



An Exploration of the Dimensions of Children's Lived Experience of Spirituality on "The Walk"

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B.AppSc, M.Arts (Spiritual Direction)

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Learning Sciences Institute

Melbourne, Australia

September 2018

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All research procedures reported in the thesis received the approval of the relevant Ethics/Safety Committees (*Approval Number V2011 96*).

Signature: Date: 24th September 2018.

Statement of Appreciation

A sincere thank you to the early learning centre where the research for this thesis was undertaken; its educators, parents, and especially the children who supported me and made this thesis possible.

Thanks go to my supervisors, Professor Susan Edwards and Associate Professor Michael Buchanan, who supported and encouraged me every step along this journey.

And thanks go to my family, Andrew and Isabella, who provided never-ending support and love and never doubted that I could finish.

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Abstract

Over the past three decades, the term “spirituality” has been included in the Aotearoa New Zealand early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki* (Te Whariki, 2017), the Australian Government’s *Belonging, Being and Becoming: Early Years Learning Framework* (*Belonging, Being and Becoming: Early Years Learning Framework*, 2009), and the Welsh Foundation Phase Framework (Early Years Team Department for Educations and Skills, 2015).

Despite the use of the term in these countries’ early childhood curriculum documents, little to no pedagogical assistance is given to early childhood educators in describing or defining spirituality that recognises children’s lived experience of spirituality, or further nurturing it once it is recognised. Due to this lack of guidance and support, many early childhood educators tend to ignore spirituality and focus on more easily identified and measurable aspects of education such as physical and mental development. In order to address this issue and explore the expressions of spirituality in young children, this research set out to identify and analyse children’s lived experience of spirituality within an early learning setting informed by the philosophical framework of Reggio Emilia and situated in a natural outdoor environment.

This qualitative case study drew upon the sociocultural theory of Lev Vygotsky, which posits that meaning arises and is constructed from interactions between individuals. A new framework of spirituality for early childhood education is proposed that draws upon Vygotsky’s (1998) concept of *perezhivanie*, a process of reflection and awareness following an event that can lead to transformation and growth in the child. *Perezhivanie*, combined with the practices of Reggio Emilia philosophy and the stimulated-recall process (Thomson, 2008), creates a robust and productive process with which to recognise and nurture the lived experience of young children’s spirituality in early childhood settings in ways that help educators meet curriculum requirements.

This thesis argues that spirituality is an important aspect of children’s growth and development and, when nurtured, can assist them in building increased levels of awareness of themselves, others, and the outside environment as well as help them to make meaning of and negotiate their identity.

Chapter 1

Introduction and Overview of the Research Project

1.1 Preface

This chapter introduces the main components of this thesis. It describes my research approach and provides an overview of how spirituality is to be understood in this research project as well as the approach and frameworks used within the field of early childhood education. This chapter also states the aims of the research and the supporting question.

Expressions of spirituality in young children are of interest to practitioners because although Australia's formal early childhood (EC) curriculum – the *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (EYLF) (*Belonging, Being and Becoming: Early Years Learning Framework*, 2009) – now incorporates the concept of spirituality, little to no pedagogical support concerning this area has been provided for use by EC educators, hence they could have difficulty recognising manifestations of spirituality in the young children they teach.

This chapter begins by briefly outlining the understanding of spirituality employed in my research project and in the EYLF (*Belonging, Being and Becoming: Early Years Learning Framework*, 2009), as well as a brief overview of the philosophical framework of Reggio Emilia (O'Neill, 2016). This thesis does not attempt to supersede a religious view of spirituality but rather views spirituality as a dimension of all individuals whether they see themselves as part of a religious framework or not. This thesis is focused upon young children's experiences of spirituality in early childhood settings in order to offer EC educators ways to both recognise and foster opportunities for spiritual learning. The chapter will conclude by mapping my study's contribution to the field of early childhood education.

In Chapter 2, I have situated the study within the existing body of literature and identified the main themes that are relevant to this present study. These themes include the role of a sociocultural approach to its research; researcher–children relationships; the perspectives of EC educators on the concept of spirituality; the relevance of Reggio Emilia pedagogy (C. Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 2012); the role of the outdoor learning environment on children's spiritual development; and children's relationship with and perception of a transcendental deity or principle. After examining the literature, a gap was identified where very few studies had brought together the study of young children's lived experience of spirituality, within a Reggio Emilia philosophical framework, in the setting of

an outdoor learning environment. This thesis has set out to bring these fields together in an innovative new way to provide new insights and perspectives that will inform these fields.

In Chapter 3, I have focused on the work of Lev Vygotsky, in particular his sociocultural theory and I outline the reasons why his theory was the most appropriate for this study. Drawing from the vast body of his work, this chapter examines, specifically, his understanding of cultural mediation, everyday and scientific concepts, creativity and imagination, consciousness, the zone of proximal development and his interpretation of the concept of *perezhivanie*. I then demonstrate how the *perezhivanie* process can assist young children to develop meaning from events and experiences that occur in a way that helps to make their spirituality visible to early childhood educators. Chapter 3 provides the theoretical basis for the examination of the lived experience of young children's spirituality.

In Chapter 4, I outline the methodological position I took that includes a qualitative, intrinsic case study. I also detail the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of the research for this study as well as describing the key components of the research process such as the selection of the site, the participants and "The Walk", the weekly outdoor activity which formed the basis of my data collection. I outline how the main themes of the project were identified using the "framework approach" as described by Pope, Ziebland, and Mays (2000). As the research project had the intention to work collaboratively with young children and ensure their voices were heard and integrated into the findings, this chapter explains how this was to be achieved.

In Chapter 5, I describe the findings in detail and how key experiences from The Walk were categorised into four key dimensions of young children's spirituality: (1) *Relational Consciousness*; (2) *Reflective Practice*; (3) *Creativity and Imagination*; and (4) *Transcendence*. The findings also demonstrate how the *perezhivanie* process was successfully applied to several of the children's experiences on The Walk – but in particular the *Three Little Pigs* (Halliwell-Phillips, 1886) and the rabbit's foot examples – to recognise and nurture the lived experiences of young children's spirituality.

In Chapter 6, I discuss the four dimensions of young children's spirituality in relation to the literature and theoretical frameworks that have been established. I then propose a further articulation of Goodliff's (2013a) model to not just include the four behaviours of children's spirituality that can be used by EC educators to recognise spirituality but to also include the ways in which spirituality can be nurtured once recognised. I also include a list of

questions that could be used by EC educators during the perezhivanie process to further assist the nurturing phase.

In Chapter 7, I conclude the thesis with an overview of the main aims and the rationale for the project, how the investigation was carried out, as well as the theoretical and policy implications of the research. I conclude with an exploration of the limitations and the effectiveness of the study.

The major challenge of this research project was the bringing together of the fields of early childhood and early childhood education, the lived experience of young children's spirituality, the philosophical framework of Reggio Emilia, and the outdoor learning environment in a new way. Ratcliff (2010) called for more cross-disciplinary research that incorporated spirituality with other areas. He believed that "beginning a serious interface between disciplines is likely to result in a plethora of new areas to be considered, enriching all of the disciplines involved" (2010, p. 19). The aim of this multi-disciplined approach was to provide new insights and perspectives. However, Ratcliff (2010) cautioned that research across vastly different and diversified disciplines is complex, and "compromises are inevitable for those in any discipline that attempts such a feat as most scholars can at best master one discipline" (Ratcliff, 2010, p. 19).

While I did set out with the intention to reduce these compromises and to become a master of these different disciplines, I do acknowledge that this proved more difficult than I anticipated. However, I do believe this research will provide a valuable contribution to the field of children's spirituality within the contexts of early childhood education, Reggio Emilia philosophical understanding and the natural environment.

1.2 Rationale for the Study

This study is important for several key reasons. First, the concept of spirituality is being included in early childhood frameworks and curricula around the world. Governments and regulatory bodies are beginning to recognise the importance of spirituality in young childhood and the importance of nurturing children's spirituality from the very beginning of their educational journey. The World Health Organization (WHO) cited spirituality as a source of self-wholeness and stability and recognised that children who have a sense of spirituality display a lower prevalence of risky behaviours (Boero et al., 2005). The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (United Nations, 2014) recognised the importance of spirituality in relation to children's education and has stated that opportunities

to “relate oneself towards realities beyond one’s current ‘personal reality’ (e.g. nature, the arts spirituality, social activism) are essential for children’s social and emotional wellbeing” (UNICEF, 2014, p. 10).

Second, spirituality is too often placed within a religious framework. The distinction between spiritual and religious is outlined by Farran, Fitchett, Quiring-Emblen, and Burck (1989) who assert that spiritual related to an inner awareness and ideas about the outside world and this is grounded in a sense of being, whereas religious is concerned about adherence to a set of beliefs and more grounded in a sense of doing. It is the sense of being that will be the focus of this research project. A purely religious framework makes it potentially inaccessible for those outside such a framework. Authors, such as Baker (2003) and Ellison (1983), maintain that as individuals age, their spiritual and psychological perspectives are developed, which enable them to make sense of their world, and the meaning, direction and purpose of their lives. Spirituality is one of the few phenomena that continues across an individual’s lifespan and impacts on other development processes (P. C. Hill et al., 2000).

Authors such as Koenig (2004) have linked spirituality with a number of positive outcomes such as the correlation between spirituality for adults and adolescents and their overall health, coping strategies and resilience. Spirituality also has a positive influence on the way in which children respond to and evaluate life events as well as how they achieve development tasks (Mabe & Josephson, 2004) .

While there appears to be widespread agreement of the importance of spirituality in children, what appears to be in dispute is a universally agreed upon definition or description. A religious framework or a definition employing religious language has often been used, but what is needed is a description or framework that transcends religion, incorporates a humanist perspective, and recognises that spirituality is something that is present in all children. Souflee (1993, p. 320) stated that if a “framework is to have practice utility, it must descend from a level of abstractions to the level of application” (p. 320).

The aim of this research was to establish a framework that incorporated a broad description of spirituality as well as having a practical application that could be used by EC educators. It was essential that this framework was developed in collaboration with children, where their ideas and perspectives on spirituality were sought, rather than there be an adult-imposed understanding. As noted by Hay and Nye (1996) the only way to draw an accurate map is to listen to what children have to say and establish an empirical framework of the

dimensions of children's spirituality. It was also important to create a framework that had applications outside of a religious context so as to ensure applicability across the EC sector.

1.3 Personal Orientation

The study described in this thesis arose from the intersection between professional and personal experiences within a specific type of early childhood educational setting and from my own interest in spirituality. From 2007 to 2009, my daughter attended an early learning centre (ELC) whose curriculum emphasised two core features that I found extremely interesting: the philosophies of Reggio Emilia, in particular the strong image of the child and the concept of the environment as the third teacher, as well as a commitment to sustainability, which resulted in a pedagogical practice specific to this ELC called "The Walk". This activity involved a class of three- and four-year-olds spending several hours each week in a natural bush setting of the school, where they were encouraged to play and to incorporate aspects of nature into creations of their own imaginations. Each Walk began and ended with a group classroom meeting including the children and their EC educators. During the pre-Walk meeting, the aims of that particular Walk were discussed and in each post-Walk meeting, the children were encouraged to discuss and reflect upon their discoveries and activities during that particular Walk, together in community with one another.

As a parent with a background and interest in spirituality, I grew deeply curious about the children's lived experience of spirituality that I observed during those weekly Walks; in particular, the way in which their interactions with the natural world provoked a deep level of reflection and contemplation within themselves. These excursions provided a great deal of freedom and unstructured time for children to explore the natural world and exercise their own imaginations. During The Walk, the children gathered natural objects, constructed cubbyhouses, and discovered and explored aspects of the natural world such as insects, flowers, birds, and clouds. By way of conversations that occurred during each Walk, new and different relationships formed and evolved among the children themselves and between the children and the adults that accompanied them on these Walks. The reflection time at the end of each Walk revealed moments of significant insight and understanding the children made regarding themselves, the other children, and their relationships, and as a consequence, the interactions between themselves, the adults, and aspects of nature.

Another area of interest was the broader social and cultural movement that had occurred, whereby young children were spending less time outside and more time inside. However, authors such as Louv (2006), C. Smith (2009) and Van Wieren and Kellert (2013)

all espoused the value of children spending time in the outdoor environment. They also made the observation that today's children are spending less and less time outside and increasing amounts of time inside engaged with the digital screens of televisions, computers and portable devices. This caused me to wonder about the implications of this shift towards more time spent indoors on the wellbeing, connectedness and spirituality of young children.

As my interest grew in the area of young children's spirituality and the connection with the natural world, I began to examine the literature on the role of spirituality in EC education (Bone, 2007; Champagne, 2003; Grajczonek, 2012; Hyde, 2006, 2008b). I was struck by how under-researched the area of young children's spirituality was, especially in the Australian and Aotearoa New Zealand context, even though spirituality was beginning to appear in national and international curriculum frameworks such as Aotearoa New Zealand's *Te Whariki* (Te Whariki, 2017), the Welsh Foundation Phase Framework ([Department for Education and Skills, 2015](#)), and the *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (EYLF) (*Belonging, Being and Becoming: Early Years Learning Framework*, 2009).

More specifically, few conceptualisations of spirituality existed within the research and practitioner literature to inform EC educators' practice. I observed that educators familiar with the concept of spirituality were able to recognise and nurture spirituality in the children under their care, but those educators unfamiliar or not comfortable with some concept of spirituality tended to ignore it when it occurred and, instead, focused on other, more pedagogical areas.

For my study, I therefore decided to investigate children's lived experience of spirituality as they were expressed during The Walk so as to identify and thoroughly explore the dimensions of these experiences. My focus was within the context of the EYLF (*Belonging, Being and Becoming: Early Years Learning Framework*, 2009) as was appropriate for the Australian research setting. My aim was to use the dimensions of spirituality that I observed during The Walk to create a new framework of spirituality that would be capable of providing guidance to EC educators in recognising and nurturing young children's spirituality.

1.4 Definition of Spirituality Employed in this Research

Spirituality has proven to be a difficult concept to define and its various definitions and descriptions vary widely in scope and emphasis (Buchanan, 2009, 2010). Furthermore,

scholars such as Bone (2007) have viewed it as “a force that connects people to each other, to all living things, to nature and the universe” (p. 8), whereas Conroy (1999) viewed spirituality as a way of appreciating the wonder and mystery of everyday life. Moreover, Blake (1996) cautioned that any inclusive description of spirituality could become so vague as to be rendered almost meaningless. Consequently, other scholars have eschewed attempts to define spirituality and have simply settled on offering a broader description of it.

Bhagwan (2009), for instance, perceived the word “spirituality” as connoting ideas, practices, and commitments that nurture, sustain, and shape the fabric of human lives and thus recognises its personal, global, and social aspects. Thus, Bhagwan (2009) stated the “dynamic quality of the spiritual as well as its hidden nature, embedded in a larger context of life’s ongoing flow ... is captured more adequately by the word ‘potential’ as is spirituality’s capacity to expand and flourish” (2009, p. 225). Moreover, King (2013), discussing the difficulties in adequately describing spirituality, stated, “Our language has to capture the dynamic and multiple developmental and experiential aspects of the spiritual, its immense promise, its mysteriously indefinable, even ultimately inexplicable quality, its ability to grow, embrace and suffuse all experiences of human life” (2013, p. 6).

All of these descriptions and definitions, while an attempt to capture the nature of spirituality, are vague and somewhat esoteric. They pose a challenge for EC educators when attempting to recognise or nurture the spirituality of the young children in their classrooms. This is problematic because without clear guidelines and frameworks, the lived experience of spirituality can often be missed and insufficiently nurtured by EC educators, which means that the opportunity for deeper engagement in life’s events that can assist in making meaning is foregone.

More recently, Goodliff (2013a), whose work contributed significantly to my understanding of spirituality as used in this thesis, advanced a comprehensive model that seems to incorporate the many aspects or characteristics of the manifestations of spirituality that are mentioned above and that I observed in young children but in a way that made it easier for EC educators to apply. Specifically, Goodliff’s integrative model consists of four different aspects or behaviours of spirituality: (1) *Relational*; (2) *Reflective*; (3) *Creativity and Imagination*; and (4) the *Transcendent* principle, which included awe, wonder and mystery (see Figure 1).

This model provided a way of conceptualising spirituality that was much broader than a definition or description. It offered four distinct perspectives on spirituality that captured the

phenomenon's dynamic nature and its presence in differing aspects of children's experiences. My understanding of spirituality as exhibited by children was as a multi-faceted phenomenon that is not easily captured by a single definition but arose, instead, through children's activities, interactions, and reflections on experiences and events. The Goodliff (2013a) model was sociocultural in nature in that it recognised spirituality as a construct created by multiple individuals within a community.

I then began to think about how the Goodliff (2013a) model could be applied to The Walk in the ELC. The Walk was grounded in, and inspired by, the work of Claire Warden (Warden, 2002, 2012), who saw the outdoor learning environment as an important setting for children to experience growth and development. It also provided an additional context in which to explore sociocultural elements and their possible link to spiritual expressions in young children that is external to the formal classroom environment.

As a parent participating in The Walk, I had already recognised many of the other aspects of Goodliff's (2013a) model – for example, young children's expressions of awe and wonder when they discover a new spider's web or bird's nest, the centrality of creativity in their play experiences, and the meaning-making exhibited in the children's post-Walk reflections on events and activities that had occurred during The Walk. Thus, where definitions and descriptions are often limiting and reductive in nature, Goodliff's model presents multiple opportunities and lenses through which to observe the spiritual characteristics of young children, and therefore I adopted it as the general framework within which to conduct my study.

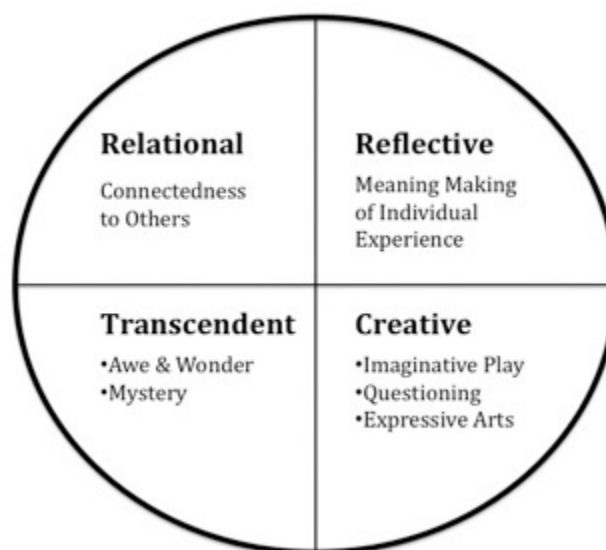


Figure 1. The four areas of behaviour in Goodliff's model (2013). From "Spirituality expressed in creative learning: Young children's imagining play as space for mediating their

spirituality,” by G. Goodliff, 2013a, *Early Childhood Development and Care*, 183(8), p. 1063. Copyright 2013 by Taylor and Francis. Reprinted with permission.

This model and its components will be discussed in greater detail in the course of this thesis. In the next section, I present the second essential component of this research, which is early learning frameworks.

1.5 Early Learning Frameworks

The role of spirituality in early childhood education is attracting increasing attention although it still remains an under-researched area. A comprehensive study of EC frameworks throughout Europe; UK (*UK National Curriculum Guidelines: Early years foundation stage*, 2007); Wales (*Foundation phase: Framework for children’s learning for 3- to 7-year-olds in Wales*, 2008) Sweden (Taguma, Litjens, & Makowiecki, 2013) and Germany (Konferenze, 2012/13) and the Asia–Pacific region: Singapore (*Nurturing early learners: A curriculum framework for kindergartens in Singapore*, 2012) Hong Kong (*Operation manual for pre-primary institutions*, 2006), Australia (*Belonging, Being and Becoming: Early Years Learning Framework*, 2009) and Aotearoa New Zealand (*Te Whariki*, 2017) has highlighted a number of different approaches to the area of spirituality and children’s wellbeing.

Countries such as Hong Kong and Singapore view EC as a time of school readiness, with a focus on numeracy and literature, whereas countries such as Wales, Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand take a more play-based approach to EC curricula, with a particular emphasis on children’s spirituality and wellbeing. This thesis has sought to examine these three curricula in more detail as they regard the concept of children’s wellbeing and spirituality as an integral and important aspect of children’s growth and development. The thesis has a particular emphasis on the Australian curriculum as it was the context for the research site. The Welsh, Aotearoa New Zealand and Australian EC frameworks reference spirituality as a learning outcome, or experience, for children, and these frameworks are as follows:

- Aotearoa New Zealand’s *Te Whāriki* (*Te Whariki*, 2017)
- The Welsh Foundation Phase Framework (Early Years Team Department for Educations and Skills, 2015)

- *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (Belonging, Being and Becoming: Early Years Learning Framework, 2009).*

As the current study examined the lived experience of young children's spirituality in an Australian setting – early learning centre – recognising different countries' attempts to incorporate spirituality in their frameworks are important.

1.5.1 Aotearoa New Zealand's Te Whāriki. Aotearoa New Zealand's Te Whāriki Early Childhood Curriculum (*Te Whariki*, 2017) adopted a consultative, broad approach to not only curriculum development but also to funding administration when it developed the first curriculum in 1996. The 1996 iteration of Te Whāriki was the first bicultural curriculum statement developed in Aotearoa New Zealand and was designed to include Maori immersion services in early childhood education. Both the 1996 and 2017 iterations recognised the importance of the social context in the relationships and the environment that learning takes place. The curricula of those iterations viewed children holistically, which meant they attached great importance to the place of children in the community and the culture (*Te Whariki*, 2017).

Since the introduction of the first iteration in 1996, there has been some criticism of the Te Whāriki framework, particularly the broad and varied interpretation by EC educators. In 2011 a report was released by the EC education taskforce, which recommended an evaluation of the Te Whāriki Early Childhood Curriculum be undertaken (Taguma et al., 2013). The outcome of the evaluation was to update the curriculum, which resulted in the new iteration released in 2017.

Te Whāriki, which means “the mat”, and the five strands of children's wellbeing, belonging, contribution, communication, and exploration are interwoven with the principles of the framework. The term “spirituality” is expressly mentioned. “*Kaiako* (“‘Kaiako’ includes all teachers, educators and other adults, including parents in parent-led services, who have a responsibility for the care and education of children in an ECE setting” [Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 7]) should recognise the importance of spirituality in the development of the whole child” (*Te Whariki*, 2017, p. 30) The overarching aspiration embedded in the curriculum is for children “from all backgrounds to grow up strong in identity, language and culture” (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 7). Te Whāriki views the spiritual dimension as fundamental to holistic development because it connects the other dimensions across time and space (Ministry of Education, 2017).

1.5.2 The Welsh Foundation Phase Framework. In 2015, Wales revised its education curriculum for all students between three and 19 years of age (Early Years Team Department for Educations and Skills, 2015). This revised curriculum was based on seven key areas of learning mandated by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC) (United Nations, 1989) of which two are most relevant to this study: “Area one, which consists of personal and social development, wellbeing, and cultural diversity; and Area seven, which concerns creative development” (2015, p. 46). Area one forms the heart of the Foundation Phase Framework and therefore influences all parts of the curriculum. Consequently, in alignment with Area one, children should be given opportunities to play indoors and outdoors, thereby having access to a wide range of both adult- and child-initiated play experiences. Moreover, during all activities, children should feel safe, secure, and valued.

The *Curriculum for Wales* document listed a number of objectives under the heading “Moral and Spiritual Development.” Among these were the opportunity to “express ideas and feelings creatively, explaining why they are significant” and to “ask questions about what is important in life from a personal perspective and from the perspectives of others” (Early Years Team Department for Educations and Skills, 2015, p. 11). Presented under the heading “Wellbeing”, the Wales curriculum document included the opportunity for children to “be aware of their own feelings and develop the ability to express them in an appropriate way” (2015, p. 11).

Based upon a sociocultural theoretical framework, the findings from previous studies demonstrated this to be an integral part of the lived experience of children’s spirituality. As part of the Welsh curriculum’s commitment to “creative development,” children should be encouraged to “work on their own and with others to pretend, improvise and think imaginatively” as well as working “with a partner or in a small group to develop their own and others’ ideas and help them to reflect on them” (2015, p. 48).

1.5.3 The Australian regulatory context. In 2009, a gathering of all Australian states and territories (known as the Commonwealth of Australian Governments or COAG) agreed upon a vision of early childhood that consisted of four keys tenets:

1. the belief that children are born healthy and should remain healthy
2. that children’s environment are nurturing, culturally appropriate and safe
3. that children have the knowledge and skills for life and learning

4. that children are engaged and benefiting from educational opportunities (Council of Australian Governments, 2009).

From this vision the National Quality Framework (NQF) was established in 2012 and applied to most long day care, family day care, preschools and kindergartens, and outside school hours care services. The aim of the NQF was to not only set a high standard for care but to also implement continuous improvements in the area. With that view in mind, a five-year consultative review was conducted, with changes to be implemented in all Australian states and territories from 1 October 2017 (except Western Australia, where changes will come into effect from 1 October 2018). These imminent changes relate to the removal of supervision certification requirements for centres and the introduction of an educator to child ratio of 1:15.

A key aspect of the NQF is the National Quality Standard (NQS), which brings together seven key areas that relate to children: educational programs and practice; children's health and safety; physical environment; staffing; relationships with children; partnerships between families; and communities and leadership. The NQS is linked to national learning frameworks that include the *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (Belonging, Being and Becoming: Early Years Learning Framework 2009) and the *My Time, Our Place: Framework for School Age Care in Australia* (DEEWR, 2011). Services are required to adhere to these approved frameworks in the provision of care for children.

1.5.3.1 Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Australian Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)

Like Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia adopted a consultative approach when it moved from state-based curricula to a nationally recognised one in 2009. A stated goal of this initiative between the Commonwealth Government and all Australian states and territories was that by 2020 all Australian children would be afforded the best possible start in life so as to create a better future for themselves and the nation. To this end a consultative process commenced, which was led by COAG, working parties, and representatives from the federal government and all states and territories to formulate a new early years framework (Sumison et al., 2009). The consultative process included two national symposia, national public consultation forums, focus groups, an online forum, and case study trials, with the final outcome being the development of the *Belonging, Being and Becoming: Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* EYLF (*Belonging, Being and Becoming: Early Years*

Learning Framework, 2009). Input was received from the education sector and from a Charles Sturt University-led consortium, which was contracted to help develop stages three and four of the EYLF (*Belonging, Being and Becoming: Early Years Learning Framework*, 2009). The intention of the framework was to create a cooperative and collaborative model of EC education that linked funding to intergovernmental agreements on policies. There was an emphasis on joint decision-making, responsibility and accountability that was designed to overcome the inefficiencies and rivalries of the past (*Belonging, Being and Becoming: Early Years Learning Framework*, 2009)

In its collaborative methodology, the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) drew upon not only Aotearoa New Zealand's Te Whāriki Early Childhood Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1996) but also the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), which recognises the right of all children to an education that lays the foundation for the rest of their lives and maximises their abilities and that respects their family, cultural identity, and language (United Nations, 1989).

The EYLF (*Belonging, Being and Becoming: Early Years Learning Framework*, 2009) was based on a policy document entitled "Investing in the Early Years – A National Early Childhood Development Strategy" (Council of Australian Governments, 2009). This document outlined the main assumptions underlying the EYLF's development. Several of these assumptions touched upon the area of children's happiness and wellbeing, which is often linked to the area of children's spirituality. One of these assumptions was based on recent research in the field of neuroscience (to which specific references were omitted), which had emphasised the importance of happiness and health in the normal development of a child's brain. In effect, happy and healthy children are more likely to grow into happy, healthy and resilient adults who will contribute to a "cohesive and prosperous society" (2009, p. 6).

This view of early childhood as a time to lay the foundation for a lifetime of ongoing health, learning, and social and cultural outcomes provided a policy base for the ELYF. Although this policy also recognised the significance of genetics and their interactions with early childhood experiences that also influenced the architecture of the adult brain, it emphasised the importance of the quality of care provided by well-educated EC educators, the relationships between children and their caregivers, and the quality of education provided, in particular the latter's incorporation of stimulating, play-based learning. It drew upon a UK study entitled "The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education" (Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-

Blatchford, & Taggart, 2004), which was a longitudinal study involving over 3000 students that found that children performed better when they attended a kindergarten for longer periods and where the staff had relatively high qualifications compared with EC educators from other kindergartens and early learning settings.

The review of the educational policy presented in the “Investing in the Early Years – A National Early Childhood Development Strategy” (Council of Australian Governments, 2009) is vague in nature. While attempting to convey the importance of children’s happiness and wellbeing, the review drew upon a range of uncredited sources and is simplistic in its conclusions. However, the EYLF (*Belonging, Being and Becoming: Early Years Learning Framework*, 2009) developed from the educational policy presented in this document and a range of consultations (*Belonging, Being and Becoming: Early Years Learning Framework*, 2009) represented a more completely thought-out, systematic implementation of this policy. Underpinning the framework was a recognition of children’s active role in constructing their own social identities and the identities of others (Sumison et al., 2009).

There are several areas of the EYLF (*Belonging, Being and Becoming: Early Years Learning Framework*, 2009) that are applicable to this study. In Learning Outcome 1 that relates to children’s sense of identity, there are four relevant points: first, that children feel safe, secure, and supported; second, that children develop their emerging autonomy, interdependence, resilience and sense of agency; third, that children develop knowledgeable and confident self-identities; and, fourth, that “children learn to interact in relation to others with care, empathy, and respect” (p. 8). Learning Outcome 3 relates to “children having a strong sense of wellbeing” (p. 17) and Learning Outcome 5 is about children “becoming effective communicators” (p. 28).

Based upon the Australian physical location in which it was carried out, my research project was situated in an early learning centre which adhered to the EYLF. Moreover, the EYLF (*Belonging, Being and Becoming: Early Years Learning Framework*, 2009) is sociocultural in its orientation, meaning that it takes into account the roles community, culture, and relationships play in children’s development, growth, and learning.

1.6 The Philosophical Framework of Reggio Emilia

The early learning centre (ELC) that was chosen for this research project uses the Reggio Emilia philosophy (REP) as its framework (C. Edwards et al., 2012) to underpin its pedagogical approach. This framework was developed in the Reggio Emilia region of Italy at

the end of the Second World War and emerged from the desire to create a democratic educational centre that would provide rights for the child. Educators wanted to not only learn from the past but to also try and improve the future for Italian children (ONEILL, 2016). Loris Malaguzzi is considered the founding father of this educational approach, which has as its core principles a strong image of the child, and a pedagogy of documentation, relationships, listening, and the environment as the third teacher.

The image of the child is central to the framework of the REP. Within the framework, children are seen as rich, strong, and powerful. They have potential, plasticity, the desire to expand their curiosity, and the ability to be amazed (C. Edwards et al., 2012). This is in contrast to the differing views of the child held by others – for example, the child is empty vessel or sponge just waiting to absorb everything around them in order to become (ONEILL, 2016). This image of the child is a very passive one compared to the active learner image that is central to the REP. A second contrasting image of the child is that of “life as a ladder” (O’Neill, 2016, p. 10) where EC education is simply a necessary stage in order to equip young children for school and that childhood is a series of skills to acquire and knowledge to gain.

Rinaldi (2006) claimed that “Childhood does not exist; we create it as a society, as a political subject. It is a social, political and historical instruction” (2006, p. 13), with the implied notion that it is the community’s and the government’s responsibility to create the most appropriate EC setting for all children.

Another key tenet of the REP is the pedagogy of documentation. While this tenet was not a focus of this current study, it does underpin many of the activities within an REP educational setting. The emphasis is on the creation of documentation during the course of children’s experiences, with the view to aid relationships and is an act of caring and love (Rinaldi, 2006).

The pedagogy of relationships grounds the REP in the relationship between values, politics, theories and practice as well as the relationships between groups of children, educators and family as they exist within the local community and the city/state. There also exists a strong “triad” of relationships between children, their families and their educators. These relationships are continually reflected upon and refined (ONEILL, 2016). It is within the REP pedagogy of relationships that offers the potential and possibilities for providing young children with opportunities to manifest the behaviours of spirituality.

The REP's pedagogy of listening underpins the pedagogy of relationships. "Each child has the desire and right to be seen, heard and listened to" (O'Neill, 2006, p. 17). Listening also extends to the families and the communities of the ELC for this study in a way that is inclusive, democratic and ethical. Rinaldi (2006) offered three insights into listening: first, slow down and allow children to pause; second, listen with curiosity, wonder, doubt and uncertainty; and third, suspend biases and prejudices.

The Reggio Emilia philosophy (C. Edwards et al., 2012) believes that children are citizens with rights and that together with these rights "they should also be given opportunities to express their intelligence and achieve success" (ONEILL (2016, p. 3).

Central to the Reggio Emilia pedagogy that developed from this philosophy is the poem called *No way, the hundred is there*, written by Loris Malaguzzi (see Appendix I), which outlines an approach that children should be encouraged to learn, grow, play and express themselves in a myriad of different ways. The poem also serves as a warning to EC educators to not deprive young children of expressing themselves in their own way and style, or to impose their own ways of understanding on the children, which could limit their potential and growth (ONEILL, 2016).

Since 1945, the Reggio Emilia philosophy has been adopted and adapted in many parts of the world, each setting adding its own context and focus. Rather than a clear model, the REP offers inspiration and provocations for EC educators to consider when applying the principles to their own settings. The philosophical framework is further explored and critiqued in Chapter 2.

1.7 Aim of this Research

What is lacking in each of the EC curricula discussed above is supporting documentation for EC educators on the nature of young children's spirituality. Few or no materials exist to aid them in meeting the curriculum imperatives of recognising and nurturing spirituality in young children.

The aim of this research project was to develop a new framework to assist EC educators in recognising and nurturing the spirituality of young children through answering the following research question:

What is the lived experience of spirituality of young children within an early learning setting that draws upon the philosophical framework of the Reggio Emilia educational framework in a natural outdoor environment?

1.8 Main Findings of the Study

The Goodliff (2013a) integrative model of four areas of behaviour presented earlier in this chapter provided a structure and a starting place within which to examine the children's lived experience of spirituality that was observed in the study. The study further developed and broadened these four themes to: (1) Relational Consciousness; (2) Reflective Practice; (3) Creativity and Imagination; and (4) Transcendence (incorporating awe, wonder and mystery).

Within the context of the study, Relational Consciousness denoted the construction of spirituality among the children themselves, between the children and the adults that accompanied them on The Walk, and within the communities to which the children belonged. The term "Reflective Practice" refers to the provision of opportunities for children to revisit their experiences and events in order to create meaning. I would like to differentiate at this point between the terms "Reflective Practice" and "Relational Consciousness" that were used throughout the research project. Reflective Practice refers to the tools that are employed to assist children in re-visiting events and experiences, such as the creation of safe spaces, small and large groups, open-ended questions, and active listening. Relational Consciousness is the raised level of awareness that develops from these practices and assists children to make meaning of, and be transformed by, the events themselves. This differentiation is further explored in the discussion chapter.

The term "active listening" is used in this research project to refer to a Reflective Practice tool that incorporates the Reggio Emilia philosophical pedagogy of listening. Active listening as a pedagogical practice was outlined by Rinaldi (2006) and included three main foci for EC educators: first, the slowing down and allowing for pauses and silences; second, the listening with curiosity, wonder, doubt and uncertainty; and third, for EC educators to suspend their biases, prejudices and judgments.

Goodliff's (2013a) model included the single dimension of "Creativity and Imagination", which was represented by the creative activities undertaken by the children during The Walk, and their perception of the "Transcendent" was demonstrated by their expressions of awe, wonder, and mystery that were observed in the outdoor learning environment, one that was particularly appropriate for evoking such expressions.

As will be revealed, the study's findings demonstrated that when the EC educators in the study created group zones of proximal development (ZPDs) (Vygotsky, 1987), there were significant opportunities for the children to reflect upon the events and their experiences

during The Walk. This occurred with the guidance from other children and educators in the form of small and large groups. Reggio Emilia educational practices were also applied such as providing children with safe and nurturing spaces, asking open-ended questions, and listening deeply to the children, the phenomenon of *perezhivanie* (Vygotsky, 1994) unfolded. The term “perezhivanie” refers to a five-step process that consists of an event which had an emotional reaction, followed by an initial reflection, awareness of self and others, “meaning-making”, and transformation and growth, and is fully outlined in Chapter 3. There is a third factor that contributes to the nurture of young children’s spirituality and that is the use of stimulated recall (Thomson, 2008), which provides an additional means for reflection. As the EC educators in the study led the children through these five steps, the children were able to increase their levels of self-awareness, perceive themselves in new ways, move from being a “practitioner” to a “theorist” within their own lives, and ultimately draw meaning from an event and be transformed by the process.

Another key finding from this research study was the ability for children as young as three and four to engage in and grapple with such complex concepts as death, dying, what happens to individuals and animals when they die, and the possible existence of a transcendent other. Young children also demonstrated the awareness that other children and adults held differing thoughts, perspectives, and opinions, and they were capable of accepting these differences without feeling the need to attempt to change them.

1.8.1 Use of the first person within the thesis. The theoretical basis for this study was grounded in sociocultural theory, which asserts that meaning is constructed in community with others. According to this theory, there is no “truth” to be discovered but, rather, reality and meaning are created and constructed by people in community with each other (Vygotsky, 1978).

As the researcher, I am part of that community and believe that by writing in the first person, I can provide a more holistic description of my study, one which takes into account my perspectives, knowledge, and ideas. This position I took is further discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

1.9 Conclusion

This introductory chapter has provided an overview of each of the main components of the thesis as well as outlining the understanding of spirituality that will be used in this

research project. It has also described Goodliff's (2013a) model of spirituality that incorporated four dimensions or behaviours; the curriculum framework providing the context for the study; the study's research aims; and its contribution in the field of early childhood education.

The next chapter examines the relevant literature, which provides the research context for this study and positions it within the early childhood education field.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the themes that have featured in the study of children's lived experience of spirituality that are pertinent to my research. These themes, which include the role of a sociocultural approach to its research, researcher-children relationships, the perspectives of EC educators on the concept of spirituality, an examination of early childhood philosophical approaches to pedagogy, the outdoor learning environment in early childhood and children's relation with and perception of a transcendent deity or principle, are first briefly introduced. Then, the development of each is traced through the literature in sections dedicated to it. The body of literature examined, whose individual sources are described in this chapter, was developed from the result of searches involving several disciplines in multiple databases.

Given the aim of this research project and the research question, which is detailed in section 1.7, the keywords of spirituality, children's spirituality, descriptions and definitions of spirituality and early childhood education, Reggio Emilia philosophy and frameworks, Montessori, Steiner/Waldorf, perezhivanie and the outdoor learning environment were used in the literature search.

Studies of early childhood spirituality provided key search terms for queries in the ProQuest Education, the A+ Education, and the Australian Education Research Thesis (ACER) databases as well as for specific keyword searches for relevant journal articles and books in the Australian Catholic University library. Both electronic and paper files were created to store these articles under each of the six thematic headings. Thomson Reuters EndNote, version X7, software was employed to store and manage literature source information. An MS Excel spread sheet was also used to capture key quotes and ideas throughout the process.

Given the multi-disciplinary nature of this research, searches on the keywords of spirituality and early childhood education produced a vast list of references. What was relevant for this project were studies that had combined disciplines such as "early childhood education and spirituality" or "Reggio Emilia philosophy and the dimensions of spirituality". The outcome of the literature review search indicated that there had been research undertaken in the areas of young children's spirituality, early childhood education and/or the Reggio

Emilia philosophy and creativity, or early childhood education and the outdoor learning environment; however, what appeared to be missing was research and literature that combined the four disciplines of young children's spirituality, the Reggio Emilia philosophy, early childhood education and the outdoor learning environment, which was the basis of my research study for this thesis.

I sought peer-reviewed journals and reviewed them for adherence to rigorous academic processes. I also used ancestry searching from the most useful articles to locate other relevant studies and articles to provide additional insights and perspectives. I kept a list of references, key quotes and page numbers in MS Excel as a reference.

2.2 Major Themes in the Literature

Exploration of the literature uncovered a number of themes that were pertinent to my research. Broad descriptions of these themes are provided in the next sections, and then the body of literature related to each theme is presented and discussed in detail later in the chapter.

2.2.1 A sociocultural theory approach. One of the growing trends in research examining young children's spirituality is the use of sociocultural theory as a theoretical framework. This differs from more traditional approaches which were philosophically, theologically and scientifically based. In general, sociocultural theory views an individual's development and learning as being shaped by the culture and history of the community in which the individual matures.

Vygotsky (1978) postulated that all higher cognitive functions begin as actual relationships between individuals, implying that all meaning develops and is constructed from interactions between individuals. Thus, these functions include "the formation of concepts", which appear twice in human development – first "on the social level" and then later "inside the child". The first appearance is between individuals, the young child and others with whom it has close relationships and is termed "interpsychological" by Vygotsky (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 57). The second, termed "intrapsychological" by Vygotsky, is inside the child (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 57). While Vygotsky apparently never employed the word "spirituality", or the concept underlying the word, Wertsch (1998), a Vygotskian researcher, views learning and development as encompassing the physical, emotional, social, cultural and spiritual dimensions.

The concept that the lived experience of spirituality emerged from interactions and relationships between individuals marks a very different approach to the philosophical, theological or scientific methodologies that have characterised most of the history of research into young children's spirituality. The literature review identified research studies that have used sociocultural concepts to develop their theoretical frameworks and examined their effectiveness in understanding and conceptualising the spirituality of young children. Of particular note in using a sociocultural approach is how the understanding of spirituality emerges. For example, is spirituality imposed upon the children by adults and their understanding of spirituality or do children participate equally in the process?

2.2.2 Interaction with children in the information-gathering process.

As the sociocultural theme discussed in section 2.2.1 stresses the role of relationships in a child's development, relationships as part of the information-gathering process in studies of childhood spirituality constitute another important theme in the literature. Throughout the study of children's spirituality, most scholars employed data-gathering methods that involved little or no interaction between the researcher and the children being studied. However, if spiritual development occurs through relationships with others, then its study would no doubt be more effective if the relationships with children are included.

The detailed discussion of this theme was used to catalogue the methods employed to gather data from children throughout the history of this field of research, with a focus on the data-collection methods best suited to this research study.

The next sections critically analyse the differences between studies where children's voices were heard and incorporated into the findings compared to those studies where adults simply observed children or imposed their own understandings of spirituality.

2.2.3 Early childhood educators' perspectives on the concept of spirituality.

How spirituality is perceived, explained and understood by EC educators plays an important role in how it is then recognised and/or nurtured in the classroom. Given the mandate to include spirituality in EC frameworks and curricula – and the lack of supporting documentation to assist EC educators in recognising and nurturing young children's spirituality – establishing how some EC educators address the concept with young children takes on added importance. The literature review undertaken for this study has demonstrated that there is a paucity of research in this area and highlights the importance of this research project to address the gap in information and equip EC educators with the skills and

knowledge they need to support children's spirituality as outlined in the relevant EC curricula and frameworks.

2.2.4 Early childhood philosophical approaches to pedagogy.

This section examines three main philosophical approaches to early childhood education. They are the Reggio Emilia philosophical framework, which is used by the ELC that is the setting for this research study and the theories of Maria Montessori and Rudolf Steiner as they offer early childhood pedagogical approaches that place a high importance on the spirituality of young children.

I begin with the work of Maria Montessori and Rudolf Steiner and outline their approaches to the education of young children, in particular their focus on the spiritual aspects of young children before examining the philosophical framework of Reggio Emilia.

A review of the literature has identified the research where the philosophy of Reggio Emilia has intersected with the four areas of young children's spirituality as described in the Goodliff (2013a) model: (1) Relational Consciousness; (2) Reflective Practice; (3) Creativity and Imagination; and (4) Transcendence (incorporating awe, wonder and mystery) or how REP may inform outdoor activities. I sought an integrated approach to young children's growth and development through the lens of REP to inform this research project but was only able to identify disparate pieces of research that lacked a coherent approach.

2.2.5 The role of reflection in identifying and understanding spiritual experiences.

In an initial review of the literature, Reflective Practice has been shown by Goodliff (2013a) and Hay and Nye (1996) to assist children in their meaning-making activities by providing sufficient time and space for them to revisit events and experiences within a safe and nurturing environment. This chapter describes the more detailed approach taken to testing this, which included the work of Vygotsky (1994) and, in particular, his *perezhivanie* concept, as well as a review of the literature and research of Reggio Emilia's pedagogical practices of reflection such as open-ended questions, and the pedagogy of listening and active listening, which were pertinent to this research. The review of the relevant literature also sought to examine the ways in which Reflective Practice facilitates the recognition and the nurturing of young children's spirituality.

2.2.6 The role of nature in children's spiritual experiences.

Due to the growing trend of reducing the amount of time children spend outdoors (C. Smith, 2009, p. 16), research has begun to examine the implications of this phenomenon on children's health, growth, wellbeing, and development. In addition, outdoor-based learning environments such as forest schools have proliferated. The implications of time spent outdoors on children's spirituality is an area that has not been comprehensively studied but is worthy of examination.

The review of the literature sought to initially identify research that included young children in the outdoor learning environment and then focused, particularly, on any research that had examined the intersection between outdoor play and young children's spirituality. The question guiding this part of the review was as follows: Was there any research that had demonstrated ways in which young children's spirituality had been impacted, enhanced or affected by the children being in an outdoor environment and away from the indoor classroom?

2.2.7 Children's capacity to address existential issues

One of the behaviours of spirituality that has been proposed by Goodliff (2013a) is Transcendence, which encompasses feelings of awe and wonder, and whose presence implies that children are capable of seeing themselves as part of a larger reality. An examination of the literature sought to establish researchers' perspectives on young children's capacity to address and engage in questions that are existential in nature.

In the next section, each of the themes discussed in the previous sections is explored and their development is traced in depth in the literature on childhood development.

2.3 Approaches to the Study of Childhood Spirituality

This section will outline four main approaches to the study of young children's spirituality; socio cultural, scientific, theological and philosophical. The first approach and possibly the most important with respect to my research is the application of sociocultural theory. This particular approach has proved the most meaningful in the context of my research and is discussed in depth in this section. To ascertain its importance, I considered first the history of the study of children's spiritual experiences.

2.3.1 Ratcliff's four stages in the study of young children's spirituality.

Over the past 100 years, there have been four periods of research into children's spirituality (Ratcliff, 2010). The first period, lasting from 1892 to 1930 and termed the "early

holistic period”, adopted an integrated approach to this research. During this period, spirituality, religion, and daily life were viewed as indistinguishable from one another. This integrated view of children’s lives is important and will be discussed in greater detail later in the chapter.

In the second period, lasting from 1930 to 1960, there was a decreased emphasis on the experience and knowledge of God and religion was viewed as not automatically resulting in a relationship with divinity and with spiritual experience in general. During this period, there was a particular focus on expressions of spirituality from young people, whether inside or outside of a religious framework.

This period marked the beginning of a debate concerning the relationship between spirituality and religion that continues even today. Researchers such as Lambourne (1996) asserted that spirituality is so connected to religion that addressing spirituality outside the context of a faith-based tradition makes little or no sense, and Carr (1996) advised avoiding use of the word “spirituality” because employing it, as distinct from its religious roots, merely causes confusion. This research project acknowledged the important role that religion has played in the development and nurturing of spirituality over time but also considered spirituality outside of a religious context so as to free it from religious constraints and to increase its accessibility to early childhood educators.

The third period (1960 to 1990) emphasised the cognitive stages of spirituality to the near exclusion of its experiential nature and brought increased precision to its study but at the expense of holism (Ratcliff, 2010). Although most researchers during this period did not specifically address spirituality, Fowler’s (1981) stages of faith were often used as a theoretical basis for mapping the spiritual development of individuals. Fowler drew upon the work of Braverman (1956), who claimed that this development occurred in clearly delineated timelines.

Fowler’s (1981) stages of faith theory outlined six stages, the first two of which have the most relevance to this project. The first is called the “intuitive-projective stage” and begins around the age of two, where a convergence of thought and language causes symbols, rich with meaning, to emerge in children. In order for this stage to begin, a trusting and loving relationship must have been formed between the child and at least one adult. The child’s thinking at this stage is filled with fantasy and imagination. Feelings, stories and reality are all bound together and, at this age, are often indistinguishable. Also in this stage of their development, children create their understanding of the sacred by combining stories and

images learnt from their parents and culture into beliefs concerning the nature of a deity. Moreover, children who have no religious framework appear to follow similar patterns in constructing the meaning they assign to the concept of the sacred (Fowler, 1981).

After beginning at age two, this stage normally lasts up to approximately age seven at which time children enter the second, or the “mythic-literal faith” stage. Dependent upon their ability to understand cause-and-effect relationships and others’ perspectives, this stage leads children to perceive God as anthropomorphic and compassionate, and who often exhibits a strict sense of reciprocity in dealing with humans.

The final period outlined by Ratcliff (2010) began in 1990 and continues to the present day. Ratcliff’s four periods exhibit a gradual move away from an integrated approach to spirituality to a more cognitive understanding of the world. The literature of this period demonstrates that moving towards a more cognitive understanding of spirituality limits the understanding of children’s spirituality, and it regards spirituality as a separate component of a child’s overall character. As this literature review is demonstrating, spirituality is an integrated part of children’s lives and development.

The last of the four stages proposed by Ratcliff (2010) commenced with the work of Coles (1990), a clinician trained in paediatrics and one of the first to undertake specific research in the area of spirituality in young children. He conducted a large-scale research project that involved conversations with children aged six to 13 from around the world and from a variety of religious and cultural backgrounds. Coles’ research has become an important reference point and the basis for many consequent studies. Not attempting to define or describe spirituality explicitly, he speaks in broader terms about children’s spiritual lives. He outlines his assumption that humans, including children, possess a level of self-awareness or consciousness and therefore, through language, can attempt to understand the world around them and to convey what they have learned to others. Coles, who observed that a sense of spirituality seemed to be universal regardless of cultural or religious background, has recognised that children’s expressions of their spirituality transcend language and culture and that listening attentively to children is more important than attempting to classify and define what they actually say.

Coles’ (1990) research found that, regardless of their exposure to and familiarity with a supreme deity within a religious setting, children possess a language that they use to speak of their own spirituality and connectedness. Coles believes that for many children, even those apparently lacking in religious affiliations, their religious and spiritual lives overlap, which

suggests that children are born with a sense of the transcendent or the concept of a supreme being. Coles' belief that children's spirituality is innate is an assumption held by many other researchers (Eaude, 2003, 2005; Hay & Nye, 2006; Hyde, 2008a) and stands in contrast to a sociocultural perspective that states spirituality is constructed by individuals in community with others. Coles' methodology included asking the children for their ideas, perspectives and understanding of spirituality, which was an important consideration for this research project.

Shortly after Coles' (1990) study, a divergence in the approach to research in the area of children's spirituality emerged. This dichotomy was based on the framework chosen to underpin the study. Members of one group (Gardner, 1999, 2011; Hart, 2003; Heller, 1986; Hyde, 2008a; Robinson, 1983; Zohar & Marshall, 2000) based their research on assumptions derived from theological, philosophical, or scientific theoretical systems of thought. Implicit in these systems is the notion that spiritual development can be studied as separate and in isolation from other aspects of children's personalities. The alternative approach adopts a sociocultural framework, which views spirituality as arising from relationships with others and is inseparable from other facets of an individual's development. The dichotomy between these two approaches provided the basis for my research and is discussed in detail in the next section.

2.3.2 Scientific, theological and philosophical approaches.

This section discusses approaches to the study of children's lived experience of spirituality that employ scientific, theological and philosophical frameworks. I looked briefly at these approaches and their limitations, particularly those that a sociocultural approach could serve to address in order to understand how these differing approaches impacted on an understanding of the lived experience of children's spirituality.

2.3.2.1 *Scientific approaches.*

Several authors (Gardner, 1999, 2011; Zohar & Marshall, 2000) have attempted to apply a scientific approach to the study of young children's experiences of spirituality. In this section, I will discuss Gardner's approach in depth in order to demonstrate the limitations of such an approach with reference to research within spirituality.

In the United States, (Gardner, 1999, 2011) proposed a theory of "multiple intelligences" in which IQ (intelligence quotient) was just one of many possible assessments or measurements that could be applied to the analysis of an individual. Gardner's first seven intelligences were linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic,

intrapersonal and interpersonal. Since then, he has added another – naturalistic – which is the ability to distinguish and form classes among objects. While Gardner has not yet added a spiritual or existential intelligence to his pantheon, he has conceded that it would satisfy all but one criterion of an intelligence, and that is neurological evidence of its existence. Such a spiritual or existential intelligence would, he stated, capture and ponder the fundamental questions of existence. Arguing that the conventional view of intelligence is “Cartesian” in nature, which means that the mind should be viewed in strictly rational and ahistorical terms, Gardner has proposed that intelligence should be considered from a more “Darwinian” perspective, wherein the mind is regarded as a complex living thing that has developed over millennia via a myriad of different settings. Gardner believed that each intelligence can be considered as a separate part of an individual’s personality rather than as an integral part of a highly integrated system. Gardner’s critics, including G. Miller (1956), state that Gardner’s argument is nothing more than “hunch and opinion”, while another critic, Ceci (1996), claims that Gardner’s approach to naming intelligences and asking participants to sit through tests provides no hard evidence that is capable of independent validation.

Also in the USA, Zohar and Marshall (2000) drew on the fields of neuroscience and psychology to unite and integrate IQ, EQ (emotional intelligence), and SQ (spiritual intelligence). They believe that SQ exists and is born from an innate human imperative to seek answers to such fundamental or ultimate questions of life as “Why was I born?” and “What is the meaning of life?” According to Zohar and Marshall (2000), the integration of IQ, EQ, and SQ makes possible a dialogue between reason and emotion, which can therefore aid in finding solutions to problems involving meaning and value and thereby situate people’s lives and actions within a wider, richer context. Zohar and Marshall (2000) describe SQ as follows:

SQ is the intelligence that rests in that deep part of the self that is connected to wisdom, from beyond the ego, or unconscious mind, it is the intelligence with which we not only recognize existing values, but which we creatively discover new values. (Zohar & Marshall, 2000, p. 93)

Studies that have attempted to bring scientific theory to bear on the study of spirituality have suffered from a number of limitations that have served to narrow their understanding of the phenomenon. By ignoring the relational aspect of spirituality, they have failed to recognise it as a highly individual aspect of personality. By focusing solely on neuroscience, they have left such areas as Transcendence, Relational Consciousness and Creativity and Imagination untouched. While these studies have offered insights into the

scientific pursuit of understanding spirituality, they have provided a very narrow understanding of children's lived experience of spirituality.

2.3.2.2 *Theological approaches.*

Another approach to the study of children's spirituality is theological in nature. Based upon the worship of a supreme deity and focused upon and employing religious language, such studies have viewed spirituality primarily in terms of the children's conception of and perceived relations to the deity around whom the religion was formed. While these studies did reveal some aspects of how children experienced and conceived of the spiritual, the focus on the religion's deity introduced inherent limitations in the extent to which the children's own spiritual experiences could be explored.

One such study was that conducted by Heller (1986), which involved interviews with 20 girls and 20 boys aged between three and 12 years of age who had been drawn from a number of different religious backgrounds. The children described the deities of their religious contexts in terms of imagery, thoughts, and feelings that crystallised into characters populating their inner worlds and consequently, particularly with the study's older children, revealed much about the culture in which the children lived and the children's own values and priorities.

Jewish children emphasised a deity existing within the realm of human history but not bound by it. Interviews with the Catholic children revealed a deity intimately involved in family life, and the deity described by the Baptist children offered nurturance to humankind. Outside the Judeo-Christian religious framework, the Hindi children interviewed regarded the supreme being as more involved with their ashram's community members.

While the younger children displayed an absence of information concerning established religious notions, they possessed a positive and soft-mannered sense of a supreme being whom they often associated with play and fun. Heller (1986), himself, cautioned against interpreting these younger children's benign interpretations of the deity as simplistic; these conceptions of a supreme deity were no less valid than more fully elaborated ones.

Heller (1986), acknowledged the children's views of a transcendent being or principle as an essential characteristic of their experiences of spirituality, even cautioning that the richness of this experience could not be fully captured in the context of a single study. Although a significant part of children's spiritual experiences, the awareness of a supreme deity or transcendent principle is, as demonstrated in the next section, not the sole dimension

through which children experience spirituality. Everyday events and experiences not directly associated with a deity can also, as will be seen, reflect a spiritual dimension, and a strictly religious focus could tend to overlook these. This limitation is typical of theologically based studies.

2.3.2.3 Philosophical approaches.

Philosophical approaches to the study of children's spirituality have also tended to suffer from limitations. One Australian study based on the work of Hay and Nye (1996) was undertaken by Hyde (2005b), who studied 35 children from three Catholic primary schools in three different settings – urban (inner-city Melbourne), suburban, and rural. Based on his observations, Hyde proposes four characteristics of children's spirituality: the *felt sense*, *integrating awareness*, *weaving threads of meaning*, and *spiritual questing*. The felt sense refers to the immediacy of awareness within a present moment and relates to a notion of Hay and Nye (1996) "here and now" of time and also to Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) concept of *flow*, wherein children become so fully absorbed and present in an activity that time seems to disappear.

The second characteristic noted by Hyde is integrating awareness, which relates to the felt sense but involves a further step. As children become absorbed in an activity, they move into a state where an emerging level of consciousness envelops their initial level of awareness, which then enables them to be involved in a free-flowing conversational style. The third characteristic is weaving threads of meaning, which taps into children's inherent sense of awe and wonder. This is where children are able to draw upon their own inner qualities in order to make sense of events and experiences. The last characteristic, spiritual questing, relates to what is most important to children.

The four characteristics Hyde (2005b) developed from his study emphasise the deliberate act of children to make meaning of their experiences through creativity and addresses the mystery elements of children's experiences that relate to their spirituality. However, not highlighted was the role of relationality in constructing a shared understanding of spirituality that demarcates the sociocultural approach. Rather, the study saw spirituality as an inherent part of children that emerged as children become occupied in creative episodes.

This research project sought to take a broader understanding of children's lived experience of spirituality and incorporate dimensions such as Relational Consciousness and Reflective Practice.

The next section considers research that adopted a sociocultural approach and the implications thereof for understanding children's lived experience of spirituality.

2.3.3 Sociocultural approach.

In contrast to the types of studies discussed in the previous section, the second major type of approach that emerged during Ratcliff (2010) fourth stage of the study of children's spirituality was the adoption of sociocultural theory as the underpinning theoretical framework. A number of researchers who adopted this approach based their work on that of Lev Vygotsky (Bone, 2007; Champagne, 2003; Goodliff, 2013a; Hay, 2005; Hay & Nye, 1996, 2006; Moriarty, 2010). Central to this area of research into young children's spirituality was the idea that spirituality is constructed, further developed, and nurtured in relationships with others.

The differences between the scientific, theological, philosophical and the sociocultural approaches profoundly impact how spirituality is perceived and conceptualised. As will be demonstrated, these differing perspectives have great relevance to this research and to the wider body of knowledge concerning young children's lived experience of spirituality. I was unable to locate any comprehensive study that detailed the key differences between these approaches with respect to children's spirituality, and yet I believe the distinction between them is important, particularly for early childhood educators. If spirituality is viewed exclusively as being within the context of a specific religious, scientific or philosophical framework, educators tasked with recognising and nurturing children's spiritual growth via formalised curricula frameworks would be required to have prior knowledge of and training in that specific religion or philosophy in order to be successful. Moreover, because of its ephemeral nature, spirituality is inherently vague and therefore subject to wide latitudes of interpretation, which make it susceptible to being imposed on children by adults.

When spirituality is viewed as socially constructed – not only within communities but in interactions between adults and children – it becomes more accessible and readily considered with EC pedagogy. There is less of an emphasis on specialised religious, scientific or philosophical knowledge and more of a focus on the experience and interactions between individuals. Moreover, adding a defined process through which children can be encouraged to explicitly reflect upon and explore their spiritual experiences would also increase the ability of educators to recognise its manifestations in young children's experiences and thinking. Drawing upon a framework of spirituality that would assist EC educators in recognising it and

then enabling them to help children to further explore and reflect upon events and experiences, as well as deepen and develop their own understanding of their spiritual nature.

Implicit in sociocultural theory's assumption that spirituality is constructed in relationships with others is the wide range of interpretations and definitions to which the concept is subject. In particular, the sociocultural approach recognises spirituality as a dynamic concept whose interpretation depends to a great extent on a cultural and historical context. Consequently, the ability to recognise spiritual experiences in another depends on understanding that individual's own particular interpretation of spirituality and not just a set of doctrinal beliefs outlined by a religious institution. Thus, the sociocultural view of spirituality enables it to encompass religion and religious frameworks while at the same time transcending them (and so remain grounded in the individual's faith), thereby providing an appreciation of spiritual experiences that is accessible to all. In particular, it enables educators to share with children their own understandings of spirituality and to help children construct their own ways of making meaning in the world.

The next section outlines some of the key research in the area of the lived experience of young children's spirituality that are most applicable to this research project.

2.3.4 Researchers adopting the sociocultural approach.

While Vygotsky (1978, 1987, 2004) apparently never employed the word "spirituality" or the concept underlying the word, Wertsch (1998), a Vygotskian researcher, viewed spirituality as a legitimate part of lived experience and believed that a holistic understanding of learning and development must encompass the physical, emotional, social, cultural and spiritual dimensions. This holistic view differed from philosophical or theological frameworks such as the Catholic frameworks used by Hyde (2008a) and de Souza (2001, 2009a, 2009b) and together with the view of spirituality as grounded in relationships, defined the work of researchers who adopted the sociocultural approach.

Nye (1996) and Hay and Nye (2006) were the first researchers to frame the research of young children's spirituality within sociocultural theory. Applying sociocultural theory to analysing data gathered from observing 38 children attending state primary schools in the United Kingdom, Hay and Nye (1996) focused on children's states of awareness of the relationships Vygotsky had described. This awareness, or set of "awarenesses", constituted a particular form of mental activity that differed from simple mental alertness. The authors believed this was best described as a consciousness, or more specifically as a "Relational Consciousness", since its objects are the types of relations the child saw themselves as

participating in. According to Hay and Nye (1996) these relationships are of four main types, depending on with whom or what the relationship is. Hay and Nye (1996) expressed these types using the phrases *I-Others*, *I-Self*, *I-World*, and *I-God*, which represent the four types of awareness, respectively, of others: of self, of the environment, and of a transcendent other (for some individuals). The particular reflective quality possessed by this mode of awareness enables children to achieve a new dimension of understanding, meaning and experience, a condition Hay and Nye (1996) term “meta consciousness” as well as perceive the world in relational terms.

The work of Hay and Nye (1996) represented a crucial milestone in the study of children’s spirituality. Not only were these researchers among the first to employ sociocultural theory within the field, but their use of this theory reveals the central importance of relationality and consciousness in research on spirituality. While their research was grounded within a religious framework, in this case Christian, it enabled spirituality to be considered without reference to a religious framework and include secular settings, which thereby allowed for a much broader application. In 2009, Nye published her book *Children’s Spirituality* (Nye, 2009) where she outlined several reasons why children have an unfair advantage when it comes to spirituality; namely their holistic way of seeing things, their open and curious capacity for wonder, their daily discovering of new things, the fact that their emotional life is at least as strong as their intellectual life making, so they don’t try and hide from their emotions and finally, their comfort around mystery enabling them to respond with awe and search for meaning in everyday situations and events.

Nye (2009) also described six steps for nurturing the spirituality of young children. While evidence exist for describing spirituality, few resources were found that outlined how care gives or educators could nurture a child’s spirituality once it has been recognised. Nye used the acronym ‘spirit’ where ‘S’ stood for space, safe space, as well as physical and emotional space that allowed children to not alone spend time alone processing events but also the space to feel closely held. The ‘P’ stood for process, the recognition that spirituality was an ongoing piece of work and not something that could ever be completed. Children needed assistance to value the often quiet slow qualities of processing. The first ‘I’ stood for imagination and creativity. Spirituality depended on a willingness to be open and willing to go deeper. The ‘R’ stood for relationships which offered authentic model for relating to each other. The second ‘I’ stood for intimacy relating to the safety of the nurturing space and the final letter ‘T’ stood for trust that was essential to the spiritual life. While these six ways were

designed for church settings, many of the components relate to the *perezhivanie* process of revisiting experiences, particularly the creation of safe space, relationships and trust.

Research undertaken by Hay and Nye provided a basis for the work of Champagne (2003), Bone (2007), Goodliff (2013a), and Moriarty (2010), whose contributions are discussed later in this section.

A Canadian study conducted by Champagne (2003) was one of the first to focus upon the spirituality of prior-to-school-aged children. She asked whether young children's spirituality could be recognised and then nurtured within a day care centre setting. To answer this question, Champagne observed 60 prior-to-school-aged children from three day care centres. Based on her research, she concluded that young children exhibit three modes of being: *the sensitive mode*, characterised by awareness of the world around them; *the relational mode*, through which children express their relations to spirituality and to other people; and *the existential mode*, which related to time and space and to existence itself through daily activities.

High-quality relationships, particularly those between children and adults within a childcare setting, enable children to discover the closeness in the distance and the presence in the absence, which she believes is a fundamental experience in spirituality Champagne (2003). She also asserted that young children look to adults to sort out and make sense of the world, which, in turn, provides them with the time and space to construct their inner selves, a spiritual pursuit. Champagne outlined her notion of *being-related* that enables children to view themselves in relation to those around them, both family members and individuals at the child care centre. This process of grounding themselves in relationship with others then enables them to participate in their own becoming. Champagne regarded this process as a spiritual one by offering children a home from which to go forth into the world and be open to love to others. Notably, Champagne's research relied only on the observation of children and did not include any interactions or conversations with children in the construction of an understanding of their spirituality. I believe the observational approach undertaken by in this particular study relied upon her own understanding and interpretation of the children's lived experience of spirituality rather than inviting the children's voices into the research.

Champagne's (2008) article explored the way that children express their thoughts around death and dying. It outlined a Canadian observational case study that involved over 4,000 children aged between 9-11 set in Christian church settings around the Paschal mystery. The study found that children were very willing to speak about death and express their

sadness, pose questions and offer hope to other students. The study found that universal elements existed, especially around the concept of a heaven or final destination. These themes will be reflected upon in the findings section.

Bone (2007) identified three ways of conceptualising spirituality in young children: *spiritual withness*, *spiritual in between-ness*, and *the spiritual elsewhere*. Spiritual withness referred to the experience where people perceive themselves as being in tune or in touch with one another in a way that could be thought of as connected on a spiritual level. Bone (2007) regarded spiritual withness “to be an aspect of the pedagogical relationship that merged inter-subjectivity with the spiritual dimension in the everyday context of early childhood contexts” (2007, p. 147).

According to Bone (2007), spiritual in between-ness emerged through ritual that then becomes highly symbolic and planned. She believes that ritual often causes individuals to find themselves between realities and thus not quite in the real world. In this place, new spiritual possibilities can emerge. Bone also believed that this space, which could be referred to as liminal or as being between worlds or realities, enables individuals to leave one reality and be open to new possibilities that are possibly spiritual in nature. She asserted that EC educators can create this liminal space and thereby assisting children to experience spiritual moments. Bone’s methodology in this research also involved the observation of young children in three ELC settings without conversations with children to help formulate her conceptualisation. In 2010, Bone returned to her thesis findings and further developed one aspect that of metamorphosis as a spiritual concept. She took four play narratives from her findings; becoming bird, becoming rabbit, becoming dinosaur and becoming horse to posit that there is “a visible infoldings that melts the boundaries that have been constructed between human and animal as a moment of inter-subjectivity” (Bone, 2010, p. 411). She witnessed children becoming other and spirituality as an embodied dimension

In 2013, Goodliff published an article and a thesis. The (2013a) article outlined her research which involved collecting data using video cameras over a nine-week period with 20 children from five privately run nurseries. She made observations, recorded field notes, and captured audio recordings and digital photos. In the second phase of the data collection process, Goodliff had a limited number of conversations with the children, but these were not recorded. She did, however, reflect on her interactions with the children in a personal journal.

From her research, Goodliff (2013a) constructed four non-hierarchical areas of behaviour linked to the expression of spirituality: (1) *Relational*; (2) *Reflective*; (3) *Creativity and Imagination*; and (4) *Transcendence*.

While Goodliff's (2013a) model incorporated the characteristic of relational as a dimension of spirituality, her research drew upon the work of Hay and Nye (1996), Bone (2007) and Champagne (2003) and did not provide her own understanding of relationality; rather, her study focused predominantly on the role of creativity in children's spirituality.

Also in 2013, Goodliff published her thesis. It outlined her ethnographic case study based upon an interpretative paradigm that included research with two and three year olds in a day nursery setting. It was particularly focused upon the development of spiritual languages that were outside of a religious framework that could be used by EC educators to help recognise spirituality in young children. Her approach involved listening to young children, direct observations, audio recordings and digital photos. As in her article, the communication was limited to listening to young children rather than engaging in collaborative conversations. While engaging in conversations with young children is not a new approach, there are few studies that employ this method with very young children. The four behaviours of relational, reflective, creativity and imagination and transcendence that were identified in her article were represented very differently in her thesis. Rather than four non-hierarchical behaviours, Goodliff (2013b) proposed a new model where transcendence was given a lower status than the other three. Transcendence, incorporating awe and wonder, was seen through her findings as occurring less often than more everyday occurrences. Goodliff (2013b) also adds an additional layer onto her model that of spaces; namely imaginative narrative spaces, solitary imaginative spaces and friendship/relational spaces to further articulate the different ways or facets of relationships and how they impacted on young children's spirituality. Goodliff also adds additional dimensions to her languages, for example relationships now included kindness and compassion and the aspect of physical gesture, reflection included chuffedness as well as moments of remembering and stillness and to creativity, fantasy and embodied expression were included.

As the starting point for this research and the basis for the deductive approach, there were a number of key reasons why Goodliff's 2013 article model of the four non hierarchical areas of behaviour model was chosen over Goodliff's 2013b multi dimensional language of spirituality was chosen. While Goodliff found that transcendence and in particular, the aspects of awe and wonder were not prevalent in her 2013b study, I wanted to investigate that in regards to my own findings. I was curious if the siting of the research in the outdoor learning

environment would render the same results. By utilising the original model, it allowed more freedom for data interpretation. Goodliff's 2013b addition of naming the relational spaces and placing these as an additional layer to the model, I believe made it in fact more difficult to analyse the data as it added additional considerations that I did not believe were helpful or added extra insight. By keeping the relational as a more general and open aspect of behaviour it allowed the data to be interpreted in a more freeing way that allowed for new and different aspects to emerge. For example, it would have been more difficult to see the interaction between relationships and the other three behaviours had I also been trying to separate these into the three relational spaces as well. The data would have become too complex and potentially distorted. The 2013b model also represented relationships as both a spiritual language of children as well as existing in physical locations. This schism between the two would impact on the data analysis of my findings. By reducing to relationships to connectedness to others, kindness and compassion and physical gestures it omitted the aspect of connectedness to children's own sense of self as well as that of the outside world and community. It also makes it more difficult to establish the role of consciousness that existed and arose from the relationships with others.

The 2013b model also somewhat diminished the reflective behaviour. In the 2013 model it is defined as 'meaning making of individual experience' which is broad enough to help categorise the data and see meaning making as an important behaviour as well as how it might intercept the other three behaviours. In the 2013b model dilutes this by adding chuffedness, remembering and stillness and reduced meaning making to only occurring in regards to identify. In Goodliff's attempt to broaden some of the behaviours and reduce the importance of others, it would make it if far more difficult and complex for me to use it as a deductive tool and pose the risk that important insights and relationships would be lost in the multi levelled model.

One of the few research projects that did conduct conversations with young children was Moriarty's (2010) study. Moriarty (2010) conducted conversations with children in Australian state primary schools using biblically based texts. She identifies four key concepts of spirituality. The first concept involves children *reaching beyond themselves*, which includes their experiences of heightened consciousness in association with a relationship to the "other" or the "transcendent" one. The second concept, *reaching within themselves*, examines children's relationship with self. The third, *charting the path*, explores the influences of the social and natural environment in shaping children's values. The fourth, *footprints*, explores the way children develop a sense of identity from their life experiences.

This study drew heavily on the work of Hay and Nye (1996), as Relational Consciousness lay at the heart of Moriarty's findings. The use of reflective activities and practices also helped her to explore children's consciousness. Although based upon religious and biblical texts, it did provide an example of sociocultural theory being applied to the spirituality of young children, in this case primary school-aged children, and the findings were constructed with the children's participation.

This research project sought to investigate if key concepts of young children's spirituality could exist outside of a religious framework where the starting point of enquiry was not biblical texts but rather children's experiences from The Walk.

The research projects discussed in this section have been based upon a sociocultural theoretical framework that considers spirituality as a constructed phenomenon existing both within and outside of a religious framework. This sociocultural framework offers a multidisciplinary way of examining spirituality that enables spirituality to be seen in the everyday lives of children. The research undertaken by Goodliff (2013a), Bone (2007) and Champagne (2003) was based predominantly on the observation of young children and therefore the dimensions or characteristics that were put forward were constructed by the researchers without the collaboration of the children.

The next section examines more closely this research methodology of only observing children and its implications for sociocultural theory as well as research that has included children's voices and perspectives.

2.4 Interaction with Children in the Information-Gathering Process

Many researchers recognised the importance of listening closely to what the children had to say. Hay and Nye (1996) proponents of Relational Consciousness, believed that two types of conversations children have indicate the presence of spirituality. The first displayed an unusual level of consciousness or perceptiveness relative to other passages of conversation spoken by children; and the second involved expressing the context in which they relate to things, other people, themselves, and a supreme being. Thus Hay and Nye advocated allowing children to reflect upon their experiences in a supportive and safe environment. In this way, they believed researchers can identify and examine the images that provide meaning for children and allow researchers to access what Hay and Nye (1996) termed their spiritual code.

This identification of the use of Reflective Practice became central to this research project. The findings of this project demonstrated the importance of a supportive and safe

environment for children to explore their own lived experience of spirituality. These findings also highlighted other components of this reflective space that contribute to children's experience, namely attentive listening and the use of open-ended questions.

The consideration of the importance of the reflective space was included in the research conducted by Goodliff (2013a), who collected data on the 20 children in her study using video cameras, observations, field notes, audio recordings, and digital photos and held only a limited number of conversations with the children. She, nonetheless, recognised the importance of listening attentively to them so as to examine the many languages children employ to reflect upon their lives and describe their spiritual experiences.

This is an area which requires more investigation and research. What appears to be missing in the literature is a detailed investigation as to what is occurring in the children in these Reflective Practices and moments. This research study examines this particular facet in more detail, mapping the process through the use of Vygotsky's (1978) *perezhivanie* process to provide a more visible way to understand the lived experience of young children's spirituality. I believe this is a significant contribution to the field of young children's spirituality and addresses Souflee's (1993) challenge for frameworks to move from a level of abstraction to one of practical utility. It is from this mapping of the *perezhivanie* process that the basis of a new framework of young children's spirituality was formed and is presented in this thesis.

Another approach undertaken by Robinson (1983) and Hart (2003) involved a retrospective examination of adult memories of childhood events that possessed spiritual significance, which meant they avoided direct interaction with the children whose spiritual experiences they were examining. Robinson (1983) believed children have original visions – flashes of comprehension or a sense of the complete harmony of life – that he regards as a gift solely of childhood. Moreover, he believed that children are unable to make meaning of these visions at the time of their occurrence during childhood. He considered, conversely, that these visions can only be properly understood after the passage of time, that is, when those children have become adults. He regarded these “original visions” to be not fantasies but rather a form of knowledge that is mystical in nature and occurs within a religious framework. Robinson's (1983) research also involved interviewing people who had had significant experiences in nature that had left them with a profound sense of mystery. He considered all visions as being self-authenticating and capable of being understood by the visionary or an outside observer as purposive in nature, that is, as associated with an element of destiny or fate.

Another study that depended on exploration of childhood experiences with adults was undertaken by Hart (2003), who attempted to give adults a means of expressing childhood experiences that were not necessarily religious in nature but nonetheless possessed an element of the mystical or spiritual. According to Hart, children have remarkable access to inner guidance, and he employed the term “natural mystics” to describe them. Natural mystics have an innate capacity for wonder and therefore feel the pulse of the spirit directly and intimately.

While both Hart’s (2003) and Robinson’s (1983) studies assigned significance to spiritual experience and provided examples of feelings of connectedness through Reflective Practice, these authors assumed that spiritual experiences could only be accessed and reflected upon later in life and that young children are not capable of making sense of their own lived experience.

The cited studies that relied upon observation as the main data gathering tools have significant drawbacks when establishing an understanding of children’s spirituality. A sociocultural approach to the field of children’s spirituality relies heavily on the idea of children’s relationships – with their peers, with adults in their worlds, with their communities, and with a transcendent principle or being. Since sociocultural theory, in particular, emphasises the importance of relationality in experiences of spirituality, the relationship between the children and adults – in this case, the educators and the researcher – would seem to take on added importance.

The next section examines early childhood educators’ understanding and perspectives on spirituality and the methodology discusses the relationship between the children and the researcher.

2.5 Educators’ Perspectives on Spirituality

As noted in the introduction, while spirituality is included in EC curricula and frameworks, there appears to be little supporting documentation for EC educators to assist them in recognising and nurturing spirituality in children. Educators’ understandings of spirituality impact the way it is viewed and treated in the classroom, and so examining the literature regarding this topic is worthwhile.

In an Australian study, 98 teachers from both government and Catholic primary schools were interviewed about their perspectives on spirituality to achieve three primary aims: developing a definition of spiritual health; exploring how teachers thought spiritual health might best be fostered; and identifying factors that hinder spiritual health (Fisher,

1999). The study's findings led to a definition of spiritual health as "a fundamental dimension of people's overall health and wellbeing, permeating and integrating all other dimensions of health (physical, mental, emotional, social, and vocational)" (1999, p. 31). This definition recognised that spiritual health is dynamic and plays an important part in the way in which people live in harmony in the following domains: personal, communal, environmental and global (which incorporates a concept of God or the transcendent). A final category, which Fisher titled "rational", refers to those who see spirituality existing in the personal, communal, and environmental domains but not in the global.

According to Fisher's (1999) findings, teachers from government schools, in what could be perceived as a more sociocultural approach, considered the path to spiritual health is through personal, communal and rational pathways, whereas teachers in the Catholic educational system regarded spirituality as residing in the global realm, which represented a more theological approach. Moreover, Fisher discovered a strong link between teachers' own views of spirituality and their willingness to nurture their students' spirituality. He also found a correlation between the following characteristics and improved spiritual health: a caring, sensitive approach; concern for other individuals; and a commitment to personal beliefs and values.

Other significant findings in Fisher's study include the importance of the parents' role in developing children's spirituality and of the role of school principals in determining how spirituality is nurtured within a school community. Teachers noted that, while students should assume responsibility for developing their own spiritual wellbeing, teachers also had a role in developing the necessary foundations for their students' lifelong journeys.

These perspectives are important to note in this study and impact the ways in which teachers interact with young children. They point to the reality that, even though a curriculum can cite spirituality as an important aspect of children's health and wellbeing, if the teachers do not fully understand the term and its underlying concept, they are less able to help children nurture their spirituality.

Fisher's (1999) study, while useful, confined itself to the notion of "spiritual health" rather than the broader concept of "spirituality". In examining studies that focused primarily on teacher perspectives, a study by Kennedy and Duncan (2006) focused more broadly on the concept of spirituality. Undertaken in Aotearoa New Zealand and involving 10 early childhood and primary school teachers drawn from a range of both rural and urban schools, the study consisted of focus groups that had three primary objectives: to explore the teachers'

own understandings of the term “spirituality”; to assess their ability to recognise and respond to children’s expressions of spirituality; and to discuss an item from the classroom setting that represented spirituality.

The discussion in Kennedy and Duncan (2006) study focused on the notion of relationships – those between the teachers and God and between themselves and others, which meant they incorporated a sense of belonging and connectedness. The study’s findings were threefold: first, that teachers recognise the many-layered nature of spirituality and consequently realise that descriptions of it need to be flexible enough to reflect its creative and manifold nature; second, that in order to nurture children’s spirituality, teachers must first nurture their own spirituality – that is, that you “can’t give what you haven’t got” (2006, p. 278); and third, teachers who themselves demonstrate such spiritual qualities as a sense of peacefulness, inclusiveness, or a love of life and other people, tend to create classroom environments in which children’s spirituality is more likely to be nurtured.

The Kennedy and Duncan (2006) study found that the most effective ways for teachers to nurture children’s spirituality are to affirm and encourage, to show children interest and respect, and to actively listen to them. This study, which was limited to 10 teachers within the Catholic system in Aotearoa New Zealand, highlights the importance of exploring teachers’ perspectives on the multiple layers and complex nature of spirituality. While educator’s perspectives of spirituality was outside the scope of this study, it is important to highlight the often confused notion on spirituality in early childhood education. The research field would benefit from a comparable study that included a larger number of teachers drawn from religious, independent and government schools to ascertain whether the Kennedy and Duncan findings are consistent across different school environments.

The limited research conducted appeared to indicate that teachers working in an educational setting within a religious framework had a better understanding of the concept of spirituality and that, in turn, provided guidance to nurturing the spirituality of their students. On the other hand, teachers in independent and government schools, who may not have had a personal experience of spirituality, may have been less confident in nurturing their students’ spirituality. The Kennedy and Duncan (2006) research was conducted in an Australian early learning centre and therefore the understanding and perspectives of the EC educators would have played a significant role in how they applied the EYLF (*Belonging, Being and Becoming: Early Years Learning Framework*, 2009) in their classrooms.

In 2000, McCreery, Palmer, and Voiels (2008) conducted research to investigate how educators defined the term “spirituality”. One hundred and sixty-two teachers were asked, which resulted in over 90 different definitions of the term being received. Such a diversity of definitions demonstrated there was wide-ranging confusion regarding the term, which confirmed the suspected high level of ambiguity surrounding this subject.

The research project that is the subject of this thesis sought to address this ambiguity by creating a framework that outlined the dimensions of young children’s spirituality and clearly detailed the ways in which spirituality could be recognised and nurtured.

The next section examines the literature and research in the area of early childhood philosophies and the intersection, if any, of young children’s spirituality.

2.6 Early Childhood Philosophical Frameworks

There are a number of early childhood philosophical approaches that exist of which the Reggio Emilia Philosophy (REP) is one. This section examines the approaches Maria Montessori and Rudolf Steiner took in relation to early childhood pedagogy. Both of their approaches are quite explicit in their understanding and inclusion of young children’s spirituality.

Maria Montessori (1870–1952) was born and worked in Italy, and her ideas largely centred on the spiritual wellbeing of children. For Montessori, education had to involve the child’s soul. “Moral malnutrition and intoxication of the spirit are as fatal for the soul of man as physical nutrition is for the health of the body. Therefore child-education is the most important problem of humanity” (Montessori, 1967, p. 10). She regarded spirituality as innate in young children and considered it the primary force that drove children’s development as well as it being central to their capacity for joyful and deep engagement with their environment (M. Montessori, 1967; M. Montessori, 1966). Montessori saw every human being as having a spiritual embryo which grows and develops alongside other developmental areas of a person. She outlined two conditions that needed to be present for this spiritual embryo to grow, firstly, it needed a dependent relationships with the environment that included people and things and secondly the freedom to develop within this environment (M. Montessori, 1936, 1949). Therefore, she felt that education should be a liberating experience that suited the developing soul of the child and should respect the child’s development pace. She believed that children passed through various sensitive periods where children could learn

particular things such as a sense of order, motor skills or language. She asserted that spirituality be considered at each of these periods. She used the term “concentration” and referred to it as a spiritual pathway to a new consciousness. Montessori viewed the spiritual process as a way for children to detach themselves “from the world in order to attain the power to unite himself with it” (Montessori, 1967, p. 272). Montessori’s approach included multi-aged classrooms that focused on specialised educational tools developed by Montessori and her collaborators and a “constructivist as discovery” model, where children learnt concepts from working with the materials and tools rather than direct construction. While classrooms were arranged in “rafts” to promote small-group learning the emphasis was upon independent and freedom for the child. Creativity for Montessori was structured within her own understanding and the creative tools that were used in her classroom were of her own making. Thus creativity was not a particularly free pursuit but was rather confined to her own interpretation. Bone (2017) believed that Montessori’s work is often undervalued or marginalised due to her sex and that other male experts such as Piaget or Vygotsky are often mentioned before her; however, she “was able to construct a pedagogical methodology that, through the domestic appeal of the material managed to challenge the accepted teaching methods of her day” (p. 7). One of the criticisms of Montessori’s pedagogical approach is her use of the word “work” to denote children’s activities. This word appears to challenge the widely held notion that childhood should be play based and not work based (Kennedy & Duncan, 2006). C. P. Edwards (2003) recognised that Montessori’s work influenced Loris Malaguzzi as he developed the pedagogy of Reggio Emilia.

Another educational approach was developed by Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925), an Austrian educator, writer and philosopher. His philosophies were applied in the creation of the Waldorf schools, with the aim of bringing up free humans who knew how to direct their own lives. Steiner believed that individuals and society were part of a larger spiritual world, and that by realising the spirituality of children, they will in turn help to create a spiritually enhanced world (Ensign, 1996). Steiner developed the concept of ‘anthroposophy’ which he named as the science of spirituality, a path of knowledge which guides the spiritual in the human being to the spiritual in the universe. Steiner believed that a person has an innate spirituality coming from the Ocean of God, which develops according to that person’s ultimate destiny or Karma. He asserted that a learning environment must take into consideration not to damage a child’s soul which is the part that will live on in re-incarnation (Steiner, 1913).

Steiner regarded children as operating within three distinct time periods: from birth to seven, from seven to 14 and 14 to 21. He saw a link between body functions and the periods. For example, the loss of baby teeth signalled an outward manifestation of an inner transformation of the body, (Ensign, 1996). The characteristics of a Steiner early childhood classroom consisted of children having the same teacher for the first eight years of their schooling, an emphasis on art and creativity as well as a focus on making things with the hands such as knitting and woodwork. Steiner believed that enhanced consciousness was latent in everyone and was developed through appropriate training of the mind (Reinsmith, 1990).

Both Montessori and Steiner made a significant contribution to the field of childhood spirituality and the implication this view has had upon educational settings. While there are similarities between the philosophical approaches of both Montessori and Steiner in terms of the development of children's inner capacities and the belief that spirituality is an innate part of children's persona, Steiner's view was underpinned by an entire cosmology that saw children interconnected with the physical and spiritual worlds (Reinsmith, 1990).

I will now examine the philosophy of Reggio Emilia and in particular the three tenets of inter-subjectivity, creativity and reflective practice and how they may assist in the opportunities for spiritual development in young children. Reggio Emilia was the underlying philosophical framework of the ELC research site.

2.6.1 The Reggio Emilia philosophy and inter-subjectivity.

The first tenet to be explored is the REP notion of inter-subjectivity. This tenet differs from Hay and Nye's (2006) understanding of Relational Consciousness in that the former relates to interactions between children and other children and educators, or between children and other adults in the classroom, rather than including other aspects of relationships such as the individual's relationship with themselves, with the outside world, or with the transcendent (Rinaldi, 2006).

Malaguzzi the founding father of the Reggio Emilia educational theory, stated in an interview with Lella Gandini that the most human thing about being human is inter-subjectivity, which he defined as "arriving at a mutual understanding of what others have in mind" (C. Edwards et al., 2012, p. xviii). He believed that, without this, "all of our intentional attempts at teaching something would fail" (C. Edwards et al., 2012, p. xviii). He continued: "Relationships and learning coincide within an active process of education. They come together through the expectations and skills of children, the professional competence and

more generally the educational process” (2012, p. 44). Malaguzzi defined “relationship” as not just a “warm, protective envelope” but rather as a “dynamic conjunction of forces and elements interacting toward a common purpose” (2012, p. 45).

Two research projects that focus upon REP and inter-subjectivity and have applicability to this study are Freeman (2011) and Chicken and Maynard (2010). Freeman’s research was an instrumental case study involving family day care centres in three Ohio counties (USA). The family day care centres all used the philosophies of REP to underpin their provision of care. Interviews with caregivers responsible for children aged two to five were undertaken to ascertain their perspectives on children’s growth and development. The research identified four key areas: responsiveness, children’s play, reflection, and didactic teaching. Responsiveness related to the educator’s ability to stay focused upon the child and their interests. In relation to children’s play, the study drew upon the work of Vygotskian-inspired scholars Bodrova and Leong (2007), who viewed play as having an important role in the development of abstraction, thought, imagination and self-regulation.

In Freeman’s study, the role of reflection arose as an important activity, with educators and caregivers reflecting upon their own experiences and observations. However, this activity did not appear to extend to creating opportunities for children to reflect on their experiences. Freeman’s final finding relates to the way in which the educators/caregivers either set the agenda and provided options for children’s play, or were guided by the children’s own interests and ideas. Freeman (2011) surmised that children are given a great deal of freedom to make their own choices and she believes that that may be due to the fact that play occurs within family homes where educators/caregivers are not constrained by a formal classroom setting.

While the focus of the Freeman study was the perspectives of educators/caregivers on children’s growth and development, its relevance to the current study is its particular focus on sociocultural theory and how it is embedded within the pedagogy of REP. It also takes REP out of the formal classroom and into alternative settings. Freeman’s study viewed inter-subjectivity as a one-way process from adults to children, which provides a limited view of the relationships that existed at that time.

A Welsh-based study that focused upon REP early learning centres was conducted by Chicken and Maynard (2010). The study examined the implementation of REP-based pedagogies in infant and toddler early learning centres. The participants in the Chicken and Maynard study were seven teachers who were working in five schools. Since this research

was also underpinned by sociocultural approaches, the teachers were viewed as partners in the research process. Four key findings emerged concerning the image of the child, projects, the role of the teacher, and documentation, respectively.

In the first finding with respect to a child's image, many teachers perceived the term "a strong child" as having a negative connotation that denoted a headstrong child. The second finding concerned educator experiences of projects and reflected Freeman's (2010) approach of communication from teachers to children as a one-way path. The teachers found it challenging to allow the focus and direction of the project to be guided by the children. Initially, they were able to release control and allow the children to direct projects but soon became frustrated with the slow progress the children were making. The third finding involved the role of the teacher, in particular, deciding whether correcting children's misinformation was in the spirit of REP and should it be done or not. The final finding involved teacher perceptions of documentation, which many viewed as "displays" intended to celebrate the products of achievements and as a form of accountability to parents and the rest of the school community.

As with Freeman's (2010) study, inter-subjectivity was predominantly seen as a one-way flow of information from educators to children rather than as a dynamic, two-way exchange, thus providing a limited view of inter-subjectivity that failed to demonstrate a collaborative approach where the children's views and ideas were taken seriously.

The Chicken and Maynard (2010) research addressed a number of issues confronting early learning centres (ELCs) that underpinned their pedagogical approaches with the philosophies of REP. As the results indicated, key tenets of the philosophy were not accurately implemented nor was there a focus upon the role of active listening to aid children in making meaning from their experiences. Creativity was mentioned only in relation to documentation and not seen as an important part of children's growth and development.

Little research appears to have been conducted linking a concept of spirituality with the REP concept and the practice of inter-subjectivity. The definition and implementation of inter-subjectivity is narrow and the potential exists for greater insights into children's lived experience of spirituality were the term to be broadened to include other relationships and where communication to be conducted as a dynamic, two-way flow.

2.6.2 The Reggio Emilia philosophy and creativity.

The second tenet of REP to be explored is that of creativity. In his interview with Lella Gandini (Rinaldi, 2006), Malaguzzi outlined his beliefs about the role creativity plays in children's early education. Of note to this project is his view that the most favourable situation for creativity seems to be interpersonal exchange. Malaguzzi saw inter-subjectivity as linked intrinsically with creativity in his assertion that, if building and sustaining relationships is considered as the foundation for learning, then creativity must always be present. He believed that creativity emerged when children are invited to venture beyond the known. He also observed that creativity appeared to emerge from multiple experiences (C. Edwards et al., 2012). Malaguzzi's view demonstrates a multi-layered approach to creativity that resides not just in creating a picture or a drawing but is a much more complex phenomenon that emerges from interactions between individuals.

A Turkish study undertaken by Gencer and Gonen (2014) examined 18 six-year-olds attending a preschool, where they introduced an REP-based curriculum for a period of three months and tested the children's creative thinking skills both at the beginning and the end of the period. They defined creativity as not just developing new ideas or a new product but also as "synthesizing what was already known so as to produce something new" (2014, p. 457) – a view which reflects Vygotsky (2004) theory of creativity. The Torrance Test of Creative Thinking was employed as a data collection tool to measure fluency, originality and flexibility in the children at both the commencement and the conclusion of the study period. At the end of the three months of increased creative activities, both the boys and the girls produced improved fluency, originality and flexibility scores, thereby demonstrating the importance of creativity as not only a function of cognition but also of overall growth and development.

The Gencer and Gonen (2014) study was vague as to what creative activities they encouraged the children to participate in – only painting was mentioned. This study regarded creativity as a discrete, separate entity in children's growth and development and did not link it to a more integrated view of the child or as a means to assist children in nurturing their spirituality. Thus, the Gencer and Gonen study did not see creativity as a relational activity but rather as something the children did independently. Moreover, no Reflective Practices were employed to help children examine their creative activities and the meanings they ascribed to them.

The research study that is the subject of this thesis sought to see creativity as a central dimension of young children's spirituality and linked with Reflective Practice.

A smaller, US-based case study (Biermeier, 2015) examined the use of provocations in nature to encourage young children's creativity. For instance, when a spider's web was found in the playground, it sparked a discussion between the children and their teachers. The children were then invited to draw a picture of the web and small-group discussions ensued wherein educators asked open-ended questions to elicit the children's knowledge and enable them to share it in a safe environment. In one of the key findings of the study, Biermeier (2015, p. 76) found that teaching became a "two-way relationship in which the teacher's understanding of the child is just as important as the child's understanding of the teacher" (p. 76). While not focused upon spirituality, Biermeier's research study demonstrated that the combination of Reflective Practice with creative activities enabled the EC educators to identify areas of the children's growth and development.

Creativity and Imagination is regarded as an important tenet of the REP framework that is deeply connected to inter-subjectivity. However, Creativity and Imagination cannot be seen in isolation; it occurs when children interact with other children and with adults in the form of Relational Consciousness and in the process of Reflective Practice.

2.6.3 The Reggio Emilia philosophy and Reflective Practice.

This section outlines the third REP tenet of reflective practice. Reflective Practice is normally considered as a tool solely employed by EC educators to evaluate their own performance and the delivery of the curriculum (Paige-Smith & Craft, 2011). However, it can also be a tool that can assist children to make meaning from their events and experiences, which then further facilitates their own growth and development.

Reflection plays a central role in the philosophy of the REP educational framework and the praxis through which to achieve this is listening. There are two aspects to listening: the REP's pedagogy of listening and active listening. The REP's pedagogy of listening was outlined earlier in the chapter, but for the purposes of this study, I would like to also include the notion of active listening as outlined by Weger, Castle, and Emmett (2010). First, the listener conveys non-verbal involvement with unconditional attention; second, the listener reflects back what he or she has heard both in the form of content and feelings to demonstrate awareness and understanding; and third, the listener asks questions to encourage the speaker to provide additional information.

Reggio Emilia philosophy practitioners see listening as a way of achieving an important objective of the search for meaning. The role of educators is to ask themselves how they can help children find meaning in what they do, what they encounter, and what they

experience. As C. Edwards et al. (2012) state, listening also forms the basis for any learning relationship: “Action and reflection learning takes shape in the mind of the subject, and, through representation and exchange, becomes knowledge and skill” (C. Edwards et al., 2012, pp. 234-235).

The process of reflective thinking is not only a re-sequencing of ideas but rather treats one idea as a consequence of another so that they form a chain, a consecutive ordering of ideas, where each idea determines the next and that idea refers back to its predecessors. In other words, the reflective process allows individuals to make sense of the order and importance of events and experiences (Dewey, 1933).

One research project involved examining two REP educators as they worked with prior-to-school-aged children and undertook creative activities. They drew on a number of data sources and artefacts such as photos, observations, teachers’ reflective journals, and collaboration sessions (Parnell, 2011). One of the complexities that emerged was that deep active listening often pushed educators out of their comfort zones. As they listened and talked to each other about issues raised in the school, they recognised the necessity for adopting a stance of not knowing and being open to being challenged.

Research conducted by Davies et al. (2004, p. 11) with regard to the role of listening to children by educators reflected this. The authors define active listening as “a practice that responds to that creative force and taps into teachers’ own exploratory creative life force” (2004, p. 120). They also recognised that deep and active listening required courage to abandon preconceived ideas and the knowledge that our being is just a small part of a broader knowledge. Listening meant opening up to the possibility of individuals seeing themselves and others in new and surprising ways. Davies et al. (2004) saw the role of listening as a double movement wherein one comes to see differently and becomes no longer the person one was before.

This concept also aligned with the spiritual aspects of reflection outlined by Goodliff (2013a), specifically those Reflective Practices leading to reflective consciousness and potential transformation of the individual. Moreover, it aligned with the reflection process with cultural historic theory that describes the process as a mental process that enabled individuals to engage with concrete and abstract objects in the world. This, in turn, allowed learners to learn with intent and purpose and become aware of what they know and what they do not (Kravtsova & Kravtsova, 2009). This process did not belong to one individual or child

but rather existed in an inter-psychic form emerging from the whole group or class (Davydov, Slobodchikov, & Tsukerman, 2003).

One of the educators' criticisms of the use of the Reggio Emilia philosophy is their level of knowledge of the philosophical framework. There is a growing use of the REP in both early learning centres and primary school classrooms, yet educators do not always have a deep understanding of the philosophy, especially the strong image of the child (New, 2009). Early childhood educators can have trouble distinguishing the difference between the original philosophy and their own socio political and cultural contexts and many educators adapt some of the principles of the REP in their classrooms without formally claiming to be a REP ELC. Ardzejewska and Coutt's (2004) Australian study found that educators often implemented only a few REP practices and don't always have a clear understanding of how the REP differs from other child-centred philosophies.

The section above examines the early childhood approaches of Montessori, Steiner and REP. Montessori and Steiner are very explicit about children's spirituality being an important part of children's identity and are central to their approaches. Yet, the definitions of spirituality given by both Montessori and Steiner doesn't allow for other interpretations or possibilities. Steiner's view of spirituality is contained within a religious framework and Montessori's within a more medical or scientific framework. This restricts and limits an understanding of spirituality. It also mandates that educators must be familiar with this limited view in order to recognise or nurture spirituality. The REP does not make mention of spirituality yet many of the practices provide possibilities for spirituality to be explored particularly through the relational or inter-subjectivity aspects of praxis. As REP is based upon a sociocultural framework, it allows for multiple understandings between educators and between educators and children. Taking the Goodliff (2013a) lens with which this study is using as a starting point and applying to the three approaches, it becomes clear that no one approach is a perfect fit. Steiner and Montessori approaches value spirituality yet contain it within a narrow understanding and REP while providing potential for spirituality does not name it explicitly.

A comprehensive study of the literature included the ProQuest Education database, which showed a lack of research examining young children's spirituality within an REP location. Given that the research question informing this study was what is the lived experience of spirituality of young children within an ELC that draws upon the philosophical framework of the Reggio Emilia educational framework in a natural outdoor environment, it was important to establish what research, if any, had been previously been conducted. The

review of the literature reveals that there are a number of different aspects of REP that have the potential to impact and nurture young children's spirituality, yet there is a lack of comprehensive research to establish the fact as well as an apparent lack of desire to be explicit about the link between the REP and spirituality. This research project examined this link and drew on REP practices to demonstrate how they can be used to recognise and nurture the spirituality of young children's spirituality.

The next section reviews the literature and research that has been undertaken in the area of Vygotsky's (1994) concept of *perezhivanie* and establishes whether it has been applied to young children's spirituality.

2.6.4 Studies using Vygotsky's (1994) concept of *perezhivanie*.

The concept of *perezhivanie* (1994), a process for deriving sense and meaning from experiences and events through a Reflective Practice, was outlined in the introduction and is further explored in Chapter 3. However, examining the literature concerning the concept was important in order to ascertain its use in research in the area of children's spirituality.

In one of the few research projects drawing upon Vygotsky's theory of *perezhivanie*, Fakhrutdinova (2010) recruited 650 students from Tatar State University in Kazan, Russia, for his study. The study used custom-designed test questionnaires, visual prompts, and psychometric procedures to explore reflective consciousness and experience within an understanding of *perezhivanie*. Fakhrutdinova (2010) found that the reflective level of consciousness enabled individuals to encounter their own true inner selves and natures, and to see themselves as interconnected with the outside world. He saw this specific point as providing the connection with indicators of *perezhivanie* as well as the connection to areas of psychology such as the inner and unconscious parts of an individual. It was at this point that another discovery emerged: this inner work had greatly impacted on the development of personality, with the individual beginning to ask more profound questions concerning meaning and existence such as "Where am I in all of this?", "Who am I?", "What is my nature?", and "What is my purpose?" (Fakhrutdinova (2010, p. 39). According to Fakhrutdinova (2010), posing such questions enables an individual to encounter his or her true self and their relationship with the outside world so as to feel rooted in the world but still a separate, unique being with his or her own fate.

Fakhrutdinova (2010) surmised that this process is also spiritual, and that it sets us apart from animals. He asserted that the process is somewhat alien, and yet it is extraordinarily familiar – at the same time very much "ours", yet unrecognisable for us. He

believed that this synthesised state contained an element of mystery, which is not easy to explain or describe. Fakhrutdinova (2010) concluded his findings by stating that individual “perezhivanie” is associated with “core” structures of the mind, its selfhood, and also with higher forms of reflective consciousness: “Such dichotomous relations reveal a spiritual aspect of perezhivanie by means of which a person’s individuation is achieved, his becoming, self-realization, and self-discovery of the outer limits of his being” (2010, p. 45).

The Fakhrutdinova (2010) study, which demonstrated a direct correlation between the process of perezhivanie and spirituality, is unique in its application of the perezhivanie concept to the field of spirituality. In this context, the perezhivanie process is employed as a tool for recognising and nurturing the lived experience of spirituality, which is a unique use of the process and one that is further explored in this thesis.

An Australian-based research project recently studied the use of perezhivanie in EC settings, with the telling and sharing of fairy tales to support emotion regulation in group settings. This was an original application of the perezhivanie concept and the first that I had come across that places the process in an EC setting. Fler and Hammer (2013) began with the EYLF (*Belonging, Being and Becoming: Early Years Learning Framework*, 2009) and the provision was for EC educators to focus upon the emotional development of the children in their care. Areas of overlap exist between these objectives and the provision of spiritual nurture, particularly with respect to “Learning Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity” (p. 8); “Learning Outcome 2: Children are connected and contribute to their world” (p. 12); and “Learning Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing” (p. 17). Importantly, the research identified that, although these are stated as expected outcomes, little to no guidance is provided for EC educators. Despite the huge body of literature discussing emotional competence, “We note that emotion regulation in group settings is still an under-theorised and researched area” (Fler and Hammer (2013, p. 128). [Fler and Hammer](#) believed that early education needed to move away from an understanding of parental emotion and towards a theory of action that can inform early education. Thus, there are direct parallels and implications for the field of early childhood spirituality; it, too, requires a coordinated effort to create a theory of action in order to equip EC educators with the skills to be able to recognise and nurture the spirituality of prior-to-school-aged children.

In the study, fairy tales were considered as cultural devices that would encourage children to make conscious their feeling states. Early childhood educators were encouraged to share the fairy tales, and then discuss how the stories might relate to the children’s lives so as to enable them to explore their feelings. In one study finding, EC educators had intentionally

engaged in shared and sustained conversation with the children, which enabled the latter to explore their emotions in a safe and nurturing environment. The study also explored the relationship between emotions, cognition, and imagination in a way that was relevant to the research study that is the subject of this thesis. Fler and Hammer (2013) drew on Vygotsky's (1987) understanding that emotions continue to exist alongside intellectual development, and do not diminish as an individual's intellectual development continues. Vygotsky (1987) believed that emotions are always present in all cognitive and imaginative contexts. The Fler and Hammer (2013) study found that when children entered into the role-playing of a fairy-tale, they more strongly felt the emotions evoked by the story.

Moreover, through social interactions between children, emotions are named and interpreted as feelings, and thus emotions become conscious through these social relations (Fler & Hammer, 2013). Thus, an important finding of the Fler and Hammer (2013) project was that how children express, feel, name, and understand emotions relies entirely upon the culture of the community in which they reside.

The Fler and Hammer (2013) study opened the way for the concept of *perezhivanie* to be applied to group settings within early learning centres. It also emphasised the importance of the role of educators in creating the environment and intention for Reflective Practice.

Given that the setting of the research study of this thesis is an outdoor learning environment, it was important to also review the literature that exists in the area of nature and young children's spirituality.

2.7 Role of Nature in Children's Spiritual Experiences

This section examines the role the outdoor environment plays in children's development and education in general and in their spiritual experiences and development in particular. I first became aware of the potential of the natural world in exploring children's development through the work of C. Smith (2009), who regards nature as helping each person become that person he or she had the potential to be.

These insights into the potential of the natural world contributed to the design of this research project and motivated me to extend the research context to outside the classroom into a more natural setting. Three areas of research are relevant to this aspect of the study: children's development and learning, forest schools, and ecological education.

2.7.1 Children's development and learning.

There has been a significant change in the nature of children's play in the West over the past century, with a sharp decline in opportunities for outdoor play (T. Waller & Bitou, 2011) coupled with global threat of climate change (Davis, 2012; Elliott, 2012; C. Smith, 2009). Educators must address a number of significant issues when taking the classroom outside: the lack of clear guidance with respect to conducting outdoor pedagogy; the potential differences in perceptions of the outdoors held by children and adults; the role of sustainability education and the ambiguity of the role practitioners play in the outside environment (Chawla, 1998). Thus, some confusion exists within this pedagogical area.

A research project entitled "The Outdoor Learning Project" (OLP) was conducted in two different settings in England and Wales in 2005 (T. Waller & Bitou, 2011). The first setting was a state nursery school that greatly emphasised the outdoor learning environment and provided the children with a large garden area as well as weekly educatory trips to a large country park. The second group studied consisted of primary school children who did not have access to a garden during the normal school day but had regular access to a woodland area approximately 1.5 kilometres from the school (Tim Waller, 2008). The research used a mosaic approach (A. Clark & Moss, 2005) to collect data in the form of observations, video and photographic evidence.

The findings from the Bitou and Waller (2011) study indicated that, initially, practitioners were very concerned about safety in the outdoor settings but soon grew more comfortable. They also expressed their appreciation for being able to spend more quality time with the children. They noted that the children were also more likely to expect an answer from practitioners outdoors than inside the classroom. Practitioners were surprised that once children had spent more time in an outdoor setting, they were more likely to go outside in inclement weather. What emerged from the study was a co-construction of knowledge between the practitioners and the children that happened more readily in the outdoor environment than in the indoor one. The OLP strongly reflected the sociocultural aspects of the co-construction of knowledge as well as the importance of reflective activities in the outdoor environments between practitioners and children. The T. Waller and Bitou (2011) study highlighted the lack of guidelines that exist for educators when taking children into an outdoor environment.

One of the rare studies relating to children's expressions of spirituality in the natural environment was conducted by Van Wieren and Kellert (2013). This study involved a small number of children and employed a range of research methods including in-depth interviews, subjective testing, and observation of children in the natural environment. The study findings

were divided into two different attributes: aesthetic and spiritual values of nature. Under the heading “aesthetic”, the researchers included beauty, pattern and order, and wonder and discovery (p. 5). Under the heading “spiritual value”, they included solace and peacefulness, commonality and connection, happiness and a feeling of being at home in nature, recognition of a power greater than oneself, and a sense of a divine presence and mystery (p. 3). Interviews were conducted with 10 seven- to eight-year-old children from 10 different families in and near Lansing, Michigan, between 2010 and 2011.

Emerging from the Van Wieren and Kellert (2013) study was a vast array of spiritual experiences, many of which related to the four dimensions of spirituality as outlined in the introduction. One of the dominant themes was creativity or the ability for free play in nature. This study was one of the few that addressed the concept of children’s lived experience of spirituality within the natural world and so provided a body of knowledge with which to compare and contrast findings. While the study was not sociocultural in its approach, it did point to a growing interest in childhood spiritual experiences and the natural world. The primary focus of the Van Wieren and Kellert (2013) study was thus individual reactions and responses to nature rather than a constructed understanding of nature.

The research study conducted for this thesis attempted to take a broader view of spirituality to incorporate the dimensions of: (1) Relational Consciousness; (2) Reflective Practice; (3) Creativity and Imagination; and (4) Transcendence (incorporating awe, wonder and mystery) in order to create a new framework of young children’s spirituality.

A Melbourne-based research project undertaken by Dixon and Day (2005) involved six prior-to-school-aged children from three Melbourne-based ELCs. Their study occurred in both the indoor and outdoor environments of the ELCs as well as during an excursion to Melbourne’s Royal Botanical Gardens. In the course of their research, the authors identified seven ways that children interact with nature: collecting loose natural materials; seeing nature as a setting for exploration and play; collecting, hunting and gathering; recalling memorable experiences; exploring unrestrictedly; exploring power; and providing a place for children and adult interaction.

The Dixon and Day (2005) study, while not explicit in its use of sociocultural theory, did incorporate a key sociocultural element – the role of reflective activities and practices in recalling memorable experiences – though they did not explain why this was important. The researchers did see the outdoor environment as a place for play, but stopped short of exploring the role of this environment in the exercise of Creativity and Imagination or spirituality.

The studies described in this section highlight the changes that have been made to children's play and the move away from outdoor play. The consequences of this trend in children's growth, development and spirituality have not yet been adequately studied. Pedagogical guidelines for EC educators are unclear and the literature review revealed a hesitation among EC educators as to how to teach children in the outdoors.

The next section examines one area of young children's education and the outdoor learning environment – that of and its possible application to the research project that is the subject of this thesis.

2.7.2 Forest schools.

One approach to address the decline in the amount of time children spend in an outdoor environment is the forest school (FS) program in which provision is made for a place that provides children with the freedom to roam in a natural setting (McKinney, 2012). The FS concept has children as young as three and four spending the majority of their day in the outdoors in a forest, where they are given the freedom to play and make their own decisions. Educators ensure the children stay safe and assist in creating an environment of trust so that they are able to develop skills, knowledge and capabilities. Forest schools are predominantly located in the northern hemisphere – in the UK, Europe and Canada.

Within Australia, there is an adaptation of this concept called “bush kindergartens”, which has begun. One of the first to be established is the Westgarth Bush Kindergarten located in suburban Melbourne. Kindergarten for the three- to five-year-olds attending this ELC is held in a nearby bush area every Wednesday regardless of the weather. The space does not have formal boundaries; instead, it is defined by a fallen tree, a nest tree, the pointing tree, and boomerang hill (Dorrat, 2011).

Forest schools and bush kindergartens have six additional benefits. “First, children experience increased levels of self-confidence and self-belief that they have developed from the freedom, time and space they have been given to learn, grow and demonstrate independence. Second, children attain an increased awareness of the consequences of their actions on other people, peers and adults. Third, children develop a keenness to participate in exploratory learning and play activities as well as forging an ability to focus on specific tasks for extended periods of time. Fourth, stamina and gross motor skills are improved through free-and-easy movement and the making of things. Fifth, children develop an increased respect for the environment and an interest in natural surroundings. And lastly, teachers and

other adults see children in different settings, which improves their understanding and ability to identify individual learning styles” (McKinney, 2012, p. 27).

The benefits that the forest schools offer have several direct correlations to the key tenets of the REP. For example, the first benefit relating to self-confidence and belief, and the second advantage relating to children’s increased awareness of themselves and those around them, correlate with the REP’s concept of inter-subjectivity. The emphasis of the REP on time spent in reflection in small and large groups enables young children to revisit experiences and events of the day, sharing their own perspectives as well as hearing from others who were also present. Open-ended questions encourage exploration and the sharing of ideas.

The value that the REP places upon the role of creativity resonates with the third and fourth benefits that have been mentioned, particularly the freedom children are given to explore different environments using different materials. The time children are given to work and play at their own pace facilitates a deepening of understanding.

One key contributor in the field of outdoor education is Warden (2012), who began her own nature kindergarten in Scotland. It involves small numbers of mixed-age children participating in an eco-friendly, sustainable living style. Her aim is to consider children’s inner and outer lives by building high emotional resilience and a positive self-image. Her image of the child is one of a motivated thinker, capable and competent, who is eminently capable of self-preservation. The methodology underpinning her nature kindergarten is that “nature creates the context and the curriculum comes from it in a more planned activity-driven day” (2012, p. 16). Two key aspects of Warden’s approach are the roles of silence and of open-ended questions in reflective activities. She links her belief that silence enables the brain to reflect and consider new information and assimilate or discard information according to its relevance with Vygotsky’s (1986) concept of silent inner speech.

Warden (2012) believed that facilitating maturation as defined by Vygotsky (1978) is vital to children’s development. According to Vygotsky, maturation occurs when there is a transition from events occurring externally to the child to silent inner speech. In this context, thoughts and ideas are internalised and children choose to express or not to express those thoughts and ideas. Warden (2012) asserted that one of the important benefits that nature provides individuals is the silence in which to perform this processing and to develop silent inner speech. The role of practitioners, then, is to trust in this process.

Warden (2012) considered the posing of open-ended questions in a reflective way as vital in assisting children to make meaning from life’s events. She believed such questions

should be designed to provoke thought rather than to test knowledge, and the process by which this is done creates an important partnership marked by exploration and discovery that encourages higher-order thinking. Another important aspect of Warden's research was the recognition that re-visiting experiences with children over time assists them to assimilate knowledge, concepts and attitudes. While Warden did not explicitly use the word "spirituality", many of the tenets of her pedagogical approach could be employed to assist in nurturing young children's spirituality. Her emphasis on sociocultural theory as a way to help understand children's growth and development and her use of Reflective Practice have contributed to an understanding of children's play in the outdoor environment.

The FS model places importance on children spending large amounts of time in the outdoor environment. It articulates a number of key reasons why this is important for children's growth and development. The next section examines the role of ecological education in research.

2.7.3 Ecological education.

A rapidly growing area of research over recent decades has been children's ecological or environmental education. Given that the care of the environment has become such an important issue within the wider society and the world, it is important that the curriculum for young children reflects this. Researchers such as Stephenson (2010); Little, Sandsetter, and Wyver (2012); Davis (2012); Elliott (2012) and Cutter-MacKenzie and Edwards (2011) have all recognised the importance of providing young children with education concerning the environment.

Within Australia, Davis (2012) believed that sustainability issues are important for young children. In a research project examining the impacts of a water education program she stated that "not only can young children learn about environmental issues, they can and do take action to change their behaviour in educational settings and at home. Children can learn to be resilient and positive about the state of the world and their role in shaping it" (p. 25).

Cutter-MacKenzie and Edwards (2011) examined the role play-based learning has in children's environmental education. They recognised the Australian Government's EYLF's (*Belonging, Being and Becoming: Early Years Learning Framework*, 2009) call for increased environmental awareness in young children but not specifically for sustainability education. Drawing upon a 2008 amendment to the UNESCO agreement, Cutter-Mackenzie and S. Edwards (2011) argue that simply taking children outside and allowing them to enjoy the outdoor world is insufficient; instead, they call for a more integrated, play-based education

concerning sustainability. Appreciation of nature by children is an important step and yet education regarding the issue of sustainability also needs to be included. While their research did not contain a spiritual element, it did recognise the importance of nature in children's growth and development.

Elliott (2012) called for children to have "deep authentic experience in nature as a foundation for young children's holistic and healthy growth and development" (p. 61). While Elliott does not specifically mention spirituality she stated that natural play spaces "create a deeper sense of connectedness, and can fulfil innate drives, promote feelings of agency or empowerment and helps to develop a child's sense of place in the world" (p. 61). While the focus of the thesis is not sustainability education but rather play in the outdoor learning environment, it is important to acknowledge the contribution that Elliott (2012) and Davis (2012) have made in the field.

The importance of ecological education was an important area for C. Smith (2009), who recognised the link between time in nature and young children's spirituality. She defined the trans-disciplinary field of education for sustainability (EfS), whose goal is to foster an approach to life emphasising environmental stewardship. This field also includes a spiritual dimension. Thus Smith calls for an integrated approach to sustainable education that encompasses cosmology, ecology and spirituality, all three of which constitute "eco-spirituality". Smith believes these three areas should provide the focus for children's education. The first draws upon the work of Thomas Berry, who regards the sense of awe and wonder at the magnificence of the universe as essentially a spiritual act. The second area is the relational science of ecology, systems theory, and neuroscience, which reflect a growing awareness of the inter-connectedness of nature and the earth. The third area is the recognition of humanity's destructive impact on the world's ecosystems. The implication of Smith's research is to see ecological education through the lens of spirituality and not as a separate topic. Thus, it not only recognises the importance of the natural world to humanity's ultimate survival but also the individual gift a connection with nature offers us all. What appear to be missing in the literature are studies that have combined the outdoor learning environment, young children's spirituality and the use of the REP.

The role of the outdoor learning environment is further discussed in Chapter 6. The next section reviews the literature in the area of young children and their capacity to engage in the deeper and more existential areas of life.

2.8 Children's Capacity to Address Existential Issues

As demonstrated by the Hart (2003) and Robinson (1983) studies, there is a perception in the literature that young children are not capable of engaging and exploring the larger existential questions of life. However, studies conducted by Champagne (2003) and Bone (2007) challenged this assertion. Champagne (2003) observed the *existential mode* in young children, which related to children's concept of time and space. She stated that "within time and space, within the existential quest of knowing through games, imitation, symbolism or imagination lies the unfolding of the child's existence, of his/her being-in-the-world" (2003, pp. 51-52). Champagne believes this mode of being is a dimension of young children's spirituality. Champagne's concept, however, constitutes a narrow view of existentialism and does not address the larger questions of life.

Two of the characteristics of the felt sense and intergrating awareness that Hyde (2008a) outlined in his research take an existential view; the third characteristic of weaving threads of meaning, tapped into children's inherent sense of awe and wonder, and the last characteristic, spiritual questing, was related to what is most important to children. Hyde defined weaving threads of meaning as the process of meaning-making that developed from children's expressions of awe and wonder. Drawing upon a wide range of ideas or threads, including the Catholic faith of their educational setting, enabled the children in Hyde's study to develop a personal framework, which then assisted them to make meaningful connections with the transcendent and others (Hyde, 2008b).

For Hyde (2008b), the idea of spiritual questing consisted of seeking experience of the "other" (that is, the supreme being or the transcendent) to gain a sense of life's meaning and purpose. Hyde regarded expressions of altruism and compassion for others and a sincere desire to find "authentic ways of being in the world" (2007, p. 125) as evidence of the existence of this other.

Similarly, Bone (2007) identified *spiritual elsewhere*, a creative and imaginative space, as a place of paradox where children felt truly free to be themselves and yet also saw themselves as connected to the larger world. Bone (2007) considered this state as an "unfixed position that can be conceptualized as a spiritual aspect of being young" (Bone, 2007, p. 195).

What is evident in the literature are many different approaches to the concept of existential questions, from an understanding of time and space to allowing children to ask the larger questions of life. Several researchers have viewed the feeling of wonder – a "constellation of experiences that can involve feelings of awe, connection, joy, insight and a

deep sense of reverence and love” (Hart, 2003, p. 48) – as an expression of spirituality in young children. Hart (2003), in particular, regards awe and wonder as a deeper reflection of the transcendent, “leading us to feel divinity firsthand ... and wonder helps us to see the sacred in the world” (2003, p. 48). In particular, for children, the capacity to be completely absorbed in the moment and experience the mystical shows us that the spiritual is not something “out there” but is present in the here and now. However, Hart’s study assumed that the role of adults and researchers is to deem what children should consider sacred rather than to work with children to assist them in exploring their feelings of awe and wonder and to discover what they view as sacred.

According to Heschel (1955), awe and wonder pointed to the divine, that is “to sense in small things the beginning of infinite significance” (p. 74). Yet these concepts are difficult to articulate. He stated that “the beginning of awe is wonder and the beginning of wisdom is awe” (1955, p. 75) Where do awe and wonder begin? Is it, as Wilson (2008) believes, the role of adults to share their own sense of awe and wonder, which can in turn “ignite and sustain a child’s love of nature” (2008, p. 43), or is it, as Hart (2003) declares, that “the greatest lessons that children have to teach adults is the power of awe” (2003, p. 61)?

Awe is addressed by Eade (2003), who regarded it as having two potential components: psychological and religious. Psychologically, awe involved moving from too great a dominance by the ego and religiosity and recognising our place in the wider context. He stated that spirituality has two characteristics: perspective and independence. Unless individuals free themselves from the dominance of the ego, they will lose a sense of perspective. Eade (2003) believed that spiritual experience is a search for identity and meaning that involves such questions as “Who am I?” and “Why am I here?” (p. 157).

Other explorations of awe and wonder appear to be grounded in religious experience, such as Otto as outlined in (Shah, 2011), who described reality as extra-subjective and at a point “where one (is) moved to feelings of devotion, awe, and reverence” (p. 290). Even Shah (2011), who uses the term “awe and wonder” extensively in the category of spirituality they name *mystery sensing*, offer little in the way of descriptions of awe in young children. They link awe and wonder to the mystery of the universe and children’s search for meaning and pattern. Instead, there appears to be a great deal of vagueness and the imposition of adult views of awe and wonder upon children.

2.9 Conclusion

Based upon my examination of the role of a sociocultural approach to research; researcher-children relationships; the perspectives of EC educators on the concept of spirituality; an examination of early childhood philosophical approaches to pedagogy; the outdoor learning environment in early childhood; and children's relationships with and perception of a transcendent deity or principle, several key observations that are applicable to my study can be made.

First, while there have been studies in the areas of the Reggio Emilia philosophy, the outdoor learning environment, and of early childhood education and spirituality, no study has explored the intersection of these four areas in an integrated way.

Second, the literature review has indicated the usefulness of a sociocultural approach to researching the area of young children's spirituality and its ability to provide insights that the fields of theology, philosophy, and science may lack. The sociocultural approach, in fact, would appear to be the most effective when spirituality is regarded as being constructed from the relationships children have with others rather than being imposed by the researcher, even if the researcher listens closely to what children say.

Third, although the four characteristics of spirituality as outlined by Hay and Nye (1996) – relationality, reflectiveness, creativity and Transcendence – have been examined and provide the dimensions of my understanding of spirituality in young children throughout the discussion of this study, in my opinion the role of Reflective Practice that can lead to reflective consciousness in the area of young children's spirituality requires further investigation. The literature review has demonstrated that the pedagogical practices of Reggio Emilia and Vygotsky's concept of *perezhivanie* offer great potential in the area of spirituality.

Lastly, the literature review has demonstrated the paucity of research in the area of nature and its ability to positively impact on young children's spiritual growth and development.

In the next chapter, I outline the theoretical approach that was used for the research study that is the subject of this thesis.

Chapter 3

Theory

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the sociocultural theoretical framework that underpinned the research study as well as providing the justification for why this theoretical approach was chosen. The study was grounded in a sociocultural understanding of the relationship between the world and the individual. Therefore, after providing an overview of some of the broad ideas in sociocultural theory stemming from the work of Lev Vygotsky, this chapter presents key tenets from Vygotsky's work that include cultural mediation, everyday and scientific concepts, consciousness, Creativity and Imagination, zone of proximal development (ZPD), and the Reflective Practice of *perezhivanie*. The chapter then explores the various interpretations of Vygotsky's ideas concerning the relationship between the individual and the world as offered by other scholars. More specifically, the chapter focuses explicitly on the work of Vygotsky (1962, 1978, 1981, 1982, 1986, 1987, 1994, 1998, 2004) and Hay and Nye (1996), whose perspectives on spirituality are informed by sociocultural theory.

Finally, I provide a basis for the use of Goodliff's (2013a) model which is underpinned by Vygotsky's socio cultural theory as a lens with which to examine young children's spirituality. Goodliff's model will form the basis for a new framework of spirituality that can be used by EC educators to recognise and nurture the spirituality of young children in order to assist the educators to fulfil their obligations under the EYLF (*Belonging, Being and Becoming: Early Years Learning Framework*, 2009).

3.2 The Origins of Sociocultural Theory

Vygotsky, who worked in Russia in the 1920s and 1930s, is considered the founder of sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1962, 1978, 1981, 1982, 1987, 1998). A number of terms are sometimes used interchangeably within Vygotsky's theory – *activity theory*, *cultural historical*, *sociocultural psychology*, *cultural historical theory*, and *CHAT* (*cultural, historical, activity theory*). These terms have arisen as researchers adopted and then adapted Vygotsky's theory into such diverse areas of study as education, organisational psychology, cognitive science, curriculum, teaching, and literacy (*Belonging, Being and Becoming: Early Years Learning Framework*, 2009). Of relevance to this study, in particular, are Vygotsky's concepts of cultural mediation, everyday versus scientific concepts, Creativity and Imagination, consciousness, ZPD, and *perezhivanie*.

Core concepts and assumptions within the field of sociocultural theory include the assumptions that the study of the human mind must be situated within applicable cultural and historical contexts and that learning cannot occur discretely from the culture in which it occurs. However, sociocultural theory is not concerned solely with the cultural aspects that relate to individuals but is, in fact, “a theory of mind... that recognizes the central role that social relationships and culturally constructed artefacts play in organizing uniquely human forms of thinking” (Lantolf, 2004, p. 30). Thus, a sociocultural approach allows for a much more integrated and holistic view of individuals, and theories within the sociocultural field emphasise the interaction between individuals and systems of artefacts rather than the individual learner operating in isolation.

3.2.1 Vygotsky’s background. Situating Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934) in the social, cultural, and historical context in which he was born and worked contributes to an understanding of him and how his theory was developed. A short overview of his life helps to contextualise his work. Vygotsky was born in Orsha in the Russian Empire (now Belarus) into a Jewish family. At a time when only a select number of Jewish students were allowed to enter university, he completed a law degree before moving into the field of psychology. During much of his life, Vygotsky lived under the rule of the Bolsheviks and so was politically active in working towards major social transformation.

During the Russian Revolution of the 1920s, Russia underwent an intense social upheaval, with the political climate directly informed by the writings of Karl Marx. In 1924, Vygotsky was employed by the People’s Commissariat for Public Education, where he worked with the poorest of children, many of whom were homeless. While there, he came to view the existing education system as needing a radical overhaul so that all children could be educated. He argued that this new educational system could emerge from the new social understanding then dawning in Russia (Lantolf, 2004, pp. 30-31).

Through many experiments conducted with his students Leontiev and Luria regarding learning and development of young children and adolescents, Vygotsky came to believe that children develop as social beings in community with others (Daniels, 2005, p. 3). Moreover, for Vygotsky, early childhood represents the beginning of an individual’s interpretation of the world around them.

After Vygotsky’s death in 1934, the Soviet government, viewing his theories as incongruent with Marxist philosophies and too influenced by the works of such Western thinkers as Spinoza, Piaget, Freud, and Watson, suppressed them (Vygotsky, 1998, pp. 30-

31). Not until the late 1970s did Russian researchers revisit his theories and make them available to the wider world. Eventually translated into English, his writings became well known in the West with the publication of *Thought and Language* in 1962. Since that time, Vygotsky's work has continued to "influence research in a wide variety of basic and applied areas related to cognitive processes, their development and dissolution" (Newman & Holzman, 2002). With relevance to this study, his theories have also underpinned much research within the field of spirituality by researchers such as Cole and Scribner (1978, p. 10), Nye (1996), Hay and Nye (1996) and Bone (2007).

3.2.2 Vygotsky's theories. Vygotsky is not without his critics, and, in his enthusiasm for Western pedagogy, for instance, L. Johnson (1986) believed he "failed to formulate a proper theory of elementary mental process; he overlooked the role of syntax in language; he proposed a radical discontinuity between evolutionary and cultural processes that is incompatible with anthropological evidence" (p. 879). While Johnson may be correct from an anthropological stance, what Vygotsky offered researchers was an alternative to the prevailing influence of Piaget.

Piaget also took a constructivist approach, placing children at the centre of their learning. He regarded action and self-directed problem-solving to be central to children's growth and development. As outlined by P. Miller (2011):

Through millions of transactions with the environment and reflections on these transactions, children move from an understanding of the world based on action schemes, to one based on representations, to one based on internalized, organized operations. The beauty of this is that it is orderly. (p. 165)

Where Piaget differed from Vygotsky was in his assumption that the move from the physical to higher mental functions was child centred; Vygotsky regarded this move as involving adults or more skilled children in the form of a ZPD. Piaget also asserted that development preceded learning. In Piaget's view, children followed a standard sequence of biological stages that formed a path to maturity. In contrast, Vygotsky (1978) argued that learning precedes and largely determines the course of the developmental process, with children learning as they interact with others in a social setting.

Vygotsky considered children's development as such a complex process that it could not be reduced to simple categories or traits and claimed that knowledge developed as a result of social interactions within a particular cultural and historical context. Therefore, children cannot be separated from the culture in which they reside; rather, "child development is such

a complex process that it cannot be determined at all completely according to one trait alone at any stage” (Vygotsky, 1998, p. 188).

Vygotsky postulated four central tenets in his process of development and learning: learning is always situated and should be viewed in an historical context; change is constant and most clearly seen at times of qualitative transformation; transformation takes place through the unification of contradictory distinctive processes; and that these unifications need to be analysed as a whole or in a holistic way.

As a consequence of these tenets, Vygotsky saw meaning as a unifying concept having individual form, and that understanding the social relations within a child’s environment is necessary in order to understand children’s meaning-making.

Critical periods in children’s lives, accompanied by changes in individual processes and social relations, often lead to crises during which internal patterns of thinking and logic are more clearly revealed. One of these critical periods is the transition from home to school. At this time, new mental formations associated with the personality develop in language, thinking and verbal skills, and these formations, which also influence the child’s character, personality and consciousness, become the driving force behind the transition from one level to the next (Vygotsky, 1987).

At approximately three years of age, children first become aware of the objective environment through speech and social interaction. Created through their relationships with others, an awareness of their subjective environment that changes their way of perceiving and experiencing their world then develops. During this period, differentiating between their internal and external lives helps children understand themselves in relation to others and make the transition to school (Vygotsky, 1998).

The next section outlines Vygotsky’s core ideas and their relevance to this research project.

3.2.2.1 Cultural mediation. The concept of cultural mediation, which explores interactions with and through social, cultural, and historical factors in the course of ongoing human activity (Vygotsky, 1998), was central to Vygotsky’s view of social formation. He outlined two forms of mediation: implicit and explicit. *Implicit mediation* involves signs and natural language and is thus primarily concerned with communication, whereas *explicit mediation* is the incorporation of signs into human action as a means of reorganising that

action. Vygotsky represented this in the form of a triangle with artefacts at the apex, the subject at the lower left point, and the object at the lower right.

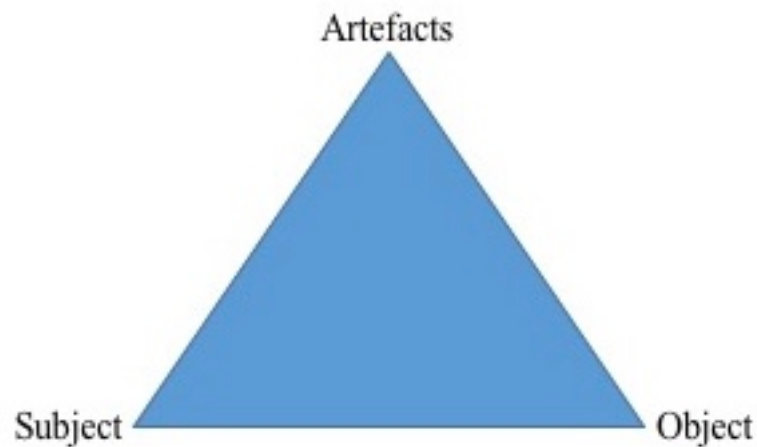


Figure 2. Vygotsky's theory of cultural mediation. From "*The collected works of L. S. Vygotsky: Problems of the theory and history of psychology* (p. 72) by L. S. Vygotsky, 1997. New York, NY: Springer. Copyright 1997 by Springer. Reprinted with permission.

In Vygotsky's (1978) view, individuals themselves construct knowledge by interacting through external cultural symbols rather than the symbols being imposed upon them. Two consequences follow from this assumption. First, the child is an active agent in his or her own development, and, second, the sociocultural context in which development and construction takes place becomes extremely important.

Development occurs through the use of the tools available at a particular place in a particular time (Vygotsky, 1981), and these tools used in the process of cognitive development may be psychological or technical in nature. Psychological tools are used to direct the mind and behaviour, whereas technical tools enable change to other objects. Cultural mediation allows young children to use cultural tools in symbolic and metaphorical ways to access their Creativity and Imagination.

Artefacts are psychological tools such as words and texts. (Vygotsky, 1981) outlined three hierarchical levels of artefacts: *primary objects* such as needles and bowls, which can be used to make things; *secondary objects*, which are representations of primary artefacts and can lead to traditions and belief as, for instance, a cross made from two pieces of wood which becomes a religious artefact; and *tertiary objects*, which are imagined worlds such as works of art. Artefacts of all types play an important role in the development of consciousness:

The understanding of artefacts carrying out different functions, being both material and ideal and circulating between inner and outer worlds in which meaning is developing, presents a complex, layered, dialectical view of human engagement with the world that carries with it a significant methodological challenge for research which aims to study processes of artefact-mediated formulation of mind (Daniels, 2055, p.11).

Several researchers have addressed Vygotsky's concept of artefacts in a number of different ways, highlighting the challenges for researchers in viewing individuals and interactions in simple one-dimensional ways. One approach was to view each interaction as a complex and multi-layered event that occurred between individuals situated within a specific historical and cultural environment laden with meaning (Daniels, 2005). Another approach regarded humans as mastering themselves from the outside through symbolic, cultural systems. Researchers who have adopted this latter approach maintained that the tools and signs employed are not as important as the meaning encoded within them, enabling a child "to internalize language and develop those higher mental functions for which language serves as a basis" (Daniels, 2005, p. 11).

Kozulin (1998) believed cultural mediation provided three possible means of generating consciousness: the first was the historical nature of human experience; the second was the social environment and the experiences of others, that an individual becomes aware of him or herself only in and through interactions with others and the third was the existence of mental images and schemas preceding actual action. Kozulin's work links with Vygotsky's further work on consciousness and is addressed later in the chapter.

3.2.2.2 *Everyday and scientific concepts.* The theory of development included the notions of everyday and scientific concepts. *Everyday concepts* are empirical and emerged spontaneously from children's everyday experiences, whereas *scientific concepts* had their roots in specialised and operationalised instruction that was scientifically defined and imposed upon children. Scientific concepts are understood in the broadest sense of the term to include social, natural, and humanistic phenomena. Children's spontaneous concepts are entirely dependent on the relationship between preschool instruction and development Vygotsky (1987).

The movement from everyday or spontaneous to scientific concepts involved the movement to a more structured and conscious acquisition of knowledge. The research project for this thesis was undertaken during the period in the lives of some young children when they were entering the transition zone between the use of everyday language corresponding to the

everyday concepts learnt in their home environments and the scientific language and concepts associated with the semi-formal structure of an early learning centre.

“Scientific concepts are formed on the basis of systematic, organized and hierarchical thinking” (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 238). As children acquire knowledge about the world around them, they undergo substantial development, and this development depends upon the existing level of their ability to form concepts. For example, a child notices that a puddle that was there the day before has now disappeared, and educators may then provide instruction on the role of evaporation to explain the puddle’s disappearance. Depending upon the child’s current level of knowledge, he or she may be able to grasp the scientific concept. If able to do so, the child will undergo a process of integrating that knowledge with their prior knowledge concerning puddles. This process enables a child to acquire mature concepts. As (Daniels, 2005, p. 9) states: “Spontaneous concepts in working their way upward towards greater abstractness clear a path for scientific concepts in their downwards development towards greater concreteness” (p. 9). Thus, a child unable to grasp the concept of evaporation will continue with the everyday knowledge of puddles until such time as he or she is able to move through the process.

3.2.2.3 Creativity and imagination. Vygotsky defined creativity as any human act that gives rise to something new and argued that the active promotion of creativity should be a central function of schooling. Vygotsky (2004) also believed that creativity is a social process which requires appropriate tools, artefacts, and cultures in order to thrive. “Creation is a historical cumulative process where every succeeding manifestation (is) determined by the previous one” (2004, p. 7). Vygotsky (2004) also stated that “imagination was the basis for all creativity activity and was a key component in all areas of individuals’ lives allowing for artistic, scientific and technological pursuits. It is this creative ability which allows individuals to orientate toward a future as well as altering the present” (2004, p. 8).

Vygotsky (2004) advanced four characteristics of creativity. First, what is imagined has a basis in experience. All individuals, including children, can imagine something only after having already experienced it themselves or after learning of another’s experience of it. Imagination’s importance rests in its ability to allow an individual to conceptualise something from his or her own experience or from another person’s story. Vygotsky (2004) believed that only religious and mystic ideas about human nature could claim that products of the imagination originate not out of our previous experience, but from some external supernatural force (Vygotsky, 2004). He strongly asserted that imagination begins with the accumulation of experience and builds upon materials supplied by reality.

Second, the link between fantasy and reality can also be considered from another perspective as being the final product of imagination and as a complex, real phenomenon. As an example, Vygotsky (2004) cites constructing an idea of the French Revolution that is based upon reading stories and accounts of the events comprising it. “It does not reproduce what I perceived in my previous experience, but creates new combinations of imagination from that experience” (2004, p. 13).

Third, Vygotsky regarded the association between the functioning of imagination and reality as an emotional one. He described how every feeling and emotion appears to seek specific images that correspond to and express it. These images of the imagination thus become an internal language of our emotions.

Fourth, when a construct of fantasy, which represents something new and never before encountered in human history, is externally embodied and given material form, it begins to actually exist in the real world and is then able to make its influence felt there. As an example, Vygotsky cited a new piece of technology that, once given material form, became real and began to affect its surrounding environment.

3.2.2.4 *Consciousness.* Vygotsky (1986) understood an individual’s consciousness as not consisting in a private inner world, or theatre, but rather as emerging entirely from the interactions of the individual’s inner life with the inner lives of others. He understood consciousness as material rather than ideal. For example, consciousness could only be revealed through its effects such as speech, children’s actions, or material objects. This concept of relational materialism is discussed later in this chapter. Consequently, Vygotsky (1986) saw the use of words and language as the means to understanding consciousness: “If language is as old as consciousness itself, and if language is a practical consciousness-for-others and, consequently, consciousness-for-myself, then not only one particular thought but all consciousness is connected with the development of the word” (p. 16).

Vygotsky observed that the study of language was usually split into two distinct elements: a linguistic one and a behavioural one. Prevailing views held that these two elements were separate and not intrinsically linked, but Vygotsky (1986) challenged this view, stating that individuals “grow into the intellectual life of those around (them)” (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 225). It is important to understand what Vygotsky meant when referring to language. For Vygotsky (1986), language was speech: “The act of voicing one’s words, the responsive effects produced by our expressive activities, not language as a formal system, that

is central to his concerns” (1986, p. 88). This distinction is important, as it encompasses what is happening to the individual as he or she interacts with the world.

Vygotsky (1987, p. v) defined the term “consciousness” as “...denoting awareness of the activity of the mind – the consciousness of being conscious” (p.v). For instance, a preschool child who, in response to the question “Do you know your name”, states his name but lacks this self-reflective awareness is thus not conscious of knowing it. Vygotsky’s understanding of consciousness thus focuses upon an individual’s awareness of his or her actions.

For EC educators, this understanding requires a careful consideration of children’s speech to assess the level of awareness and consciousness. It also requires that educators create safe and nurturing environments that encourage children to interact and have conversations with others, with the intention of enabling them to manifest their own level of consciousness and awareness. Vygotsky (1986) posed the question: Do individuals’ responses arise in response to others’ words and actions in a way that they are conscious of or unconscious of? Shotter (2006) explained the concept thus, “It is through the words, the utterances, of others that we can come to act in a voluntary, conscious manner, in a way in which we ourselves are responsible, or ‘answerable,’ for our own conduct” (2006, p.16). For Vygotsky, consciousness could only arise within an individual after an individual had had interactions with others.

3.2.2.5 Zone of proximal development. Vygotsky (1987) described the zone of proximal development (ZPD) as “What the child is able to do in collaboration today he will be able to do independently tomorrow” (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 211). He outlined three different contexts for ZPDs. The first is a developmental context, which is used to explain the emerging psychological functions of the child. The second is the applied context, which is the difference between the child’s individual and aided performance in classroom learning, and the third is a metaphorical space where everyday concepts of the child meet the scientific concepts (as defined in the previous section) provided by teachers and other mediators.

The ZPD is one of the most frequently used yet least understood of Vygotsky’s concepts (Palinscar, 1998) primarily because it is not viewed within the context of Vygotsky’s whole view of children’s development. His model states that the following criteria need to be satisfied in order for a ZPD to be effective: the model of children’s growth must be explanatory rather than descriptive, and development needs to be explained as a single process. Thus, the model should consider the child as an integral person.

When Vygotsky (1987) used the term whole, he was referring to an integrated structure of relationships among developed and developing higher psychological functions acquired through material interaction. When he referred to the social situation of development, he was referring to the initial moment of all dynamic changes that occur in any given developmental period. A researcher looking at the dynamics of an individual of any age must first explain the social situation in which development has occurred.

I believe that the work of Vygotsky has encouraged researchers to consider the integrated whole of a child – their mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual (though he did not use this term) aspects, together with the cultural and historical context in which they live. By focusing only on one aspect of development, the whole picture is not visible.

Vygotsky (1987) believed this instruction stimulated those higher psychological functions that were in the process of maturing. Consequently, without that instruction, developmental growth would have become stunted, and the child would have remained at the current level of development. Vygotsky saw the ZPD as an essential method in understanding the dynamic between instruction and children's development. He used the ZPD as a central concept in his criticism of school readiness.

The ZPD treats cognitive development as a continual process of change rather than as an end-product established as a set of discrete levels. Vygotsky identified two types of ZPD: the objective and the subjective. The objective ZPD explains the psychological functions that need to be created during each age period to allow for the next age period to develop. One of the main features of the ZPD is to include the whole child and their internal structures. These represent the relationship between the psychological functions and the children's actions that occur within the social setting of. Each age and stage of development has a leading activity that helps to organise a child's actions. These leading activities assist children in engaging in actions that develop their psychological functions. Children are then able to move from being passive recipients of their environment to being able to select those activities and things which are of interest to them (Vygotsky, 1987).

Subjective ZPD refers to the development of an individual person in relation to the objective historically formed period of next development (Vygotsky, 1987). In order to understand subjective ZPD, it is important to understand the way in which Vygotsky used the term "imitation". He saw imitation as not just the copying of one action but, rather, that it was the learning and development that occurred when there was collaboration between a less competent and a more competent person. Imitation was only possible when a child had some

understanding of the process, and it lay within his/her intellectual potential. (Chaiklin, 2003) believed that imitation was only possible when the maturing psychological functions were sufficient to support independent performance and that a person could understand how to use the collaborative actions.

The way in which the ZPD has been adopted, particularly in early childhood education, has some common conceptions – namely, that it is an interaction between a more competent person and a less competent person, with the purpose of the less competent person being to become independently proficient. Thus, it is assumed to be used for learning across a wide range of subject matters. Another assumption is that learning is dependent upon interventions by a more competent “other”. In the case of spirituality, is it necessary that this other be more spiritually aware in order for a child to learn about spirituality? It would appear consistent with sociocultural theory that the sharing of information, perspectives, ideas, and thoughts is what is occurring to assist all participating to construct an understanding of spirituality. Vygotsky (1987) addressed this question when he wrote about the importance of collaboration as being not necessarily the knowledge that the more competent person teaches or exhibits, but rather the process of collaboration that brings forth learning and development.

The ZPD is also perceived as one of the most significant methods for children to learn. This assumption raises the question as to the purpose of a ZPD. Is it about learning a skill or a piece of knowledge, or is it about a child’s growth and development? I would argue that a ZPD can be equally applied as either a tool or a method in children’s growth and development. When a ZPD is established, there are a number of possible outcomes that can occur: the movement from everyday to scientific concepts and the Reflective Practices (Goodliff, 2013b) that assist children to discover meaning in events and potentially be transformed by the process and cultural mediation. It is the reflective nature of the ZPD that has relevance for the research study of this thesis. Reflective Practices are seen by Goodliff (2013b) as a dimension of children’s spirituality because it assists children to develop their consciousness and awareness of themselves and others. An examination of Vygotsky’s understanding of the ZPD and the role of reflection informed this study and provided an understanding of what might be occurring for young children as they play and learn in community with others. This next section outlines each of these in turn.

3.2.2.6 *Perezhivanie*. Throughout his writings, Vygotsky referred to the Russian word *perezhivanie*, a complex, multilayered concept. A current translation of this word in modern usage is “experience”; however, Vygotsky (1994) used this word to capture the process by which young children make meaning and to describe how a child “becomes aware

of, interprets and emotionally relates to a certain event”(p. 340). He believed that meaning is an internal structure resulting from the unification of thinking and speech yet lying between thought and word. Thus, perezhivanie implied a sense of unity between an individual child and the child’s environment, which consists of not just the physical context but also included social and affective activities; that is, such products of cultural development as speech or other symbolic and social systems.

Perezhivanie is sometimes referred to as being possessed by a child as in “the child’s perezhivanie” (1994, p. 341) yet Vygotsky’s writing indicated a process that children undertake to arrive at meaning-making and to reach deeper levels of consciousness. The process is dependent upon a person’s situation, particularly its emotional and visceral impact, and occurs when the individual is able to recollect particular situations and events, including the surrounding conditions and the effect of those conditions on them, others’ perceptions of them, and how they coped at the time of the experience. By reflecting on events, children are able to develop higher mental and psychological functions, thereby enabling them to move through different stages of awareness to arrive at deeper levels of understanding regarding the experience, which in turn can transform their levels of awareness and consciousness.

Moreover, different situations and experiences are interpreted and perceived differently by different individuals. Vygotsky (1994) believed that traumatic or significant events often acted as the catalyst for the perezhivanie process. Such events often occurred at transition stages during childhood when frustration arose from interactions. This movement towards transformation and growth through Reflective Practice can be linked to the lived experience of spirituality in young children. The literature review revealed that this concept has been used to provide an understanding of spirituality in young adults, and the potential to apply an understanding of perezhivanie to young children formed the basis of this research study.

The next section examines how Vygotsky’s understanding of perezhivanie has informed research into the area of consciousness.

3.2.2.7 *Perezhivanie and consciousness.* Several authors regards perezhivanie as one of the two components of consciousness, the other being knowledge, with both being bound within a unity of interpretation (Vygotsky, 1994). Reflection can be viewed as a unit of consciousness and in the process of reflection, behaviour is regulated; thus, activity and all known mental processes are seen as an organised structure (Karpov, 2004; Leontiev, 1985; Rubinshtein, 1946; Vygotsky, 1982). Karpov considered the process of reflection as moving

through the different levels of a cognitive hierarchy, from initial vague sensations to more sophisticated levels of self-awareness. It is these levels of self-awareness that link with the child's consciousness and make possible transformation.

Karpov (2004) expanded on Leontiev's (1985) two levels of consciousness – *consciousness for consciousness* and *consciousness for being* – and proposed three components of consciousness: the sensory fabric of an image; meaning; and personal sense. For Leontiev, meaning enabled communication between individuals and served as a messenger between “consciousnesses”. The purpose of meaning was to preserve and transmit social experiences in order for them to be reproduced. Within Russian psychology, meaning existed within the sphere of cultural conventions and sense was located within the minds of those participating. Meaning was socially constructed while sense described the processes within an individual as he or she sought to make meaning. The concept of sensory fabric referred to various perceptual categories such as space, colour, movement, and form that together comprised an image.

This is significant, as I believe that, through the concept and description of *perezhivanie*, Vygotsky's (1994) sociocultural theory intersects with young children's spirituality. As children reflect upon experiences in a safe environment, ontogenesis occurs and children grow, develop, and are ultimately transformed by not just the event but by the process of reflecting and reliving the experience. Vygotsky (1994) saw a child's personality as developing at this stage also. Furthermore, Vygotsky regarded *perezhivanie* as the interplay between environment and personality. Moreover, different children move through the stages of *perezhivanie* differently, depending upon the space, time, and intentionality of the teacher or parent guiding the process. If this process is safe and nurturing, and sufficient time is allowed for processing, children are able to derive meaning from the experience and thus may ultimately be transformed.

“The interaction between *perezhivanie* and reflection represents a dialectic unity between the irrationally interacting subjective and objective principles of the mind” (Vygotsky, 1994, p. 36). This constitutes an important step in individual meaning-making, as without the reflective element of *perezhivanie*, individuals would remain or be returned to a lower state of awareness (Vygotsky, 1994).

Rubinshtein (1946) stated that *perezhivanie* is primarily first and foremost a mental fact. However, the question arises as to where consciousness, *perezhivanie*, and even spirituality reside. Limiting *perezhivanie* to the status of merely a mental construct reduces its

significance. In reality a more accurate depiction of the concept originates in the mind but extends beyond the boundaries of the mind to others and to the world.

Drawing upon the work of Slobodchikov and Isaev (1995), which was written in Russian in an article written by Fakhrutdinova (2010), they expanded the concept of *perezhivanie* by proposing five different levels of reflection. The first was *assumptive reflection* (Fakhrutdinova, 2010, p. 37), which produces the first distinction between a person's self and their life activity. The second was *comparative reflection* (Fakhrutdinova, 2010, p. 37), where all positive definitions of the non-self become a definition of the self. The third level was *defining reflection* (Fakhrutdinova, 2010, p. 37), which first reveals the divergence and oppositeness of the self and the non-self. The fourth level was *synthesising reflection* (Fakhrutdinova, 2010, p. 37), where the many different aspects of the self are recognised, and the fifth level was *transcendental reflection* (Fakhrutdinova, 2010, p. 37), or expanding consciousness, which enables individuals to go beyond the bounds not only of themselves but also of their relationships with the world. They do so by engaging deeply their inner selves with objective reality.

By following this process, individuals began to see, in increasing states of awareness, that not separateness but rather unity exists between their consciousness and objective reality. Thus, individuals came to view reality as endowed with genuine life and that awareness expands to include the immanence of the world in a number of different dimensions – for example, axiologically moral, aesthetic, and theoretical Slobodchikov and Isaev (1995). Individuals were then able to discover their own deep rootedness in this reality. This process invited them to leave the boundary of their own selves, which brought them into relationship with the world and enabled them to be transformed and capable of experiencing a greater level of consciousness. This last level appeared to relate directly to the lived experience of spirituality – in particular, a person's individuation, self-realisation, and self-discovery.

3.3 Post-Vygotsky Theorising

In the decades since Vygotsky's death, his work has been read, interpreted, and expanded upon across many disciplines. Kostin (2000) believed that Vygotsky's fundamental idea that learning can lead development is anchored in three concepts of Vygotsky's work: the first concept – social – states that interactions between individuals (children and adults, for example) are seen as the main source of mental processes; the second is the role of cultural tools in mediating the components of psychological development; and the third concept is the ZPD, which is the overlaying framework through which development proceeds.

Stetsenko (1999) asserted that the three concepts have evolved as threads, or paths, in the dissemination of Vygotsky's work. She argued that researchers need to see each of the three paths as interrelated and informing the other two in order to fully appreciate the depth, scope and importance of Vygotsky's work. She states: "The internal links among the three described concepts have not been explicated sufficiently...and these concepts remain de facto isolated from one another and, as such, their full potential remains to be revealed" (Stetsenko, 1999, p. 237).

Stetsenko, (1999) also posited that the three concepts have resulted in three distinct threads of sociocultural theory. The first thread was sociocultural research, which emphasised the role of shared activities and social interaction between the child and adults as the path to individual cognitive development. Some of the key constituents of this thread are contained in the studies of Stetsenko (1999), Cole (1985), Lave and Wenger (1991), and Rogoff (1994). In particular, Rogoff, whose central idea was that children's cognitive development cannot be separated from their social environment. Children develop cognitively in the context of guided participation in a social setting involving social activities. Such activities are normally conducted with more experienced partners who support the child's understanding in the use of cultural tools.

Because this thread emphasized the importance of both the children's and their caregivers' roles within guided participation, Stetsenko (1999) could see the value of it in the expansion of Vygotsky's concept of social interaction. However, Stetsenko (1999) regarded the work of Rogoff (1990) as incomplete, because Rogoff saw the communicative processes and social activities as the ultimate ends.

The focus of this research study was to take Vygotsky's thread of social interaction and apply it to the concept of the lived experience of young children's spirituality. The aim was to not see the social activities as the ultimate end, as Rogoff did, but to examine them further, particularly through the use of Vygotsky's (1994) *perezhivanie* concept, which enabled children to further explore events and experiences in community with others. This, in turn, deepened children's level of consciousness of themselves and others and nurtures their lived experience of spirituality. This ability occurred through the relational nature of children's play and experiences and is the dimension of Relational Consciousness used by Rogoff (1990, 2009) in her model of spirituality. Goodliff drew upon Vygotsky's epistemological stance that different people may construct meaning in different ways. There is no one truth out there to discover, but through relationships and interactions, individuals are able to articulate their thoughts. Goodliff (2013a) stated that "the individual acquisition of

new knowledge and skills as well as individual development were dropped in favour of the inter-psychological dynamic of the relative contributions of individuals to shared activities” (p. 239).

The second thread of research that has emerged from Vygotsky’s research concerns the role of cultural tools and their functions in children’s cognitive development. Researchers who have studied this thread, are Stetsenko (1999), Galperin (1969, 1989, 1992), and Davydov (1988). These researchers primarily focused on how children acquire new cultural tools through specific pedagogical procedures. Based on this view, the quality of the cultural tools directly impact on the quality of children’s learning. The development of cultural tools correlated with Goodliff’s (2013a) four behaviours of young children’s spirituality. As children reflected on events that they have experienced together in the form of small and large groups, cultural tools are developed. The reflective process, which is aided by the *perezhivanie* process, enabled children to explore experiences that have occurred in their outdoor play.

Within this field of inquiry, some of key contributors have been Karpov and Haywood (1998) and Galperin (1969, 1989). Karpov and Haywood (1998) credited Galperin with being the first researcher to single out and identify the core, distinctive features of the cultural tools and respective instructional procedures that defined the leading role of learning in a child’s development. Galperin (1902–1988) was a contemporary of Vygotsky, and central to his theory is the development of cognitive processes and how individuals internalise cultural tools Arievitch and Stetsenko (1998).

The third thread of research focused on Vygotsky’s concept of the zone of proximal development. This line of research has been undertaken by researchers such as Wertsch (1998), Arievitch and Stetsenko (2000), Wood (1980), and Brown and Campione (1994). The ZPD formed a central component of the research study of this thesis as a way of connecting the social and relational aspects of the finding with the development of the cultural tools and concepts to assist young children in identifying their lived experience of spirituality.

The next section of this chapter outlines the key theoretical considerations of young children’s spirituality and EC development through the lens of Goodliff’s four behaviours of spirituality. Each behaviour is explored and the work of Griffin and Cole (1984), Hay and Nye (1996), Goodliff (2013a), and Champagne (2003) is considered before I explain how the theoretical ideas of Vygotsky are being deployed in relation to Goodliff’s model and how a

framework offers a new and important way of recognising and nurturing young children's spirituality.

3.3.1 Relational Consciousness as a dimension of young children's spirituality.

The area of Relational Consciousness is seen as a key component of young children's lived experience of spirituality and this is highlighted in the work of four key researchers who have drawn upon Vygotsky's sociocultural theory: Bone (2007), Goodliff (2013a), Hay and Nye (1996) and Champagne (2003). Hay and Nye were the first researchers to apply Vygotsky's sociocultural theory to young children's spirituality. As outlined in the literature review, they regarded the way in which children interacted with other children and adults as central to children's understanding of their own spirituality and that it incorporated four elements: awareness of self, of others, of the environment, and of a transcendent other (in some individuals).

For Bone (2007), the phenomenon she witnessed in the conversations of young children as Relational Consciousness had two components. The first was an unusual level of consciousness or perceptiveness relative to other passages of conversation spoken by them. The second was how children relate to things, other people, themselves and God.

In every case where it is identified, this kind of consciousness was qualified by reference to a specific relationship. "In brief, children's spirituality was recognized by a distinctive property of mental activity, profound and intricate enough to be termed 'consciousness' and remarkable for its confinement to a broadly relational, inter and intra personal domain" (Hay & Nye, 1996, p. 108). Hay and Nye (1996) could not separate the relational aspect from other aspects of children's growth and development, which led them to assert that it was a fundamental component of young children's spirituality.

Other researchers have included the concept of Relational Consciousness, although they have named it differently. Champagne (2003) observed three "modes" in young children's spirituality: sensitive, relational and existential. For Champagne, the *relational mode* enabled children to express their relationship to spirituality and to other people. Bone (2007) referred to her understanding of Relational Consciousness as *spiritual witness*, where individuals perceive themselves as being in tune or in touch with one another in a way that could be thought of as connected on a spiritual level. Bone noticed this occurring in the everyday events of children's lives. Champagne (2003) observed relationality as having links with creativity and a connectedness to others. These researchers above employed an observational approach to children's spirituality.

As noted in the literature review, the Reggio Emilia philosophy also has a version of Relational Consciousness: inter-subjectivity. It differs from Relational Consciousness in that inter-subjectivity relates to the interactions between children and other children and educators, or between children and other adults in the classroom. It does not take into account other aspects of relationships such as an individual's relationship with themselves, with the outside world, or with the transcendent or mystery. The importance of Relational Consciousness as a key component of young children's spirituality cannot be overlooked. The epistemological understanding that meaning is manifested and made in community with one another is central to research conducted in this area.

3.3.2 Reflective Practice as a dimension of young children's spirituality.

This section outlines the importance of Reflective Practice as a dimension of young children's development and spirituality. Reflective Practice also includes contemplation as a dimension of spirituality and will also be covered in this section. This section provides an overview of pertinent studies within the areas of the Reggio Emilia philosophical framework, spirituality studies and the perezhivanie process, as well as its contribution to the dimension of reflective consciousness.

Reflective Practice and reflective consciousness play a central role in the REP, and the praxis through which to achieve this is by creating safe nurturing environments, actively listening, and asking open-ended questions. Reflective Practice refers to the tools that enable children to begin to reflect upon events and experiences such as the creation of safe spaces, open-ended questions and active listening, and reflective consciousness is the raised level of awareness that develops from these practices.

In the area of children's spirituality, researchers such as Goodliff (2013a) and Hart (2003) observed the central role reflection played in an individual's recognition and nurture of spirituality. In their research, they focused on adults reflecting upon meaningful experiences that occurred in childhood. Goodliff's (2013a) research included several instances of her as a researcher reflecting on her own experiences in the form of reflexive journal keeping, which assisted her throughout her study. She did not, however, offer any specific processes to help children reflect but did mention its importance.

Contemplation is a form of human activity that possesses its own inherent value (Rockefeller, 2006) and has been the royal road to awakening in the traditions of the East for thousands of years (Nakagawa, 2009). Contemplation's act of awareness is outlined by the Buddha with the first step involving the stopping, calming and resting and the second step of

looking deeply (Nakagawa, 2009). The benefits for providing opportunities for young children to contemplate events and experiences include the promotion of reflective thinking, personal insights (Holland, 2004) and Stock (2006) highlighted the historical link that exist between contemplative practice, intellectual thinking and ethical action with an emphasis on self knowledge. J. Miller (1994) added that taking a stance of contemplation an individual becomes one with the world of goodness and truth.

There are four ways to define contemplative development as outlined by A. Johnson (2009): the first he names attitudes and emotions that support the act of living with presence, attention, awareness and mindfulness, the second is an epistemology or intuitive way of knowing, the third a religious or spiritual knowing and the fourth a way of thinking when considering something deeply that can then lead to insight and reflection. Roth (2006) also believed that there are some common forms of contemplation such as music, dance or drama, he also outlined a more general contemplative stance which included the simple act of sitting quietly, relaxing, reflection and responding with attention to any situation in daily life.

Several authors have outlined the role and impact that contemplation can have on teachers and educators. Sunley (2009) believed that the role of reflection is vital for teachers as they act as gatekeepers for children's spirituality and wellbeing. They must value their own spirituality and wellbeing before they can assist children in nurturing their spirituality; however, Hay and Nye (1996) believe that the reverse is true – children are a model of spirituality that adults that learn from. Teachers allow for the nurture of spiritual moments, in the honouring of moment to moment experiences without teacher's solutions imposed upon them (Upton, 2009).

3.3.2.1 Perezhivanie as a Reflective Practice.

As early as the 1880s, authors had begun to link the concept of perezhivanie to spirituality. Of note was Dilthey (1907), who was the first to call for adding a new field within the science of psychology that he termed “emotional”, which neither focused on human behaviour nor on human consciousness. Dilthey believed that the laws and methods of the natural sciences could not be applied to mental reality and asserted that the perezhivanie process could replace the traditional reflective model of spirituality; that is, contemplation-thinking-action.

Authors, such as (Dilthey, 1907, p. 27), also regarded perezhivanie as experiencing an event, which resulted in the subsequent overcoming of a crisis that restored lost spiritual equilibrium and had the ability to resurrect the lost meaning of existence. Vasilyuk (1991)

believed that this reflection and meaning-making process is in fact transformative, and that this transformation moved an individual from the self and outwards, concentrating “all his spiritual and physical forces not upon achievement of personal happiness, welfare or security, but upon service to a higher value” Vasilyuk (1991).

3.4 Creativity and Imagination as a Dimension of Young Children’s Spirituality

This section draws upon the works of (Slobodchikov & Isaev, 1995), Goodliff (2013a), Vygotsky (2004), and the Reggio Emilia philosophies in order to provide a theoretical framework for spirituality in young children.

As outlined earlier in this chapter, Hart (2003) mentioned four characteristics of Creativity and Imagination: first, what is imagined has a basis in experience; second, the link between fantasy and reality can also be seen from another perspective; third, the association between the functioning of imagination and reality is an emotional one; and fourth, when a construct of fantasy, which represents something new and never before encountered in human history, is externally embodied and given material form, it begins to actually exist in the real world and is then able to make its influence felt there.

Hart (2009) considered there are six layers of transformation that occur during children’s education, which represent a coherent whole movement towards depth, Transcendence, and integration that embodies the spiritual impulse. He noticed a strong link between children’s creativity and their expressions of spirituality. Hart (2009) believed that imaginative play in children shows their capacity for expressing meaning for experiences and events and negotiating their identity. Hart (2009) regarded creativity as the most tangible symbol of transformation, which is an inherently spiritual endeavour. However, Hart did not mention a process to assist children through the six layers or a comprehensive theory relating to the creative process in children.

Goodliff (2013a) outlined a continuum in her understanding of creativity in young children. At one end is a big “C” creativity associated with high achievement in a particular field and at the other end of the continuum is a little “c” creativity that is linked to everyday resourcefulness. This continuum provided a framework for considering creativity in young children but lacks a definitive guide on how to place creative endeavours on a continuum.

The praxis of REP places high importance on children’s creativity; Malaguzzi considered the most favourable situation for creativity to be interpersonal exchange (Rinaldi,

2006). He regarded inter-subjectivity as linked intrinsically with creativity; his assertion that building and sustaining relationships provide the foundation for learning implies the presence of creativity. They could not separate creativity from inter-subjectivity or relationality. Despite creativity being a central tenet of REP, the literature review has demonstrated that there have been few studies in the area of creativity and the Reggio Emilia philosophy.

The discussion of the studies in this section has demonstrated that there is a lack of clear guidelines or theories for examining and researching creativity in young children and the way creativity may intersect with young children's lived experience of spirituality.

3.4.1 Transcendence as a dimension of young children's spirituality. In the area of Transcendence, the literature is predominantly religious and often refers to the notion of rising above or escaping the realities of everyday life. Hay and Nye (1996) and Goodliff (2013a) regarded mystery as a way to understand Transcendence and also as a way a child may transcend everyday experience.

Within the literature, where Transcendence has appeared outside of a religious framework, it is often vague in nature. Hyde (2008b) and Champagne (2003) observed that some children seem to have an innate sense of the transcendent or God. Hay and Nye (1996) used the term "mystery" to describe transformation external to a religious setting. Employing the term to describe the outcome of learning as a process of transformation of participation itself, she argued that how children develop was a function of their transforming roles and understanding in the activities in which they participate.

Several studies, including those of Bone (2007), Goodliff (2013a) and Champagne (2003), mention awe and wonder as a dimension of spirituality in their observations of young children. However, little is offered by the researchers in the way of guidelines or practical steps to recognise awe and wonder in children, although Hay and Nye (1996) believed that young children initially sense that much of life is incomprehensible and therefore mysterious.

One possible approach is to draw upon the view of Bone (2005) concerning everyday and scientific concepts. Children develop everyday concepts to help to understand and make sense of the world around them. As they enter the more formal structure of early learning centres, these concepts can be replaced by scientific concepts when they are ready. Children often express awe and wonder at phenomena they consider is mystical or improbable such as that resulting from fairies or magic.

3.4.2 Play as transformational. Another approach to the concept of transformation involving meaning-making is the work of Vivian Paley (1999). She held as a central tenet in her work the role of fairness in classrooms and how to include all voices. She also believed that a play-based curriculum that focuses on fantasy play, storytelling acting, and imaginative play is the highest level of development in early childhood. She described fantasy play as the young child's curriculum in its natural form (Cooper, 2013; Paley, 1999).

The relationship to self and others then becomes a question of "who do I want to become". In play, children use substitute objects as props for whatever is needed to enhance the fantasy in their minds. For Paley (1999), fantasy consisted of unstructured play, storytelling and acting activities. Her pedagogy of meaning involved teaching young children to explore ideas and other things in the world that they find meaningful. She found that children turn to fantasy play and to explore the idea of truth.

3.5 The use of Goodliff's model with Vygotsky's theoretical framework.

As outlined in the literature review, the research project that is the subject of this thesis used Goodliff's (2013a) four areas of behaviours; Relational, Reflective, Creativity and Imagination, and Transcendence – as a model for the research into children's spirituality. As mentioned in previous sections, much of Vygotsky's theoretical work informed these four dimensions. Relational clearly underpinned Vygotsky's understanding of how children learn, grow and develop within community with each other. Vygotsky's work on Creativity and Imagination appears to be the starting point for Goodliff, who then expanded this notion to incorporate the difference between big "C" creativity and the everyday small "c" creativity.

The reflective dimension of Goodliff's (2013a) model was not elaborated upon in her work, yet there seems to be the potential of including the perezhivanie process as a way to offer the "how" of Goodliff's four areas of behaviour. While awe and wonder are not featured in Vygotsky's work, Goodliff has recognised that they are often seen as a behaviour of children's lived experience of spirituality. While Vygotsky did not explore the concept of the lived experience of spirituality in young children, his theory has informed and underpinned the work of researchers such as Goodliff (2013a) who was able to take Vygotsky's key concepts and develop a multifaceted understanding of young children's spirituality. One area of further examination in the use of Goodliff's model is her understanding of the non-hierarchical nature of the model when applied to the findings of this research study.

The shared epistemological understanding of how meaning is created in community with one another could be further enhanced but Vygotsky's perezhivanie understanding,

which provides a way for EC educators to take experiences and events from The Walk and share them with themselves and educators. The strength of both Goodliff's model and description of spirituality, together with Vygotsky's "how" via the perezhivanie process, created a firm foundation that underpinned the work of the research study of this thesis and has offered new insights and perspectives to consider regarding young children's spirituality in early childhood settings.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the theoretical framework that was used for the research study that is the subject of this thesis. It has also provided an overview of Vygotsky's main theories of cultural mediation, everyday and scientific concepts, consciousness, creativity, ZPD, and the process of perezhivanie. The chapter has described the theoretical framework that is based upon Goodliff's (2013a) model of the four behaviours of young children's spirituality, as well as detailing Vygotsky's theories and the current literature to demonstrate the way in which his theories inform the dimensions of Relational Consciousness; Reflective Practice; Creativity and Imagination; and Transcendence. Vygotsky's theories and these dimensions underpinned the work of the research study of this thesis and the next chapters outline how this new approach could lead to a new understanding of young children's spirituality.

Chapter 4

Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological approach used in this research project, including the selection of participants and role of the young children in the research. The rationale for adopting a qualitative approach, specifically a case study approach, is also discussed. It then outlines the data collection and analysis processes in order to identify the study's primary findings and so fulfil the research aim.

4.2 Research Aim

The aim of this research project was to develop a new framework to assist EC educators in recognising and nurturing the spirituality of young children. The research question that informed this aim was as follows:

What is the lived experience of spirituality of young children within an early learning setting that draws upon the philosophical framework of the Reggio Emilia educational framework in a natural outdoor environment?

The setting of this research was the outdoor learning environment, which formed part of an activity employed by the early learning centre (ELC) that was referred to as The Walk. The rationale for this project was my own experiences as a parent of a child attending a Melbourne-based school's early learning centre that viewed participation in the outdoor environment as an important part of a child's learning, growth and development. This was combined with my role as a trained spiritual director, who accompanied individuals on their spiritual journey that had a focus on the role of contemplation and reflection as part of an individual's spirituality.

The Walk consisted of a weekly two- to three-hour walk in which the children and teachers explored the natural bush setting of the ELC. The school is set on 80 hectares of land within the green wedge of the outer south-eastern suburbs of Melbourne. This pedagogical practice was particular to this ELC. As the ELC utilised the Reggio Emilia philosophy (REP) as its underlying pedagogical framework, a time for reflection was included at the end of each Walk to allow the children the opportunity to revisit experiences and events that had occurred during The Walk in a group setting. The study's data collection process was therefore to capture both the children's play experiences during The Walk and the interactions and

conversations that occurred in the reflection time immediately following The Walk and in semi-formal interviews conducted several days later using stimulated recall processes (Thomson, 2008). These processes are explored further later in this chapter.

4.3 Philosophical Underpinnings

This qualitative research study employed a case study approach, and understanding the epistemological, ontological, and axiological perspectives that underpinned it is important. These dimensions of the research are discussed in the next sections.

4.3.1 Epistemology. Epistemology centres on the question: “How do we know what we know?” and is concerned with “providing a philosophical grounding for deciding what kinds of knowledge are possible and how we can ensure that they are both adequate and legitimate” (Maynard, 1994, p. 10). Maynard outlined three possible epistemological stances: objectivism, subjectivism and constructivism.

Objectivism states that truth and meaning reside in an object and are independent of any conscious belief regarding the object. Objectivists hold the view that an objective truth exists and consequently that application of appropriate inquiry can lead to certain knowledge. Objectivism was not considered a viable option for this research project as spirituality is the lived experience of individuals. Spirituality is not an objective truth as it manifests in various ways in different individuals. As the literature review has indicated, spirituality can be considered through the lenses of (1) Relational; (2) Reflective; (3) Creativity and Imagination; and (4) Transcendence (Goodliff, 2013[a](#)). Thus, no amount of inquiry could ever lead to certain knowledge.

In contrast, subjectivists believe that meaning does not arise from the interaction between a subject and an object, but, rather, when a subject imposes meaning on an object. Adopting this approach would have greatly limited the scope of this research project. Considered from a subjectivist perspective, the process of researchers and children working collaboratively together and attempting to impose meaning upon an object, in this case spirituality, would have resulted in many differing and competing views of the phenomenon. Such an outcome, rather than advancing an understanding of the lived experience of spirituality, would have limited the understanding of the phenomenon to a narrow definition that would have been applicable to this research project only and not allowed for the inclusion of other perspectives and ideas.

The third stance – constructivism – regards knowledge and reality as constructions that are contingent upon human interactions with the world and therefore develop and propagate within a social context. Crotty (1998) stated this point regarding constructivism: that different people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon. This idea closely aligns with that proposed by Vygotsky (1978) who also stated that meaning is constructed between individuals and that no one truth exists but rather arises out of relationships and interactions. Since the concept of spirituality is not compatible with objective knowledge, the constructivist stance seemed to be the most appropriate for this research project, where meaning arises in interactions among the children themselves, between the children and the educators and other adults, and between the children and the researcher. This notion aligned appropriately with the process employed in this research project as it allowed for flexibility in the data collection and data analysis phases. For example, this approach was suitable to examine the concept of spirituality in three- and four-year-olds, as well as how an EC educator might nurture these children's spirituality.

4.3.2 Ontology. Ontology, the study of “being”, is concerned with the “what is”, the nature of existence, and the structure of reality (Crotty, 1998). Within ontology there are three main stances: positivism, interpretivism and realism.

Positivism is concerned with observable facts and maintains that the truth can only be captured when the correct research methods are employed. Positivism attempts to be value free and seeks universal principles and truths. As indicated in the literature review, spirituality resides at the intersection of an individual's beliefs and the levels of consciousness and awareness. Since broad understandings of spirituality exist both within and outside religious structures, and in different cultural and educational settings, employing an ontological lens to seek a universal understanding of spirituality that would then be regarded as the one truth would have greatly limited the scope of this research study. Thus, this project did not subscribe to the positivist ontology. In contrast to positivism, interpretivism considers individual meanings and actions as culturally and historically situated and so is a more subjective stance.

In response to what many scholars saw as two ontological extremes – positivism, with its deterministic stance and interpretivism, with its relativistic stance – a third approach, realism, emerged (Crotty, 1998). Realism acknowledges the existence of objectively real structures independent of human consciousness but regards knowledge as socially constructed. Realists believe that researching from different angles and at multiple levels contributes to greater understanding since reality can exist on multiple levels (Flowers, 2009).

This project adopted an interpretivist approach for two primary reasons. First, an interpretivist approach is congruent with a project utilising a framework of sociocultural theory, which seeks to explain social processes and recognises the inherent complexity within these processes. An interpretivist approach thus acknowledged the specific cultural and historical contexts in which the social interactions recorded in the course of this project were situated. Second, this type of approach also allows for flexibility in the data analysis phase, thereby providing for new possibilities that might emerge during the study to be considered and included in the research. Within an interpretivist approach, there are three distinct variations: hermeneutics, phenomenology and symbolic interactionism. Phenomenology began with the work of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) who wanted philosophy to take as its primary focus, the description of structures as they relate to their consciousness. His intention was to study things as they were, rather than through certain theoretical frameworks or assumptions. He believed that this approach allowed for knowledge of the world to be grounded in our lived experience (Wrathall & Dreyfus, 2006). This research project will adopt a phenomenological approach as it seeks to understand the world through direct experience and observation and attempts to bring meaning and insight into the lived experiences of young children (Crotty, 1998).

4.3.3 Axiology. As the study of values, axiology includes the impact a researcher's values can have on the conduct of the research and the value the researcher places on the research's results. Axiology impacts on both a project's epistemological assumptions and the cultural context that informs those assumptions. Thus, epistemology is also linked to axiology in that the knowledge that is generated by a project will be discussed, evaluated and justified in relation to broader cultural values (Crotty, 1998).

So as to create transparency in the research findings, articulating as many of the relevant values inherent in my research as possible was important. From the outset, I acknowledged the cultural and societal lens through which this research was to be conducted. This lens was determined as follows. I am an Australian woman, a parent, a Christian (Protestant) living within a particular socioeconomic range in a suburban setting of a first-world country. I was part of a Protestant church congregation for 10 years (1996–2006). Since 2006, I have not been part of a congregation or worshipped regularly, I have instead been focused on international inter-faith work serving on the board of Spiritual Directors International (2012–2018). While I have my own belief in a God or high power, I also believe that not everyone does or needs to believe in a God. However, I do believe that everyone has a spiritual dimension within them that is sometimes expressed through and supported by a

religious framework but often times not. This context created the particular lens through which I observed the children, the school setting, and the natural environment. I place a high value on children spending time in the natural environment and this viewpoint may have caused me to see benefits where perhaps none existed. It may also have skewed my belief that any learning that takes place outside is somehow superior to that occurring within a classroom. Acknowledging that these viewpoints existed was an important factor in conducting this research project. I needed to be aware of these during all phases of the study, particularly when I was collecting and analysing the data. The use of a reflection journal was helpful as I was able to record my reactions and impressions of the data while being aware of my own prejudices and cultural outlook.

During a project such as this, some assumptions are visible and can be addressed while others are subtler. A critical self-awareness was therefore necessary during the course of the study to ensure that I recognised and acknowledged as many of my own underlying assumptions and presuppositions as possible. An example of this was the high regard in which I held the educational staff at the ELC. To ensure the project's integrity, I had to make sure that I recorded what was actually occurring and not what I would have liked to have seen as both a researcher and a parent. As one of the principal elements of the study was the importance of listening to young children, I needed to ensure that I noticed and recorded the incidents of when the educators listened attentively to the children as well as those times when they didn't appear to listen so closely and perhaps left the children feeling unheard. I recognised the difficulty of that stage and was cognisant that most researchers, including myself, have a complex number of hidden assumptions and presuppositions that may influence their research to varying degrees.

One significant area of researcher assumptions related to the proposed research site. As a parent of a child who attended the early learning centre where the study was situated, I was already familiar with the research site's location, and knew some of the children involved in the study and their educators. Therefore, I came to this project assuming I knew how the centre worked and, in particular, that I was familiar with the methodology of the Reggio Emilia philosophy that underpinned its praxis. These assumptions had both a positive and a negative impact on the project. A positive aspect was that I was familiar with the centre and had established relationships with both the educational staff and some of the children. This ensured that a level of trust and comfort was already present at the outset of the project. However, a negative impact on this position was that I needed to recognise that my prior knowledge of the site, the purpose of The Walk, and my understanding of the Reggio Emilia

philosophy was that of a parent of a child at the ELC, not as a researcher who needed time to be open to new understandings, particularly the theoretical underpinnings of the ELC and the knowledge and skills of the EC educators.

I needed to adopt a frame of mind that was of a new researcher who was not necessarily familiar with the setting and try to maintain that position throughout the project. One strategy I adopted was to question everything that was happening – for example, asking why the staff prepared the children for The Walk in a particular way or why they took a certain route, instead of relying on what I thought I knew.

4.4 Use of the First Person

In order to answer the research question, I felt it was important to include my own voice and perspectives into the project. Even though I was an existing part of the learning community, I was not a research participant to be filmed or interviewed. By choosing sociocultural theory as my underpinning framework, I understood this to be that meaning-making is an interconnected approach that draws upon individuals' cultural, historical, social, and personal aspects and renders separating out specific components belonging to an individual difficult (Carter & Little, 2007). All members contribute to discovering an understanding of spirituality and that there was not "one truth" out there.

As the researcher involved in the data collection, as well as the interviewer and observer, it was very difficult to find a way to remove myself from the process and remain neutral and detached. I believe that the presentation of this research using the first person added a more comprehensive study of the data and findings. An example was acknowledging my background as a counsellor and spiritual director, who possesses knowledge and skills on how to create safe and nurturing environments where children are listened to attentively and are asked open-ended questions.

4.5 Theoretical Perspectives

This study required a theoretical perspective that provided for the emergence and examination of a complex picture of young children's spirituality. Sociocultural theory as discussed in the previous theory chapter was therefore selected for this study because it provides a way for the lived experience of children in relation to their spirituality to be explored and reflected upon while still recognising the complex web of interactions that individuals operate within at any given time. This web has physical, social, cultural,

historical, spiritual and political aspects, and no simple system exists to isolate one aspect from another.

Researchers such as Nye (1996) and Bone (2007) all based their research on young children's spirituality using sociocultural theory because of the multifaceted approach it would provide in understanding the phenomena of spirituality. Through this approach these researchers were able to construct their understandings of children's spiritual experiences within the contexts created by the communities and cultures in which they undertook their research projects. As outlined in the literature review, the sociocultural theoretical framework provides conceptualisations that encompass the phenomena and activities I see as most important in recognising children's expressions of their spiritual experiences and facilitating their spiritual development.

A sociocultural approach clearly aligns with the assumption of children's Relational Consciousness; their awareness of their interdependence with the adults in their lives, their communities, and a transcendent principle. Reflective Practice, through which children reflect upon and integrate into their consciousness their experiences, including those of a spiritual nature, is an activity typically practised with others, and is one that teachers can use to help children make meaning of their experiences. For Goodliff (2013a), reflection was an important aspect of meaning-making and one approach was to use the *perezhivanie* concept to assist children in revisiting experiences and events.

Likewise, Creativity and Imagination, through which children can express spiritual feelings and experiences, occurs within a child's social and cultural context. Lastly, children's recognition of and relationship with a supreme being or transcendent principle is inherently a profoundly spiritual experience. Thus, a sociocultural approach recognises the difficulties in defining and describing spirituality that are attributable to social and cultural differences and provides a framework where meaning can be co-constructed *between* children and adults rather than being imposed upon children by adults (Vygotsky, 1994).

Unlike the approaches of Nye (1996) and Bone (2007), which employed an observational methodology, the strength of this research process was the importance placed upon a collaboration between me, as the researcher, and the children in order to ensure their voices were heard, recorded and included in the findings. Conversations between the children and me occurred during and after The Walk and in the classroom using the stimulated recall (Thomson, 2008). During these latter conversations, video footage of The Walk was replayed to the children, and they were asked open-ended questions about the experiences and events

depicted. This research methodology was a strength of this project and enabled the children's lived experience of spirituality to be constructed through interactions between the researcher and the children, rather than me as the researcher assuming and imposing my own theories of what was happening in the lives and minds of the young children being observed.

4.6 The Choice of a Qualitative Approach

The approach employed for this research study was a qualitative one. A quantitative approach to research adopts as its epistemological framework a more objectivist view that considers truth and meaning as residing in an object. Its reference point is outside the researcher's purview and is, therefore, in the world of facts that stands independently of the knower. Adopting an objective view consists of seeing the world free of the researcher's personal views or perspectives. Objectivity implies that findings state the way things really are and that there is only one truth. Although, the ontological stance employed in this research study was interpretivist rather than objectivist, the epistemological stance adopted was constructionist.

A qualitative approach has two primary levels of aims. The first level consists of seeking a direct understanding of a situation or individual through an immediate apprehension without employing reflection – that is the “what” of the situation. The second level seeks to understand the nature of the activity and to assign meaning, which is the “why” of the situation. This approach is in line with an interpretivist view and acknowledges that research must take into account the fact that meaning is grounded in social and historical realities (J. K. Smith, 1983).

Qualitative research, an approach frequently used to study social issues, employs analytical categories to describe and explain social phenomena (J. K. Smith, 1983). Data collected, which can be in the form of interviews, field notes, observations, photographs, and video recordings, is analysed in a non-quantitative manner. The primary aim of qualitative research is to document and record individual experiences, which in this study occurred within a social setting and in reflective states. Outcomes may include documentation of cultural observations and new insights regarding individuals and human social settings. Moreover, qualitative research is often conducted across multiple disciplines that can include education, psychology, and, as in this research project, spirituality, early childhood development, and education.

Based upon the axiological, ontological, and epistemological stances that have been outlined in the discussion to date, a qualitative approach was viewed as necessary to fully

explore the spiritual manifestations of young children in the research setting of this study, which would address the study's research aim of developing a new framework to assist EC educators in recognising and nurturing the spirituality of young children. The research question that informed this aim was to identify and analyse children's lived experience of spirituality within an early learning setting informed by the REP and situated in a natural outdoor environment. Moreover, a qualitative approach was felt to be the most helpful in the formulation of a new framework of young children's spirituality.

The data collection methods associated with a qualitative study – for example, videotaping, direct observation, and stimulated recall (Thomson, 2008)– facilitate a more in-depth and interpretive study of children and therefore better addressed the “why” of the study's research aim. This method recognises that young children's ideas and perspectives are not merely statistics or facts, and that young children are complex social beings situated within a specific cultural and historical context. Consequently, a qualitative study could offer insights into the nature of spirituality that a quantitative study was not capable of achieving.

Also, this research study required an approach that provided for a level of flexibility in the data analysis phase and for the emergence of new possibilities for consideration and inclusion in the research. For example, when showing the children the video that was captured on *The Walk*, they would often point to other videos and ask if they could watch them as well. Often these other videos had been filmed many months before or had involved other children, but I felt it was important to follow their lead. Acquiescing to their requests often led to new insights. The children also asked to watch the videos repeatedly. Again, I acceded to their requests and was often surprised that each viewing unearthed new insights provided by the children. I expected that the first viewing would elicit a response but was not expecting further insights upon each additional viewing. It appeared that meaning-making required time and that the additional viewings enabled the children to process events in new ways.

The qualitative approach adopted for this study enabled me to better understand how outdoor environments of early childhood settings provide children with the opportunity to be reflective and creative, to experience awe and wonder, and to explore the possible transformational nature of spirituality.

4.7 Case Study Type

The need for a qualitative approach with sociocultural theory as its underpinning framework led me to adopt a case study approach to closely explore the lived experience of young children's spirituality at the chosen research site. Case studies offer a means of

“investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon” (Merriam, 2009, p. 50) and therefore provide rich detail in a holistic and grounded way. In addition, they enable meanings to be illustrated and can communicate the realities of a research site.

One way of determining whether a research study is a case study is by identifying the unit of analysis (Guba, 1981), which, rather than the topic of investigation, characterises a case study. A unit of enquiry is a bounded system focusing upon one phenomenon, such as a class, department, or location. In this research project, the unit of analysis was the lived experience of young children’s spirituality in an ELC setting on The Walk.

4.7.1 Intrinsic versus instrumental case studies. Stake (1994) defined two types of case studies: intrinsic and instrumental. The aim of an intrinsic case study is to gain knowledge and understanding of the particular situation or event being studied rather than to treat this one situation or event as representative of a class. From an intrinsic perspective, I chose to use a case study to examine the lived experience of young children’s spirituality in the setting of an early learning centre that used the philosophical framework of Reggio Emilia and conducted weekly walks into the natural outdoor environment of the school. This specific, unique, and bounded system offered the best research location to answer the research question (Stake, 1994). An instrumental case study, on the other hand, involves examining a particular case to provide insight into a specific issue or a refinement of a theory (Stake, 1994). Thus, the issue or theory becomes the predominant aim of the research, with the case study itself secondary.

My research study, which was to identify children’s lived experience of spirituality within an early learning setting informed by the philosophical framework of Reggio Emilia and situated in a natural outdoor environment, contributed to the instrumental use of the case study approach. My understanding of spirituality was informed by the multi-faceted phenomenon that emerged from the children’s activities, interactions, and reflections on experiences and events, and was best represented by the Goodliff (2103a) model presented in Chapter 1 as well as Vygotsky’s perezhivanie process of reflection. Thus, my case study consisted of the long-term examination, through the lenses represented by the Goodliff model, of the lived experience of young children’s spirituality at an early learning centre employing the philosophical framework of Reggio Emilia and a natural outdoor setting for a portion of the school week. The ELC provided the context for this case to be studied.

From an instrumental perspective, this particular case exhibited three areas of interest with respect to my research question. The first was the use of sociocultural theory, which enabled the study of the lived experience of young children's spirituality to be removed from a religious context. This was important as little research into young children's spirituality had been conducted outside of a religious setting. The second was the ability to undertake the research in an outdoor educational setting rather than within a classroom. This was important as the vast majority of research had been conducted inside the classroom. By conducting research outside, it facilitated an examination of the impact an outdoor setting may have on children's experiences, activities, and use of Creativity and Imagination, and thereby determine if there were any implications for the lived experience of young children's spirituality. The third was incorporating young children's voices in constructing an understanding of spirituality, which was one of the primary reasons for employing the Reggio Emilia philosophical praxis.

This concept is associated with the use of the *perezhivanie* process as a pedagogical practice in which educators can assist children to reflect on prior experiences to construct meaning from them. Exploration of these three theoretical considerations could deepen researchers' and educators' understanding of young children's spirituality, and then they, in turn, could provide knowledge to children to help them construct meaning from their own experiences, including those of a spiritual nature.

4.7.2 Multi-sited versus single-sited case studies. Case studies can be multi-sited or single-sited. Multi-sited, or comparative, case studies involve collecting and analysing data from a number of different sites, whereas single-sited case studies focus on the examination of one research site. As a single-site study, this research project offered a number of unique factors to explore in one location.

The challenge of a single-site case study is the expectation that it will capture the complexity inherent in the one setting by unearthing something unique that will provide an insight into that particular location (Stake, 1994) and yet it will also demonstrate the implications that complexity has for the larger reality. Thus identifying both those aspects that are unique to the case and those that are common to other comparable cases is desired. (Stake, 1994) outlined a number of ways for a case study to be considered unique, which include the nature of the case, its historical background, and its physical setting.

The site of the research study for this thesis, the ELC, was unique in that it places a high emphasis on children spending time in the outdoor environment, a priority that had been

present in that ELC for over a decade. Moreover, the ELC's physical setting was unique in that children and educators had access to a large tract of natural bush in which to conduct The Walk. The ELC's use of the Reggio Emilia framework as the philosophical underpinning of its program also made it unique. Taken together, these three features of the ELC, where my research was conducted, created a unique environment. What is applicable to other ELC settings is the intention of recognising and nurturing young children's spirituality.

4.7.3 Role of assumptions in case studies. Another consideration for researchers conducting case studies is to be aware of the possible tendency of making causal assumptions and determinations of events and generalisations. For instance, in this study, causal assumptions would be concluding that the combined application of the Reggio Emilia philosophy and *perezhivanie* had inevitably led to children having spiritual experiences, or that children in an outdoors setting are somehow more likely to demonstrate a dimension of spirituality than children inside a classroom. In the context of this study, it was important to avoid making conclusions regarding causality and, instead, simply describe the findings, with the knowledge that the whole story could never be told since. If this assumption is accurate, the question arises as to who decides which story to tell and how is it to be told. Ultimately, the researcher must decide these and, while these decisions can be based upon sound methodological considerations and frameworks, acknowledging this tension in the presentation of findings is important. I chose what I considered to be the most complete findings, which for this study were the children's experiences. These experiences provided the children with multiple opportunities to reflect over time, and, therefore, I felt that they offered the children the best opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings, and provide insights. I did this with the understanding that I may miss other examples.

The data ultimately did not conclude that the outdoor learning environment had a significant impact on the lived experience of young children's spirituality and I outline the findings and conclusions in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

Another related and important factor of the case study approach involves the transfer of knowledge from the researcher to the reader. When published, the case study assumes a place among previously known cases, and the elements it has in common with these will serve to situate it within the body formed by these cases for its readers. However, a new case, having no commonality with other cases, may not be easily understood by readers of its reportage Stake (1994). Moreover, although the reader's role is to determine how the information presented in the single-site case study can be applied in other contexts Stake

(1994), the knowledge regarding the case study that is transferred depends largely on the researcher's axiology and assumptions

4.8 Ethical Processes and Protocols

Ethical considerations in qualitative research include ensuring that young children are not confused or do not feel pressured to participate (Hamel, 1993). The ethical aspects of the project were reviewed by the Australian Catholic University's Human Research Ethics Committee on 30 September 2011 (V2011 96) (see Appendices E and F). Once approval had been granted, I sought permission from the research site. As the ELC that was the setting for this research study belonged to a school under the auspices of the Uniting Church Synod (Victoria/Tasmania), I sought approval from the Synod, the school principal, the ELC's director, the parents of the children who would be participating in the study, and the children themselves (see Appendices A to C for the corresponding letters).

After receiving approval from the Synod, the school principal, and the ELC's director, I approached the parents of the children in the class for three-year-olds. Having received permission from nine parents, I then developed a process to obtain the assent of the children. Further ethical considerations are explained later in the chapter, for example children's assent and participation. Assent is defined as the relational process where children's actions and adult's responses are taken together to reflect children's decisions to participate (M. Hill, 2005).

The belief that young children should be given a voice in research is asserted by researchers such as A. Clark and Moss (2005), Harcourt, Perry, and Waller (2011) and Dockett and Perry (2010) who all argue strongly in favour of respecting children's rights and agency in decisions that affect them. In this project, an assent form was created for the children. It took the form of a piece of paper with faces either smiling or not smiling (see Appendix D). A form was shown to each child on each separate occasion to ensure they provided assent every time I visited the ELC. The children were given a pencil and asked to colour or make a mark on the face that applied to them. While the children normally assented, there were a few occasions when some children chose not to participate in the research on a particular day. On those occasions, I did not videotape or invite them to the simulated recall (Thomson, 2008) which was the semi-formal interview process that occurred a few days following each walk.

4.9 Selection of the Early Learning Centre

The school I selected as the site for my research study is situated on approximately 80 hectares of land within one of Melbourne's designated "green wedge" areas. The intention for these areas is that their blocks of land are to remain as natural as possible, although light industrial dwellings such as schools, farms and market gardens are permitted. Much of the school property (approximately 60 per cent) is still in a natural setting and consequently has trees, grasslands, a lake, and other bush attributes.

Moreover, the curriculum and philosophy of this school's education system is underpinned by a number of different forms of sustainability. Its curricular and co-curricular programs are based upon a conceptual model of four interlocking rings developed by the school to capture the essence of its philosophy with respect to education. These rings have not been designed to replace the Australian curriculum through the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (AusVELS), the requirements of the International Baccalaureate, or the use of the REP in the ELC, but rather act collectively as a guiding principle of sustainability for the school. The focus of the first ring – natural sustainability – is the child's understanding of the importance of and their responsibilities with regard to the preservation of natural areas. The second ring – personal sustainability – relates to the mental and physical health of the child. The third ring – urban and technological sustainability – considers the child's roles and responsibilities as an urban citizen, and the fourth ring – sociocultural sustainability – focuses on the child's understanding of other cultures' histories, beliefs and values, as well as their economic, political and legal systems.

These rings apply to all levels of the school including the ELC, and the first ring is clearly manifested in the priority the outdoor environment has within the curriculum. The REP is used in the ELC and supports the four-ring philosophy of the school. Throughout the ELC, evidence of sustainable practices includes the recycling of materials, the collection of food scraps for the chickens, low-water-use toilets, and rubbish-free lunches, as well as the time spent in the outdoor learning environment.

The ELC uses the pedagogical approach informed by the REP (C. Edwards et al., 2012). Key elements of the approach to which the ELC's teachers are committed hold the image of the child as a powerful learner, who is rich in potential, strong, powerful, competent, and, most of all, connected to adults and other children. The use of the REP in the ELC supports the four rings, with a particular focus on sociocultural practices in an outdoor learning environment. Also inherent in this pedagogical approach are the pedagogy of

listening, the belief that the environment can act as the third teacher, and the creation of meaningful documentation to enhance meaning-making (C. Edwards et al., 2012). Although the Reggio Emilia philosophy does not specifically mention spirituality, a number of key tenets of its philosophy include the notion of connectedness and wellbeing, both of which have strong overtones of and connections to spirituality.

As noted in the literature review, one of the important influencers in the ELC's operations is Reggio Emilia practitioner Claire Warden (2002, 2012), who has performed extensive research in the area of outdoor play and has also established a forest school in Scotland. It is her pedagogical focus on the importance of children spending regular time in the outdoors that continues to support the EC educators in the ELC of this research site. Of particular note was Warden's (Warden, 2002, 2012) use of documentation to capture outdoor experiences for future use in relation to the child's own reflection and continuing development.

4.10 Description of The Walk

As the aim of this research project was to focus upon the lived experience of young children in an ELC during outdoor activities, providing a description of the outdoor activity, termed by the ELC as "The Walk", is important. The ELC instituted The Walk as a pedagogical practice based on its use of the REP as well as its commitment to the sustainability education of children via the interlocking rings that underpin the school's curriculum. The study's data collection occurred during each week's Walk, during which the ELC class would undertake a walk activity into the school's natural bush setting. Conducted on Thursday mornings and involving all the children and educators, it includes a standing invitation for parents, grandparents and caregivers to also attend if they wished. (Appendix G shows a simple map of the location and the main destinations of The Walk.)

The Walk has two main destinations known as "the island" and "the mountain". The island is in the middle of a large lake located on the school grounds and is accessed by a wooden bridge. On the island are a tarpaulin erected as protection from inclement weather; a gathering place for campfires; a small shed for firewood; a swing; and a climbing frame. The island is covered in grass and trees, and the children are invited to explore the island, climb trees, pretend to fish in the lake (with sticks), and play on the swing or climbing frame.

Construction and creation are very much encouraged and many cubbyhouses and dens were built over the period of the research. The children usually gather at the start and end of each time on the island for a class discussion. On the way to the island are several places to

stop and explore – a “fairy forest”, an outdoor play area, the chicken and duck coop, the orchard consisting of a grove of citrus and olive trees, and the bird hide that overlooks the lake.

The other location for The Walk – the mountain – is actually a large hill with grass on one side and a steep dirt face on the other. A stroll to the mountain also includes a visit to the fairy forest and the outdoor play area, but then the path veers off before the chicken and duck coop to lead to a small farm that has sheep, cows and alpacas. The main activity of the mountain walk is play that involves the children taking ropes and working in tandem to climb the mountain, with one child holding the rope at the top of the hill while the other scales the dirt face. Both walks take approximately 2 to 2½ hours to complete. The Walk is conducted each week regardless of the weather.

4.11 Selection of Children

The ELC has two classes of approximately 20 children, each consisting of three- and four-year-olds. In consultation with the director of the ELC, it was decided to conduct the research for the study with the three-year-old group, as it would provide for the possibility of a longer research period given that the majority of these children would return the following year to participate in the four-year-old program.

The initial preparations for the study involved me, as the researcher, accompanying the children on four Walks to help build the necessary trust and the development of positive relationships with them. No videotaping occurred during these initial Walks, which took place in the final term of 2011. The study’s main data was collected during Terms 2 and 3 of 2012.

Letters with consent forms seeking approval for the children to participate in the research study were sent to their parents. A total of 12 forms were returned with full consent for five girls and six boys. These children, who were also asked to complete written assent forms (see Appendix D), were aged three and four at the beginning of the research.

This number of participants was consistent with qualitative studies of a similar size. This sample size best informs the research question, and significant input from these children was envisioned in the form of semi-structured and stimulated recall processes. Creswell (2013) stated that, with qualitative studies, choosing a sample size that best informed the research to be explored is important. Thus, out of the class group consisting of 20 children, the 12 whose parents provided consent for participation were the primary focus of the videotaping on The Walk and were then invited into the stimulated recall (Thomson, 2008).

4.12 Descriptions of the Participating Children

To protect the children's privacy, the children who participated in the study were assigned pseudonyms as stated they would be in the consent forms provided to the school and the children's parents. After receiving assent from their parents, each child was also asked for permission at the beginning of each research session. Consistent with my role as a researcher in this project, the summaries below are representative of my understanding of each child.

4.12.1 Isabella. Four years old and in her second year at the early learning centre, Isabella also had an older brother who was currently in Prep. She had a quiet temperament and a strong inner sense of self. She delighted in the idea of magic and appeared most at home in the fairy forest. She had a natural affinity with animals and enjoyed visiting the chickens and the ducks. She relished being outside and loved getting messy – walking into the lake and splashing in puddles – and she was not afraid of getting a little mud on her face or water in her gumboots.

She was a kind child who was often seen helping others with carrying baskets or pulling the wagon. She was friendly and once she had established a relationship with another, was happy to open up, contribute her ideas and thoughts, and ask good questions. She would often appear quiet in a large group situation. When she spoke, it was always a well-considered comment that demonstrated deep thinking and consideration.

4.12.2 Aaron. Four years old and in his second year attending the early learning centre, Aaron had a younger brother who sometimes joined us on The Walk. Aaron had a close relationship with his grandmother, who also often came on The Walk together with his younger brother. Aaron was a thoughtful child who pondered things deeply and liked to make connections for himself. He was also playful and loved to enter into role-play situations and “pretend”. While he was often seen as playing with many of his classmates, he was particularly good friends with Adam. Aaron had big ideas and enjoyed gathering other children and adults around him to help create large-scale projects. Aaron enjoyed The Walk experience and was often seen climbing trees and the mountain and scaling fences.

4.12.3 Melinda. Four years old and in her second year attending the early learning centre, Melinda was the youngest of three children; her older brother and sister also attended the school. Melinda was an intelligent child who often offered quite profound insights and ideas. She was also quite in tune with her emotions and could easily articulate if she felt sad or happy and also perhaps why. In the previous year, she had been particularly close to a child who left at the end of the year to attend another school. Melinda had felt that loss quite keenly

and obviously missed her friend very much. Melinda also had a good sense of humour and was quick to laugh and make jokes. Melinda also appeared to love The Walk experiences and seemed very much at home splashing in puddles, collecting eggs from the chicken coop, and playing on the island.

4.12.4 Noah. Four years old and new to the early learning centre, Noah had an older sister who attended a nearby primary school. Noah appeared to have settled into the ELC very well and had forged new friendships and connections. He displayed a strong empathy for those around him, which included animals as well. He also thought a great deal and offered well-considered opinions and views when asked. He cared deeply and held on to his ideas even when those around him had different viewpoints.

4.12.5 Rory. Four years old and in his second year at the early learning centre, Rory had an older sister at the school. Rory was friendly, curious and thoughtful. He had a very good imagination and would spend a lot of time on The Walk creating imaginary scenarios and role-playing. He was helpful and enjoyed playing with many of the other children.

4.12.6 Patrick. Four years old and in his second year attending the early learning centre, Patrick had an older brother at the school. Patrick was a dynamo of a child who was active, engaged and energetic. He loved running, jumping and climbing, and seemed to be happiest outside in nature. He also played with many of the other children and had a vivid imagination. Late in 2011, Patrick had been involved in a terrible accident on his property and so had missed the last term of 2011. After many operations, he was able to return to his class at the start of 2012. The children missed him very much while he was away and often asked about him. They made cards and drew pictures for him. Despite his ordeal, he returned full of the same energy and vigour.

4.12.7 Sophie. Four years old and in her second year attending the early learning centre, Sophie was an only child at the time and related very well to adults; in fact, she often sought out teachers or parents. She was a very sensitive and deeply empathetic child, who was able to articulate her feelings very well. She had an imaginary friend, “Stinky”, who often accompanied her on the weekly educatory Walk. Stinky often was able to say things that Sophie was not able to communicate. Sophie often appeared to live in her own world, which included fairies, fictional animals, rainbows and magic. She loved offering pretend gifts to people she liked and would invite them to undo the ribbon, take off the wrapping, and open the box. She loved to sing and would often perform whole songs with her own created lyrics.

Sophie was a very kinesthetic child, who loved to offer hugs to those she felt comfortable with or grab an adult's hand when walking.

4.12.8 Gemma. Four years old and in her second year attending the early learning centre, Gemma had an older brother who was also at the school. Gemma was a delightful girl, who was full of energy, had a great love and zest for life, and engaged fully with the world around her. She had a warm sense of humour and laughed easily. She played with many of the other children in the class and was quick to join in any activity, whether it was making daisies, playing with clay, or drawing pictures. She seemed to relish getting messy and dirty, and wet feet or a muddy face did not faze her in the slightest.

4.12.9 Samantha. Four years old and new to the early learning centre, Samantha had an older brother in the school. Samantha appeared to have settled into the new group very well. She was a happy, bright child who engaged fully with the world around her. She particularly liked collecting natural objects such as leaves, seed pods and sticks, and then arranging them in new and different ways. She was often found happily playing on her own.

4.12.10 Matt. Four years old and in his second year attending the early learning centre, Matt was an only child who was very quiet and needed to get to know someone before he felt comfortable enough to share his ideas or thoughts. He was equally comfortable either playing with others or on his own. He was a deep thinker and would spend a lot of time engaged in an activity before moving on to something new.

4.12.11 Adam. Four years old and in his second year attending the early learning centre, Adam had been born in Switzerland to Swiss parents, spoke Swiss German and English, and had an older sister. Adam was a happy, friendly child who laughed easily and enjoyed his time outside and with his friends. He was also a deep thinker who pondered questions thoughtfully before offering his ideas. He was a very helpful and empathetic child who was quick to help other children pull the wagon, carry a bucket, or fetch a hat that had blown away.

4.12.12 Claire. Four years old and in her second year attending the early learning centre, Claire also had an older brother at the school. Claire was a quiet and softly spoken girl who seemed to be very comfortable in the outdoors. She was often found exploring on her own and had a particular attraction to bugs. Her father had been very ill during her first year at the early learning centre and passed away towards the end of her second year. Her mother would often accompany the class on The Walk.

4.13 Research Involving Children

Over the past two decades, there has been a move away from conducting research *on* children to conducting research *with* children (Pence & Brenner, 2000). Children have come to be seen as worth listening to and having dialogue with and as having the courage to think and act autonomously (Pence & Brenner, 2000). However, how adult researchers choose to include children reflects their conception of childhood and children (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999).

Within my study, I considered it important to view the children as active participants in the research, to work alongside them in constructing knowledge, and to include their views and perspectives in the understanding of children's spiritual experiences. In order to do so, it was necessary to underpin this research project with the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC). The convention seeks to provide a sound basis for developing policies and decision-making that involves children, ensuring that they are active participants in these.

The convention has four main principles. First, as stated in Article 2:

Children should neither benefit nor suffer because of their race, colour, gender, language, religion, nationality, social class, or ethnic origin, or because of any political or other opinion; because of their caste, property, or birth status; or because they are disabled. (1989, p. 2)

In Article 3: "The best interests of the child are to be considered at all times: Laws and actions affecting children should put their best interests first and benefit them in the best possible way" (UN, 1989, p. 2). Article 17 recognises the importance of survival, development, and protection: "The authorities in each country must protect children and help ensure their full development – physically, spiritually, morally, and socially" (United Nations, 1989, p. 3). Article 13 refers to the child's voice: "Children have a right to a say in decisions that affect them and to have their opinions taken into consideration" (United Nations, 1989, p. 6). The remainder of this section addresses these articles as they applied to my research.

4.13.1 Article 2. In order for the best interests of the child to be considered, it was vital that the participants' thoughts, ideas, opinions and perspectives were respected during the research project. Within the context of the research study, children were considered as competent social agents (United Nations, 1989, p. 6) and active research participants. Also, regarded as social actors who had valid opinions, ideas, and theories to contribute (A. Clark & Moss, 2005) the children were asked for their permission before they were included in the

data collection process. Moreover, I ensured that the children were given access to sufficient and appropriate information on which to base their decisions.

4.13.2 Article 3. In accordance with Article 3 of the UNCROC, I sought to build safe and trusting relationships with the children participating in the study. A vital first step was to provide them with appropriate information regarding the study. To do so, I visited the research site prior to the data collection stage and met with the children. I explained that I was interested in the experiences of their Walks, and I let them know that I would be accompanying them regularly on the Walks. I answered the questions they posed. (Mayall, 2002) “found children’s views, reflections and suggestions about their own and other’s relationship with their teachers (to be) profound” (p. 24). Given the importance of building safe and trusting relationships with the children, once they were aware and informed about the project, I then accompanied them on several Walks, with the sole aim of getting to know them. No data was collected on these initial Walks, and I spent time asking open-ended questions of the children and listening to their ideas and thoughts.

Harcourt and Mazzoni (2009, p. 24) asserted that listening to children predicates any authentic relationship between them and adults. In Harcourt and Mazzoni’s research in Singapore and Italy, the children were found to have placed high importance on the relationships they had formed throughout the research project.

Harcourt and Mazzoni (2009) offered three additional perspectives in relation to young children’s participation in research. First, practitioners and researchers who value children’s emotional wellbeing should offer young children the potential to thrive in a safe and secure social and intellectual environment. Second, researchers and adults have a responsibility to provide children with “respectful and legitimate opportunities for hearing their ideas, views and opinions” (2009, p. 24) and assist children to build competence as researchers. Third, inviting children to be active participants in research enables them to build their competence as researchers. These three factors were present in this research project and aligned with the third principle of the UNCROC (2009, p. 83), which is to assist young children to reach their full development – physically, spiritually, morally and socially.

4.13.3 Article 13. Article 13 was relevant to this project as it relates to children’s right to have a say in decisions that affect them and to have their opinions taken into consideration. Once children were made aware of the research, receiving permission from them to participate was necessary. This was done in conjunction with the governance (in this case the Uniting Church), the school principal, the director of the ELC, the children’s parents,

and the children themselves. The children's assent was ongoing and re-affirmed at the beginning of each research-focused encounter with the children (UN, 1989). In order to achieve this, the children were presented with permission forms (see Appendix D) where they were invited to select a face (happy or sad) that symbolised their willingness to be part of the research for that day only. This was repeated for each visit.

Obtaining permission from the children to include them in that session's research included several important components. For instance, one important aspect of seeking permission with respect to children is the location where permission is asked. According to R. Edwards and Aldred (2000) it is vital that children are asked for their permission to participate in research in a location that feels safe and familiar to them. Thus, in my research, the permission forms were given to the children in the ELC classroom prior to The Walk. In addition, children's capacity to agree to participate in research has been found to be contextual and relational rather than developmental R. Edwards and Aldred (2000), which is additional evidence of the importance of building relationships with the children. Therefore, prior to and during the actual data-gathering process, I sought to build such relationships.

Another important consideration in seeking children's permission is ensuring that they understand that their assent is indeed voluntary (Valentine, 1999). Children often feel a perceived obligation to adults and thus may feel the need to provide the answers that they believe adults are looking for. Thus, the voluntary nature of participation in my research was stressed during each data-gathering session involving them. The children participating in the project were also made aware of their ability and the means to withdraw consent should they have needed or wanted to.

Consideration of the issues aforementioned can be difficult ones to ensure, and I believed the best way to address all of them was to spend sufficient time building trust and familiarity so that the children felt safe in providing their own perspectives and ideas. I also reiterated on each visit that the permission granted that session was valid for that session only and that each child had the right to tell me if they did not want to continue providing assent at any time during that session. I am unable to provide evidence that I was successful in communicating these concepts to the children. However, in one instance, a child did not wish, and therefore was not required, to revisit the video footage because she preferred to spend time with her Year 8 buddy instead.

One last consideration I viewed as important in working with the children was the way in which I transited out of the research project (Dockett & Perry, 2010). I believed that

abruptly leaving the children after building relationships with them over time and collaborating with them in constructing the research could be detrimental to them. Therefore, I returned to the ELC a week after I had completed the final interviews and let them know how much I appreciated their time, ideas, perspectives and opinions. I presented them with a gift, something that they could all play with, and answered any questions they had. They asked if I could read them a story, which I did, and then I said goodbye. Two years after the research project, I was invited back to the school by the Year 1 teacher, whose class many of the children from the research project were now in. The class was doing a unit on “How to be good researchers”, and I spoke to them about how to undertake research, some ways to discover things, and good questions to ask. Many of the children remembered me.

4.13.4 Other influences on the study’s research involving children. The other framework guiding the methodology of this research project was the Reggio Emilia philosophical framework (C. Edwards et al., 2012). Central to the REP is its image of the child as a strong, competent learner who is deserving of being listened to. The educational praxis of the REP is to pose open-ended questions, to create safe and nurturing environments, and to listen actively to the children’s ideas and perspectives. These practices align with the principles of the UNCROC (United Nations, 1989) and offer additional ways in which to work collaboratively with children.

Within Australia, the Early Years Learning Framework (UN, 1989) also offers guidelines for working with children. The ELC in this research project was required to follow these guidelines, which are based upon the UNCROC (*Belonging, Being and Becoming: Early Years Learning Framework*, 2009, p. 30; United Nations, 1989) and sociocultural practice.

In summary, this research project was conducted in accordance with the principles outlined in the UNCROC (United Nations, 1989), REP (C. Edwards et al., 2012) and the EYLF (UN, 1989) guidelines. This research project treated each child as an active learner capable of co-constructing their own view of the world together with the researcher. Moreover, each child participating in the project was given the freedom to participate or not.

4.14 Time of Year Selected for Conducting the Research

The research was conducted over four school terms: Term 4 in 2011, and Terms 1, 2, and 3 in 2012. During this period, the children transitioned from the ELC3 class to the ELC4 class, but the same teaching staff were retained for this two-year period. There were a few changes to the make-up of the class – one of the children who had provided permission left

the school, and several new children arrived, thus somewhat changing the dynamics of the group over the course of the study. The duration of The Walk and the time of the week over which it was conducted did not vary. Consequently, I observed that the children developed an even deeper comfort level with The Walk experience over this time period, which was demonstrated by their exploration of larger areas of the grounds and their attempts at new activities, such as fishing and playing on a new swing.

The focus of the first term and the first four walks was to introduce the research project to the children and accompany them on The Walk to build relationships. The second term involved two Walks using the first phase of the methodology prior to beginning the second phase of data collection. The remaining eight walks continued through Terms 2, 3 and 4.

4.15 Methods

4.15.1 Data collection. In order to include the children's perspectives and respect their agency as participants in the research process, I began the data collection process with a group discussion to share their ideas and perspectives of The Walk. The children shared the elements of The Walk that they enjoyed. I then asked the group how I might gain a better understanding of The Walk. They agreed that I should come along on The Walk to experience it myself. I asked them what would be the best way for me to really understand The Walk from their perspective and several offered the idea of "coming to the island and playing with them". From this initial discussion, I then developed a data collection methodology which resulted in two distinct phases, which are outlined in the next sections.

4.15.1.1. Phase 1. During Phase 1 of the data collection process, three main data collection tools were used: (1) observation (*Belonging, Being and Becoming: Early Years Learning Framework*, 2009); (2) field notes during The Walk (Herbert, 1970); and (3) semi-structured interviews (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2017). Observation using a small still digital camera was chosen because it offered a way of capturing objects and people that the children thought were interesting or meaningful. Field notes captured conversations between the children themselves and between the children and adults as well as events that could later be discussed with the children. Semi-formal interviews were conducted in the ELC classroom several days after a Walk. During these interviews, photos that the children had taken were printed and placed on a table. The children were invited to look at these, to discuss the photos they had taken, and to point out what was interesting about these particular photos. During

these sessions, I asked open-ended questions and listened carefully to the children's responses, often taking additional field notes.

The children were very quick to learn how to use the cameras to take photos. However, when I returned to the classroom to conduct the semi-formal interviews and discuss the photos, I discovered that the children were not able to provide many insights, ideas or perspectives on the photos they had selected. What I came to realise was that the taking of the photos had distracted them from their experiences during the Walks. I also came to believe that the children were photographing either things that interested them or that they thought I wanted to see, rather than selecting what was important to them. I had also assumed that things significant enough for them to photograph would continue to interest them at a later time, and that they would be interested in exploring these subjects further, but this proved not to be the case.

I interviewed the children one on one in an attempt to create a ZPD, where I employed the process of *perezhivanie* to encourage reflection and awareness when they viewed a photo. I used open-ended questions, listened actively, and focused my attention on each child. However, the children showed little interest in the photos and, instead, appeared more interested in cutting the pages of photos up into smaller photos, or removing the borders from the photos. They seemed bored by the experience and were keen to return to other activities. The event represented by a photo taken was not significant enough to elicit an emotional response to begin the reflection process.

In addition, Schischka (2013) found that the introduction of a camera would lead to it becoming a cultural tool that would impact on children's play and activities. As children began to learn to use the camera within a social setting, new understanding would arise, which in turn would encourage continued learning. This was a very different process from that which I wished to set in motion, and, without this knowledge, it was understandable that the children were using the camera in a very different way than I had hoped. This observation facilitated the need for a revised approach.

A study conducted in which three- and four-year-olds were given the opportunity to play within the natural environment (woodland and river banks), provided a close look at the role participatory tools, which they interpreted to include both still digital cameras and digital movie cameras, can play in research involving children (T. Waller & Bitou, 2011). They proposed three main considerations when researching with young children employing participatory tools: firstly; does using participatory tools necessarily engage children?

Secondly; does the adult research agenda inevitably change children's experiences? And thirdly; how does participatory research empower children?

All three questions were pertinent to this research project. I began by giving the children still digital cameras and asking that they take photos of things that interested them on their walks. The children were given several opportunities to familiarise themselves with the cameras and to practise taking photos before the actual research began. A novelty aspect associated with the use of the cameras was evident the first few times the children played with them; however, the children were part of an environment rich in materials and provocations and therefore familiar with new items with which to play. They quickly learnt to operate the cameras efficiently and enjoyed taking photos.

However, the data indicated that their level of engagement lessened with use as the first few interviews conducted using this approach revealed. Children were shown the photos they had taken on The Walk and were asked to choose three or four that they felt were particularly interesting. Both the children who had been entrusted with the cameras on that Walk were able to do this, but they preferred to stay with the experience of viewing the photos rather than revisiting the outdoor play experience which the photo documented. Thus, it became evident that the cameras did not empower children to take (or choose not to take) photos and record significant events.

Providing the cameras to the children made the agenda of the adult researcher overt and thereby changed the children's experience. It is possible the children felt they had to choose things to photograph or, back in the classroom, select photos that they thought that I would like. It also became evident that a group ZPD that would have enabled the children to share their ideas, thoughts, and perspectives of The Walk was missing. I concluded, therefore, that this approach was not going to aid in addressing the research question and, in fact, would actually interfere with the children's ability to interact and play within the natural environment.

Furthermore, Waller's (2008) assertion that researchers need to be mindful of children's agency and respect the "spaces for childhood" where children are able to make their own decisions, undertake their chosen activities, and make meaning themselves was a significant consideration in revising the data collection process. Children often like to escape the prying eyes of educators Rogers and Evans (2007) and researchers and find places to hide and be themselves. I needed to honour their decisions and be mindful when videotaping that the researcher should not be intruding in on their personal and private spaces.

4.15.1.2 Phase 2. Revisiting the research question, the theory of group ZPD, and the concept of *perezhivanie* for meaning-making demonstrated that these factors related to children's lived experience of spirituality within the context of outdoor play rather than the use of technology in the outdoor environment. Therefore, a revised approach was required.

The second phase employed observation, field notes, and stimulated recall (Thomson, 2008). In this phase, observation moved from providing the children with still digital cameras to me, as the researcher, recording events from the Walks with a small, hand-held video camera. (Flip ©). My actions in this regard enabled the children to be free to play and explore the outdoor environment without having duties imposed upon them. I also took field notes of conversations and events that occurred during The Walk. Stimulated recall (Thomson, 2008) then replaced the semi-structured interviews with children in the ELC classroom. This process enabled me to invite the children to re-watch the videos that I had captured on The Walk and ask open-ended questions to discover what they wanted to share about their experiences.

I discussed the idea of changing the research methodology with the children participating in the study and asked them for permission to film them and then show them the videos after The Walk. The children agreed. Consequently, I videotaped as much of The Walk as possible, focusing particularly on interactions and conversations between the children, and between the children and the adults, according to the sociocultural idea of spirituality as located in relationships. I also ensured that I recorded as much of the reflection time at the end of The Walk as I could. This part, in particular, provided a rich amount of data, where the children explored episodes from The Walk with each other, and thereby developed a knowledge and an understanding of the process.

4.15.2 Stimulated recall

The process of stimulated recall (Thomson, 2008) was very successful in gaining meaningful data. The children were highly engaged and able to share their thoughts, feelings and perspectives after viewing the video data. They often requested to watch the videos several times, with each viewing, in most instances, providing additional insights that were helpful to the other children as well as to me. In addition, this method provided the children with more freedom to play and explore the outdoor environment as well as be an active participant in the research process.

I found that when I returned several days after The Walk, the children had already begun the meaning-making process, particularly for experiences they considered significant. In addition, the educators provided several opportunities in the intervening time to discuss

these events with the children and allowed them to use art materials to process them. Thus, in studies involving children, video can help both the children and the researcher recall the context of activities. A multi-modal medium, the video camera captures action, verbal interaction, and body language (Thomson, 2008).

Children as young as three years old are able to grasp the concept that they are seeing themselves on the video screen and can even recognise themselves, while nonetheless understanding that they are not viewing a live event (Dockett & Perry, 2010). Forman uses the phrase “tools of the mind” to describe the concept of showing children video and allowing them to “download” the details so that their minds are then free to reflect more deeply upon the events shown. This concept assumes that the children need to see the video in order to reflect upon the events recorded. It also assumes that only a “free mind” is capable of deeper thought and reflection. It was my experience that children as young as three were capable of viewing video footage of themselves and reflecting upon the events depicted.

An important question arose during the course of my study; namely, which videos to show the children. Initially, I chose a number of short videos, which involved the same three to four children and invited them to watch these with me, thereby creating a group ZPD. However, when the children were offered a range of videos from *The Walk* to watch, they demonstrated their ability to select the videos that were meaningful to them. For example, on the first visit to the ELC to conduct a stimulated recall (Thomson, 2008) the session began with showing the children four or five selected videos. Once this was done, however, they were then very curious to see what other footage had been taken. Several wanted to see them all, and often more than once. Thomson (2008) addressed the notion of repetitiveness, noting that children often need to perform the same act of play many times over many days or weeks to fully process it and derive meaning from it.

Forman (1999) noted that “video has an affordance”; that is, the teacher or researcher has the power to deem events worthy or unworthy of being filmed or discussed. However, it is important to challenge the notion that only the teacher’s or researcher’s view of what makes an event “worthy” of recording and/or revisiting is correct. In point of fact, during the study, a piece of video not deemed sufficiently worthy by me elicited great interest among the children. Thus, in a study such as this one, the children need to be consulted in choosing events to be filmed and to be worthy of discussion. While asking children at every stage whether they would like a particular event to be filmed is clearly impractical and can reduce the number of spontaneous events, filming a lot of video footage and inviting the children to help in choosing what they would like to watch provides a way to capture what is relevant.

The children included in this research project were also shown two or three videos of themselves and were then asked what was happening in the video, and what they were thinking and feeling at the time it was recorded. Based on the children's observations, contemporaneous field notes, and conversations recorded on the video, I created a series of transcripts that provided insights into the moment by moment and the in-situ construction of social reality that occurred during The Walk.

Video is a particularly effective method for capturing evidence as children have a strong interest in image-making, which includes "mark marking" and photography Forman (1999). The research bore out this assertion as the children took great interest in the video material presented to them. This approach provided the children with the opportunity to re-enter the immediacy of the event and provide significant levels of recall, even some weeks or even months after the events depicted; while watching the video, they were able to recall what they were thinking and feeling at the time the video was taken.

4.16 Data Collection

I accompanied the children on a total of 14 Walks over the four terms. The aim of the first four Walks was to create a safe environment where the children felt respected and comfortable. The following two Walks used the first data collection method of asking the children to take photos, but in the remaining eight walks I used the second data collection method of videotaping the children.

At the end of the Walks and interviews, I had a large collection of short videos, field notes, and notes from the stimulated recall (Thomson, 2008) sessions. The videos were then re-watched and all relevant data placed in an MS Excel spreadsheet to begin the data analysis phase.

4.17 Data Analysis

There are two distinct approaches to data analysis – inductive and deductive (Gray, 2014). The deductive approach "begins with a universal view of a situation and works back to the particulars; in contrast, induction moves from fragmentary details to a connected view of a situation" (Gray, 2014, p. 16). The inductive approach enables previously unknown categories and patterns to emerge from the data during the analysis phase.

The two approaches are not mutually exclusive and employing both in a qualitative case study is appropriate. Gray (2014) employed the term "interim analysis" to describe analysis that begins with a deductive framework but is open to change based on new findings

as the data is explored. For the data analysis phase of this research project, I chose an interim analysis approach that began with Goodliff's (2013a) model outlining four areas of behaviour of children's spirituality: relational, reflective, creativity, awe, and wonder; and Transcendence. At the same time, I employed the inductive approach to look for additional patterns, categories and themes that could emerge from the data.

The robust and proven deductive approach that proposed is called the "framework approach" (Pope et al., 2000). I selected this approach, which has five stages and allows for interim analysis, for this project. The five stages of the Pope et al. framework approach are *familiarisation; identifying a thematic framework; indexing; charting; and mapping and interpretation*.

The first stage – familiarisation – requires an intensive examination of the raw data in order to begin identifying key themes and ideas. The second stage – identifying a thematic framework – involves ascertaining the key issues, concepts and themes that have emerged from the initial data analysis, or that have been selected in advance based on the research question to be addressed. In the context of this research, Goodliff's (2013a) model of four behaviours of young children's spirituality acted as "sensitising concepts" and provided a thematic starting point for the analysis.

Within the Pope et al. framework, such concepts provide suggestions or initial directions for analysis. Applying the inductive approach to the data in subsequent stages of the data analysis process then facilitated the emergence of other categories, themes and patterns. The third stage in the Pope et al. framework – indexing –involved systematically labelling all the data according to the sensitising concepts and any applicable themes, categories or concepts.

As well as the indexing process, a heuristic paradigm was applied at this stage. An heuristic paradigm recognises that research and the actions and words of participants are often complex, interactive and sometimes illogical, and don't always lend themselves to comprehensive analysis and exact solutions (Pope et al. 2000). A heuristic paradigm is defined as "any problem-solving strategy that appears likely to lead to relevant, reliable and useful information" (Heineman, 2009, p. 11).

A heuristic paradigm is congruent with an interpretivist approach that seeks to explain social processes and recognises complex cultural and historical contexts. It is also phenomenological in its application, seeking to understand through experience and observation. As a researcher, I brought all my years of experience in spiritual direction and

spirituality to bear in undertaking this research study. I drew upon this experience in a heuristic way, reviewing the data for what I felt also potentially represented spirituality in young children.

The fourth stage of the Pope et al. (2000) framework – charting – required the data to be summarised and classified according to the labels identified in Stage 3. At this point of the study, I identified and charted not only the Goodliff behaviours that had provided my starting point but also the Reggio Emilia philosophical praxis, cultural references, and nature. The final stage of the Pope et al. (2000) framework – mapping and interpretation – involved using the Stage 4 charts to define new themes, identify associations between themes, and determine the appropriate explanations that would describe the findings. This stage can also involve subsuming some themes identified in the data under others, resulting in reduced dimensions.

4.17.1 Familiarisation. As mentioned, the first stage, familiarisation, requires an intensive examination of the raw data in order to begin identifying key themes and ideas. In this project, such examination involved watching all the video data that had been captured and reading the stimulated recall (Thomson, 2008) transcripts as well as any field notes, journal notes, or recorded observations. In addition to the sensitising concepts of Relational Consciousness; Reflective Practice; Creativity and Imagination; and Transcendence, which had already been established, some additional themes and ideas began to emerge heuristically. I then created an MS Excel spreadsheet, which recorded each of the videos with a title and short description. I also noted corresponding and related data. (See Appendix H for examples.)

4.17.2 Identifying a thematic framework. The second stage, identifying a thematic framework, involved identifying key issues, concepts and themes that had emerged from the study of the data. To accomplish this step, I began with the project's sensitising concepts, as these had been identified as the dimensions of young children's spirituality that underpinned my study, and I revisited the research aim, which was to analyse children's lived experience of spirituality within an early learning setting informed by the REP and situated in a natural outdoor environment.

Other potential themes then emerged heuristically, such as the affordances of nature, the interactions between the children themselves and between the children and adults, the cultural beliefs and values observed during the data collection process and any other specific observations that were clear demonstrations of the REP. Some overlaps between categories

occurred – for example, child-to-child and child-to-adult interactions appeared to overlap with Goodliff’s (2013a) relational area of behaviour.

In this stage, consistency in comparing each datum with the rest of the data to establish analytical categories was crucial. Also important was that categories be added to reflect as many of the nuances observed in the data as possible so as not to mistakenly limit the number of categories in the initial stages of the research (Pope et al., 2000). At this point in the data analysis phase, nine themes had been identified.

4.17.3 Indexing. In the third stage, indexing, the index was applied to all the data in a systematic way. Short text descriptors were used at this stage to organise and summarise the data. For this project, I created a detailed index in MS Excel that incorporated themes identified in the first and second stages.

A code was given to each of the themes and each video was indexed accordingly:

R – Relational

RF – Reflective

T – Transcendence incorporating awe and wonder

CR – creativity

N – Nature

CA – Child to Adult

CC – Child to Child

Z – ZPD

CUL – Cultural references

RE – Reggio Emilia

4.17.4 Charting. The fourth stage in the Pope et al. (2000) framework was charting, which involved rearranging and displaying the data in chart form. As part of this project, a chart was created to list the major themes that had emerged during the study (see Appendix H).

The nine themes were then combined to represent four main categories as follows:

1. Relational Consciousness incorporating:
 - Child-to-child interactions
 - Child-to-adult interactions
2. Reflective Practice incorporating:
 - Reggio Emilia Reflective Practices
 - ZPD
3. Imagination and creativity incorporating:
 - Cultural references
 - Use of natural objects
4. Transcendence incorporating:
 - Awe and wonder
 - Mystery
 - Natural phenomenon

The videos were re-indexed and re-classified to reflect this step.

4.17.5 Mapping and interpretation. The final stage, mapping and interpretation, involved using the Stage 4 charts to define concepts, identify associations between themes, and find explanations that described the findings. In this stage, some of themes were found to have possibly belonged under other overarching ones. Thus, in my study, the four new categories identified from the examination of the data – Reggio Emilia philosophy and praxis, cultural references, children’s symbolic language, and nature – were subsumed under the four dimensional themes derived from Goodliff’s (2013[a](#)) model: Relational Consciousness, Reflective Practice, Creativity and Imagination, and Transcendence. The data observed pointed to these as the most relevant to the dimensions of the children’s lived experience of spirituality. It is important to note that each dimension contains rich material that expands Goodliff’s (2013[a](#)) original areas of behaviour as presented in her article. It was at this stage in the data analysis process that the concept of perezhivanie began to emerge as a possible framework to help to analyse the process that many children followed as they sought meaning in the small and large-group discussions.

A table was established to record the most relevant Walk experience from the findings.

Table 1

Dimensions of Spirituality

Dimensions of spirituality	Theoretical framework	Relevant data
Relational Consciousness Child to child Child to adult	Reggio Emilia Vygotsky (1978, 1994, 2004), (C. Edwards et al., 2012)	Ella and Melinda build a house (15/11/2011) <i>Three Little Pigs</i> (6/3/2012) and Stimulated recall (8/3/2012) Toadstool ZPD (6/3/2012)
Reflective Practice Reggio Emilia ZPD Perezhivanie	Goodliff (2013a) Reggio Emilia Vygotsky (1978, 1994, 2004), (C. Edwards et al., 2012)	The rabbit's foot (28/4/2012) Conversation at the end of The Walk (28/4/2012) Discussion at the end of The Walk (20/3/2012)
Creativity and Imagination Cultural references Children's symbolic language Use of natural objects	Goodliff (2013a) Reggio Emilia Vygotsky (1978, 1994, 2004), (C. Edwards et al., 2012)	Patrick and his map (6/3/2012) Children playing musical instruments (20/3/2012) Isabella fishing (6/3/2012) Construction of the cubbyhouse (28/4/2012) The ice cream shop (20/3/2012) Playing in the tree (20/3/2012)
The transcendent Awe and wonder Mystery	Goodliff (2013a)	Spider's web (6/3/2012) Isabella and the slug (29/11/2011) Claire and the bark (6/3/2012)

4.18 Data Validity

Employing sociocultural theory in a research study can present a challenge when establishing data validity. If knowledge is constructed by individuals within a unique cultural and historical social setting, then the notions of verifiable truth and reproducible results are perhaps elusive. Qualitative researchers have long been aware of the inherent challenges when it comes to the representation of multiple socially constructed versions of reality (Mertens, 2014) and the way in which researchers know is bound up with both what the researcher knows and the relationship they have with the research participants (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). Validity is the extent to which the categories adequately describe

the material and the concepts that are part of the research question (Schreir, 2014, p. 179). In other words, what is stated as a finding must match what actually occurred. However, it is important to ensure that the data analysed is presented with integrity and internal consistency.

This section outlines the four practices undertaken during the study to ensure data validity: (1) the long periods over which data were collected; (2) participant observation; (3) data triangulation; and (4) reflexivity.

4.18.1 Long periods over which data were collected. Glaser and Strauss (1967) asserted that collecting data over a longer period of time allows for continual data analysis and comparison to refine constructs. Thus, extending the data collection period to over four terms covering a two-year period ensured a greater level of accuracy and integrity in the data.

Having longer periods with the children enabled me to revisit experiences over time. I began to observe from the data that often children needed multiple opportunities to make sense and meaning from experiences – for example, ZPDs and small and large groups during The Walk, as well as time spent back in the classroom in the form of stimulated recall (Thomson, 2008), where they would often ask to watch and re-watch videos a number of times and frequently add new insights with each additional viewing. For example, the initial data collection method, where the children were invited to take their own photos and then interviewed, did not provide me with the data needed to address the research question and therefore address the aim. As a result, the data collection process was modified so that the more reliable data was collected.

4.18.2 Participant observation. Another means of increasing the validity of data in a study such as mine is to observe the study participants in such a way that can open mature eyes to how children see things (C. Clark, 2010). Clark outlined two main forms of observation; participant observation and non-participant observation. Participant observation features naturalism, sensitivity to context and the emphasis on process rather than static behaviour. It invites the researcher to view children's life experiences with empathy and openness. Non-participant observation occurs when the researcher does not interact with the children in any direct or sustained way. Studies such as those of Coles (1990) and Hyde (2008a) took children out of a classroom setting and placed them in an interview room, which meant that the study did not take place in the children's normal setting. Moreover, not only have few studies included data gathering in the children's normal setting, but even fewer have included observation and videotaping in an outdoor setting, together with the use of stimulated-recall processes (Thomson 2008). In contrast, data collection in this research

project was carried out by observing children's natural play activities in an outdoor setting. It employed videotaping so that the process of observing influenced the children's normal behaviour as little as possible, and stimulated recall was employed to include the children in the construction of knowledge and so heighten the amount of detail obtained through observation of their activities.

4.18.3 Data triangulation. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), the process of triangulation prevents the researcher from "accepting too readily the validity of initial impressions; it enhances the scope, density, and clarity of constructs developed during the course of the investigation" (1967, p. 11). Although the data from this research was collected over four school terms over a two-year period with different children all having different experiences, I was nonetheless seeking a common theme of a lived experience of spirituality. Consequently, I employed a number of different means to triangulate the data. I videotaped the children's experiences to ensure that events were accurately recorded, and I then later had these video segments transcribed. The video tapes were shown to the children a few days after the actual event in a stimulated-recall interview setting. These interviews enabled me to verify with the children that the transcripts accurately reflected the words and expressions they had used as well as ensuring that my understanding of what had occurred in those moments was a true reflection of the children's experiences. I also allowed the children to watch and re-watch the videos to ensure that all of their feelings, perspectives and thoughts had been captured.

4.18.4 Reflexivity. Reflexivity involves turning back on oneself in order that the subject of the investigation is the production of knowledge (May & Perry, 2014). It is important for the integrity of the data to include "how the researcher's praxis and their role and social position relate to the production and processing of their work" (2014, p. 110). Reflexivity is not a method but a "way of thinking but rather an iterative and continuous characteristics of good research practice" (2014, p. 111). Lincoln et al. (2011) stated that reflexivity is a "conscious experience of the self as both inquirer and learner and as one coming to know the self within the process of the research itself" (2011, p. 124). Therefore, the researcher must be mindful of their own role at every step of the process. It is important to continually question the assumptions and perceptions that existed at every stage. For example, as a parent of the ELC, I needed to be aware that I only knew a small part of what occurred at the ELC and for the most part, I was unaware of the philosophical underpinnings of each activity. I was viewing the activities through a parental lens rather than an educator's or researcher's lens. As outlined, earlier in the chapter, my own religious views and training informed by understanding and perceived importance of spirituality that may or may not exist

in the lives of the young children in the project. As each step of the data collection and analysis stage, I needed to ask myself what assumptions was I holding in those moments and how might those assumptions impact my choice of what to video tape and what questions to ask of the children.

4.19 Conclusion

According to Guba (1981), outlining each stage of the research design process increases the potential reliability of the data presented. In preparation for conducting my study, and as presented in this chapter, I designed and then outlined each step in the data collection and analysis processes. The methodology I employed was based on accepted epistemological, ontological and axiological theories. For example, I adopted a constructivist epistemology, an interpretivist ontology, and an axiological approach of critical self-awareness that acknowledged my underlying assumptions and pre-suppositions. This approach ensured the transparency and reproducibility of my research.

While the main data collection and analysis process was sufficiently sound to produce a significant amount of useful data, in retrospect I would have modified the design of my research project to include the voices and perspectives of the teaching staff. I believe that such a modification would have added another dimension in terms of their understanding of young children's spirituality and would have been beneficial to the overall aim of the research project, which was to design a new framework of spirituality for early childhood education.

This chapter has outlined the methodology that was used for the research project of this thesis. Based upon a sociocultural theoretical framework, an ontological stance of interpretivism, and an epistemological perspective of constructivism, this chapter has outlined how a qualitative, instrumental case study provided the ideal framework for this research project. This framework enabled me to work alongside the children in a collaborative way to construct a shared understanding of the dimensions of young children's spirituality.

The chapter has also outlined the two approaches to the data collection phase that were adopted and explained why it was necessary to change them during the project. In addition, it has described the data analysis processes that were used, and concluded with a description of the processes that had been designed to ensure the validity of the data collected throughout the study.

The next chapter expands on the four dimensions of spirituality that were identified during the conduct of this research study.

Chapter 5

Findings

5.1 Introduction

The aim of this research project was to develop a new framework to assist EC educators in recognising and nurturing the spirituality of young children. The research question that informed this aim was to identify and analyse children's lived experience of spirituality within an early learning setting informed by the philosophical framework of Reggio Emilia and situated in a natural outdoor environment.

In this chapter, I present the main findings with respect to this aim. In the methodology chapter, I described how the main themes emerged from encoding the data through the use of an interim analysis approach Grey and Winter (2011) which employed both a deductive and an inductive methodology as well as an heuristic paradigm. Four main dimensions of spirituality with several subthemes were identified: (1) Relational Consciousness; (2) Reflective Practice; (3) Creativity and Imagination; and (4) Transcendence, which drew together the model of the four areas of behaviour by Goodliff (2013a) and the sociocultural theoretical framework based on the work of Vygotsky (1987). These four main dimensions addressed the research question, which informed the new framework of young children's spirituality. An exploration of each of these dimensions forms the structure of the chapter.

Each dimension of spirituality presented in the next section explores a number of the examples from The Walk, beginning with the transcripts from the video footage captured followed by the conversations that occurred during the stimulated-recall (Thomson, 2008) reflection when recorded. Not every Walk example had a stimulated-recall reflection process. I have indicated where this is the case by using the term "no stimulated recall reflection" (NSRR).

5.2 Dimension 1: Relational Consciousness

The first dimension of children's lived experience of spirituality is Relational Consciousness. This dimension consists of two subthemes: child-to-child Relational Consciousness and child-to-adult Relational Consciousness. This research project drew upon sociocultural theory and its application to the field of children's spirituality. Therefore, significantly influencing the conduct of this study were the works of authors such as Bone

(2007), Champagne (2003), Goodliff (2013a), and Hay and Nye (1996) who asserted that spirituality is constructed, further developed and nurtured in relationships with others.

Researchers such as Moriarty (2011) and Goodliff (2013a) have adopted a holistic and integrated view of Relational Consciousness, arguing that spirituality can only be adequately described as an integrated journey made up of both inner and outer experiences. Hay and Nye (1996) regarded Relational Consciousness as central to children's spirituality and capable of being divided into four "awarenesses": (1) of self; (2) of others; (3) of the environment; and (4) of a transcendent other (for some individuals).

The scenarios described in the next sections relate to the child-to-child and child-to-adult consciousness subthemes and a holistic view of Relational Consciousness in relation to the interactions and conversations among the children themselves and between the children and adults which respectively provide insights into the nature of children's lived experience of spirituality.

5.2.1 Child-to-child Relational Consciousness. The first subtheme with regard to the dimension of Relational Consciousness is child-to-child Relational Consciousness, which is illustrated by the episode from the research study when the children constructed a house from natural materials. The following description of this episode points to the elements in the development of Relational Consciousness it illustrated.

5.2.1.1 *Ella and Melinda building a house.* The following episode that is described was captured on video.

This episode involved interactions among the children that occurred in a new play area of the school where tree stumps were used as stepping-stones. Ella and Melinda began gathering a section of a tree stump and some large pieces of bark and leaves to form a house, and no adults were involved in this project other than me, who filmed the event.



Figure 3. Claire and Dash observing the group and holding her “roof”.

Melinda (removing a piece of wood on the tree stump and replacing it with a larger piece): *A table.*

Ella (picking up pieces of leaves): *Chairs.* She then placed these next to the “table”.

Ella: *It’s a water table.* Removing some pieces, she then stated: *We don’t need those.*

Melinda (placing another piece of wood): *And some chairs.*

Ella: *We need a couch.*

Ella: *Melinda, that’s the table.*

Melinda: *And a bed.*

Ella: *That’s the couch. If the kids want to sit at the table, they can, and the adults can sit there* (pointing to the other side of the table).

As the children were occupied constructing the house with natural materials, Claire arrived and stood behind the other children.

Claire (holding layers of bark): *Look what I made. Did you need a roof like this?*

Ella and Melinda didn't answer but continued to fix the sides of the "house". During this episode, the children exchanged few words, yet they worked together to construct the house. Each child contributed items they believed to be important for a house. Claire remained silent, observing the construction of the house and holding her 'roof'.

Several days later, I returned to the ELC to conduct the stimulated-recall reflection (Thomson, 2008). I asked Ella, Melinda and Claire to watch the video footage I had recorded of them. I was interested in what the children were thinking and feeling during the construction of the house and, in particular, what was happening for Claire when Ella and Melinda were apparently ignoring her.

Ella: I was trying to build a house, but it didn't really work.

Claire: And I said what are you making?

Kristen: You were offering Ella something you had made. What happened?

Claire: I had the roof; it was lots of stuff and my cousin Dash broke it and Mum made it again.

Claire: I asked you (addressing Ella) if you wanted it, but you were concentrating and didn't hear me.

Ella: I didn't need anything else.

Claire: She didn't know I was there. Who's there Ella asked, and I said your favourite friend. Maybe it's Melinda or Gemma or Claire.

Ella: I didn't know who it was.

As I didn't capture on video Claire asking Ella who was there, I am not sure the episode occurred as reported. Claire did not appear to be upset that Ella had not responded to her offer of the roof and believed that Ella did not hear her. Ella was matter of fact in her response, stating: "I didn't need anything else." Further, she admitted that she didn't know who was there.

The group ZPD created with this Walk episode in the form of stimulated recall (Thomson, 2008) in the classroom enabled the children to further explore their thoughts and feelings at the time the episode occurred. As they watched the videos of the episode, they were able to shift their awareness from themselves to others who were around them at the time and what they might be thinking and feeling.

This episode highlights the importance of researchers setting aside their assumptions as well as demonstrating that children's memories and recollections can change over time. Although Claire's comments were not captured on the video and perhaps displayed a desire on Claire's part to communicate that feeling to Ella, Claire shared how she had told Ella "It was her favourite friend". Thus, this episode exhibited how including both the inner and outer realities provides a more holistic view.

From the perspective of the *perezhivanie* process, the presence of a great deal of meaning or of any level of transformation during the episode was not evident. The Reflective Practice of showing the videos in small groups using the stimulated-recall process (Thomson, 2008) enabled the children to revisit the experience and reflect on the presence of themselves as well as others in The Walk episode. At this stage, it appeared Claire was far more aware of who was present than perhaps either Ella or Melinda, who were otherwise occupied in the construction event.

As the open-ended questions concluded at this point, it was impossible to ascertain if the children had constructed any meaning or if any transformation had occurred. Thus, applying only the first few steps of the *perezhivanie* process had apparently limited the ability for the lived experience of spirituality to be recognised or further developed. Little learning or development appeared to have taken place during this episode, perhaps because I had ceased to ask open-ended questions that were meant to encourage further discussion and thought, or perhaps because the episode had lacked the emotional context needed to progress the *perezhivanie* process further.

5.2.2 Child-to-adult Relational Consciousness and group ZPD. The second subtheme of Relational Consciousness is child-to-adult interactions and the establishment of a group ZPD to create safe spaces for children to reflect upon their experiences. Characterised by interactions between children and adults, this subtheme was apparent in the *Three Little Pigs* (Halliwell-Phillips, 1886) episode.

5.2.2.1 *Three little pigs episode.* The following episode that is described was captured on video.

Out of sticks and leaves, the children had constructed a cubbyhouse that leant against a large tree. Several children were playing inside when a visiting adult, Warwick, began playing the role of the big bad wolf from the tale of the *Three Little Pigs* (Halliwell-Phillips, 1886). The children inside then joined in the story and assumed the roles of the three little pigs. As I observed and filmed the event, I was aware that some of the children had become frightened

of the pretend “wolf”, and I then noticed some of the other children moving to protect those who were frightened.

Samantha: *“Everyone, get out.”*

Samantha had perceived a danger in the form of the adult, Warwick, pretending to be a wolf, that caused her to not only recognise feelings of fear within herself but to also recognise that this fear might be felt by others as well. Her fear had led her to express a ‘practical consciousness for others’ (Shotter, 2006) and warn others to leave the tent. The stimulated-recall (Thomson, 2008) process confirms this impression. I asked Samantha what was happening in the video. She replied:

Samantha: *Scariest.*

Able to express her feelings at the time the incident occurred, she then elaborated further:

Samantha: *’Cos he was trying to get all of us. I stayed so the big wolf couldn’t get me. I could hardly stay there.*

Other children exhibited a similar response. For example, Sophie, who was also in the tent, had not needed words to express her fear. She took Rory’s hand and led him out of the tent. Shotter (2006) believed there was a strong link between language and consciousness, and yet this example occurred without any verbal expressions. In the stimulated-recall process a few days later, I asked Sophie what was happening for her in that moment. After watching the video, she was able to recall her emotions and replied:

Sophie: *When the boy started to be the wolf, I wanted to go.*

And also:

Sophie: *I ran away. I was scared and I just grabbed him (Rory).*

Thus, Sophie had demonstrated a consciousness for others and a desire to protect others from danger. This episode also illustrated a very different response, this one from Isabella. What began as a consciousness and awareness of others moved to an awareness of her own consciousness and agency. Rather than assuming a flight response, Isabella, left the safety of the tent to confront “the wolf”, which demonstrated that she had adopted a fight response. She stated:

Isabella: *I’m the other one.*

Warwick roars at her, but she stands her ground.

Isabella: *No, I'm the other one.*

When I interviewed Isabella with Gemma a few days later, she was able to further articulate her thoughts and feelings:

Isabella: *Yeah, there was a wolf.*

Gemma: (to Isabella) *But did he get you?*

Isabella: *Yes.*

Gemma: *Oh my God!*

Isabella: *Then a nice wolf came and saved us.*

Kristen: *Why did you leave the cubbyhouse, Isabella?*

Isabella: *I wanted to be the nice wolf.*

This example indicates a movement from consciousness for others to a consciousness for herself and then a movement back to consciousness for others and how she might have been able to act in this situation to protect her fellow children. Thus, Isabella had displayed a level of courage in the face of danger, but spoke of the coming of the “nice wolf” in the third person, as if this wolf were removed and separate from herself. However, when Gemma expressed amazement at this, she owned the identity of the good wolf as herself.

Isabella had also demonstrated an awareness and consciousness of the *Three Little Pigs* story and so knew that the wolf represented the dangerous figure in the story. Her consciousness had demonstrated a level of creativity and intelligence when she discovered a new way for the story to progress. She believed that if she were able to create a character – that is, the “nice wolf” – that could negate the threat of the bad wolf. Many of the children had fled the tent and, even though she felt fear, she transcended it to act in a way to protect the safety of the other children and possibly the tent as a safe place in which to play.

A few days later when I conducted the stimulated-recall process (Thomson, 2008), which created a group ZPD, it enabled Isabella to begin to reflect deeply upon the experience and find meaning as the *perezhivanie* process unfolded. Reggio Emilia philosophy places a strong emphasis on the reflection process which included open-ended questions and the pedagogy of listening and active listening. During the re-watching of the video, sufficient

time was offered Isabella to watch the videos, often several times and open ended questions such as ‘what was happening in this video’ allowed her to respond in whichever way she wanted to. In this reflection space, Isabella became aware of her thoughts and feelings as well as of the others present in the cubbyhouse. Isabella was thus able to move from being the practitioner of her life to viewing herself as a theorist in her life. This awareness allowed her to access her own agency and become aware of the significance and consequences of her own actions. Thus, the reflection process enabled the children to see themselves in new and surprising ways. Being able to see herself in a new light, Isabella had become aware of her own agency and power and could apply the lessons learnt in this episode to other future events.

The difference between this play episode and the previous in terms of the *perezhivanie* process was that Isabella had been provided with more space and time for reflection, which enabled her to ponder further upon the event. As a result, the event itself evoked a larger/deeper emotional response, thus facilitating the unfolding of the *perezhivanie* process in an easier and more helpful way.

5.2.2.2 The toadstool ZPD. The second example of child to adult relational occurred when some children found what appeared to be several toadstools growing on the ground.



Figure 4. Sophie showing non-verbal cues and demonstrating her comfort with the educator.

Noah (kneeling down and touching the toadstools with a stick): *It might be poisonous*

Educator (kneeling down alongside the Noah): *It might be poisonous. How do we know if they are poisonous?*

Adam: *Because we don't have a person who knows all about mushrooms*

Educator: *No, we don't.*

The educator then creates a ZPD and invites other children to share their knowledge of toadstools and mushrooms. She reflects back to the children what she hears and asks open ended questions to elicit their knowledge.

Aaron: *I know*

Educator: *Oh Bodhi knows. What do you know Bodhi?*

Aaron: *The sun and the rain grow them*

Educator: *The sun and the rain grow them*

Isabella: *And some can be poisonous*

Educator: *So some are poisonous and some are not. I wonder what these are?*

Isabella: *these are toadstools. You don't touch them. You only touch the ones that you buy from the shops.*

Ava starts to touch the toadstools.

Sophie comes and stands alongside the educator and places her hand on her shoulder. She leans over to have a look.

Educator: *Is that right? What about you Ava, you are touching them – is that OK?*

The educator allows Ava to touch the toadstools and invites her to explain her actions.

Ava: *Yes, I can feel them, they aren't poisonous.*

Sophie now squats down alongside the educator and places her arm over her knee: *Excuse me. I know about plants and the mushrooms can grow really tall if you put water on them.* She gestures with her hands how the mushrooms start off small then grow very big by extending out her hands very wide.

Sophie is clearly comfortable with the educator and feel the need to physically touch her and be close to her.

Isabella picks one off the ground and comes to show me: *I picked one. Have a look.*

She places the toadstool in front of my face so I can get a good look.

The creation of the ZPD has many qualities of the perezhivanie process. The educator created a safe space for the children to explore the toadstools. She also kept the ZPD open and allowed new children to join in the conversation. She asked open ended questions not to test knowledge necessarily but to elicit the knowledge of the children. She didn't try and provide the answers but rather simply reflected back what she had heard before asking what other children felt. The ZPD ended when all the children had provided their knowledge and were satisfied with the information that had been shared. The non verbal cues I observed demonstrated that the children felt comfortable squatting down to get very close to the toadstools, Sophie felt comfortable being very close to the educator. Sophie also used her hands to demonstrate how the mushrooms may grow.

5.3 Dimension 2: Reflective Practice

The second dimension of children's lived experience of spirituality is the use of Reflective Practice. There are three sub-themes of Reflective Practice: the REP practices of active listening and open-ended questions, and the use of stimulated recall (Thomson, 2008); group ZPD; and the perezhivanie process.

5.3.1 Reggio Emilia practices of active listening and open-ended questions.

Reflective Practice on The Walk was enabled by employing the pedagogical practices of Reggio Emilia – namely, the creation of safe spaces for children to reflect upon experiences, the use of open-ended questions, active listening to young children, the creation of group ZPDs, the perezhivanie process and stimulated recall (Thomson, 2008) This dimension is comprised of one main Walk episode of the rabbit's foot, which has been broken down into four smaller episodes: (1) the burying of the rabbit's foot; (2) the group ZPD created by the educator and me; (3) the class discussion at the conclusion of The Walk; and (4) the stimulated recall (Thomson, 2008) that occurred the following day in the classroom. Providing a number of opportunities for the children to reflect both in small and large groups,

offered the children time and space to reflect upon the event and deepen their understanding of the event.

5.3.1.1 *Burying the rabbit's foot.* This episode was captured on video.



Figure 5. Burying the rabbit's foot.

The first smaller episode involved the children finding a rabbit's foot near the start of The Walk and carrying it to the island. Noah then decided to bury the rabbit's foot and conduct a funeral for the rabbit. He dug a hole, placed the rabbit's foot inside it, and then poured some water on the foot.

The first stage of this episode contained the following dialogue:

Noah: *Let's put some water in the dirt.*

With these words, Noah was simply recounting his actions as he performed them. His words provided no insight into what he was thinking or feeling or what his actions represented. In the second stage, I asked Noah to reflect upon his actions:

Kristen: *Noah, why did you put water in the hole?*

Noah: *I'm thinking we should.*

Kristen: *Why?*

Noah: *So it will come alive again.*

Noah then performed a eulogy for the rabbit.

Noah: *Poor, poor rabbit. I'll never forget rabbit. Every time I come on The Walk I will remember the rabbit.*

Asking Noah why he had performed these actions enabled him to access beliefs concerning them. His statements provide insight into his beliefs about death and dying, an afterlife, and the role funerals and eulogies play in life. By doing so, Noah had been attempting to make meaning from the event.

This play episode also demonstrates creativity on Noah's part as he drew on his own knowledge of funerals and eulogies and was able to create his own version of them. Noah had expressed deep sadness during the eulogy and the idea that the rabbit would be very sorely missed by him.

5.3.2 The group ZPD created by the educator and me. The second element of this episode involved the Reflective Practice of young children's lived experience of spirituality in the use of stimulated recall (Thomson, 2008), group ZPD, and the perezhivanie process.

The following scenario was captured on video.

This next finding began with the arrival of the educator as the children were continuing with the burial of the rabbit. She conducted a small group discussion.

Samantha: *We're covering the bunny leg.*

The educator: *Really? Why?*

Noah: *Because it is dead.*

The educator: *Why do you need to bury the bunny leg?*

Noah: *So it can go up to Heaven.*

The educator: *How does that happen?*

Noah: *God! God does it.*

With the help of the educator's ability to create a safe environment and the use of open-ended questions, Noah had been able to reflect further upon what he believed was happening with the rabbit.

The educator then turned to the other children and asked them if they agreed.

Gemma: *It just stays in there.*

Samantha: *God does it.*

The educator was then able to ask the other children what they believed might have happened to the dead rabbit. In doing so, she had created an environment where the children felt safe to offer their opinions, even if they differed from Noah's.

The educator: *What do you think, Aaron?*

Aaron: *The Easter Bunny comes and has to chop off the wolf's head.*

The educator: *Why do we have to chop the wolf's head off?*

Aaron: *Because he killed the rabbit.*

Adam: *We could just say "shoo!"*

The educator: *We could just say "shoo".*

The educator had not offered her opinion as to what she believed had happened to the dead rabbit but instead assumed a listening stance that reflected back the children's ideas to them. This enabled the children to access their own ideas and perspectives about death and the possibility of an afterlife. In doing so, she had been able to elicit the children's knowledge and assist them in articulating their own beliefs and explore the question of their identities in that experience for themselves. Rinaldi (2006) considers the value of open-ended questions as provoking thoughts rather than testing knowledge.

5.3.3 Class discussion. The third episode involved a class discussion at the end of The Walk.

Noah: *And I put the X on top, telling people not to bury, not to dig there.*

The educator: *Why, why is that important?*

Noah: *So it can go up to heaven. It has to go up to heaven so God knows it's dead and I saw a broken bone sticking out.*

This conversation had provided more insight into Noah's understanding of God. He had moved from saying the rabbit would live again to being able to articulate how that would happen. The question from the educator had provided more time and space for Noah to deepen his response and articulate what beliefs those responses touched and were based upon.

5.3.4 Stimulated-recall reflection. The fourth stage in the rabbit's foot episode was the stimulated-recall (Thomson, 2008) interview that occurred the following day:

Kristen: *What happened yesterday on The Walk, Noah?*

Noah: *We found a dead rabbit and I digged (dug) a hole and put the rabbit in the hole, and it didn't go to heaven straightaway because I think I heard God's magic.*

Kristen: *Tell me about God's magic.*

Noah: *God will make it come alive again.*

This dialogue provides another insight into Noah's beliefs. The additional reflection space created by the Stimulated Recall process of re-visiting the experience allowed him to further depth his feelings and articulate his ideas. He had now been able to explain how he believed God could make the rabbit come alive – by using his magic. This movement from action to beliefs and consciousness had been made possible by the process of reflection offered by the educator and me.

Another aspect of this reflection had been the social one. In the class discussion, Noah's experiences with the rabbit's foot had provided opportunities for the other children to reflect upon their own views of death, dying, Heaven and God:

Samantha: *I was telling all the people not to dig where the bunny rabbit leg was and we go to heaven when we are very, very old.*

Samantha had been able to reflect upon the event and, within the class discussion, had been able to articulate her view that Heaven was for people when they get very, very old.

Adam: *Well, when my cat died, we made a big hole and, um, we didn't dig the hole up, but I didn't know if she was still in the hole or gone from the hole.*

Adam's reflection on the event had caused him to reflect also upon the topic of burial. He had been able to talk about his experience of his cat dying and digging a hole in which to place the cat's body. It had also raised questions for him about whether the cat's body was still in the hole. He had appeared to be considering Noah's statement about the rabbit's foot going up to heaven, which caused him to wonder if his cat was still in the hole.

Claire: *When my mum had a brown cat when she was little and we weren't born, she took a picture of it, and it died and she buried it with her mum, and that's Nan and Pa. And she stuck it on her fridge.*

The reflection time had provided the opportunity for Claire to consider her experience of death. For her, the closest experience appeared to have been her mother's childhood cat, whose photo was on the fridge. Thus, the rabbit's foot had become a cultural tool that had enabled the children to explore and deepen their own understandings of death, dying, Heaven, God, funerals and ageing.

This finding resonates with Champagne's (2008) study that found that children were very comfortable addressing the issue of death. This episode demonstrated children expressing their sadness and posing questions about death, dying and the after life. Champagne's study found that universal elements existed, especially around the concept of a heaven or final destination and this was borne out in this play episode from *The Walk*.

This episode also demonstrates the effectiveness of group ZPD as a place for reflective consciousness to emerge. In the episode, adding the praxis of the REP and the *perezhivanie* process within the group ZPD seemed to add additional dimensions of meaning-making, thus enabling the children to construct their own understanding in community with other children and adults.

The rabbit's foot Walk episode provides an excellent example of how the *perezhivanie* process can assist young children to make meaning from events. Group ZPDs had been created a number of times during that particular Walk, both as small groups directly after the burial and funeral, and also as a large group at the end of the meeting held several days later.

The children had been able to reflect upon the experience and share their thoughts and ideas with others when the educators posed open-ended questions and engaged in active and deep listening. This process had enabled the children to see not only their role in the event but also see the episode in relation to others who were present. The *perezhivanie* process provided a way of meaning-making for the children.

The findings demonstrate that the children had been able to think through such complex existential issues as death, dying, and the possible existence of a transcendent presence. Noah had been able to articulate what he believed might have happened to the rabbit's foot once it had been buried and had ascended to Heaven. Other children had been able to draw upon their own experiences of death and apply them to this play episode. Complexities such as the existence of an afterlife or Heaven for animals versus humans, and the existence of a God had been displayed and demonstrate the ability of children as young as three and four to engage in and grapple with the deeper meaning of human existence.

As the *perezhivanie* process unfolded, it was evident that examples of transformation and growth had occurred for some of the children. In the rabbit's foot episode, the children had demonstrated their ability to go beyond themselves and move towards a higher level of self-awareness. They had been able to share differing views of the rabbit's foot experience, many in direct disagreement with others, but had shown remarkable maturity in respecting other children's differing perceptions of reality, including Adam's "not-knowing" regarding the situation.

I believe that the findings demonstrate the power of the *perezhivanie* process to assist children to reflect deeply on an experience, grow in awareness of themselves and others, be transformed by the experience, and consequently see themselves in new and different ways. Moreover, it enables educators to realise and recognise children's lived experience of spirituality. These findings clearly demonstrate Noah's and the other children's ability to have engaged deeply in the experience when they were given the time and space to discuss it in small and large groups. Thus, the *perezhivanie* process enables educators to move beyond simply guessing young children's lived experience of spirituality and, instead, actually see it as a dimension of the children's growth and development.

5.4 Dimension 3: Creativity and Imagination

The third dimension to be explored is the use of Creativity and Imagination as an expression of children's lived experience of spirituality. This dimension is illustrated by four play episodes: Patrick and his map; the music band; Isabella fishing; the construction of the cubbyhouse, the ice cream shop and the tree example.

The word "imagination" is often used interchangeably with creativity, yet Vygotsky (2004) asserted that imagination is the basis of all creative activity. Vygotsky (2004) defined creativity as "any human act that gives rise to something new" (2004, p. 9) and identified four stages in the creative process: first, what is imagined has a basis in reality; second, new combinations arise from previous events; third, creativity has the ability to link to an individual's emotions; and fourth, once something is created, it becomes real and takes on a life of its own. (2004, p. 7) believed that creativity is a social process that requires appropriate tools, artefacts and culture to thrive.

5.4.1 Patrick's map making. This episode was captured on video.

The first subtheme for the Creativity and Imagination dimension is an episode in which Patrick created a map in the mud with a stick. This subtheme was characterised by the

use of natural objects found in the outdoor environment that the children use to create new things. This use of natural objects by children is a particular phenomenon of play in an outdoor environment. Vygotsky (2004, p. 7) stated that “in any environment, both the degree of inventiveness and creativity, and the possibility of discovery, are directly proportional to the number and kind of variables in it” (p. 6). The outdoors offers almost limitless variables in the form of stones, leaves, rocks and flowers, and provides children with the ability to gather these and use them in countless different ways. These variables enable children to discover creative ways to express themselves and the world around them. I believe that Nicholson (1973) would have viewed these natural objects as cultural tools that enable children to express their creativity.

Patrick’s drawing of a detailed map in the mud with a stick could be considered an example of Vygotsky’s (2004) stages one and two in the creative process. The video of this episode begins with Patrick drawing in the mud, which prompted the following dialogue:

Kristen: *What are you doing, Patrick?*

Patrick: *I’m making a map.*

Patrick is concentrating very hard on his map creation. His head is down and he answers me still looking at the ground. He uses the stick to draw a detailed map of the walk in the mud.

In the stimulated-recall interview, held two days after this episode occurred, I asked Patrick about his drawing. He replied as follows:

Patrick: *A map to go to the fire, and here are the chickens. I just made a map. The chickens are behind.*

For Patrick, what he had imagined had a basis in reality. In this particular episode, it was a map that he had been able to create through the use of a cultural tool, namely, a stick. Patrick had then been able to create new versions using his previous knowledge his experience of past events, perhaps of maps he had seen previously. Employing this previous knowledge of maps, he had been able to create a new map with new dimensions and locations to re-create the geography of The Walk in a new way.

This finding suggests that Creativity and Imagination plays an important and complex role in the lived experience of spirituality. The process of creating something appears to spark an emotional response. When further explored in a safe space, the perezhivanie process can

enable further exploration to occur. When Patrick viewed the video and re-experienced the process of creating his map, an awareness of himself as well as of the others who were present (in this case, me as the researcher) became apparent. Affirming his role as the protagonist, Patrick had been able to see himself as capable of creating items that were meaningful to him and perhaps others. Patrick had been able to articulate all the elements of the map and view himself in new ways – as a map maker, and as someone who had been capable of capturing different elements of The Walk in the form of a map in the mud. In this case, only the first few stages of perezhivanie had been explored.

5.4.2 Playing musical instruments. This episode was captured on video.

The second example exhibiting Creativity and Imagination occurred when the children formed a band using sticks as the musical instruments. This example of the creative and imaginative theme was also characterised by the use of natural objects, found in the outdoor environment, that the children used to create something new. The following play episode that illustrates this dimension can also be regarded as a demonstration of the social aspect of creativity as evident in the formation of the music band. Having collected sticks and turned them, in their imaginations, into musical instruments – a violin, a guitar, and a cello – with Sophie singing a song using a stick as a microphone, the educator and four of the children together created a band and pretended to play together. Each child was holding their instruments, some humming and some dancing to Sophie's singing. There was a unity in the way the children were all playing in the band together. Something new had been created whereby the children had been able to express themselves in an alternative and different way.



Figure 6. Children playing musical instruments.

In the stimulated-recall (Thomson, 2008) session held a few days later, one of the children was able to further reflect upon the event.

Kristen: *Did you have a musical instrument, Melinda?*

Melinda (demonstrating playing the cello): *Yes, I had a piano. I got a log and I pressed on it. I had a cello actually. I get a stick and I rubbed on the stick*

The form of the cello that Melinda had created in her imagination had its basis in past experience – that is, musical instruments she had previously seen from which she created something new. Vygotsky (2004) stated that “creativity is an historical cumulative process where every succeeding manifestation is determined by the previous one” (2004, p. 7). Melinda would not have been able to create a cello had cellos not already been invented and were not a cultural artefact of society. The third stage of Vygotsky’s creativity is its ability to link to the emotional aspects of an individual. Vygotsky asserted that creative activity connects thought, emotion, and action, and it is this connection that I believe provides evidence of spirituality, expressing this in a different way that helps to further clarify the link of creativity with spirituality, states, “It is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self” (Vygotsky (2004, p. 922). The children had been able to see another aspect of themselves; not just as musicians, but as social players in a band interacting with others who had become aware of their actions in relation to those around them.

Creativity and Imagination in children’s play is where the spiritual dimension of children’s lives can be recognised (Goodliff, 2013a). Goodliff believed that imaginative play provided young children with a space to pretend and explore possibilities, where they can draw upon their own experiences and add these to their imagination. Having the space to pretend offered another way of being that is imaginative and enabled children to see themselves in different roles.

Researchers such as Bruner (2004) and Goodliff (2013a) regarded creativity as a spiritual pursuit as well as a transformative process. As did Hart (2009) in his six layers of education model and how they lead to spiritual transformation; *information, knowledge, intelligence, understanding, wisdom*, and ultimately *transformation*. Evidence of these six layers is present in the findings of this research study. For example, in the band episode, the children had taken their knowledge of musical instruments and their modes of operation and applied their intelligence to creating something new. They came to understand that a band is made up of many players, all of whom contribute to the overall expression of music. Sophie had been able to apply her words and singing to the setting and in doing so, had understood

the role of a lead singer in this setting. As the music progressed, the children were transformed imaginatively from single musicians to members of a fully functioning band. It is possible the children were also transformed at a deeper level, seeing themselves as capable musicians, able to work in harmony with others. Hart (2009) would further argue that this experience changes both the known and the knower through movement towards wholeness and unity. Hart saw creativity as an inherently spiritual endeavour, and the findings reflect this with respect to the creative process in this example of the children forming a band.

There are parallels between Hart's six layers of education and the perezhivanie process. With both, there is a movement from an awareness of self to an awareness of others and their relationship to others as well as a process of making meaning from events. Perezhivanie, however, offers a structure for how the process of meaning-making can occur. In this Walk episode, perezhivanie, combined with the Reggio Emilia praxis, gave the children the opportunity to reflect upon events and see themselves in new ways as they shared their thoughts and ideas with others in the small group. Although Hart did not explain how individuals move between the layers, I believe the perezhivanie process adds an additional underpinning, which further strengthens and gives weight to his observations. This play episode, in which creative events represented outer experiences that were further explored within a perezhivanie process, demonstrated the creative dimension of young children's spirituality. Moreover, it demonstrated that perezhivanie offers a way to move from an outer play experience to an inner place of meaning-making and transformation through creating safe spaces, asking open-ended questions and listening actively.

5.4.3 Isabella fishing. This episode was captured on video.



Figure 7. Isabella fishing.

The third example of Creativity and Imagination occurred when Isabella and Samantha went fishing. It exemplifies the use of natural objects found in outdoor learning environments that children use imaginatively to create something new. The video captured Isabella and Samantha standing at the edge of the lake “fishing”, with both of them holding large sticks in their hands to act as fishing poles.

Isabella: *I’ve caught something!*

Kristen: *What did you catch, Isabella?*

Isabella: *A fish!*

Isabella: *I’m putting it in the basket.*

In this episode, Isabella had performed a creative action by using a stick as if it were a fishing rod. She had thus entered into the imaginary world of fishing, becoming someone who fished and who then caught a fish. Her words and tone were evidence of her excitement; she had expressed delight at catching a fish, which she was then able to keep by placing it in her imaginary basket.

Isabella displayed this same excitement during the stimulated–recall (Thomson, 2008) process when I replayed the videos a few days after the event:

Isabella: *Please play it again; leave it on; I love this one.*

Kristen: *Why do you love it, Isabella?*

Isabella: *I like getting the fish on my stick.*

During this episode, Isabella had been able to find the connection between creativity, imagination, emotion and action, thus providing a glimpse of her inner thoughts and feelings and demonstrating a moment of self-discovery. It was the safe space for reflection that was offered both on The Walk and during the Stimulated Recall time (Thomson, 2008). It was important in the reflection space to allow Isabella the freedom and time to watch the videos multiple times. The posing of open ended questions such as the one above, also allowed her to choose what was important for her to share. She, therefore, had been able to see herself in a different way, as someone who could angle and be capable of catching a fish. Hart (2009) would argue that the spirituality expressed in this imaginative act is a combination of external experiences and the unique inner world of imagination, which is capable of expressing creativity.

5.4.4 Constructing a cubbyhouse. This episode was captured on video.



Figure 8. Constructing a cubbyhouse.

Vygotsky's (2004) fourth stage of creativity stated that "once something is created, it becomes real and takes on a life of its own" (p. 7). Aaron's building of a cubbyhouse out of sticks, leaves and some wire exemplified this stage. As shown in the video, what began as his construction project extended to include many other children, all of whom participated in the creation of the cubbyhouse. There was no stimulated-recall data for this Walk experience.

Aaron: I'm good at making knots. I need someone to cut this string for me.

Aaron had recognised that he needed help to make the camp site, and the other children came to assist.

Aaron: This is great.

Other children made suggestions:

Samantha: We need material on top so we don't get cold.

Some children (going into the tent): It's freezing.

Samantha: That's why we need a material on the top.

The educator: How could we make a bed?

Adam: We could use wood.

The educator: Let's go on a hunt to find things to help build a bed.

These excerpts demonstrate that the project had ceased to be Aaron's alone but rather, had taken on a life of its own and was engaged in by the other children as well. This episode further illustrates the connection between thought, emotion and action that gives rise to creativity and consequently demonstrates the experience of spirituality. Moreover, the educator, posing open-ended questions to the group and thereby contributing to the sharing of knowledge related to the construction, had created a group ZPD in which the children could contribute to the construction project.

Having the space to pretend offers another way of being that is imaginative and enables children to see themselves in different roles. I would argue, however, that children can only see themselves in new ways by reflecting upon their experiences in a safe space, where open-ended questions are posed and the children are able to explore the impact of their creative acts and the extent to which such experiences can help them to further explore themselves and others.

The findings demonstrate that pretending to act as fishermen or band members were significant events for the children participating in the research study. These experiences appeared to enable the children to access a more intuitive part of themselves, not as logical and orderly as the normal world, but nonetheless full of possibilities.

As this experience of other-worldliness is explored in small and large groups, children are able to hear from others who are processing similar experiences. This sharing, coupled with a Reggio Emilia praxis, can assist in meaning-making and possible transformation.

5.4.5 Creating an ice cream shop. This episode was captured on video as Rory and Ava are playing in a cubby house. It has been constructed using large sticks against a tree. Rory is inside the cubby house and Ava is attaching a piece of wire to one of the outside sticks. I begin filming them.



Figure 9. Cooper's ice-cream shop.

Kristen: *Can you tell me what you are doing Rory?*

Rory: *We are making an ice cream shop for tomorrow*

Kristen: *An ice cream shop! What flavours do you have?*

Rory (looking to his side where the ice creams are kept): *Chocolate, vanilla, pink.*

Kristen: *Do you think I could come back tomorrow and have one?*

Rory (smiling): *Yes.*

There is evidence of Nicholson's (1973) loose parts theory where natural objects are gathered and used in new and different ways. Rory is using the parts to create something he has seen before; an ice cream shop and when asked is able to describe the flavours and colours of the ice cream. This imaginative play episode provided Rory with a space to pretend and explore possibilities, and this case, something that he enjoyed, ice cream. Children are able to draw upon their own experiences and explore them in new ways while at the same time exploring themselves in different roles and identities (Goodliff, 2013a). There was no stimulated recall process conducted for this play example.

5.4.5 Playing in the tree example.

Regan, Noah and Ava are all sitting in a large tree, on different branches, not far off the ground.

Kristen: *What's it like being in the tree?*

Ava, pointing to the higher branches: *That's a bee home*

Kristen: *A bee home. Can you see any bees?*

Ava: *No, they are out looking for food*

Regan, lying back on the branch and closing her eyes: *Let's have a good sleep*

Ava slips as she is climbing up to a higher branch: *slippery tree*

Sophie, extending her hands out quite far: *Look how big the boat is, there are hundreds of people on it*

Regan, after hearing Sophie's comments, grabs a small branch with both hands and pretends it's a rudder

Noah also hears Sophie's comments, finds a small branch near him and grabbing it with both hands begins to pull it as if it were a rudder.

This play experience shows the interaction of the children. A child would propose a scenario such as Sophie describing the tree as a boat and the children would follow her lead and enter into the imagination of the boat. The non-verbal cues in this experience also show the way children were following each other's leads, such as Reagan taking a branch as a rudder then Noah following her. Ava is imagining the bees home above her and explains the absence of bees by telling me that they are all out looking for food. Reagan feels very safe in the tree, safe enough to want to close her eyes and go to sleep. There are very few words exchanged with the children in the form of conversation, they answer my questions and explain what the situation is like for them, they enter into the imagination that is proposed by other children without debate.

5.5 Dimension 4: Transcendence

The fourth dimension of children's lived experience of spirituality is Transcendence. Three subthemes emerged from the findings relative to this dimension: awe and wonder; mystery; and the observation of natural phenomena. The episodes from The Walk experience

that underpin this dimension are: (1) the spider's web; (2) Isabella and the slug and (3) Claire and the holes in the leaf. More than one subtheme is evident in each episode because they are frequently interconnected. For instance, observations of natural phenomena provide the basis for recognising the other subthemes.

5.5.1 Awe and wonder. Researchers such as Van Wieren and Kellert (2013), (Hart, 2003) and Goodliff (2013a) address the notion of awe and wonder in young children by not only by acknowledging its existence but also by asserting that it provides evidence of young children's spirituality. More specifically, Hyde (2008b) observed manifestations of young children's spirituality in aspects of nature via the *aesthetic attribute*. The concept of aesthetic attribute refers to such qualities as attraction, curiosity, beauty, balance, symmetry, pattern, order and harmony.

Also relevant to the subtheme of awe and wonder is the process Hyde (2008a) describes as *weaving threads of meaning*, in which children are able to draw upon their own inner qualities to make sense of events and experiences. Among these inner qualities are their inherent sense of awe and wonder, which they can tap into to make meaning of their experiences. While the perspectives of these authors are valuable, little recognition has been attributed to the process by which children are able to do this and thereby hone educators' ability to recognise spirituality in young children.

In the descriptions of the following episodes, the children express awe and wonder at aspects of nature they noted on their Walks.

5.5.1.1 The spider's web: This episode was captured on video.

Within the context of this study, the episode that most cogently illustrated the aesthetic attribute as defined by Hart (2003) was the children's response to raindrops caught in a spider's web. The educator and children had discovered a blackberry bush covered with spider webs. It had rained during the previous night, and so many of the spiders' webs had tiny droplets of rain caught in them. The children expressed curiosity as to the origins of the raindrops and wondered at the beauty and symmetry of a spider's web, which led to the following exchange:

The educator: *I wonder how they are there; how do those raindrops stay there?*

Claire: *Because it's squeezed on.*

The educator: *What's squeezed on?*

Claire: *The drops.*

The educator: *How?*

Patrick: *The raindrops are just all over and they just did it.*

Capable of appreciating the beauty of the raindrops and of communicating feelings about their origin, all the children had recognised something larger than themselves was responsible for placing the raindrops on the spider's web. The educator had created a safe group ZPD space in which to ask open-ended questions, listen actively, and ensure that all the children had the opportunity to offer their ideas. This small group ZPD had enabled the children to reflect upon their beliefs as well as hear from others what they believed. Again, the children had proved themselves capable of providing theories as to the origins and existence of the raindrops.

This episode also linked the concept of awe and wonder with everyday concepts. Although, at some point in the future, they will learn the scientific basis of raindrops caught in a spider's web, which is due to the uneven or "bumpy" construction of the spider's threads. Due to the sticky nature of these bumpy threads, water is able to adhere to them and cover the gaps Hyde (2005a). As the development of scientific knowledge in the future may diminish their sense of awe and wonder, in this episode the children regarded the raindrops' origin as a mystery. Moreover, the perezhivanie process had begun in the group ZPD and had enabled the children to share each other's differing views on the origin of the raindrops. There was no stimulated recall recorded for this Walk experience.

5.5.1.2 *Isabella and the slug:* This episode was captured on video.



Figure 10. Isabella and the slug.

Another episode illustrating the children's awe and wonder at some aspect of nature involved Isabella showing me a slug on a piece of bark. This prompted the following dialogue:

Kristen: *Tell me about it.*

Isabella: *It's a tiny, tiny, tiny, little slug. Look!* (Her voiced is hushed and quiet)

Kristen: *A tiny little slug.*

Isabella: *It's a baby one.*

Isabella's voice was quiet and almost reverent as she described what she saw on the bark; it was expressive of awe and wonder. Her words alluded to something larger than herself, something capable of creating this creature. Being asked to reflect upon the slug on the piece of bark had evoked her expression of awe and wonder.

Isabella's experiences of awe and wonder based on the baby slug could have been an expression of her spirituality, or perhaps been based on her everyday knowledge. Only by the creation of a group ZPD along with initiation of the perezhivanie process, which enables children to more deeply experience and begin to make meaning of events and experiences, could their articulations be identified as expressions of spirituality or of their everyday knowledge related to the experience. This episode and the one following were too short in duration to determine whether these were, in fact, genuine expressions of spirituality.

5.5.2 Mystery. The episode of Claire and the holes in a leaf illustrates not only awe and wonder but is also an expression of mystery.

5.5.2.1 Claire and holes in a leaf. This episode was captured on video.

This episode began with Claire approaching the educator and showing her something she had found:

The Educator: *What have you found, Claire?*

Claire: *There are holes in there* (pointing to part of the leaf).

The Educator: *I wonder why.*

Claire: Because those are there (pointing to part of the leaf). Sometimes it goes in there so they can grow into green.

Claire had been trying to explain what she had seen on the leaf and appeared fascinated with the holes and who or what had created them. Hart (2003) asserted that children often initially found things incomprehensible and therefore mysterious, but as they mature, discover answers that reduce the awe and wonder with which they first regarded those things. Thus, awe, wonder and mystery are illusive qualities that are difficult to measure.

5.5.3 Response to natural phenomena. Three issues characterise the previous research into the relationship between the emotions evoked by natural phenomena in young children and the children's spiritual experiences. First, these researchers failed to demonstrate the existence of a spiritual dimension in children's responses of awe and wonder to such phenomena but, instead, simply labelled them as "spiritual". Although Heller (1986) suggests an inherent sense of awe and wonder in certain experiences, the presence of these emotions does not necessarily indicate a spiritual experience.

Second, related to their failure to demonstrate the presence of spirituality in such experiences, these researchers proposed no process whereby spirituality can be systematically identified and explored. Consequently, without adequate guidance to recognise spirituality in their charges, educators simply have to guess as to the nature of young children's spiritual experiences and the transcendent condition described.

Third, the role of nature as a setting in which such experiences are likely to occur has been largely unexplored. While pointing to nature as an important dimension in human maturation and modern life, Sobel (2008) nonetheless noted that contemporary research has neglected the magical, mystical and archaic dimensions of children's experiences.

I believe that there is an area deserving of further investigation; that being a method of identifying and exploring the interrelationships between nature, the feelings of awe and wonder natural phenomena can evoke in children, and children's lived experience of spirituality. Hyde (2008b) explored the role of children's experiences in nature, and yet did not consider the social dimension inherent in spiritual development and the way awe and wonder is constructed in community with others.

In her "community of learners" approach, Rogoff (2009) recognised that children learn and develop best when they are part of a community, with no one person acting as the holder of all knowledge or being the "expert", yet this approach has not been explored in

relation to an outdoor environment. Hay and Nye (1996) also recognised the importance of the social aspect of constructing knowledge; however, they did not extend their research to the context of an outdoor environment. In Nye's later work (2009), she outlined six steps for nurturing young children's spirituality, using the SPIRIT acronym. While this was designed for religious or church settings, there are many parallels with the perezhivanie process outlined in this thesis. The creation of safe spaces (S), the process (P) which could be applied the perezhivanie process of meaning making, the importance of imagination (I) which was found in many of the experiences that children described, the importance of the relationships (R) which offered an authentic way for children and adults to relate to each other. The second 'I' stood for intimacy which emerged from the sharing of the children and finally the trust (T) that was essential to the spiritual life.

The findings of this research study found that in all cases, acting in community with others permitted the children participating in the study to fully articulate their sense of awe and wonder.

Reflective Practice – that is, the group ZPD initiated by the educator, or the open-ended questions posed by me, enabled the awe and wonder that had been generated by the episodes on The Walk to consolidate and be expressed by the children in the study. Thus, the findings from the study demonstrate that children's feelings of awe and wonder that are associated with spiritual experiences can be facilitated by the use of Reflective Practice.

An educator or researcher that understands Reflective Practice and uses open-ended questions would be capable of fostering and optimising this process in young children that would enable natural phenomena to be further examined. Children would be provided with additional opportunities to reflect upon these experiences to ascertain if these intimate encounters with the natural world were dimensions of their spiritual life or examples of everyday knowledge at work.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has detailed the findings from this study where it was ascertained that a number of the episodes from The Walk manifested the four key behaviours of Goodliff's (2003) model of spirituality – (1) Relational Consciousness; (2) Reflective Practice; (3) Creativity and Imagination; and (4) Transcendence.

The dimension of Relational Consciousness appeared in each of the episodes as an underpinning reality of the construction of young children's lived experience of spirituality.

Also displayed was the threefold importance of the pedagogical importance within the REP of creating safe spaces; asking open-ended questions and actively listening; and forming group ZPDs and using the perezhivanie process to enable children to deeply reflect on their experiences and move to a place of meaning-making and understanding of themselves. The next chapter discusses the findings in more detail.

Chapter 6

Discussion

6.1 Introduction

The aim of this research project was to develop a new framework to assist early childhood (EC) educators in recognising and nurturing the spirituality of young children. The research question that underpinned this aim was to identify and analyse children's lived experience of spirituality within an early learning setting informed by the philosophical framework of Reggio Emilia and situated in a natural outdoor environment. The findings outline the four main dimensions of young children's spirituality: (1) Relational Consciousness; (2) Reflective Practice; (3) Creativity and Imagination; and (4) Transcendence.

In this chapter, I will demonstrate how these dimensions characterise young children's lived experience of spirituality. While spirituality is often difficult to describe or define, these dimensions provide insights into the way in which spirituality is expressed in young children. These dimensions possess both an inner and outer awareness. The outer awareness was evident in the videos and actions of the children on The Walk; the inner awareness, however, only became evident when the children reflected upon their experiences in small and large groups, offering their thoughts and opinions as they heard others express their thoughts and describe their experiences. This inner awareness is linked to Vygotsky's (1996) concepts of meaning-making, language and consciousness, which will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

The conversations that occurred within the small and large groups were supported by the educational praxis of the REP as well as the *perezhivanie* process, and they took place during both The Walk and the stimulated-recall process (Thomson, 2008), which typically occurred back in the classroom a few days after The Walk. This threefold process facilitated the young children's lived experience of spirituality becoming visible to the EC educators and me. The process also drew upon Vygotsky's (1996) concept of "whole" as it relates to a holistic picture of a child and their physical, mental, emotional and spiritual aspects.

From this collaborative model of shared understanding, I propose a new framework of spirituality, which is outlined later in this chapter. This new framework will be helpful to EC educators when they seek to incorporate the dimensions of spirituality experienced by children into the early learning centre's curricula. Capturing these experiences will help EC

educators respond from a curriculum perspective as per the EYLF Bone (2007). As mentioned in the introduction, spirituality is defined in the main glossary of the EYLF and states that “spiritual refers to a range of human experiences including a sense of awe and wonder, and an exploration of being and knowing” (DEEWR, 2009, p. 46).

6.2 Relational Consciousness

The findings from The Walk demonstrate that Relational Consciousness is a central dimension of young children’s spirituality. The interactions between the children, and between the children and the adults, both during The Walk in the form of group ZPDs and in the reflective conversations that occurred in the classroom using the stimulated-recall process (Thomson, 2008), support this dimension. Also, as the findings suggest, Relational Consciousness intersects significantly with the other three dimensions I’ve identified throughout, namely Reflective Practice; Creativity and Imagination; and Transcendence. Thus, removing this dimension would render these other dimensions impossible since it underpins them. For instance, Creativity and Imagination was displayed when the children played together, discussing ideas, and offering opinions and thoughts. It was also evident when the children discovered, among themselves and with adults, the natural phenomena that appeared on The Walk (for example, the raindrops on the spider’s web).

One way of describing Relational Consciousness is given by Hay and Nye (1996), who believe it can be divided into four main elements: (1) awareness of self; (2) awareness of others; (3) awareness of the environment; and (4) awareness of other or the transcendent (for some individuals). This view is limited in its application as it implies only an awareness and does not detail the way in which an awareness can lead to a more profound understanding for young children of themselves and others. The findings from The Walk demonstrate that in multiple settings and in small and large groups and ZPDs, children are able to engage more deeply in concepts when they interact by participating in conversations among themselves and with adults((*Belonging, Being and Becoming: Early Years Learning Framework*, 2009). Aided by Reflective Practice, which is employed to assist children in processing events and making meaning, the groups and ZPDs enable a deeper engagement to occur.

Hay and Nye’s (1996) view is that Relational Consciousness is central to children’s spirituality and that meaning develops from interactions with others, which then enables religious experiences, personal and traditional responses to mystery and being, and mystical and moral insights to occur. Thus, the view of Relational Consciousness presented by Hay and Nye (2006) offered a simplistic view of spirituality that suggests that it simply appears as

a result of the interactions children have with other children or educators without there being a process to assist children in understanding potentially spiritual events.

For the purposes of this thesis, I argue that spirituality encompasses more than Relational Consciousness and draws upon all of the dimensions outlined in the findings chapter (Chapter 5) – Reflective Practice incorporating the subthemes of REP practices, ZPD, stimulated recall (Thomson, 2008) and perezhivanie, as well as Creativity and Imagination, and Transcendence.

For example, the incident that occurred in the tent the children had made became part of the *Three Little Pigs* story (Halliwell-Phillips, 1886) where a visiting adult played the role of the wolf and the children inside the tent pretended to be the pigs. It became a meaningful experience of Relational Consciousness, particularly for Isabella, who during this experience was able to access her own courage and agency by confronting the wolf. She was then able to fully explore and process this experience during the stimulated-recall session (Thomson, 2008) and the perezhivanie process in the small group ZPD that occurred in the classroom several days after the event. Her personal responses indicated an awareness of her own inner thoughts and feelings as she was able to talk about the experience with the other children that were also present. Hearing the perspectives of the other children had enabled her to clarify and affirm her own agency and idea of herself. Isabella had also been able to identify the moral insight that had arisen within her as she protected the other children and their safe playing tent.

This research project has confirmed the notion put forward by Hay and Nye (1996) that sociocultural theory is a helpful way in which to research spirituality in young children. However, it is just a starting point. As was highlighted in the literature review in Chapter 2, when sociocultural theory includes only the observation of young children and does not involve conversations with them in order to access their perspectives and thoughts, the information is then only constructed by the researcher and, therefore, could be construed as simply guesswork as to what the children are thinking and feeling.

This approach is also contrary to the understanding that sociocultural theory is constructed between individuals and is inter-subjective. It also differs from Vygotsky's concept of a holistic view of the child. If a researcher merely observes a young child, then only the physical and possibly the emotional aspects of the child are visible. By engaging in conversation with the child, it becomes possible to gain insights into the emotional and spiritual aspects of the child's personality.

As outlined in Chapter 3, Vygotsky's (1996) view is that individuals construct knowledge by interacting through external cultural symbols rather than the symbols being imposed upon them. Vygotsky asserted that the child is an active agent in their own development. This was evident in all The Walk experiences. The children were active in seeking out activities and participating in experiences that they were drawn to and had an interest in. The Walk provided the freedom for the children to largely choose how they would spend their time.

Vygotsky maintained that children move from being passive recipients of an objective environment to being selective about what is interesting to them. Vygotsky also maintained that the sociocultural context in which development and construction takes place becomes extremely important. This was evident in the many different aspects of The Walk, such as the freedom, but also the Reflective Practice processes that enabled the children to make meaning from the events and experiences. Hay and Nye (1996) noted that cultural mediation interactions are complex and multi-layered and occur between individuals when they are situated within a specific historical and cultural environment that is laden with meaning.

The findings pertaining to the rabbit's foot demonstrate this in several different ways. Each interaction between the children, and between the children and the adults, appeared to develop in complexity. In particular, Noah's thoughts and ideas on God and the role God may have or may not have played in the rabbit's afterlife. His articulations occurred after open-ended questions were posed to him. There was also the opportunity to hear from the other children regarding their ideas in relation to the rabbit's demise.

The discussions in the small and large groups demonstrated that it was not simply the rabbit's foot that was the subject, but that the rabbit's foot was culturally symbolic of death and the many motifs that surround death such as funerals, the existence of an afterlife, and even the possibility of a transcendent being. As noted by Kozulin (1998), "individuals only become aware of themselves through interactions with others" (p.10). The words of others impact our own thinking and level of consciousness asserted.

Vygotsky (1981) regarded humans as mastering themselves from the outside through symbolic cultural systems. In the episode of the rabbit's foot, the foot presented Noah with the opportunity to internalise the language that had been spoken by himself and others and develop higher mental functions such as ideas that were existential in nature.

The findings in this study indicate that on numerous occasions – for example, the small conversations that occurred during The Walk, and the larger class discussions and the

stimulated recall (Thomson, 2008) sessions when the time was taken to create safe and nurturing environments – the children were willing to explore and deepen their experiences in community with others. These environments enabled them to make meaning from the experiences and discover things about themselves and others.

Another informant to the dimension of Relational Consciousness, as I define for it for the purpose of this thesis, is Rogoff's (1990) theory of the three planes of analysis. This notion, while not explicitly spiritual, suggests that at any given time, individuals operate on three planes represented by three corresponding perspectives: *the inter*, *the intra*, and *the community* perspectives. Isabella demonstrated an intra perspective, where she drew upon her own inner knowledge, resources and courage; an inter awareness that caused her to protect the other children and return the tent to a place of safety for all of them; and a larger, community perspective that manifested in her wanting to restore order or peace to the larger community space.

Isabella had demonstrated that children as young as three and four are capable of assuming the larger, community perspective. Her awareness was, however, realised in the *perezhivanie* process, where Relational Consciousness combined with Reflective Practice enabled Isabella to make true meaning from her experiences. It involved Isabella being given the opportunity to reflect upon events and experiences as well as her own sense of self that was present. This self-reflection can be a transforming process.

The Walk episode I term the *Three Little Pigs* (Halliwell-Phillips, 1886) also demonstrated the central role relationships play in exploring and reflecting upon spirituality. It began with interactions between the children, or between the children and the adults. An experience or event occurred that caused an emotional reaction in the children, and a desire to make sense of the event began to arise. Through the reflective-practice process of *perezhivanie*, questions began to surface for the children as they explored who they were in relation to themselves, to others, and to the outside world. For example, they could ask themselves: *Am I courageous? Can I use my voice to express my feelings? Do I try and escape situations where I don't feel safe, or do I stand and fight?* It is important for EC educators to allow children to ask and ponder such questions of themselves within a safe and nurturing environment. The findings indicate that young children do possess a natural tendency to ask these larger questions of life. Although they may not always be able to fully articulate their thoughts and ideas in a cohesive way, by simply posing the questions they can gain enormous value from them. It is in the asking that children are able to explore their

spirituality, and one of the most effective ways is in a group ZPD, employing the practices of the REP.

The literature review included the studies of Robinson (1983) and Hart (2003), who believe that young children are not capable of addressing the larger, existential questions of life, but could only do so later in life as adults. Yet on numerous occasions during the Walks, such as the small group discussions that occurred regarding the burial of the rabbit's foot, the raindrops on the spider's web, or the construction of the cubbyhouse, when children were provided with safe spaces and a robust framework for exploration such as the *perezhivanie* process, these children, as young as three and four years of age, exhibited the capability of processing complex issues such as life, death, the existence of God, and an afterlife

A strong sense of identity is essential for children's growth and development because it provides a stable base from which they can further explore the world Daniels (2005). Learning that they can rely on themselves to make decisions, discern the correct path to take, and knowing that they are capable gives them the confidence to explore the world. Isabella clearly demonstrated this capability in the *Three Little Pigs* (Halliwell-Phillips, 1886) episode as she explored her capacity to express herself and make decisions based on her awareness of a situation. Isabella proved herself capable of showing bravery and courage, and this knowledge will no doubt give her the strength and confidence to express herself in the future in similar situations.

The situation that enabled Isabella to find these traits within herself arose in an environment created by her educators. This environment respected and valued her agency and allowed her to fully express herself. Even though the situation frightened some of the children, it also provided a place for children, in this case Isabella, to choose who they wanted to be.

The Walk episodes also demonstrated Rogoff's (1990) community of learners approach. On the Walks described in the findings, no one individual – adult or child – was the holder of all information. Instead, educators created a nurturing space where both children and adults felt free to contribute their knowledge and ideas, and the episodes involving the construction of the cubbyhouse, playing musical instruments with sticks, and participating in the large group discussions around death and dying were all made possible by the creation of a nurturing space.

Implicit in Rogoff's (1990) approach is the recognition that individuals play different roles at different times during experiences such as those that occurred during The Walk. In

these episodes, the children adopted the personae of project managers, shopkeepers, narrators and musicians, and the freedom to engage in such diverse roles enabled them to explore their own agencies. Moreover, they were able to view the other children and the adults accompanying them on The Walk as participating in novel roles and as possessing theretofore unexplored capabilities.

When fostered by educators, Relational Consciousness enables children to form deep connections with other children and with the educators themselves. Friendships are encouraged, and children are able to feel safe in the company of others. Along with these relationships, adding ways for children to reflect on events with others further intensifies this awareness of themselves and others. The connections children experience contribute to an understanding of their place in the larger school community and in the world in general, which helps them to see themselves as occupying an important place in these contexts and as capable of making a contribution within them. In addition, these connections help young children to experience feelings of aliveness and to view themselves as present to themselves, to others, and to the transcendent, as well as helping them discover the joy of learning.

6.3 Reflective Practice

The dimension of Reflective Practice as outlined in the Chapter 1 also appeared to play a crucial role in the young children's experience of spirituality observed on the Walks. On these Walks, the creation of safe spaces and small and large ZPDs permitted the children to reflect upon events they had previously experienced during the Walks, which facilitated the *perezhivanie* process to unfold over time through the conversations. As a result, Reflective Consciousness occurred, which gave rise to higher levels of awareness of self and others. The findings also demonstrate that the more Reflective Practice processes that the children were presented with, the higher the level of reflection that occurred and the greater the chance that Relational Consciousness would develop. The dimension of Reflective Practice enables a child's spiritual experiences to be observed, which is a particularly important capability for educators to have as they attempt to recognise and nurture young children's spirituality.

The findings reveal that a number of Reflective Practice processes proved to be helpful for the children to make meaning from the events and experiences of The Walk. They are represented in the diagram in Figure 11.

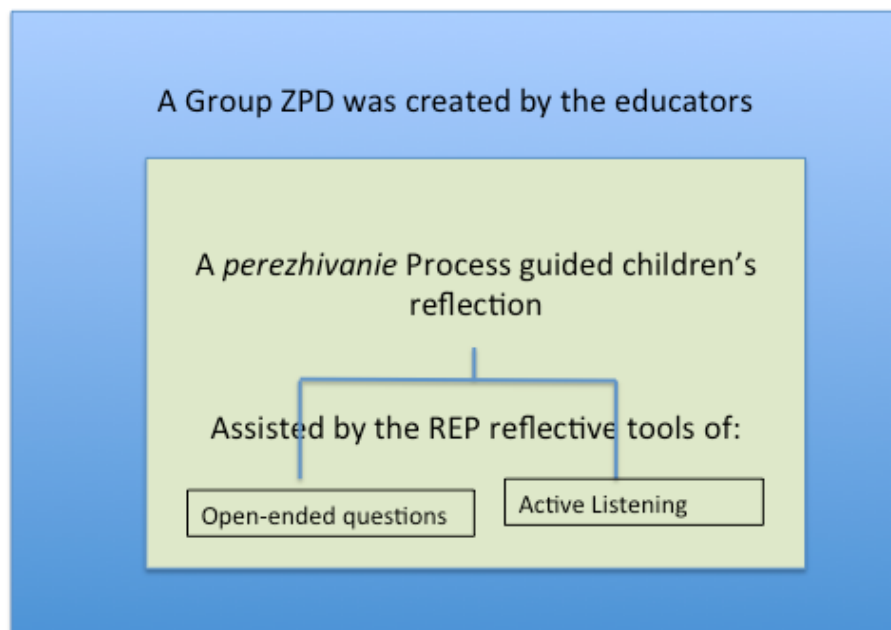


Figure 11. Reflective practices.

Figure 11 indicates the relationship between the Reflective Practice processes that were outlined in the Chapter 5. Small and large group ZPDs were created by the EC educators or by me as the researcher. Within these ZPDs, the perezhivanie process was introduced to assist the young children to revisit and make meaning from the events and experiences of The Walk. The reflective tools of the REP praxis of open-ended questions and active listening were used to assist in this process.

Slobodchikov and Isaev (1995) proposed five levels of reflection as outlined in Chapter 3: (1) assumptive reflection; (2) comparative reflection; (3) defining reflection; (4) synthesising reflection; and (5) transcendental reflection. I believe these five levels could be adapted to include young children's lived experience of spirituality and provide a practical way for EC educators to nurture young children's spirituality. These five levels enable children to relive their experiences and derive meaning from them. I believe these five levels can be mapped and adapted for young children in line with Vygotsky's concept of perezhivanie – to be transformed by an emotional event or experience.

1. The event.

This could be a significant event such as a trauma, or perhaps a crisis emanating from the transition from one stage of childhood to the next, or simply an everyday event that causes questions to arise in a child. The event does appear to require an emotional reaction. At this stage, the child is unable to separate themselves from the environment or from the actual event.

2. Reflection.

This involves a recounting of the event by the child and may incorporate the assumptive, comparative, and defining levels of reflection as outlined by (Hart, 2003).

3. Awareness of self and others.

The child begins to become aware of themselves as an entity separate from others and the environment. They also become aware of the presence and experiences of others.

4. Meaning-making and expression.

At this stage, the child is developing higher psychological functions and creating new formations. They are moving from being a practitioner to a theorist of their own life. This stage could also include the synthesising level of reflection that Slobodchikov and Isaev (1995) discuss. At this stage, the child is able to articulate their thoughts and feelings to others and learn to see the connection between their own and other's experiences.

5. Transformation and growth.

At this level, the child is able to go beyond the bounds of themselves Slobodchikov and Isaev (1995) and move towards an increased level of self-awareness. This is where I propose *perezhivanie* links directly with the lived experience of spirituality in young children. Children are also able to experience the mystery of life and are able to tolerate "not-knowing" or "not-knowing yet" with respect to some experiences. This stage may also lead to an experience of Transcendence. I also believe that Vygotsky would refer to this process as reflective consciousness, the awareness of self and others that arises from the process of moving through these stages.

The four dimensions comprising the findings of the study reported in this thesis suggest that when educators create a group ZPD, there are a number of possible outcomes, many of which assist children in nurturing their lived experience of spirituality. For example, there can be a transmission of cultural information through the use of symbols and artefacts and reflective consciousness ((Slobodchikov & Isaev, 1995). These are discussed in the next sections.

6.3.2 Perezhivanie within a group ZPD.

The first element of the Reflective Practice dimension is the group ZPD. The ZPD is the scaffold for the five step perezhivanie process. In Chapter 3, Stetsenko (1999) outlines three strands of post-Vygotsky research that has emerged: (1) social interactions and shared activities as a pathway to cognitive development; (2) the role of cultural tools in children's development and their ability to mediate the components of psychological development; and (3) the ZPD as the overlaying framework through which development proceeds.

Stetsenko (1999) invites researchers to take a more holistic and integrated view of Vygotsky's work, and that until that is achieved, the full potential of his work remains to be realised. I would like to propose that the five-step perezhivanie process could potentially be a way to bring these three strands together in a new way. The five-step perezhivanie process is created within a group ZPD that recognises that children's growth and development occurs when there are peers who can model learning. Instruction within a group ZPD awakens children's higher psychological functions. The five-step process is a shared activity conducted in collaboration with other children and adults. As children share their ideas and perspectives and hear the ideas and perspectives of others, an internal process occurs and learning takes place. Consciousness increases and children become aware of their own agency and identity.

As mentioned, perezhivanie can be viewed as a process of meaning-making and transformation. Applying the five-step perezhivanie process to two episodes that occurred during The Walk enabled me to test whether the process has validity in providing for children to access their lived experience of spirituality. It involved examining each episode in its entirety to assess if it exemplified movement towards awareness, meaning-making and possible transformation.

Applying the concept of perezhivanie to the rabbit's foot episode, it is possible to see the development of Noah's understanding and meaning-making over a period of a number of days. The reflection stage of perezhivanie involved a series of small and large group ZPDs in which Noah was able to further explore his ideas and the events themselves. The educator drew upon a number of REP practices such as creating a safe environment for exploring, asking open-ended questions, and listening actively. As these group ZPDs continued, Noah was able to raise his level of awareness concerning issues of death, dying, the transcendent other (which in this case he named God), an afterlife, and the notion of Heaven.

Each group ZPD that was established enabled him to further explore these concepts in greater depth. He also became aware that his ideas and opinions often differed from those of the other children. For instance, some did not believe in the existence of God or Heaven,

while others believed that only humans went to Heaven, not animals. In the hearing and processing of discordant voices, Noah was able to arrive at the fourth stage of meaning-making – drawing conclusions from events and even displaying the ability to “not know” and therefore tolerate the mystery related to the afterlife.

I believe that proceeding through the steps of *perezhivanie* in a safe environment within a framework formed by practices based on those of the REP enabled Noah to undergo a transformative experience. He was encouraged to ask questions, which led to deeper levels of self-awareness, such as “Do I believe in a Transcendence?”, “Does this transcendent being have powers to act in the world?”, and “What do I believe about death and dying, and do animals and humans differ in the process of dying?” These questions and subsequent reflections on the experience not only demonstrated evidence of maturing psychological functions within Noah but also the lived experience of spirituality.

The example of Noah demonstrated that the development of higher psychological functions can occur in the appropriate safe environment, and specifically for Noah, this had a direct effect on his level of consciousness. Vygotsky (1996) believed that it is the instruction that awakens the higher psychological functions that are in the process of maturing. Consciousness is only revealed through its effects such as speech, actions or material objects. Vygotsky (1987) spoke about the consciousness of being conscious, and this was evident in the findings – for example, over time, Noah was able to further articulate his thoughts and feelings.

The role of a subjective ZPD was evident in the rabbit’s foot episode. A subjective ZPD refers to the development of an individual person in relation to the objective historically formed period of next development Vygotsky (1994). Vygotsky used the term “imitation”, which for him was not just the copying of one action but, rather, learning and development that occurred when there is collaboration between a less competent and a more competent person. Imitation was only possible when a child had some understanding of the process, and it lay within their intellectual potential. (Chaiklin, 2003) believed that imitation was only possible when the maturing psychological functions were sufficient to support independent performance and that a person could understand how to use the collaborative actions.

The findings demonstrate Noah’s ability to learn from others when they expressed their thoughts and ideas about death and dying. He became aware of his own understanding of death and dying through this process, which was aided by the *perezhivanie* process. Although only aged four, I believe Noah had demonstrated a maturing psychological function,

supported by the collaborative nature of the ZPD and perezhivanie process, which enabled him to be conscious of his consciousness. As Vygotsky (1987) asserted, the importance of collaboration cannot be underestimated as it is not necessarily the knowledge that the more competent person teaches or exhibits but, rather, the process of collaboration that brings forth the learning and development. When applying this process to the lived experiences of young children, it would appear that the perezhivanie process is more important than the spiritual knowledge of EC educators. The perezhivanie process within a group ZPD occurs within a particular cultural and historical context, and while this may differ in other settings or at other times, the process is more important than the outcome. This discovery enables EC educators to recognise that young children's spirituality is not dependent upon their knowledge but rather the use of the perezhivanie process.

The episode of the rabbit's foot illustrates the effectiveness of the perezhivanie process, in combination with the practices of the REP, as a tool for assisting children to access their lived experience of spirituality. It appears to extend Hay and Nye's (1996) theory of Relational Consciousness in that spirituality is more than just an awareness of ourselves and others but also includes an integration of new learning – that is, children's experiences of seeing themselves as the theorists in their own stories and thereby being transformed by the stories' events.

Applying the same process of perezhivanie to Isabella's experience in the *Three Little Pigs* episode (Halliwell-Phillips, 1886) prompted a similar movement towards transformation. In Isabella's case, the aspect of the perezhivanie process that was applied was stimulated recall (Thomson, 2008) which occurred several days after the event. The first step of the process demonstrated two dimensions that had been identified in the findings chapter – Relational Consciousness and Reflective Practice. This occurred several days after the *Three Little Pigs* (Halliwell-Phillips, 1886) episode when Isabella watched the video of the event, along with several other children, which thereby created a group ZPD with me as the researcher.

During the stimulated-recall process (Thomson, 2008) when the children viewed the video and shared their thoughts, they were able to raise their levels of awareness and consciousness of what had been occurring within themselves and hear how other children experienced the same event. In this way, they had been able to more deeply explore their own perspectives and ideas and compare them with the perspectives and ideas of others. Meaning consequently developed, particularly for Isabella, as she was able to view herself in a new way as a result of retroactively observing herself in the event. She was able to explain to me

how she felt confronting the “bad wolf” and wanting to be the “good wolf”. She also saw herself in a protective role, wishing to return the cubbyhouse to a safe place for all the children. At this point in the process, children can transition from practitioners in their own lives to theorists. Watching the video empowered Isabella to see herself in new ways and to theorise for herself what was occurring from the outside in.

I believe she was able to access her own agency, which indicated that she was capable of standing up and confronting a much taller and bigger adult. I believe she was able in that moment to see herself as a courageous person, capable of defending herself and others. This awareness led to her exploring the meaning that had arisen for her in this episode and transformed her view of herself as a strong person.

Both of these examples demonstrate the effectiveness of *perezhivanie* as a process for meaning-making and transformation. The process does require educators to allocate sufficient time and attention to notice events, which may be significant for children. I believe, however, that this process is a robust and helpful one that contributes to children’s increased self-awareness and consciousness of themselves and others.

6.4 Creativity and Imagination

The study’s findings from The Walk suggest that Relational Consciousness, combined with Creativity and Imagination, enabled the children to access the lived experience of spirituality. A number of specific Walk episodes illustrated this, including the construction of the cubbyhouse, on which this section will now focus.

At different points in The Walk episode of constructing the cubbyhouse, Aaron’s exploration of his own ideas demonstrated his *intra* perspective and thoughts. He began by working with other children and adults, directing them, asking for help and ideas (thereby demonstrating the *inter* personal perspective), and then adopting a much higher, or *community*, viewpoint as to the ultimate role of the cubbyhouse and how it might serve the needs of the larger group (Rogoff, 2009). He posed questions about what needed to be included in the tent to ensure its usefulness to as many people as possible. The fluid movement between the three planes as described by Rogoff (2009) demonstrate an integration of the different aspects of Aaron’s persona.

As was apparent from The Walk episodes, when educators provide opportunities for Creativity and Imagination, children are able to recognise the lived experience of their own spirituality. However, there appears to be more to this process. The experiences from The

Walk that I identified as exhibiting spirituality also appeared to play an important part in the children's growth and development. Meaning-making enabled the children to help in integrating different aspects of themselves such as the physical, emotional, cognitive and social.

Spirituality is seen as a legitimate part of experience that contributes to an integrated and holistic view of human nature Vygotsky (1987). Wertsch (1979) understood the term "holistic" to include an individual's physical, emotional, social, cultural and spiritual dimensions. The study's findings contain many occurrences of this integration process, one being the construction of the cubbyhouse. Its construction required that many different aspects of the children's development come to the fore – for example, the physical aspect in manipulating materials; the creative process in imagining how the end product would look and what steps would be needed to achieve that; and the social aspect through co-operating with the other children, voicing their opinions and ideas, and listening to others voice theirs. This integration also assisted the children to develop a sense of agency and inner strength; in effect, to become aware of what they were capable of doing and of the process of meaning-making.

Vygotsky's (2004) four levels of understanding and conceptualisation of Creativity and Imagination provided a further means of interpreting the study's findings. Aaron's building of the cubbyhouse corresponded to Vygotsky's first point. This episode, in which Aaron had drawn upon his understanding of construction from previous Walks, family, or perhaps something he had seen on television, provided him with an opportunity to demonstrate his agency. He realised that he had the power to construct a cubbyhouse, and this experience was now embedded in his social and relational experiences. Moreover, he was not constructing the cubbyhouse alone but as part of a larger social system that included parents, educators, peers and me as the researcher.

The findings collected over the several Walks suggest that Creativity and Imagination played an important and complex role in the lived experience of spirituality in the young children. It appeared that, in the process of creating something, whether it was a flag, a cubbyhouse, or an ice-cream shop, the process itself unfolded in a *perezhivanie* way or it could at least be mapped by using the *perezhivanie* process. For example, as an awareness of self and others increases, an individual's place in the world as a protagonist capable of creating items that are meaningful also increases. The creative process thus helped the children participating in the study to find meaning in the events and experiences of their lives.

The findings demonstrate that pretending to run ice-cream shops or being fishermen or flag makers were significant experiences in the lives of the children. These experiences appeared to enable the children to access a more intuitive part of themselves, not as logical and orderly as the normal world, but nonetheless full of possibilities. This other-worldliness led the children into the meaning-making and transformative process.

Bone (2007) referred to this space as “spiritual in-between-ness” and describes it as the liminal space that can occur during rituals and that then becomes highly symbolic and planned. In the findings of the children’s experiences from The Walks, these events did not occur during rituals but were found throughout The Walk. Each experience was highly symbolic as the children created symbols to represent their scenarios – for instance, employing sticks to symbolise boom gates, or leaves to symbolise ice-creams. From the findings, it was clear that the perezhivanie process can be accessed in a group ZPD or in the creative process, which can then lead to transformation and growth, although a group ZPD and creative process are not mutually exclusive. A creative event or experience could serve as the catalyst for the perezhivanie process in a group ZPD. Vygotsky (1987) believed that the perezhivanie process requires a significant or traumatic event that then needs exploration; however, the findings suggest that these could also be everyday creative moments that occur during a child’s day. The findings did suggest that such events need to be significant enough to evoke an emotional response, a questioning, or a calling which the child would like to explore. As revealed by the findings, the incident with Claire and the construction of the small house did not lead to a perezhivanie process.

Hart (2009) regarded creativity as a spiritual pursuit as well as a transformative process. Hart (2009) considered creativity as an inherently spiritual endeavour, and the findings support this viewpoint with respect to the creative process, with the creation of the cubbyhouse. In this scenario, Aaron embraced the role of “project manager” in collaboration with others and created a fully-realised house with beds, blankets, a roof and a door. He was transformed by the experience, found meaning in the experience, and transitioned from being a practitioner to also being a theorist of his life.

Creativity and Imagination in children’s activities is a place to recognise the spiritual dimension of children’s lives (Goodliff, 2013a). Goodliff (2013a) believed that imaginative play provides young children with a space to pretend and explore possibilities, where they can draw upon their own experiences and add these to their imagination. The space to pretend offers another way of being that is imaginative and enables children to see themselves in different roles.

Transformation arising from Creativity and Imagination, whether the process itself or a creative experience explored in a group ZPD, is identified by Bone (2007). Relational Consciousness occurs during creative pursuits and increases when children are encouraged to reflect upon events. Moments of transformation, which for the children involved in this study occurred in the outdoors, helps children to make meaning of life's events and integrate the many different parts of themselves – the physical, emotional, cognitive and spiritual.

The field of early childhood education would benefit from additional research in the area of Creativity and Imagination in young children and its link with their lived experience of spirituality. While there is ample literature on young children and play (Broadhead & Burt, 2012; Cutter-MacKenzie, Edwards, Moore, & Boyd, 2014), the research to date has failed to link play with children's creative processes. If Hart (2009) was correct in his assertion that creativity is the highest and most tangible symbol of transformation, then it warrants further study and research in relation to children and their spirituality. In particular, there would appear to be value in researching the creative process through the lens of *perezhivanie* in order to explore what this could mean for EC educators in nurturing the lived experience of spirituality in young children.

6.5 Transcendence

The final of the four dimensions outlined in the findings is that of Transcendence, which incorporates awe, wonder, mystery and natural phenomena. The findings demonstrate that children are often presented with complex and existential issues which are hard to explain and grasp, yet by creating a safe space for reflection, they are able to tolerate the inherent complexity and the inability to attain certainty with regard to these issues. This ability to hold mystery enables them to see that life is bigger than themselves and that things can occur outside of themselves and outside of their control. Like creativity, moments of awe and wonder spark deeper reflection in a group ZPD that is using *perezhivanie* processes. They enable children to see themselves and the world in new ways.

The findings contain a number of examples where the children from the study responded to the outdoor environment with awe and wonder. These included viewing the raindrops on a spider's web, spiders' nests on pieces of bark, and baby slugs.

These episodes can be further explored using two main types of attributes – the *aesthetic* and *edenic* – as outlined by Van Wieren & Kellert (2013), who consider young children's spirituality as being realised in the outdoors via these two attributes. An aesthetic attribute refers to such qualities as attraction, curiosity, beauty, balance, symmetry, pattern,

order and harmony. These attributes were evident in the research when the children displayed curiosity and interest regarding the raindrops on the spiders' webs. The children expressed curiosity as to the origins of the raindrops and wondered at the beauty and symmetry of the webs.

An edenic attribute relates to feelings of union, wholeness, oneness, universal patterns and shapes, the existence of a commonality among all peoples, communities, relationships, awe, and Transcendence (Van Wierien & Kellert, 2013). The rabbit's foot embodied a symbol for life's larger universal questions of death, dying, and the existence of an afterlife. The findings demonstrate that children as young as three and four years of age are able to grasp concepts of being part of something much larger and to grapple with the idea of mystery. This is in contrast to the studies conducted by Robinson (1983) and Hart (2009), which state that young children are not able to grasp larger existential issues but can only do so as adults.

The research conducted by Van Wierien & Kellert, 2013) made an important contribution to understanding the spiritual lives of young children in the outdoor world by identifying the edenic and aesthetic attributes, which enable a researcher to identify the ways in which children interact with the outdoor world and understand their influence on children's lived experience of spirituality. However, I believe their research lacked an acknowledgment of the Relational Consciousness aspect, which proves so significant in my findings. The Van Wierien & Kellert (2013) research assumed that spirituality simply appears in the natural environment, with no means for children to make sense of what they see, feel and experience.

The construction of knowledge together in community and the group ZPD as a way for the children involved in the study to process the events and experiences of their Walk proved important in nurturing their lived experience of spirituality. The findings suggest that further exploration could be undertaken with young children in the form of a perezhivanie process applied specifically to the experiences of awe and wonder. Such a process would provide a more concrete process in which to explore children's experiences rather than leaving them as vague notions of spirituality.

6.6 Spirituality as Transformation

While spirituality can be a difficult concept to define or describe, the findings from The Walk demonstrate that spirituality can be seen in four dimensions: (1) Relational Consciousness; (2) Reflective Practice; (3) Creativity and Imagination; and 4) Transcendence.

Reflective Practice, such as the creation of a safe space, asking open-ended questions and listening actively, can be described as transpersonal and is transformative in nature. When children feel valued, when they feel free to express their thoughts in a safe environment, they display evidence of growth and development. They are not only transformed but they also play a part in the transformation of others. In addition, they are able to access, recognise, and integrate different aspects of themselves such as their physical, emotional, cognitive and spiritual sides. This recognition, in turn, assists them in moving towards wholeness, inner unity, and an increased level of consciousness.

As was evident in episodes during The Walk, spirituality has a role in developing children's self-awareness and integration. Significant spiritual growth appeared to occur in the young children when a group ZPD and the perezhivanie process were employed to help them process their experiences during the Walks. As the children were led through the process and were able to reflect upon their actions, thoughts and perspectives, they were able to increase their levels of self-awareness and knowledge. They learnt about themselves, their strengths, their capabilities, and their fears.

Hart (2009) outlined three characteristics of the integration of children's spirituality into their overall personalities. First, the integrated personality has no single template but is in a constant state of movement towards and away from integration; second, integration is multi-faceted and applies to many different types of experiences; and, third, it requires making sense of the inner world of beliefs and emotions and the external world of confusing experiences.

This latter characteristic was evident in Isabella's confrontation with the bad wolf. She was able to view herself through a number of different lenses, realise her agency, and learn that she was capable of bravery, courage, compassion and consciousness for others.

Often, research examining children's spirituality is vague and implies that spirituality simply appears as children perform a creative act or enter the outdoor environment. The findings in this study demonstrate that spirituality manifests itself as a combination of the four dimensions mentioned in this section that have provided a framework throughout this study, but with an emphasis on the Relational Consciousness and Reflective Practice dimensions, which directly assist children in realising their lived experience of spirituality. What is common to each dimension is the process of perezhivanie as a way for spirituality to be recognised and nurtured. Perezhivanie is a part of a process that also includes the practices of

the REP (the creation of safe spaces, active listening, and open-ended questions) as well the creation of group ZPDs, both large and small.

The findings demonstrate that, along with Relational Consciousness, the perezhivanie process enabled the children to express themselves, particularly where specific experiences evoked an emotional response. For instance, in the *Three Little Pigs* episode (Halliwell-Phillips, 1886) the children were given several opportunities over a number of days to revisit the experience and learn more about themselves in the process. This was done in community, through small and large group ZPDs, which offered the children the means to share their thoughts with others and to hear the thoughts of others.

The findings demonstrate that perezhivanie is, in fact, a powerful tool to help make the spiritual dimensions of children apparent to themselves, to other children, and also to educators. In this study, the perezhivanie process was augmented by the stimulated-recall process (Thomson, 2008) the practices of the REP, and the group ZPD process. The findings indicate the increased level of awareness the children had of themselves, of others, of the world, and of the transcendent, which occurred during the rabbit's foot episode that emerged from the reflective-practice process. Without this process, researchers could only begin to guess at the nature of children's spirituality.

Provocations in nature, such as spiders' webs and baby slugs, enabled the children to enter into the mystery of the natural world. One of the subthemes of the Transcendence dimension of spirituality is awe and wonder, and while some sense of awe and wonder can be explained by the existence of everyday knowledge in the children, evidence suggests that a perception in the children of the existence of a larger world and of questions for which there were no ready answers was also apparent.

For spirituality to become visible, it is vital that EC educators create a safe and nurturing space for children to reflect together on such events and experiences. The REP practices such as open-ended questions and active listening contribute greatly to children's readiness to reflect upon events. What became clear in the findings is an awareness that children as young as three and four are capable of engaging in the deeper existential questions of life.

One assumption in research into young children's spirituality regards children's awareness, or the naming of a transcendent being (Moriarty, 2011), as the ultimate expression of spirituality. What the findings from The Walk demonstrate, however, is that any experience that elicits sufficient emotional reaction could be reflected upon in community, and that when

EC educators use a perezhivanie process, it provides an opportunity for children to reflect upon their experiences with the aim of building meaning-making and higher levels of awareness.

Hay and Nye (1996) described spirituality as an awareness of self, others, the world, and the transcendent, but the findings from this study demonstrate that this is not so much a description of spirituality as its desired outcome. With spirituality defined as the four dimensions of Relational Consciousness; Reflective Practice; Creativity and Imagination; and Transcendence, applying the perezhivanie process enabled higher levels of awareness and consciousness to manifest through a reflection process that permitted the children participating in this study to see themselves in new ways. More specifically, this process enabled them to realise their own agency and uniqueness, to become aware of the presence of others, and to hear others' thoughts, feelings and ideas. Moreover, siting the research project in the outdoor learning environment enabled them to see the natural world and increase their awareness of the life around them. As the perezhivanie process unfolded, transformation occurred, perhaps in the form of an awareness of a transcendent being, or simply by seeing themselves in a larger and more expanded way that wasn't possible before.

6.7 The Natural World

Just as the perezhivanie process underpins each of the four dimensions, the natural world is also present as a part of all dimensions. The Walk, together with the natural world, enabled the development of Relational Consciousness when the children constructed things with natural objects or observed natural phenomena in community with each other.

The events of The Walk and aspects of the natural world provided the provocations that were then explored using Reflective Practice processes. The children were able to intensify their experiences in community with one another as they listened to each other's ideas about the natural world and about such existential issues as death, dying, life and rebirth. The objects within the natural world provided the materials for the creative episodes that occurred on The Walk – for example, sticks used to represent fishing rods or musical instruments. The natural world also presented a number of situations that evoked the children's sense of awe, wonder and mystery. Thus, the natural world assisted the children as they played, explored, created and reflected together.

While the dimensions of spirituality are not solely the domain of an outdoor learning environment, the findings demonstrated that the natural world can contribute to a rich setting where spirituality can be recognised and nurtured, and where the experience of spirituality is

not limited to the classroom. So, rather than spirituality suddenly appearing in children when they step onto the grass, the natural world does appear to provide some key ingredients for recognising and nurturing spirituality in young children.

As the findings demonstrate, in order for spirituality to become evident, an event must occur that evokes an emotional response as a starting place. This need not be a traumatic event, but one that simply elicits an emotional response such as awe, wonder, reverence, anger, or confusion.

6.8 Sociocultural Approach to the Research

As identified in the literature review in Chapter 2, there appears to be a paucity of research where the sociocultural approach had been applied to the area of children's spirituality, and where the views and perspectives of the children, as determined through interactions with the children, had been included. The literature review revealed that several studies in the area of young children's spirituality – such as Hart (2003), Moriarty (2011), Van Wieren and Kellert (2013), and Hay and Nye (1996) – employed largely observational methods of data collection. It was the intention of this current study to not only use observational methods but to also engage the children in conversations as well as draw upon the stimulated-recall Thomson (2008) process to work with the children to retrieve and consider experiences. What has emerged is a new understanding of the way in which the lived experience of young children can be made visible through Reflective Practice, beginning with the creation of a group ZPD that contains a five-step *perezhivanie* process and uses the REP pedagogical practices of open-ended questions and active listening. Employing this process enabled me to map the unfolding process that led the children through meaning making as well as moments of transformation.

I now present this understanding as a new framework of spirituality for early childhood education – realising that the aim of the research study of this thesis was to develop a new framework to assist EC educators in recognising and nurturing the spirituality of young children. The research question that informed this aim was to identify and analyse children's lived experience of spirituality within an early learning setting informed by the philosophical framework of Reggio Emilia and situated in a natural outdoor environment.

6.8.1 A new framework of spirituality.

Based upon the findings obtained on The Walk, I propose a new framework of spirituality for early childhood education. This new framework does recognise Relational

Consciousness, Reflective Practice, Creativity and Imagination, and Transcendence as the four dimensions of spirituality; however, I am proposing a new way of viewing these dimensions, which better reflects the findings from this study.

Figure 12 represents diagrammatically this new framework of spirituality for early childhood education. On the left hand side, the framework details the aforementioned four dimensions of spirituality. The Reflective Practice dimension contains the group ZPD, the five-step perezhivanie process and the REP pedagogical practices of open-ended questions and active listening. In this framework, I propose that when children are provided with opportunities for each of these dimensions to manifest itself, a more profound movement towards reflective consciousness emerges.

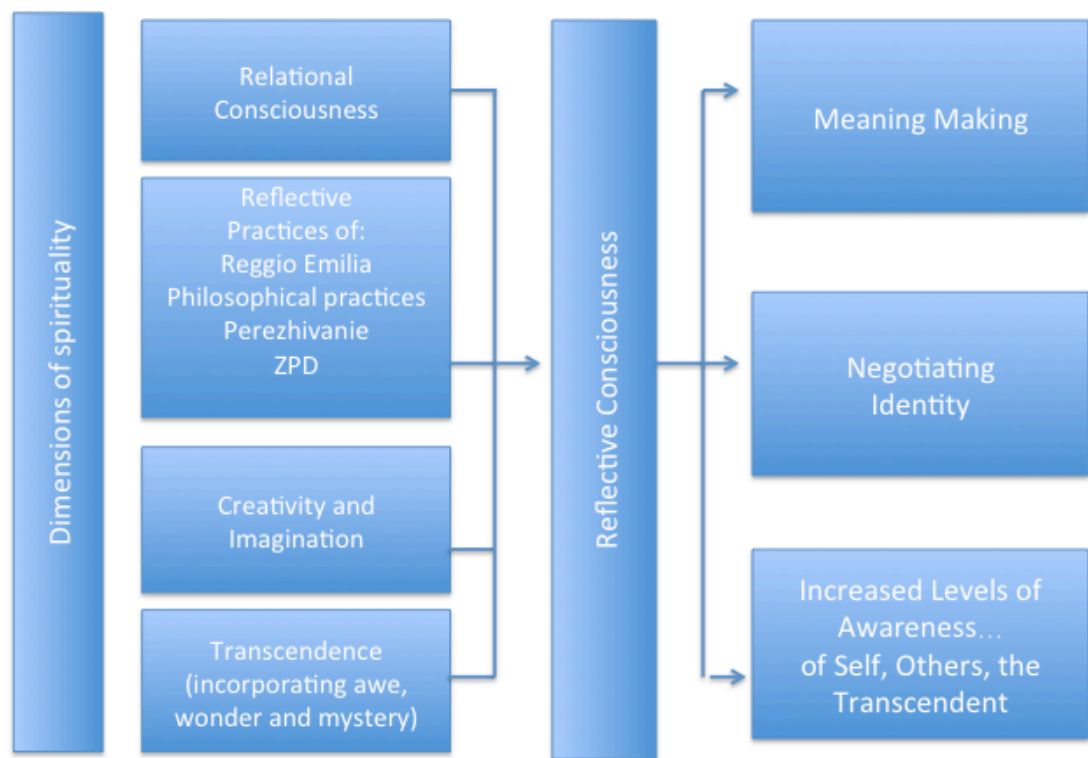


Figure 12. Framework to support EC educator's recognition of young children's opportunities to experience spirituality in EC educational settings.

When reflective consciousness develops in children, transformation can occur and a number of additional outcomes can result. On the right-hand side of the diagram in Figure 12, there are three outcomes mentioned: meaning-making, negotiating identity, and increased levels of awareness. Meaning-making refers to the ability of young children to garner sense and understanding from events that have occurred. When they are able to do this in community with other children and adults, they begin to view themselves and others in new and more holistic ways. The findings from this study demonstrate that young children are

quite capable of drawing meaning from events and experiences and Reflective Practice processes can assist in this realisation. Negotiating identity refers to the way in which young children are able to come to know themselves in new ways. A raised level of awareness is the final outcome that includes a stronger connection with their own self, others, the world around them, and possibly even a transcendent being for some.

6.9 Role of the Educator

In order for EC educators to recognise and nurture the spirituality of young children, it is vital that they create an environment where the four dimensions of spirituality are encouraged. Once these are present, EC educators can then create an environment for reflective consciousness to emerge through the use of Reflective Practice. This process then enables the three additional outcomes of meaning-making, identity negotiation, and increased levels of self-awareness to flourish. The events and experiences of everyday life can be the prompts for children to begin to explore their perspectives, ideas, thoughts and feelings. Early childhood educators need to set the intention of the group and convey the group’s expectations in addition to creating a safe and nurturing environment where children feel valued. They need to listen actively and ask open-ended questions.

6.10 The Findings of this Research

6.10.1 Perezhivanie process.

Figure 12 shows that the perezhivanie process is located in the Reflective Practice dimension. The five-step perezhivanie process can support this dimension in practices between children and adults, by providing opportunities for children to reflect on their experiences with the aim of building higher levels of awareness. In Table 2, I provide some questions for each of the steps that would be helpful for EC educators seeking to facilitate perezhivanie. The questions are open ended and invite children to reflect at each stage. This process can be carried out over a number of days. Questions may need to be modified depending upon the age of the child.

Table 2
Helpful Questions for EC Educators During the Perezhivanie Process

Perezhivanie step	Helpful questions for EC educators
The event itself	
Reflection	“Tell me about your experience.” You may ask the child to draw a picture of the event and then offer

Perezhivanie step	Helpful questions for EC educators
	to discuss the picture with him or her. You might like to involve the five senses: “What did you see/hear/smell/taste?” (if appropriate) “What did you feel with your hands or feet?” (if appropriate)
Awareness	“What were you feeling during this experience?” “Who else was there with you?”
Meaning making	“What did you learn from the experience?” “If this event happened again, would you do anything differently?” “How did this event change your ideas about yourself and/or others?”
Transformation/growth	Who are you in this experience?” “What do you now know about yourself that you didn’t before?”

While not every conversation will ultimately lead to transformation, taking the time to allow the five-step perezhivanie process to unfold may assist children in the Relational Consciousness process, potentially leading to meaning-making, self-awareness and identity integration.

6.11 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the four dimensions of spirituality that were discovered in the data analysis stage – (1) Relational Consciousness; (2) Reflective Practice; (3) Creativity and Imagination; and (4) Transcendence – and the way in which they provided insights into the spiritual experiences of the young children involved in the study.

The chapter also examined the central role that group ZPDs, the five-step perezhivanie process, together with the REP pedagogical practices, can play in aiding children to recognise and construct their perceptions of their spiritual experiences as well as assisting EC educators to help children nurture their spiritual dimensions in an EC setting.

The chapter concluded by presenting a new framework of spirituality, which can be used by EC educators to understand, recognise, and nurture young children’s lived experience of spirituality as well as some helpful questions for each step of the five-step perezhivanie process as part of the Reflective Practice dimension.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes the thesis by bringing together the aim and the research question as well as outlining the main theoretical and policy implications of the findings, highlighting the limitations of the study and offering directions for future research.

7.2 Aims of the Research

The impetus for this study was the growing use of the term spirituality in early childhood curriculum frameworks around the world – for example, the Aotearoa New Zealand early childhood curriculum Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education [NZ], 2017) the Australian Government's *Belonging, Being and Becoming: Early Years Learning Framework* (DEEWR, 2009) and the Welsh Foundation Phase Framework (Early Years Team Department for Educations and Skills, 2015). However, despite the use of the term in these curriculum documents, there appeared to be little to no pedagogical assistance given to early childhood educators to describe or define spirituality, recognise children's lived experience of spirituality, or nurture it once it had been recognised.

As noted in Chapter 1, spirituality can often be regarded as a vague, religiously laden or ambiguous term, and thus many EC educators are inclined to ignore it and focus on more easily identified and measurable aspects of education such as physical and cognitive development (*Foundation phase: Framework for children's learning for 3- to 7-year-olds in Wales*, 2008).

The literature review in Chapter 2 identified a number of significant gaps in the research regarding young children's spirituality generally and, more specifically, young children's spirituality in an early childhood education setting, particularly those using the REP and with a commitment to outdoor learning.

First, while there have been studies conducted in the areas of the REP, the outdoor learning environment, and of early childhood education and spirituality, no study has explored the intersection of these four areas in an integrated way.

Second, the literature review indicated the usefulness of a sociocultural approach in researching the area of young children's spirituality, and that this approach has the ability to

provide insights that the fields of theology, philosophy and science may lack. The sociocultural approach, in fact, appears to be the most effective when spirituality is viewed as constructed through the relationship of the child with others rather than being imposed by the researcher, even if the researcher listens intently to what the child says. The literature review also demonstrated that there is a lack of agreement or cohesion around the term “spirituality” and that a plethora of definitions and descriptions are used by EC educators (Kennedy & Duncan, 2006)

Third, although Goodliff (2013^a) has identified four areas of behaviours in young children’s spirituality – relationality, reflectiveness, creativity, and Transcendence – all four behaviours are given equal importance. The findings reported in this thesis suggest that Reflective Practice that leads to reflective consciousness is significant and is the most effective way for young children to explore their spirituality. The findings indicate that the pedagogical practices of the REP and Vygotsky’s concept of *perezhivanie* offer great potential in the area of spirituality in terms of the Reflective Practice dimension.

The literature review revealed the paucity of research in the area of nature and its ability to positively impact on young children’s growth and development. With the exception of (Van Wieren & Kellert, 2013^b), very little research has been undertaken with young children outside of the classroom and in the natural environment. The literature review also highlighted a number of studies – for example, Bone (2007) and Champagne (2008) – that used predominantly observational methods of data collection. It was the aim of this research project to engage young children in discussion both during The Walk and the stimulated-recall (Thomson, 2008) process to ascertain their thoughts, ideas and perspectives on the concept of spirituality. This approach aligns with Vygotsky’s (1987) concept of considering young children in a holistic way that takes account of their physical, mental, emotional and spiritual traits. It was the insights gleaned from the conversations with the children involved in the study that led to the development of the new framework of spirituality.

In Chapter 3, the thesis explored in detail the work of Lev Vygotsky and his sociocultural theory. In particular, it examined the areas of cultural mediation, everyday and scientific concepts, consciousness and *perezhivanie*, which underpinned the research for this study. This theory chapter also examined the two strands of research used when young children are involved – namely, the sociocultural approach versus those approaches that have their origins in theology, philosophy and science.

Chapter 4 outlined the methodology used for the data collection and data analysis phases of the research study. This study was conducted in an early learning centre (ELC) that uses the pedagogical framework of the REP and is situated in a green wedge location in Melbourne's south-eastern suburbs. The data collection phase was conducted in the outdoor learning environment. The site was selected because this ELC places a high importance on the natural environment and includes long periods of time outside of the classroom that provide young children with time to explore the natural bush setting of the school. Particular attention was paid to include the voice of the young children in the research and to ensure their perspectives, ideas and thoughts were included in the development of the new framework of spirituality that was the outcome of this research study. The Early Years Learning Framework (DEEWR, 2009) and the United Nations Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) were also closely examined.

In Chapter 5, key experiences from The Walk were presented as well as the theory and literature which underpinned them. The findings from the research indicate that there are four dimensions to young children's spirituality – (1) Relational Consciousness; (2) Reflective Practice; (3) Creativity and Imagination; and (4) Transcendence – and that the first dimension of Relational Consciousness is central to each dimension and could not be seen in isolation. This chapter also demonstrated how the five-step *perezhivanie* process was successfully used by EC educators and me to assist the children involved in the study to revisit events and experiences and derive meaning from them. Higher mental functions and increased levels of consciousness were evident as a result of this process.

In Chapter 6, I explored each of the dimensions of young children's spirituality and proposed a new framework of young children's spirituality, which could be used by EC educators to aid them in meeting the EC curriculum requirements of nurturing the spirituality of young children. I also provided EC educators with suggested prompts for each step to aid this process.

7.2.1 How the study was carried out.

In order to address the research study's aim, I set out to work with the children in a collaborative way that would ensure their voices were heard and captured in the research. I chose a qualitative intrinsic case study and used sociocultural theory as my theoretical theory base, which ensured that knowledge and meaning were constructed in community with each other, and that there was no one truth out there to discover but rather meaning would occur

when time was spent creating a safe and nurturing environment where participants felt heard and valued.

Research in the area of young children's spirituality has typically involved observational methods (Bone, 2007; Champagne, 2008) rather than inviting young children into the conversation and obtaining their perspectives and ideas. Drawing from my experience as a spiritual director, I knew it was vital to create an atmosphere of mutual trust, safety and openness. I took significant time to establish relationships with the children by accompanying them on several Walks before undertaking any data collection.

As I explained in the methodology chapter, just giving a still camera to children and discussing with them the photos was not sufficient to facilitate the children really exploring their experiences. I did not want the technology to interfere with their Walk experiences; however, I needed a robust process that would ensure the children's experiences were recorded. I began by filming them as they played on The Walk, and then engaged them in conversations both at the time and also a few days later in the classroom. This involved employing the pedagogical practices of the REP to actively listen to the children and ask them open-ended questions that would encourage reflection in small and large groups.

The five-step perezhivanie process was employed with events and experiences that were seen to be significant for the children in order to illicit an emotional response. This praxis was then continued in the classroom with the stimulated-recall (Thomson, 2008) process, which, again, provided an opportunity for the children to reflect upon their experiences within a perezhivanie framework. This data collection methodology ensured that children's voices were heard, recorded and integrated into the research findings.

7.3 Effectiveness of the Methodology

This intrinsic case study involved only a small number of children; however, the number of Walks undertaken (14 over four terms), together with the use of a video camera and observation as well as the stimulated-recall (Thomson, 2008) process a few days later, provided rich data for analysis. One of the more surprising findings was that children often contributed additional insights and ideas after a second or third viewing of the same video, which thereby demonstrated the benefit of providing additional time and space for children to reflect upon their experiences. I expected that a single viewing would be sufficient to glean the children's thoughts and ideas, but subsequent viewings did provide additional insights.

The use of sociocultural theory was extremely helpful in providing a framework of the emergence of spirituality as a result of interactions between the children, and between the children and the adults. It illuminated that spirituality is constructed and that no one person is the holder of the ultimate truth. The methodology and theoretical frameworks chosen for this research proved fruitful for developing a comprehensive range of significant findings on the lived experience of young children's spirituality in an EC setting. The additional use of group ZPDs and the five-step *perezhivanie* process, together with the pedagogical practices of the REP, provided an effective method by which EC educators could help children to reflect upon experiences and make meaning from them.

The use of Reflective Practice with the children, such as the five-step *perezhivanie* process within a group ZPD and the stimulated-recall (Thomson, 2008) process, was a valuable tool for listening attentively to them and engaging with them as well as enabling their voices to be heard and incorporated into the project's findings. The example of the rabbit's foot episode demonstrated that it took multiple opportunities for reflection over the period of The Walk, in both a one-on-one encounter as well as in small and large groups and time back in the classroom, for Noah to really explore his experience burying the rabbit's foot. These additional opportunities for reflection, as well as the clear intention of this research project to include the children in the process, led to rich understandings and findings, which contributed to the creation of the new framework of young children's spirituality.

7.3.1 The principal claim of this thesis.

This thesis places the lived experience of spirituality as a central and essential dimension of children's growth, development and wellbeing. Governments have been cognisant of this fact and have been increasingly including the term in curriculum documents – for example, in Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand and Wales – yet these documents do not provide any supporting documentation to assist EC educators in how to implement this area of the curriculum.

It was the aim of this research study to address this issue and to provide guidelines for EC educators in how to both recognise the lived experience of spirituality in young children and to nurture it once it had been recognised. First, this was achieved with the creation of a new framework of spirituality, which features the four key dimensions of spirituality – Relational Consciousness, Reflective Practice, Creativity and Imagination, and Transcendence. The findings demonstrate that the dimension of Relational Consciousness is the most significant. Children learn, grow and develop through relationships with their peers,

as well as with educators and their parents. It would be impossible to remove this dimension as it is intrinsically linked to the other three dimensions.

Another significant finding was how reflective-practice processes could be undertaken. There are three main elements: first, the creation of a group ZPD; second, the use of the five-step perezhivanie process – consisting of the event, reflection, awareness of self and others, meaning-making and expression, and transformation and growth – and, third, the REP practices, which consist of open-ended questions, active listening and the creation of secure spaces where children can feel safe and valued when they contribute their thoughts and ideas. The five-step perezhivanie process provides children with the time to reflect deeply on their experiences and events, to explore their thoughts and feelings, as well as their relationships to themselves and others, and thereby be potentially transformed by the experience.

Vygotsky (1987) asserted that it is the process of collaboration in community with each other, in this case children and EC educators, that brings forth learning and development rather than the knowledge of the more competent person. This collaboration enables children to develop higher psychological functions and increased levels of consciousness, both of themselves and others, which leads to the formation of identity and self-awareness. This is a significant discovery because it reduces the need for EC educators to be experts or even knowledgeable about spirituality; instead, the emphasis is placed on the need for EC educators to create a group ZPD and allow the five-step perezhivanie process to unfold.

While the perezhivanie process has been applied to other areas of education, such as universities, where students have explored their spirituality (Fakhrutdinova, 2010), and in ELCs, with the use of fairytales as a tool for role-playing (Fleer & Hammer, 2013) as far as I can ascertain from a thorough investigation of the existing literature, it has not been mapped to the lived experience of young children's spirituality, or used to assist young children to reflect on their experiences. The five-step perezhivanie process is significant in that it provides a helpful tool for EC educators to assist young children to make sense and meaning of their experiences. It provides a guide for practice in an area which is often vague and difficult to define or describe.

One of the key findings regarding the use of the five-step perezhivanie process is that for it to be effective it appears that an emotional reaction, either positive or negative, is required in response to experiences and events. When this approach was used with respect to more mundane activities, there was little insight gained.

The final element of the Reflective Practice dimension is the use of the ZPD.

7.3.2 Theoretical implications.

The implications of the findings in relation to some key theoretical studies and policy statements are considered in this section and will include a review of the work of Hay and Nye (1996), the pedagogical framework of the REP, and the study undertaken by Fleer and Hammer (2013), which included teachers' perspectives and understandings of the term "spirituality".

Hay and Nye

One of the significant changes in the understanding of young children's spirituality came about through the work of Hay and Nye (1996) and their use of sociocultural theory as a basis for their research. This move away from regarding spirituality as a theological, philosophical or scientific construct to one that could be constructed in community with others cannot be underestimated. It provided for a new way of perceiving spirituality that made it accessible to EC educators, even for those not familiar with religious or philosophical frameworks, or who possessed specialised scientific knowledge.

The use of Vygotsky's (1987) theories paved the way for spirituality to be seen as an integrated part of children's growth and development. Up until time of the work of Hay and Nye (1996), spirituality was either considered as a separate aspect of children's growth and development (Gardner, 1999), or as something innate to children (Hyde, 2008a, and de Souza, 2009) that all children possessed and simply needed to discover.

Hay and Nye's (1996) work provided a completely new approach to this area; in their study they postulate that spirituality in young children is constructed from within relationships. Hay and Nye's (1996) work focused upon children's awareness as a central tenet of their spirituality; it consists of an awareness of themselves, of each other, of the outside world and of a possible Transcendence. They believe that this awareness constitutes a particular form of mental activity that differs from simple mental alertness. They describe this higher level of awareness as "consciousness", or, more specifically, as a "Relational Consciousness". The particular reflective quality possessed by this awareness enables children to achieve a new dimension of understanding, meaning and experience, a condition Hay and Nye (1996) term "meta-consciousness", which also enables children to perceive the world in relational terms.

The findings of this research project did find that Relational Consciousness was a central dimension of young children's spirituality. I agree with Hay and Nye (1996) that it would be impossible to remove this dimension as it is intrinsically linked with the other three dimensions; however, there is a key area where my findings differ from the work of Hay and Nye. For Hay and Nye, spirituality is found in the increased level of awareness displayed by young children. They assert that children need to be given the opportunity to discuss experiences and events and in Nye's later work (2009) she outlined six ways in which care givers, specifically leaders within a church setting, can nurture children's spirituality. I believe more guidance and explanation is needed specifically for EC educators within the classroom to meet curricula requirements. The work of Hay and Nye (1996, 2006) is mentioned here to establish how spirituality is specifically made possible for children via experiences provided in early childhood settings, specifically settings which draw upon REP as their philosophical framework as well as settings that have a focus upon spending times in the outdoor learning environment.

Spirituality does not appear or emerge but rather develops through the use of the reflective-practice processes of carefully created ZPDs and the five-step perezhivanie model of open-ended questions and active listening. This form of Reflective Practice invites children to move beyond the third step of awareness of self and others to the higher levels of awareness of meaning-making and expression, where they are able to see themselves as theorists of their own lives and potentially reach those levels that will enable transformation and growth. It is these final stages of the perezhivanie model that can lead to negotiating identity.

7.3.2.2 *Reggio Emilia philosophy.*

The practices of the Reggio Emilia philosophy (REP), particularly in relation to posing open-ended questions and active listening, held great significance for this study. The findings demonstrate that, when these practices are combined with a group ZPD and the five-step perezhivanie process, children are able to derive meaning, awareness, and even transformation from events and experiences in their lives.

While REP practitioners are reluctant to name spirituality, the findings indicate that many of the embedded REP practices such as the daily practices of small and large group discussions, the creation of safe spaces for children, the pedagogy of listening, asking open-ended questions, the focus on the creativity of young children, the importance of inter-subjectivity, and the use of reflection time all contribute to the nurture of young children's

lived experience of spirituality. As the findings of this research demonstrate, Relational Consciousness forms an important part of children's growth and development that can potentially lead to improvements in other areas of their development such as strengthening identity and self-awareness.

There are two areas for EC educators using the REP pedagogy to consider, which arose as a result of this research; the invitation to expand the understanding of inter-subjectivity and the opportunity to embrace spirituality as an outcome of REP practices. For REP practitioners, the notion of inter-subjectivity differs from Relational Consciousness in that the former relates to interactions between children and other children and educators, or between children and other adults, in the classroom, rather than including other aspects of relationships, such as the individual's relationship with themselves, with the outside world, or the transcendent or mystery. I believe this expanded notion of Relational Consciousness would assist EC educators when they are supporting young children nurture their lived experience of spirituality.

Another related limitation in the existing research that was explored in the literature review was where the notion of inter-subjectivity is further reduced to one-way communication from the EC educators to the children (Freeman, 2011). The research study of this thesis demonstrated the value of listening to young children's ideas and perspectives and of providing them with the time and space to reflect on their experiences. This would assist EC educators to gain valuable insight into children's thinking and ideas.

Given the emerging interest of governments from around the world to include the concept of spirituality in EC curricula (Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand and Wales, for example) it would appear that the REP is in a position to provide valuable insight and make a significant contribution to the area of young children's spirituality. The research of this study strongly indicated that the REP reflective-practice processes of creating safe spaces, open-ended questions and active listening are significantly useful tools for EC educators to recognise and nurture the dimensions of young children's spirituality.

The REP is a suitable concept to satisfy the curriculum requirements of nurturing the spirituality of young children should it be introduced more widely. The EC sector has an enormous amount to learn from the REP, particularly from its strong focus on the child and its emphasis on Reflective Practice.

7.3.2.3 *Kennedy and Duncan*

The literature review outlined three main findings of the Kennedy and Duncan (2006). The first finding was teachers' recognition that spirituality has many layers, and that in order for the concept to be relevant for teachers, flexibility in describing spirituality is required. The current study addressed this issue and developed a new framework, which is broad, open, and flexible enough to allow for teachers within and outside of a religious framework to be able to grasp and understand the concept of spirituality. The second dimension of the framework is Reflective Practice, which is of particular use to EC educators because it provides additional resources in the form of appropriate questions to ask for each step of the five-step perezhivanie process that will assist them to guide young children to revisit and make meaning from experiences and events.

The second finding from Kennedy and Duncan's (2006) research was that in order for teachers to be able to nurture the spirituality of young children, they need to first nurture their own spirituality. Several teachers in their study expressed the view that "you can't give what you don't have" (p. 278). While a full investigation of this area was outside the scope of the current study, it is an important point to consider. Are EC educators with a thorough knowledge of spirituality the only ones equipped to nurture the spirituality of young children? I believe that the framework that has been proposed in this current study minimises the need for EC educators to have a thorough knowledge of spirituality. The findings demonstrate that any experience which elicits an emotional response is capable of being reflected upon by children with adults. By using Reflective Practice, the process will naturally unfold to nurture the spirituality of young children through meaning making and increased awareness without EC educators being required to fully understand all the facets of spirituality. This is echoed in Vygotsky's view of the collaborative nature of ZPDs and perezhivanie.

The third finding from the Kennedy and Duncan (2006) study was that teachers who demonstrate what they perceive as spiritual qualities – that is, peacefulness, inclusiveness, and love of life – tend to create classroom environments where children's spirituality is likely to be nurtured. This finding appeared to be based on opinions rather than scientific investigation because who decided what was deemed to be a "spiritual quality"? I believe values such as peacefulness and inclusiveness are admirable traits to have in EC educators; however, the nurture of young children's spirituality is not reliant upon them. As long as EC educators are prepared to be intentional about the creation of safe and nurturing environments and provide the time and space for children to explore experiences through the use of Reflective Practice, in particular the five-step perezhivanie process, then children will have the opportunity to

revisit experiences, make meaning, develop higher psychological functions and raise their level of self-awareness and consciousness.

7.4 Policy Implications

The new framework of spirituality that has been proposed as an outcome of this research study is designed to assist EC educators in not only recognising but also confidently delivering key pedagogical practices to nurture the spirituality of young children. To date, faced with the term “spirituality” in the EC curriculum but lacking guidance, it has been left up to educators to make their own sense of the term.

As revealed in the literature review, when asked for a description or definition of spirituality, educators have provided a wide range of responses within and outside of a religious framework, with Kennedy and Duncan’s (2006) study demonstrating the confusion present within the early childhood education sector. Something less vague and more concrete is clearly needed in the early childhood curriculum to support EC educators in engaging young children’s spirituality. The new framework of spirituality put forward in this thesis has implications for enabling EC educators to identify the dimensions of spirituality as well as ways to nurture them in children. The new framework features four dimensions of young children’s spirituality: (1) Relational Consciousness; (2) Reflective Practice; (3) Creativity and Imagination; and (4) Transcendence. The second dimension of Reflective Practice has three main components: (1) the creation of group ZPDs; (2) the five-step *perezhivanie* process, which allows EC educators to assist young children to revisit experiences and derive meaning from them; and (3) the REP pedagogical practices of open-ended questions, active listening and the creation of safe and nurturing spaces.

As well as a new framework, additional questions have also been developed to assist EC educators during the five-step *perezhivanie* process. As discussed in the previous section, it is not necessary for EC educators to have a thorough knowledge of spirituality, but rather that they have a willingness to allow children the time and space to reflect upon experiences and events so that they can derive meaning from them and increase their levels of self-awareness.

The opportunity in this research study to invite children to reflect upon their experiences within a group ZPD proved to be one of the most helpful exercises in nurturing their spirituality. Throughout the course of *The Walk*, at its conclusion, and at day’s end, times were set aside for pausing and reflecting. As the findings attest, each time the five-step *perezhivanie* process was introduced for a particular episode, it enabled the children to revisit

experiences and events and deepen their understandings, express their own thoughts, hear different perspectives from other children and adults, make meaning from events, and come to understand themselves in new ways. Daily reflection by EC educators is frequently cited in the REP pedagogical framework as a useful tool but, in the context of this study, reflection time for children also provides a safe and nurturing environment in which they can further make meaning and learn more about themselves.

7.4.1 Spirituality and the Early Years Learning Framework.

As outlined in the introduction, several areas of the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) are applicable to this study. In Learning Outcome 1 Children have a strong sense of identity - there are four points that had relevance to this current study: first, that children feel safe, secure and supported; second, that children develop their emerging autonomy, inter-dependence and sense of agency; third, that children develop knowledgeable and confident self-identities; and, fourth, that children learn to interact in relation to others with care, empathy and respect (DEEWR, 2009).

It would appear from the findings of the research study of this thesis that the five-step perezhivanie process, which is a component of the Reflective Practice dimension of the newly proposed framework of spirituality and is used to help children revisit and make meaning from events, has the added advantage of meeting the practices to support Learning Outcome 1. The Perezhivanie process occurs when EC educators create a safe and nurturing environment where children are encouraged to express their ideas, thoughts and perspectives as well as listen to others speak and share. This mutual sharing in conversation assists children in building confidence and their sense of agency. By having their contributions respected and actively listened to, they are able to see themselves as theorists in their own lives, to see themselves in different roles, which help them to build their identity. For example, the findings demonstrate how Isabella in the *Three Little Pigs* scene (Halliwell-Phillips, 1886) was able to reflect on her experience with others, which in turn enabled her to see herself in new and holistic ways that acknowledged her strengths.

Learning Outcome 3 of the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) relates to children having a strong sense of wellbeing, and using the five-step perezhivanie process would assist children to feel that they have agency and the ability to process life's experiences in a way that brings meaning, awareness, and even transformation – all feelings that ultimately contribute to increased levels of wellbeing.

Learning Outcome 5 encourages children to become effective communicators (DEEWR, 2009). The inclusion of the five-step perezhivanie process would assist in achieving this outcome by enabling children to interact verbally and non-verbally and practise their communication skills in a safe and nurturing environment. The perezhivanie process provides for children to not only explore their own experiences but to also hear about the experiences of other children and adults. The findings from this current research project demonstrate that children as young as three and four are capable of holding multiple interpretations and ideas about a single event. In the example of the research project's rabbit's foot episode, some of the children believed that the rabbit would go to Heaven; others believed only people went to Heaven; and for others, there was no concept of an afterlife or Heaven at all. This scenario demonstrated a sophisticated level of communication and awareness from the children, which was facilitated by the five-step perezhivanie process and other reflective–practice processes that were employed.

7.5 Studies in the Natural World

As outlined in Chapter 1, there is a growing trend for children to spend less unstructured time in the outdoor environment (C. Smith, 2009) and it was an awareness of this trend that led me to conduct the data collection phase outside the classroom in the natural bush setting of the school. The literature review revealed there was a paucity of research that had examined specifically the role nature played in the spiritual development of young children and more so their lived experience of spirituality. This was surprising and exposed the need for more studies to be undertaken to investigate the contribution that time spent in an outdoor environment made to a child's spiritual growth and development.

Does time spent in the outdoors contribute to children's lived experience of spirituality, or is it merely a context in which play occurs? This research project could not provide a definitive answer to this question. Nature certainly provides affordances, which leads to children playing in different ways than indoors, such as being able to collect natural found objects and assemble them in new ways, gazing at a spider's web covered in dewdrops, or exploring a row of ants, but the support this provides to children's lived experience of spirituality was not automatically evident from this study. Experiences that elicit an emotional response could just as easily occur inside the classroom and the reflective-practice processes could have then been introduced to assist children explore their experiences.

7.5.1 Significant contributions of study.

The research study of this thesis has contributed to the knowledge of young children's spirituality with the development of a new framework of spirituality for early childhood education. This new framework has identified four main dimensions of young children's spirituality – Relational Consciousness, Reflective Practice, Creativity and Imagination; and Transcendence. The second dimension of Reflective Practice has three main components – the creation of group ZPDs, the five-step perezhivanie process, and the REP pedagogical practices of open-ended questions and active listening. As discussed earlier in this chapter, this new framework of spirituality provides a new and helpful way for EC educators to understand how spirituality can be recognised in young children and the ways in which it can be nurtured. Prior knowledge of spirituality is not necessary for EC educators, but a willingness to create safe and nurturing spaces for children to revisit experiences in community with other children and adults would be beneficial. The added advantage of this new framework of spirituality is that it would assist EC educators to meet a number of the curriculum requirements, particularly regarding the nurturing of children's spirituality and wellbeing. However, it would also contribute to children's ability to develop their own agency, identity and communication.

As part of the research study of this thesis, the perezhivanie process described previously was mapped against two episodes from the findings – the *Three Little Pigs* (Halliwell-Phillips, 1886) and the rabbit's foot – and was found to be robust. The process relies upon EC educators valuing Reflective Practice and having a willingness to create time and space for children to revisit experiences. In Chapter 6, a number of key questions that could be posed by EC educators at each stage to assist in the process were articulated.

The new framework of spirituality that has been developed as an outcome of this research study provides a foundation for EC educators to consider the dimensions of spirituality in early childhood. In addition, EC educators need not be the REP practitioners to create and facilitate this process. The techniques presented in this study are those EC educators would typically employ in practice, such as open-ended questions, active listening and creating safe spaces. The findings indicate that the process of collaboration and reflection is the most important element. Gaining information or knowledge is not the point of the exercise; rather, it is the sharing of experiences in a safe and nurturing environment.

The findings indicate that children are capable of reflecting upon their own experiences and making meaning from them. The EC educators in this research study did not attempt to provide answers; they created a group ZPD that facilitated the process of constructing meaning together to unfold. While the five-step perezhivanie process may appear

complex, it is actually a simple way of enabling children to process experiences and events, and it assists them to make meaning and be transformed by the process. I believe this process offers an accessible and robust tool for EC educators to assist in identifying spirituality and nurturing it in their classrooms.

7.6 Limitations of the Study

This study was conducted within an Australian context, with an early learning centre (ELC) that can access an outdoor learning environment and uses the pedagogical framework of the REP. Consequently, the generalisability of the findings needs to be addressed. While it is possible that different results could have emerged if the study had been conducted in a different setting, such as a forest school, where the time spent outside would have comprised a greater percentage of the school day, or an Indigenous community, where the outdoor environment would have been viewed in a more connected and holistic way, I believe the new framework of spirituality proposed by this thesis is applicable to different EC settings and is not confined to Australian contexts, REP classrooms, or outdoor learning environments. It also does not rely upon a prior understanding of young children's spirituality or specific REP training, but rather offers a robust framework that EC educators could adapt to their particular circumstances. However, it does require a willingness from EC educators to value the role that Relational Consciousness and Reflective Practice plays in young children's spirituality as well as provide the time and space for the five-step perezhivanie process to unfold.

The research study was conducted over a period of four consecutive terms in the latter half of one year and the first part of the next. If this study had been extended to cover several years of the children's schooling, perhaps the data would have been different and could possibly have provided insights into the children's ongoing development of their spirituality. This would have been difficult at the research site used because once the children leave the ELC and enter the primary school, they do not participate in weekly Walks or access the outdoors in the same way.

The children involved in the study were mainly of Anglo-Australian heritage and from a relatively high socioeconomic background, who were attending a Christian-based school, although not all of them were from religious families or attended church. Perhaps the data and findings might have differed if the children had been from a more diverse cultural and religious background including might have possibly Indigenous heritage. Indigenous children, for instance, might have displayed a different relationship with the outdoor environment.

7.7 Contribution of the Research

This research makes a number of contributions to the field of early childhood education. After completing the literature review, it became apparent that this research project would highlight the inadequate understanding of spirituality that EC educators currently have. Even though spirituality is part of the present EC curricula, there is a paucity of guidelines to assist EC educators in nurturing young children's spirituality. Through the presentation and discussion of the findings of the research study of this thesis, these issues relating to spirituality for EC educators have been addressed by the development of a new framework of spirituality for young children and its demonstration through outdoor and reflective activities.

This study has proposed some practical ways in which EC educators can help young children to recognise and nurture their life experiences of spirituality through the suggestion of suitable reflective questions and an outline of how to introduce the five-step perezhivanie process in the early childhood educational setting. It also identified the effectiveness of replaying video footage to young children as a mechanism for them to relive and re-experience recent events, and thereby stimulate their responses in readiness for the introduction of the perezhivanie process.

This study has made a further contribution to the field of young children's spirituality by demonstrating the link between young children's spirituality and their self-awareness, and integrates the dispositions that first manifest in young children.

7.7.1 Future directions for research. While the findings of this research project have demonstrated that the five-step perezhivanie process is a robust and helpful tool for EC educators, it is yet to be replicated and validated in other settings. While the process appears to show potential as a tool for EC educators to use to recognise and nurture the lived experience of young children's spirituality, applying it to other ELCs and settings is required. The setting for this research was the outdoor learning environment with some classroom involvement in the form of stimulated recall (Thomson, 2008). How would this process translate to a totally indoor location is a question for further research.

The current study did not attempt to capture or investigate the perceptions of the EC educators and their views on spirituality. It is possible that they may have had certain views on spirituality that could have influenced the findings. Research would need to be carried out in a range of different ELC settings with a diversity of EC educators in order to investigate the impact on the findings of such views.

The current study was located in an ELC that had as its underpinning framework the REP. Is it possible that different findings would have been found in an ELC that used an alternative framework? Similarly, how might have the geographical or socioeconomic status of the school impacted on the results? Future directions or expansions of this research lie in its broader application to EC settings.

This study worked collaboratively with young children, providing them with opportunities for their voices to be heard, valued and included in the research that pertained to their learning and development. This approach could be adapted to other areas of research, providing a more holistic view of young children, which would be in line with Vygotsky's (1987) concept of the "whole child", where children's social, emotional, psychological and spiritual aspects are taken into account.

7.8 Conclusion

The aim of this research project was to develop a new framework to assist EC educators in recognising and nurturing the spirituality of young children. The research question that informed this aim was to identify and analyse children's lived experience of spirituality within an early learning setting informed by the philosophical framework of Reggio Emilia and situated in a natural outdoor environment. The aim was achieved by developing a new framework of spirituality for early childhood education. The new framework contains the four dimensions of young children's spirituality: (1) Relational Consciousness; (2) Reflective Practice (incorporating the three elements of group ZPDs, the five-step perezhivanie process and the REP pedagogical practices of open-ended questions and active listening); (3) Creativity and Imagination; and (4) Transcendence (incorporating awe, wonder and mystery).

This new framework of spirituality is a further contribution to knowledge because it enables educators for the first time to consider spirituality outside of a specific theological, philosophical or scientific framework, and it satisfies the curriculum expectations of early childhood education, which within Australia is outlined in *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (DEEWR, 2009).

This new framework offers EC educators a simple yet accessible and robust process to equip them with the "how" of recognising and nurturing spirituality in young children. The research sought to engage with the experience of spirituality in early childhood education in order for spirituality to be considered as a significant aspect of young children's growth and development.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Letter to the Uniting Church of Australia Synod

ACU Letterhead

Rev. Dr. David Pargeter

Board of Mission and Resourcing (BOMAR)

Uniting Church of Australia Synod of Victoria and Tasmania,

130 Little Collins Street

Melbourne Victoria 3000.

20th July 2011

Dear Mr. Pargeter,

Re: A case study exploring the role nature plays in nurturing the spirituality of prior-to-school aged children.

Supervisor: Dr Brendan Hyde (Australian Catholic University)

Student Researcher: Kristen Hobby (School of Religious Education (Victoria)– Australian Catholic University)

I would like to request permission to conduct my research project at Early Learning Centre at research site.

This research project will examine the role nature plays in the development of spirituality of three and four year old children. The purpose of the study is to accompany the children on their weekly Walk to observe, record conversations and invite children to take photos of their Walk experience to investigate the role nature plays in the nurturing of children's spirituality. Over two weeks, approximately three children each week (a total of 6 children) will be asked to take a still camera on their weekly Walk into the school grounds and take photos of anything that interests them. These children will then be asked to select three or four photos and invited to explain the reasons for taking them and also questions relating to The Walk experience. These interviews will take place within 24 hours of The Walk and take no more than 20 minutes per child. I would then like to form small groups of selected children to

further explore the experience with the use of drawings. Both the one on one interviews and small groups will be videotaped with only the researcher having access to this taped material.

It is envisaged this will take place after successful ethics approval in Term Four 2011 over three weeks.

There will be very little risk associated with this research and very little inconvenience on the part of the children other than the presence of a researcher and the use of still cameras during The Walk and 10–20 minutes for an interview and then small group discussion.

It is important to emphasise that parents will have the right to exclude their child in this research. As well as parental consent, children will also be invited to provide written consent to participate in this study and can choose to opt out of the research at any time. Neither children nor parents need to provide any reasons to opt of the research at any stage.

Confidentiality is essential in this research to protect the identity of the children. Children are able to select a pseudonym for use their real names for use in the study which will only be known by the researcher. The collected material which includes photos, videos material and transcriptions will only be analysed by the researcher. Any findings that are shared, including articles or books published will be conducted in a way that protects the identity of the child.

Any questions regarding this project should be directed to the student's Supervisor:

Dr. Brendan Hyde

(03) 9953 3296

School of Religious Education

Australian Catholic University (Melbourne Campus)

Level 2, (Rm 2.73) 115 Victoria Parade Fitzroy Vic 3065

It is intended to share the results of this study with the teaching staff, parents and children who participated in a way that protects the confidentiality of each child. This study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University.

In the event that you have any complaint or concern, or if you have any query that the Supervisor has not been able to satisfy, you may write to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee care of the nearest branch of the Research Services Office

Chair, HREC

C/- Research Services

Australian Catholic University

Melbourne Campus

Locked Bag 4115

FITZROY VIC 3065

Tel: 03 9953 3158

Fax: 03 9953 3315

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. The participant will be informed of the outcome.

If you agree to participate in this project, you should sign both copies of the Consent Form, retain one copy for your records and return the other copy to the Supervisor.

.....

Supervisor: Dr Brendan Hyde

.....

Student Researcher Kristen Hobby

Appendix B – Letter to Principal of Research Site

ACU Letterhead

Principal

20th July 2011

Dear

Re: A case study exploring the role nature plays in nurturing the spirituality of prior-to-school aged children.

Supervisor: Dr Brendan Hyde (Australian Catholic University)

Student Researcher: Kristen Hobby (School of Religious Education (Victoria) – Australian Catholic University)

I am formally requesting permission to conduct my research project at the research site.

This research project will involve examine the role nature plays in the development of spirituality of three and four year old children. The purpose of the study is to accompany the children on their weekly Walk to observe, record conversations and invite children to take photos of their Walk experience to investigate the role nature plays in the nurturing of children's spirituality. Over two weeks, approximately three children each week (a total of 6 children) will be asked to take a still camera on their weekly Walk into the school grounds and take photos of anything that interests them. These children will then be asked to select three or four photos and invited to explain the reasons for taking them and also questions relating to The Walk experience. These interviews will take place within 24 hours of The Walk and take no more than 20 minutes per child. I would then like to form small groups of selected students to further explore the experience with the use of drawings. Both the one on one interviews and small groups will be videotaped with only the researcher having access to this taped material.

There will be very little risk associated with this research and very little inconvenience on the part of the children other than the presence of a researcher and the use of still cameras during The Walk and 10–20 minutes for an interview and then small group discussion.

It is important to emphasise that parents will have the right to exclude their child in this research. As well as parental consent, children will also be invited to provide written consent

to participate in this study and can choose to withdraw from the research at any time. Neither children nor parents need to provide any reasons to opt of the research at any stage.

Confidentiality is essential in this research to protect the identity of the children. Children are able to select a pseudonym or their real names for use in the study which will only be known by the researcher. The collected material which includes photos, videos material and transcriptions will only be analysed by the researcher. Any findings that are shared, including articles or books published will be conducted in a way that protects the identity of the child.

Any questions regarding this project should be directed to the student's Supervisor:

Dr Brendan Hyde

(03) 9953 3296

School of Religious Education

Australian Catholic University (Melbourne Campus)

Level 2, (Room 2.73) 115 Victoria Parade, Fitzroy, Vic 3065

It is intended to share the results of this study with the teaching staff, parents and children who participated in a way that protects the confidentiality of each child. This study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University.

In the event that you have any complaint or concern, or if you have any query that the Supervisor has not been able to satisfy, you may write to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee care of the nearest branch of the Research Services Office

Chair, HREC

C/- Research Services

Australian Catholic University

Melbourne Campus

Locked Bag 4115

FITZROY VIC 3065

Tel: 03 9953 3158

Fax: 03 9953 3315

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. The participant will be informed of the outcome.

If you agree to participate in this project, you should sign both copies of the Consent Form, retain one copy for your records and return the other copy to the Supervisor.

.....

Supervisor: Dr Brendan Hyde

.....

Student Researcher: Kristen Hobby

Appendix C – Parent/Guardian Consent Letter

PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM

TITLE OF PROJECT: A case study exploring the role nature plays in nurturing the spirituality of prior-to-school aged children.

SUPERVISOR: Dr Brendan Hyde

STUDENT RESEARCHER: Kristen Hobby

I (the parent/guardian) have read and understood the information provided in the Letter to the Parents. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree that my child, nominated below, is allowed to participate in this study over Term 4, 2011. I understand my child will be invited to take a camera on the weekly Walk to take photos and then be invited to select three or four photos and discuss these with the researcher. My child may also be invited to participate in a smaller group with two or three other children to further discuss the Walk experience. Both the one on one and small group interview will be videotaped but access to the taped material will be limited to the researcher. 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. If you wish your child to participate in just the one on one interview or the group interview, please note this on this form

NAME OF PARENT/GUARDIAN:

SIGNATURE:

DATE:

NAME OF CHILD:

SIGNATURE OF SUPERVISOR:

DATE:

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:

DATE:

Appendix D – Consent of Participants Aged Under 18 Years

This script will act as a guide to informing each child about the research project. The children will then be invited to complete the consent form below. The informing process will be broken down in to three parts in order to accommodate the children's level of attention/understanding.

Prior to The Walk.

My name is Kristen Hobby and I am very interested in The Walk that you all do every week. I think there is something special about The Walk you do and not very many children get to go on a Walk like this one. I would love to know what is it like to go on your Walk. I would like to invite you to take some pictures on The Walk of things you find important and interesting.

Talking about the photos

I thought we could bring the camera back to the classroom and choose the photos that are the most important to you. It would be great if I could use a video camera to record those chats so I don't forget anything that you say.

Small group

I was then wondering if we then joined in with some friends and drew some pictures about what happened on The Walk. I was wondering if I could use a video recorded to record you drawing pictures. I would really like to take your drawings home with me to help me with my project. I will then type up our conversations and read them back to you to make sure I haven't missed any words and I have recorded exactly what you meant to say.

You don't have to take part in my project if you don't want to and you don't need to give me a reason. Each day I come I will show you a form with some smiley faces and some faces that aren't smiling on them. If you would like to be part of the project you just have to colour in the happy face and if you don't want to then you can either choose to colour in the other face or just leave it blank.

CHILD CONSENT / WILLINGNESS TO PARTICIPATE

My name is

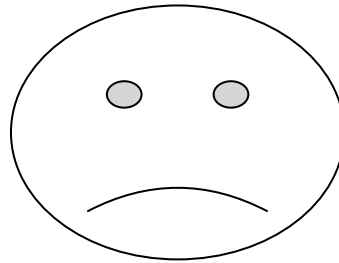
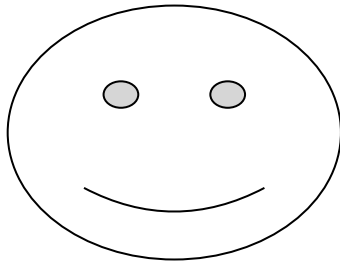
Kristen is interested in asking me questions and videoing me while she is talking with me.

Kristen would like to talk to me about The weekly Walk.

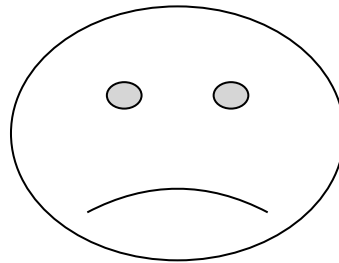
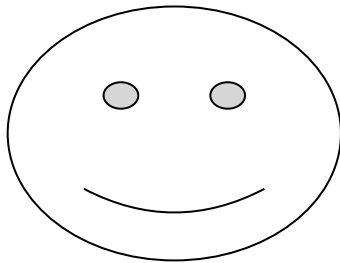
Kristen would like to video-tape me when we are talking

Kristen would like me do some drawings about our Walk

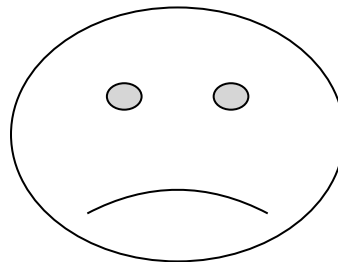
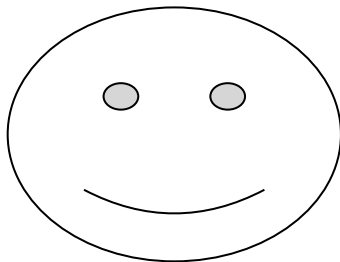
I would like to talk to Kristen I would not like to talk to Kristen



I would like to be videoed I would not like to be videoed



I would like to do drawings for Kristen I would not like to do drawings for Kristen



Appendix E – Ethics Approval

Human Research Ethics Committee

Committee Approval Form

Principal Investigator/Supervisor: Melbourne Campus

Co-Investigators: Melbourne Campus

Student Researcher: Melbourne Campus

Ethics approval has been granted for the following project:

for the period:

Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) Register Number:

Special Condition/s of Approval

Prior to commencement of your research, the following permissions are required to be submitted to the ACU HREC:

The following standard conditions as stipulated in the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans* (2007) apply:

- (i) that Principal Investigators / Supervisors provide, on the form supplied by the Human Research Ethics Committee, annual reports on matters such as:
 - security of records
 - compliance with approved consent procedures and documentation
 - compliance with special conditions, and
- (ii) that researchers report to the HREC immediately any matter that might affect the ethical acceptability of the protocol, such as:
 - proposed changes to the protocol
 - unforeseen circumstances or events

- adverse effects on participants

The HREC will conduct an audit each year of all projects deemed to be of more than low risk. There will also be random audits of a sample of projects considered to be of negligible risk and low risk on all campuses each year.

Within one month of the conclusion of the project, researchers are required to complete a Final Report Form and submit it to the local Research Services Officer.

If the project continues for more than one year, researchers are required to complete an *Annual Progress Report Form* and submit it to the local Research Services Officer within one month of the anniversary date of the ethics approval.



Signed: Date:30/09/2011.....

(Research Services Officer, Melbourne Campus)

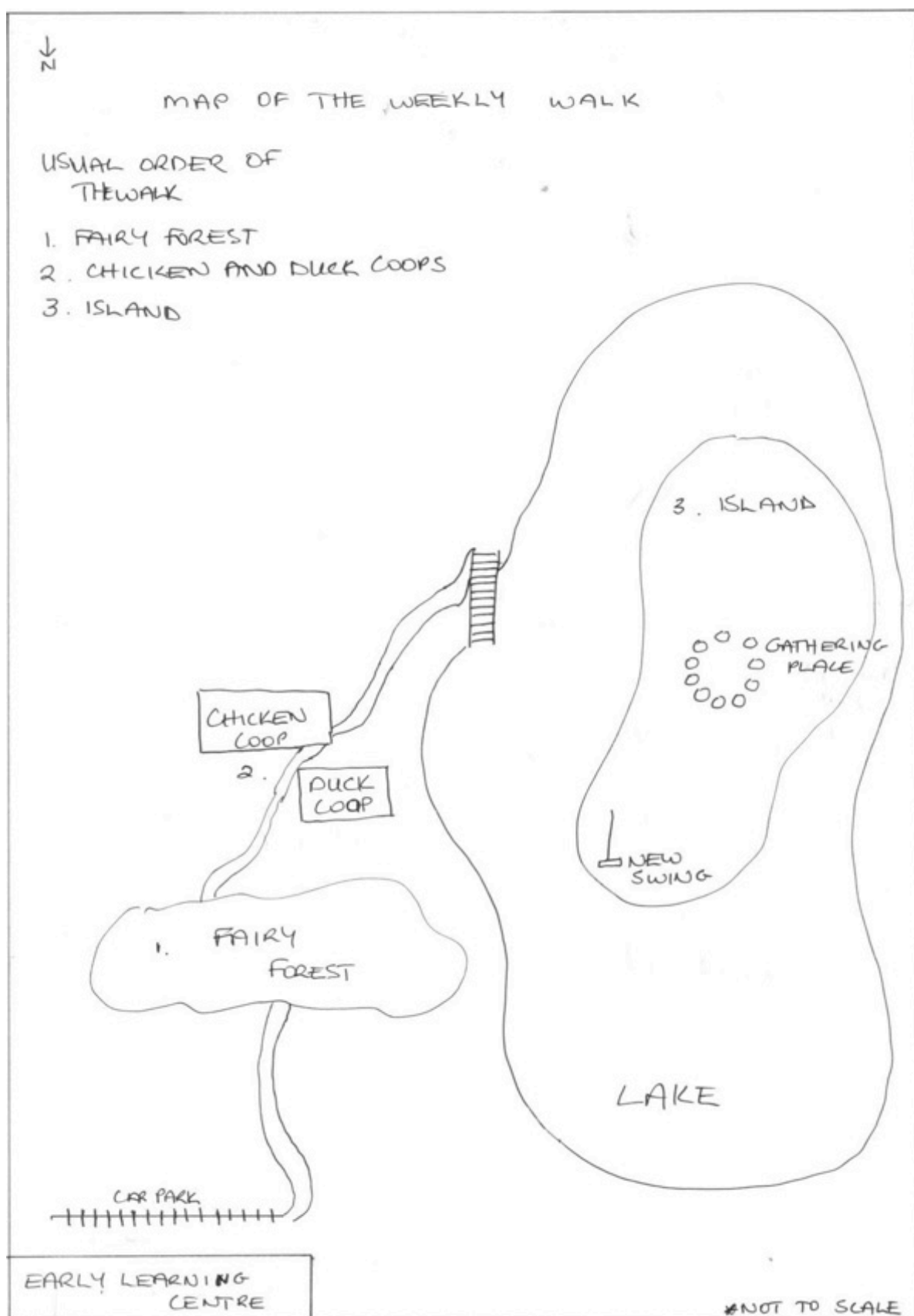
Appendix F – Ethics Extension

In my original ethics application (V2011 96) I stated that data collection would take place over Term 4, 2011. I would now like to extend the data collection timeframe to cover the 2012 school year. The data collection phase of the project is taking longer than first anticipated. There have been a couple of weeks where the class has been occupied with excursions and end of year celebrations and this has impacted on the available time to conduct research. It will allow me to work with the children in the data analysis stage. The research procedures will not differ from my original application:

This research will use a convenient sample of approximately six children who will take a camera with them on The Walk and take photos. The researcher will take field notes on The Walk. Upon returning to the classroom, three of the children will be interviewed one on one using a semi structured interview guide. Small groups of three to four children will then be formed to continue to reflect upon The Walk using drawing or other art materials. Both the one on one and small group interviews will be videotaped.

The above procedure will be followed but I would like to extend this to 1st, December 2012 to allow more data to be collected and more time for children to be interviewed.

Appendix G – Map of The Walk



Appendix H – Data Analysis Process

Data Analysis Stage 1 – Familiarisation

I began by watching each video, providing a title and a short description. I also included links to other sources of data

Video name	Date	Short Description	Other related material
Stick Bridge	15/11/2011	Ava and Talia testing the stick bridge	
Stick Bridge 2	15/11/2011	Cameron testing the stability of the stick bridge	
Ella on the swing	15/11/2011	Ella and Melinda taking it in turns on the swing	
What's a fair turn?	15/11/2011	Children discussion what is a fair turn on the new swing	
Discovering the rabbit's hole	15/11/2011	Children discover a rabbit's hole and wonder whether to cover it up or not.	
Building a cubby house	15/11/2011	Ella, Melinda and Dash build a cubby house with a tree stump, leaves and other natural items	Stimulated recall 8 th March 2012
Isabella finds a slug	15/11/2011	Isabella shows me a slug she has found on a piece of bark	Stimulated recall 8 th March 2012
Isabella catches a fish	15/11/2011	Using a stick, Isabella catches a fish in the lake	Stimulated recall 8 th March 2012
Blackberry Bush	15/11/2011	The children discover dewdrops on the spider's web and discuss the origin with the educator	Stimulated recall 8 th March 2012

Stage 2 - Identifying a thematic framework

This step involved looking for possible themes that were emerging from the video material. These were recorded against each video.

Video name	Date	Short Description	Other related material	Possible themes
Stick Bridge	15/11/2011	Ava and Talia testing the stick bridge		Creativity with natural objects, child to child and child to adult interactions, cultural symbols, ZPD, RE principles of open ended questions.
Stick Bridge 2	15/11/2011	Cameron testing the stability of the stick bridge		Creativity with natural objects, child to child and child to adult interactions, cultural symbols, ZPD, RE principles of open ended questions.
Ella on the swing	15/11/2011	Ella and Melinda taking it in turns on the swing		Creativity with natural objects, child to child and child to adult interactions, cultural symbols, ZPD, RE principles of open ended questions.
What's a fair turn?	15/11/2011	Children discussion what is a fair turn on the new swing		Creativity with natural objects, child to child and child to adult interactions, cultural symbols, ZPD, RE principles of open ended questions.
Discovering the rabbit's hole	15/11/2011	Children discover a rabbit's hole and wonder whether to cover it up or not.		Child to child and child to adult interactions, ZPD, RE principles of open ended questions.
Building a cubby house	15/11/2011	Ella, Melinda and Dash build a cubby house with a tree stump, leaves and other natural items	Stimulated recall 8 th March 2012	Creativity with natural objects, child to child and child to adult interactions, cultural symbols, ZPD.
Isabella finds a slug	15/11/2011	Isabella shows me a slug she has found on a piece of bark	Stimulated recall 8 th March 2012	Child to adult interaction, RE principles of open ended questions, awe, wonder, RE principles of open ended questions.
Isabella catches a fish	15/11/2011	Using a stick, Isabella catches a fish in the lake	Stimulated recall 8 th March 2012	Creativity with natural objects, child to adult interactions and cultural symbols, RE principles of open ended questions.
Blackberry Bush	15/11/2011	The children discover dewdrops on the spider's web and discuss the origin with the educator	Stimulated recall 8 th March 2012	Awe and wonder, natural objects, child to child and child to adult interactions, ZPD, RE principles of open ended questions.

Stage 3 - Indexing

From stage 2, 9 possible themes emerged. These were then indexed with the following codes:

R – Relational

RF – Reflective

T – Transcendence incorporating awe and wonder

CR - creativity

N – Nature

CA – Child to Adult

CC – Child to Child

Z – ZPD

CUL – Cultural references

RE – Reggio Emilia

Video name	Date	Short Description	Possible themes	Indexing
Stick Bridge	15/11/2011	Ava and Talia testing the stick bridge	Creativity with natural objects, child to child and child to adult interactions, cultural symbols, ZPD, RE principles of open ended questions.	CR, N, CC, CA, CUL, Z, RE
Stick Bridge 2	15/11/2011	Cameron testing the stability of the stick bridge	Creativity with natural objects, child to child and child to adult interactions, cultural symbols, ZPD, RE principles of open ended questions.	CR, N, CC, CA, CUL, Z, RE
Ella on the swing	15/11/2011	Ella and Melinda taking it in turns on the swing	Creativity with natural objects, child to child and child to adult interactions, cultural symbols, ZPD, RE principles of open ended questions.	CR, N, CC, CA, CUL, Z, RE
What's a fair turn?	15/11/2011	Children discussion what is a fair turn on the new swing	Creativity with natural objects, child to child and child to adult interactions, cultural symbols, ZPD, RE principles of open ended questions.	CR, N, CC, CA, CUL, Z, RE
Discovering the rabbit's hole	15/11/2011	Children discover a rabbit's hole and wonder whether to cover it up or not.	Child to child and child to adult interactions, ZPD, RE principles of open ended questions.	CC, CA, Z, RE
Building a cubby	15/11/2011	Ella, Melinda and Dash build a cubby	Creativity with natural objects, child to child and child to adult interactions.	C, N, CC, CA, CUL, Z

house		house with a tree stump, leaves and other natural items	cultural symbols, ZPD.	
Isabella finds a slug	15/11/2011	Isabella shows me a slug she has found on a piece of bark	Child to adult interaction, RE principles of open ended questions, awe, wonder, RE principles of open ended questions.	CA, RE, T, RE
Isabella catches a fish	15/11/2011	Using a stick, Isabella catches a fish in the lake	Creativity with natural objects, child to adult interactions and cultural symbols, RE principles of open ended questions.	C, N, CA, CUL, RE
Blackberry Bush	15/11/2011	The children discover dewdrops on the spider's web and discuss the origin with the educator	Awe and wonder, natural objects, child to child and child to adult interactions, ZPD, RE principles of open ended questions.	T, N, CC, CA, Z, RE

Stage 4 and 5– Charting and mapping and interpretation

The 9 main themes were then analysed and re-categorised to reflect four main themes with several subthemes under each. The data was then revisited and the most relevant examples were used to reflect these themes.

Aspect of Spirituality	Relevant Data
Relational Consciousness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Child to Child - Child to Adult 	Ella and Melinda build a house (15/11/2011) Three Little Pigs (6/3/12) and Stimulated recall (8/3/12)
Reflective Practice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reggio Emilia - ZPD - Reflective practice of <i>perezhivanie</i> 	The rabbit's foot (28/4/12) Conversation at the end of the walk (28/4/12) Discussion at the end of the walk (20/3/12) Gemma in the tree (28/4/12)
Creativity and Imagination <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - cultural references - children's symbolic language - use of natural objects 	The tree becomes a boat (20/3/12) Alice in the tree (20/3/12) Sophie and Stinky (6/3/12 and 20/3/12) Patrick and his map (6/3/12) Isabella fishing (6/3/12) Children playing musical instruments (20/3/12) Construction of the cubby house – materials (begins with epistemic) (28/4/12) (S and I) Construction of the cubby house – materials (various examples) (28/4/12) Matt and his flags (28/4/12)
The Transcendent <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Awe and wonder - Mystery - Natural phenomenon 	The rabbit's foot (28/4/12) Spider's web (6/3/2012) Isabella and the slug (29/11/2011) Sienna and the bark (6/3/2012) Rabbit's foot (28/4/2012)

Appendix I – No Way. The Hundred Is There

No way. The hundred is there

The child
is made of one hundred.
The child has
a hundred languages
a hundred hands
a hundred thoughts
a hundred ways of thinking
of playing, of speaking.
A hundred always a hundred
ways of listening
of marveling of loving
a hundred joys
for singing and understanding
a hundred worlds
to discover
a hundred worlds
to invent
a hundred worlds
to dream.
The child has
a hundred languages
(and a hundred hundred hundred more)
but they steal ninety-nine.

The school and the culture
separate the head from the body.
They tell the child:
to think without hands
to do without head
to listen and not to speak
to understand without joy
to love and to marvel
only at Easter and at Christmas.
They tell the child:
to discover the world already there
and of the hundred
they steal ninety-nine.
They tell the child:
that work and play
reality and fantasy
science and imagination
sky and earth
reason and dream
are things
that do not belong together.
And thus they tell the child
that the hundred is not there.
The child says:
No way. The hundred is there.

Loris Malaguzzi

translated by Lella Gandini