ethics Committee care of the Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research).

Manager, Ethics
c/o Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research)
Australian Catholic University
North Sydney Campus
PO Box 968
NORTH SYDNEY, NSW 2059
Ph.: 02 9739 2519
Fax: 02 9739 2870
Email: resethics.manager@acu.edu.au

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

I want to participate! How do I sign up?

If you would like to participate in this study you must complete and return the information and assent form attached. These forms should be returned to XXXXX at your school. Once you have returned the forms you will be invited to a briefing at your school about the process.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Lentern



TEACHER PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM
Copy for Researcher / Copy for Participant to Keep

TITLE OF PROJECT: The expression of spirituality among senior students in Catholic Schools

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR (or SUPERVISOR): Professor Peta Goldberg

STUDENT RESEARCHER: Paul Lentern

I (*the participant*) have read (*or, where appropriate, have had read to me*) and understood the information provided in the Letter to the Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this interview of between 30 and 45 minutes. I agree that an audio recording can be made of the interview. I realise that I can withdraw my consent at any time without adverse consequences. I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT:

SIGNATURE.....

DATE:.....

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR (or SUPERVISOR):

DATE:

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:

DATE:.....

From: Res Ethics <Res.Ethics@acu.edu.au>
To: Peta Goldburg <Peta.Goldburg@acu.edu.au>, "Paul Lentern(PLentern@msben.n...
CC: Res Ethics <Res.Ethics@acu.edu.au>
Date: 2/04/2015 1:57 PM
Subject: 2014 328Q Ethics application approved!

Dear Applicant,

Principal Investigator: Prof Peta Goldburg
 Student Researcher: Paul Anthony Lentern
 Ethics Register Number: 2014 328Q
 Project Title: The expression of spirituality among senior students in Catholic Schools
 Risk Level: Low Risk
 Date Approved: 02/04/2015
 Ethics Clearance End Date: 31/12/2015

This email is to advise that your application has been reviewed by the Australian Catholic University's Human Research Ethics Committee and confirmed as meeting the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research.

The data collection of your project has received ethical clearance but the decision and authority to commence may be dependent on factors beyond the remit of the ethics review process and approval is subject to ratification at the next available Committee meeting. The Chief Investigator is responsible for ensuring that appropriate permission letters are obtained, if relevant, and a copy forwarded to ACU HREC before any data collection can occur at the specified organisation. Failure to provide permission letters to ACU HREC before data collection commences is in breach of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research and the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research. Further, this approval is only valid as long as approved procedures are followed.

If your project is a clinical trial you are required to register it in a publicly accessible trials registry prior to enrolment of the first participant (e.g. Australian New Zealand Clinical Trials Registry <http://www.anzctr.org.au/>) as a condition of ethics approval.

If you require a formal approval certificate, please respond via reply email and one will be issued.

Researchers who fail to submit a progress report may have their ethical clearance revoked and/or the ethical clearances of other projects suspended. When your project has been completed please complete and submit a progress/final report form and advise us by email at your earliest convenience. The information researchers provide on the security of records, compliance with approval consent procedures and documentation and responses to special conditions is reported to the NHMRC on an annual basis. In accordance with NHMRC the ACU HREC may undertake annual audits of any projects considered to be of more than low risk.

It is the Principal Investigators / Supervisors responsibility to ensure that:

1. All serious and unexpected adverse events should be reported to the HREC with 72 hours.
2. Any changes to the protocol must be reviewed by the HREC by submitting a Modification/Change to Protocol Form prior to the research commencing or continuing.
3. Progress reports are to be submitted on an annual basis.
4. All research participants are to be provided with a Participant Information Letter and consent form, unless otherwise agreed by the Committee.

For progress/ final reports or modifications, please complete the relevant form available for download from our Forms and Templates section of the webpage:
<http://research.acu.edu.au/researcher-support/integrity-and-ethics/>

Researchers must immediately report to HREC any matter that might affect the ethical acceptability of the protocol eg: changes to protocols or unforeseen circumstances or adverse effects on participants.

Please do not hesitate to contact the office if you have any queries.

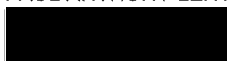
Kind regards,

Kylie Pashley
on behalf of ACU HREC Chair, Dr Nadia Crittenden

Ethics Officer | Research Services
Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research)
Australian Catholic University

THIS IS AN AUTOMATICALLY GENERATED RESEARCHMASTER EMAIL

PAUL ANTHONY LENTERN



Surname	LENTERN
First Name	Paul
Working With Children Check number	[REDACTED]
Type of clearance	Valid for paid and unpaid work
Expiry date of Working With Children Check	12/11/2019

You must provide your employer with your surname, WWC number and date of birth for the compulsory online verification process.

For more information, go to www.kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au/check or email check@kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au.

NOTICE TO EMPLOYERS

This document is not proof of clearance. You must verify the applicant's clearance online. Paper-based evidence is subject to fraud and you risk criminal and/or civil action if you engage a worker who has submitted fraudulent clearance information.

How to verify a clearance online:

- Go to www.kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au/check and click the [Start here] button.
- Under the [Verify] section, select the [Employer log in and verify] button.
- Enter your username and password details and select the [Login] button.
(If you have not already registered as an employer, please register.)
- Select the [Verify Working With Children status] tab.
- Enter the applicant's surname, date of birth and WWC (or APP) number.
- Click the [Verify] button. The verification results will be displayed.

If the verification result is *CLEARED* or *APPLICATION IN PROGRESS*, the worker may commence child-related work.

If the verification result is *NOT FOUND*, *EXPIRED*, *INTERIM BARRED* or *BARRED*, you must not employ the worker for child-related work and it is a criminal offence to do so.

When to verify a worker online

- New paid workers must be verified online before they begin child-related work.
- Existing paid workers and volunteers should be verified online as they are phased in to the Working With Children Check. This also applies to new volunteers.