Title

Identifying some characteristics of children's spirituality in Australian Catholic primary schools: A study within hermeneutic phenomenology

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Statement of Sources

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

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Abstract

This qualitative research study aimed to identify, through classroom observation and conversation, some characteristics of children's spirituality in Australian Catholic primary schools. In the context of this study, spirituality was described as an essential human trait. While much of the recent literature in the field describes spirituality in terms of connectedness and relationality, in this study spirituality was described as a movement towards Ultimate Unity (de Souza, 2004a, 2004b), whereby at the deepest and widest levels of connectedness, an individual's true Self may experience unity with Other. Spirituality was also described as the outward expression of such unity in terms of how one acts towards Other.

Located within the constructionist epistemology, and in taking its philosophical stance from interpretivism, this qualitative study took its theoretical impetus from that stream of human science known as hermeneutic phenomenology. The videotaped life expressions of two groups of approximately six children in Year three (8-years-olds) and Year five (10-years-olds) in each of three Australian Catholic primary schools formed the texts that were reflected upon in order to gain insight into the spirituality of these children. The researcher met with each group on three occasions. Each group meeting, consisting of a semi-structured interview (conversation) and an activity (observation) was structured around the three categories of spiritual sensitivity – awareness sensing, mystery sensing and value sensing – as proposed by Hay and Nye (1998). van Manen's (1990) lifeworld existentials were drawn upon as guides to reflection upon the life expressions of these children.

Hermeneutic phenomenological reflection upon the texts of this present study identified four characteristics of these children's spirituality – *the felt sense*, *integrating awareness*, *weaving the threads of meaning*, and *spiritual questing*. As well, two factors which appeared to inhibit these children's expression of their spirituality were also identified – *material pursuit* and *trivialising*. Each of the four

characteristics identified reflected the descriptions of spirituality drawn upon throughout this study, particularly the notion of spirituality as a movement towards Ultimate Unity (de Souza, 2004a, 2004b). In some instances, these characteristics also revealed the emergence of the Collective Self, in which the individual Self of each child became unified with every other Self among the group of children. It was argued then, that a movement towards Ultimate Unity may entail the emergence of a Collective Self, in which, at the deepest and widest levels of connectedness, Self and Other become one and the same. The two inhibiting factors indicated that such a movement was thwarted in that these factors prevented the children from moving beyond their superficial self towards deeper levels of connectedness.

As the result of this investigation, this present study proposed some recommendations for learning and teaching in the primary religious education classroom which may nurture spirituality. These include the creation of appropriate spaces for nurturing spirituality, allowing children time to engage in the present moment of their experience, the use of tactile experiences in religious education, and the need to begin with the children's personally created frameworks of meaning. A learning model for addressing the spiritual, affective and cognitive dimensions of the curriculum has also been offered as a means by which to realise these recommendations for learning and teaching. As well, recommendations for the personal and professional learning of teachers and leaders in Catholic primary schools who seek to nurture the spirituality of their students have also been proposed in light of the characteristics of children's spirituality that were identified. These include the formation and professional learning for teachers of religious education, and the possibility of revisioning the curriculum to explore where spiritual development might be addressed across the curriculum.

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

INTRODUCTION

Identifying Some Characteristics of Children's Spirituality in Australian Catholic Primary Schools

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the spiritual dimension of people's lives, and in particular in the spiritual lives of children (e.g., Champagne, 2001, 2003; Erricker, Erricker, Sullivan, Ota & Fletcher, 1997; Hart, 2003; Hay & Nye, 1998). In Australia, questions concerning the spirituality and spiritual wellbeing of young people have begun to arise in relation to the coping mechanisms and resilience of youth. While factors such as the increasing incidents of youth suicide, the increase in delinquency and in drug and alcohol abuse have impacted negatively on wellbeing, it has been demonstrated that a sense of connectedness with family and community can act as a protective factor and a means by which to build resilience in young people (e.g., Eckersley, 1998, Victorian Government Department of Human Services, 1999), and hence may contribute to spiritual wellbeing. The notion of connectedness is pertinent since, in this thesis, connectedness is a key concept underpinning spirituality.

In Australian Catholic education, an interest in the spiritual dimension of children's lives has emanated from numerous sources, including the development and revision of diocesan policies, guidelines and textual materials for the religious education curriculum. Catholic educators have been led to ask questions about the students in Catholic schools for whom such materials have been written, especially in terms of what is known about their spiritual lives:

The students who come to Catholic schools today are from a variety of religious and secular backgrounds. A fundamental responsibility of the

classroom religious educational curriculum should be to nurture the spiritual life of each one of these children . . . can we really undertake contemporary religious education unless we have a much richer understanding of the world-views and meaning-making of the students in Catholic schools? (Liddy, 2002, p. 13).

The religious education guidelines and textual materials that have been produced in recent years have aimed to present the content of the Catholic faith tradition systematically through outcome statements and key concepts. Yet, as Liddy (2002) has argued, many diocesan religious education materials do not adequately take into account the reality of children's lives, in which there is often little contact with formal religion. If such realities are not addressed and reflected in these curriculum documents, it remains difficult for religious educators to provide a classroom program that, while presenting the content of the Catholic faith tradition in a systematic way, will nurture the spiritual lives of the children in the classroom.

In recent years researchers from the United States of America and Great Britain have sought to explore the spiritual lives of children. Prominent among such researchers are Coles (1990), Erricker, Erricker, Sullivan, Ota & Fletcher (1997), and Hart (2003). Also included among such researchers are Hay and Nye (1998), who sought to develop a theoretical framework, or an interpretation of children's spirituality based on the reflections of what the children themselves said in conversation with the field worker, Rebecca Nye. Their study attempted to reflect the reality of the world into which western children are socialised. While aware of the divide that has grown between spirituality and traditional religion, Hay and Nye have explored ways in which the spiritual life of children might be recognised in the absence of traditional religious images and language. They have presented some areas of language and behaviour in which educators can be alert in looking for evidence of spiritual awareness in children.

The Problem to Be Investigated

In building upon the work of Hay and Nye (1998), as well as other recent studies, and in using the Australian Catholic primary school as the setting, the purpose of this research study is threefold:

- to review the literature on spirituality with the intention of situating this study within its broader field, and thus to offer a description of spirituality and how it is to be understood within the context of this present study;
- to identify, through classroom observation and conversation, some characteristics of children's spirituality in Australian Catholic primary schools;
- to propose some recommendations for future directions and practices in learning and teaching in the primary religious education classroom, and for the professional learning of teachers and leaders in Catholic schools in light of the characteristics that have been identified.

In order to achieve this purpose, this study begins by examining the literature on spirituality from a number of different perspectives. From this, three descriptions of spirituality have been developed, thereby indicating how this term is to be understood within the context of this present study. As well, this study examines pertinent research in recent times that has explored the spiritual dimension of children's lives. It was intended that these may inform the design of a framework for the research design.

Drawing upon such investigations, and in using the descriptions of spirituality derived from the literature review as a starting point, this qualitative study has attempted to identify some characteristics of children's spirituality in Australian Catholic primary schools. It has sought to determine whether any of the features of spirituality as outlined in the literature are observable in these children, or whether other characteristics could be identified. If other features were identifiable,

this study has attempted to determine if these possess a distinctly Australian quality, compared to the more universal features described in the literature.

As well, an unexpected finding of this research study comprised factors that appeared to inhibit children's expression of spirituality. As such, these factors were identified and have been reported on in this thesis, and their implications for religious education have been discussed.

Finally, this study proposes some recommendations for learning and teaching in the primary religious education classroom, and for the professional learning of teachers and leaders in Catholic schools in light of the characteristics which have been identified through this research.

While this study has drawn upon the work of Hay and Nye (1998), there are some significant differences. In their research, Hay and Nye sought to include children representative of a range of both religious and secular perspectives found in state schools in Britain. This study, however, has taken place within a Catholic religious framework. The setting was Australian Catholic primary schools where the Catholic ethos would be expected to permeate all facets of school life (Ryan, 1997). Nonetheless, there is recognition that children attend Catholic schools from a range of family backgrounds, including secular and religious home environments. As well, children come from families who do not attend Sunday Mass or who have distanced themselves from the institutional Church (Malone, 1999). This study acknowledged this diversity of backgrounds in seeking to identify some characteristics of these children's spirituality.

A further consideration of relevance in this present study is the researcher's Christian background and his extensive and significant experience in teaching, planning, and in curriculum development in the area of religious education in Australian Catholic primary schools. This particular background or prejudice (Gadamer, 1960/1989) is recognised here at the beginning of this thesis. While the

researcher has attempted not to allow personal judgements, values and theoretical inclinations to overtly influence the conduct of this present study, it is acknowledged that absolute objectivity is impossible (Bryman, 2001). Accordingly, the researcher's confessional position is, here, made explicit.

The Significance of this Study

While there has been an increase in the empirical research that has taken place overseas in the field of children's spirituality, particularly in the United States of America, Canada and Britain (e.g., Adams, 2003; Broadbent, 2004; Champagne, 2001, 2003; Coles, 1990, Erricker, Erricker, Sullivan, Ota & Fletcher, 1997; Hart, 2003; Hay & Nye, 1998; Reimer & Furrow, 2001; Scott, 2004), there is to date little published research here in Australia on the spirituality of children. Kelly (1990) and Tacey (1995; 2000) have presented a description of an "Australian spirituality" in terms of the collective national psyche or persona, and Carroll (1998, 2001) has outlined the archetypal stories which are central to the western search for meaning. Social commentators such as Hugh Mackay (2001) have raised questions pertaining to the spirituality of adolescents in an Australian context. Other research studies have explored the spirituality of teenagers and adolescents in the Australian context. For example, Rossiter (2000; 2002) and Crawford and Rossiter (2003) have investigated the search for meaning and identity amongst Australian youth, while Engebretson, de Souza and Salpietro (2000) outlined research findings on the expressions of religiosity and spirituality found among some middle school students in Victorian Catholic schools. Other such studies include Engebretson (2004), who has investigated the spirituality of Australian teenage boys, de Souza and Rymarz (2002) who have investigated the perceptions of Coptic Orthodox senior primary and secondary students regarding the influences on their religious and spiritual development, de Souza, Cartwright and McGilp (2002) who have explored the spirituality and search for meaning among rural youth, and Chung (2003) who has explored identity and spirituality among Chinese young people (adolescents) in Australia. One study which made links with the spirituality of children of primary

school age was conducted by Mountain (2004), who investigated the meaning and function of prayer among children, although the focus of that study centred on prayer as a mechanism for coping, rather than on spirituality per se. Aside from that particular study and this researcher's own investigations (Hyde, 2003b, 2004b, 2004c, 2005a, 2005b, in press), there is very little published research detailing the spiritual life of Australian children of primary school age.

This lack of published research has serious implications for Australian religious educators in Catholic primary schools. Religious education, as an area of learning, should address not only the cognitive and affective domains of learning, but also the spiritual dimension, that is, the "reflective/intuitive thinking of the students in their personal search for meaning and decision-making" (de Souza, 2001, p. 39). If this spiritual dimension is to be addressed, and religious educators are determined in their efforts to foster and promote spiritual growth in their students, then it is imperative that something of the spiritual dimension of children be known and understood. Religious educators can then consciously plan for and provide learning experiences that nourish the spirituality of their students.

Given the scarcity of such research in an Australian context, this study is significant. It has attempted to provide some insights into the spirituality of young children in Australian Catholic primary schools by identifying some of the characteristics of their spirituality. It has also made recommendations for learning and teaching in the primary religious education classroom, and for the professional learning of teachers and leaders in Catholic schools in light of the characteristics which have been identified through this research.

The Organisation of This Thesis

The introduction to this thesis presents the background and purpose of this study. It outlines the problem to be investigated and explains the significance of this research in the Australian context. Exact definitions of terms, assumptions and

limitations of this study are not set forth separately, but rather are made clear as the research unfolds.

Chapters one to three present literature from three strands which inform this present study. Chapter one details a conceptual understanding of spirituality, and explores and describes spirituality from a number of different perspectives. These include religious, biological and neuro scientific, sociological, and some psychological perspectives, the latter of which explores the notions of consciousness and Self in relation to spirituality. As a result of this, three descriptions of spirituality are offered indicating how this term is to be understood within this present study.

The second chapter examines some of the pertinent research that has taken place in the field of children's spirituality. Such research has emanated from outside of Australia, and has largely been the work of scholars from Britain, Canada, and the United States of America. This chapter shows that while some of the research in this area tended to assume that spirituality was expressed through traditional religious language and concepts, more recent investigations have utilised the perceptions, awarenesses and responses of children to ordinary every-day activities in gaining insight into their spirituality.

The third chapter describes the context of this research, that is, the contemporary Australian Catholic primary classroom. It notes that, in contrast to some other systems of education in the western world, Australian Catholic schools have generally understood religious education to be the subject area in which the spirituality of students might be nurtured. The problematic nature of this assumption is addressed, and some curriculum developments in religious education within Australia which may be seen as addressing the spiritual dimension of learning are outlined. In addition, this chapter reviews some theories that suggest there is a distinctive Australian spirituality.

The fourth chapter outlines the epistemology, theoretical perspective and methodology for this qualitative research. It situates this study within the constructionist paradigm, and, in detailing the use of hermeneutic phenomenology as the theoretical perspective for this present study, describes van Manen's (1990) notion of lifeworld existentials and their utilisation as guides to reflection and interpretation of the texts of this study, which comprised the semi-structured interviews and observations of the children. This chapter also details the working design of this study, describing the invitation for schools and children to participate. It provides a rationale for each of these. In keeping with the hermeneutic phenomenological tradition, this present study has sought to use terms which reflect the qualitative nature of the research, rather than terms which may indicate positivistic overtones. Therefore in describing the research approach, this chapter details the rehearsal of the interview guide and the means by which the ground was prepared for the conversations with and observation of the groups of children.

Chapter five presents the findings in relation to the characteristics of children's spirituality of this present research study. Using examples of hermeneutic phenomenological writing drawn from the researcher's reflective journal, four identified characteristics of children's spirituality are presented and described. As well, examples of hermeneutic phenomenological writing are presented which indicate two particular factors that appeared to inhibit the children's expression of their spirituality.

Chapters six, seven and eight discuss and analyse each of the characteristics of children's spirituality that have been identified in this research study. The discussion has been divided into three separate chapters in order to systematise for the reader the large amount of material gleaned by the researcher for each of the characteristics. van Manen's (1990) lifeworld existentials have been drawn upon to guide these reflections. In keeping with the hermeneutic phenomenological tradition, the term "reflection" has been utilised in preference to the word "analyse", which

can be perceived to have positivistic associations. As well, each of these chapters indicates the significance of each of these reflections for this present study.

Chapter nine discusses and reflects upon an additional feature that emerged through this research study. This was the identification of two factors which appeared to inhibit the children's expression of their spirituality. Again, van Manen's (1990) lifeworld existentials have been drawn upon to guide this reflection. The significance of these reflections for this present study is also indicated.

The final chapter begins by drawing together and briefly summarising the identified characteristics of children's spirituality as well as the inhibiting factors which were reflected upon in Chapters six to nine. It then proceeds to make some recommendations for learning and teaching in the primary religious education classroom, and for the professional learning of teachers and leaders in Catholic schools for nurturing the spirituality of children in light of the characteristics which have been identified through this research.

CHAPTER ONE
MAPPING THE TERRAIN: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS THAT
UNDERPIN CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES OF SPIRITUALITY

> I am talking of a single reality but coming at it from different perspectives. This is the Hebrew rather than the Greek way of treating a human phenomenon. The Hebrew way is to go round and round a subject, each time using different images to illuminate what is most profound. The Greek way of arguing by logical stages can never, in my opinion, do justice to any deep experience.
>
> Symington (1986)

Introduction

There are three strands to the literature that inform this research study. This chapter focuses on the first of these strands, and comprises the conceptual understanding of spirituality. The second strand examines pertinent research studies in the field of children's spirituality, and is the focus of the following chapter. The third strand investigates the contextual issues of this study, and is the focus of the third chapter in this thesis.

The notion of describing rather than defining spirituality is pertinent. Problems in attempting to limit an understanding of spirituality to any one fixed definition have been attested to in the scholarly literature (e.g., Berringer, 2000; Eaude, 2003; Erricker & Erricker, 1997; Hay & Nye, 1998; Keating, 2000; Pridmore & Pridmore, 2004; Priestley, 2002; Tacey, 2000). As well, a large assortment of related terms can be found in contemporary writings. For example, spirituality has been described as pertaining to interior life, religious experience, the search for meaning and purpose, expressions of relatedness, transcendence, immanence, ultimate values, integrity, identity, connection to something greater, awareness (Bosacki, 2001; Champagne, 2001; Chater, 1998; Crawford & Rossiter, 2003; Eaude, 2000; Engebretson, 2002; Fisher, 1997; Harris & Moran, 1998; Keating, 2000; O'Murchu, 1997). It has also come to be understood in relation to the new age movement (Kohn, 1996). These indicate that the term "spirituality" has been used in various contexts with a multiplicity of possible meanings. However, while

spirituality may not be able to be succinctly defined, it can be described (Priestly, 2002). Therefore, in an attempt to avoid the tendency to reductionism implicit in approaches that seek an exact definition (Eaude, 2003), the advice of Symington (1986) in the epigraph to this chapter is followed. Rather than attempting to limit the concept of spirituality to a single fixed definition, this chapter explores and describes spirituality from three broad perspectives – the relationship between spirituality and institutional Christianity, spirituality as a natural human predisposition, and the Divine at the core of Self, and of all existence, which connects Self with Other. These are investigated in order to tease out an understanding of the word spirituality as it is to be understood in the context of this present study. As a result, this thesis argues that rather than being the exclusive property of any one religious tradition, spirituality is an essential human trait, that it concerns the notion of Ultimate Unity (de Souza, 2004a, 2004b), and that it is given expression in terms of how one might act in relation to the human and nonhuman world.

In terms of such action towards the human and nonhuman world, spirituality, in this thesis, is not being framed by Christian notions of good and evil. Instead, spirituality is regarded as a positive attribute which begins with an individual's movement towards Ultimate Unity (de Souza, 2004a, 2004b) – an understanding which is explored further in this chapter. The notion of spirituality which has not been nurtured is understood to result not necessarily in evil, but rather in an individual's sense of dislocation and disintegration in relation to the human and nonhuman world.

The Relationship between Spirituality and Institutional Christianity

For many years, the word spirituality was used in western culture principally with religious connotations. For instance, Rossiter (2005) has noted that the use of the word spirituality was once to be understood in relation to Christian religious practice, and that if one were to speak about Catholic spirituality, it was in relation to the spiritual life of religious orders, or lay members of the Church striving to

emulate aspects of the life of religious orders. Traditionally understood within Christianity, spirituality drew on Scripture and theology as well as religious practice. It was "evident in people's thinking and religious practices, especially prayer, both personal and communal" (p. 4). So connected with religion was spirituality that O'Murchu (1997) and Tacey (2000) have posited that institutional Christianity has, to a large extent, claimed ownership of spirituality, and sought to control it, arguing it to be impossible that spiritual feelings or values could arise apart from the context of formal Christian beliefs. Drane (2000) has noted that in many instances, institutional Christianity has sought to control spirituality, ecclesiastically through the use of doctrine, but also through lay ministries. For while lay people have a variety of gifts and talents to offer in the service of the Church, Drane has argued that often, those ministries "invariably have an over-emphasis on particular areas – all of them carefully chosen to ensure that we identify in other people only those gifts that are not going to challenge the position of the established leadership" (p. 47).

However, some contemporary perspectives maintain that it is possible for spirituality to exist and to be given expression outside of any religious tradition. For instance, Tacey (2000) while not undermining the value of religion has argued that in spite of its efforts to control spirituality, institutional Christianity is no longer able to contain it, and that today, many people are searching for and giving expression to their spirituality outside of formal systems of values and beliefs. In light of such an argument, different academic disciplines have argued it to be erroneous to describe spirituality as being the exclusive property of any one particular religious tradition, and that there is, in fact, a clear distinction between spirituality and institutional religion (e.g., Bosacki, 2001; Erricker, 2001; Priestly, 2002; Scott, 2001; Tacey, 2003).

Spirituality is much larger and older than any form of organised formal religion (O'Murchu, 1997; Tacey, 2000; Hay & Nye, 1998). The spiritual history of the human species is at least 70,000 years old, by comparison of which formal,

organised religions have been in existence for only 4,500 years (O'Murchu, 1997). While formal religion encompasses the organised structures, rituals and beliefs belonging to the official religious systems (Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism), spirituality concerns that "ancient and primal search for meaning that is as old as humanity itself . . . and . . . belongs to the evolutionary unfolding of creation itself" (O'Murchu, p. vii, 1997).

It was William James who, in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, distinguished between institutional religion and the "primordial religious experience", today more commonly known as spiritual experience. In describing religious experience, James' (1977, original work published 1902) interest was not so much in institutional religion as in "the original experiences that were the pattern-setters for the mass of suggested feeling and intimated conduct" (p. 29) that has subsequently resulted in formal religion. His concern with religion was in essence, the psychological experience of the individual "for whom religion exists not as a dull habit, but as an acute fever" (p. 29). That is to say, James considered spirituality, or spiritual experience to be the primordial religious experience of the individual. Institutional religion becomes, then, a secondary phenomenon – a response to the original spiritual experience of the individual or community. Other more recent scholars, including Maslow (1970a), Tacey (2000, 2003) and Zohar and Marshall (2000) have also understood spirituality to be the primary religious experience of the individual, and institutional religion to be the secondary phenomenon, "the codification and communication of [the] original mystic experience or revelation . . . to the mass of human beings in general" (Maslow, 1970a, p. 19).

Importantly, Tacey (2003) has noted that although formal religion is a secondary phenomenon, a response to the original spiritual experience, this does not render it of less meaning or value. That which comes first – the spiritual – does not necessarily imply that it is better than what later ensues. Tacey has maintained that the initial spiritual experience can be unrefined, and is often lacking in wisdom.

Also, the primary experience tends to be removed from the communal context, whereas the secondary development enables the primordial to be experienced within such a milieu. It ought to be possible, Tacey then has argued, to "state that spirituality is primary, without implying that religion is therefore 'merely' secondary" (p. 140).

Although religion and spirituality are not synonymous, the literature contains contributions from some scholars who have argued that a person's spirituality may be given expression through an organised religious belief system. For instance, Ranson (2002) has suggested that a religious tradition, such as Catholicism may provide the context and shared value system needed to depth and give voice to an individual's spiritual experience. Ranson has maintained that spirituality comprises an arrangement of interrelated activities within two foundational moments. The first is the "spiritual", whereby one attends and inquires into the spiritual experience which has been apperceived. The second is the "religious", whereby one interprets and acts upon the spiritual experience, placing it into the social and communal reality, that is, into a system of shared beliefs and values (institutional religion). Ranson has argued that these two moments are held together in creative tension:

> Spirituality, therefore, comprises two foundational moments: the 'spiritual' *and* the 'religious'. Without the religious, the spiritual can never attain its depth; without the spiritual, however, the religious can present as doctrinaire. When the 'spiritual' and the 'religious' moments do work together in harmony, then there is every possibility for spirituality's vitality (p. 32).

Ranson has asserted that the activities comprising these two movements are cyclical in nature. The more one attends and inquires into their initial spiritual experience, the more one will be led to interpret and act upon it, which in turn, leads one to attend, inquire and reflect upon the original experience, and so forth.

However, Ranson's (2002) construct could be considered problematic as it seems to suggest that an individual's spiritual development is incomplete unless it proceeds to the activities of interpreting and acting within an organised system of values and beliefs. To be precise, such a view in fact considers spirituality to be dependent upon formal religion, deeming institutional religion to be the larger sphere in which an individual's spirituality might be nurtured. Such an understanding has been expressed and advanced by some scholars including Wright (2000, 2004), and Carr (1995), who have rejected approaches to spirituality that do not begin with the religious because "they are not focused on transcendent or spiritual experiences in any relevant sense (p. 91). Thatcher (1996, 1999) has maintained that to speak of spirituality outside of a mainstream religious tradition is meaningless, arguing that any articulation of spirituality requires first and mostly, a theology. He has remained suspicious of so called secular and modernist treatments of spirituality that have broken "the conceptual connection between spirituality and belief in God" (Thatcher, 1996, p. 122).

Meehan (2002), however, has pointed out that Thatcher's position is essentially exclusivist. He has contended that Thatcher's argument fails to recognise that there are many people who are not associated with any religious tradition, yet would describe themselves as spiritual. One cannot dismiss their spirituality on the grounds that they are not religious, or that they may not possess a theology to articulate it.

Further, some have argued that the ability to use a theology in order to articulate spirituality is a secondary and more recent phenomenon. As discussed, O'Murchu (1997; 2000) has maintained that the spiritual history of the human species is at least 70,000 years old, by comparison to which formal, organised religions have been in existence for a mere 4,500 years. In other words, for at least some 65,000 years, the human species has neither had nor needed a theology to articulate its spirituality. Theology developed with the emergence of organised religion (O'Murchu, 2000). For the greater part of human existence, formal religion

has not existed. The spirituality of humankind was not articulated via the use of any theology.

Also, Berryman (2001) has presented the case for the nonverbal nature of spirituality. He has argued that although it is difficult to define, people readily recognise spirituality when they encounter it because it is a part of humankind's non-verbal communication system. Although Berryman has indicated the importance of guiding people (especially children) from non-verbal spirituality into religious language as a means of nurturing spirituality, he has warned that any religious language, uprooted from its nonverbal source, is potentially destructive. While Berryman has believed that nonverbal spirituality needs to be rendered in a specific religious language, he has maintained that:

> . . . whatever religious tradition of communication we use, we need to ground it in the fullness of a living and creative spirituality. When religious language is uprooted from this source it becomes full of animus and destruction, as all 'religious wars' – usually in the name of peace, truth, and love – have shown (p. 21).

In general, then, while institutional Christianity may have provided one possible avenue for the expression of spirituality, spirituality cannot be contained or confined to Christianity. It is possible to apperceive spirituality outside of institutional religion.

Spiritual Experience and Institutional Religion

Supporting the notion that spirituality can exist outside of a mainstream religious tradition such as Christianity, the literature suggests that there have been numerous individuals who have apperceived spiritual experience. Such individuals would include those connected with formal traditions, such as Buddhist monks who have experienced the state of *anatta*, where the self ceases to exist as a distinct and separate entity. Also, Christian mystics including Francis of Assisi, Teresa of Avila

and Hildegard of Bingen have claimed to have experienced the presence of God as the ground of their own being. However, such spiritual experiences are not confined to the mystics and practitioners of various religious traditions. The literature indicates that all people, whether or not they belong to or practise any particular religious code, are capable of apperceiving spiritual experience.

James (1902/1977) proposed that what he called "personal religion" or spirituality as it is more commonly known today, is experienced by numerous people in a wide variety of ways, and may be used by the individual as a means to find solutions to problems of value and meaning in life.

James (1902/1977) argued that logical reason alone cannot explain the religious or spiritual experience of the individual. That "like love, like wrath, like hope, ambition, jealousy, like every other instinctive eagerness and impulse, [religious experience] adds to life an enchantment which is not rationally or logically deductible from anything else" (p. 64). Priestly (2001) has noted that while rationality might construct arguments for such convictions to which a person may have become emotionally attached, it cannot of itself supply the foundations of those convictions in the first place. For this reason spirituality "is thus an absolute addition to the Subject's range of life. It gives him [*sic*] a new sphere of power" (James, 1902/1977, p. 64).

According to James (1902/1977), this new sphere of power enabled an individual to draw upon her or his spiritual experiences as a mechanism for confronting and finding solutions to the difficulties and problems of life. Those who experience such mystical states apperceive them as states of absolute knowledge. They are "states of insight into the depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect. They are illuminations, revelations, full of significance and importance . . . and as a rule they carry with them a curious sense of authority for aftertime" (p. 367).

Priestley (2001) has noted that those who undergo such experiences frequently claim that while emanating from feelings, they have resulted in an absolute intellectual certainty. An individual would claim that she or he was never more certain of anything in her or his life, and that from that moment on, life was changed in some way. Importantly, Priestly has noted, "the things about which we are most sure are those upon which we try to act. They become part of our being" (p. 190).

James (1902/1977) provided numerous varieties of accounts in which an individual had undergone a spiritual or mystical experience, and had gone on to use this as a catalyst for living life in a particular way. The fact that there are varieties cannot be understated. James maintained that no two people apperceive the same religious (spiritual) experience. They are private and individual. They function so as to lead people to act upon them and seek solutions to problems in different ways according to their life situations:

> I do not see how it is possible that creatures in such different positions and with such different powers as human individuals are, should have exactly the same functions and duties. No two of us have identical difficulties, nor should we be expected to work out identical solutions. Each from his [*sic*] own peculiar angle of observation, takes in a certain sphere of fact and trouble, which each must deal with in a unique manner (pp. 465-466).

Maslow (1970a) also recognised the validity of an individual's religious (spiritual) experience, arguing that it was a rightful subject for scientific investigation. Maslow coined the phrase "peak experiences" to describe these revelations, or mystical illuminations. While he maintained that they are common to all, or almost all people, Maslow recognised that many people repress or suppress such experiences, and so do not use them as a source of "personal therapy, personal growth, or personal fulfilment" (p. 29).

Further to this, Robinson's (1977) study at the Religious Experience Research unit in Oxford discovered and reported that spiritual experiences are common to a significant number of people. An extensive body of correspondence had been built up in relation to particular experiences of people, in which they felt that their lives had been affected by some power beyond themselves. Robinson noticed that a substantial number of them, which were written by adults, described profound experiences from childhood. For example, one participant responded "'The most profound experience of my life came to me when I was young, between 4 and 5 years old… I just know that the whole of my life has been built on the great truth that was revealed to me then'" (p. 11). These experiences from childhood had remained vivid memories of the correspondents for their whole life, and held great significance for them when contemplating questions relating to identity and meaning. While these accounts may have become embellished over time, Robinson argued that it was difficult to ignore the impact of these experiences, which in some way generated reflection in the individual.

Zohar and Marshall (2000) maintained that experiences like these, whether explicitly religious in content or otherwise, are quite common. They have claimed that in western cultures, between 30% and 40% of the population are recorded as having undergone such experiences on at least one occasion. Such experiences were described as being accompanied by feelings of great euphoria and wellbeing, and resulted in "deep insight that brings new perspective to life" (p. 99). Similarly, Hart (2003) has reported that his research indicates that up to 80% of participants (mostly adults) indicated that they had had a spiritual experience, and that between 60% and 90% of those indicated that experiences of this nature occurred during childhood. This is significant because it suggests that children may have particular spiritual capacities and experiences which are uncommon to many adults. Hart maintained that this may be due to the openness of children to such capacities and experiences as opposed to many adults, who tend to approach the spiritual from rational thinking. Hart has maintained that "spirituality lives beyond the rational" (p. 5), and that it lies rather in people's "inner wisdom and sense of wonder, with [their sense of]

compassion and deep meaning" (p. 14). All people have these spiritual capacities, although it seems that perhaps children may be more open to them.

By way of summary, Table 1 outlines the key understandings concerning the relationship between spirituality and institutional religion.

Table 1
A Summary of the Key Understandings Concerning the Relationship between Spirituality and Institutional Religion

Spirituality…
• Is not synonymous with institutional religion.
• Is the primordial religious experience and much older than any of the formal religious traditions.
• May be given expression through a religious tradition . . .   . . . BUT . . . may also find expression outside of institutional religion.
• Is able to be experienced by all people irrespective of whether or not they practise any religious tradition.

The above summary has relevance for this present study. It indicates that although individuals may draw upon a religious tradition, such as Catholicism, to give expression to their spirituality, they may also express their spirituality outside of institutional religion. Although in many instances institutional religion appears to have claimed ownership of spirituality, the literature explored in this section suggests that there are people who do not practise any particular religion who have apperceived spiritual experience. This would suggest that there is a case to be argued that spirituality is accessible to all people irrespective of their membership of any particular religious tradition. That is, spirituality may be considered to be a natural human predisposition, or an innate human trait.

Spirituality as a Natural Human Predisposition

An Ontological Reality

Following on from the above discussion, there is reason to examine spirituality as an ontological reality for human beings. For instance, O'Murchu

(1997) has maintained that spirituality is a natural human predisposition. It is something that people are born with, "something essentially dynamic that forever seeks articulation and expression in human living" (p. 37). Groome (1998) has argued that spirituality is a human universal, and is therefore ontological in nature. Spirituality "belongs to every humankind's 'being'. It is more accurate to call ourselves spiritual beings who have a human life than human beings who have a spiritual life" (p. 332). Similarly, Hart (2003) has stated that "rather than thinking of ourselves as human beings occasionally having spiritual experiences, I find it more helpful to think of ourselves as spiritual beings having human experiences" (p. 7). Hart has further maintained "It is not that some of us are spiritual and some are not; our entire existence is a spiritual event" (p. 8). In writing from a Christian perspective, Rolheiser (1998) has asserted that spirituality is "something that issues forth from the bread and butter of ordinary life . . . something vital and non-negotiable lying at the heart of our lives" (p. 6). Similarly, Champagne (2001) has argued that the human cannot be separated from the spiritual. Spirituality then can be understood to be rooted in the reality that human beings are incarnated. That is to say, people embody their spirituality. It cannot be "dissociated either from the human or from what is beyond the human, in transcendence and in immanence" (p. 83).

As such, spirituality has also been understood to be holistic in nature (e.g., Bosacki, 2001; Erricker et al., 1977; Fisher, 1997; Hart, 2003; 1998; O'Murchu, 1997, 2000; Tacey, 2003). Hay and Nye (1998) have maintained that spirituality involves a deep awareness of the whole – of one's relationship with Self and with everything that is Other than Self. They have argued that such an "awareness of this holistic relationship with the rest of reality is central to the nature of spirituality" (p. 142). Moffett (1994) has similarly written of the holistic nature of spirituality, maintaining that to be spiritual is to "perceive our oneness with everyone and everything and to act on this perception. It is to be whole within one's self and with the world" (p. xix).

Likewise, Priestley (2002) has maintained that the spiritual is holistic. People live in a society that tends to fragment reality, a society which constantly demands of people that they separate out the entities of which both individuals and groups are composed. As a necessary corrective to such a separation, Priestly has argued that a concern for the spiritual requires people to regard others as whole beings and to respond to them, each with her or his own sense of wholeness.

Zohar and Marshall (2000) have also described the spiritual as holistic. They have maintained that the spiritual "represents a dynamic wholeness of self in which the self is at one with itself and with the whole of creation" (p. 124). Zohar and Marshall have contended that the goal of western spirituality has been the achievement of this type of unity, or wholeness. They have described the spiritual as being in touch with some whole that is larger and richer, and which puts one's present limited situation into a new perspective. It entails a search for meaning that leads to something more, something beyond that gives meaning to a person's lived experience. Zohar and Marshall's holistic concept of the spiritual as representing a dynamic wholeness – of Self at one with Self and the whole of creation – suggests connectedness and relationality not only with Self but also with Other in creation – the universe – and possibly the Transcendent.

The above views support the notion that spirituality is a natural human predisposition. If this is the case then it is possible that insights from the process of biological evolution may support this understanding. The following section examines this possibility.

A Biological and Evolutional Reality

Perspectives presented as the result of recent studies in the fields of biology, neurological science and evolution support the case that spirituality is a natural human predisposition, arguing that spirituality is present in all people as an attribute that has been selected in the evolution of the human species. Hardy (1966) proposed that what he called "religious experience" (more commonly termed today as the

spiritual, or spiritual experience) has evolved through the process of natural selection because it has survival value for the individual. In other words, the capacity for spirituality is potentially present in all human beings because it has a positive function in enabling human beings to survive in their natural environments, and therefore is an attribute that has been favoured by the process of natural selection. The following discussion on the notions of domain specificity and neurobiological perspectives further supports this understanding.

Domain Specificity and Expert Knowledge Bases

In exploring the evolution of the human mind, Hirschfeld and Gelman (1994) have argued that it has evolved not as an all-purpose problem solver, but rather as a collection of independent subsystems, or domains, designed to perform specific tasks. They have offered the following characterisation of a domain as:

> a body of knowledge that identifies and interprets a class of phenomena assumed to share certain properties and to be of a distinct or general type. A domain functions as a stable response to a set of recurring and complex problems faced by the organism. This response involves difficult-to-assess perceptual, encoding, retrieval, inferential processes dedicated to that solution (p. 21).

While there has been some debate as to whether spirituality functions as a means by which individuals can find solutions to problems of meaning and value, thereby rendering it as a form of intelligence (e.g., Emmons, 1999, 2000; Hyde, 2003a, 2004a; Fontana, 2003; Kwilecki, 2000; Mayer, 2000; Sinetar, 2000; Zohar & Marshall, 2000), it can be seen from the above description, that it is possible such an independent body of knowledge – a domain – has evolved in the composition of the human mind that specifically relates to the spiritual. For instance, Boyer (1994) has argued in favour of a domain that interprets the class of phenomena described as "religious ideas", which may function as a means by which individuals respond to and solve problems pertaining to religiosity.

Another perspective has come from Emmons (1999, 2000). While not explicitly employing the term domain specificity, Emmons has discussed the notion of spirituality as an "expert knowledge base". An expert knowledge base consists of a collection of information within a substantive realm that facilitates the process of adaptation to an environment. Emmons has maintained that the spiritual consists of at least five such competencies that could conceivably form part of an individual's expert knowledge base. These are: a) the capacity to transcend the physical and material; b) the ability to experience heightened states of consciousness; c) the ability to sanctify everyday experiences; d) the ability to utilise personal spiritual resources to solve problems in living; and e) the capacity to be virtuous. Emmons has further cited the existence of spiritually exceptional individuals such as St. Theresa of Avila and Sufi master Ibn Al-'Arabi. Such cases serve as evidence that the spiritual capabilities outlined above can be (and throughout history have been) highly developed in certain individuals.

Neurobiological Perspectives

The concept of the evolution of a domain, or expert knowledge base specifically concerned with the spiritual is further supported by recent neurobiological studies that have sought to identify those aspects of the human brain that might be involved in religious or spiritual ideas and perspectives. Persinger (1996) and Ramachandran and Blakeslee (1998) have reported on their research linking heightened activity in the temporal lobes of individuals who have apperceived spiritual experience. They concluded that the temporal lobes might contain neural machinery specifically concerned with religion, or the spiritual. This area of the temporal lobes has been coined by Zohar and Marshall (2000) as the "God spot" or "God module". While the "God module" may play an essential biological role in spiritual experience, it neither proves nor disproves the existence of God or whether human beings can communicate with a Divine source. Also, the research described above is controversial. Fontana (2003) has argued that this type of study would require extensive replication by others before it could be concluded that temporal lobe activity is involved in the experiences reported across cultures

and through the centuries that have been labelled as spiritual. Nonetheless, the research of Persinger and of Ramachandran and Blakeslee does suggest that, from a biological perspective, aspects of the human brain may have evolved which render all human beings the capacity to be spiritual.

More recently, and as the result of extensive research, a slightly different perspective has been offered by Newberg, d'Aquili and Rause (2001), who have maintained that the temporal lobes and limbic structures within it are not solely responsible for the complexity and diversity of such spiritual experiences. These researchers have argued that there are potentially many other structures involved in such experiences. They have identified four association areas of the human brain – the visual, the orientation, the attention, and the verbal conceptual – which interact to produce the mind's spiritual potential. These four association areas are the most complex neurological compositions in the brain. Newberg, d'Aquili and Rause have argued that all these structures are required in order to explain the vast array of spiritual experiences apperceived by people. For instance, they describe how these structures combine and interact during the state of passive meditation to shield the mind from the intrusion of superfluous sensory input, a process known as 'deafferentation' (p. 118). In this state, the orientation area lacks the information needed to create the spatial context in which the self can be oriented. Since there would be no line of distinction between the self and the rest of the universe, the mind then perceives a neurological reality consistent with many mystical descriptions of ultimate spiritual union. In such a state, the mind exists without ego in a state of pure undifferentiated awareness.

In discussing the architecture of the brain, Newberg, d'Aquili and Rause (2001) have maintained that the human brain has evolved over millions of years to address issues of survival and adaptation to environment. These scholars have maintained that although the particular structures involved in spiritual experience developed initially from simpler neurological processes that evolved to address more basic survival needs, their potential for spiritual experience always existed. As

evolution proceeded, the potential for the spiritual and its usefulness in addressing issues of meaning and value was realised and favoured by the process of natural selection. This supports the original thesis of Hardy (1966) maintaining that spirituality has evolved through the process of natural selection because it has a positive function in enabling individuals to survive in their natural environments.

Ultimate Unity

Another result of research into structures of the brain that become active when an individual apperceives spiritual experience is the contention of Newberg, d'Aquili and Rause (2001), who have described the neurobiology of transcendence as a movement towards Absolute Unitary Being, that is, when Self blends into Other and mind and matter become one and the same. This refers to the states of unity experienced by many of the mystics from various religious traditions of both eastern and western cultures. As the result of their exploration of different association areas of the human brain which may become active in producing the mind's spiritual potential, Newberg and his colleagues have proposed the notion of a "unitary continuum" (p. 145), where at one pole, a person may interact with the world and with others, but may experience this interaction as something from which he or she is apart. As that person progresses along the unitary continuum, the sense of separateness becomes less distinct, and could lead to individual experiences of sacredness, and experiences of unity with Other, regardless of whether Other is encountered in community, creation, or in the Transcendent. In the state of Absolute Unitary Being, "the self blends into the other; mind and matter are one and the same" (p. 156). Such a notion is consistent with, and describes in neurological terms, the Buddhist state of *anatta* (no-self), or the Christian mystical state of experiencing the presence of God as the ground of one's own being.

Similarly, Austin (2000) has explored the possibility of the waking consciousness losing its sense of superficial self, rendering a state of no-self, or complete unity with Other. Austin's contention has been that consciousness evolves when the superficial self dissolves. When the "I-Me-Mine" (p. 209) egocentric triad

dissolves, novel states of consciousness are said to emerge. Austin has referred to two such states – insight-wisdom, or *kensho-satori*, and internal absorption. In such states, all self-centred subjectivities dissolve, leaving the apperception of the world of the other. Released from subjective attachments, the world revealed is one in the form of unburdened clarity. That is, the world as it really is, without self-referent attachments is apperceived, and one can glimpse the reality "of things as they 'really' are" (p. 228).

In drawing on such notions as outlined in the research described above, and in exploring the spirituality of young people in a regional setting, de Souza (2004a, 2004b) has described spirituality as a journey towards Ultimate Unity. Such a movement can be understood to spiral through different layers of connectedness with self, others, the world and possibly with the Transcendent, which generally move forwards towards wider levels, or inwards to deeper levels, but which could recede depending upon the particular contexts of an individual's experiences and responses. de Souza has argued that such forward and inward movement, for some individuals, has the potential to lead to the widest or deepest level of connectedness, where the individual experiences becoming one with Other, that is, Ultimate Unity. These conclusions support particularly the contentions of Newberg, d'Aquili and Rause (2001) that the neurobiology of transcendence is a movement towards Absolute Unitary Being, when Self blends into Other, and mind and matter become one and the same.

Social Evolution (Co-evolution)

The biological nature of spirituality and its favoured selection in the process of the evolution of the human species, as discussed above, alone may not adequately explain its continual emergence in humankind. Fontana (2003) has argued that the descriptions of spirituality that have been offered by recent psychological and neurobiological scholarship do not necessarily reveal the evolutionary advantage that it might confer upon the human race. He has maintained that such descriptions (particularly in relation to the "God Spot") seem more concerned with the quality of

life than with the physical survival of the human species. Fontana has noted, for instance, that many of the descriptions of spirituality are closely linked with the generation of altruism. Altruism is problematic because it does not necessarily enhance the survival prospects of members of a species, as would be the case with, for example, self-sacrifice. Following this line of thought, Fontana has maintained that if spirituality is linked with altruism, it would be difficult to conceive of it as an attribute that had been selected in the evolution of the human species because it would not necessarily enhance its chances of survival. Yet, scholars such as Hay and Nye (1998) have argued that spirituality underlies the altruistic impulse, and that all forms of self-sacrificing behaviour can be viewed as a function of spiritual awareness. There is a need then to examine and take account of additional factors, and perspectives, such as the social and cultural component in the evolution of spirituality.

One such perspective can be drawn from the work of Durham (1991) who offered a systematic account of the relationship between biological and social evolution, a process known as co-evolution. The assertion has been that social evolution occurs in a way similar to biological evolution through the process of natural selection. In the case of the former, the units of cultural meaning are known as *memes*. Memes can vary from the most basic units of connotation, through to the more complex ideas, beliefs and value systems. The particular variations of memes within a human group or community – "allomemes" – provide the different possibilities from which selections can be made in the process of social evolution.

As with genetic variation, not all variations of memes have equal fitness for survival. Durham (1991) has asserted that whilst natural selection occurs as a type of selection by consequences – organisms that are unfit for survival fail to survive – cultural selection operates as selection according to consequences. Particular patterns of social behaviour are deemed as either helpful or detrimental to survival on the basis of personal experience, history or rational reflection. Social evolution then acts as guided mechanism of change "that tends to promote human survival and

reproduction, and does so with considerably greater efficiency than natural selection" (p. 363).

This process of co-evolution may explain in part the continual emergence of spirituality in humankind, particularly as it underlies the altruistic impulse. That is to say, altruism may be a meme that has been selected via the process of social evolution because it has survival value for the human community, and because it has concordance with the underlying biological predisposition to spirituality. However, as Hay and Nye (1998) have noted, in some cases social evolution can have a damaging effect on the survival of a community. Negative social processes can be imposed from influences outside of a community. For example, powerful groups or individuals can coerce others to behave in ways contrary to the mechanism of change promoted by social evolution. There can be occasions on which, in relation to external pressure, there is a voluntary acceptance of memes that are unhelpful to survival. This may create an obstruction, where existing social values that normally promote survival are impeded by factors such as propaganda, advertising, brainwashing, or drug addiction. Such value displacement is contradictory to natural selection if:

> values appropriate to survival in one sphere of life are translated to another inappropriate social context. People may suffer from 'imperception' that there are likely to be damaging consequences of a particular choice of social behaviour…when there are destructive consequences following from certain actions, people may simply be 'oblivious of the link' with a particular allomeme (p. 151).

It has been the contention of Hay and Nye (1998) that spirituality, naturally (biologically) selected in humankind, can be repressed by the socially constructed processes that contradict it in the manner described above. By way of example, they have identified modern individualist philosophy as a meme that has emerged in opposition to biological evolution because of the destructive nature of the societies it

has generated. Hay and Nye have suggested that the traditional meme that has constantly been selected for the history of the human species is universalist religion. However, the processes described above have in many instances operated so as to create value blockage, and eventually, in many instances, to displace this meme.

Spirituality, Social Evolution and Children

Of pertinence to this present study is Hay and Nye's (1998) contention that the theory of co-evolution has particular importance in exploring the spirituality of children. Spirituality is a quality selected in the biological evolution of humankind and is therefore a universal human predisposition. Because it is so primal, it is something that can be seen particularly clearly in children. The process of co-evolution in part explains why particular memes – units of cultural meaning – have been selected via the process of social evolution because they have survival value for the human community, and because they have concordance with the underlying biological predisposition to spirituality. This would be the case with a meme such as altruism. However, Hay and Nye have also noted that the process of co-evolution can at times have a detrimental effect on spirituality by selecting memes that work in opposition to the biological predisposition of spirituality. It has been the contention of Hay and Nye that in many cases, the spirituality so naturally present in children is being overlaid and repressed by socially constructed processes that contradict it in the manner described above. Social evolution has selected memes that have created a value blockage or displacement to the natural expression of spirituality.

Hay (2001) has further maintained that this suppression of people's spiritual lives has led to the privatisation of spirituality (p. 115). The discarding of spiritual awareness is not a natural phenomenon. It is a social construction of western culture that needs to be counteracted. Hay has maintained that it is the task of educators in both secular and religious settings to nurture and protect the spiritual dimension of children's lives. The role of the teacher is crucial in reconstructing a climate in which spirituality is nourished. Hay has argued, "Spirituality needs the context of a

culture that recognises its importance and allows it to 'come out'. Our task as educators is to reconstruct that culture" (p. 116).

By way of summary Table 2 presents the understandings concerning spirituality as a natural human predisposition.

Table 2
A Summary of the Key Understandings Concerning Spirituality as a Natural Human Predisposition

Spirituality is an essential human trait, since it…
- Is ontological – it belongs to each person's being.
- Is an attribute that has been selected in the process of evolution of the human species because it has survival value for the individual.
- Can be explained also through the process of co-evolution.

Spirituality concerns the notion of Ultimate Unity (de Souza, 2004a, 2004b), since it…
- Involves a movement towards Ultimate Unity in which Self blends into Other.
- Can spiral through different layers of connectedness, having the potential to lead to the widest and deepest levels of connectedness where the individual becomes one with Other.
- Underlies the altruistic impulse, the desire to act selflessly towards Other.

Spirituality is given expression…
- So as to function to lead people to act upon their spiritual experiences in seeking solutions to problems of meaning and value in life.
- Through altruistic behaviour.
  BUT . . . Can be repressed or overlaid by socially constructed processes.

The above summary of the literature explored in this section is of relevance for this present study. Not only can the spirituality of all people be explained, at least in part, by the processes of biological and social evolution, but in some instances, those aspects of the human brain, favoured and selected through the evolutionary processes, may enable individuals to experience Ultimate Unity (de Souza, 2004a, 2004b), in which they may experience becoming one with Other. Throughout history, there have been individuals who have reported and attempted to describe such spiritual experiences. Prominent among such people are the adherents of the contemplative and mystical traditions of Christianity, who understood all people to be capable of becoming one with the Divine, and who understood the Divine to be within each person. Examples of this are intimated in Christian Scripture, particularly in the Gospel of John. In this particular Gospel, Jesus states that at the

deepest (inward) level of connectedness between himself and God, "I am in the Father and the Father is in me" (Jn 14:9). In this Gospel, Jesus goes on to intimate that at the widest level of connectedness (outward) between Self and Other in community, that ". . . you will know that I am in the Father and that you are in me, just as I am in you" (Jn 14:20). While the literature clearly indicates such a possibility, in discussing the notion of a movement towards Ultimate Unity (de Souza, 2004a, 2004b) in which Self may potentially become one with Other, particularly a Transcendent Other, or the Divine, the researcher acknowledges this concept as foundational to his research study.

Also prominent among those who have experienced becoming one with Other are those from eastern philosophies who similarly have understood that at the highest levels of unity, one's Self is understood to be unified with the Absolute, the Brahman. This notion of the Divine as being at the core of Self forms the basis of the next section.

<center>The Divine at the Core of Self</center>

While much of the contemporary literature has described spirituality in terms of relationality and connectedness (e.g., Bosacki, 2001; de Souza, 2003; Elton-Chalcraft, 2002; Fisher, 1997; Hay & Nye, 1998; Kendell, 1999; Myers, 1997; O'Murchu. 1997, 2000; Reimer & Furrow, 2001; Scott, 2001; Tacey, 2000, 2003), many of the world's mystical and contemplative traditions, both eastern and western, have understood spirituality as involving a journey towards Ultimate Unity (de Souza, 2004a, 2004b), by which, at the deepest levels of connectedness, an individual might experience becoming unified with Other. While an in-depth discussion of these traditions is beyond the scope of this thesis, a few pertinent factors are highlighted below.

Christian Mystical Traditions

The Christian mystical tradition has for some time understood the unity said to exist between Self and the Divine. For example, in *The Interior Castle*, Teresa of Avila (1577) wrote of the soul, the core of Self, as being the place where God dwells, and of prayer as being the means by which the soul is united to God. Similarly, in *Stanzas between the Soul and the Bridegroom (The Whole Canticle)* St. John of the Cross (1542 - 1591) wrote of the soul who has glimpsed the high state of perfection, of union with God. In *The Soul's Journey into God*, St. Bonaventure wrote of Jesus Christ as being not only the way of the mystical path, but the one who stands at the ultimate point of the mystical path (Mommaers, 2003). Christian mystic Meister Eckhart in his statement succinctly phrased this unity between Self and God, "The eye with which I see God is the same eye with which God sees me" (Shannon, 2003, p. 217).

Among the more contemporary mystics of the Christian tradition who have expressed this understanding of Self as being one with the Divine is Thomas Merton. In exploring the quest for self-identity, Merton wrote of the discovery of the true Self as an experience of finding God (Malits, 1980). Such a search entailed transcending the superficial self – going beyond the "I" that represents the ego with its own opinions and ideas, to discover, or recover the "I" at the depth of one's own being, achieved in Merton's own language as passing through the centre of the soul to find God:

> Self-realisation … is an awareness of the God to whom we are drawn in the depths of our own being. We become real, and experience our actuality, not when we pause to reflect upon our own self as an isolated individual entity, but rather when transcending ourselves and passing beyond reflection, we centre our whole soul upon the God Who is our life. That is to say, we fully 'realise' ourselves when we cease to be conscious of ourselves in separateness and know nothing but the one God Who is above all knowledge (Merton, 1978, p. 122).

Of significance in the above idea of Merton (1978) is the concept of ceasing to be conscious of the separateness between Self and God – Other. In seeking to discover, or to rediscover one's true Self, Merton has effactually argued that Self becomes unified with the Transcendent Other. In writing of Merton's place of nowhere, Finley (2003) has summed up Merton's concept: "The true self is rather our whole self before God" (p. 23). The more an individual searches for her or his true Self, the more she or he may come to discover that Self and Other are one.

Following the essence of the above discussion, this thesis argues that at the centre of each individual's Self is the Divine presence, and therefore, the relationship between Self and others is also pertinent, and renders a significance not just for the Transcendent Other, but also for Other as encountered in both the human and nonhuman world. That is, the Divine at the core of all existence. Again, the writings of Merton express the importance of the relationship between Self and Other. The "I" that searches to discover God by transcending the superficial self and delving into the deeper core of one's being also discovers the image of the Divine in every other person and in the whole of creation (Malits, 1980). By journeying into the depths of one's being to discover God, humankind may come to discover who others really are:

> His [*sic*] one image is in us all, and we discover Him by discovering the likeness of His Image in one another. This does not destroy the differences between us but all these incidentals cease to have much meaning when we find that we are really one in His love. It is great praise of Him when people rejoice at finding Him in one another – not by effort, not by mere blind acts of faith, but by the experience of a charity illuminated, perhaps, by Wisdom – for it is "sapience" and fruition of God's reflection in the joy which is His mirror in souls (Merton, 1956, p. 152).

Shannon (2003) has described Merton's understanding of the above as the ultimate unity of all reality. The world, although distinct from God, is not separate

from God. People, although individual and unique are not separate from God because God is the source and ground of humankind's being. Therefore, as Shannon has argued, "God plus me equals, not two, but one . . . Precisely because we are one with God, we are also one with one another . . . you are one with God. I am one with God. It follows that we are one with one another" (p. 217).

Another contemporary Christian mystic who has expressed this understanding of Self as being one with the Divine is Bede Griffiths. In exploring the Hindu-Christian dialogue, Griffith (1984) maintained that the search for God entails a continual effort to discover the "reality of the hidden presence of God in the depths of the soul . . . (it is there that one must) make the discovery of Christ as the Atman, the true Self, of every being" (p. 24). For Griffith, Christ is at the centre of Self, and provides a point of meeting not just for the individual and God, but the individual and other people, as well as the whole of creation. For in Christ "we discover not only the centre or ground of our being, but we also find a meeting point with all men [*sic*] and with the whole world of nature" (p. 25). That is to say, Griffith has affirmed the presence of the Divine in Other, and therefore, spirituality may become an expression of connectedness with Other. The means by which the individual attains, or realises this unity with the Divine at the centre of Self is, as Griffith (1984) has maintained, through prayer and contemplation:

In the East it has always been understood that there is a higher mode of knowledge than sense or reason – the knowledge of spiritual intuition, a knowledge not dependent on the senses or on any logical process, but on the soul's direct, intuitive awareness of itself . . . which gives the true knowledge of God . . . it transcends the finite order and unites man [*sic*] directly with God (p. 80).

The Christian Concept of the Soul and Spirituality

A key feature of writings of the Christian mystics referred to above is the notion of the soul, and its centrality in an understanding of spirituality. For example,

Griffith (1984) maintained that God was to be found at the centre of one's own soul. Merton (1978) wrote of passing through the centre of the soul to discover God. While there are numerous scholars who have articulated an understanding of the concept of the soul, the work of Rolheiser (1998) presents a clear understanding of the soul and its relationship to spirituality.

Rolheiser (1998) has maintained that the soul is not something that a person possesses, but rather is concerned with who a person is in terms of their identity and being. From this perspective, Rolheiser has argued that the soul has two key functions. Firstly, the soul is that which gives life to a person. Within the soul "lies the fire, the eros, the energy that drives us" (p. 12). The second function of the soul is to integrate the person into a coherent whole. The soul "is the glue that holds us together, the principle of integration and individuation within us . . . [which] makes us one" (p. 12). Biologically a person's body is an aggregate of chemicals. However, Rolheiser has argued that as long as the body has a soul, these chemicals function together to form a single organism. At death, when the soul is said to leave the body, the chemicals begin to disperse, and the body gradually decomposes. Such chemicals, going their separate ways, do not constitute life. Rolheiser has maintained that what is true biologically is also true psychologically. The soul is the principle of oneness, of unity:

> In the heart and in the mind, the soul is what glues us together . . . to lose one's soul is to become, in contemporary jargon, unglued. To lose one's soul is to fall apart . . . a healthy soul has to continually give us a sense of who we are, where we came from, where we are going, and what sense there is in all of this" (p. 13).

When the soul is hurting, it does not act as an integrating principle, and one might be said to have lost one's soul. Rolheiser (1998) has maintained that losing one's soul refers not to eternal damnation, but to the loss of a sense of individuation:

When cynicism, despair, bitterness or depression paralyse our energy, part of the soul is hurting . . . When we stand looking at ourselves, confusedly, in a mirror and asking ourselves what sense, if any, there is to our lives, it is . . . the soul, our principle of integration, that is limping (pp. 13-14).

With these two functions of the soul in mind, Rolheiser has argued that spirituality is about what one does with one's soul. It is about what one does with the fire, or the energy within the soul that drives the individual. Spirituality then is concerned with the *outward expression* of this energy and integration towards the human and nonhuman world. It is the expression of a person's sense of connectedness with Self, others, the world, and with God. Spirituality is:

about how we channel our eros (desires and inner energy). And how we do channel it, the disciplines and habits we choose to live by, will either lead to a greater integration or disintegration within our minds, bodies and souls, and to a greater integration or disintegration in the way we relate to God, others, and the cosmic world (pp. 10-11).

If the Divine is to be found at the centre of the soul, as Merton, Griffith, and other Christian mystics have argued, then the Divine is the source of the fire, the energy, out of which a person acts towards others. Rolheiser (1989) affirms this when he maintains that past generations have understood such divine energy "as coming from God and as ultimately directed back towards God" (p. 22). In combining this notion of the soul with the assertions of the Christian mystics, it can be understood that the Divine is unified with Self at its core – the soul in Christian language. How a person then expresses this reality – what they do and how they act towards others – is their expression of spirituality.

Eastern Traditions

Eastern philosophy has long understood the spiritual path to involve Self and its true nature. In Buddhism, significant emphasis is placed upon the individual

being able to see through the illusory, conditioned self so as to realise one's true nature (Billington, 1997). Once a person recognises the illusory nature of her or his relative and socially constructed self, there comes an awareness that in its place exists an expansive state of being (Shannon, 2003). Such a state of being is understood to be an integral part of the unified whole which is ultimate reality (Fontana, 2003). One is said to arrive at this state through intensive meditative practices. The Buddhist term for this state is *anatta*, meaning no-self (Billington, 1997; Hill, Knitter & Madges, 2002; Fontana, 2003). This means that the self ceases to exist as a distinct and separate entity. Self blends into Other, and mind and matter become one and the same. This state is understood to be one's true nature, and in becoming aware of it, a person might become aware of the true nature of everything else.

Hindus traditionally refer to "self" in lower case letters, signifying the conditioned and socially constructed self that results from a person's learned experiences and reactions to those experiences. It is the "self" that a person mistakenly takes to be who he or she really is. It refers to the ego which seeks to make itself "master of the world" (Griffiths, 2002, p. 16). In speaking of "Self" with an initial capital, Hindus refer to a person's own true nature which is understood to be identified with the Absolute, the Brahman (Billington, 1997; Fontana, 2003). It is the indwelling Self, the Divine light, mysteriously present and shining in each person (Zohar & Marshall, 2000). Self is understood to be one with the Brahman. Hart (2003) has drawn attention to the Hindu tenet, Atman and Brahman are one, meaning that the individual human and the Godhead are one and the same. From this, Hart has concluded that the spiritual path "involves realising more of this innate divinity as we uncoil the multidimensional nature of ourselves and the universe" (p. 114). Griffith (2002) has maintained that the unity of the Atman and the Brahman is a key feature of Indian thought. Self – the Atman – the Ground of personal being is one with the Brahman, the Ground of universal being. In further exploring the concept of the Divine as being one with Self, de Souza (2005) has maintained that the above understanding is reflected in the Indian greeting, *Namaste*, which in loose

translation may be rendered as "The Divine Presence in me meets the Divine Presence in you. I bow to the Divine Presence in you" (p. 4).

The above literature alludes to the individual being able to expand her or his awareness so as to transcend or move beyond the superficial self – the ego – in order to realise the true Self, or in Merton's language, to pass through the centre of the soul in order to find God. Literature from the biological perspectives has explained in neurological terms those parts of the human brain that might become active when this occurs. Such an activity involves the notion of consciousness, and the possibility of attaining higher levels of consciousness in order to realise the true Self. While acknowledging the complexity and uncertainty associated in a discussion of the nature of consciousness and Self, the following perspectives drawn from eastern philosophy, integrated in some instances with western science, are presented as they may have a particular bearing upon the present research study.

Eastern Philosophical Perspectives on Consciousness

Several writers have indicated the eastern notion of different, and sometimes interconnected, levels of consciousness that might be attained by the individual in order to realise the true or centre of Self. In commentaries on the work of eastern philosopher Sri Aurobindo, Maitra (1962), Cornelissen (1999), and Marshak and Litfin (2002) have drawn attention to Aurobindo's notion of the ascending planes of consciousness from *matter* to *satchitananda*. These planes include the material plane, the vital plane, the mental plane, the transitional planes of higher mind, the illuminated mind, the intuitive mind and Overmind, the Supramental plane, and the divine consciousness. According to Aurobindo, each human being is a self-developing soul, evolving towards greater divinity (Marshak & Litfin, 2002). It is when a person reaches the level of divine consciousness that he or she might be said to have arrived at the highest status of his or her real, or true Self.

Similarly, Fontana (2003) has noted that a feature among the major eastern traditions and western esoteric traditions is the notion of developmental levels of

consciousness, most clearly outlined in the Advaita Vendanta school of Hinduism. This particular model of consciousness has six major levels, each, with the exception of the last, containing several subdivisions. At the lowest point is the material level, at which consciousness is identified solely with the sensory. This is followed by the vital level, at which consciousness becomes aware of itself. At the discriminatory level, consciousness begins to categorise objects and events presented by experience. It is also at this level that consciousness distinguishes between turning inward towards the nonmaterial realm of thought, intuition, and perhaps spiritual awareness, and outward toward the material world. At the ratiocinative level consciousness acquires the capacity for analytical and rational thought. The causal level entails consciousness experiencing pure contentless awareness, or consciousness in and of itself. At the highest level – the Brahmanic level – consciousness is said to be aware of reality as a unified field of energy in which the material, the individual, and the Absolute, or Brahman, are in essence identical with each other.

Wilber's Integral Theory of Consciousness

In discussing the different waves, lines and states that might comprise an integral theory of consciousness, Wilber (2000a, 2000b) has made a sustained and authentic attempt to link the notion of developmental levels of consciousness that are recognised in the east, for example those outlined in the Advaita Vedanta model, with western science. Rather than envisaging these levels of consciousness as hierarchical, Wilber has described these developmental levels as a holarchy from matter to life to mind to soul to spirit, arranged along what he terms the "great rainbow or spectrum" (Wilber, 2000a, p. 148) of consciousness. Along this spectrum, Wilber has incorporated key aspects of many of the major psychological and wisdom traditions – eastern and western, as well as ancient and modern. Across this spectrum, the higher levels of consciousness are understood to enfold the preceding levels. Wilber has maintained that this type of thinking reflects the work of Aurobindo, who had argued that spiritual evolution conformed to a logic of successive unfolding. The higher, transpersonal levels of consciousness do not sit on top of lower levels, but rather, as these higher levels of consciousness unfold,

they envelop the lower levels. These levels, or "waves" as Wilber has described them, have been termed developmental not because they are rigid, linear, or appear as rungs-in-the-ladder, but rather because they are fluid, and overlap as waves appear to do. These developmental levels or waves therefore appear to be like "concentric spheres of increasing embrace, inclusion, and holistic capacity" (p. 147).

Central to this notion of developmental waves of consciousness is Wilber's (2000a) notion of Self, or self-system, which acts as a means by which to integrate, or balance these waves of consciousness. Wilber has maintained that levels or waves of consciousness, as well as other aspects of awareness, appear to be devoid of an intrinsic self-sense. He has argued that one of the primary characteristics of Self is its capacity to identify with the basic levels, or waves of consciousness. This drive to integrate the various components of the psyche is a fundamental feature of the self system. Wilber has envisaged Self as a centre of gravity, with the various levels, lines and states of consciousness orbiting around the integrating tendency of Self. He has also argued that Self also undergoes its own type of development through what might be considered as a series of waves. However, the distinguishing feature of Self is its ability to coordinate all of this into a coherent whole. It is pertinent to note that Wilber's understanding of Self bears some correlation with Rolheiser's (1998) understanding of the second function of the soul. As discussed earlier in this chapter, one of the functions of the soul is to integrate the person into a coherent whole. Rolheiser had described the soul as "the glue that holds us together, the principle of integration and individuation within us. . . (which) makes us one" (p. 12). Wilber has drawn upon similar terminology in describing the function of Self.

Such an understanding of an integral theory of consciousness enhances the credibility of the existence of different levels, or waves of consciousness. It serves to broaden the perspective and include levels other than the three that have been widely referred to in western psychological literature: conscious, subconscious, and unconscious. Wilber (2000a) has further suggested that this integral theory of consciousness, with its notion of Self and the integrating tendency of Self, has the

potential to assist in explaining how Self, through integrating higher levels of consciousness with lower levels, might achieve unity with the Absolute, the true Self. That is to say, Self becomes one with Other, where in the Buddhist tradition, one attains the state of *anatta*, or no self, or where in the Hindu understanding, Atman and Brahman become one, or where in Christian mystical terms, one passes through the centre of soul in order to find God:

> the time is now ripe to . . . move towards a more integrated theory, not only of consciousness, but of the Kosmos at large; a theory that would begin to show us the how and why of *intrinsic* [italics in original] connections between all things in existence. This would truly be a 'theory of everything'…even if all of the details remain beyond our grasp (p. 167).

By way of summary, Table 3 presents the key understandings of spirituality in terms of the Divine as being at the core of Self.

Table 3
A Summary of the Key Understandings of Spirituality in terms of the Divine as being at the Core of Self

Spirituality is an essential human trait which . . .
- Concerns the unity that exists between Self and the Divine (God).
- Involves a path towards the realisation of one's true nature (the true Self).
- Involves the successive unfolding of higher levels of consciousness, which enable the individual to transcend the ego in order to realise the true Self which is unified with Other.

Spirituality concerns the notion of Ultimate Unity (de Souza, 2004a, 2004b), since it . . .
- Entails the unity that exists between Self and Other as encountered in all elements of creation.
- Involves awareness of being in relationship with Self, others, the world, and possibly with the Transcendent.
- Is the motivating force for action towards others in life.
- Leads to greater integration/disintegration in the way people relate to God and others in the physical/cosmic worlds.

Spirituality is given expression . . .
- Through different layers of connectedness with Self and everything Other than Self.
- Outwardly in terms of the way one acts towards Other in both the human and non-human worlds.

The above summary is pertinent for this present research. While, as noted, many scholars have put forward the notion that spirituality is concerned with a sense of connectedness and relationality with self, others, the world, and possibly with the Transcendent, this thesis, in drawing on the literature detailed in this section, argues that spirituality is concerned with more than connectedness. Spirituality is concerned with that movement towards Ultimate Unity (de Souza, 2004a, 2004b), whereby at the deepest and widest levels of connectedness, an individual may experience unity with Other. The notion of connectedness, or relationality, implies two objects being in relationship or connected to each other. Ultimate Unity, however, implies one – becoming one with Other. The means by which Ultimate Unity may be attained involves the successive unfolding of higher levels of consciousness, which may enable the individual to transcend the ego in order to realise the true Self which is unified with Other.

<div align="center">Summary and Significance for this Research Study</div>

This chapter has explored the understanding of spirituality from three broad perspectives – the relationship between spirituality and institutional Christianity, spirituality as a natural human predisposition, and the Divine at the core of Self. By way of summary and in an attempt to describe how spirituality is then to be understood within the context of this present research study, Table 4 presents a précis of the insights gained from these perspectives on spirituality.

Table 4
A Précis of the Insights Gained from Three Broad Perspectives on Spirituality

Description	Perspective		
	The relationship between spirituality and Institutional Christianity	Spirituality as a natural human predisposition	The Divine at the core of the Self
Spirituality is an essential human trait…	- It can be experienced by all people irrespective of whether or not they practise any religious tradition. - Spirituality is the primordial experience of the human being out of which religious traditions may emerge	- It is ontological. It belongs to each person's being. - Is an attribute that has been selected in the process of evolution of the human species. - Can be explained in part by the process of co-evolution.	- Concerns the unity that exists between Self and the Divine (God). - Involves a path towards the realisation of one's true nature (the true Self) -Involves the successive unfolding of higher levels of consciousness, which enables the individual to transcend the ego in order to realise the true Self which is unified with Other.
Spirituality concerns the movement towards Absolute Unity…	- Ultimate Unity may be achieved by practitioners of particular religious traditions… …BUT… belonging to a religious tradition is not a prerequisite for achieving Ultimate Unity.	- Involves a movement towards Ultimate Unity in which Self blends into Other. - Can spiral through different layers of connectedness, having the potential to lead to the deepest and widest levels of connectedness where the individual becomes one with Other. - Underlies the altruistic impulse, the desire to act selflessly towards Other.	- Entails the unity that exists between Self and Other as encountered in all elements of creation. - Involves awareness of the connectedness with Self, others, the world, and possibly with the Transcendent. - Is the motivating force for action towards Other. - Leads to greater integration or disintegration in the way people relate to God and others in the physical and cosmic worlds.
Spirituality is given expression…	- Possibly through a religious tradition… …BUT…may also find expression outside of institutional religion.	- So as to function to lead people to act upon their spiritual experience in seeking solutions to problems of meaning and value in life. - Through altruistic behaviour. BUT…can be repressed or overlaid by socially constructed processes.	- Through different layers of connectedness with Self and everything Other than Self. - Outwardly in terms of the way one acts towards Other in both the human and non-human worlds.

From Table 4 it can be seen that this thesis argues for three particular descriptions of spirituality – that spirituality is an essential human trait, that it

concerns the movement towards Ultimate Unity (de Souza, 2004a, 2004b), and that spirituality is given outwards expression. Each of these is outlined below.

1. *Spirituality is an essential human trait*

In this research study, spirituality is understood to be an ontological and biological reality. It is a natural human predisposition involving a path towards the realisation of one's true Self in which ultimately Self is unified with Self and with everything that is Other than Self. It involves the successive unfolding of higher levels of consciousness which, at the highest levels, may enable the individual to transcend the ego in order to apperceive the deepest and widest levels of connectedness in which Self and Other are unified. The continual emergence of spirituality in humankind may in part also be explained by the process of co-evolution. Behaviours and attributes which have concordance with the underlying biological predisposition to spirituality have continued to be selected as they have a positive value in enabling individuals to survive in their environments.

2. *Spirituality concerns the movement towards Ultimate Unity*

Within this present study, spirituality is understood to involve more than connectedness and relationality. Spirituality is concerned with that movement towards Ultimate Unity (de Souza, 2004a, 2004b), whereby at the deepest and widest levels of connectedness, an individual may experience unity with Other. As noted, the notion of connectedness, or relationality, implies two objects being in relationship or connected to each other. Ultimate Unity, however, implies one. It entails the individual becoming one with Other. The means by which Ultimate Unity may be attained involves the successive unfolding of higher levels of consciousness, which may enable the individual to transcend the ego in order to realise the true Self which is unified with Other.

The notion of Ultimate Unity (de Souza 2004a, 2004b) has been argued I this chapter on a number of grounds. In a religious sense, practitioners of both eastern and Christian traditions have sought and described this type of unity with Other, in

which, at the deepest and widest levels of connectedness, Self becomes one with Other. However, as also noted in this chapter, some literature suggests that individuals who are not declared adherents of any particular faith tradition are capable of apperceiving experiences along the "unitary continuum" (Newberg, d'Aquili & Rause, 2001, p. 145) since the capacity for an individual to do so has evolved biologically, and involves the neurological function of various sites within the human brain.

3. *Spirituality is given expression*

Within this present research study, spirituality is understood to be the outward expression of this sense of unity, possibly, although not necessarily, through a formal system of values and beliefs, that is, institutional religion. Spirituality is the outward expression of the fire within the soul (Rolheiser, 1998) in terms of how one might act in relation to the human and nonhuman world, and towards a Transcendent dimension. Typically, such expression might be characterised by altruism and acts of selflessness.

The above descriptions indicate how spirituality is to be understood within this present research study. This thesis argues that children's spirituality is an ontological reality and involves a path towards the realisation of the true Self, in which ultimately, Self is unified with Self and with everything that is Other than Self. This unity can be expressed both outwardly and inwardly in terms of different levels of connectedness towards Other, and in some instances, this expression could reflect the deepest levels of connectedness, whereby the individual may experience becoming one with Other, that is, Ultimate Unity (de Souza, 2004a, 2004b).

Following such a line of thought, this thesis uses "Self" with an initial upper case letter to refer to the individual's true nature, which, at the deepest level, can be understood to be one with the Divine, or God in the Christian tradition. It utilises "self" with an initial lower letter case to refer to the socially constructed self, the ego, or persona out of which a person might commonly act. Since the Divine, or

Absolute is one with each other person's Self, this thesis uses "Other" with an initial upper case letter in referring to Other in both the human and nonhuman, with whom Self seeks to become unified.

This chapter has indicated how the term "spirituality" is to be understood and carried forward within the context of this present research study. The following chapter will focus on pertinent empirical research that has been undertaken in the field of children's spirituality. It will indicate the significance of such research for the present study.

CHAPTER TWO
RESEARCH AND INVESTIGATION INTO CHILDREN'S SPIRITUALITY

Introduction

While the previous chapter presented the framework within which spirituality is understood for the purpose of the research described in this study, this chapter presents, analyses and discusses some of the pertinent research which has investigated the spirituality of children. As has been noted, there exists a scarcity of published research into the spiritual lives of children in Australia. Studies undertaken in the Australian context by de Souza, Cartwright and McGilp (2002), Duffy (2002), Engebretson (2002, 2004), Engebretson, de Souza and Salpietro (2000) and Rossiter (2000, 2002, 2005) have focused on the spirituality and search for meaning among adolescents rather than on young children of primary school age. An Australian study undertaken by Mountain (2004) explored the notion of prayer as one possible expression of spirituality among children of primary school age. However the focus of that particular study was on the meaning and function of prayer as an aid and coping mechanism for significant moments in children's lives, rather than on spirituality per se and the characteristics of children's spirituality. As well, Mountain's study focused largely on children who came from faith based school communities and therefore had been exposed to certain religious influences. While Mountain's study may contribute to the research in the field of children's spirituality, her particular study did not attempt to determine or describe the characteristics of the participants' spirituality. Those studies, which do provide insights into spirituality and its manifestation in the lives of children have emanated largely from Great Britain, Canada and the United States of America. An exploration of some of this research which has influenced this present study will now be presented.

Research into Children's Spirituality Relying on Religious Language and Concepts

Some examples of research into the area of children's spirituality have tended to have an underlying assumption that such expressions of spirituality were dependent upon the use of religious language and concepts. The following research studies are indicative of this understanding.

The Work of David Heller

American psychologist David Heller (1986) conducted a study during the latter half of the 1980s, investigating children's conceptions of God. Assuming the role of an observer-participant, Heller conducted semi-structured interviews with 40 children (20 boys and 20 girls) of four different religious backgrounds – Catholicism, Judaism, Protestantism (Baptist) and Hinduism (American Ashram Group). Heller met with each of these children once in a two-hour interview block. The interview schedule itself consisted of six segments, each of which was designed to collect particular data related to aspects of these children's religious imagery: naming the deity, drawing the deity, storytelling about the deity, playing the deity, questions and answers about the deity, and letters to the deity. While Heller's personal perspective was openly religious, he took care to ensure that the children used their own terms and language, and that they related them to other issues of personal significance.

Through the interviews with the 40 children who took part in this study, Heller (1986) discovered a rich array of spiritual imagery. Many of the children conversed quite spontaneously about God and about matters that offered insight into their personal search for meaning. In responding to a query regarding the death of an older person, an eleven-year-old girl openly noted "God takes away people's suffering, like from cancer. He has the power to do that and he uses death in that way. But he must not have full control – otherwise he would cure the cancer" (p. 108).

Similarly, Heller (1986) noted that, in discussing the theme of "light" as a recurring theme which emerged from the interviews, one nine-year-old child described:

> a warm, glowing feeling . . . a feeling that helps you feel good about yourself . . . I don't know what to call it exactly, but its sort of like there's a little light inside you . . . Even when something goes wrong, like when my sister died, it still can shine. I can't say I feel this all the time – but when I feel it I feel it very strong [look of enchantment] (p. 128).

The Work of Robert Coles

Among others who have attempted to provide insight into the spiritual lives of children is American child psychiatrist Robert Coles. In his large-scale study, Coles (1990) engaged in numerous conversations with children between the ages of six and thirteen from a variety of countries. These countries included the United States, South America, Europe, the Middle East and Africa. The children came from a variety of cultural and religious backgrounds, including Christianity, Islam and Judaism. Coles described his work as "an investigation of the ways in which children sift and sort spiritual matters. The emphasis . . . is not so much on children as students or practitioners of this or that religion, but on children as soulful in the ways they themselves reveal . . . " (p. xvii). In dialoguing with children, Coles placed his emphasis on listening attentively to the descriptions of these children's experiences and on their understandings of what they mean when they speak of God, thereby allowing these children to articulate for themselves, their ultimate concerns:

> we talked with a lot of children whose specific religious customs and beliefs came under discussion; but we also talked with children whose interest in God, in the supernatural, in the ultimate meaning of life, in the sacred side of things, was not by any means mediated by visits to churches, mosques, or synagogues. Some were the sons and daughters of professed agnostics or atheists; others belonged to 'religious' families but asked spiritual questions that were not in keeping with the tenets of their religion (p. xvii).

As a result of his conversations with these many children from such an array of cultural and religious backgrounds, Coles (1990) viewed spiritual awareness as a universal human predisposition. The children with whom he spoke expressed in their own way their understanding and indeed concern about spiritual matters. For example, after a lengthy period of two years, a Hopi Indian girl expressed to Coles her understanding of spirituality as a connectedness between her people, the land and her notion of God:

> The sky watches us and listens to us. It talks to us, and it hopes we are ready to talk back. The sky is where the God of the Anglos lives, the teacher told us. She asked where our God lives. I said, 'I don't know.' I was telling the truth! Our God is the sky, and lives wherever the sky is. Our God is the sun and the moon, too; and our God is our people, if we remember to stay here on the land. This is where we are supposed to be, and if we leave, we lose God. (p. 25).

This links with Tacey's (2000) understanding of Aboriginal spirituality, that the indigenous people of Australia too express their spirituality in terms of connectedness with the land and with their ancestors. In this sense, Tacey has asserted that the Aboriginal people have a living spirituality, a "cosmology that [gives] bearing to [their] lives and a larger design to [their] individual activities" (p. 41).

Coles (1990) understood it to be a mistake to give first place to cognition, that is, to intellectual operations in attempting to understand children's spirituality. Rather, he has maintained the importance of actively listening to the children themselves, and of resisting the urge to overlay one's own interpretation on the experiences these children describe.

The work of Coles (1990) has presented something of the landscape of the spiritual lives of children. While he has hesitated to generalise and draw conclusions,

Coles has articulated his belief in religious language as providing a framework for discussing spiritual matters, and as being one possible expression of a child's spirituality:

> There is certainly an overlap for many children between their religious life and their spiritual life – even for young people who have never set foot in any religious institution or received any religious instruction whatsoever (p. xvii).

The research presented above has assumed, either implicitly or explicitly, that spirituality is expressed largely through the use of religious language and concepts. This in part has been due to the language the researchers themselves have used in designing and communicating their projects. Spirituality has been understood and identified as an expression of religion by many investigators. Hence, much of the research on children's spirituality, until more recent times, has focused on "God-talk". However, if spirituality is a natural human predisposition concerned with the relational dimension of being, and is given expression outwardly as has been outlined in chapter one, then it is an attribute present in all people regardless of their religious affiliation and belief or nonbelief in a higher power. In other words, spirituality can be expressed outside of a mainstream religious tradition.

In taking this into account, some of the more recent research into the spirituality of children has taken a different direction. Such investigations have focused not so much on the expression of religious language and concepts as indicators of spirituality. Rather, these studies have focused on the perceptions, awareness and responses of children to what might be classified as ordinary and every-day activities in looking for clues to the spiritual domain in the lives of children. The following examples of research, presented and discussed below, are indicative of this understanding.

Research into Children's Spirituality Focusing on Perceptions, Awareness and
Responses of Children to Everyday Phenomena

'Talking to Children About Things Spiritual': The Work of Elaine McCreery

Beginning with a description of spirituality as an awareness that there is something other, something greater than the course of everyday events, McCreery (1996) entered into conversation with young school children, aged between four and five, about the world as they understood it. She selected a range of familiar experiences for discussion, as well as activities for engagement in which spiritual aspects might arise. Such experiences included events in the home (birth, death, love, trust), at school (stories, nature-study, companionship) and on television (cultural difference, violence, noble behaviour, etc.). These experiences, along with activities such as painting, drawing, sorting, matching, singing, story, and the like, were included in each of a number of sessions with small groups of children. It was hoped that the children's participation in these sessions might enable the identification of some ways of entering into young children's conception of the spiritual.

Importantly, in her conversations with children, McCreery (1996) was careful to allow them to use their own words, thereby avoiding language that might influence their responses. McCreery was especially careful to avoid the use of religious language – "God talk" – in these conversations. She was interested in learning the words and phases the children themselves used to express their spiritual knowing, "If they used a religious language themselves, then I would explore it with them, but I would not furnish them with it" (p. 200). For example, in talking about death with the children, McCreery considered a question such as, "What do you think happens when we die?" as being too leading. A question of this nature could have introduced to the children the religious connotations of death. Instead, McCreery felt it better to tell a story, involving a little girl, Julie, and the death of her pet cat. The children were then invited to offer a reflection on this by responding to

the question "Julie was very upset after her cat was killed, what could we say to make her feel better?" (p. 201).

In this particular example, McCreery (1996) found that the children related the story of Julie and the death of her cat to their own lives. They spoke freely about the death of their own pets, grandparents, and in one instance, the death of a baby sister. The children expressed an understanding of the notion that once dead, a person, or animal, cannot return to life. They also related some knowledge about the dead going to the sky to be with Jesus and God. One particular notion that seemed to occur frequently in the discussion on death was the connection of death with the hospital. As well, the notion that God "makes people alive again" (p. 202) also appeared in such conversations with these groups of young children.

While acknowledging that further investigation was necessary, McCreery (1996) noted that the use of stories that could be related to the children's own life experience was an effective strategy to use in this type of research. In using such a technique, McCreery found that, even at very young ages, children have begun to sort their experiences of the world, and they have begun to ask questions about those aspects they do not yet understand. From this investigation, McCreery pointed out that the development of the spiritual lives of these young children needs to begin with the questions they themselves ask as they begin their encounter with the world. Educators must then find ways of encouraging such questions in their students, and determine ways of exploring such questions and issues when and as they arise. In this way, McCreery argues that teachers can be sure that they are addressing the spiritual dimension of their students' lives in way that are meaningful for them.

The Work of Clive and Jane Erricker

As researchers involved in the *Children and Worldviews Project*, Erricker and Erricker (1996) have contended that the ways in which children learn are inseparable from who they are and the experiences that have shaped their identity.

They have argued that if educators wish to plan a curriculum that takes as its starting point where the children are "at", they need to take into account more than the existing knowledge of the learners. Educators need also to consider the interpretive frameworks of the learners. Such frameworks, they have argued, include the ways in which children attempt to understand and make sense of important existential issues. If existential issues form a part of such a framework, the Errrickers have suggested that one might be said to be considering aspects of children's spirituality.

These researchers maintained that truth, for children, was related to their personal narratives that had been constructed out of their individual experience. They argued that children already possess a narrative within which they construct meaning, and that it is therefore meaning in preference to truth or knowledge that underpins a holistic education. In their view, educators then cannot "impose a narrative upon (children) which does not engage with their own, nor a rationality which does not make sense in terms of the way they have constructed meaning from their experiences" (Erricker, Erricker, Sullivan, Ota & Fletcher, 1997, p. 9). This is not to undermine the importance of instruction or enculturation. These are pertinent, but cannot be addressed independently of an engagement with the evolving worldviews of children.

In their qualitative research, Erricker and Erricker (1996) utilised unstructured interviews with small groups of children. They were eager that these children should be allowed to speak in as natural and unstructured way as possible. The data generated would then enable them to construct theory (a grounded theory approach). After examining the data provided by the children's conversations focusing on the existential themes of loss and conflict, they identified a set of "genres" (p. 190) that these children tended to utilise, and within which their spirituality must find expression. The genres tentatively assigned to the children interviewed include:

1. The 'my little pony' genre – typified by a Disneyesque approach and a deep interest in the welfare of animals.

2. The all-American kid whose life revolves around theme parks, Macdonald's and consumerism.

3. The family-centred genre where relationships within the family are all-important.

4. The hard man . . . whose life includes a lot of violence and conflict.(p. 190)

While not suggesting that children always operate only in one particular genre, Erricker and Erricker (1996) have maintained that the identification of such genres helps in gaining insight into a child's approach to life. In reporting at length the findings of the *Children and Worldviews Project*, Erricker, Erricker, Sullivan, Ota and Fletcher (1997) have stressed the importance of listening and speaking to children in coming to an understanding of their spirituality and the ways in which educators might nurture this in the classroom context. They have maintained, "our research has convinced us that, should we not take the thinking of children seriously in relation to their particular experiences and ideas, we do them and education a disservice" (p. 189).

The work of David Hay and Rebecca Nye

One major investigation, which has sought this type of new direction, is that of Hay and Nye (1998), two researchers from Great Britain. They have reported on a three-year children's spirituality project at the University of Nottingham, England. In using a grounded theory approach, the intention of their investigation was to develop a theoretical interpretation of children's spirituality, based on the reflections of what the children themselves who took part in this study said in conversation with the field worker, Rebecca Nye. In particular, this research was in response to the 1998 Education Reform Act, England and Wales, which issued a mandate that schools must have balanced and broadly based curricula promoting the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of students.

The researchers were interested in conversing with children representative of the range of religious and secular perspectives likely to be found in state schools in Britain. In total, they held conversations with thirty-eight children: nine boys and nine girls between the ages of six and seven, and with ten boys and ten girls between the ages of ten and eleven. Approximately three quarters of these children were classified as having no religious affiliation, four were classified as Church of England, four were Muslim and two Roman Catholic (Hay & Nye, 1998, pp. 83-84).

In undertaking this research, Hay and Nye (1998) expressed their acute awareness of the fact that in the west, the world into which children are socialised is often destructive of their spirituality. Such ways have been previously discussed in chapter one of this thesis. These researchers have also expressed their awareness of the fact that children growing up in today's western world may be unlikely to use traditional religious language to express elements of their spiritual life.

To begin, then, Hay and Nye (1998) proposed three interrelated themes or categories of spiritual sensitivity as a "sketch-map" of those areas of human experience that may act as media for spirituality. These categories provided a starting point in terms of what to look for in their conversations with children. They have been influenced by the work of Donaldson (1979) and were developed further from these researchers' earlier work (Nye & Hay, 1996). They can be described as:

1. Awareness sensing (attending to the 'here and now' of experience, the alertness of what might be experienced in moments of concentration or stillness).
2. Mystery sensing (the wonder and awe, the fascination and questioning which is characteristic of children as they interact with the mystery of the universe).
3. Value sensing (the moral sensitivity, the delight and despair that express children's sense of goodness or evil. It includes a sense of that which really matters) (p. 59).

As the result of their research investigating the spirituality of children, Hay and Nye (1998) have described spirituality as *relational consciousness*. They noted and described surprisingly high levels of consciousness or perceptiveness exhibited in the conversations of those children with the field worker, Rebecca Nye. These conversations were couched in the context of how the child connected or related to themselves, to other people, to the world and to the Transcendent (God). They have coined the term 'relational consciousness', reflecting the two patterns which drew their data together:

1. An unusual level of *consciousness* or perceptiveness, relative to other passages of conversation spoken by that child.
2. Conversation expressed in a context of how the child *related* to things, other people, him/herself, and God (p. 113).

This consciousness, they argued, referred not to a superficial understanding of the word, but to a more reflective perception, as in a type of metacognitive process. "Relational" similarly was not applied in a narrow sense:

In a broad section of the data the dual patterning included not only 'I-Others', but also 'I-Self', 'I-World' and 'I-God'. In each case the child's awareness of being in relationship with something or someone was demonstrated by what they said and, crucially, this was a special sense that added value to their ordinary or every day perspective. Sometimes this was explicitly expressed as having a distinctive form of awareness. In this 'relational consciousness' seems to lie the rudimentary core of children's spirituality, out of which can arise meaningful aesthetic experience, religious experience, personal and traditional responses to mystery and being, and mystical and moral insight (p. 114).

Hay and Nye (1998) commented particularly on two characteristics of these children's relational consciousness. The first was the individuality of each child's

spirituality. They maintained that it was possible to identify for each child a personal "signature" that pertained to that child's spirituality. This was referred to in their study as the "signature phenomenon" (p. 95). The notion of the signature phenomenon led them to conclude that each of the children with whom they spoke presented different expressions of spirituality, each active in its own way. From this they concluded that "The practical implication is that one needs to inquire carefully about and attend to each child's personal style if one is to 'hear' their spirituality at all" (p. 99). In other words, the spirituality of a child is uniquely dependent upon the contours of his or her personal psychology. This links with the research of Erricker and his colleagues (1997), and their emphasis on the need to listen carefully to children in order to understand their spirituality.

The second feature of these children's relational consciousness discussed by Hay and Nye (1998) was their ability and readiness to draw on religious language and ideas in making meaning of their discussed experiences. This feature emerged, even though, as noted, many of the children had little or no background knowledge and experience of formal religion. Hay and Nye noted that their use of religious dialogue could include the explicit use of religious language and terminology (p. 101), or it could include what they term "implicitly spiritual discourse" (p. 106). The latter involved discourse where, although the dialogue may have lacked clear traditional religious or metaphysical terminology, the child was able to express sensitive, profound and philosophical reflections concerning ultimate meaning and value.

'Listening to…listening for…' – The Work of Elaine Champagne

Canadian scholar Elaine Champagne has investigated the spiritual dimension of the lives of very young children in a secular setting, using as a starting point, some ordinary and everyday observed experiences of children. Champagne (2001) has argued that while it is possible to listen to the expressions of spirituality the children themselves reveal in conversation, it is also possible to listen *for* the spiritual underlying their everyday lives. In reflecting upon the observations of three

children, she has presented three characteristic dimensions of spirituality that might be encountered in such a listening to and for: spirituality as human experience, spirituality as a quest for unification and integrity, and spirituality as a quality of consciousness.

Champagne (2001) has pointed out that spiritual experience is human experience. Spirituality cannot be dissociated from human experience. Yet, at the same time, spirituality points to "what is beyond the human" (p. 83). In other words, spirituality is both immanent and transcendent.

Spirituality is also a search for unification and integrity. Champagne (2001) has noted that an individual's spirituality has the potential to muster inner resources towards a more unified and harmonious existence. Spirituality can then "act as a source of growth towards one becoming a relational human being [pointing] to what individuals consider . . . as the ultimate value emerging from their horizon of meaning" (p. 84). In the Christian context, this search for unification and integrity enables a person not only to relate to themselves and others, but also to the Ultimate Other, God.

Spirituality as a quality of consciousness refers to the capacity of a person to reflect, to maintain a distance from, or describe an experience, and the capacity of abstraction. Champagne (2001) has noted that while most cognitive theories suggest that these capacities have generally not yet developed in young children, there is a sense in which young children can and do display such capabilities, even before they have acquired the formal language to express them. Champagne has drawn on Hay and Nye's (1998) categories of spiritual sensitivity (awareness-sensing, mystery-sensing and value-sensing) as experiential categories that point to such capabilities in young children. As with Hay and Nye, Champagne (2001) has noted that children appear to have relational and conscious intuitions at an early age. Very young children seem to be aware of, and have an implicit understanding of their relationship to, their environment long before they are able to name it.

Champagne (2001) has noted that these characteristics, or dimensions, were identifiable in each of the children she observed. For example, the experiences of the children observed belonged to the human realm. They were, at a cursory glance, ordinary and everyday experiences. Yet at the same time, each of these children's experiences transcended the human, pointing to something beyond. The children's search for unification and integrity was evident in their openness and eagerness to discover, and engage in their world. This pointed to the richer and more complex reality to which they were relating. Spirituality as a quality of consciousness was identifiable in each child's relational way of being – their sense of connection to others and to their world.

From her research, Champagne (2001) has raised several important issues regarding young children and spirituality. Chief among them was the question of how one might recognise and give witness to the spiritual dimension of what children express, particularly when their verbal language is limited and often needs to be translated. In acknowledging that further work needs to be undertaken, Champagne has maintained that one fundamental question that needs to be asked is whether adults "are willing to consider young children capable of making sense of their lives, capable of a creative way of addressing life which would have nothing to do with a mere repetition of what we would have taught them" (p. 86).

More recently Champagne (2003) has expanded upon her initial research by suggesting, from a phenomenological and hermeneutic approach, that children's spirituality is rooted in the concept of *being*. Analysis of the data of her research has highlighted three spiritual modes of the child's being – Sensitive, Relational and Existential.

The Sensitive mode refers to the way in which young children perceive their environment and the way in which they express themselves while living in that surrounding. It includes the perceptions and expressions of children through their different senses. Parents, care-givers, siblings and peers constitute a significant part

of the surrounding of young children with which they interact. The relational mode of being addresses the quality of such interactions from a spiritual perspective. The Existential mode of being refers to the experiencing of life in time and space. As sensitive and relational beings, young children are active participants in their own existence, for example, through games.

Champagne (2003) has argued that the sensitive, relational and existential modes of being have the capability of rendering significant adults in the lives of children – parents, educators – effective witnesses of their spirituality. Further, Champagne has agued that nurturing the spiritual lives of young children by being attentive to these modes of being may in turn enhance the spiritual awareness of those who care for them.

The Secret Spiritual World of Children – the Work of Tobin Hart

In a large scale research project American psychologist Tobin Hart (2003) collected indepth interviews from children, as well as written accounts from adults recollecting childhood experiences, that detailed spiritual moments and experiences of those individuals. Rejecting the assumptions of many psychologists that children cannot have spiritual lives prior to the development of formal reasoning, Hart's research suggested that children possess rich and formative spiritual lives.

Through his research, Hart (2003) identified five spiritual capacities through which children's spirituality seemed to naturally flow: wisdom, wonder/awe, the relationship between One's Self and the Other, seeing the invisible, and wondering in relation to the ultimate questions of life.

In Hart's (2003) research, wisdom referred to that way of knowing that emerges through an opening of heart and mind. While it is often assumed that wisdom derives from years of life experience, Hart has maintained that wisdom refers also to the child's capacity for "cutting to the heart of the matter. While they

may not have the language or thinking capacity of an adult, they have a capacity to open to the deep currents of consciousness" (p. 19).

Wonder refers to the way in which the world is sensed by children and involves an array of feelings such as awe, connection, insight as well as a deep sense of joy. While they can be difficult to describe, Hart (2003) has argued that experiences of wonder "serve as a cornerstone for a spiritual life" (p. 48). Further, Hart has maintained that during such experiences the boundaries can blur between Self and everything Other than Self. Hart recounted one's child's description of standing in the water at the beach, moving back and forth with the motion of the waves. When her father had asked what it was she was doing, she had stated "I was the water . . . I love it and it loves me. I don't know how else to say it" (p. 47). Such a description accords with the notion of spirituality as Ultimate Unity (de Souza, 2004a, 2004b), discussed in chapter one of this thesis. This child had experienced becoming one with Other. From this, Hart has concluded that although the spiritual has often been portrayed as separate from the world, the wonderings and experiences of this child indicate "that the other world is right here and right now" (p. 49).

The relationship between Self and Other, or in Hart's language, "between you and me" (p. 67) refers to the relational understanding of spirituality in which the spiritual life is lived out at the intersection between one's own life and that of Other. This relational understanding entails how one treats Other and how people treat one another. Relational spirituality is about "communion, connection, community and compassion" (p. 68). It is about the sense of compassion and empathy one has for Other. Despite some developmental theorists insisting that children tend to be self centred and are incapable of empathy and compassion, Hart has argued that young children do have a capacity to feel care and concern for Other, whether Other is to be found in a another human being, or in an aspect of nature:

> They do not have to wait until adulthood to act unselfishly, feel into another's pain, or share their heart. Their openness allows them to experience

deep interconnection with the world, and their compassion can arise very naturally. The capacities for separateness and connection, selfishness and compassion can exist simultaneously (p. 69).

Hart's (2003) notion of wondering entails a consideration of questions of ultimate concern, of ultimate meaning and value. Such questions could include "Why am I here?" or "What happens when I die?" Hart has argued that children are "natural philosophers" (p. 91) and that they frequently wonder about the larger existential questions of life. Hart has noted that for many people, their spiritual quest is focused and explored through the wonderings in relation to such questions. While acknowledging that psychologists like Piaget would maintain that children lack the ability to reason and reflect with any degree of sophistication, Hart has maintained that such an understanding is incomplete. While they may not possess the adult logic and language, Hart has argued that his research indicates children show a capacity for thoughtful consideration of existential questions of meaning and value, and that they are able to comprehend at a deep level.

Hart (2003) has contended that the universe is multidimensional and mysterious, beyond the ability of humans to measure or imagine. "Seeing the invisible" refers to the awareness of some children to experience some of these different dimensions. Hart's use of the term indicates "that in some way, children are tuning in to these more subtle levels of reality as they see visions, hear voices, feel energy, know things at a distance, and find insightful inspiration" (p. 115). Among the many instances cited by Hart to demonstrate this spiritual capacity, is Laura, a three-year-old child who sees lights and colours around people. Further, Laura's mother insisted that Laura was then able to interpret these colours, indicating what they meant about each person.

However, Hart (2003) has also issued a cautionary note in relation to seeing the invisible. He has warned of the possibility of becoming overly fascinated by such capabilities, maintaining that those who fixate on developing such psychic abilities

without simultaneously developing compassion, intellect and emotional maturity may become preoccupied with their own achievement, a feature that can ultimately be destructive of one's spiritual life. Developing one's spiritual potential means integrating and balancing the different aspects of one's Self:

> it is never our sheer capacities or our wondrous experiences that determine a spiritual life, it is what we do with them – what we learn and how we live – that is the measure of our spirituality. Profound events may be important milestones on our journey, and intuitive capacities may be a powerful and misunderstood way of knowing, but they become out of balance if not guided by love and wisdom (p. 144).

In other words, the focus of spirituality needs to be on the ordinary and everyday facets of life that might enable a person to relate to others. Capabilities like seeing the invisible can be detrimental unless they are balanced by compassion, empathy and the like, and enable the individual to better relate to Self and everything that is Other than Self.

Retrospective Spiritual Narratives – the work of Daniel Scott

Canadian scholar Daniel Scott (2004) has researched the spiritual dimension of young people's lives by collecting recalled childhood spiritual experiences as a means by which to explore the qualities and characteristics of the spirituality of the young. While the narratives collected by Scott, twenty-two in total, were from adults, many of them describe incidences from childhood. As with the work of Robinson (1977) and Hart (2003), Scott found that these narratives touched on a range of experiences, including death, mortality, visions, as well as perceptions and connections beyond Self.

Scott (2004) has noted that some of the story-tellers drew explicitly upon religious language in recounting their experience. For example Ben (six at the time of the experience) described suffering through a severe childhood infection, and

turned to God for help. He noted that "God and I were on first name terms!" (p. 69). Other participants in Scott's research drew upon the language available in their culture in describing their spiritual experience. For example, Merle (ten at the time of the experience) was winded in a fall from a wall, and heard an inner voice chanting over and over "Who am I?" (p. 70).

In presenting these experiences, Scott (2004) has noted that in many instances, they were lifeshaping for the individual. For example, Joyce (three at the time of the experience) described how the wonder of the full moon in the middle of the night has remained with her throughout her life: "For all my life I feel that I've been given a very precious gift: the moon, the sun, the earth, and us fed, warmed, and amazed in this universe" (p. 75). This accords with the work of James (1901/1977), who, as discussed in Chapter one of this thesis, argued that the spiritual experiences apperceived by the individual often remained vivid memories for the whole of the person's life. Nonetheless, Joyce, like many of the other participants in Scott's study, chose to keep her spiritual life private, maintaining that speaking of spiritual matters prompted others, particularly her parents, to persuade her to discard her inner life. The question of how adults respond to children's spiritual experience is viewed by Scott (2004) as crucial in terms of how the adult response can shape the lives of the children themselves, and consequently, their confidence in their consciousness and perception. He has maintained that children commonly have significant responses to the ordinary events of life, many of which could potentially be spiritual. Scott has maintained that children who apperceive spiritual experience need adults who can demonstrate the capacity to listen, and can "model their experience by telling their own stories, or who make an effort to recover lost skills and explore moments of ecstasy, fear or insight" (p. 77). For example, one of his participants, Rita (ten at the time of her experiences) commonly experienced premonition in dreams. However, rather than offering support and guidance, her grandmother acted so as to "construct a ring of silence" (p. 71) around these dreams, effectually repressing this aspect Rita's spirituality. As a result, Rita, no longer spoke to any one about her dreams. As she continued to dream, and without any

guidance from the significant adults in her life, her ability to process her perceptions was affected. She became fearful of the fact that she could dream about particular things, and felt confused by her lack of understanding or control of the situation.

Scott (2004) then has maintained that there needs to be willingness on the part of adults to take seriously and to listen to what children are saying or hinting at in order to acknowledge their experiences. He has maintained that by doing this, adults – parents, caregivers, educators – might come to see how common such spiritual experiences are. If such a climate of openness can be created, then "children may be freer to tell their stories and to nurture rather than stifle perceptions and sensibilities that they do have" (p. 78).

Summary and Significance for This Research Study

This chapter has presented some of the pertinent research into the spiritual dimension of children's lives that has been conducted in recent years. As noted, such research has emanated largely from the United States of America, Canada, and Britain. By way of summary, Table 5 presents a précis of the insights gained from the various insights reported on in this chapter.

Importantly, each of the research investigations outlined above attests to the existence of a spiritual dimension to the lives of children. Further, these investigations indicate that this spiritual dimension is active and can be nurtured if educators and care-givers have appropriate techniques for respectfully listening to (and for) and acknowledging seriously the individual characteristics of each child's spirituality.

Table 5
A précis of the insights into children's spirituality gained from the research reported on in this chapter

Research into children's spirituality relying on the use of religious language/concepts	
Heller	Coles
• Children from 4 different religious backgrounds • Individual interviews • Importance of listening to children	• Children from many religious backgrounds • Large scale research • Individual interviews • Use of religious language • Importance of listening to children

Research into children's spirituality focusing on perceptions, awareness and responses to everyday phenomena	
McCreery	Erricker and Erricker
• Young children (aged 5-6) • Small group semi-structured interviews • Incorporated a range of familiar experiences and activities • Avoided use of religious language when speaking with children • Importance of listening to children	• Children are inseparable from the experiences that shape their identity • Small group unstructured interviews • Focus on themes of loss and conflict • Children develop worldview from within their personal narrative • Importance of listening to children
Hay and Nye	Champagne
• Primary school children • Individual interviews structured around categories of spiritual sensitivity • 'relational consciousness' identified as the core of children's spirituality • 'personal signature' – detectable only if children are listened to • ability of children to draw on explicit and implicit religious language • social constructed pressures can suppress the expression of spirituality	• young children (kindergarten/ preschool) • observation of ordinary and familiar events in the lives of children • spirituality as being relational • importance of listing to AND listening for features of children's spirituality
Hart	Scott
• examination of written accounts as well as interviews (many of these with adults recalling events from childhood, as well as with children) • identifies 5 spiritual capacities in children: wisdom, wonder/awe, relationship between Self and Other, seeing the invisible, wondering about ultimate questions of life • the importance of listening	• recalled childhood experiences • participants used both explicit and implicit religious language • life-shaping experiences from childhood • the importance of listening • the importance of adult response to spiritual experiences of children

The findings of Hay and Nye (1998), Hart (2003) and Scott (2004) have also attested to the fact that children are capable of having profound spiritual experiences from an early age. Each child expresses his or her spirituality in different and unique

ways, and if this dimension of their lives is not listened to, nurtured and fostered, it can become suppressed and damaged by socially and historically constructed processes. According to these scholars, this can lead children, as they grow older, to repress, neglect and even discard the spirituality first experienced in a significant way during childhood.

Of particular importance in the work of Hay and Nye (1998) was the awareness that the use of traditional religious language may not be a distinguishing feature of children's spirituality. Accordingly, their research design was not dependent upon the use of religious language and concepts. Pertinent to this present study, however, is that they reported that the children with whom the field worker spoke did in fact display an ability and readiness to draw upon religious discourse of an explicit and implicit nature in discussing and exploring spiritual matters.

All of this is significant for this present research study in a number of ways. Firstly, each of the above investigations stresses the need to honour and listen attentively to the children themselves if insight into their spiritual lives is to be gained. Accordingly, this research study has acknowledged the spirituality ontologically present in young children and has focused on this aspect of their being. It has endeavoured to actively listen to, and for what the participating children said and did in terms of identifying characteristics indicative of their spirituality.

Secondly, the research discussed in this chapter has indicated that the spirituality of children can be experienced and expressed in and through the ordinary daily experiences of the children themselves. Therefore, in this present research study, common experiences and events that potentially might form a part of the children's daily lives have been drawn upon in the research design. In particular, Hay and Nye's (1998) categories of spiritual sensitivity; awareness sensing, mystery sensing and value sensing have provided a useful framework around which to structure discussion and activities that might comprise the experiences of children that could provide insight into their spirituality. This is discussed in further detail in

chapter four, which outlines how these categories of spiritual sensitivity were drawn upon and utilised in the research design.

Thirdly, many of the investigations outlined above indicate the children's ability and willingness to draw upon religious language in discussing spiritual matters. Even in those studies which were not dependent upon the use of a framework of religious concepts or language, children were both able and ready to draw upon religious concepts and language, either explicitly or implicitly in their discussions on spiritual matters. This present research study has taken three Australian Catholic primary schools as the setting. Although children in Australia who attend Catholic schools emanate from a variety of backgrounds, both religious and secular, it was quite possible that the children who participated in this research may have drawn upon religious language and concepts in their discussion of spiritual matters. In a Catholic school, the religious dimension permeates all aspects of the curriculum, both implicit as well as explicit (Ryan, 1997). If children who participated in this study have been immersed in such a setting where the permeation of the religious dimension is prevalent, they may have readily, and perhaps even naturally, drawn on implicit and explicit religious language in articulating something of their spiritual lives.

However, it needs to be noted that, in relation to this point and in following the advice particularly issued by McCreery (1996), this present research study took care so as to allow the children to use their own words in discussion, thereby avoiding language – particularly explicit religious language – that might have influenced their responses. The research design of this present study, outlined in detail in chapter four, has focused on the words and phases the children themselves used to express their spirituality.

The focus of this chapter has been on pertinent aspects of research the field of children's spirituality. It has indicated the significance of these for this present research study. Before moving into a detailed description of the research design, the

following chapter will explore the relationship between spirituality and education as it exists within contemporary Catholic primary classrooms in the Australian context. It is essential that this be done in order that the research described may be thoroughly understood with its local context.

CHAPTER THREE
THE CONTEXTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THIS RESEARCH STUDY: AN
EXAMINATION OF THE EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT IN RELATION TO
CHILDREN'S SPIRITUALITY AND SOME CONSIDERATIONS FOR
RESEARCHING SPIRITUALITY IN AUSTRALIA

Introduction

While the previous chapters have presented the conceptual frameworks that underpin contemporary perspectives of spirituality and reviewed relevant literature, this chapter relates this material to the immediate context of the research, that is, the contemporary Australian Catholic primary classroom. It explores some religious education curricula developed in more recent times that may be seen to address the spiritual dimension of students' lives. In addition, it reviews some theories that suggest there is a distinctive Australian spirituality. This latter undertaking is pertinent to this research, and will inform the research design.

The Context of Education in Some Western Countries

In recent decades the spiritual dimension of learning has been given greater emphasis in some western systems of education. For example, in countries such as Britain and Wales, measures have been taken to ensure that spirituality is addressed within the curriculum of both primary and secondary education in both state and Church related settings. This has emanated from the British 1944 Education Act and has been reinforced more recently in various educational documents. For example, in Britain, the National Curriculum Council (1993) released a document titled *Spiritual and Moral Development* stressing the need for schools to include spiritual education as an integral part of the curriculum. Similarly, the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted, 1994) produced in its handbook a statement indicating that all areas of the curriculum ought to contribute to the spiritual development of students.

In addition, a number of scholars working within the British context have sought to clarify and identify the ways in which spirituality might be addressed in the educational curriculum. For example, Erricker (2001) and Watson (2003, 2004) have discussed the ways in which spiritual education might occur as a part of citizenship education, while Cottingham (2005) has explored the ways in which the spiritual might be addressed in the history curriculum. Granger and Kendall-Seatter (2003) have explored the role that drama can play in facilitating spiritual development. They have reported that the children's "engagement in and reflection upon the drama are seen as vehicles to build a sense of community, increase self-knowledge, develop empathy, search for meaning and purpose and experience a sense of the transcendent" (p. 25). Other scholars who have explored the link between spirituality and various aspects of the curriculum include Broadbent (2004), Erricker and Erricker (2000), Kibble (2003), Morris (2001), Ota (2001), Priestley (1996), Wilson (2001), Winston (2002) and Wright (2004).

In countries such as the United States of America, a focus on the spiritual dimension of education has also developed in recent years. This has occurred particularly through the notion of holistic education, where education is envisaged not just in terms of a transmission of knowledge and skills, that is, cognition, but as inclusive of other dimensions of learning such as the affective (feelings, attitudes and values) and spiritual. Holistic education promotes not only intellectual development, but is also "shaped by a commitment to champion the identity and integrity of students" (Koegel, 2003, p. 13). Such an understanding gives place to cultivating the students' inner lives, that is, their spiritual dimension. Miller (2003) has maintained that holistic education focuses on meaning, connection, and the search for wholeness. While the beginning point in such an endeavour is the personal wholeness of the student, holistic education:

> stresses that everything exists in relationship . . . holistic [education] focuses on respect for the oneness of all of life and for what many think of as the spiritual dimensions of human existence . . . And beyond all phenomena that

we can experience directly . . . there is an ultimate source of meaning and reality, what we might think of as an all-encompassing context (Miller, 2003, p. 15).

The unity described by Miller (2003) reflects the understanding of spirituality that has been explored in chapter one of this thesis, and which this thesis now carries forward.

Moffett (1994) too has maintained that education is holistic in nature. He has argued that learning should centre primarily on personal growth and relations with others, and with nature, which entail spiritual development. Moffett has argued that questions in relation to the nature of the world and the purpose of life should underpin education just as they underlie the daily activities of people. For Moffett, "Spirituality pays. So educate for it. No society can survive if it does not function holistically . . . Thought that is not spiritual is intellectually inferior because it is too partial… [there is a] lack of holistic perspective" (p. 43).

As the founder of the ChildSpirit Institute in Georgia, Atlanta, Hart's (2003) concern with children's spirituality has extended beyond the classroom environment. He has proposed a spiritual curriculum underpinned by ten principles for use by parents and caregivers as well as by educators:

- Who am I?
- To thine own self be true;
- What am I here to give?
- What am I here to learn?
- Finding my voice;
- Mastering myself;
- Seeing our future;
- Where am I now?
- Hearing the inner voice, and
- Listen with your heart.

These ten principles provide ways of empowering the spirituality of children. They are not specific to any one religious or cultural tradition. Rather, they "cut into the deep structures of human life that cut across religious and cultural particularities . . . and provide touchstones for parents and friends in the midst of a teachable moment" (pp. 173-174).

The Context of Education in Australia

In Australia, there are three major systems of education. There is the state, or public system, funded by the state and federal governments, and which, since its inception in the middle of the nineteenth century, has generally sought to maintain education as a secular institution (Buchanan, 2003). This public system, particularly in the state of Victoria in which this present research study is situated, has had no inclusion of a spiritual dimension of learning in its formal curriculum documents. In recent times however, a national framework has been proposed outlining nine values as being foundational for Australian schooling, and indeed these values can be seen as expressions of connectedness. The nine values are: care and compassion, doing your best, fair go, freedom, honesty and trustworthiness, integrity, respect, responsibility, as well as understanding, tolerance and inclusion (Curriculum Corporation, 2005). As this framework is relatively new it may be some time until the implications and challenges for learning and teaching are realised.

The second system of education in Australia is the Catholic sector. This is a large system of education comprising a significant number of Catholic primary and secondary schools. The Catholic system was established by bishops of Australia during the nineteenth century in response to government initiatives to extend secular schooling to all children (Ryan, 1997). The founding of these schools provided an alternative for Catholic families where not only would religion be taught on a daily basis, but where "a Catholic atmosphere would permeate . . . the whole school experience" (p. 134). It is estimated that at the present time 180,000 students in the state of Victoria in Australia attend Catholic schools (Catholic Education Office,

Melbourne, 2005). While these schools are sponsored by the Catholic Church, they have, since the 1970s received increasing amounts of government funding. This has meant that, in addition to teaching the Catholic faith tradition, they have sought to implement various state and federal government educational initiatives, since these bodies provide funding to the Catholic school system.

The third system of schooling in Australia is the independent system. This comprises largely, although not solely, denominational schools associated with religious traditions other than Catholic, such as the Anglican and the Uniting Churches. These are largely private and elite secondary colleges, funded in part by the government, but also by the tuition fees set for students by the schools' governing bodies. Also there are a growing number of Christian schools which can be classified as belonging to this third system of schooling in Australia. Such schools do not adhere to any one denomination of Christianity, such as Catholicism or Anglican, but are rather more eclectic, with students whose backgrounds may emanate from a number of different Christian traditions. Constitutionally, parents of children have held the right to decide which of these three systems of schooling will best meet the needs of their children. In many instances, the high fee structures often set by the Independent schools have not acted as a deterrent for parents to send their children to those schools. For instance, McLaughlin (2005) has noted that many Catholic families are being attracted to non-Catholic Independent schools. In spite of the high fee structure associated with many Independent schools in Australia, McLaughlin has suggested that approximately 30% of students in the more elite Independents schools are Catholic.

Of these three systems of schooling, it has largely been the Catholic and, in many instances the Independent systems that have articulated a concern for the spiritual development of students. However, this may be seen as problematic for two reasons. Firstly, there has been little attempt to describe what is meant by spirituality. The assumption seems to have been that spirituality is somehow synonymous with religion, and that it may be seen as an expression of one's faith.

For instance, with regard to Catholic schools, students' spirituality may have been understood to be nurtured when, for example, they attended Mass, prayed the Rosary, attended a retreat or engaged in other devotional activities. Such an understanding of spirituality pertains solely to religion, and to belief in God. In light of the contemporary understandings of this word, and descriptions of spirituality that have been offered in chapter one of this thesis, and which are being carried forward in this present research, this understanding of spirituality would appear to be narrow.

Secondly, and perhaps because of the lack of articulation of what might be meant by spirituality and its association solely with religion, there has tended to be an assumption that the spirituality of students in Catholic schools was largely addressed through the subject area of religious education, rather than through all areas of the curriculum. Therefore, to a large extent, in Catholic schools, religious education has been understood to be the greater sphere in which a narrow religious understanding of spirituality might emerge and be nurtured.

Crawford and Rossiter (2003) have noted that while there have been some attempts in more recent times to acknowledge a broader understanding of spirituality and that attempts to address the spiritual dimension across the whole curriculum have existed in some quarters, there has not been enough "progression from intention to practice" (p. 2). One example of an across curriculum approach to spirituality in the Australian Catholic school context might include the Ignatian Pedagogy in Jesuit Schools (International Commission on the Apostolate of Jesuit Education, 1993). This pedagogy sought to draw upon a mixture of approaches to values learning and growth within the existing curricula rather than by adding new courses. Incorporating the dimensions of context, experience, reflection, action and evaluation, a key goal was to bring about "a radical transformation not only in the way people think and act, but of the way they live in the world" (# 19), and so for the student to evaluate her or his life in a relationship with God. However, this approach was limited to Jesuit schools, the majority of which provide secondary education for students.

Perhaps another example could include the program *A Sense of the Sacred* (Catholic Education Office, Sydney, 1993), developed for Catholic secondary schools. This program attempted to infuse what it termed as "Gospel values" into secondary school subject areas such as economics, business studies, geography, science and history. It was envisaged that such a process would result in a new expression of what it termed "Christian spirituality". However, this program did not explicitly describe an understanding of spirituality, using instead the phrase "Gospel values". While the term "Gospel values" may be interpreted as including a relational dimension, seen for example in Christ's command to love one another, its usage is limited to a Christian context, since the term "Gospel values" emanates from Christianity. If spirituality is to be encompassed in such a term, then possibly spirituality has been understood in a manner limiting it to a particular expression of religion, rather than in relation to the contemporary understandings that have been detailed in this thesis. As well, this program was also designed for the secondary context of Catholic schooling.

With the exception of these across curricular approaches, nurturing the spirituality of students has then largely been seen as taking place through the religious education curriculum. However, this too has proved to be problematic. Outcomes based approaches which are prevalent in the areas of literacy and numeracy in Australian primary education have impacted upon religious education. Since the mid 1990s (Ryan, 1998), religious education too has begun to place emphasis on observable competencies. This has entailed a clear focus on the cognitive dimension of the curriculum, often to the exclusion of other domains of learning, such as the affective and spiritual. Outcome-based approaches in religious education have impacted largely upon secondary education, but they have also influenced approaches to religious education in the primary context. Such approaches have been criticised within Australia for presenting a narrow and constricted curriculum, for effectually deskilling educators, and for "a marked lack of attention to theories of teaching and learning" (Ryan, 1998, p. 17). As a corrective, Welbourne (2000) has emphasised the need for religious educators to

bring professional judgement and discernment to bear on religious education curricula that are structured on staged outcomes. Without such discernment, "the educator runs the risk of devaluing critical intellectual work of the profession and becomes a technician controlled by instrumental solutions" (p. 1). The fact that outcomes based approaches to curriculum in religious education seem to place little emphasis on the nurturing of student's spirituality has also become a critique of such approaches within the Australian context (de Souza, 2001, 2004a; de Souza & Hyde, 2003; Hack, 2004; Hyde, 2004c; Liddy, 2002). Therefore, while spirituality may have been perceived as being addressed through the religious education curriculum, current outcomes based approaches may have effectually impeded this.

Religious Education as a Key Learning Area for Nurturing Spirituality

de Souza (2001, 2004a) has argued that curriculum in religious education ought to place an equal emphasis on the cognitive, affective and spiritual dimensions of learning, with the associated processes of perceiving, thinking, feeling and intuiting. While each of these three domains is relevant for all disciplines across the curriculum, de Souza has maintained that they are particularly pertinent to religious education in Australia "given the rediscovery of a spirituality outside religion for so many young people and their parents in today's world" (de Souza, 2004a, p. 23).

de Souza (2004a) has argued that the cognitive dimension, which refers to the knowledge, skill, abilities and understandings in relation to the content of the particular curriculum area, needs to be complemented by an equal emphasis on the affective (feelings) and spiritual (inner reflecting/intuiting) dimensions of learning. The importance of the affective dimension has been attested to in recent literature which has explored the notion of "emotional intelligence" (e.g., Goleman, 1995; Mayer, 1999; Mayer, Salovey & Caruso, 2000). The pertinence of the spiritual dimension has been explored particularly in relation to the notion of "spiritual intelligence" as advocated by scholars such as Emmons (1999, 2000) and Zohar and Marshall (2000). de Souza (2004a) has argued for the inclusion of affective and

spiritual learning to ensure that student learning does not remain at the cognitive level, but that it rather engages the inner core of the students, where it might lead to an outward expression of altered thinking or behaviour:

> If learning is to go beyond the surface, it must touch the 'soul' of the student. It must reach that core where the learning becomes transformed by an inner response which may and should lead to outward expressions of changed thinking and behaviour . . . The motion is then perpetual, moving from the initial perceptions at the surface through thoughts and feelings that merge with previous learning and instincts at the centre before returning to the surface in transformed expression (p. 27).

This transformed outward expression to which de Souza (2004a) has referred reflects the understanding of spirituality which is being carried forward in this thesis. Spirituality is the outward expression of this inner response in terms of how one might act in relation to the human and nonhuman world. It is the outward expression of a sense of connectedness with the Other.

<p style="text-align:center">Attempts to Place an Emphasis on the Cognitive, Affective and Spiritual
Dimensions in Religious Education</p>

There have been some attempts in more recent times to develop religious education curricula within the Australian context that place an emphasis on the cognitive, affective and spiritual dimensions of learning. Such curricula may then address the spiritual development of students in Catholic primary schools. For example, the three country Catholic dioceses in Victoria (at the time of writing), as well as the Catholic Archdiocese of Hobart in Tasmania, have been developing guidelines for religious education influenced by Groome's Shared Christian Praxis approach (Groome, 1980, 1991). The Archdiocese of Canberra/Goulburn, as well as the Diocese of Parramatta have also developed a syllabus for primary religious education influenced by this same approach. While it needs to be acknowledged that

Christian Shared Praxis did not explicitly have as its original intention the nurturing of spirituality, Groome's foundational principles – inform, form, and transform – have the potential to address the cognitive, affective and spiritual dimensions of learning. This potential has been clearly recognised in the Archdiocese of Hobart, where the new religious education curriculum *Good News for Living* (2005) has made specific reference to the spiritual dimension of learning.

While the process has been refined over recent years, Groome (1991) has described Christian praxis as:

> a participative and dialogical pedagogy in which people reflect critically on their own historical place in time…have access together to Christian Story/Vision, and personally appropriate in community with creative intent of renewed praxis in Christian faith towards God's reign for all creation (p. 135).

It comprises five movements which have been adapted by the different dioceses who have drawn upon this process. These movements centre on naming the present or existing action or situation, reflecting upon the present action, making accessible the Christian Story and Vision, making links between the Christian Story or vision with the participants' own stories and visions, and a response for lived Christian faith. When these movements are applied to religious education, it may become an enterprise involving information which empowers, or forms people to transform themselves and the world in the light of the Christian story (Bezzina, Gahan, McLenaghan & Wilson, 1997). That is, through *informing* about the present situation and the Christian Story/Vision (the cognitive dimension), the individual's attitudes, values, feelings and reactions may be *formed* (affective dimension) and could lead the individual to bring about change in her or his own life and the community – *transformation* (spiritual dimension).

However, Ryan (1997b) and Rossiter (1997) have argued that the classroom application of the Shared Christian Praxis approach to religious education is limited. Unlike Groome's vision which presumes that the context of such an approach comprises one in which people freely come together to share and to nurture each other in their Christian faith, the context of the Catholic primary school classroom is one of diversity of culture. Classrooms in Australian Catholic schools comprise students from a wide range of both religious and secular backgrounds. Students have not come together freely, nor can it be presumed that they necessarily have any intention of sharing their faith.

While adaptations have been made by those dioceses which have adopted a Shared Christian Praxis approach, the above critique serves to highlight the potential deficiency of the approach to religious education in effectively addressing the spiritual dimension of learning.

Approaches to Religious Education in the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne and Sydney

In the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne and Sydney, the materials developed for use in the early years of primary schooling, which form a part of the *To Know, Worship and Love* series (2000; 2001; 2004) have drawn specifically on the scholarship of Jerome Berryman and Sofia Cavalletti, and may in part address the spiritual development of students within the primary religious education classroom. Titled "The Good Shepherd Experience", this curriculum has been reported to have connections with some of the contemporary theories of children's spirituality discussed in chapters one and two of this thesis, particularly in relation to wonder, play and imagination, and using religious language and concepts (Hyde, 2004b). "The Good Shepherd Experience" outlines a learning and teaching process structured around four phases: telling the story, listening and reflecting, proclaiming God's Word, and responding. Through this process, significance is placed upon the need for a prepared environment through which students can respond to the stories

of Scripture through moments of wondering, stillness and quiet, as well as through the use of three-dimensional figures and play materials.

Wonder and Mystery Sensing

The listening and reflecting phase of the suggested learning and teaching process of "The Good Shepherd Experience" aims to evoke a sense of wonder in relation to the Scripture story of the topic being explored. It can be associated with Hay and Nye's (1998) notion of mystery sensing, pertaining to the wonder, awe and fascination which is characteristic of children as they interact with the world around them. In terms of religious education, Hyde (2004b) has noted that wonder and imagination may offer a way of talking with children about the notion of transcendence, and about the Transcendent (God). The "tool" for enabling this to occur is the use of a number of *"I wonder…"* reflections. Derived from the work of Berryman (1991), these are open-ended statements that aim to stimulate the children's sense of wonder in relation to the Scripture story being explored. They are intended as a way of enabling children to uncover the essence of a particular Scripture story, and to discover its possible impact upon their own lives. The teacher is invited to become a co wonderer, and to engage in a sense of wonder with her or his students:

> When the teacher is truly wondering, the children sense wonder in the air. It manifests itself in the playfulness present in the room. Permission and reinforcement are present to encourage it. When the teacher enters religious language with wonder, he or she shows the children by example how to open the creative process (Berryman, 1991, p. 62).

Play and Imagination

The responding phase of the suggested learning and teaching process of "The Good Shepherd Experience" entails the invitation initially for students to respond to the Scripture story in stillness, or silent prayer. This is followed by the opportunity to engage in a number of sensory activities, many involving the use of three-

dimensional materials – an indispensable component of the learning and teaching process. In drawing upon the Montessorian view of learning, both Cavalletti (1983) and Berryman (1991) have advocated the use of such play materials. As well as providing a tactile and sensory experience, these materials enable the students to reflect on the Scripture story independently of the educator, to internalise and make meaning from it.

Here also are to be found connections with contemporary theories of children's spirituality. Hay and Nye (1998) have noted that the concept of mystery sensing also involves the use of imagination. For young children, imagination is the means by which they are able to make meaning and sense of their experience. It may provide "an opportunity to transcend – to go beyond the ordinary – to discover for themselves the meaning and value of their experiences" (Hyde, 2004b, p. 145). When students in the classroom context are playing with the three-dimensional materials, they are engaging in opportunities to imagine, to transcend and to make sense of the Scripture story in ways meaningful to them. In their imagination, play and manipulation of these materials, "religious educators may at times encounter a window to this facet of children's spirituality" (Hyde, 2004b, p. 145).

The Ability to Use Religious Language and Concepts

Spanning all phases of the learning and teaching process of "The Good Shepherd Experience" is the belief that children possess an ability to draw upon and use religious language and concepts in expressing their spirituality. Cavalletti (1983) has attested to numerous occasions on which very young children have used religious language, even when such children came from families which lacked an explicit religious background. For example, Cavalletti recounted an episode involving a three-year-old child whose family were not religious and had never spoken of God, nor attended Church. When the child questioned her father as to the origins of the world:

Her father replied, in a manner consistent with his ideas, with a discourse that was materialistic in nature; then he added: "However, there are those who say that all this comes from a very powerful being, and they call him God. At this point the little girl began to run like a whirlwind around the room in a burst of joy, and exclaimed: "I knew what you told me wasn't true; it is Him, it is Him! (p. 32).

From such observations, Cavalletti (1983) concluded that a child's relationship with God exceeds the intellectual plane, and is founded rather on a deeper existential level. She maintained that children have an extraordinary capacity to experience the presence of God and to develop a conscious relationship with God if given the guidance and encouragement in developing their religious language to enable them to give expression to this relationship. This can be seen to accord with the contentions of Hay and Nye (1998) that were discussed in chapter two, who maintained that children do draw upon religious discourse to express their spirituality, either explicitly or implicitly.

Berryman (1995) too has placed importance upon the acquisition of religious language, maintaining it to be essential if children are to transcend the existential limits to their lives. Such existential limits include the personal experience of death, a sense of isolation, the need to create meaning, as well as an appreciation of what it means as a human being to be free. Berryman has argued that although children experience and speak of them in more simplistic ways, these existential limits are just as fundamental to the lives of children as they are to adults. He has argued that religious educators need to provide opportunities for children to acquire and use religious language in order to find meaning and so transcend these existential limits. The *"I wonder…"* reflections of "The Good Shepherd Experience", or "Group Wondering" as Berryman has termed this, may provide such opportunities. Berryman has suggested that there are four types of meaning that religious language can provide for children – parables, silence, sacred stories, and liturgical acts. All

four of these are represented within the various units of work that comprise "The Good Shepherd Experience".

While "The Good Shepherd Experience" has been critiqued elsewhere in relation to its reported connections with spirituality (e.g., Hyde 2004b), it also needs to be noted that this approach to religious education is aimed only at the early years of primary schooling. As well, elements of this process can produce conditioned responses from students, particularly in relation to the "I wonder…" reflections. Wonder is something which ought to occur more spontaneously (Melchert & Proffitt, 1998). Although aspects of this process can be adapted and included for older children, the *To Know, Worship and Love* (2000, 2001, 2004) curriculum, of which "The Good Shepherd Experience" is a component, places a far greater emphasis on the cognitive dimension of learning from the middle primary to the senior secondary components of the series. As such, de Souza (2004a) has noted that the approach becomes far more content driven, and hence an exercise in cognitive learning. This becomes explicitly evident in the secondary materials in which the curriculum framework is derived from Bloom's taxonomy, "built on an understanding of knowledge as functioning within categories of remembering; understanding; applying, analysing; evaluating; and creating" (Engebretson & Pagon, 2001, p. 20).

Although "The Good Shepherd Experience" may make a positive contribution to nurturing students' spirituality in the junior primary religious education context, such nurturing needs to extend further. Nurturing spirituality ought perhaps to take account not only of wondering and play, but of the experiences of the students themselves which, in light of the literature discussed in chapter two of this thesis, may be rendered as spiritual.

Situating Religious Education within the Broader Sphere of Spirituality

Perhaps the approach outlined above is problematic because it envisions spirituality (potentially) to be nurtured within religious education. It posits that by knowing the content of the faith tradition, students might come to respond in faith and so nurture their spirituality. In such a process, dimensions of learning other than the cognitive tend not to be emphasised. It may not necessarily be that they are not valued, but rather that they are viewed as secondary to the acquisition of knowledge and skills in relation to the Catholic faith tradition because religious education is understood to be the greater realm in which spirituality might be nurtured.

An approach to religious education is required then, that places a greater and more consistent emphasis on the affective and spiritual development of students along side the cognitive dimension of learning. While not suggesting one explicit programmed methodology, the work of Griffith (2003) offers an alternative perspective to the above approaches. Griffith has maintained that, in terms of Christian religious education, it is possible to situate the activity of religious education within the larger ambit of spirituality. Griffith has argued that such an undertaking leads to a more holistic understanding of the nature of religious education, and offers a more enhanced sense of purpose of this activity. Griffith has maintained that knowledge of the content of the Christian faith (the cognitive dimension) is important, but that by itself is insufficient. The fullness of Christian life "requires embracing one's spiritual potential, integrating one's heart and intellect in a stance of lived faith, and being committed to embodying gospel values in the world" (p. 58). That is to say, Griffith has placed an emphasis on the cognitive, affective and spiritual dimensions of religious education.

Griffith (2003) has further argued that when religious education is situated within the larger ambit of spirituality, educating for spiritual maturity becomes the primary goal. The identification of spiritual maturity as the purpose of religious education is to focus primarily on relational life with self, others, the environment,

and with God. Being intentional about this will entail religious educators including the practice of discernment, contemplation and self knowledge in their learning and teaching:

> If the practice of discernment is central in coming to spiritual maturity, then one's pedagogical approach . . . should allow for a careful discernment of the full subject matter being taught, and a built-in discernment of one's lived experience. If spiritual maturity requires a habit of contemplation, enabling one to become what it is he or she beholds, then the teaching/learning event should include time for gazing, for beholding . . . if self-knowledge is a constitutive dimension of spiritual maturity, then inviting participants to . . . pause before their own experience, to reflect on it, to pay attention to the movements within . . . becomes a key role of the [religious educator] (pp. 58-59).

In Griffith's (2003) work can perhaps be seen the potential for designing curriculum in religious education for Catholic primary schools in Australia. It acknowledges the distinction between religion and spirituality, yet suggests that religious education can be set within the larger expanse of spirituality, and posits the possibility of planning a curriculum that has as its aim not just a knowledge of the content of the faith tradition, but rather, spiritual maturity. Such a program would also recognise the pluralism and diversity of the students' background (a common feature in many Australian primary schools) and draw upon these, thereby enabling them to create meaning within a holistic framework. It would also recognise and place emphasis upon the cognitive, affective and spiritual dimensions of learning.

Some Pertinent Considerations in Researching Children's Spirituality in an Australian Context.

The context in which this research was conducted was that of Australian Catholic primary schools. It has been argued by some Australian scholars that there

exists a distinctive flavour to what has been described as "an Australian spirituality" (Kelly, 1990; Ranson, 2002; Tacey, 1995, 2000). If this is the case, the notion of an Australian spirituality needs to be briefly explored since the expression of spirituality of the children who took part in this present study may have been influenced by such a concept. There are three particular elements to this notion of an Australian spirituality that may have an impact upon this present study. Each of these is discussed below.

A Spirituality of Silence

In examining the possible features of an Australian spirituality, Kelly (1990) has noted that any sense of spirituality of Australian people has largely been a spirituality of silence. Australian people, according to Kelly, are unlikely to articulate their spirituality in terms of intellectual discourse. Matters pertaining to the deeper questions of life and of meaning tend to be avoided by Australians, whose culture has little patience for those dimensions of life that appear non-evident. At times it can seem as though:

> anything ultimately meaningful, cannot be a fitting matter for conversation…Besides, if the sun is shinning and the barbecue is sizzling, if the beer is cool and the waves are thumping down there in the surf, moments of metaphysical reflection are necessarily rare! (p. 9).

However, Kelly (1990) has suggested that there may be a depth to this characteristic silence. He has argued that this silence, or inability to articulate the spiritual, does not necessarily indicate an absence of depth in the spiritual domain. There is, perhaps, something about the Australian person that prefers to communicate in silences rather than in words:

> Perhaps we feel safer with the great things left unsaid, meaning them only in silence . . . Ultimate truths are not the exclusive possession of anyone; nor

are they to be merely taken on anyone's authority. For someone to really know these things is to keep a decent reserve, to hold what is sacred in silence. I suppose it blends with all the other silences about us – the haunting silence of the bush, the daunting silence of the desert; the surrounding silence of the sea (p. 15).

Similarly, Ranson (2002) has argued that the silence, or reluctance of the Australian person to speak about the spiritual, does not necessarily indicate an absence of spirituality. It is in their instinctual ability to seek the divine in the ordinariness of life, Ranson has suggested that "Australians honour such [spiritual] experiences by refusing to clothe them with many words, preferring a spiritual sensibility that is quiet, unobtrusive and which remains deeply connected with the ordinariness of life" (p. 68). It would be erroneous, Ranson has stated, to mistake such a reserve for indifference or antipathy.

A Divided National Psyche

It has been the contention of Kelly (1990) that a major obstacle to any expression of spirituality on the part of the Australian person is the dominance of secular society. For although Australian culture has come more and more to perceive the need for a transcendent dimension to life, the official establishment of Australia remains one of secularism, which, according to Kelly, has sought to suppress questions pertaining to the spiritual. In the public arena, the spiritual and the religious have no place. These have been relegated to the private sphere of the individual's existence. In doing so, the dominant culture of Australian society has encouraged and maintained the notion of a spirituality of silence. It has consigned the spiritual to "the domain of what tends to remain unspoken amidst our usual pre-occupations, habitual compromises and strident confrontations" (p. 16).

Tacey (2000) has further clarified the above notion by positing that the national psyche of Australia is divided between two levels of reality. On the public

level, Australia is a contemporary secular society. The political and social life of the country strives to reflect this notion. However, Tacey has contended that privately, that is, in the experience of the individual, a spirituality is encountered which is expressed not religiously or intellectually, but holistically, in the ordinariness of everyday experiences. This expression of spirituality, of the individual's inner life, exists, despite the nationally projected image of a secular public life that attempts to suppress it:

> The inner life . . . will always tend to compensate the one-sidedness of the dominant consciousness, so that whereas Australian public life is secular and rationalistic, our inner life is quite naturally spiritual and even mystical . . . The inner life will always embody those aspects that have been repressed by the governing style (p. 252).

This inner life and vision, Tacey (2000) has argued, most typically finds expression in the work of the Australian artists – painters, musicians, writers and poets, who have recognised this spiritual dimension of Australian life, and who have acted as prophets, creating works which have reflected the spiritual themes of Australia.

Therefore, while there exists a spiritual dimension to the lives of Australian people, it may not be immediately evident because the public persona is shaped by the governing story of secularism. In light of this, Tacey (2000) has suggested that an Australian spirituality is not likely to be expressed through traditional religious language. The secular realm of Australian life has superseded and replaced the religious discourse of the institutional Church. It is therefore more likely to be expressed outside of the mainstream religious traditions.

A Spirit of Place

Tacey (1995, 2000) has maintained that in Australia it is the landscape that carries and gives rise to the experience of the sacred. Spirituality is linked closely to

the earth – a spirit of place – which colours all that Australians do. In contrast to the notion of a spirit that descends from above, Tacey (2000) has stated:

> In Australia, the country of reversals, the upside-down land, whose symbol is the tilted Southern Cross, the celestial realm appears 'below' us, in the earth itself, in the soil, rock, and plants of this ancient land. Here, the spirit has not departed the earth and retreated to its heavenly abode. The spirit is in the earth, under our feet and below our normal level of vision and understanding (p. 94).

Australian spirituality is then viewed as being of the earth, grounded in the ordinariness of everyday activity and phenomena, and linked to the physical reality of people's lives. Because this spirituality is non-otherworldly, non-dualistic, and linked to the here-and-now, it is perhaps difficult to imagine. Australians in general are then unlikely to articulate their spirituality in formal ways. The Australian experience of the spirit is, as Tacey has maintained, existential.

Kelly (1990) has similarly held such a view, maintaining that Australian people are growing in their awareness of their connectedness to the land. The Australian landscape is "our place; the place where our lives are earthed and grounded. We are coming to reverence it as our own 'holy land'" (p. 103).

Summary and Significance for This Research Study

This chapter has examined the contextual framework for this research study. It has noted that, for the most part in Australia, religious education has been perceived as the subject area in which the spirituality of students might best be nurtured. As well, this chapter has discussed the problematic nature of this perception. Although some religious education curricula within Australia comprise connections with theories involving children's spirituality, such programs remain

potentially ineffective because they have presumed that students in Catholic classrooms are willing and able to share faith (as can be the case with curricula modelled on the Shared Christian Praxis approach), or as the program extends beyond the early years of schooling, far greater emphasis is placed upon the cognitive dimension of learning (as is the case with the *To Know, Worship and Love* series). As well, this chapter has suggested that situating religious education within the greater ambit of spirituality may provide a means by which to address the balance between the cognitive, affective and spiritual dimensions of learning, and to nurture the spirituality of students within the classroom context. In addition, this chapter has also explored the notion of a distinctive Australian spirituality.

This is significant for this present study. If, within Australian Catholic schools, religious education is perceived as largely being the subject area in which spirituality is nurtured, then an understanding and identification of the characteristics of children's spirituality may enable religious education curricula to be developed that situate the activity of religious education within the wider sphere of spirituality, providing learning and teaching frameworks which specifically address such characteristics. In this way, not only the cognitive, but also the affective and spiritual dimensions of learning might be addressed through the religious education curricula.

As well, the possibility may exist to extend the nurturing of children's spirituality in the classroom context beyond religious education to include aspects of the broader curriculum. The characteristics of children's spirituality identified in this present study would not be limited to religious education. An understanding of these characteristics on the part of classroom teachers could mean that they are in positions to plan learning and teaching strategies as a part of the broader curriculum that may be effective in nurturing the spirituality of their students within the classroom context.

The notion of an Australian spirituality brought to bear some pertinent considerations for undertaking research into children's spirituality in the Australian

context and these have particular implications for this present research study. If an Australian spirituality is characterised by silence (Kelly, 1990), then it may be that the children who participated in this present study would not have had an identifiable language for expressing their spirituality. This, along with Tacey's (2000) notion of the existential nature of Australian spirituality (a spirit of place), could mean that insight into these children's spirituality would need to be gained by what these children did and how they may have acted, rather than solely by what they might have said in conversation. Therefore, the research design would need to include opportunities for the children to engage in activity, and for the researcher to observe the children – their activity, and their silences, gestures, facial expressions and body language if insight into their spirituality was to be gleaned. In particularly, activities which may have enabled the children to express their sense of connectedness with the land would need to be included in the research design.

The dominant and public secular nature of Australian life (Kelly, 1990; Tacey, 2000) may have served to reinforce the understanding that the children who participated in this present research may have had the spiritual dimension of their lives suppressed to some extent, or relegated to their inner lives. If aspects of the spiritual dimension of the Australian person are to be found within the inner life, then the research design would need to include a means by which the children in this present study might have had opportunities to express aspects of their inner lives, either through discussion or activity. The means by which the researcher sought to achieve this is also outlined in greater detail in chapter four.

The conceptual and contextual background, as well as the review of literature that informs the research reported on in this thesis has now been presented. Chapter one explored understandings of the word "spirituality" from a number of different perspectives, and has described how it is to be understood within this thesis. Spirituality is understood in this present study to be a natural human predisposition involving a path towards the realisation of one's true Self, in which, ultimately, Self is unified with Self and with everything that is Other than Self. Spirituality concerns

the relational dimension of a person's being. It entails the relationality and unity that can exist between Self and Other as encountered in the human and nonhuman world. Spirituality is the outward expression of this sense of connectedness in terms of the way in which one acts towards Other as encountered in the human and nonhuman world, and possibly towards the Transcendent.

Chapter two identified some pertinent examples of literature and research in the field of children's spirituality which have been conducted outside of Australia. These have influenced the research design of this present study, described in detail in chapter four of this thesis.

Chapter three has described the relationship between spirituality and education in Australia, noting how within the Catholic primary system, the subject area of religious education has largely been understood to be the curriculum area in which the spirituality of students might be nurtured. Such understandings have tended to assume a narrow view of spirituality as being religious, that is, as possible expressions of faith, rather that the understanding of spirituality that is being carried forward in this present study. It also presented some relevant considerations for undertaking research in children's spirituality within the Australian context in terms of an Australian spirituality. These have had an important bearing on the research design for this present study.

The ground has now been prepared for an outline and justification of the research design chosen in this present study for identifying the characteristics of children's spirituality in Australian Catholic primary schools, and this is the task of the following chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR
THE RESEARCH DESIGN

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify some characteristics of the spirituality of children in Australian Catholic primary schools. This chapter discusses and justifies the research design for this present study. It outlines the epistemology and theoretical perspective, as well as the research methodology and methods pertinent to this present study. It details the working design, and discusses the manner in which the schools and children were invited to participate in this research. In addition the selection of particular observation and conversation techniques are described, and a rationale for these particular selections is provided. This study is qualitative in nature, and therefore, the ways in which these conversations and observations were reflected upon and interpreted are also presented.

As discussed in chapter two, there is virtually no published research that details the spiritual life of Australian children of primary school age. The studies which have explored the field of children's spirituality have emanated largely from Britain, Canada and the USA, and were detailed in Chapter two of this thesis. Therefore, international research outside Australia has been drawn upon to inform the design and interview guide that was developed to facilitate conversation with children who participated in this study.

Qualitative Paradigm

This present study is situated within the qualitative paradigm. Creswell (1994) has described a qualitative study as "an enquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting"

(pp. 1-2). Qualitative research holds that reality is subjective and dimensional as seen by the participants in a given study. It generally upholds and gives credibility to the collection of thoughts, perceptions and experiences of those participants in a particular study.

Epistemological Foundation

The epistemological foundation which underpins this present study is that of constructionism. Constructionism holds that all knowledge, and thus all meaningful reality, "is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world" (Crotty, 1998, p. 42). Whereas objective epistemologies consider truth to be identifiable with precision and certainty, and subjective epistemologies consider truth to be imposed upon the object by the subject, constructionism maintains that phenomena and their meanings are in the process of continually being constructed by social actors. Knowledge is understood to be indeterminate. Social phenomena and their categories are not only fashioned through social interaction, but they are also in a state of constant revision (Bryman, 2001).

Crotty (1998) has noted that constructionism regards truth as emanating from the relationship between the subject and object. That is to say, the relationship between the researcher and the object of the researcher's interest is viewed as being central in establishing human beliefs and ideas:

Meaning is not discovered it is constructed. In this understanding of knowledge, it is clear that different people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon. Isn't this precisely what we find when we move from one era to another or from one culture to another? In this view of things, subject and object emerge as partners in the generation of meaning (p. 9).

Bryman (2001) has supported the above understanding, maintaining that the researcher's own account of the social world must necessarily be understood as a construction. That is, the researcher always presents "one specific version of social reality, rather than one that can be regarded as definitive" (p. 18).

Constructionist epistemology was integral to this present research study. The phenomenon under consideration – characteristics of children's spirituality – was such that the identification of these would require the researcher's interpretation of the life expressions of the participants, whereby meaning would be generated through the researcher's engagement with and reflection upon the texts of this study. The understanding of such an interpretation is discussed in greater detail in the following sections of this chapter.

<div align="center">Theoretical Perspective</div>

The theoretical perspective is understood to be the philosophical stance which lies behind the methodology of a particular study (Crotty, 1998). It provides both a context and a foundation for its logic and criteria. In this present study, the broad philosophical stance lying behind the methodology is that of interpretivism. Often linked to the thought of Weber (1949) and his notion of *Verstehen* (understanding), the interpretivist approach "looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world" (Crotty, 1998, p. 67). In contrast to the position of positivism, with its focus on explanation and causality, interpretivism is concerned primarily with understanding in human enquiry.

Crotty (1998) has noted that the interpretivist approach to human enquiry has appeared historically in several guises, including those of symbolic interactionism (where reality is experienced individually, and meaning results from interaction with the objects of that experience) as well as those of hermeneutics and phenomenology. This present study has specifically drawn upon the hermeneutic phenomenological stream of interpretivism as its theoretical perspective.

Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Located within the constructionist epistemology, and taking its philosophical stance from interpretivism, this qualitative study has taken its theoretical impetus from that stream of human science known as *hermeneutic phenomenology*. The hermeneutic phenomenological tradition has developed from the work of Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger and particularly Hans-Georg Gadamer (Schwandt, 1994; Sharkey, 2001). While the natural sciences seek the attainment of knowledge and truth through method and through adherence to a set of rules pertaining to a particular method (Kvale, 1996; van Manen, 1990), the philosophy underpinning hermeneutic phenomenology is that knowledge is realised in the interpretation and understanding of the expressions of human life (Sharkey, 2001). It is a tradition that attempts to be attentive to the way in which things (phenomena) appear to be, and to be interpretive, since all phenomena are encountered meaningfully through lived experience and can be described in human language (van Manen, 1990).

In this research then, the phenomenon being studied is spirituality, or more precisely, the characteristics of children's spirituality. This phenomenon was encountered through the life expression of others (the texts) – in this instance, children in Australian Catholic primary schools. Insight into these children's spirituality (the phenomenon) was therefore gleaned by reflecting upon and interpreting their life expression (the texts).

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is concerned with essence, seeking to provide a true description of an object (phenomenon), based on what the object is in itself (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1996). As Heidegger (1926/1980) stated, phenomenology is concerned with allowing "that which shows itself [to] be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself" (p. 58). It can be distinguished from rationalism and empiricism in that it does not project in advance a structure onto the object of a researcher's interest (Barnacle, 2001). Husserl (1911/1965; 1913/1976) was a key figure in the development of phenomenology. While convinced of the

excellence of the western intellectual tradition, Husserl was concerned about the "unstable bases on which the edifice of knowledge rests" (Levinas, 1998, p. 47). Husserl's approach to the problem of certainty and the foundation of knowledge was to determine the meaning which certainty and truth can have for each domain of being. In other words, rather than measuring objects with respect to an ideal of certainty, Husserl advocated a study of the significance of their truth, which would define the existence to which they have access.

In providing this foundation for knowledge, Husserl's phenomenology developed as a method of reflection that sought to regard an object of a researcher's interest with as few suppositions as possible. His original idea was that this could be achieved by the researcher's conscious attempt to suspend her or his presuppositions about the phenomena being described. Husserl employed terms such as *bracketing* and *disconnecting* (1913/1976, p. 109) to describe the researcher's attempts to suspend these presuppositions.

However, Husserl's approach to phenomenology also realised that all understanding is biased according to the particularity and perspective of the knower. Such a notion is reflected in his articulation of the "perspectival nature of understanding" (Barnacle, 2001, p. 6). Through inquiring into the relation between consciousness and objects of knowledge, Husserl maintained that genuine understanding is really only ever of aspects of things. That is to say, one can never come to understand things as they really, or actually are. One can only come to understand aspects of things. This can be likened to the visual limitation of perception of a three-dimensional object. When, for example, a person, observes such an object, it is impossible to see it in its entirety. What are visible are partial aspects, seen from particular perspectives depending upon where the person positions herself or himself in relation to the object. The disclosure of one aspect, or perspective, necessarily conceals another.

In identifying such an effect upon the knower about what is known, Husserl maintained that one can never have pure access to that which is other than one's self. When a person seeks to understand the world, she or he does not access the world as it actually is, but rather, as it appears to her or him. Thus, any attempt to search for knowledge that is "absolute" is considered futile. All understanding necessarily reflects the particularity of the knower, and cannot be perceived as absolute (Barnacle, 2001).

In light of the above notions, Sharkey (2001) has noted that most phenomenologists have today relinquished Husserl's notion of bracketing one's presuppositions. Many, such as van Manen (1990) have preferred to maintain that phenomenological texts need to contain *thickened* language, that is, richly descriptive and evocative language that invites the reader to encounter the phenomenon in a new and fresh way. Such language has the effect of dispelling the everyday and taken-for-granted meanings about the particular phenomenon that is the object of the researcher's interest. As van Manen has noted, "If the description is phenomenologically powerful, then it acquires a certain transparency, so to speak; it permits us to 'see' the deeper significance, or meaning structures, of the lived experience it describes" (p. 122).

Hermeneutics

Primarily, hermeneutics has been described as the interpretation of texts, the purpose of which is to obtain a common understanding of the meaning of a particular text (Kvale, 1996). It has been in common usage among biblical scholars for the interpretation of Scripture. However, in drawing on the work of Schleiermacher and Dilthey, Sharkey (2001) has noted that the concept of "text" has come to be understood more broadly. Texts could refer not only to literary writings and works, but also to a wider range of notions, including discourse and meaningful human action.

Schwandt (1994) has noted that Dilthey developed his notion of hermeneutics as a counter response to the dominant positivist paradigm of his time. Dilthey had expressed his concern of the denigration of the *Geisteswissenschaften*. While having no equivalent English translation, the Giesteswissenschaften, refers to the "spiritual, cultural or human disciplines" (Sharkey, 2001, p. 35). van Manen (1990, p. 3) has also included the humanities, the arts, symbolic interactionism, phenomenological sociology, ethnography, ethnomethodology, critical theory and gender study under this umbrella term. Dilthey argued that although the human sciences drew upon different methods than those employed in the natural sciences, the human sciences were no less valuable. In essence his contention was that the modality of the human sciences was concerned with interpreting and understanding the great expressions of human life.

Gadamer (1960/1089) was a key figure in typifying the synthesis that has resulted in hermeneutic phenomenology. Although there are significant areas that resonate with phenomenology as developed by Husserl, Gadamer's work was influenced by other sources, including the ideas of Dilthey and Schleiermacher (Sharkey, 2001; Schwandt 1994). There are six insights drawn particularly from the work of Gadamer that have an important bearing on this research study. While it is acknowledged that these insights are not mutually exclusive, each has been distinguished for the purpose of discussion, and will now be explored.

Method

One of the fundamental insights of philosophical hermeneutics is that the researcher who seeks to understand a text, another's life expression, does not rely on any one particular method in order to do so. Gadamer's (1960/1989) work intended to demonstrate the ways in which human understanding both unfolds and is embedded in language and history. For Gadamer, the ascertaining of truth is achieved not though scientific method, but rather by entering into genuine conversation with the text, or life expression. No one method exists that informs a researcher as to how to inquire into the life expression of another.

Following in this vein, van Manen (1990) has expressed his wariness about employing methods of analysis that involve frequency counting or coding as a means to identifying the themes of a text when engaged in hermeneutic phenomenology. "Too often theme analysis is understood as an ambiguous and fairly mechanical application of some frequency count or coding of selected terms in transcripts or texts, or some other break-down of the content of protocol documentary material" (p. 78).

The use of coding techniques may be of great value in social scientific and ethnographic approaches to research. However, the conviction of hermeneutics, as a human science, is that methods of analysis such as coding do not necessarily result in understanding. The power of hermeneutic phenomenological research is animated by the researcher's powers of observation, reflection and judgement (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1996). It is the value of such observation, reflection and judgement, lying beyond the employment of any one particular method that is brought to the fore in hermeneutic phenomenology.

However, this is not to suggest that hermeneutic phenomenology is "method-free". Rather that empiricism and the claims of objectivity made by those employing the so-called "scientific method" are called into question by a hermeneutical approach, practitioners of which argue that the subjectivity of the researcher is always and already present. In hermeneutic phenomenology reflexivity in research is embraced, rather than the notion of rational objectivity.

Conversation

Gadamer (1960/1989) has put forward the metaphor of *conversation* as an ideal for that which ought to occur during the hermeneutical process. His assertion has been that conversation exemplifies the qualities of responsiveness, creativity and freedom that are central to genuine understanding:

We say that we 'conduct' a conversation, but the more genuine a conversation is, the less its conduct lies within the will of either partner. Thus

a genuine conversation is never the one we want to conduct. Rather, it is generally more correct to say that we fall into conversation, or even that we become involved in it. The way one word follows another, with the conversation taking its own twists and reaching its own conclusion, may well be conducted in some way, but the partners conversing are far less leaders of it than the led. No one knows in advance what will be the 'come out' of a conversation. Understanding or its failure is like an event that happens to us. Thus we can say that something was a good conversation or that it was ill fated (p. 383).

A conversation works most effectively when the subject matter of the conversation assumes control, while those in dialogue allow themselves to be led by it. A conversation is foiled when one of the conversation partners seeks to dominate by imposing his or her own point of view. The prerequisite for genuine conversation is that the dialogue partners give in to the "ebb and flow of the conversation as its subject matter unfolds" (Sharkey, 2001, p. 23). In hermeneutic phenomenology, what is sought is a genuine conversation between the researcher and the text, or life expression. The object of the conversation is that which both seek to understand. It is this joint object, not the partners, that conducts the conversation (Weinsheimer, 1985). In this way, the researcher and the text become the conversation partners, neither dominating, but rather asking questions of each other to weigh and test what the other has to say in conversation.

The fact that the interpreter and the text are considered as conversation partners is important. The idea of "partner" in Gadamer's work implies the notion of equality (Weinsheimer, 1985). That is to say, neither of the conversation partners – the interpreter or the text in this instance – is superior or inferior to the other. Neither one is considered to be more important. Both are equal, and both contribute to the ebb and flow of the conversation in valuable, albeit different ways. The text presents insights of value to the interpreter, while the latter brings to the text her or his own reflection and insight. Both have questions to ask of the other.

This notion of the interpreter asking questions of the text, and of the text asking questions of the interpreter, is crucial in Gadamer's idea of conversation. The interpreter is drawn into conversation with a particular text because it has something of interest to say. In engaging with the text, the interpreter effectively asks questions of the text, thereby drawing the text itself into conversation. This in turn implies that the text no longer consists of definitive statements, but instead of answers and questions. The text asks questions of the interpreter, leading her or him to reassess the dubiousness of what she or he takes for granted (Weinsheimer, 1985).

The hermeneutic conscious interpreter acknowledges that the text has not had the last word, so to speak, because she or he contributes her or his own ideas to the conversation. On the other hand, the interpreter knows she or he will not have the final word about the text. The interpreter needs the text "in order to place his own prejudices at risk and to point out the dubiousness of what he himself takes for granted, thus disclosing new possibilities for questioning and extending his own horizon by fusing it with that of the text" (Weinsheimer, 1985, p. 211).

Play

Gadamer (1960/1989) has offered the metaphor of play to complement his reflection on conversation. The notions of both play and conversation express the human capacity for engagement and responsiveness that are to be found at the centre of the phenomenon of human understanding. Gadamer has argued that the playing of a game has the capacity to draw the players into its power, and so the players become lost in the playing of the game. Importantly, Gadamer has noted that the players themselves have no control over the outcome of the game. The whole point of the game is that its conclusion is unknown. It is not clear exactly what will happen – who will win, what a player's next move might be, and so on. Gadamer's reflection highlights that genuine conversation, like play, leads the dialogue partners to become lost in the encounter. Rather than the notion of the dialogue partners dictating the terms of the conversation, there is a sense of engagement. The outcome of a genuine conversation, like that of a game, is unknown.

The notion of *middle space* (*Zwischen*) is important in Gadamer's (1960/1989) reflection on play and conversation. Barnacle (2001) has noted the central theme in the work of Heidegger, who was Gadamer's mentor, was that understanding occurs in the relation between thought and the object of a researcher's interest. In order to understand a phenomenon, a researcher must first attend to the relation that exists between the phenomena and the researcher. Gadamer developed this idea further by suggesting that interpretation is an event that unfolds in the middle space of encounter between the text, or life expression, and the interpreter, or researcher. Just as the playing of a game is resolved on the playing field, game-board, or some other designated space, common meaning between a text and its interpreter is to be found in the encounter between them, that is, in the middle space. In this creative middle space, the ideas and horizons of the interpreter are brought into a creative fusion with those of the text. Rather than the task of interpretation being seen as one whereby the interpreter attempts to understand the fixed and objective meaning of text, the hermeneutic task is one "where the meaning of a text opens up in an encounter that is best described . . . as contextual, playful and dialogical" (Sharkey, 2001, p. 24). Therefore, a researcher who attempts to engage in hermeneutic phenomenology takes seriously the challenge to enter the middle space that is opened up in a playful and dialogical engagement with that which is the object of the researcher's interest.

Understanding as a productive activity

Gadamer (1960/1989) has maintained that the hermeneutical activity always transcends the mere reproduction of that which was the author's original intention. Interpretive inquiry, as Weinsheimer (1985) has noted, always exceeds what the original author may have had in mind. This is so because the interpreter "cannot help noticing the dubiousness of what the author takes for granted" (p. 210). The meaning of a text then is always co-determined by both the hermeneutic situation of the interpreter and the horizon projected by the text, or life expression. As Gadamer (1960/1989) declared, "a hermeneutics that regarded understanding as reconstructing the original would be no more than handing on a dead meaning" (p. 167). Because

the text must necessarily always be understood from within the particular context of the interpreter, the hermeneutic process cannot be one of simply reproducing or reconstructing that which may have been in the mind of the author. Rather, the hermeneutic process is a productive activity. The meaning of a life expression, or text, must always be co-determined by the particularity of the interpreter and the text itself. Gadamer (1960/1989) has likened the productive nature of this activity to the interpretation of a work of art:

> The artist who creates something is not the appointed interpreter of it. As an interpreter he has no automatic authority over the person who is simply receiving his work. Insofar as he reflects on his own work, he is his own reader. The meaning that he, as reader, gives his own work does not set the standard. The only standard of interpretation is the sense of his creation, what it 'means' (p. 193).

This is not to imply that a text, or life expression, may have a multiplicity of meanings attached to them by anyone and everyone who would seek to interpret them. Gadamer's assertion is rather that there exists no one 'ready-made' meaning of a text that lies in wait of an interpreter. Understanding is the result of interpretation that is co-determined by the hermeneutic situations of all involved.

Nor is this to imply that hermeneutic phenomenological research results in a work of fiction. As a productive activity, hermeneutic phenomenological writing involves the use of thickened language (van Manen, 1990) that seeks to evoke the underlying essence of the phenomenon as the researcher has encountered it. It seeks to invite the reader to enter the world which the text reveals and so encounter the phenomenon in a new and fresh way.

Understanding as a fusion of horizons

When engaged in hermeneutic phenomenology, Gadamer (1960/1989) has further maintained that what takes place between the interpreter and the author of a

text is a "fusion of horizons" (p. 306). The situation of one's own understanding can be deemed a horizon. It marks the limit of everything that can be understood from a particular point of view. But more than this, Weinsheimer (1985) has suggested that the notion of a horizon implies that it is possible for a person, or a text, to see beyond an immediate standpoint. Thus, an individual's horizon of understanding is constantly in the process of formation. It is not something that remains static.

Understanding occurs when the horizon that is projected by the worldview, or life expression (the text), combines with the researchers own comprehension and interpretive insight. Such a fusion of horizons can be likened to a conversation where that which is expressed is common to both original author and interpreter. In other words, hermeneutic phenomenological research results in the production of something of value and insight that is common to both the researcher and the author of the text. It results in the production of something new, created out of the encounter of the interpreter and the life expression, or text, being interpreted. Hence, Gadamer (1960/1989) has asserted that the hermeneutic task goes beyond simply reconstructing that which was in the author's mind. It is rather, as discussed, a productive activity. The meaning of a text is co-determined by both the hermeneutic stand-point of the interpreter and the horizon that the text projects.

While it is true to maintain that hermeneutic research seeks to be faithful to the text and the horizon that is projected by it, such an activity is, in itself, incomplete. Hermeneutic research also takes into account the particularities, insights and comprehension of the interpreter. It "engages genuinely (dialogically and playfully) with the research texts and aims to produce something of value and insight that is common to the researcher and author" (Sharkey, 2001, p. 28).

Prior understandings (prejudice)

Importantly then, is that while many research approaches endeavour to eliminate the prior understandings of the investigator, hermeneutic phenomenological research views such understandings as a prerequisite for any act

of interpretation (Sharkey, 2001; van Manen, 1990). For Gadamer (1960/1989) it is these very prior understandings, or prejudice, that "gives the hermeneutical problem its real thrust" (p. 270). In contrast then to Husserl's original notion of phenomenology, the goal of hermeneutic phenomenological research is not for the investigator to eliminate these prior understandings and suppositions, but rather, to test them. Such a testing unfolds as a genuine engagement with the object of the researcher's interest, where such an engagement is open to other possibilities.

The text, or life expression, becomes the vehicle for this testing of prior understandings. Weinsheimer (1985) has maintained that the interpreter needs the text in order to place his or her own prejudices – prior understandings and taken-for-granted meanings – at risk. The text is needed as a means by which to highlight the uncertainty and suspicion of what the interpreter takes for granted. In this way new possibilities for questioning and understanding are disclosed as the interpreter's horizon is extended by blending it with that of the text.

Hermeneutic phenomenology is, then, antithetical to the positivist position of the natural sciences, which understands truth to be an objective reality, and which is concerned with the collection of objective and quantifiable data. It was not appropriate to apply the epistemology of objectivism to the constructionist framework of this study. The issues under consideration here were not objective data that could be quantified. Rather the qualitative material collected in this study consisted of meaningful observation and conversation with children – the texts – that were reflected upon and interpreted to shed light upon the characteristics or features of their spiritual lives (the phenomena).

The Research Methodology and Methods

Crotty (1998) has distinguished between the methodology and methods of a research study. Methodology refers to the strategy, or design which lies behind and shapes the choice and use of particular methods. In the research reported in this

thesis, the methodology stems from the theoretical perspective of hermeneutic phenomenology. Therefore, this present study has employed hermeneutic phenomenological research as its methodology. The particular methods appropriate for this present research, then, have comprised videotaped semi-structured interviews (conversation) as well as observation of small groups of children to identify some characteristics of children's spirituality in Australian Catholic primary schools. Conversation and observation took place through a series of three meetings with each of two small groups of children from three Australian Catholic primary schools. The meetings consisted of a semi-structured interview with the researcher (conversation), and a short activity undertaken by the children, which the researcher observed and recorded using videotape.

These recorded conversations and observations then became the texts which were reflected upon and interpreted in this study in order to gain insight into some of the characteristics of children's spirituality. A detailed explanation of the methods employed in this present study now follows.

The Research Process

Selection of Schools

Permission to conduct this research was granted by the University Research and Research Training Management Committee and ethical clearance was given. After then gaining permission from the Director of Catholic Education, Melbourne, to approach schools, three Australian Catholic primary schools, one in each of three settings – inner city, suburban and regional/rural – were invited to take part in this study by allowing, in consultation with the principal and with parents, children from their school community to meet with the researcher. These schools were situated within the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne, a geographically large archdiocese in the state of Victoria. The researcher approached these schools personally to discuss the research with the principal. A letter formally inviting their participation in this research study then followed (Appendix C).

Selection of Children (Participants)

A total of 36 children were to be indiscriminately invited to participate in this study. This total was to be made up of 12 children from each of the three Catholic primary schools; six children at Year three (approximately eight years of age) and six children at Year five (approximately ten years of age). Groups of six were chosen by the researcher since the group size was significant in terms of management and access. This size would allow levels of intimacy, enough for the participants to respond to the invitation to contribute to discussion, yet be large enough to create a group dynamic through the planned discussion and activities. The Year levels of three and five had been sought because it was felt that children of ages eight and ten respectively would have been able to engage in the type of conversation and activity that had been envisaged and planned by the researcher.

The total of 36 children was comparable to the total number of children who participated in several other qualitative research studies that have sought to gain insight into some aspect of the spiritual lives of children (Adams, 2000, 2003; Halstead & Waite, 2001; Hay & Nye, 1998; Heller, 1986; Reimer & Furrow, 2001).

It was hoped that there would be a balance of male and female participants. Letters were sent to the parents/guardians of all children in these year levels in all three schools, outlining the purpose of the research and seeking their permission to allow their child to take part in this study. This letter also contained a consent form for the children to complete if, after discussion, and with their parents'/guardians' permission, they agreed to participate in this present research study (see Appendix D). From these responses, it was intended that a total of 36 children would be invited to take part in this study.

The researcher spent one two-hour session each week over a period of five weeks in each of the classrooms from which the children were drawn, assisting the classroom teacher by, for example, supervising the small groups of children during the morning literacy block. (Most Catholic primary schools in the state of Victoria

begin each day with a two-hour literacy block, consisting of a number of small rotating group activities aimed at enabling students to practise and consolidate their skills in reading, writing, speaking and listening.) This prolonged engagement (Guba & Lincoln, 1985) was useful in helping to ensure that the researcher was not encountered as a total stranger when interacting with these children during the research. It was also hoped that this would build a sense of familiarity and perhaps trust with the researcher.

Selection of Observation and Conversation Techniques

Interactive collection techniques comprising semi-structured interviews (conversation) and observation were employed in this study. Each group meeting included two phases. The first phase comprised a semi-structured interview. This consisted of a story, some guiding questions and conversation loosely structured around the three inter-relating themes or categories of spiritual sensitivity outlined by Hay and Nye (1998) - awareness-sensing, mystery-sensing and value-sensing (see interview guide in Appendix E). In constructing the interview guide, suggestions for interviewing children as proposed by Garbarino and Stott (1992) had been consulted. There were two guiding principles that were of particular importance. The first was the notion that children are most likely to offer reliable information in conversation when speaking about events that are a part of, or at least related to, their own interests, and which form part of their everyday experience (p. 178). The work of McCreery (1996) and Erricker et al., (1997) has attested to this.

The second was the notion of *valence* (Garbarino & Stott, 1992, p. 182). Valence refers to the amount of authority exercised over children when questioning and interviewing them. It is a feature of adult-child communication to which children are very sensitive. For example, Garbarino and Stott have noted that one common question asked of children by their parents is "What are you doing?" They have maintained that such a question is not necessarily a request for information about what the child is actually doing. Rather, it is a demand for the child to stop what he or she is doing. The question "What are you doing?" then has positive

valence when asked of a child. It is difficult for an adult to ask such a question of a child because children are used to such questions and are subordinate in most of their relationships with adults. Therefore, in constructing the interview guide, and in conversation with children, care was exercised to avoid conveying the impression that a request for information was a demand. Even a question asked in a neutral tone may have led the children to assume the question had valence.

Also, in constructing the interview guide and in conversation with the participants, the ten qualification criteria of a successful interviewer as suggested by Kvale (1996) were taken into consideration. The ten criteria are as follows:

- *Knowledgeable*: Has an extensive knowledge of the interview theme.
- *Structuring*: Introduces the purpose for the interview; rounds it off, asks whether interviewee has any questions.
- *Clear*: Poses clear, simple, easy and short questions; does not use academic language or professional jargon.
- *Gentle*: Allows the subjects to finish what they are saying, lets them proceed at their own rate of thinking, tolerates pauses.
- *Sensitive*: Listens actively to the content of what is said, hears the many nuances of meaning in an answer; is empathetic in dealing with the interviewee.
- *Open*: Hears which aspects of the interview topic are important for the interviewee. Responds to what is important to interviewee and is flexible.
- *Steering*: Knows what he or she wants to find out.
- *Critical*: Does not take everything that is said at face value, is prepared to challenge what is said, for example, dealing with inconsistencies in interviewee's replies.
- *Remembering*: relates what is said to what has been previously said.
- *Interpreting*: clarifies and extends meanings of interviewee's statements, but without imposing meaning on them (pp. 148-149).

In addition to these ten qualification criteria, Bryman (2001) has suggested another two criteria that were also be taken into consideration for this research study:

- *Balanced*: does not talk too much, which may make the interviewee passive, and does not talk too little, which may result in the interviewee feeling he or she is not talking along the right lines.
- *Ethically sensitive*: is sensitive to the ethical dimensions of interviewing, ensuring the interviewee appreciates what the research is about, its purpose, and that his or her answers will be treated confidentially (p. 318).

It was intended that in preparation for this first phase, as well as to put the children at ease with the researcher and facilitate conversation, children would be invited to draw and paint. However, all children who participated were already at ease (and in fact were quite excited to be involved), perhaps as the result of the researcher's weekly interaction with them in their classroom contexts. This first phase – the semi-structured interview – was videotaped.

The second phase of each meeting consisted of an activity also guided by the three inter-relating themes or categories of spiritual sensitivity outlined by Hay and Nye (1998) – awareness sensing, mystery sensing and value sensing. While it was acknowledged that these three concepts are interrelated, one such concept became the focus for the second phase of each of the three meetings. This activity was also videotaped.

In the first meeting, awareness sensing (Hay & Nye, 1998) was the focus of the second phase activity. Awareness sensing involves attending to the here-and-now of experience, the total engagement in a particular activity and the alertness of what might be experienced in moments of concentration or stillness. In order to evoke this sense of awareness, the children were invited to select from a variety of activities that may have involved attending to the here-and-now of experience. These

activities included jigsaw puzzles, 'bead-creation' materials, drawing, and seed planting. The children were invited to select from these activities the one(s) in which they wished to engage.

The second phase of the second meeting focused on the concept of mystery sensing. Mystery sensing (Hay & Nye, 1998) involves the wonder and awe, the fascination and questioning which is characteristic of children as they interact with the mystery of the universe. In order to evoke this sense of mystery, an ambiance was created by playing an Australian Nature Soundscape CD – Tony O'Connnor's *Uluru* (1999). Also, an oil burner was used, and an essential oil – eucalyptus – was burnt. It was hoped that these would draw upon the children's sense of smell and hearing in evoking a sense of mystery. The children were then invited to talk about and discuss one or more of a set of photographs. Some of these were selected from the Photo Language Kit (1986). The photographs utilised in this second session were similar to the types of pictures utilised by Hay and Nye (1998) in their conversations with children. It was hoped that these photographs would generate some reflective conversation on the theme of mystery-sensing. It was also anticipated that they might also lead to conversations that incorporated the concepts of awareness-sensing and value-sensing, remembering that these concepts are inter related. Appendices E and G contain an outline of the interview guide and selected photographs for this session respectively.

In each case, the photographs were used in a non-directive fashion so as to encourage children in the group to speak personally about their own thoughts and experiences. The researcher introduced each photograph with an 'I wonder…' reflection (Berryman, 1991).

In the third meeting, value sensing (Hay & Nye, 1998) was the focus of the second phase activity. Value-sensing concerns the moral sensitivity of the children. It includes a sense of that which really matters to the children themselves. In order to evoke this sense of value, the children were invited to respond to the reflection "I

wonder what you think really, really matters?" (R. Nye, personal communication, May 9, 2002). This question implicitly asked what is it that was of ultimate value or concern for these children, and so connected directly to the search for meaning of the larger questions of life. Rather than openly discuss or respond to this question, children were invited to write or journal their responses.

A visual summary of the content of both phases one and two of each of the three meetings is outlined in Table 6. The length of time planned for each meeting varied due to the nature of the activity planned for phase two. While it was envisaged that each meeting would have a duration of between half an hour and forty-five minutes, each of the group meetings, in fact, lasted between forty-five minutes and one hour.

Table 6
An Outline of Each Phase of Each of the Three Meetings

	Phase 1 Conversation	Phase 2 Activity
Meeting Number 1	Loosely structured conversation around an oral story leading to the notion of *awareness-sensing*.	Children select from a variety of activities that may involve attending to the here-and-now of experience. *(awareness-sensing)*
Meeting Number 2	Conversation loosely structured around an oral story leading to the notion of *mystery-sensing*.	Discussion around a set of photographs, some from the Photo-Language Kit. Drawing on "I wonder..." reflections. *(mystery-sensing)*
Meeting Number 3	Conversation loosely structured around a picture story book "The Tunnel", leading to the notion of *value-sensing*.	Journaling activity – "I wonder what you think really, really matters?" (R. Nye, personal communication, May 9, 2002). *(value-sensing)*

Details of the Three Schools and the Participants

The suburban school which was invited to participate in this study was situated approximately 15 kilometres from the city in the North Eastern Zone of the

Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne. There were approximately 280 students enrolled during the time in which the researcher was visiting. These students came predominately from middle-class Catholic Christian families, and were largely Anglo-European in background.

A total of 12 children – five boys and seven girls – took part in this study from the suburban school. The following names of the children who participated are pseudonym names used in order to safeguard their identity. From the Year three class, the children who met with the researcher were Joseph, Stacey, Sally, Emma, Milly, Zephaniah and Eloise. The Year five children who met with the researcher were Adam, Cameron, Danny, John and Alicia.

The inner city school which was invited to participate in this study was situated approximately three kilometres from the city centre in the North Western Zone of the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne. At the time of the researcher's visit there were approximately 150 students enrolled from a variety of multicultural and multi-faith backgrounds. Among the cultural groups represented in the school were the Vietnamese, North African, Lebanese, Egyptian and Iraqi. The religious backgrounds of the students included Eastern Chaldean Catholic Rite, Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu.

A total of 12 children – six boys and six girls met with the researcher. Their names (again pseudonyms) were Marco, Tran, Amina, Charlotte, Ali and Rosie from the Year three class, and May Ling, Missal, Hy Sun, Fadde, Maria and Ramsay from the Year five class.

The rural school which was invited to participate in this study was situated approximately 150 kilometres from the city in the Outer Eastern Zone of the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne. It was situated in a tightly knit community surrounded by mountain ranges. At the time of the researcher's visit there were approximately 110 students enrolled, emanating from farming families. While the

majority of the students were from Anglo-Celtic backgrounds, many came from families who were Christian, but not Catholic. Some came from families who professed to have no particular religion.

There were 11 children – four boys and seven girls – who participated in this study from this school. The pseudonym names of these children from the Year three class were Susan, Imelda, Michael, Wallace and Tom. The names of the students from the Year five class were Lara, James, Kristy, Annabelle, Michelle and Emily.

Although it was intended that there be 36 participants, in total, there were 35 children who, with their assent and parents' permission, took part in this study. This total was made up of 15 boys and 20 girls. For the most part all of the named children met with the researcher in each of the three group meetings. In some instances, due to absences because of illness, not all children were present at school on the days the researcher conducted the group meetings.

Rationale

Use of Semi-structured Interviews

Drawing on both hermeneutic phenomenological research methodology and previous research investigating aspects of children's spirituality (Coles, 1990; Erricker & Erricker, 1996; Heller, 1986; Halstead & Waite, 2001; Hay & Nye, 1998; McCreery, 1996, Mountain, 2004) this study used semi-structured interviews as the medium for conversation with children. These, along with the observations made of the children, became the texts that, when reflected upon and interpreted, shed light upon the characteristics or features of these children's spirituality.

Through a prepared interview guide (see Appendix E) rather than a rigid interview schedule, the researcher was able to facilitate a flexible interview process. The children were allowed freedom and leeway in terms of what they viewed and expressed as important in their understanding and explanation of events, patterns and forms of behaviour (Bryman, 2001). This flexibility also enabled the researcher to

follow up on varying points of discussion which may have enabled the children to further articulate and clarify aspects that may have been indicative of their spiritual characteristics.

Meeting with Groups of Children

A total of three meetings were planned, during which the researcher met with groups of six children from the same two Year levels (three and five) in each school. It had been decided to meet with groups of children rather than with individuals for two key reasons. Firstly, in being guided by the work of Halstead and Waite (2001), the group dynamic may have been beneficial in enabling children to feel less threatened and more comfortable in the company of their peers. The conversation was be geared to group participation, and the activities planned, to a large extent, allowed for some group dialogue.

The second reason for meeting with groups of children rather than with individuals was a practical one, and concerned the issue of a protective safeguard for both the researcher and the children. Given recent events made public by the media in Australia concerning the abuse of trust by those in positions of authority, be they clergy or teaching staff, it was felt to be inappropriate to meet with children on an individual basis.

There are two possible disadvantages concerning the use of group interviews and activities. Firstly, as has been noted by Adams (2000) and also by Halstead and Waite (2001), students' own opinions may be suppressed, or swayed in order to remain acceptable by their peer group. Some children may thus be inhibited from expressing their deeper and more personal feelings and reactions. Hay and Nye (1998) expressed similar concerns. In deciding to speak to children on a one-to-one basis, the field worker, Rebecca Nye maintained that individuals may be hesitant to speak about spirituality in the company of others for fear that they would be taunted in some way.

The second possible disadvantage is that those children in the group who are more dominant could influence the direction of the discussion (Halstead & Waite, 2001). In an attempt to counter this possibility, various forms of activities, as well as conversation, had been planned for each group meeting. It was anticipated that the inclusion of such activities during each group meeting, while allowing for the facilitation of group dialogue and conversation, may have enabled each participant to give voice to their own particular characteristics or features of spirituality without being overly inhibited by the factors discussed above.

On balance, considering all of the issues that have been outlined above in relation to whether conversation and observation would take place on a one-to-one basis or in small groups, it was decided to remain with the use of small groups of children in conducting this present research.

Three Australian Settings: Inner City, Suburban, Rural

Catholic primary schools from three different Australian settings – inner city, suburban and regional/rural – were invited to take part in this study. While the texts from these three settings did not enable this study to make broad generalisations, three distinct settings had been selected because it was thought that conversation with and observation of children from schools in these geographical locations may have shed light upon different characteristics of their spirituality.

Time of Year for Conducting the Research

This research was undertaken during terms two and three of the 2003 school year. Term one had been ruled out as a possible time for commencing this study. The beginning of the new school year is a busy time for school communities, who may not have appreciated the presence of an unfamiliar adult. Also, children at this time of year have just begun the process of settling into their new classrooms, possibly with a new teacher and different (even unfamiliar) routines. Given these factors, it was deemed more appropriate to undertake this study once the children

had settled into the school year. Term two seemed to be a more suitable option for commencing the research.

The Selection of Activities for Observation

The selection of activities for observation during phase two of each of the three meetings had been influenced particularly by the descriptions of an Australian spirituality as outlined by Kelly (1990) and Tacey (1995; 2000). The children, when engaging in these activities, may have exhibited behaviour, or may have revealed through conversation, characteristics, or features that reflected these concepts outlined by Kelly and Tacey.

A selection of activities was planned for phase two of the first meeting. These directly linked with the contentions of both Kelly (1990) and Tacey (2000), that spirituality, for Australian people, is an existential spirituality, grounded in the here-and-now (awareness-sensing) of the ordinariness of everyday life. A selection of everyday activities that involved children attending to the here-and-now of experience may have provided insight into this aspect of spirituality. These activities included jigsaw puzzles, 'bead-creation' materials, drawing, and seed planting.

The use of the photographs, some of which were sourced from the Photo Language Kit (1986) in phase two of the second meeting had been selected because of their potential to evoke a sense of wonder. The use of "I wonder…" reflections provided a point of entry here. The notion of an "I wonder..." reflection has emanated from the work of Berryman (1991). In drawing on Montessorian principles to devise a process for catechesis in a Christian context, Berryman maintained that children should be led to a sense of wonder and awe in terms of their religious imagination. Further, the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne (the capital city of the state of Victoria) in which the three schools were situated has produced a text-based religious education curriculum, *To Know, Worship and Love* (Archdiocese of Melbourne, 2000). In the junior primary years of schooling, this series has drawn specifically on the work of Berryman and includes "I wonder..." reflections as a part

of its learning and teaching process. Since *To Know, Worship and Love* is the prescribed religious education text for students in the Archdiocese of Melbourne, many of the children who participated in this study would have been familiar with these types of reflections. Also, in beginning with "I wonder…" the researcher was intimating that there was no one particular or correct response required from the children. In other words, the reflection was open-ended. The researcher was then able to allow the children freedom in expressing themselves while valuing and actively listening to each contribution.

The strategy of journaling was employed in phase two of the third meeting because it was felt to address Kelly's (1990) notion of a spirituality of silence. Kelly has maintained that Australian people, while outwardly or publicly having little patience for those dimensions of life that appear non-evident, may privately prefer to communicate matters of ultimate meaning, of what really matters, in silence rather than in conversation. The activity of journaling was thought to be an appropriate strategy with which to address Kelly's notion.

This strategy also addressed Tacey's (2000) notion that an Australian person's spiritual life and seeking of ultimate meaning occurs privately as a part of such a person's inner life, despite Australia being a secular society. In journaling, these children were being invited, and given opportunity, to express something of their inner life in a private fashion. If the children wished to discuss or share any of what they have recorded, they would have been welcome to do so. However, it was anticipated that this would be unlikely. Also, the researcher made no such request for these children to share publicly what they had written.

The children were, however, invited to allow the researcher to have their pieces of writing. This needed to be invitational in respecting the privacy of each individual, and indeed, the inner life of each participant, something of which they had revealed through the journaling activity. Bloom, Madaus and Hasting (1981) and Macdonald (1990) have stressed the private nature of such reflective activities

which, in revealing something of these children's spiritual lives, also revealed their personal attitudes, values and feelings – their affective response.

This was an ethically sensitive moment in the conducting of this research, and care was exercised in addressing the dynamic of the adult/child relationship in a school environment. In attending to this aspect, the researcher decided to indicate to the children prior to them beginning the task that they would be invited to allow the researcher to view their journals. The notion of this being an invitation was emphasised so that, if the children wished, they could refuse the invitation.

It was anticipated that the sense of trust and familiarity which the researcher had built up and maintained with these children, together with the fact that these journaling pieces were anonymous (the researcher allowed the children to omit their names from the written pieces), may have encouraged the children to leave their written journal pieces with the researcher. All but a few of the children who participated in this study responded to the researcher's invitation to allow the researcher to collect their journaling. These written journal reflections were also analysed and interpreted by the researcher.

Journaling, as an activity, had also been selected since it was a strategy with which the children who participated in this study may have been familiar. Requesting students to keep a journal of private reflections is a technique that has been used in the religious education classroom by teachers of both junior and senior primary students (Hyde, 1998).

Collection Of and Reflection Upon the Texts

Each of the three meetings was recorded using videotape. Videotaping had two advantages. Firstly, it recorded the conversation and discussion, which formed the texts to be interpreted. These were viewed and reflected upon to determine the particular themes and insights that emerged. Secondly, it provided a means of

interpreting what was not articulated – the spirituality of silence (Kelly, 1990). It was anticipated that children's facial expressions, their body language, their interaction with each other during the activities, and indeed their silences may also be examined and reflected upon so as to shed light upon their spirituality.

Rehearsing and Preparing the Ground

Having decided upon the format for each of the three meetings, having formulated the interview guide and selected appropriate activities for the second phase of each meeting, the researcher set about rehearsing both phases of one of the three meetings with one small group of children. Selecting a group of six children at Year five in one of the three schools to meet with the researcher on one occasion achieved this.

The purpose of this rehearsal was to prepare the ground for the research. It was designed not to determine the effectiveness of each phase of each meeting. This would have been too time consuming, and placed extra pressure on the school community to accommodate the researcher's requests. Rather, the purpose was to provide some initial indications as to whether the semi-structured interview might generate the sort of conversation that enabled the researcher to gain insight into the spirituality of these children. Through this, the researcher was able to practise interacting with children, probing where necessary for further information, or remaining silent to allow the participants to elaborate on their own terms. It also enabled the researcher to determine whether or not some of the planned activities for the second phase of each meeting were appropriate for observing. From this point, elements of the interview guide and planned activities could be amended and added to if necessary.

This rehearsal was also a valuable opportunity to determine the optimum positioning of the video camera. The camera needed to be placed in such a way so as to not only identify and record each participant's conversation, but also to capture

his or her reactions, body language, silences, facial expressions and engagement in the planned activity. This crucial aspect would ultimately determine the quality of the text for reflecting upon and interpreting. This proved to be a difficult task, and much time was spent preparing the ground in this area. Additionally, each school setting required a different positioning of the video camera due to the nature of the space that was used for the group meetings. This required arriving considerably earlier on the day of the first group meeting in each new school setting to prepare this ground.

As a result of this rehearsal, it became clear that the children (in this particular group at least) were more than willing to enter into conversation with the researcher. They were most eager to be a part of this study and readily offered their thoughts and opinions to the questions that were planned in the interview guide. In other words, they generated much valuable discussion. It became clear at this point that the interview guide was indeed simply that – a guide! The children themselves were really in control of the direction of the discussion. The researcher's task was not one of strictly "keeping them on track." If the researcher was to hear and perhaps experience anything of their spirituality, it was clear that the children themselves needed to take control of the discussion. The researcher's role was to facilitate that conversation, but not to lead it. The researcher's role was to listen and to observe intently. In light of this, no changes were made to the interview guide. The questions and discussion starters seemed to provide enough stimuli to generate discussion. While it could not be guaranteed that this would be the case for every group of children, it would have been impractical to rehearse the interview guide for each group. The researcher was prepared to make judgements based this initial experience.

It was also found that, in the placement of the video camera, an object, such as a chair, needed to be placed in such a way that it indicated the centre of what could be seen through the viewing piece. In this way, children could be positioned on either side of this object so that they were all 'in view' of the camera. Also, two

other small objects were positioned at the extremities of what could be seen through the viewing piece. This indicated the limits of what would be seen on the videotape. Children were then requested, if possible, not to place themselves outside of these objects while the taping was in progress. When the children were engaged in phase two of the meeting, the researcher was able to physically take the video camera and move among them, zooming in and out on facial expressions, body language, and so forth. While at first, some children were quite conscious that they were being videotaped, this self consciousness did not last. As they continued to engage in conversation and activity they appeared to become quite oblivious to the camera, and in some instances, to the researcher's presence.

Method of Analysis: Lifeworld Existentials as Guides to Reflection and Interpretation of the Texts

In taking its theoretical impetus from hermeneutic phenomenology, the researcher drew upon van Manen's (1990) notion of "lifeworld existentials" (pp. 101-106) as a guide to reflection and interpretation of the texts of this study (semi-structured interviews and the observation). In phenomenological literature, the lifeworld existentials have been well utilised and have been seen as fundamentally belonging to the structure of the lifeworld (for example, Heidegger, 1926/1980; Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1996, 1948/2004). In preparing the ground for this present study, the researcher himself has successfully drawn on these lifeworld existentials in reflecting upon another's life expression (Hyde, 2003b, 2005a). There are four lifeworld existentials that permeate the lived experiences of all human beings, regardless of their social, cultural or historical contexts: *lived space* (spatiality), *lived body* (corporeality), *lived time* (temporality), and *lived human relation* (relationality or communality).

Lived Space

Lived space refers to felt space. It is "space in which the heart feels . . . space which is close to us and with which we are organically connected" (Merleau-Ponty,

1948/2004, p. 54). When one thinks of space, commonly, it pertains to geometrical space, that is, to the dimensions of space – height, length, depth, and so forth. However, lived space refers to the landscape in which people move and in which they consider themselves at home, for "Home is where we can *be* what we *are*" (van Manen, 1990, p. 102). It is helpful to inquire into the nature of the lived space that may render a particular experience or phenomena its quality of meaning. For example, the reading of a book may entail the seeking of a space that is conducive to reading, such as a quiet corner, a comfortable chair, or perhaps even at a table in a secluded coffee shop or book room. In this example, "reading has its own modality of lived space and may be understood by exploring the various qualities and aspects of lived space" (p. 103).

Merleau-Ponty (1945/1996) has maintained that the notion of spatiality refers not necessarily to geometrical space, but rather to a spatiality of situation, an orientation towards a possible world. One can, for example, be physically situated within a particular geometrical space, but be dreaming, or longing to be somewhere else, that is, oriented towards some other space that might be possible. This might occur when a person is homesick, or longing to be with a loved one from whom she or he is physically separated by distance. Merleau-Ponty has maintained that in such instances, a person feels that towards which their desire goes out:

> Our body and our perception always summon us to take as the centre of the world that environment which they present to us. But this environment is not necessarily that of our own life. I can 'be somewhere else' while staying here, and if I am kept far away from what I love, I feel out of touch with real life (p. 285).

In this present study, spirituality may have had its own modality of lived space. It may have been better understood by inquiring into the various qualities of

the space and spaces in which something of these children's spirituality was expressed and experienced. For example, it has been noted that a space of potential and promise – the site for a new family home in a natural bushland setting – has led to identifying elements of one young child's spirituality (Hyde, 2003b).

Lived Body

Lived body refers to the phenomenological fact that human beings are always bodily in the world. Merleau-Ponty (1948/2004) has noted that there exists a relationship between objects and a person's bodily encounter with those objects. The relationship between human beings and objects "is not a distant one: each speaks to our body and to the way we live. They are clothed in human characteristics . . . and conversely they dwell within us as emblems of forms of life we either love or hate" (p. 63). The relationship between body and object is one of "vertiginous proximity" (p. 66) which prevents people from both apprehending themselves as pure intellect separated from things and from defining things as pure objects lacking in all human attributes.

van Manen (1990) has suggested that when people encounter one another in the lifeworld, they do so through bodily presence – a handshake, an embrace, a gaze, a smile, and so forth. In the physical bodily presence, something is both revealed and concealed simultaneously. van Manen has noted, for example, that when a person is the object of someone else's gaze, her or his modality of being may be enhanced. A person in love with another may "incarnate his or her erotic mode of being in a subtle glow or radiant face" (p. 104).

In this present study, spirituality may have been better understood by inquiring into corporeal or sensorial encounters of children in which something of their spirituality was expressed and experienced. For example, it has been suggested that spiritualty can be encountered sensually in the ordinariness of everyday experience (Hyde, 2003b; Tacey, 2003).

Lived Time

Lived time is the time that seems to speed up in enjoyment, and slow down in periods of boredom or anxiousness. It is the human being's temporal way of being in the world. As Merleau-Ponty (1945/1996) has stated "Time exists for me only because I am situated in it . . . Time exists for me because I have a present" (p. 423). When a person is getting to know another, she or he might ask about the other's personal life history – what their project is in life. van Manen (1990) has maintained that the "temporal dimensions of past, present, and future constitute the horizons of a person's temporal landscape" (p. 104). As a person's identity emerges and grows, she or he not only lives towards a future that is taking shape, but also reinterprets the past in light of who she or he has now become. The past changes because a person lives towards a future which she or he can see beginning to take shape. Through an individual's hopes and dreams for the future, a perspective on the life that lies ahead is gained.

Lived Human Relation

Lived human relation refers to the lived relationships people maintain with others in the interpersonal space they share. When people encounter one another, they do so in a corporeal way. They are able to develop a conversational relation with the other. In the larger existential sense, human beings have always searched in their experience of the other for a sense of life's meaning and purpose. Tacey (2003) maintained that the Self only comes to know itself in relationship with the other. Without a personified "absolute other" (p. 156) the Self lacks a sense of identity, definition and form. Therefore, in a religious sense, many have searched in their experience of, and relation to the Transcendent for a sense of identity and life meaning and purpose. Some would name the Transcendent, the ultimate ground of being, as God.

van Manen (1990) has maintained that these four lifeworld existentials can be differentiated, but not separated. In a research study such as this present one, the existentials can be studied in their differentiated aspects, while acknowledging that

each existential calls forth the other aspects. In this present study, these four lifeworld existentials became the lenses through which the texts (consisting of conversation and observation) were interpreted. They guided the process of reflection and interpretation in seeking to identify characteristics of children's spirituality in Australian Catholic primary schools.

The Researcher's Reflective Journal

The means by which the researcher actually reflected upon the texts of this study – the videotaped observation of and conversation with the groups of children – was through the use of a *reflective journal*. Each of the videotaped meetings was viewed and reviewed by the researcher, and a journal was maintained. It contained descriptive hermeneutic phenomenological reflections, woven around the four lifeworld existentials. These reflections contained "thickened language" (van Manen, 1991) that sought to describe what the children had to say in conversation, as well as their reactions and body language during the group meetings, which attempted to capture the presence of the phenomenon – their spirituality – in a new and fresh way. The following chapter, which presents the findings of this study, contains pertinent excerpts from this reflective journal that serve to indicate the presence of particular characteristics of these children's spirituality. These reflections appear in the text in italics and they have been indented for further clarity.

Criteria for Evaluating this Study

If a positivist approach was not an appropriate framework for this study, its quality needed then to be evaluated according to alternative criteria. Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Guba and Lincoln (1989, 1994) have argued the necessity of evaluating qualitative research in ways alternative to the positivist criteria of reliability and validity. Lincoln and Guba (1985) have maintained the need to establish the *trustworthiness* of inquiry that is guided by constructionist and

naturalistic paradigms. The fundamental issue in relation to trustworthiness, they have suggested, asks "how can an inquirer persuade his or her audience (including self) that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of?" (p. 290).

As a means of establishing the trustworthiness of alternative research paradigms, they have proposed the criteria of *credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability* as being suitable for assessing the quality of such research. These four criteria were drawn upon in this present study. The following indicates briefly the way in which each was addressed.

Credibility

Credibility was addressed in this study through the notions of prolonged engagement and persistent observation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Prolonged engagement refers to the investment of sufficient time in becoming oriented to a situation, context or research site, and also to the notion of building trust with the research participants. It will be recalled that the researcher spent one two-hour session each week over a period of five weeks in each of the classrooms from which the children were drawn. This enabled the researcher to become oriented to the classroom contexts from which these children came. It enabled the researcher to "be certain that the context [was] thoroughly appreciated and understood" (p. 302). Prolonged engagement also enabled the researcher to establish a rapport and to build trust with the participants. Lincoln and Guba have noted that the building of trust is both a time-consuming and developmental process, yet essential if adequate trust and rapport are to emerge.

The notion of persistent observation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 304) also helped to establish the credibility of this study. Persistent observation involves attending to the salient factors of the phenomenon under consideration. It entails the ability to identify those characteristics and elements of a situation that are most relevant to the research, and to focus on these in detail. It also involves a sorting out

of the irrelevancies – those elements that do not really count. In this present study, persistent observation was undertaken particularly in relation to the viewing and reviewing of the texts – the videotaped group meetings, and to the recordings made by the researcher in the reflective journal. It involved the researcher in the process of justifying the sorting out of both relevancies and irrelevancies. This was often challenging, as there was considerable information gathered through the videotaping process.

Transferability

Within a constructionist paradigm, the perception of transferability is different to the way in which it might be understood within a positivist approach that relies on external validity. Within a constructionist paradigm, transferability depends on context:

> Whether they [the findings] hold in some other context, or even in the same context at some other time, is an empirical issue, the resolution of which depends upon the degree of similarity between sending and receiving (or earlier and later) contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316).

Transferability was addressed in this study through the detailed reflections and interpretations of the texts of this study, resulting in the use of thickened language (van Manen, 1990) to describe the features and characteristics of the children's spirituality. These hermeneutic phenomenological descriptions and reflections were recorded in the researcher's reflective journal. These may potentially enable the reader to encounter the phenomenon of spirituality in a new and fresh way. Guba and Lincoln (1985) have argued that although such descriptions do not specify the external validity of an inquiry, they do in fact enable others interested in replicating the research to reach a conclusion about whether such a transfer might be considered as a possibility.

Dependability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) have argued that there can be no dependability without credibility. That is, a demonstration of the credibility of the research is sufficient to establish its dependability – "If it is possible [to demonstrate credibility] it ought not be necessary to demonstrate dependability separately" (p. 317). While such an assertion has merit, and may establish dependability in practice, the researcher was eager to demonstrate dependability in principle.

Accordingly, dependability was also addressed in this study through ensuring that all phases of the research were accurately described and documented. The videotaping of each group meeting also assisted in ensuring dependability. Although the researcher was the only one to view these recordings, the videotapes formed the texts for refection and interpretation. As such they were viewed many times to ensure that the conversation (Gadamer 1960/1989) between the text and the interpreter was genuine, and that the understandings of each were weighed and tested throughout this conversation.

Confirmability

Confirmability was addressed in this study firstly through the reflective journal (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), in which were recorded the hermeneutic phenomenological descriptions and reflections upon the texts under consideration.

Confirmability was further addressed in this study by both of the researcher's supervisors assisting in confirming that, while absolute objectivity is impossible in any research (Bryman, 2001), the investigator made a conscious attempt not to allow personal values and judgements, or theoretical inclinations, to overtly influence the conduct of the research and findings that evolved from it. They were also able to confirm that the investigator remained faithful to the philosophical underpinnings of hermeneutic phenomenology.

Summary and Significance for This Research Study

This chapter has detailed the epistemology and theoretical perspective which underpinned this qualitative study into the characteristics of children's spirituality in Australian Catholic primary schools. Hermeneutic phenomenology was chosen as the theoretical perspective in which this present study was set because it enabled the researcher to reflect upon the phenomenon under consideration – the characteristics of children's spirituality – and through the use of thickened language, to present this phenomenon in a new and fresh manner. van Manen's (1990) notion of lifeworld existentials have been drawn upon as the lenses through which to reflect upon and analyse the texts of this study. This is particularly significant for this present research study, since, in Australia, hermeneutic phenomenology has not previously been drawn upon as theoretical framework for gaining insight into the spirituality of children of primary school age. Figure 1 presents a summary of the major elements that have been employed for conducting the research reported in this thesis.

Figure 1. A summary of the elements of the research process.

Qualitative Paradigm

Epistemology: Constructionism

⟹ **Theoretical perspective:** Interpretivism – Hermeneutic phenomenology

⟹ **Methodology:** Hermeneutic phenomenological research

⟹ **Methods:** (1) Semi-structured interviews (conversation and observation) to collect the texts; (2) lifeworld existentials as guides to reflection on the texts
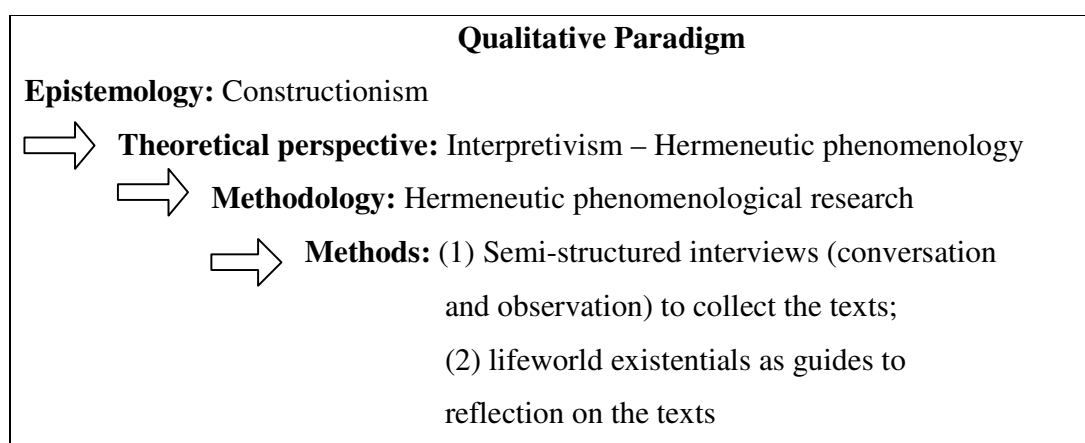
A total of 35 children took part in this research from three Catholic primary schools situated within the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne. These children comprised the two groups of approximately six children in each of the three schools – one group from Year three and one from Year five – with whom the researcher

met on three separate occasions. Each group meeting was structured around the categories of spiritual sensitivity as outlined by Hay and Nye (1998).

As well, this chapter detailed the way in which this research proceeded. It has provided an outline of the types of activities that were incorporated into the second phase of each of the group meetings, and a rationale for their inclusion. It has outlined the way in which the ground was prepared for this research and the means by which the researcher was able to reflect upon the texts of this study, that is, through the use of a reflective journal.

The following chapter presents the findings of this present research study. It outlines four characteristics of these children's spirituality that were revealed as the result of the researcher's reflection upon the texts that comprised this study. It also describes two factors that were identified as the result of such a reflection which seemed to inhibit the children's expression of their spirituality.

CHAPTER FIVE
THE CHARACTERISTICS OF CHILDREN'S SPIRITUALITY: THE
FINDINGS OF THIS RESEARCH STUDY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify some characteristics of children's spirituality in Australian Catholic primary schools. The research began with an initial approach to each of the three schools in the locations of inner city, suburban and rural. The researcher decided to complete the visits, semi-structured interviews and observations in one school at a time rather than attempt this task concurrently, although there were some instances of overlap in order to coincide visits with each school's preferred times. The reason for this was so that the researcher could develop a rapport with the students and learning communities of each of these schools individually before moving onto the next. It also enabled the researcher to gain a sense of the individual character and environment of each school setting, that is, it sought to establish credibility through prolonged engagement (Linclon & Guba, 1985). The researcher spent approximately one two-hour session each week for a period of five weeks in each of the classrooms from which the children were to be drawn. It will be recalled that children in Years three and five were to be invited to participate in this study, and that a total of 35 children took part.

This period was followed by a further three weeks in each of the schools, during which the semi-structured interviews with, and observations of small groups of children were conducted. A total of 18 meetings took place, each lasting between forty-five minutes and one hour. This comprised three meetings with groups of Year three and Year five students in each of the three schools. The visits to schools and conducting of semi-structured interviews commenced late April of 2003. This process concluded in late October of that year.

This chapter centres on the characteristics of these children's spirituality. They have been gleaned as the result of hermeneutic phenomenological reflection upon the texts of this study – the videotaped conversations and observations of each group meeting – through the reflective journal. Each group meeting took as its focus one the categories of spiritual sensitivity described by Hay and Nye (1998) – awareness sensing, mystery sensing and value sensing. Hence, the ensuing discussion explores the characteristics of spirituality that were displayed in relation to these categories.

In general, much discussion and dialogue took place during each of the group meetings. The children's discussion centred on a wide range of topics, which, as well as including the focus for each group meeting, incorporated their likes and dislikes, what they did on the weekend, their favourite foods and hobbies, their football teams and sporting achievements, their favourite school subjects, along with sharing with the researcher the composition of their friendship groups and families and their pets. In brief, the children talked about their engagement with the everyday. While the videotaped group meetings contained numerous possible characteristics which may have been indicative of these children's spirituality, there were four characteristics which, as the result of a thorough reflection upon the recordings, emerged consistently among each group of children in each of the three school locations. As these appeared to be evident across each group, these four characteristics became the focus for discussion in this research study.

The process employed by the researcher involved viewing and reviewing, several times, each of the videotaped recordings – the texts – of the group meetings. Notes were made in the researcher's reflective journal in relation to the similarities which seemed to be recurring in each of the texts. The researcher then 'book marked' each section of each of the group meetings in which there was evidence suggesting the presence of a particular characteristic of the children's spirituality for further viewing and reflection at a later date. These particular book marked sections were then viewed again – several times – and additional notes made in the reflective

journal, along with some verbatim transcriptions of the children's words, body language, facial expressions, silences, and the like. The researcher then utilized a table which acted as a tool for recording each of these characteristics (see Appendix F). This tool indicated the area of spiritual sensitivity in which the characteristic seemed to be evident, the geographical location of the school and the Year level of the children involved.

In this chapter, each characteristic that has been discerned is presented and outlined, with some hermeneutic phenomenological descriptions of the texts that exemplify the presence of the particular characteristic. The full hermeneutic phenomenological texts are presented in Appendix H.

Four characteristics of the children's spirituality were identified as the result of such a reflection:

- *The felt sense*
- *Integrating awareness*
- *Weaving the threads of meaning*, and
- *Spiritual questing*.

As well, there were two factors identified that appeared to inhibit these children's expression of their spirituality. These have been termed *material pursuit* and *trivialising*. While there were potentially other factors that may have inhibited these children's expression of their spirituality, these two particular factors, once again, showed a degree of consistency across the groups of children who participated in this study. The discernment of these two factors by the researcher occurred through the process described above for the identification of the characteristics of children's spirituality. These two inhibiting factors are also presented in this chapter.

Awareness Sensing: *Flow*, *the Felt sense*, and *Integrating Awareness*

The first group meeting focused on the concept of awareness sensing (Hay & Nye, 1998). Awareness sensing involves attending to the here-and-now of experience, the total engagement in a particular activity, and the alertness of what might be experienced in moments of concentration and stillness. After some initial conversation centred on times when they may have been completely absorbed in an activity, the children were invited to select from a variety of activities that may have involved attending to the here-and-now of experience. These activities included, seed planting, bead-creations, jigsaw puzzles, and drawing. The children were invited to select from these activities the one(s) in which they wished to engage.

The characteristic described by Csikszentmihalyi (1975, 1990) as *flow* was evident during all of the awareness sensing meetings. Csikszentmihalyi (1975) described flow as the feeling one might have when, for example, one reads a compelling book, or becomes lost in a fascinating conversation. It involves the experience of concentrated attention giving way to a liberating feeling of the activity being managed by itself, or by some outside influence. The action of the activity in which one is involved and the awareness of that activity become merged. Flow is:

> a holistic sensation that people feel when they act with total involvement . . . action follows upon action according to an internal logic that seems to need no conscious intervention by the actor. He experiences it as a unified flowing from one moment to the next, in which he is in control of his actions, and in which there is little distinction between self and environment, between past, present and future (p. 36).

Typical activities that might result in an experience of flow include music, art, yoga, the martial arts, games, rock climbing, and even a person's work (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Religious ritual too can be a source of flow for an individual. For example, the Jesuit Rule and the spiritual exercises devised by

Ignatius of Loyola can be understood as an attempt to generate the experience of flow. In the focused attention to the act of one's breathing, for instance, such exercises potentially provided "an optimal set of conditions by which young men could live the entirety of their lives as a single flow experience" (Hay & Nye, 1998, p. 65). This is not dissimilar to the eastern tradition of *vipassana* (awareness meditation) in Theravada Buddhism.

Although the researcher did not explicitly use the term *flow* with the children, they were introduced to this concept through the telling of a story as a part of the first phase of the awareness sensing group meetings (see Appendix E). In all of the awareness sensing group meetings the children were able to recall occasions on which, in essence, they had undergone an experience of flow. For example, John in Year five from the suburban school stated:

> *"I was playing with my sister's birthday present. It was a little bead-threading thing, and you had to look so closely at it that you couldn't pay attention to anything else. It wasn't until I dropped a bead that I realised that mum was calling me for lunch."*

Similarly, May Ling in Year five from the inner city school recounted the following:

> *"Once, when I was lining up at the end of lunch time, I was looking at a bird on the ground not far from me. I think it was a sparrow, because it was really little. The teacher must have called for us to walk into class, but I was still looking at the bird. My back was turned away from the teacher and I didn't realise that my line had moved, and suddenly I was standing by myself."*

Wallace, a Year three student in the rural school recalled the following:

> *"I'm a computer freak,"* began Wallace, *"and every time I'm fixed on something, everything turns to total blackness except for me and the thing I'm fixed on. Everything disappears, and only me and the thing I'm fixed on are there. Like, nothing else exists."*

While the characteristic of flow was identified, in reflecting upon the texts of this study it was noted that the children's expression of flow could be further characterised by two distinctive features: *attending to the felt sense*, and *integrating awareness*.

The Felt Sense

Attending to the felt sense entails Hay and Nye's (1998) notion of the here-and-now of experience. It refers to the intensity and immediacy of awareness of the present moment. In attending to the felt sense, an individual may become lost in the activity in which she or he is engaged. A lack of awareness in relation to the passing of time is common in such an experience. Further, these experiences tend to be private. They are experienced only by the individual. The following researcher's reflective journal (RRJ) entry on the Year five suburban school children is indicative of this:

> *The children proceeded to their selected activity. Adam headed for the seed planting, the materials of which were located on one of the tables. Alicia, John and Cameron made their way to the table containing the materials for the bead creations. Although the three children sat next to one other, there was no interaction among them. They could well have been physically situated in separate countries, or at opposite ends of the earth, for there appeared no dealings among them. Each was engaged and focused on her or his own activity . . . although they were seated within close proximity to one another, each seemed to be oblivious to the presence of her or his peers.*

Of particular relevance in attending to the felt sense is Gendlin's (1962, 1981) notion of *focusing*. Focusing entails the attending to the bodily awareness of situations, persons, or events. Bodily awareness, as Gendlin (1981) has maintained, is not a mental experience, but a *physical* one:

A felt sense doesn't come to you in the form of thoughts or words or other separate units, but as a single (though often puzzling and very complex) bodily feeling . . . Since a felt sense doesn't communicate itself in words it isn't easy to describe in words. It is an unfamiliar, deep-down level of awareness (p. 33).

Gendlin (1981) has maintained that individuals encounter and act upon the world with the whole of their bodies. An individual's corporeality is then a primary source of knowledge. Attending to the felt sense may enable a person to draw upon the wisdom of the body in assisting with personal difficulties and in being sensitively aware in relationships. In other words, it may enable an individual to get in touch with the felt sense of a particular situation. The following RRJ entry on one of the Year five children from the suburban school is indicative of this feature of *the felt sense*:

> *Adam carefully and skilfully engaged in the tactile experience of placing potting mix into the seed boxes. He seemed to acknowledge the texture and consistency of the soil by rubbing it between his finger tips and thumb before patting it into each of the sockets. Then, delicately, placed one or two of the seeds into each of the sockets, and gently compressed them into the potting mixture. In a way that could almost be described as lovingly, he added a little water to each.*

Similarly, two of the children in Year three from the inner city school exhibited this quality of *the felt sense*:

> *Marco headed straight for the bead creations activity. He selected his stencil and began to choose beads to place on it. "I'm going to finish this," he murmured almost to himself as he settled and began to engage in this activity. His focus was almost immediate. Carefully and skilfully, he manipulated the beads, selecting his colours and moving them into position. His actions and awareness seemed to merge as a look of delight came across his face.*

Soon, he was joined by Tran . . . (who also) began to engage in this activity. Quite consciously and gently, Tran deliberately ran his fingers across the pile of beads, acknowledging their texture and shape. He selected his beads with thought and care.

"Oh no," whispered Marco. He had accidentally knocked some of the beads from their position on the stencil. Painstakingly, he set about restoring his work . . . One might intuit a reverence – almost a sense of the sacred in this activity. It was as though both children desired to maintain the silence and tranquillity of the space in which this activity was undertaken, and which this activity seemed to deserve.

A group of girls in Year five from the rural school also exhibited this particular quality of *the felt sense* as they worked cooperatively on the jigsaw activity:

Kristy's finger tips gently ran across the individual pieces that were laid out on the floor, searching for the correct interlocking parts. There seemed a need and a desire to honour the quiet – the sacredness – that this activity required . . . (as other children joined her) their finger tips seemed to run across the individual jigsaw pieces, almost as if to "get a feel" for the right piece. It was almost as if the resulting bodily sensation would somehow indicate the correct piece that might be required in order to complete their section. Although they were using their sense of sight to search the array of patterns presented by the jigsaw pieces, they seemed to be relying on the wisdom of their sense of touch to guide them in locating the required pieces in order to attempt and complete this particular task.

With the arms and hands of the different children moving across one another, and in and out of each other's way, there was a sense in which a communal space had been created for the completion of this activity. They worked together with purpose . . . It was not long before various sections that were being completed were ready to be attached to the original larger

segment. There was some excitement as this was undertaken, accompanied by looks of pride and satisfaction.

My announcement that it was almost time to conclude was met with cries of surprise and disappointment. "Oh no!" they lamented as one voice.

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

Integrating Awareness

The characteristic of *integrating awareness* could be observed particularly during the second phase of the awareness sensing meetings with the Year five children from the inner city school and the Year three children from the suburban school. Initially, it involved the typical elements of the flow experience. The children seemed to begin concentrating upon the activity they chose to undertake. After a short time, however, it seemed that their chosen activity seemed to manage itself, thereby allowing them to transcend the activity, and to enter into a "free-flowing" style of conversation. At one level of awareness, their concentration remained on the activity at hand. Yet at a second level of awareness, they were able to speak freely and in an uninhibited manner, oblivious to the fact that there was an adult present, and that they were being videotaped. Their conversation seemed to take on a life of its own, and it was the activity in which the children were engaged that seemed to enable this to happen. It was almost as if the activity enabled the children to transcend it, and to speak freely in conversation. Yet, as they spoke freely in conversation, the care which they displayed in attending to the activity did not diminish. The conversation seemed to have integrated the activity. That is, this second level of awareness had enveloped or become integrated with the first level. In each case, after a time, one of the children became conscious of the presence of the adult and the video camera, and reminded her or his peers of this. At this point, a

quiet resumed and the children's focus would return solely to the activity at hand. The following RRJ entry on the awareness sensing meeting with Year five children of the inner city schools provides an example of *integrating awareness*. All of the children in this group chose the bead creations activity, and after their concentration had become focused on the task at hand, a second level of awareness seemed to develop among them, manifest in the form of free-flowing conversation:

"When we're noisy, you're quiet, and when you're noisy, we're quiet," began May Ling, who smiled as her comment was met with laughter.

"Like on camp," interjected Hy Sun. "Our cabin was so quiet, but Wadi couldn't stop snoring!"

"Me and Jack fell asleep straight away," added Ramsay, but "Albert kept on chanting 'Aaaaanthony, Aaaaanthony'"

There was more laughing, followed by Fadde, who declared "We were the noisiest cabin. Mr. Marks and Miss Phoebe had to shout at us…"

"Those two love each other!" interrupted Missal, to the sound of further giggling.

"We had to get changed in our cabins" continued Fadde, but every time Jack had to get changed he asked us to close our eyes – "

"And you should hear how he blows his nose!" added May Ling. "It is so quiet ,but when he blows his nose everyone went, 'ew!'"

"Oops – the camera is listening!" cautioned Hy Sun, who, while looking around, had suddenly become aware of the video and my presence.

Similarly the following RRJ entry on the Year three children from the suburban school provides some evidence of this characteristic of their spirituality. These children had all selected the seed planting activity, and after a short silence and time of focusing on the task, a second level of consciousness seemed to emerge among them, evident again through the particular style of conversation which developed. So free was their conversation that it was almost as if they had become oblivious to the presence of an adult and video camera recording the meeting.

"Joseph gets to sleep in the lounge room," declared Stacey.

"I get to sleep in the kitchen!" announced Joseph, who seemed pleased to be the centre of attention.

"No, Joseph sleeps with Sally!" exclaimed Milly.

"No, I don't!" retorted Joseph.

"As if!" replied a defiant Sally.

"Yes you do!" teased Milly.

"You're being silly," giggled Sally.

Stacey turned towards the camera and said in a more serious tone, "Is this (the video) going to be shown to our mums and dads?"

Trying my best to act impartially and not to react to the comments of their conversation, I assured them that the video would not be viewed by anyone other than myself.

"Good," and "That's OK then," came their replies simultaneously.

Quiet descended upon the group as children's focus returned to the task at hand.

"Don't you dare tell my mum [that I said that]," cautioned Milly in a quiet voice to Emma. "She's going to kill me!"

The Year three children from the rural school setting provided a variation on this characteristic of *integrating awareness*. While this group did engage in conversation, their conversation seemed to be largely task oriented. There was a communal purpose to their engagement in their activity, as the following reflection indicates:

The children divided themselves into three smaller groups to work on different sections of the jigsaw. There was a sense of cooperation, but more than this. There was a sense of relationality. It occurred to me that this jigsaw activity was being completed in relationship with Other. There was a sense of group spirit. All group members were needed, and had an important role to play in completing the task. Various pieces of the jigsaw were passed from group to group, according to the sections that were being

worked upon. There was a sense of purpose and engagement in this activity. In this instance, the activity took care of itself, but only in relation to the other. As the activity proceeded, some conversation was generated, but mostly in relation to the task at hand, and for the most part, it was undertaken in quiet whispers.

Integrating awareness, as a characteristic of children's spirituality, seemed to entail the emergence of a second wave of consciousness, typified by a free-flowing style of conversation, which enveloped, or became integrated at an initial level of consciousness which featured an attention to tactile, hands-on activity.

Mystery Sensing: *Weaving the Threads of Meaning* – Wondering as a Tool
for Expressing Spirituality

The second group meeting focused on the concept of mystery sensing (Hay & Nye, 1998). Mystery sensing involves the sense of wonder and awe, the fascination and questioning which is characteristic of children as they interact with the mystery of the universe. The second phase of this group meeting entailed the children's reactions and points of discussion in relation to a series of photographs shown to them by the researcher. It was hoped that these photographs might generate some reflective conversation around the notions of mystery and wonder.

In each of the mystery sensing group meetings, it became clear that the children's sense of wonder acted as a tool for expressing their spirituality. That is to say, the children seemed to draw upon their sense of wonder in order to make meaning of events and to piece together a worldview based around their attempts at meaning-making. Since the act of meaning making is continuous and ongoing, the children's own creating of their spirituality was also a "work in progress". It is interesting to note that this active creating seems to have occurred despite the fact that these children were immersed in school contexts that presented and promoted the Catholic faith tradition, and hence a Catholic worldview. These children did not

draw solely from the Christian meta-narrative in creating and expressing their spirituality. Rather, they seemed to draw upon an eclectic range of concepts and ideas to develop a personal framework that enabled them to make meaningful connections with the Transcendent and with others. In terms of western culture, Horell (2004) has expressed such a notion in terms of a shift away from a focus on adherence to a Christian religious worldview towards a greater emphasis on the importance of spiritual experiences, and the notion of connecting spiritually with self, others, the world, and with God. Such a shift seemed to be evident in these children, who were effectively able to "weave together strands of meaning from our pluralistic, multicultural world into a framework . . . that provide(d) a sense of personal centeredness and enable(d) them to make meaningful connections with God and others"(p. 8). In drawing upon Horell's notion, the characteristic expressed by the children in this present study has been termed *weaving the threads of meaning*.

The children's reactions and conversation generated in relation to three of the photographs shown to them were particularly indicative of their ability to utilise their sense of wonder in order to weave together the threads of meaning. The first of these three pictures was the Ken Duncan panoramic photograph of Uluru. The following RRJ entry on the Year three children in the inner city school exemplifies this characteristic.

> *The children's faces displayed expressions of amazement as I showed them the panoramic photograph of Uluru…*
>
> *"I wonder: how did it get so big" (asked Rosie)…*
>
> *"I wonder if it is a volcano," said Ali, who seemed to be drawing some recent work in the classroom which had involved an exploration of a volcano that had erupted some time ago.*
>
> *"No," interjected Rosie, "it's just a rock.*
>
> *"But how did it get there?" wondered Charlotte. There was something about this particular photograph that seemed to have captured her attention.*
>
> *"Well, maybe it just dropped from the sky," offered Tran.*

"Yes, but it's huge!" exclaimed Charlotte.

"It could have fallen, like how hail stones come out of the sky," replied Rosie, "and there could have been so many of them, and the Aboriginals [sic] could have stacked them up and painted the rock that red colour."

"But the hail would have melted," said Charlotte, who seemed a little disappointed that Rosie's theory could be flawed so easily.

"Maybe a volcano somewhere erupted," said Ali, attempting to take up and build upon Rosie's theme with his own creation, "and all the rocks came and landed there. A few days later, they somehow got stacked together."

"Well," began Rosie, "maybe it could have been part of a volcano that disappeared, and it just came to be rocks and it was all mushy and some people pushed it up and made it tall and it went hard."

"The lava might have made it that colour," added Tran, who was eager not to be left out of the conversation.

Similarly, the following RRJ entry on the Year three students in the suburban school illustrates the ability to draw upon wonder as a tool for *weaving the threads of meaning*. In this instance, the notion of God as creator was introduced into the discussion.

"Wow!"

Such was the unanimous comment when I showed the children the large Ken Duncan panoramic photograph of Uluru.

"Maybe there was once an ocean there, and when the waves came up and splashed against it, it carved the shape," said Zephania,

"I think it was a volcano," said Joseph, "and when it erupted, the lava came down the side, and that's how it got its curves."

"Maybe the marks (curves) were put there by the claws of a big animal, like maybe a dinosaur!" exclaimed Milly.

"Yes," replied Joseph, "I think it has been there since dinosaurs were alive."

"Maybe God made it," offered Sally.

I took the opportunity of asking Sally what she meant by God. She confidently replied, "God is our Father."

The Year five children in the inner city school found this meeting difficult. Their body language seemed to suggest that they were disinterested and even mistrustful of each other and their responses. Their flippant and off-hand remarks, as well as their constant giggling indicated that they had created a façade of facetiousness which seemed to protect their safety zone. However, their reaction to the photograph of Uluru was an instance in which these children displayed some insight into their genuine wondering, and their ability to draw upon it as a means by which to weave together the different strands of meaning:

When I showed the photograph of Uluru, their body language changed. They edged forward for a closer look, saying, "It's Uluru, it's Uluru!"

"How did it get like that?" wondered Missal, almost oblivious to the fact that she had broken her façade.

"It's in the middle of nowhere," added Hy Sun, who had become momentarily mesmerised by the photograph. His eyes were opened wide and his mouth was ajar.

"Maybe God created it" began Maria, "and it slowly began to grow bigger and bigger…"

"Maybe there are spirits there" said Missal, "and people distract them…"

"By walking all over it," interjected Maria, "and the spirits get angry."

"It might have been a volcano" suggested Ramsey, "that was slowly shrinking."

"And it's got that funny red colour," added May Ling, "maybe because of the sun. It's hot in the Northern Territory."

"Maybe the Aborigines painted it," commented Missal to the sounds of relieved laughter. The safety zone had been restored and the children could again return to familiar territory.

The second of the three photographs that provided the impetus for drawing upon their ability to utilise their sense of wonder in order to create meaning, was the photograph of two young children crying. In many cases, children in each group wondered if the children in the photograph were crying because someone had died. This generated much discussion and attempts to fashion a particular meaning-making framework indicative of their spirituality, as can be seen in the following RRJ entry on the Year five children in the suburban school.

"They look like someone might have died," replied Adam. The rest of the group nodded in agreement.

"I wonder what you might say to make them feel better," I probed.

"I'd say 'Don't worry, they'll still be with you in your heart.'"

"And that you'll always remember them," added Alicia.

"And I'd tell them that they still have each other," stated Adam.

There was a pause in the conversation, so I probed a little further. "I wonder where the person who had died might have gone."

"Their body would still be on earth, because it would have been buried," said Alicia thoughtfully, "but the soul would go to heaven."

As the term "heaven" had been introduced by the children themselves, the researcher explored this further with them:

"Well, heaven," began Cameron, "…it's not like you can drive there. It's a thought, it's in your heart if you believe that it's there."

"It's like a secret place," explained Danny. "No one has been there except for those who have died. No one knows where it is."

"No one on earth knows what it is or where it is," added John. "And no one has been there and come back to tell us about it…Heaven is…"

[continued] John, who was struggling to find the right words to give

expression to this thought, "…you can't really imagine it. We go there in our golden years, like, after we turn fifty."

One of the children then added that Jesus had told people about heaven, and although the researcher wanted to explore this idea further, the conversation was taken by the children in a different direction:

"I actually think that everyone who has passed away…" began Danny, "well, they have a different heaven. If a person liked painting, then they'd go to a place where you can paint all you want."

"I'm reading a book," added Alicia, "about a girl who is thirteen-years-old and she dies and goes to this angel academy school in heaven. Once I had read that, I thought that's where people go. They go into separate groups and do what they want to do and what they like to do."

The Year three counterparts of these children in the suburban school similarly drew upon their sense of wonder in order to create a sense of meaning in relation to this photograph.

"Maybe someone died in their family," offered Stacey.

"I wonder what you might say to the children to make them feel better," I probed.

Joseph was the first to offer a reply. "I'd say, don't worry. If they've died, they're all around you."

"I'd say we'll all be up there one day," added Emma.

"Everyone will go up to heaven," [said] Emma, "and we'll stay there.

"Yes, and because they're up in heaven, they can look down on you and see you."

The researcher then asked the children what they meant by the word "heaven".

"It's where God is," replied Joseph.

"It's a cloud, and a place where there is peace, and it's all white," added Stacey.

"It's where nice people go when they die," said Sally.

"I think heaven is maybe a happy place with waterfalls and rainforests," suggested Milly.

"Heaven is like a new world," declared Zephaniah.

"It is a place where God and Mary and Jesus live," added Stacey.

The children in Year three in the inner city school were shown a third slightly different photograph of an elderly lady, perhaps someone's grandmother. But again, the conversation focused around the idea of death, and attempts were made to create meaning around this:

"Maybe it's a photo of a lady who passed away," said Rosie…*"and they had a funeral for her with a photo like that one."…*

"She might have got cremated," added Rosie. *"They put you in a coffin and put it on a fire, and then there's only ashes left and they put them in a jar and you keep it. Or, sometimes you can tip the ashes out in a spot that she liked."*

There followed a short pause, and then Charlotte said, "Maybe she got buried and then her soul flew up to heaven." As she said this, Charlotte placed her hands in the position of wings and fluttered them upwards. Then she quickly added, "Or down to hell or to purgatory."

"That's in between," clarified Rosie.

"Well, it's exactly the same as hell, except one day you go to heaven," replied Charlotte.

"And if you've been really bad, you go to hell," said Rosie, eager to further clarify.

At this point, the researcher asked the children to clarify what they meant by the term "heaven".

"Like, say if you're Catholic," began Charlotte, "heaven is a really happy place."

"How would they make heaven happy and hell bad?" asked Tran, who seemed to now be wondering quite seriously about this.

"Do you know what purgatory means?" Rosie asked Charlotte, "It's hard to explain."

*"I know how to explain it," declared Charlotte confidently. "My dad taught me because his mum is **really** Catholic. She has all these statues, and every day she says the Rosary. She loves God. She used to go to church everyday, but now she's too old. She only goes once a week."*

Similarly, the Year five children in the inner city school, although at times cautious and hesitant in their earlier conversation, expressed something of their ability to weave together the treads of meaning when shown this same photograph. After agreeing that the lady had died, the researcher asked what the children might say to comfort her relatives:

"You'll still have memories of her," said Maria.

"She's with you in spirit," added May Ling. "Just because she's not in front of you doesn't mean she's gone."

"She's in your heart," added Missal.

"If she was good," began Hy Sun, "she might be in heaven."

I inquired as to what he meant by the word 'heaven'.

The responses came quickly – "It's a good, peaceful place," "where God lives," "It's where good spirits go."

"If she was not a good person on earth," explained Hy Sun, "she would remain a ghost and haunt people and their houses."

"Yeah," agreed Fadde, "evil stuff would happen."

"Or," suggested Maria, "she'd go to hell. It's a place of torture with the devil and his pitchfork."

"Like on 'The Simpson's,'" said Fadde.

When children in the Year three group from the rural school were shown this same photograph, again, the conversation focused around the idea of death, and attempts were made to create meaning around this concept. The following reflection is indicative of this:

"She has probably died," added Michael, *"and she was very special to them because they wouldn't have bothered to put her photo in that pretty frame if she wasn't important to them."*

"She goes into a grave," replied Susan, *"and she'll go up to heaven."*

"Her soul goes up to heaven," said Imelda.

"Its only our soul that goes up to heaven – except for Mary – our soul and our heart are what really care…depending on how good you are," enlightened Tom.

The researcher inquired what the children mean by the word "heaven".

"Paradise," offered Michael after a moment's reflection. *"Heaven is a paradise because people say 'I'm in heaven' when they're at a good place, or when they're doing something they really enjoy."*

"It's a peaceful, loving place," added Imelda.

"She'll (the lady in the photograph) stay there for eternity," said Tom.

"You can't die again," added Michael.

"A lot of people don't think that there is new life," continued Tom, *"but there is actually life after death."*

The notion of hell was also raised during this discussion, and so the researcher asked the children what they may have meant by this term.

"It is a kind of death after death," reflected Michael.

"It's a ball of fire," said Tom. *"Heaven is ruled by Jesus and God, but hell is ruled by the Devil, and the Devil is actually an angel that turned on God. Where there's heaven, there's probably hell too."*

"Everyone has a good side and a bad side" explained Michael. "It's like the good side says 'Don't listen to him, he's the devil', but the bad side says 'Go on, flush your brother's mouth guard down the toilet!'"

The Year five children in the rural school spoke quite freely about the notion of death and afterlife without the need of a stimulus photograph. Some of these children indicated that these were concepts about which they frequently wondered. This may perhaps have been because many of these children's families came from farms, and they had seen the life cycles of the natural world. Such experiences may have allowed these children to be more comfortable with the topic of death and afterlife. The discussion that ensued in this particular group meeting flowed quite freely in an attempt to actively create meaning. The following reflection is indicative of this:

"I wonder about why people die and go up to heaven," added Kristy. "I wonder about what they do up in heaven, because, you see shows on TV where people in heaven play games, or can dance – if they were dancers when they were alive. I wonder about that sort of stuff. I wonder why we grow old and die."

"I wonder why some people die at 30 years," said Emily, "and why other people die at 100 years. I wonder why people who die at 30 don't live until 100. One of my uncles died at 27, but my grandpa died at 98. I kind of wish that I had known him better when he was alive."

"I wonder about why my sister died," added Michelle, clasping her hands around herself, "and if there was a reason – I can't really explain why. She pretty much died instantly, and I wonder why our family got someone who died."

The researcher inquired what the children understood by the word "heaven", which had been introduced into the conversation.

"It's hard to explain," began Lara. "It's like a second world."

"No one on earth has seen it until they die, "added Michelle.

"One of my mum's uncles, he's been to heaven and come back," remarked Annabelle, who had been quiet, and almost disinterested until now. The other children immediately turn to look at her with great interest. *"Well, he thinks he has seen it, because he's been in hospital a couple of times, and he's been in a coma. He woke up recalling hearing music and seeing all his [dead] relatives again."*

"My great nana is in an old folks' home," explained Kristy, *"She had to be taken to hospital. During the night she wouldn't wake up, and she reckons she's seen heaven as well."*

"Sometimes we used to go to Port Fairy with my sister Kim before she died," began Michelle, *"and one time when we went back there after she died, I thought I'd saw her walking behind me."*

*This immediately captured the attention of the other children. One or two of them, who had been fidgeting, now look directly at Michelle for further details. Michelle seems to sense this, and although happy to reveal further, clasps her arms around her own body, as somehow indicating that this was **her** story. That her story is sacred, and that although sharing it with her peers, she is not ready to let go of it just yet.*

"I was amazed," continued Michelle *"that I actually saw her again because I was young and I thought I wouldn't see her again until I was really old and had died."*

Michelle was convinced that she had seen, or at the very least experienced her sister in this event in a profound way. So I asked if she remembered what Kim might have been wearing, or what she might have looked like.

"I think she had a pink dress on," replied Michelle, *"but she was like a faded cloud, sort of – she didn't look alive – it was like a spirit sort of – I was walking behind Tom and Mum, and Kim was behind me."*

Figure 2 below is an attempt to represent some of the various frameworks of meaning that appeared to be drawn upon by the children in their weaving together the threads of meaning in order to express something of their spirituality.

Figure 2. Some frameworks of meaning drawn upon by children in creating their spirituality.
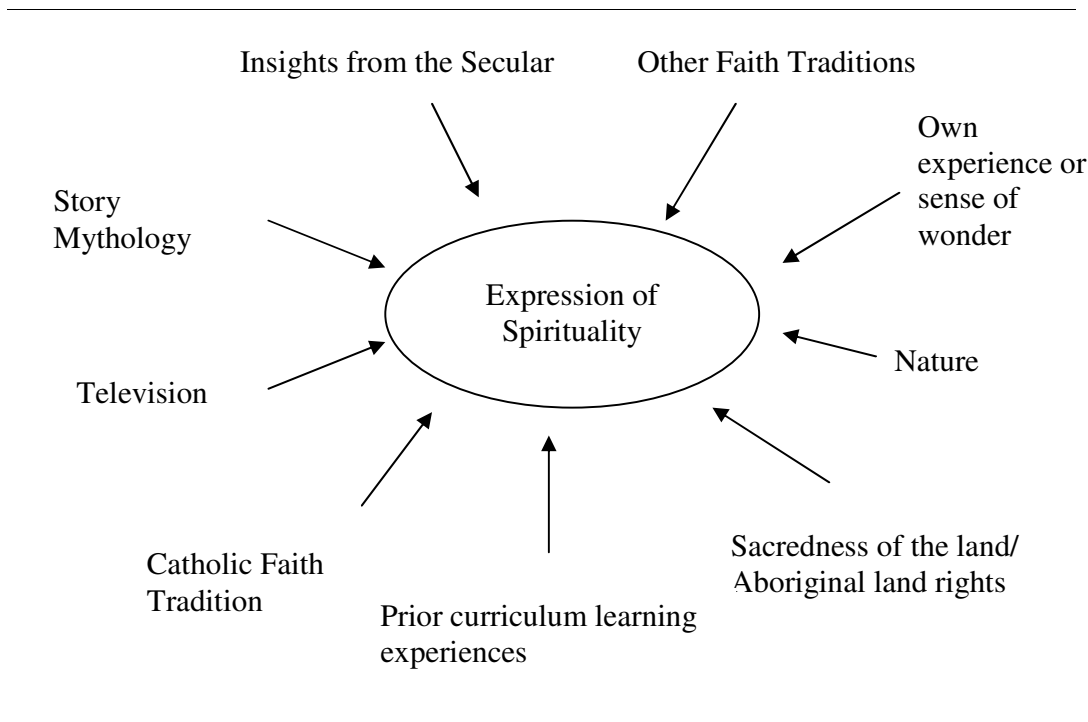
Value Sensing: *Spiritual Questing*

The third group meeting in each of the three schools focused on the concept of value sensing (Hay & Nye, 1998). Value sensing concerns the moral sensitivity of children. It includes a sense of that which really matters to the children themselves. The first phase of this group meeting entailed the researcher sharing a short story with the children, and then inviting them to respond to the question of what really mattered to them. This responding was undertaken through both discussion, and, in the second phase of the meeting, a journaling activity.

In response to the question, "I wonder what you think really, really matters?" (R. Nye, personal communication, May 9th, 2002), the characteristic described in

this present study as *spiritual questing* became evident. This term has been adapted from the work of Horell (2003), who has suggested that the present time marks a broad cultural shift in the ways that people make sense of their lives and their world. Horell has described this movement as a shift away from the confidence of modernity towards the greater ambiguity and multiplicity of postmodernity. Emerging postmodern sensibilities, he has argued, give rise not to one, but to a range of attitudes towards life and the world. This range of attitudes is particularly evident in this young generation of children (and adolescents) known variously as "Millennials" (Howe & Strauss, 2000) and "NetGen" (Hicks & Hicks, 1999). Horell has used the term "questing postmodernity" to describe one such attitude. The research described in this thesis has drawn on an adaptation of questing postmodernity, using the term *spiritual questing*, which "seek(s) to promote imaginative creativity and the pragmatic construction of new patterns and self-identity" (Horell, 2003, p. 91). Spiritual questers view the shift from certainty towards a multiplicity of meanings as one of opportunity. Instead of resulting in scepticism, nihilism and trivialising in relation to human activity and thought, for spiritual questers, the current milieu provides opportunities for a freedom to envision more life-giving and life-enhancing ways of being. Horell has noted that, in terms of the Christian tradition, those who might be classed as postmodern questers – "spiritual questers" in this present research – seek to explore new and perhaps more authentic ways of connecting with self, others, the earth and with God.

All group meetings provided much evidence of this characteristic of *spiritual questing*. The following RRJ entry on Michelle in Year five in the rural school suggests the presence of this characteristic of spirituality. Michelle spoke freely about the keep-sakes of her older sister Kim who had died when Michelle herself was quite young:

> *When asked what it was that really mattered to them, Michelle's response was immediate. "The stuff we have of Kim left, and mum's journal that says what we reckon about Kim and our grief that we've had inside." She replied. "When Kim died, dad and mum and I, and Tom did a bit too, we*

used to have a lot of dreams about Kim, and mum used to write them down in a journal. When we go on a big holiday, mum gives the journal to (a family friend) in case anything happens to the house while we're away." She added, "I've got a teddy bear that she used to love a lot, and some of her ornaments."

The idea of a sense of connectedness after death seemed prevalent among this group of children, as was evidenced by Emily:

"I'd wish for everyone in my family who has died to come back so I can meet them," said Emily. "My grandpa died a long time ago, but he is important to me. Even though I didn't know him very well, I would still really like to meet him, like, probably, now."

The counterparts of these children in Year three from the rural school also exhibited signs of *spiritual questing*. After a thoughtful silence, the children began to speak freely:

Tom was the first to offer his thoughts. "God and Jesus, and probably my family" he declared. "My family cares for me and everything, and God and Jesus – because – I can't really explain, but they're kind of – " Tom's voice trailed as he searches for the language to convey his thoughts.

"Yeah, God and Jesus," affirmed Michael, "and Mary, because they're the kind of people that, if you could meet them, they'd be really nice. Also, my family and my pets matter to me."

"What matters to me," added Imelda, "is to take care of my family because they might split up or have a divorce or something. You have to take care of your family and they have to care for you, even if you do something wrong, and even if they do something wrong to you. You still have to care for them."

Wallace, who had been thinking quietly, now took the conversation in a slightly different direction. "My life is important to me," he declared,

"Because the stuff I do is kind of daring, like mast windsurfing. I've got a new board that's kind of big and fast and I hope I don't crash!"

Similarly, the following reflection on the Year five students in the inner city school indicates spiritual questing as a characteristic of these children. When asked what it was that really mattered to them, the following types of replies were generated:

"Astrology," replied May Ling.

[Other] responses came both instantaneously and simultaneously – "Its star signs", "And clairvoyance", "Cancer, Capricorn…"

"They tell you about yourself and others" replied Hy Sun reflectively.

I ask the question again. Ramsay, who had been relatively quiet, said "Being myself…I like who I am."

Missal affirmed his response, saying "You're unique."

"Imagine you had three wishes", I began, "What might you wish for?"

"Whenever I want something, it just comes to me!" offered Maria to the sounds of further giggling.

"Like powers" suggested Missal.

"Oooh, magic!" teased Hy Sun, waving his fingers like a magician…

…"What kind of powers would you wish for?" I inquired.

Two responses again came instantaneously and simultaneously – "Telepathy", "That I can read minds".

"That I can disappear whenever I want, when I'm embarrassed..." continued Maria.

"Like on 'Charmed'" clarified May Ling, alluding to a popular television show that deals with magic and the occult.

"Yeah, and how Phoebe and Paige (characters from "Charmed" use their powers to save the universe!" added Missal enthusiastically. Ramsey and May Ling nodded their heads in agreement.

Their counterparts in Year three (inner city school) also exhibited this characteristic of spiritual questing:

> *Almost as if reflecting to herself, Amina said "I wish that I'm really, really healthy and that my parents weren't divorced."*
>
> *Charlotte added "I'd wish for a happy future, that my family stays together, and that the poor become richer, well, not rich, but average, so they don't have to go around asking for money and that they live a good life." This is the second time that Charlotte has indicated the importance of a happy future.*
>
> *"Like, no one's poor in the world," added Amina.*
>
> *"Why might that be a good thing to wish for?" I probed.*
>
> *"Cause it's doing something for another person," replied Amina confidently.*

Likewise, children in both value-sensing group meetings in the suburban school displayed the characteristic of spiritual questing. The following reflection on the Year five group meeting exemplifies the presence of this characteristic:

> *John considered my request for information carefully, and responded by saying "Freedom really matters, because, a long time ago slavery was not illegal, and some people didn't have freedom, which everybody should be able to have."*
>
> *"Like the aborigines," said Adam. "They didn't have any freedom – they couldn't vote, they couldn't live wherever they wanted to."*
>
> *"But aborigines now can do anything that white people can do," declared Cameron. "Because we should treat all people the same way. And we should all have the same amount of the things we like."*

Again, searching for the right words was often difficult. As the conversation with this group of children continued, John indicated this difficulty in an explicit way:

"Love matters. If you weren't loved, I don't think any of us would be here, cos, you need love and affection, um – how shall I say this – some parents don't care about their children –" (John searches again for the right words). "They don't send their children to school…they go away and leave their children to do the groceries and stuff. They don't care for them."

Similarly, the Year three children in the suburban school exhibited the characteristic of spiritual questing:

"I would wish for world peace so that we could all be happy," replied Stacey confidently.

"And that all the poor people have money and food and clothes," added Zephaniah.

"I'd wish for no more war," replied Sally, "and that all the people who have been hurt or sick would get better."

The Journaling Activity

It will be recalled that the second phase of this meeting involved a journaling activity in which the children were invited to respond through writing and/or drawing to the reflection "I wonder what you think really, really matters?" (R. Nye, personal communication, May 9th, 2002). As indicated earlier, this was an ethically sensitive moment in the research process. The children had been informed prior to commencing the task that the researcher would, at the conclusion, invite them to allow him to access their journal entries, and it had been stressed that they could refuse this invitation. Evidence that the children did not feel compelled to accept this invitation was indicated by the fact that several chose to keep their journals private. In all, 28 of the 35 children allowed the researcher to take their journal entries.

In looking at these journal entries, it could be seen that there were many examples that suggested *spiritual* questing. For example, many entries contained either written or drawn references to the children's families and friendship groups as being what mattered most to them. It is interesting to note that all of the Year five

journal entries collected from the children in the inner city school explicitly named/drew family as being what mattered to them most. Yet, in conversation, this group did not mention their families as being what mattered most to them.

In the suburban school, some of the Year five journal entries collected indicated other issues that were of importance to the children that could be indicative of the notion of spiritual questing. The following two extracts from these entries illustrate this:

> *I think that life matters a lot because obviously, without the gift of life, we wouldn't be here. Without life, the whole world wouldn't exist. [The] trees and plants and sun and moon are all alive and they need warmth and water just like humans do. The world wouldn't be here because the world is made up from lots and lots of different things. Without life there probably wouldn't even be a universe and everything would just be blank and there wouldn't be anything at all.*

> *What really, really matters is our religion. I think this because if we didn't have these we would definitely live a dull life. Our religions keep us going. They put strength in us.*

Several of the journal entries collected contained lists of things that could be indicative of spiritual questing. For example:

> *Human being, world peace, my family, God, Jesus* (Year three, suburban school).

> *My health, my family, a happy future, no dangers in the world, nature, I don't die at an early age, my family not divorced* (Year three, inner city school).

> *What matters to me is: the poor become healthy and they live a good life, we have peace in the world, the world becomes diplomatic, humans treat nature carefully, I don't become a bad person that takes drugs* (Year three, inner city school).

Books of astrology, and stuff like tarot cards and powers. All my friends who are really close to me and my soft toy Pookie Pookie (Year five, inner city school).

Mum and dad, my pets, my grandma, grandpa, nana, Billy and Pa, my sisters and brothers, my life (Year five, rural school).

Spiritual questing, as a characteristic of children's spirituality in this present study, entailed the children searching for authentic ways in which to relate with Self and Other.

Factors That Inhibited the Children's Expression of their Spirituality

There were two factors identified that seemed to act so as to inhibit the children's expression of spirituality. These have been termed *material pursuit* and *trivialising*. They became evident largely during the value sensing group meetings with the Year three and five children from the inner city school, and during the Year three group meetings with children from the suburban and rural schools.

Material Pursuit

This characteristic termed in this present study as *material pursuit* suggested that the children genuinely believed that what mattered most to them was the acquisition of money and/or material possessions. For instance, when asked what really mattered to them the Year three children from the inner city school responded as follows:

Marco and Tran immediately interjected. "My computer!" "TV!" They shouted almost simultaneously.

Ali thought momentarily and then replied, "Nothing – OK, money!"

At this, Amina, who was growing impatient with her classmates' seemingly trivial responses, asked "What about food? You wouldn't be alive if you didn't eat food or drink water. What about McDonalds? Isn't that important to you?"

Ali shook his head. He was determined. "If I can get enough money,"
he began, "I can buy everything. I'd spend ten dollars every day."

At this, Tran declared, "I'd wish for more money – I always ask for
my mum's money."

There was also evidence of *material pursuit* among the Year five children in
the inner city school, as the following RRJ piece indicates:

"I wonder what you think really, really matters", I probed.

Slowly, even reluctantly, some responses were offered – soft toys,
music, books. Yet, when I inquired as to whether the children might like to
say something about these, there was an awkward silence, and a sense of
uneasiness.

I wondered if they could have three wishes what they might wish
for.

"I'd wish for money," declared Fadde, "so that I can be rich and
buy whatever I want." The other children nodded in agreement. I could sense
that this was not a comment made in jest. Fadde seemed to be quite serious –
and so did his classmates. In a moment of honesty and genuine response to
my question, it seemed that money was that which was of value and
importance.

Similarly, the following reflection, this time on Year three students from the
rural school indicates the presence of material pursuit. When asked what they might
wish for if granted three wishes, the following replies ensued:

"To get a horse," replied Susan quickly, almost struggling to give
voice to the many possible wishes that were entering her mind at a rapid rate
of knots, "and to get lots of money for a holiday just for me!"

"I would wish for a bigger motor bike," added Imelda thoughtfully,
"and to get a new car (if I was allowed to get a car) and to buy a bigger
farm."

> *Michael said that he would like to make it to the AFL and to win a*
> *Brownlow Medal. While Wallace, reflecting briefly for a moment, declared*
> *that he would wish to be the best at windsurfing and skiing, as well as to get*
> *a licence to drive his first motor bike.*

These reflections indicate that the responses of these children were serious. They were being honest. The more they were probed, even by their peers, they more they indicated a genuine belief in materialism as that which mattered most to them. Material possessions may serve a purpose in that they can contribute to the defining of one's identity and sense of belonging. For instance, Maslow's (1970b) motivation theory suggested a hierarchy of human needs corresponding to growth and maturity. When the human person's basic needs are met – food, clothing, shelter, and the like, other higher needs emerge. In the case of these particular children, it may have been that only when their need to belong and their need to define their identity was met that they may then begin looking beyond towards their inner Self for a sense of that which really matters. However, in these instances, the materialistic desires were satisfying the children's outer self, that is, the ego. They did not seem to have yet moved beyond this need. This is consistent with a consumerist culture which continually promotes the outer self and its desires. *Material pursuit* then appeared to be a factor that inhibited these children's expression of spirituality because the searching for what really mattered remained solely at the outer level. The true Self was not engaged.

Trivialising

The second of these inhibiting factors has been termed in this present study as *trivialising*. This is an adaptation of "trivialising postmodernity", a term used by Horell (2003) in describing one particular attitude amongst the range of those held by people in the present milieu. Trivialising postmodernity highlights the fact that "the more we come to realise that universal understanding is not achievable, the more likely it is that we may be forced to accept a quite limited sense of what we can hope for in our personal and communal lives" (p. 90). Such attitudes then advance

scepticism, nihilism and trivialising in relation to human activity and thought. Horell, sites the example of *Seinfeld*, one of the most highly rated television shows of recent times in popular culture about a group of people who lead trivial and "do-nothing" lives, as an example of trivialising postmodernity.

In this present research, *trivialising* refers to the avoidance of confronting issues of meaning and value in life, as well as to the making light of such issues. Evidence of this inhibiting factor of spirituality was apparent in two particular group meetings, where the children indicated a distinct discomfort in talking about those things that really mattered to them. In many cases, and in the absence of an adequate language to express their ideas (Hay & Nye, 1998), the children seemed to prefer to dismiss that which was too difficult or awkward to speak about by trivialising. The following RRJ entry on the Year five children from the inner city school serves as an example of *trivialising*.

> *As these children set about the journaling task of writing/drawing what it was that really mattered to them, Missal frowned. She, like the other children, was finding it difficult to communicate issues of meaning and value. She engaged in some idle chatter and giggling. "This chair is uncomfortable" she complained, "I haven't got a pencil" she protested. The other children too made similar remarks. Although snippets of their earlier conversation indicated that there was a need and a wish to engage at a deeper level… it seemed easier to trivialise and mask their deeper feelings by façade of idle chatter and giggling.*

> *Hesitantly, they attempted the task. Fadde was busily drawing and writing, and stated, almost as if thinking out loud, "Money".*

> *At this Missal turned to him and said "Money's not important."*

> *"Yes it is," replied Fadde. "You can buy anything."*

> *"You can't buy love," retorted Missal. She was serious, but as the other children began to snigger at her remarks, she too began to smile and laugh, almost as if realising that she has momentarily broken her façade.*

Lines from a song on a recent episode of "The Simpson's" were then taken up in chorus by the children – "I got two tickets to paradise…"

Similarly, the following RRJ entry on the Year three children from the inner city school may also serve as an example of *trivialising*. When asked what it was that really mattered to them, three of the children, Marco, Tran and Ali appeared to look uncomfortable. They looked away from me and began to fidget. Marco began tapping a pencil. Tran, who was fidgeting with an eraser, seemed clearly embarrassed.

There followed a lengthy and awkward silence during which the children continued to avoid eye contact with one another as well as with myself. They seemed to be experiencing a physical discomfort in response to this silence in the face of issues of ultimate meaning and value.

There was a sense in which the children also appeared to be perplexed by my question. It was as though they were unsure of exactly what it was that was being asked of them. It was almost as though they did not know how to respond, and so preferred to remain silent.

"What about you Ali?" I asked, noticing that Ali too appeared restless and almost reluctant to contribute.

He thought for a moment. "Nothing – I can't think of anything that's important to me," replied Ali shrugging his shoulders.

Summary and Significance of These Findings for This Study

This chapter has presented the findings of this study in relation to the four characteristics of children's spirituality that became evident during the awareness sensing, mystery sensing and values sensing group meetings:

- *The felt sense*
- *Integrating awareness*
- *Weaving the threads of meaning*, and
- *Spiritual questing*.

It has also outlined two factors that appeared to inhibit the children's expression of their spirituality. These two factors – *material pursuit* and *trivialising* – were evident largely during the value sensing group meetings. In presenting both the characteristics of children's spirituality and possible inhibiting factors, this chapter has drawn from the researcher's reflective journal to provide examples indicative of each characteristic and inhibiting factor.

The findings suggest that children who participated in this study did in fact possess a spiritual dimension to their lives, and that this spiritual dimension seemed to reflect the understanding of spirituality that has been carried forward in this thesis – that spirituality is an essential human trait involving a movement towards Ultimate Unity (de Souza, 2004a, 2004b), and that it may be given expression in terms of how one acts in relation towards Other. The findings suggested that the children drew upon the wisdom of their bodies to encounter and act upon the world. It will be argued in the following chapter that in doing so, they may have become momentarily unified with that with which they are engaged. This could reflect an aspect of being on a journey towards Ultimate Unity (de Souza, 2004a, 2004b) discussed in chapter one of this thesis. As well, the findings suggested that the children were able to integrate emerging levels of consciousness with previous levels of awareness. This may reflect Wilber's (2000) understanding of the spectrum of consciousness. The findings also indicated that the children were able to piece together their own framework of meaning by drawing from those that are presented to them from their immediate and wider world. The findings also suggested that these children were able to seek life enhancing ways of being in the world by expressing their spirituality outwardly as different layers of connectedness with themselves, with others, the world, and possibly with the Transcendent. It is argued in this study that these findings are indicative of characteristics of these children's spirituality as a natural human predisposition and as being concerned with a movement towards Ultimate Unity (de Souza, 2004a, 2004b), whereby at the deepest and widest levels of connectedness, an individual may experience Self unified with Other.

The two inhibiting factors of spirituality that have been identified indicate that although these children possessed a spiritual dimension to their lives, their expression of spirituality was at times thwarted by materialism and a tendency to make trivial issues of meaning and value that appeared too difficult to address. These inhibiting factors seemed to promote disconnection rather than unity. An awareness of such inhibiting factors would be necessary for educators who seek to nurture the spirituality of their students within the classroom context, so that strategies could be planned to address and overcome such inhibitors.

The following three chapters present a reflection upon each of the identified characteristics of children's spirituality and justify the conception of each as a legitimate characteristic of children's spirituality.

CHAPTER SIX
AWARENESS SENSING: *THE FELT SENSE* AND *INTEGRATING AWARENESS*

Introduction

This chapter presents a discussion of and reflection upon the two characteristics of children's spirituality that were identified in each of the awareness sensing group meetings – *the felt sense* and *integrating awareness*. The first phase of the awareness sensing group meetings consisted of a short story and a semi-structured interview (Appendix E). The second phase involved the children engaging in a series of tactile, "hands-on" activities. It was hoped that these activities would engage the children in an awareness of the present moment of their experience, and provide opportunity for the researcher to observe the children's potential engagement in this category of spiritual sensitivity. Each of the awareness sensing group meetings was recorded using videotape. The researcher was then able to view these recordings, and begin the task of writing hermeneutic phenomenological descriptions and reflections using a reflective journal.

In the following discussion van Manen's (1990) notion of lifeworld existentials have been drawn upon as guides to reflection on each of these two characteristics of children's spirituality. The four lifeworld existentials, as discussed in chapter four of this thesis, are lived body (corporeality), lived time (temporality), lived space (spatiality) and lived human relation (relationality). While these lifeworld existentials have been differentiated for the purpose of reflection and discussion, it needs to be acknowledged that in a research study such as this, each existential calls forth the other aspects. That is to say, each existential cannot be considered in isolation from the others. They are interconnected.

Attending to *The Felt Sense*

The characteristic that became immediately evident in reflecting upon the texts of this study from the awareness sensing group meetings was Csikszentmihalyi's (1975, 1990) notion of *flow*, the holistic sensation a person might feel when she or he acts with total involvement in relation to the activity or task to which she or he is attending. The children in each of the awareness sensing group meetings seemed to act in this way. They displayed a concentrated attention to the activity in which each was engaged, an attending to the here-and-now of the experience. This could be seen particularly when, for example, the children in Year five from the suburban school, although seated in close proximity to one another, appeared to be so absorbed in their chosen activity that each seemed oblivious to the presence of her or his peers (see p. 141). Their focus and engagement in their chosen activity was intense but, at the same time relaxed. The children appeared calm and seemed to be lost in the activity to which each was attending. The action of the activity in which each child was involved and the awareness of that activity seemed to have merged.

Similarly, this notion of flow could be seen among the Year three children in the inner city school (see p. 142). In this instance, the concentration of two children in particular – Marco and Tran – was almost immediate. They appeared to be consumed in the concentration and quiet that their chosen task seemed to demand. The way that movement upon movement seemed to follow each other, their focus of awareness upon the task at hand, and their seemingly lack of perception of anything else around them at the time indicated the presence of the flow characteristic.

Moreover, when the researcher explored in basic terms the elements of a typical flow experience through the use of an oral story, the children were able to readily identify with occasions in their own lives in which they believed they had experienced something similar. For example, John in Year five from the suburban school (see p. 140) recalled how, when playing with his little sister's birthday

present, his focus and attention were directed solely towards what he was doing. He was not aware of anyone or anything around him until he dropped one of the beads, and his concentration was broken. Similarly, Wallace in Year three from the rural school recalled how he could often become fixed upon a particular task or activity. Everything else, Wallace maintained, would turn to total blackness except for that upon which he was fixed. May Ling in Year five from the inner city school was similarly able to recount an occasion when she had observed a small bird in the playground, and found herself the only person left in the yard after her classmates had lined up and entered the school building at the end of recess.

However, while Csikszentmihalyi's (1975, 1990) notion of flow is helpful in describing what appeared to be occurring, it became apparent that something more than flow was being displayed by these children. In reflecting further upon the texts of this study, two distinctive features became evident: attending to *the felt sense* and *integrating awareness*. The first of these characteristics – *the felt sense* – is explored below using the lifeworld existentials (van Manen, 1990) as guides to reflection.

Lived Body

The children in this study encountered the activities in which they chose to engage in a corporeal way. They drew readily upon their bodily senses, particularly those of touch and sight, in order to connect in some way with their activity. What they experienced was tactile and sensorial. The characteristic termed in this study as *the felt sense* has been used to describe this feature that became evident in these awareness sensing group meetings.

Attending to *the felt sense* is a bodily awareness. Drawing upon Gendlin's (1962, 1981) notion of "focusing", *the felt sense* entails the attending to the bodily awareness of situations, persons, or events. Individuals encounter and act upon the world with the whole of their bodies. An individual's corporeality is a primary source of knowledge, although as Gendlin has noted, it is a source that western cultural history conditions people to ignore in favour of intellectual detachment.

Attending to *the felt sense* may enable a person to draw upon the wisdom of the physical body in assisting with personal difficulties and in being sensitively aware in relationships. In other words, it may enable an individual to get in touch with the *felt sense* of a particular situation. Gendlin has also reiterated a holistic understanding of the body as including both the mental and physical capacities of the individual. Therefore, the *felt sense* is encompassing of both "body *and* mind before they are split" [italics in original] (p. 165).

In reflecting upon the texts of this study, *the felt sense* seemed to involve a conscious perception of physical bodily awareness. In each of the hermeneutic phenomenological descriptions presented in chapter five in relation to *the felt sense*, the children appeared to be fully aware of their bodily engagement in the activity of their choice. For example, when engaging in the seed planting activity, Adam in Year five from the suburban school (see p. 141) seemed to consciously manipulate the soil between the tips of his fingers and thumb, acknowledging the texture and consistency of the potting mix. He gently compressed the seeds into the soil mixture and watered them. All of this was undertaken consciously. Adam's perception of, as well as his sensorial and bodily interaction with the materials involved in the seed planting activity led to his conscious thinking and acting upon the task. In other words, his whole Self was acting upon the task. In a similar way, Marco and Tran in Year three from the inner city school (see p. 142) consciously manipulated the materials of the bead creation activity, carefully selecting their colours and positioning these beads with care and skill. Tran deliberately ran his fingers across the pile of beads, consciously acknowledging their shape and texture. Marco painstakingly set about restoring his work when he had accidentally knocked some of the beads from their position on the template. These two children, while they seemed oblivious to the physical presence of others around them, appeared to be quite conscious of their own engagement in their task, and of their own senses acting upon the task, that is, their sense of touch particularly in handling the beads, and also their sense of sight in deciding where exactly to place the beads onto the template. Again, this conscious action possibly involved their perception of and thinking about

the task, leading to whole involvement. Their whole Selves were acting upon the task.

The Year five children in the rural school (see p. 143) also seemed to exhibit a conscious perception of bodily awareness in relation to their chosen activity. This group of children engaged in the jigsaw activity appeared to consciously move their finger tips across the jigsaw pieces, almost as if the resulting bodily sensation would indicate the correct piece that might be required in order to complete a particular section. Although they used their sense of sight to search the array of patterns presented by the jigsaw pieces, they seemed to be relying on the intuition and wisdom of physical sensation inherent in their sense of touch and shape in locating the required pieces in order to attempt and complete this particular task. While they probably would not have possessed the language to name what they were doing in this way, they seemed to be quite conscious of their actions in relation to this act. This could be seen in the way in which these children focused upon their task. There was a sense of purpose in their undertaking of the activity. Intuitively, they seemed to know what they were doing. Their actions appeared to be instinctive and seemed to be the result of the interaction between their senses of sight, touch and thinking about the process in which they were involved. Further, there were expressions of pride and satisfaction on their faces when the correct interlocking pieces were located and positioned.

In this conscious bodily experience, Thomas Merton's notion of becoming unified with Other, as discussed in chapter one of this thesis, became evident. This was particularly apparent in relation to Merton's concept of ontological awareness (Del Prete, 2002). Merton maintained that an ontological way of knowing is a natural predisposition of humankind, although it is one that is largely neglected in Western culture. Ontological awareness is the ability to perceive with one's whole Self – one's whole being – in a direct, experiential and concrete way. In such a way of knowing, one enters the domain of holistic experience. That is, the whole of the individual is involved – mind, body and soul – without distinction or separation, as

well the whole of the experience in which one is engaged. This stands in contrast to the scholastic, Aristotelian philosophy that has prevailed in the west, assuming a capacity for distance, that is, to separate one's Self from that which is being studied or considered. Ontological awareness is an integration of the whole person with the whole experience.

The seeds of ontological awareness could be seen in the children in the awareness sensing group meetings. In each case, their conscious bodily and tactile encounter with the materials they were manipulating were experiences that appeared to engage their whole Selves in direct, experiential and concrete ways. They were experiences that seemed to bridge the divide – the dualism – between Self and the object. For a short time, it seemed as if each of the children and the activity in which they were engaged had merged into a single entity. There was a connectedness – a unity – between the child and the activity. It was as if the activity had become the child, and the child had become the activity. It appeared as though they were one and the same. While they may not have been aware of the presence of others around them, it seemed as though these children were ontologically aware of themselves and their connectedness to their chosen activity.

This sense of connectedness and unity could also be seen amongst the children from Year three in the inner city school (see p. 142). The whole Self was absorbed in the corporeal activity to which each was attending. Although in the classroom context some of these children could at times be noisy, boisterous and easily distracted (as had been observed by the researcher), in this awareness sensing group meeting they appeared to be consumed with concentration. They were calm and quiet. They seemed to have become unified with their chosen activity. There appeared to be no separation between themselves and their chosen activity. In this group meeting these children were not distracted by each other or by the presence of the researcher. It was as if this particular level of consciousness had been "blocked out" so as to focus on the task at hand. This accords with the contention of Newberg, d'Aquili and Rause (2001) that the attention association area of the brain is able to

screen out superfluous sensory input in order to attain a particular goal, in this instance, the completion of the tactile activities.

These experiences were holistic. They involved the children's whole being, and seemed to bridge the divides between mind, body, and spirit, and between Self and everything that was Other than Self. In these holistic experiences of unity, it was possible that these children were being led to a sense of their unity with Other in the more cosmic dimensions – in creation, and possibly in the transcendent. At one level of consciousness, these children were physically present within close proximity to one another in a classroom space that had been provided for the conducting of this research. Yet, at another level, the children appeared to have removed themselves from this physical context of the classroom and from their peers into another dimension of being in which they were unified with their actions – one with Other. This accords with de Souza's (2004a, 2004b) notion of journeying towards Ultimate Unity. It is more than likely that the children themselves would not have been able to articulate this experience since it was more primal than thought or language (Gendlin, 1981). It was a tactile, sensorial and bodily experience of being – an experience of being whole. In this act of being, Merton might have said, these children had perhaps experienced something of the presence of God, for God had been present to them in the very act of their own being (Del Prete, 2002). In other words, the unity experienced was possibly Ultimate Unity, in which the children had momentarily become one with Other.

Lived Space

There seemed to be two particular kinds of space that existed between each of the children in the awareness sensing group meetings, as well as a space that existed between each child and the activity in which she or he was engaged. The space between each of the children in the group will now be explored.

In the awareness sensing group meetings with the Year five children in the suburban school (see p. 141) and the Year three children in the inner city school (see

p. 142), the children, although seated in close proximity to one another seemed to be oblivious to the presence of their peers. The physical space that separated them was only a few feet, and in some cases, less. However, in these two instances, the space that separated the children appeared to act as a barrier. It was almost as if the children had created for themselves a "cocooned" space that enabled them to focus their attention solely on their chosen activity. This space they created was important and necessary for their engagement in their chosen task, and could perhaps have been regarded as sacred space. It was respected, honoured, and almost revered. None of the other children attempted to enter the space that surrounded any one particular child and her or his activity. This space was a space of quiet. It was a space of tranquillity in a room surrounded by the hustle and bustle of activity in a typical primary school. It was a space that seemed to enable the children to enter experiences of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975); a space in which *the felt sense* could manifest itself, and in which the children could consciously attend to their perception of bodily awareness in relation to the activity in which each was engaged.

Yet, in the case of the Year five children in the rural school (see p. 143), a slightly different space seemed to be encountered. These children worked cooperatively in order to complete the jigsaw. Rather than the notion of a "cocooned" personal space, the space that these children seemed to create was a space of inclusion. This could be seen in the way that, for example, the arms and hands of these individual children physically crossed over each other – entering what might be regarded as the personal space of Other – in attempting to locate the correct interconnecting pieces of the puzzle. None of the children appeared concerned that their personal space had been intruded upon. In fact, it seemed a necessary occurrence if the activity was to be completed with success.

In this inclusive space, there was talking and an exchange of ideas in relation to the task in which the children were engaged. The space was honoured, but in a different way from that described above. It was a space of common purpose. Those who entered the space espoused the same goal – to complete the puzzle. The talking,

the movement of arms and hands in and across this space was focused in relation to the common goal of finishing the jigsaw, and in this way, the space continued to be honoured. There seemed to be a communal flavour to this created space, and this appeared to enable the children to engage in the activity. In other words, the space that was created seemed to be *relational*. It was a space in which the children not only became unified with the activity in which they were engaged, but in which they were also able to relate to each other in the shared purpose of completing the jigsaw.

This inclusive, communal and relational space could also have been perceived of in terms of a space of possibilities. There were possibilities in terms of who would attend to which section of the jigsaw. There were possibilities in relation to which way the jigsaw would be positioned, and possibilities in terms of which pieces might fit where. As well, there were numerous possibilities in terms of the combinations of who would work with whom, and upon which section – there were some instances in which the groups altered slightly according to patience, feeling, and so forth.

The difference between the spaces created by the Year five children in the rural school and the children in the Year five and Year three from the suburban and inner city schools respectively could perhaps be explained in part by the different contexts – both classroom and community – from which these children came. It could have been that the Year five students in the rural school came from a classroom context in which cooperative group work was a significant feature, as had in fact been observed by the researcher. Also, coming from a small and close-knit farming community in which the children knew each other (and each other's families) well may have led these children to naturally create spaces of inclusion. In the case of the Year three children from the inner city school, these children came from a classroom context that tended to be noisy and at times distracting (as had again been observed by the researcher). It may have been that these children welcomed the relative quiet of space in which the group meeting was conducted, and sought to create a space in which they could direct their attention solely towards the

task they were undertaking. Also the children's classroom teacher may have been a factor in the spaces that were created by the children. It is possible that the children who created spaces of inclusion may have had classroom teachers (both at the time of the research and in previous years) who were skilled at creating inclusive, respectful and relational spaces within their classrooms. It is also possible that the children who created the "cocooned" personal spaces may have come from families, or may have had classroom teachers who placed a value on creating opportunities for students to reflect individually, or whose learning and teaching strategies often included activities designed to be undertaken individually by their students. Equally, the nature of the activity itself could have resulted in the creation of the particular quality of space that eventuated. It could have been that the jigsaw activity, containing many pieces, lent itself to being undertaken as a group activity, and provided the common purpose that resulted in the relational quality of space created. Activities such as seed planting and bead creations may have lent themselves to a more solitary undertaking. They were activities that perhaps lent themselves to being undertaken by an individual rather than by groups of people.

In the individual and group activities described above, a space was created to contain both the personal the communal. In the personal space, the children were able to become unified with their activity; in the communal relational space each child had a sense of purpose. There was also a particular quality to the space that existed between each of the individual children in the awareness sensing group meetings, and the activity to which each was attending. Perhaps it might be better envisaged as a closing of space. There was a sense in which the space that separated each child from her or his chosen activity seemed to disintegrate as *the felt sense* – the conscious perception of bodily awareness – led each child to an experience of unity with that activity. This could be seen particularly in the cases of the Year five children in the suburban school (see p. 140) and the Year three children in the inner city school (p. 141). In both of these instances, the space that separated each child from the activity seemed to disappear as the whole Self engaged in the whole

activity. In this experience of unity between Self and that which was Other than Self, the space of separation ceased to exist.

This seemed to be the case also with the Year five children in the rural school (see p. 143). Although there was a communal flavour to their engagement with their chosen activities, the space that existed between the children collectively and the jigsaw activity seemed to disappear as the children became unified with the task of completing the jigsaw. Again, any separation by means of space between Self and the object ceased to exist. It was indeed a holistic experience – the whole Self absorbed by the whole activity.

Lived Time

In being absorbed in the activities in which they were engaged, each child was effectively attending to the here-and-now of the experience in which she or he was occupied. Each child appeared to be aware only of the present moment of their experience. For example, the Year three children from the inner city school (see p. 142) seemed to be centred on the activity to which each had chosen. In particularly, Marco seemed to focus his attention almost immediately. His comment "I'm going to finish this" (see p. 142) may perhaps have suggested that, for him, time was not going to prevent the completion of this task. For Marco, time, was literally going to stand still to enable him to complete his work. In this concentration and stillness, Marco was perhaps aware only of what he was doing – not of the passing of time.

This notion accords with the work of Donaldson (1992), who has referred to this immediacy of awareness as the *point mode*. As one of the most basic operations of the mind, point mode has prominence in children even after they have developed the capability to focus on the past and future of experience. These children seemed to be alert to that which was being experienced in their moment of concentration – the here-and-now of the experience in which they were engaged.

This immediacy of awareness was also evident in the Year five children from the rural school (see p. 143). These children, who had worked cooperatively as a group, were focused on the task of completing their jigsaw puzzle. They seemed not to have noticed the passing of time in attending to their activity. This became evident when the researcher announced that it was almost time to finish. At this point, there were cries of disappointment, and looks of surprise that a passage of time – approximately 30 minutes – had passed. These children had experienced the relativity of time. It seemed that, for them, time had somehow "sped up" in their enjoyment of and engagement in their chosen activity. These children seemed to experience the passing of time subjectively, rather than objectively. Perhaps this could be said of all the children in the awareness sensing group meetings. In their subjective experience of time, they were responding to the corporeal encounter of their activity in a temporal way, each with the whole of her or his being. Perhaps their holistic experience as a connectedness with their chosen activity was one that was literally timeless.

Thomas (2001) has referred to this notion of here-and-now time as an immediate temporal horizon. A temporal horizon constitutes how far ahead in time a person thinks, or plans. In contrast to adults, children have a limited concept of what it is to plan ahead in time. The temporal horizon of children is immediate. Although as children mature, engagement in the immediate temporal horizon gives way to *line mode* (Donaldson, 1992), that is the ability to focus on the past and future, the children in this present study, aged about eight to ten years old, seemed to indicate their ability to maintain a focus on point mode, the immediate temporal horizon when absorbed in an activity that engaged the whole of their being – that is, a holistic activity. While, as maturing children, their ability to focus on line mode was in all probability developing, in this instance, they were focusing on the present and immediate temporal horizon, that is, point mode. They were engaged in the here-and-now. There was perhaps a real sense in which, for them, time seemed to stand still as their consciousness focused on the activity at hand, rather than on the passing of time. Further, it seemed that while these children were engaged in the here-and-

now of the experience to which they were attending, they encountered a sense of unity with the task in which they were absorbed. It was in the immediate temporal horizon that the encounter between themselves and their activity became unified. It was in this particular experience of time that the divide between Self and object – the space of separation – ceased to exit, resulting in a *unified* apperception.

Lived Relation

In some instances, there was a particular quality to the relationship between the children and their chosen activity, and between the children themselves in completing the activity. In the case of the Year three and five children from the inner city and suburban schools respectively, a particular relationship existed between each child and the activity to which he or she was attending. This relationship became so intimate that it seemed as though the activity and the child had become unified. In the case of the Year five children from the rural school (see p. 143) the jigsaw activity in which these children were collectively engaged gave rise to a particular relationship that was experienced between each of the children in that group. It was perhaps a relationship of common purpose. These children became one with each other in their unified mission of completing the jigsaw. Each child, although distinct and inherently different from his or her peers, played a particular role in completing the jigsaw, and so became united *in* the task. Each used her or his individual talents and skills in the unified undertaking of the jigsaw puzzle. There was a sense in which each of these children became one body with many parts to play in the successful completion of this task (cf. Corinthians 12: 12-27) – the emergence of a Collective Self.

The notion of a Collective Self was pertinent. Its emergence seemed to entail a movement in which each individual Self became unified with every other Self among the group of children. Every Other – each other child with her or his Self – composed this Collective Self, in which Self had become one with Other. In this sense, a movement towards Ultimate Unity (de Souza, 2004a, 2004b) may entail the

emergence of a Collective Self, in which, at the deepest and widest levels of connectedness, Self and Other become one and the same.

Although individual children, they were united in spirit and common purpose. Whilst engaged in this activity there was no division between them. Their sense of connectedness with each other had momentarily led to the emergence of a Collective Self, in which Self and Other had become unified. The Collective Self could be seen to act in common purpose so that all would be praised and satisfied at the completion of the jigsaw.

Summary and Significance of *The Felt Sense* for This Study

By way of summary, Table 7 presents a conceptualisation the key insights gained from the above reflections on *the felt sense*.

Table 7.

A Summary of the Reflection on the Felt Sense using the Lifeworld Existentials.

	The Felt Sense…
Lived Body	• Conscious perception of physical bodily awareness. • Use of bodily wisdom. • Become unified with the activity (journeying towards Ultimate Unity).
Lived Space	• Two aspects – personal (cocooned) and communal (relational). • Momentary disintegration of the space of separation – becoming unified with the activity (Ultimate Unity).
Lived Time	• Immediacy of awareness, the here and now of experience.
Lived Relation	• Emergence of a Collective Self. Self becoming unified with Other *in* the common task – every Other composes the Collective Self.

The sense of unity between Self and everything Other than Self accords with the understandings of spirituality that have been outlined in chapter one and drawn upon throughout this present study. *The felt sense*, as a characteristic of children's spirituality, seemed to entail the individual drawing upon the wisdom of the body, as

a natural way of knowing, in order to sense this unity. Further, this perception of bodily awareness, although more primal than thought and words, appeared to be a conscious, relational awareness on the part of the children. This may accord with Hay and Nye's (1998) notion of spirituality as *relational consciousness* – a conscious awareness of Self and Other.

Religious educators seeking to nurture the spirituality of their students then need to plan within their classroom curriculum opportunities for students to engage in activities that may enable them to draw upon their *felt sense*, allowing them to become conscious of their own bodily awareness and of their connectedness to Self and that which is Other than Self. This present study has indicated that children of primary school age are capable of apperceiving this unity. Such activities would be tactile and sensorial in nature, enabling students to draw upon the physical wisdom of their own bodies as a means through which to engage their whole person as perceiving, thinking, feeling and intuiting beings.

If the spirituality of children is to be nurtured within the classroom context, spaces that enable both the personal and communal elements need to be created. Opportunities for the students themselves to create such spaces need to be planned. Classroom teachers are in positions to create spaces within their classrooms that might be conducive to nurturing spirituality. Such spaces could be physical, created with a consideration being given to the placement of furniture and classroom resources. They could also be mental or aesthetic, created in terms of the use of music, art works, the use of light and shadow, as well as essential oils to establish an ambiance, or through the lighting of a prayer candle which could lead to a relational space in which students might be invited to pray. Educators are skilled at creating environments that are conducive for learning. The challenge may be for them to create environments that are conducive for nurturing the spirit, thereby leading to an expression of it.

It was the children's engagement in the immediate temporal horizon that seemed to enable their conscious and relational interaction with their activity, and in some cases with each other. This intensity and immediacy of awareness that was experienced by the children in the research reported in this thesis has been accomplished at more sophisticated levels by followers of religious traditions, both eastern and western. In these instances, such experiences have been apperceived by those who experience them as spiritual. For example, in Theravada Buddhism, the chief religious practice – *vipassana* or awareness meditation – is an intentional and disciplined attending to the here-and-now. It is achieved by careful attention to either the act of breathing in and out, or to one's movement in walking. Similarly, in the Christian tradition, certain forms of contemplative prayer require a focus on the here-and-now of experience in order for the individual to come to a realisation of the presence of God in all things. For example, Hay and Nye (1998) refer to the eighteenth century French Jesuit Jean Pierre de Causade, and his notion of the "sacrament of the present moment" (p. 62), in which the will of God is discerned not through reading or study, but through an individual's experience of the Divine in the present moment.

The challenge for religious educators in Catholic primary schools seeking to nurture the spirituality of their students may be the allowance of time in which students can engage in the present moment of experience. While time can be viewed as a limited commodity within the curriculum, the above reflections indicate the need to set aside periods of time for engaging in the immediate temporal horizon which could potentially lead to experiences of Ultimate Unity (de Souza, 2004a, 2004b). This would seem to be a necessary requirement for the nurturing and expressions of spirituality.

The felt sense as a characteristic of children's spirituality was expressed relationally in terms of the unity of Self with everything Other than Self. A reflection on *the felt sense* through the existential lens of lived relation indicates the possible emergence of a Collective Self, in which each individual Self becomes

unified with each other Self. Self and Other become one and the same. Again this can be seen to accord with de Souza's (2004a, 2004b) notion of Ultimate Unity, in which, at the deepest and widest levels of connectedness, Self and Other become unified. The context of religious education in Catholic primary schools may provide an appropriate setting in which this quality of relationality might emerge and be nurtured, since a Collective Self could entail unity with God. However it needs to be noted that, for various reasons, not all teachers of religious education may be equipped both professionally and personally to provide opportunities for nurturing the relational nature of their students' being. The challenge for the leadership of Catholic schools may be to provide opportunities and pathways for the development and formation of teachers of both a professional and personal nature to enable them to plan for the nurturing of their students' spirituality.

<div style="text-align:center">The Characteristic Integrating Awareness</div>

The characteristic termed *integrating awareness* was particularly evident in the awareness sensing group meetings with the Year five children from the inner city school, the Year three children from the suburban school, and the Year three children from the rural school. Initially, the children seemed to be involved in experiences of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). They appeared to be concentrating upon the activity to which each was engaged, attending to the here-and-now of experience. However as the children became unified with the activity, they appeared to reach another level of consciousness whereby they were able to transcend the activity and to enter into a "free-flowing" conversation with those around them (see pp. 145-147). At one level of awareness, their concentration remained on the activity in which they were engaged. Yet at a second level of awareness, they were able to speak engagingly with their peers in a freely and uninhibited manner. Their conversation seemed to take on a life of its own, and the activity in which they were engaged seemed to enable this to happen. This could be seen in the fact that their absorption in the activity at the first level of awareness did not simply become a mechanical response. The care with which the children attended to their tasks

continued even as they began to engage at this second level of awareness. This may be a feature of classes in which students are engaged in "hands-on" or art and craft activities. The physical action of the students in attending to these types of activities at this level of awareness may prepare the ground for another level of awareness to emerge. While the work of Csikszentmihalyi (1975, 1990), Gendlin (1962, 1981) and Hay and Nye (1998) in part explains the concentrated awareness through the notions of flow and focusing, there appeared to be something more than this occurring in these particular instances. The conversation in which these children engaged seemed to have assimilated the activity. Put another way, a second level of consciousness had encased, or become integrated with the first level. This understanding accords with traditional eastern notions of interconnecting levels of consciousness as discussed in chapter one of this thesis presented by Aurobindo (Cornelissen, 1999; Maitra, 1962, Marshak & Litfin, 2002), Fontana (2003), and by Wilber (2000a, 2000b), who has made a sustained attempt to link such developmental levels of consciousness to western science. In this study, this characteristic has been termed *integrating awareness* and is explored below using the lifeworld existentials (van Manen, 1990) as guides to reflection.

Lived Relation

It seemed that while the children were engaged in the activity to which each was attending, in some instances the children wished for something more in terms of their desire to connect with those around them. There seemed to be a wish to enter the interpersonal space shared by the group, and to connect with Other through conversation. This was evident, for example, among the Year five children from the inner city school (see p. 145). As they engaged in their chosen activities, they began to whisper to one another. Gradually this emerged into a conversation in which each of the children was able to participate. While the activity was engaging, it appeared that the children sought to go beyond the task at hand. They appeared to want to connect with Other – their peers – through conversation. Yet the very activities in which the children were engaged provided a foundation for them to move beyond –

to transcend the task, and to enter into conversation with Other. It is relevant to note that in each instance in which the characteristic *integrating awareness* became evident, the children were all undertaking *the same* activity. Although in two instances the activity was undertaken individually by the children, the commonality of the activity itself seemed to provide an impetus for conversation. This could be seen in the case of the Year five children from the inner city school (see p. 145). As the necessary skills needed for their chosen activity became 'second nature' the activity itself seemed to provide a foundation for the children moving beyond it to enter into a particular style of conversation with their peers. This conversation was of a nature that normally wouldn't have been conducted in the presence of an adult or authority figure such as a classroom teacher. For example, these children spoke about their adventures on their camp in a way that was intended only for their peer group. So engaged were these children in their conversation that they seemed oblivious to the presence of the researcher and the video camera recording the meeting. Yet, at the same time, the activity in which they were engaged continued to be undertaken with care and skill.

This appeared also to be the case with the Year three children in the suburban school (see p. 146). As they engaged in their chosen activity, they exhibited a desire to become unified with Other – their peers, and so the conversation began to develop freely, again oblivious to the presence of the researcher and the video camera. Yet their focus on the activity to which they were attending remained, and seemed to be sustained by the conversation. It was almost as if the free and uninhibited style of conversation had enveloped, or integrated the activity. It seemed as though one level of consciousness – attention to the activity – had somehow been encased and sustained by a second emerging level of consciousness – the conversation.

While acknowledging the complexity and uncertainty in discussing the nature of consciousness, the work of Wilber (2000a; 2000b) provides a useful model for exploring the phenomena exhibited by both of these groups of children in the awareness sensing meetings.

It will be recalled in chapter one of this thesis that in discussing the different waves, lines and states that might comprise an integral theory of consciousness, Wilber (2000a) maintained that there are various developmental levels of consciousness which unfold in the individual. They are termed developmental not because they are rigid or linear, but because they are fluid, and overlap as waves appear to do. Wilber has applied the term levels or waves to describe this developmental unfolding of consciousness. The higher levels of consciousness do not sit on top of the lower dimensions like rungs in a ladder, but rather they enfold them, just as, for example, cells embody molecules which embody atoms. These developmental waves appear to be like "concentric spheres of increasing embrace, inclusion, and holistic capacity" (Wilber, 2000a, p. 147).

Central to this notion of developmental waves of consciousness is Wilber's (2000a) notion of the Self or Self system, which acts as a means by which to integrate, or balance these waves of consciousness. Wilber has maintained that levels, or waves of consciousness, as well as other aspects of awareness, appear to be devoid of an intrinsic self-sense. He has argued that one of the primary characteristics of the Self is its capacity to identify with the basic levels, or waves of consciousness. This drive to integrate the various components of the psyche is then a central feature of the Self system. Wilber has noted that, in psychopathology for instance, the basic waves of consciousness would be considered to emerge in a generally well-functioning manner. The basic structures of consciousness do not in themselves become 'broken'. When, for example, concrete operational thinking – 'conop' – emerges in a child, it does so more or less intact. However, what the child does with that wave of consciousness specifically involves the child's sense of Self and the ability of the Self system to *integrate* the emerging wave of consciousness with the previous waves, or structures. It is possible that "the child can take any of the tenants of the conop mind and repress them, alienate them, project them . . . or

deploy any number of other defensive mechanisms. This is a disease, not of conop, but of the self" [1](Wilber, 2000a, p. 159).

This process of integration occurs each time Self encounters a new level, or wave of consciousness. Wilber (2000a) has maintained that Self system must firstly identify, or be in fusion with that new level. Secondly, Self then *disidentifies*, or transcends that level so as to move to a yet higher wave. Then, ideally, Self integrates the previous wave of consciousness with the higher wave. Wilber (2000a; 2000b) has termed this process as the fulcrum of self development. It occurs each time the Self system encounters a new level, or wave of consciousness. The fulcrum has three basic sub-phases – fusion, transcendence, and integration. Figure 2 presents a construct as one attempt to represent this process of integration visually.

Figure 3. A construct representing the phases of fusion, transcendence and integration.
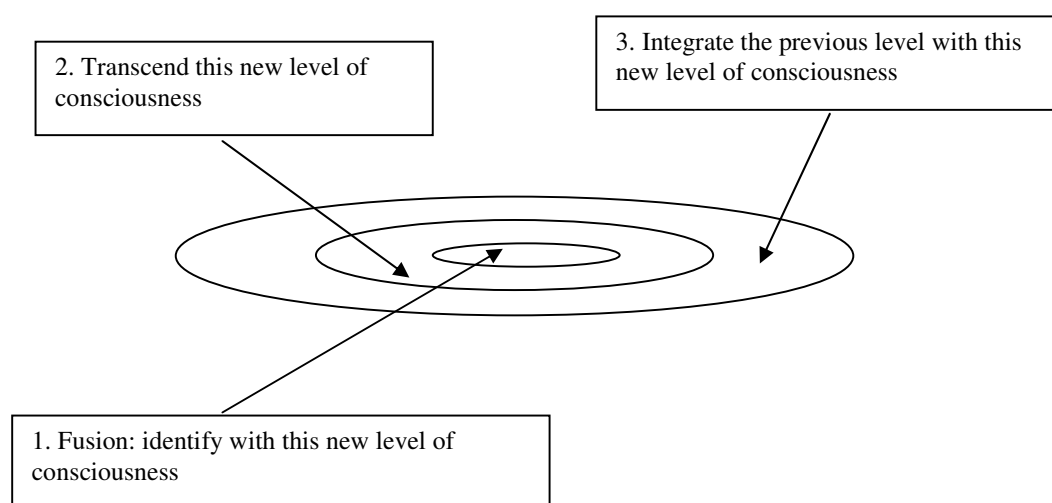
None of this, Wilber (2000a) has asserted, occurs in a rigid or linear type of classification. The fluidity of this highlights the fact that the Self system can be best

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[1] Although Wilber (2000a) uses "self" with an initial lower case, it would seem that this use of the term "self" is being used to refer to the individual's true Self. Hence, in discussion of Wilber's Self system, "Self" with an initial capital has been used, consistent with the understanding of Self outlined in Chapter 1 of this thesis.

envisaged as a centre of gravity, with the various levels, lines and states of consciousness orbiting around the integrating tendency of Self. Indeed, the Self system itself also undergoes its own type of development through what might be considered as a series of waves. However, the distinguishing feature of Self is its ability to coordinate all of these.

Wilber's (2000a) model serves to inform the discussion of the characteristic of *integrating awareness* exhibited by some of the children in this present study. In each case, an initial level of consciousness was encountered by the individual's Self system. This comprised the awareness of the activity in which they were engaged. Their focus, their concentration, and absorption in this corporeal activity may have indicated that Self had already integrated this particular level of consciousness with previous levels. Then, the Self systems of these children encountered a new level of consciousness – the particular type of conversation that was emerging among them. In the case of both the Year five children from the inner city school and the Year three children from the suburban school, the children seemed to gravitate towards this new level. This was evident in the way they began to engage in the conversation, each child making her or his own contribution to the topic under discussion. The motivation for this was perhaps the desire to transcend the activity and, so, to connect with Other, that is, their peers. In response to this desire, Self identified, or fused with this emerging level. Self then transcended this level so as to integrate this new wave of consciousness with the previous. The result of this integration of consciousness by Self was that the new level of consciousness – the free flowing conversation – enveloped or integrated the previous level of engagement in the activity. Evidence of this integration may have been seen in the fact that the task which was being completed by the children continued to be undertaken with care and skill. There was a quality to their work that seemed to suggest that their completion of the task was not a mechanical response, but that the conversation – the new level of consciousness – had enveloped the initial level. At first it may have appeared that the activity itself had enabled the children to transcend it. However, in drawing upon Wilber's model, it would seem that, in fact,

the second level had enveloped the previous level of engagement in the activity. Awareness of the free-flowing conversation in which the children could become unified with Other (their peers) and the corporeal activity in which the children were engaged had become one. This may explain how these children were able to maintain the care, skill and quality of the tactile activity while at the same time attend to the conversation that was developing among them. The desire to relate to Other led the Self systems of these children to integrate their awareness of two seemingly separate activities so that in fact the two became one.

In the case of the children in Year three from the rural school (see p. 146) the characteristic of *integrating awareness* was also evident, although in this instance, their conversation was largely task oriented. Nonetheless, their engagement in the tactile activity seemed to lead them beyond the task and into conversation with one another. The conversation enveloped the activity, and seemed to enable them to complete the jigsaw activity in relationship with one another. There was a definite group spirit. It seemed that, collectively, this group spirit – generated by the conversation – had integrated the previous level of awareness, of engagement with the sensorial task. This new and emerging second level of consciousness had enveloped the initial level, and this sustained the group in their effort to complete the jigsaw. This second level of awareness was relational in nature. Through their conversation, which was largely task oriented, the children were able to connect with each other in their task of completing the jigsaw, and in this way the conversation nourished their endeavours.

Lived Space

It appeared, as with *the felt sense* that the children collectively seemed to create a particular kind of space, this time in which to accommodate the emerging second wave of consciousness. This space had been especially prepared by the children through their initial engagement in the corporeal tactile activities to which they were attending. As noted, in the instances in which *integrating awareness* was evident, all children in the group were engaged in *the same* activity. Although the

activity may have been undertaken individually by the children, the commonality of the task itself seemed to provide an impetus for conversation. The children seemed to have created a space for the emerging wave of consciousness by engaging in a common activity. For example, there was, initially, very little conversation among the Year five children from the inner city school (see p. 145) until the skills required for the completion of their chosen activity became 'second nature'. At this point, the conversation then seemed to develop in a way that was not at all self conscious. The ground was prepared and the space had been created by the common activity in which the children were engaged. This was similar with the Year three children from the suburban school (see p. 146). While their conversation had ceased only momentarily, it was not until after these children had set about engaging in the seed planting activity individually that the conversation began to freely develop. Again, the space required for the new wave of consciousness to emerge had been created by the children's engagement in the activity.

This was also the case with the Year three children from the rural school (see p. 146), although in this instance, the jigsaw activity was being completed collectively by the children. Those who were previously engaged in other activities made a conscious decision to join the small group of girls completing the jigsaw to work collectively on this task. It seemed that perhaps the children's active attending to the commonality of the task – the jigsaw – may have prepared the necessary space in which the new wave of consciousness could emerge.

The space prepared for the emerging level of consciousness could be described as a space of invitation. All of the children in each of the three groups referred to above seemed to enter this invitational space to contribute to and become involved in the particular type of conversation that was emerging. There was a sense in which they were welcomed into this space. At the same time, this space presented an element of risk. The children who contributed to the conversation took the risk to speak and to have their comments affirmed, added to and incorporated into the ebb and flow of the dialogue. Yet at the same time, it was a space of safety, for the

particular type of conversation that emerged – itself somewhat inappropriate for the supervised classroom context – was able to develop freely and without hindrance in a space in which both the context and content of the discourse was respected. The children seemed to sense this, although in the cases of both the Year five children from the inner city school and the Year three children from the suburban school, some assurance was sought to ensure that the researcher also respected the nature of the space that had been created. For example, Hy Sun's comment, "Oops – the camera is listening" (see p. 145) was as much a reminder to the researcher as to his peers of the safety and confidentiality of space that had been created. Similarly Stacey's question "Is this (the video) going to be shown to our mums and dads?" could have been interpreted as a request for the researcher to honour the space that had been created, a space that was sacred. It needed to be respected and honoured, as did the contents of that space (the conversation). It was in this space that these children were exhibiting a characteristic of their spirituality, namely the ability to integrate an emerging level of consciousness with a previous level – *integrating awareness*.

Further, this was a space that enabled the children to become less self conscious and to connect with Other through conversation. In other words, the space that was prepared for the emerging level of consciousness could again be described as *relational.* It was in this relational space that a second level of consciousness emerged and enveloped the previous level of awareness. This accords with the understandings of spirituality that have been drawn upon throughout this study, particularly the notion of spirituality as *relational consciousness* (Hay & Nye, 1998). These children appeared to be conscious of their consciousness. As a result of their integrated awareness, the children seemed to be conscious of both their continued engagement in their chosen activity, and at the same time, aware of their conversation with their peers that was enabling them to connect with Other.

Lived Time

The children seemed to be both aware of their attending to the activity in which they were engaged, and at the same time, they appeared conscious of their conversation with their peers. In other words, their awareness was focused on the present moment of their experience. In this present moment the children experienced a merging of temporal horizons – immediate past, present and the immediate future. The immediate past temporal horizon consisted of their engagement in their chosen activity. It included their focus, their concentration and mastery of the skills necessary to complete the particular task. Yet, this horizon seemed to merge with the present temporal horizon, in which the activity continued to be undertaken while a particular free-flowing style of conversation developed among them. In this present or immediate temporal horizon the characteristic of *integrating awareness* was exhibited. The children were unified with the task they had begun in the immediate past *and* with the conversation that was emerging in the present. It seemed also that all of this merged with the immediate future temporal horizon as the children anticipated the direction of the conversation and contributed to its ebb and flow. The children did not seem to control the conversation, as this took on a life of its own and dictated its own direction. As is the case with all genuine conversations, the children found themselves to be less leaders of it than they were led by it (cf. Gadamer 1960/1989). Yet, each child, in risking and offering her or his own contribution to the conversation anticipated its possible course, like players in a game attempting to predict their opponent's next move. The outcome of the conversation, like that of a game, was unknown. But the various possibilities, the potential twists and turns, the likely plays with and plays upon words were sought in advance by the children involved. In this way the immediate future merged with the present and immediate past temporal horizons. Situated in this temporal sequence, the students perhaps experienced the passing of time as a unified and simultaneous flowing from one moment to the next (cf. Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1996) – from the immediate past, through the present to the immediate future. Yet at any one moment in time, all three temporal horizons could have been understood to coexist, that is, to have merged into a single temporal horizon. There was a sense in which any one

particular moment in time could have been understood to contain the immediate past, present and immediate future as a single entity.

Lived Body

At an initial level of consciousness, the corporeal and tactile activities in which these children engaged seemed to provide a foundation for the emerging level of consciousness. In the instances described above involving children in Year three from the suburban and rural schools, and in Year five from the inner city school, the conscious perception of physical bodily awareness of *the felt sense* seemed to act in such a way as to prepare the ground for the emerging wave of consciousness to develop and integrate the previous level. This was evident, for example, among the Year three children from the suburban school. They began by engaging their focus upon the seed planting activity. It was only after their initial absorption in the task that the conversation begun to emerge. Without the children's engagement in these sensorial tasks, it was possible that the characteristic of *integrating awareness* may not have become evident. Physical and bodily engagement by the children was then a necessary prerequisite in preparing the ground for the emergence of this new wave of consciousness and its integration with previous levels.

Perhaps these two waves of consciousness were interdependent. The physical and tactile experiences were needed in order to provide a foundation for the emerging wave of consciousness (the free-flowing conversation). Yet this new level of awareness was itself needed so that Self could integrate it with the awareness of the physical and the tactile in order that Self could then disidentify, or transcend that level so as to move to a yet higher wave. It seemed that consciousness generated other levels of consciousness. Neither wave was more important nor more integral than the other. Yet both were required for Self to move through the phases of fusion, transcendence and integration. In other words, both were necessary for the children's expression of the spiritual characteristic of *integrating awareness*. Both waves of consciousness were required for the children's embodiment of their spirituality, for their physical and outward expression of *integrating awareness*.

Summary and Significance of *Integrating Awareness* for This Study

By way of summary, Table 8 presents a conceptualisation the key insights gained from the above reflections on *integrating awareness*.

Table 8.

A Summary of the Reflection on Integrating Awareness using the Lifeworld Existentials.

	Integrating awareness…
Lived Relation	• Self's drive to integrate emerging waves of consciousness with previous levels so as to connect with Other.
Lived Space	• Creation of a space to accommodate the emerging level of consciousness. • A space of invitation, safety, confidentiality. • Prepared by the initial engagement in the corporeal activity.
Lived Time	• Fusion of temporal horizons – immediate past, present, immediate future.
Lived Body	• Corporeal activity provides the foundation for the emerging level of consciousness.

The above reflections are significant for this study. Self's drive to integrate an emerging wave of consciousness with a previous level through fusion, transcendence and integration in order to connect with Other at the very least suggests that the characteristic in this study termed *integrating awareness* could be a characteristic of spirituality.

Throughout history, there have been individuals from various religious traditions who appear to have been able to do precisely this – to integrate a new emerging wave of consciousness with previous levels in order to enter into relationship – to become unified - with the Transcendent. As discussed in chapter one, examples of such individuals who have been able to do this at sophisticated levels could include The Prophet Mohammed and Sufi master Ibn Al'-Arabi. Christian mystics such as St. Theresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross could also be included among such examples. For example, in *Stanzas between the Soul and*

the Bridegroom (The whole canticle), John of the Cross wrote of the soul who has glimpsed a high state of perfection – union with God:

> There you will show me
> What my soul has been seeking,
> And then you will give me,
> You, my life, will give me there
> What you gave me on that other day.

> The breathing of the air
> The song of the sweet nightingale,
> The grove and its living beauty
> In the serene night,
> With a flame that is consuming and painless   (Stanzas 38 & 39)

These two stanzas speak of the beatific state, the sole aspiration of one who, having integrated a higher level of consciousness of the Divine with previous levels, has reached perfection in the relationship and union with the Ultimate Ground of Being. Similarly, in *The Interior Castle*, Theresa of Avila wrote of the dignity of the human being as the dwelling place of God. In attaining a higher level of consciousness and integrating it with previous levels, she spoke of the soul as being the interior castle, the place where God dwells, and of prayer as being the means by which the soul is united to God. Through prayer Theresa wrote of a higher consciousness that the individual can attain by which she or he may reach the boundaries of this ultimate union or relationship:

> A soul that has tried to be the betrothed of God Himself, that is now intimate with His Majesty, and has reached the boundaries that were mentioned must not go to sleep (5.4.10).

The research reported in this thesis indicates the possibility that children of primary school age are able to do this at more basic and less sophisticated levels. The fact that children are able to integrate new waves of consciousness with their previous levels of awareness so as to connect with Other suggests that *integrating awareness* is at least a characteristic of Self's drive to integrate, and therefore it could possibly be identified as a characteristic of their spirituality. In relation to this characteristic, the children in this present research seemed to be, as it were, at the beginning of the "unitary continuum" (Newberg, d'Aquili & Rause, 2001, p. 145) where Other, for these children, was to be found in their immediate community – their peers.

The context of religious education can provide appropriate opportunities for enabling students to express and develop this characteristic of their spirituality. For example, opportunities for prayer could draw upon *integrating awareness*. At an initial level, students might be encouraged to engage in a sensorial and tactile activity, such as moulding clay, or painting in relation to a particular passage of Scripture, such as "Lord, our God, how great your name throughout the earth!" (Psalm 8:1), or "For it was you who created my being . . . I thank you for the wonder of my being, for the wonders of all your creation" (Psalm 138: 13-14). Time should be provided for the students to become aware of the activity in which they engage – to be conscious of it. As the children continue to engage in these activities, they could be invited to name silently to God those particular talents, skills or attributes that make them unique. These could be silently repeated. This second emerging level of consciousness – conversation with God, may envelop the initial level – engagement in the tactile activity. In this particular instance, the teacher would not be able to determine with any degree of certainty whether or not *integrating awareness* was occurring. However, the opportunity for it to occur would have been consciously planned and built into the curriculum, thereby allowing for the possibility of it to occur and be nurtured within the classroom context.

While religious educators seeking to nurture the spirituality of their students need to pay attention to the types of spaces that are created within their classrooms, the reflections in this chapter also indicate the importance of the children themselves in creating their own relational spaces in which to express and nurture their spirituality. Classroom teachers need to enable this to happen, although many religious educators may not be equipped either professionally or personally to nurture spirituality in this way. For instance, enabling children to create their own relational spaces may require the teacher to be absent from the space created by the students if their spirituality is to be genuinely expressed. Some elements of the conversation of the children in this present study may not have emerged in the ordinary classroom context in which their classroom teachers were present and 'monitoring' the dialogue. While teachers would not necessarily wish to encourage conversation of the potentially inappropriate nature exhibited among the children in this present study, the space that students create for their own nurturing of spirituality needs to be envisaged by the students as safe and confidential. It may be that in some instances, teachers would need to be willing to remove themselves from this space in order for the students to express and to nurture their own spirituality. For an educator to perceive and to be sensitive to this need would possibly require prior learning and experience in this area. Opportunities for professional and personal learning for teachers of religious education in the area of children's spirituality become then a necessary consideration.

The importance of enabling children to engage in the present moment of their experience has also been reiterated. If spirituality is to be expressed, the present moment is a temporal reality that needs to be engaged. The context of religious education can nurture spirituality by allowing time for students to engage in the present moment of their experience. In busy classrooms, time is of the essence. Yet without planning for adequate time for students to engage in the here-and-now of their experience, it will be difficult to genuinely nurture spirituality.

If *integrating awareness* is to emerge and be nurtured, the ground needs to be prepared in terms of providing the initial tactile and sensory experiences for the children's engagement. In primary classroom contexts such bodily and physical experiences are essential in nurturing spirituality. Without these, students may not have the opportunity to integrate an emerging wave of consciousness with the initial physical awareness. That is, they may not have the opportunity to develop their spirituality in this particular way.

This chapter has explored and discussed the two characteristics of children's spirituality that became evident during the awareness sensing group meetings. In this present study, these characteristics have been termed *the felt sense* and *integrating awareness*. The significance of each of these characteristics for this present study has also been indicated. The following chapter will discuss the characteristic that became evident during the mystery sensing group meetings.

CHAPTER SEVEN
MYSTERY SENSING: *WEAVING THE THREADS OF MEANING*

Introduction

This chapter discusses the characteristic of children's spirituality that was identified during the mystery sensing group meetings – *weaving the threads of meaning*. The first phase of these group meetings involved a short story in which a young boy was captured by a sense of wonder and awe in relation to the lighting of a heat-bead fire-lighter (Appendix E). During the second phase, the children engaged in a discussion centred on a series of photographs that may have evoked a sense of wonder. These included a panoramic colour photograph of Uluru, as well as photographs from the *Photo Language kit* (Catholic Education Office, Sydney, 1986) (See Appendix G). Each of the mystery sensing group meetings was recorded using videotape. The researcher was then able to view these recordings, and begin the task of writing hermeneutic phenomenological descriptions and reflections using a reflective journal. Again, van Manen's (1990) lifeworld existentials have been drawn upon as guides to reflection upon the texts.

The Characteristic *Weaving the Threads of Meaning*

The hermeneutic phenomenological descriptions emanating from the mystery sensing group meetings revealed the characteristic described in this study as *weaving the threads of meaning*. The children seemed to draw upon their inner qualities, including their sense of wonder in order to make meaning of events and to piece together a worldview based around their attempts at meaning making. Further, although immersed in contexts that promoted the Catholic faith tradition, these children seemed to draw upon an eclectic range of concepts and ideas to develop a personal framework that enabled them to make meaningful connections with others and with the transcendent. For example, in discussing the photograph of Uluru, the Year three children from the inner city school (p. 148) drew upon a combination of

their previous learning in school, mythology and their own sense of wonder in order to create meaning in relation to how Uluru came to exist. None of these children mentioned that it might have been created by God. Similarly, the Year three children from the suburban school (see p. 149) in discussing the same photograph drew upon similar combinations in order to create meaning. Milly's comment, "Maybe the marks (curves) were put there by the claws of a big animal, maybe a dinosaur!" was perhaps indicative of her drawing upon several influential frameworks of meaning, including prior learning and mythology. Also, in this instance, one of the children – Sally – explicitly mentioned the possibility that God might be the creator of Uluru.

Lived Space

The frameworks of meaning drawn upon by the children in this present study had been offered by the society in which these children lived, the media, their own lived experience, their prior learning, as well as the Catholic tradition, in whose schooling context they were immersed. In reflecting upon the texts of this study, the question arose as to how these children actually chose from these various frameworks of meaning those that offered personal significance for them. There was a sense in which the children seemed to enter the space between each of these different frameworks in order to select eclectically those elements from each which created meaning for themselves. They were then able to weave together these threads of meaning into a personal framework of meaning. For example, in discussing what happens when a person dies, the Year five children from the suburban school (pp. 151 - 152) seemed to enter the space between several frameworks in order to create meaning. Danny stated that heaven would be different for each person, depending upon what that person liked most. If a person enjoyed painting, then heaven for that person would be "a place where you can paint all you want" (p.152). Alicia added that she believed heaven to be like an angel academy, based upon a fiction book that she had been reading recently. These children did not contradict each other's view. The children appeared to accept each other's view because of the freedom each felt to enter the space between the frameworks of meaning in order to locate that which was personally relevant.

Webster's (2004) notion of an existential framework of spirituality is helpful here in shedding some light upon the characteristic *weaving the threads of meaning*. Webster has noted that human beings are both historically and culturally embedded in terms of the particularities of the time in history in which they are situated. As such, humans attempt to make sense of the world in which they find themselves from an already existing horizon of understanding. This horizon consists of the meanings received from the individual's social and cultural world that provide a code for how one might conduct one's life in order to satisfy, or comply with that which is expected as the norm in that culture.

However, existential philosophy would contend that while an individual is influenced by the historical, social and cultural elements that comprise this horizon of meaning, an individual is not totally determined by them. A person is "able to exercise a degree of agency that enables the formation of personal views and commitments" (Webster, 2004, p. 13). In other words, the individual has choice.

This notion of the individual as free to choose is pertinent here. There exists a freedom that one can exercise in relation to the meanings that one receives from a particular culture. Webster (2004) has maintained that there is a particular type of space that is created between the various frameworks of meaning that are provided by a culture or society, and the individually created meanings that offer personal significance for the individual. Such a space can present a tension between the meaning acquired from one's personal life experience, and what Chater (2000) has referred to as "received authoritative wisdom" (p. 200) of the culture, society or presented world view. Webster (2004) has argued that a person's spirituality emerges in this space as the result of the encounter between personal meaning and the frameworks provided by society. It has been Webster's contention that spiritual development does in fact require the struggle of an individual who strives to "exercise one's sense of freedom and decide which meanings offer greater personal significance, and therefore how one relates to these" (p. 14).

This existential framework, and the notion of space offered by Webster (2004) sheds light upon the characteristic of the children in this present study in weaving together the strands of meaning in their own expression of spirituality. If Christianity, as the overarching framework of the Catholic school context (culture) is considered to be the "received, authoritative wisdom" (Chater, 2000, p. 200), it would seem from the hermeneutic phenomenological descriptions provided, that the children were exercising their personal sense of freedom. In other words, the children had, and were continuing to enter the space between the frameworks provided by their context, in particularly the Christian narrative, and their own personal experiences and meanings, and so exercise their freedom to choose from those which offered some significance for them.

For example, in exploring the photograph of Uluru, the Year five children from the inner city school (see p. 150) seemed to be drawing on many different frameworks in wondering about its appearance. Missal and Maria spoke about the spirits that might dwell there that become disturbed when the Anglo-Europeans climb all over this sacred site. They were perhaps referring to the spirits of the Aboriginal ancestors, and possibly the spirits of the earth itself. Ramsey alluded to the Aboriginal dreamtime stories in his comment that at one time Uluru might have been a volcano that "was slowly shrinking". And Maria, in drawing on the Judeo-Christian story commented that perhaps God had created it. In their wondering, these children seemed to have entered the space between the various frameworks of meaning, and exercised their freedom selecting from those frameworks elements that were significant for them.

In discussing the photograph of the elderly woman, the Year three children from the rural school (see p. 155) maintained that the woman had died and gone to heaven. In exploring what the children meant by the word heaven, the children drew initially on the Catholic tradition as a starting point in their explanation, but drew also on other frameworks to enrich the significance of heaven for themselves

personally. Tom and Imelda spoke of the soul going to heaven, while Michael seemed to draw from elsewhere, particularly in his comment that "Heaven is a paradise because people say 'I'm in heaven' when they're at a good place, or when they're doing something they really enjoy" (see p. 155). A little later in the conversation, Michael appeared to be further elaborating upon this when he spoke about people having a good and a bad side. He was alluding to the notion of conscience, a concept common to many traditions, including Catholicism. However, it became clear that Michael was drawing upon other frameworks (perhaps the media) when he explained that "It's like the good side says 'Don't listen to him, he's the devil', but the bad side says, 'Go on, flush your brother's mouth guard down the toilet!'" (p. 156).

In exploring the notion of heaven, it seemed that many of the children in the inner city, suburban and rural schools drew on the Catholic tradition, but sought other frameworks to create greater significance. For example, Milly in Year three from the suburban school remarked that "heaven is maybe a happy place with waterfalls and rainforests" (see p. 153). Children in Year five from the inner city school maintained that heaven is where good spirits go. In this group Hy Sun further explained that "If she (the lady in the photograph) was not a good person on earth she would remain a ghost and haunt people in their houses" (see p. 154). Kristy in Year five from the rural school commented that she wondered what people do in heaven, "because you see shows on TV where people in heaven play games, or can dance" (p. 156). Cameron in Year five from the suburban school maintained that heaven is "a thought, it's in your heart if you believe that its there" (p. 151). These ideas are not reflected in the teachings of the Catholic tradition. Yet the children included them because they offered greater significance for themselves personally. These ideas had been sought from a range of alternative frameworks of meaning including fictional reading, personal experience, other religious traditions (perhaps Hinduism is speaking about the notion of good spirits), and the secular.

Of particular influence here would be the media and the children's own peer group. These two frameworks of meaning are highly influential in shaping the world views of children. The media continually presents images of how one is to appear as acceptable in society. As well, it presents an array of images in relation to death and after-life through television programs such as *Touched by an Angel* and *Crossing Over*[2], as well as through popular music. Since the media is so influential in the lives of children and young people (Crawford & Rossiter, 2003), it is a framework of meaning commonly drawn upon by them in weaving together the different threads of meaning.

The above illustrates that while the children who took part in this research did draw upon the Christian story as a framework of significance, this was but one of many sources of meaning. The children appeared to feel in no way constricted by it, and, in entering the space between the frameworks, exercised their freedom to draw upon whatever sources were necessary for them to create personal meaning. In this act of meaning making – in the space of encounter between the Christian tradition and their own choosing of alternative frameworks of meaning – the children were giving expression to their spirituality. They were engaged in finding "personal significance and meaning in (both) religious and other world views, by exercising their freedom to these meanings as (their) *own* [italics in original]" (Webster, 2004, p. 14).

Lived Body

In all of the mystery sensing group meetings it seemed that the children were physically drawn to the panoramic photograph of Uluru. For example, the children in Year three from the inner city school (see p. 148) displayed bodily expressions of amazement when shown this photograph. Their facial expressions revealed something of their astonishment at the grandeur of this natural feature. They recognised it instantly. Their recognition of it alluded to an unexplainable physical

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[2] These are two popular television programs shown in Australia. *Touched by an Angel* depicts three angels who intervene in the lives of people, while the host *Crossing Over* is said to be able to communicate with the deceased loves ones of members of the audience who appear on that program.

connection to this element of the Australian landscape. They physically edged themselves forward to get a closer look at the photograph of Uluru. Their eyes widened with amazement, perhaps as the result of seeing a familiar sight in the guise of a panoramic photograph, with vivid colours and intricate detail.

The Year five children from the inner city school (p. 150), who had found it difficult to engage during this group meeting, displayed an almost instant change in their body language when shown this photograph. It was as if they had suddenly become animated. They too physically edged themselves forward and crowded in on the photograph. The body language of these children seemed to indicate great excitement upon recognising the photograph. "It's Uluru! It's Uluru!" they exclaimed with a sudden enthusiasm that had been notably absent prior to this point. One of the students, Hy Sun, seemed to become physically mesmerised by the awesomeness of the photograph. His eyes appeared to be fixed upon it. His jaw seemed to be dropped in what appeared as an expression of wonder.

This reaction to the photograph of Uluru, common among all of the children in each of the mystery sensing group meetings, surprised the researcher. The reaction may perhaps be explained in part by their sense of connection to this feature of the Australian landscape about which they seemed to have some prior knowledge. This connection may be explained in part by the children's instant recognition of Uluru. There was perhaps a sense in which the children, as belonging to Australia, felt a sense of pride an ownership of this feature. Their sense of ownership could be better described as a sense of stewardship, for the children seemed to recognise the sacredness of this place. For instance, the children in Year five from the inner city school (see p. 150) indicated a respect for the sacredness of this site through comments alluding to the spirits of the place becoming angry when people walk all over it. While the ideas and expressions of the children in relation to this photograph may have emanated from previous work in the classroom context, and from the influence of the media, the children seemed to be offering more than a "learned" or "politically correct" response. The researcher sensed that there was a genuineness

and sincerity to these elements of their conversation. There was no sarcasm in their voices. The children's responses were delivered with what appeared as a degree of insistence and resolve. They seemed to be offering a genuine insight into their feelings.

This sense of connectedness with an element of the Australian landscape reflects aspects of the work of Tacey (2000), who, in describing ancient aboriginal insights, has maintained that in Australia, the spirit emanates from the earth. The spiritual enters the lives of people from below, from the ground, and in a sense incarnates the body. The result is that many Australian feel unexplainably drawn towards the place in which they find themselves, "drawn into the mystery and poetry of this place, almost as if (they) were indigenous to it" (Tacey, 2000, p. 136).

In being drawn towards the centre, towards Uluru, it could perhaps be seen that these children were experiencing, as the result of their recognition and sense of stewardship for Uluru, a physical connectedness with the land. While this type of connectedness is experienced quite naturally within the indigenous culture of Australia, the Anglo-European inhabitants long for such a connection to a place in which they might physically at one (Tacey, 2000). Although the non-indigenous psyche has, in the past, been one of colonisation, of conquering the land and claiming dominion over it, there seems to have been a shift in more recent times that has resulted in a longing for a sense of connectedness with the land. Such a notion accords with Tacey's (1995, 2000) understanding of activating the indigenous archetype.

In drawing upon Jung's concepts of the collective unconscious and the archetype, Tacey (1995) has maintained that the deep world of the psyche of the Anglo-European Australians is directly influenced by the forces of the land that surrounds them:

Certain Australian Aborigines assert that one cannot conquer foreign soil, because in it there dwell strange ancestor-spirits who reincarnate themselves in the new-born. There is a great psychological truth in this. The foreign land assimilates its conqueror (Jung cited in Tacey, 1995, p. 134).

Such an idea can be extended, Tacey has argued (1995, 2000), to include the notion of the conqueror – white Australia – becoming, or taking on the likeness of those who have been conquered (Indigenous Australia). The earth exerts power of the mind, and this can be seen as a direct link between the deep unconscious and the world of nature. White Australians have begun to be "aboriginalised" (p. 136) from within. There is, Tacey has argued, an indigenous archetype within the collective human psyche. It can take on different expressions and can be activated within the modern soul in various ways. Tacey has argued that the unconscious is already attempting to impose the indigenous soul upon white consciousness, evidenced by the growing number of Australians who come into contact with Aboriginal figures in their dreams.

Perhaps it is also evidenced by the growing numbers of Australians who long for the great outdoors, who long to visit places at "the heart" of Australia. Perhaps it is also evidenced by the children in this present study, who, through their physical and bodily expressions to the photograph of Uluru, were indicating their desire for unity with this land. Perhaps the land once conquered by the ancestors of these children was now seeking to assimilate them, and, to draw upon Tacey's (1995) animistic and mythological construct, "strange ancestor-spirits (have) *reincarnated*(ed) themselves in the new-born [italics in original]" (p. 137).

Lived Relation

The children in the mystery sensing group meetings seemed to be weaving together the various strands of meaning as a means by which to connect in relationship with those who were of significance to them. This could be seen particularly among the children in Year five from the rural school (see pp. 156-157)

and their expressions of connectedness – and in some instances longing for connectedness – with members of their families, predominantly those who were deceased. For example, Kristy wondered about why people die and go to heaven, and about what they might do there. Emily wondered about why her uncle died at a young age, yet her grandpa lived to be quite elderly before dying. Emily had further commented that she wished she could have known her grandpa in a more intimate way before he died. This was perhaps indicative of such a longing for connection. Also, Annabelle's account of the near death experience of one of her family members could also be seen as an attempt at *weaving the threads of meaning* in order to connect in relationship with her deceased relatives.

Michelle from this same group of children was able to speak openly about her older sister, Kim, who had died while Michelle herself was quite young. Although deceased, Kim seemed to continue to be a part of Michelle's (and her family's) life. Michelle was able to weave together the threads of meaning in order to give expression to this continuing relationship. She drew upon her peers' accounts of near death experiences among older family members to describe an occasion on which she herself had had an epiphany of Kim in her own life while on holiday at Port Fairy, a holiday destination often visited by the family while Kim was alive (see p. 157). She was able to describe in some detail the events surrounding this occasion, and even the clothes Kim was wearing. She commented on how surprised and happy she was to have had this experience because, to use her words, "I thought I wouldn't see her again until I was really old and had died" (p. 157). In a later group meeting, Michelle went on to speak about the significance and value attached by her family to the possessions of Kim that remained. The ornaments and the teddy bear that belonged to Kim, as well as the photographs and journal kept by Michelle's mother (p. 159) serve as media through which Michelle and her family remain connected and unified to her older sister.

The children in Year five from the inner city school (see p. 154) also expressed, by weaving together the threads of meaning, something of this longing to

connect in relationship. While these children were generally cautious in their discourse, and did not speak of anyone specifically, in reflecting upon the comments of May Ling and Missal particularly, it can be seen that these children understood something of the interrelatedness of different states of life. In wondering about the photograph of the elderly lady, and what might be said to console the relatives of this lady if in fact she had died, May Ling maintained that "She's with you in spirit. Just because she's not in front of you doesn't mean she's gone" (p. 154). Not only might this comment indicate a weaving together of several possible frameworks of meaning, but it may indicate May Ling's capacity to be empathetic with the death experience. "Just because she's not in front of you doesn't mean she's gone" is a use of language that could intimate an understanding of the connectedness and relationship that, in many cultures and religious traditions, is considered possible – even crucial – after the death of a loved one. Similarly, Missal's comment "She's in your heart" (p. 154) may suggest that she too understood this sense of connectedness to deceased loved ones. It is interesting to note in this instance that Missal has used the present tense. Rather than saying "I would say that she's in your heart", Missal seemed to be stating this she (the lady) was now, at that present moment in the hearts of those who loved her while she was alive. Missal too appeared to be empathetic with the experience of death.

In the above instances, it seemed that the children had developed a sense of kinship between themselves and the dead. This accords with the findings of Hay and Nye (1998) in relation to the medieval qualities of spirituality that were suggested by the children in their study and their sense of relationship between the living and the dead. Hay and Nye have noted that the religious practices of those living in medieval times intimate that people had a greater sense of kinship that seemed to extend not only across generational boundaries, but also across the boundary between the living and the dead. For example, the less wealthy depended in part on the financial support paid to them for the offering of prayers and attendance at Mass for the deceased persons. In turn, the dead were viewed as being dependent upon the living

in order that their souls could be adequately prayed for to ensure entry into heaven. Such interdependency then fostered a kinship-based sense of spirituality.

The children in this present study however seemed to be aware of this kinship not simply in terms of the deceased looking after them in times of difficulty or trouble. These children may have had a heightened awareness of the relationship between themselves and the deceased for its own sake. For example, Emily's comment that she wished she could have known her grandpa in a more intimate way before he died is perhaps indicative of this natural sense of connection with her grandfather even though she did not know him well. Similarly, Michelle, although quite young when her sister Kim died and would have barely known her, nonetheless seemed to have a profound relationship with her sister that, with the support of her family had somewhat naturally formed. In this particular instance, the profound nature of this relationship could possibly be conceived of as the emergence of a Collective Self. Michelle and her family seemed to experience an intimate sense of unity with Kim that exceeded the boundary between physical life and death. Each Self in this relationship was unified – Self and Other had become one.

The comments of both May Ling and Missal also indicate this sense of affinity with the deceased. May Ling's comment "She's with you in spirit…Just because she's not in front of you doesn't mean she's gone" expressed something of her understanding of the enduring nature of the kinship between the living and the dead. Such a relationship is not limited to the physical proximity between people. It is boundless, and transcends this restricted understanding. For these children, the relationship between the living and the dead was significantly more encompassing. This notion was perhaps expressed quite succinctly by Missal in her statement that "She (the deceased woman) is in your heart."

Lived Time

The children's wonderings and weaving together of the various strands of meaning seemed to include a fusion of the past and present temporal horizons. In

many cases the children's wondering about past events somehow made those very events present in the here-and-now. This was particularly evident in the children's wondering about Uluru. For example the children in Year three from the inner city school (see pp. 148-149) seemed to be drawing upon a version of their own mythology in describing possible events from long ago that may have resulted in the formation of Uluru. Ali and Tran wondered if Uluru was once a volcano that had erupted, while Rosie suggested that it could have fallen like hail from the sky, and that the Aborigines might have stacked all the pieces together. Similarly, the Year 3 children from the suburban school (see pp. 149-150) drew upon their own created stories in wondering about the creation of Uluru. Zephaniah had maintained the possibility that there was once an ocean there and that the waves splashed against the rock, thereby carving its shape over time. Milly added that perhaps the curves in the rock were put there by the claws of large prehistoric animals.

In both of the above instances, the children's wonderings about possible events from a distant past time in fact rendered those events present in the here-and-now time. Although their wonderings were precisely that – wondering in order to create meaning – their wonderings of the past were made real in a present temporal landscape in which the ancient past and the here-and-now fused into a single temporal horizon.

The wonderings that these children were articulating – their narratives (Erricker, et al., 1997) seemed to contain a power to merge the past and present temporal horizons. Their wonderings were not dissimilar to the stories of the indigenous peoples of Australia, known as the Dreamtime Stories, which also contained this ability. Dreamtime stories present events from the ancient past to explain various elements of the created earth. They are told traditionally through song, dance and ritual. When these stories are retold and celebrated, mythological events from the past are made present in the immediate temporal horizon. The remembering of these events of long ago renders them a reality in the present moment. Similarly, the stories of Christian Scripture act in this way. When the

sacred text is proclaimed, the saving acts of God are made present in the here-and-now. The Catholic celebration of the Eucharist (Mass) uses ritual, Scripture, movement and song to make present in the here-and-now the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This deep remembering – *anamnesis* (O'Loughlin, 2000) makes present the events of long ago. It enables the Christian to enter the story and so (potentially at least) be transformed by it.

This notion of a fusing together of the past and present temporal horizons could also be seen in some of the children's wonderings about what happens when a person has died. Among the Year five children in the suburban school (see pp. 151-152) there was a sense in which the memory of the deceased somehow made the reality of that person present in the here-and-now. Comments such as "they'll still be with you in your heart," and "you'll always remember them" from Alicia were indicative of this. Similarly, among the Year five children from the inner city school (see p. 154) there was a sense in which the memory of the deceased could make that person a reality in the present moment. Maria's comment "You'll still have memories of her," and May Ling's statement "She's with you in spirit…Just because she's not in front of you doesn't mean she's gone" again suggested this particular quality of time.

In particular Michelle in Year five from the rural school (see pp. 156-157) seemed to actively experience the presence of her deceased older sister, Kim, in the here-and-now through an activation of her memory. This was especially evident in her recounting of experiencing Kim's presence when on holiday in Port Fairy. It was as though a literal return to the past – the holiday destination – made the memory of Kim a reality for Michelle in her experience of the here-and-now. That is to say, by revisiting an aspect of the past, itself full of memories, Kim's presence was somehow apperceived as a reality in the present moment of Michelle's experience. Michelle was able to articulate how this had happened (she had turned to see Kim walking behind her) and what Kim was wearing (her pink dress). Further, there was a sense in which this epiphany had a future dimension to it. This experience seemed

to provide for Michelle a sense of comfort and hope, and a sense of meaning. In speaking with her, one got the impression that this incident, and others like it, provided Michelle with a spiritual experience that she could and would continue to draw upon on future occasions for a sense of life's meaning and purpose. A past event could be drawn upon in the present, as well as in the future, as a possible means by which to solve problems of meaning and value in life (Emmons, 1999, 2000; Hyde, 2004a; James, 1902/1977; Maslow, 1977; Zohar & Marshall, 2000).

Summary and Significance of *Weaving the Threads of Meaning* for This Study

By way of summary, Table 9 presents a conceptualisation the key insights gained from the above reflections on *weaving the threads of meaning*.

Table 9.

A summary of the Reflection on Weaving the Threads of Meaning using the Lifeworld Existentials.

	Weaving the Threads of Meaning…
Lived Space	• Children entered the space between the various frameworks of meaning to select eclectically those elements from each which created meaning. • Weave these elements together into a personal framework of meaning. • The Catholic/Christian story was but one of the many frameworks drawn upon by these children.
Lived Body	• Physical connection to the Australian landscape in creating meaning. • Activation of the indigenous archetype.
Lived Time	• Fusion of temporal horizons – past, present and future. • Story/mythology from the ancient past made present in the here-and-now.
Lived Relation	• Weaving together the threads of meaning so as to remain connected – unified – to deceased family members. In some instances the nature of this unity may lead towards the emergence of a Collective Self • Heightened awareness of the kinship extending across the boundaries of living and dead.

The above reflections are significant for this present study. Firstly, they accord with the understandings and descriptions of spirituality that have been

outlined in chapter one and carried forward in this thesis. This is particularly evident in the reflection which has drawn upon lived body. The children in this study exhibited a genuine sense of connectedness with elements of the Australian landscape. As well, the reflection emanating from lived relation suggests that some of these children experienced a sense of unity with their deceased loved ones, or an ability to be empathetic with the death experience. Michelle indicated a heightened sense of this unity when speaking about her deceased older sister, Kim, and this particular sense of unity may have indicated a movement involving the emergence of a Collective Self, in which Self and Other had become unified.

Secondly, the above reflections suggest that children do wonder about issues of deeper significance. These echo the findings of Hart's (2003) research as discussed in chapter two of this thesis, particularly in relation to his notion of wondering about life's existential questions. As such, the meaning making and worldviews of students in the classroom context cannot be ignored. Rather than imposing a worldview that may not make sense in terms of the way in which the students themselves have constructed meaning (Erricker, et al., 1997) religious education, if it is to nurture the spirituality of students, needs to take account of, and begin with the worldviews and personal meaning of the students themselves.

Ota (2001) has argued this very point, maintaining that religious education in Catholic schools tends to have presented students with a contained, well-defined worldview. In many instances, little, if any attempt has been made to take into account the worldviews and personal meaning frameworks of the students themselves. Religious education programs and curricula frequently present the authoritative wisdom of the faith tradition, but may not adequately support the genuine spiritual development of the students. In other words, they do not provide opportunities for students to enter the space between the framework of the faith tradition and their own personal experiences in order to create meaning.

The challenge for religious education may then be threefold. Firstly, it may involve an acknowledgment of the world views held by the students themselves, and an ability to draw upon these as its beginning point in the presentation of the Christian story. Secondly, it would need to accompany students in entering the space between the various frameworks of meaning drawn upon by the students in creating meaning. Thirdly, it would be required, where appropriate, to challenge and to provide an alternative framework of meaning. All three of these challenges might be summed up as involving religious education and students in a process referred to by Ota (2001) as concerning *responsible partners*. While acknowledging that this term would require further unpacking, for religious education to act as a responsible partner and to contribute in a meaningful way to children's personal growth may require it to "engage with pupils, allowing them to share their stories and to contribute to the community's story" (Ota, 2001, p. 271). In other words, religious education needs to partner children in entering the space between the authoritative wisdom of the faith tradition and the individually created meanings that offer personal significance for the children themselves. It is in this space that it must engage with children, exploring a range of frameworks of meaning including the Christian story. Herein exists a great tension and an enormous challenge for religious education. However, if this tension can be creatively addressed, religious education may contribute to children's spiritual development and creation of meaning. For this to occur, however, entails the educator's familiarity with the various aspects and expressions of children's spirituality. As noted in chapter six many educators may not be skilled in this area. Therefore, opportunities for professional and personal learning for classroom teachers of religious education are pertinent.

This chapter has discussed the characteristic termed in this present study as *weaving the threads of meaning*, which became evident in during the mystery sensing group meetings. As well, it has indicated the significance of this for this present study. The following chapter will explore the characteristic of children's spirituality that became evident during the value sensing group meeting.

CHAPTER EIGHT
VALUE SENSING: *SPIRITUAL QUESTING*

Introduction

This chapter presents a discussion and reflection upon the characteristic of children's spirituality that was identified during the value sensing group meetings. This characteristic has been termed *spiritual questing*. The first phase of the value sensing group meeting comprised a picture story book titled *The Tunnel* (Browne, 1989) and a short discussion about those things that really mattered in the story, as well as in their own lives. The second phase of this group meeting comprised a journaling activity, in which the children were invited to write or draw about what really mattered to them (Appendix E). Each of the value sensing group meetings was recorded using videotape. The researcher was then able to view these recordings, and begin the task of writing hermeneutic phenomenological descriptions and reflections using a reflective journal. Again, the lifeworld existentials (van Manen, 1990) have been drawn upon as guides to reflection upon the texts.

The Characteristic *Spiritual questing*

The characteristic described in this present study as *spiritual questing* was evident in all of the value sense group meetings. Adapted from Horell's (2003) notion of questing postmodernity, *spiritual questing* "seek(s) to promote imaginative creativity and the pragmatic construction of new patterns and self-identity" (p. 91). For spiritual questers, the present time provides opportunities for a freedom to envision more life giving and life enhancing ways of being. Horell has noted that, in terms of the Christian tradition, those who might be classed as spiritual questers seek

to explore new and perhaps more authentic ways of connecting with Self, others, the earth and with God[3].

Spiritual questing was exhibited in a variety of ways. For example, among the Year three children from both the inner city school (see p. 162) and the suburban school (see p. 163) there were altruistic expressions of a desire for the wellbeing of those less fortunate, and for the happiness of people, especially the poor. The Year three children from the rural school (see p. 160) revealed signs of *spiritual questing* through their searching in the Transcendent Other as an expression of what really mattered most to them. The Year five students from the inner city school (see p. 159) exhibited signs of *spiritual questing* through their searching for a sense of life's meaning and value through horoscopes and clairvoyance and the supernatural. The Year five children from the suburban school (pp. 162-163) indicated their *spiritual questing* through an articulation of the values of freedom for all people, love and equality.

Lived Relation

Spiritual questing entailed a sense of Other and the relationship of Self with Other. The children indicated a searching in their experience of Other for a sense of life's meaning and purpose (Tacey, 2003). In some instances, this searching was named explicitly as being in the Transcendent Other. For example, several of the Year three children from the rural school (see p. 160) indicated that what really mattered to them was a relationship with God and Jesus. While Tom from this group of children was less able to articulate and expand upon his thoughts in relation to this, Michael was able to describe a little more of this desired relationship in terms of actually meeting God, Jesus and Mary because "they'd be really nice" (p. 160). In this instance, these two children were drawing upon religious language to search in their experience of and relation to the Transcendent for a sense of identity and life's meaning and purpose. This could be further evidenced by the fact that these

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[3] Although Horell (2003) uses the term "self" with an initial lower case, it would seem that his usage of this term reflects the notion of one's true Self, and therefore reflects the understanding of Self which has been advanced in this thesis.

responses were the first offered, after a short time of quiet and contemplation, in reply to the researcher's wondering about what really mattered to them. In searching their relationship to the Transcendent, these two children were possibly coming to a greater knowledge of themselves, since without such a relationship with the "absolute other" (Tacey, 2003, p. 156), the self lacks a sense of identity, definition and form. A part of their identity was defined through their relation to the Transcendent.

In other instances, this searching was named as being in relation to family. For example, Imelda in Year three from the rural school (see p. 160) indicated that her family really mattered, and that this mattering was unconditional. Regardless of what she had done, or what members of her family may have done to her, families were charged with the responsibility of caring for each of its members unconditionally. Her family provided her identity, and she in turn provided her family with definition and form. Amina and Charlotte in Year three from the inner city school (p. 162) also indicated family as something which really mattered to them. For Charlotte, her family also provided a sense of identity and form. However, in Amina's case, her family had experienced breakdown though her parents divorce. Almost as if reflecting more to herself than to the group, she had said "I wish that my parents weren't divorced" (p. 162). While her love for her parents and their love for her might have remained unconditional, there was a sense in which Amina's definition of herself had been altered. She could no longer be defined by her family in the same way that perhaps she once was. Reciprocally, Amina's family could no longer be defined by her in quite the same way that had once been. Although she was continuing to search in her experience of her family for a sense of her identity, Amina seemed to realise that she would now also need to search elsewhere. This was perhaps indicated in her wishing that her parents were not divorced. The unifying bond that had once held the family unit together had been severed. Although they remained connected to one another in various ways, the dynamic of the relationship was now different.

Some of the children in Year five from the rural school also indicated family as being what really mattered. Notable among this group was Michelle and her family's sense of unity, and Collective Self (as discussed in chapter six) with her deceased older sister Kim. Kim continued to be an active presence in this family's life, providing it with identity, definition and form. Michelle spoke of members of her family, including herself, as having had dreams about Kim. She spoke of the journal kept by her mother, in which were recorded the family's thoughts, feelings and descriptions of the dreams they may have experienced about Kim. She spoke of the precious keepsakes that once belonged to Kim which she now held sacredly. These seemed to serve as a means by which to remain unified with Kim. This was further evidenced in a previous group meeting (discussed on p. 157) in which Michelle believed she had experienced Kim's presence while on holiday at Port Fairy. Michelle had stated that she was not afraid, but glad and heartened by this experience because she thought that she would not have seen Kim again until she herself had died sometime later in life. Michelle's *spiritual questing* appeared to be seeking and exploring authentic ways of remaining unified with Kim. In this *spiritual questing* Kim defined who Michelle was, and reciprocally, Michelle defined Kim. While each of these children was a unique individual with her own particular likes and dislikes, and gifted with her own unique traits and talents, in terms of identity it was almost as though without Kim, there was no Michelle, and without reference to Michelle, there was no Kim. They were unified in terms of a Collective Self in which the relationship of each to Other was indispensable in defining each other's being. Further, it seemed that Michelle had an intuitive sense of this unity. Although she did not use language to articulate this, Michelle seemed to be intuitively aware of the self-defining unity that she and her deceased sister shared.

This notion of defining, reciprocally, the relationship and sense of connectedness between the living and deceased accords with some of the findings of Coles (1990) in his interview with a young Hopi girl named Natalie. Coles reported that Natalie spoke of going to the mesa to visit her ancestors:

I think a lot about the mesa, a lot. I visit it [in my thoughts], and I meet our ancestors. They give me a blanket, and they hold me, and they point to the sky and say there are more up there – our ancestors . . . I feel myself sometimes wanting to . . . go to the mesa and have a feast: eat our bread, stand in a circle, and hear my grandmother talk about our people . . . I have seen my ancestors and others lifted towards us by the wind. They come here and whisper to our old people, and then they [the old people] talk to us [about what they have heard and learned] (pp. 151-152).

In the above anecdote Natalie is defined by her ancestors, and her ancestors are defined through reference to Natalie. It is a living relationship and sense of unity with Other which indicate the emergence of a Collective Self – Natalie and her ancestors were unified. Like Michelle in this present study, Coles indicated that Natalie seemed to be consciously aware of this unity. While she may not have possessed the language to express this relationship, Natalie understood herself to be connected to and defined by her ancestors, who in turn collectively defined her being – "Her body is a link in a chain of life, even as all those links are part of a universe of life . . . Death for Natalie meant a shift in the universe, a spirit moving on to new territory" (pp. 156-157).

In other instances *spiritual questing* manifest itself as a searching in relation to Other through what appeared as a fascination with the supernatural. This was particularly evident among the Year five children from the inner city school (see p. 161). These children indicated that what really mattered to them were phenomena such as astrology, clairvoyance, and the possession of supernatural powers. While some of the children had indicated that these were fun or interesting to engage in, Hy Sun from this group of children had suggested that astrology was important because it could "tell you about yourself and others". Although an interest in astrology and horoscopes could be attributed to the peer group and media influences, it could also have been that these children believed that meaning and value in relation to one's Self and to others could be found in one's zodiac sign, and in the terrestrial position

of the stars. If taken seriously, this could inform one about one's Self and one's daily interactions with others. Although they were somewhat reluctant to elaborate in great detail their conceptions of astrology, it seemed clear that this phenomenon provided one source of their searching for meaning and purpose in life.

This same group of children also indicated that the possession of supernatural powers also mattered to them. They seemed to have been greatly influenced by a popular television series titled *Charmed* which featured the notion of witchcraft. The children in fact named this television program during the value sensing group meeting. At first it seemed as though the children desired to possess such supernatural powers for their personal gratification. For example, Maria had stated that these were important because "Whenever I want something, it (would) just come to me." She further went on to explain that the possession of such powers would enable her to "disappear whenever I want – when I'm embarrassed" (p. 161). However, further reflection upon this may have indicated something beyond personal gratification. One of the features of the television series *Charmed* – and also of other media productions that were influential in these children's lives at that time, such as *Harry Potter* and *Lord of the Rings* – was the notion of good ultimately overcoming evil. Although the story plots of these television series and films portrayed the many ways in which evil and destruction could run rampantly, these were eventually and inevitably conquered by the good and virtuous. For example, in the Harry Potter movies, it is Harry himself who is the personification of good and overcomes the evil of Voldermort. In *The Philosopher's Stone* his trusted friend Hermione reminds Harry that he personifies the ultimate values that are sought after in life – friendship, loyalty, trustworthiness, and the like. Similarly the characters of Mr. Frodo and Gandolf in *Lord of the Rings* personify the trustworthy and the faithful in relation to their quest in spite of the evil and destructive forces that were at work. These qualities eventually overcome evil. The characters in the series *Charmed* operate in similar ways. Although the forces of evil seem to have acquired the upper hand, the good and virtuous ultimately overcome and succeed. In reflecting upon the text of this Year five group from the inner city school, these

children indicated an awareness of good overcoming evil. While they may not have possessed the language to express it in this way, and while they may have appeared to desire a possession of such supernatural powers for their self gratification, it seemed these children were seeking connection to a life force that promoted the life-giving values of the characters of these popular media dramas. These children were perhaps searching – questing – in Other for more life enhancing ways of being in the world. What they were perhaps really seeking, what really mattered to them, was not necessarily the supernatural powers possessed by the characters of these films and television series, but rather the inherent values that these characters personified and lived out, and which in some instances were explicitly named either by the characters themselves, or by their associates. The supernatural was perhaps the media through which these children could access, or be in touch with these values. This could perhaps be seen in Missal's comment that she enjoyed the ways the characters of the series *Charmed* used their powers in such a way as to save others from evil (p. 161). Two of the other children in group – May Ling and Ramsey indicated their concurrence with Missal's thoughts by nodding their heads in agreement. Perhaps it was these values themselves that were of ultimate concern, but about which the children did not have a language that enabled them to give to voice to them.

In some instances the characteristic of *spiritual questing* manifest itself in terms of the altruistic concerns of the children to empathise with others, especially those they considered to be less fortunate than themselves. This was particularly the case with the Year three children from the suburban and inner city schools. For example, Charlotte and Amina in Year three from the inner city school both indicated that if they could have three wishes they would wish for the wellbeing of the poor. It seemed that both of these children felt they were in a position to *do* something for those less fortunate, albeit in the simple way of wishing them a better plight in life. Charlotte stated that she wished for them to "live a good life" (p. 162). Amina added that it would be important to wish such a thing because it was *doing* something for another person. This accords with the descriptions of spirituality that

have been carried forward in this thesis – that spirituality is given expression outwardly in terms of the way in which one acts towards Other. They appeared to express compassion they felt and they seemed able to empathise with those less fortunate than themselves. It seemed that these children were seeking and expressing a movement towards unity with Other through their altruistic motives. This perhaps led them to express those feelings of compassion and empathy in terms of action – of doing something that they as eight-year-old children could realistically do – to wish for them.

The Year three children from the suburban school also expressed this outward sense of connectedness with those less fortunate (see p. 163). Zephaniah wished that all of the poor people in the world might have clothes and money. Stacey and Sally both indicated that they would wish for the sick and the injured to be healed, and also for world peace. These altruistic notions were possibly a means of seeking and expressing their movement towards unity with Other, particularly those less fortunate, perhaps through their feelings of empathy and compassion. They were seeking more authentic and life giving ways of being in the world. Rather than simply wishing for new toys, new clothes, or for more money, in these instances, the children were consciously expressing their genuine concerns for other people. Their well-wishing for them served as a means by which they could facilitate their movement towards unity with Other, and so could be understood to be an expression of their spirituality.

Among the Year five children from the suburban school (see pp. 162-163) the characteristic of *spiritual questing* seemed to manifest itself as a movement towards unity with Other through the larger themes and values of life, particularly those of freedom and love. For example, John, who seemed to have considered carefully that which really mattered to him, indicated that the freedom of all people was something of ultimate concern. Perhaps because of his own freedom – something which he did not seem to take for granted – he was able to empathise with those who could not share in this basic human right. Further, John seemed to feel

quite strongly about freedom. This could be seen in his statement "a long time ago slavery was not illegal, and some people didn't have freedom, which *everybody should be able to have* [Italics added]" (see p. 162). Cameron, Alicia and Adam from this same group affirmed John's position as freedom being something that was of ultimate concern. They too expressed their *spiritual questing* as a searching for connectedness to Other, through the ability to empathise with Other. For example, in adding to John's declaration of the importance of freedom, Adam stated "Like the Aborigines…They didn't have any freedom – they couldn't vote, they couldn't live wherever they wanted to" (p. 162). Cameron maintained that freedom was important because "we should treat all people the same way. And we should all have the same amount of the things we like" (p. 162). In this instance, all three children drew and expanded upon the theme of freedom as a means by which to express their growing sense of unity with Other.

This same group of children also drew upon the theme of love as being something that really mattered to them in their spiritual questing. From his experiences, John, perhaps at an unconscious level, expressed his understanding that love, particularly the love between a parent and a child, was an expression of connectedness to Other. While experiencing difficulty in finding the language to articulate his thinking, John, also expressed a sense of empathy for those children who do not experience the love of a parent in perhaps the way that he has: "some parents don't care about their children. They don't send them to school – they go away and leave their children to do the groceries and stuff. They don't care for them" (p. 163). John was revealing something of his genuine heart-felt values that really mattered to him. His spirituality was given expression as a sense of connectedness with those who perhaps had not experienced love the way that he had through his compassion and empathy. It was as if he was somehow united to them through this empathy, and desired to share with them something of the love that he himself had experienced. It seemed that John was perhaps reaching out to those who were unloved, or at least not loved in the way he had experienced love. Through the theme of love, John was able to give not only expression to something of ultimate

concern, but also to his longing for unity with Other with whom he might be able to share love.

Lived Time

In all of the value sensing group meetings that which really mattered to the children seemed to be concerned with the immediate temporal horizon, while those things that they might wish for seemed to be largely concerned with the future. The things children indicated that really mattered to them were in many cases issues that had impacted upon them in the past, and hence had become things that mattered to them in the here-and-now. For example, Michelle in Year five from the rural (see p. 159) indicated that the keepsakes and memorabilia that remained in her family from her deceased older sister Kim really mattered to her. In this instance, the death of her sister was an event that had greatly impacted upon Michelle in the past. In the immediate temporal horizon, those keepsakes that had belonged to Kim were of ultimate importance as a means by which Michelle remained unified with her sister.

The Year five children from the inner city school (see p. 161) indicated that what really mattered to them was astrology, clairvoyance and the supernatural. While these phenomena possessed a futuristic component – for example, a person's horoscope might indicate what was going to happen to that individual in terms of future direction – it seemed that these children might have been drawing upon these to search in their immediate temporal horizon. This notion was particularly evident when, in response to the researcher's wondering as to why horoscopes might have been important to them, Hy Sun had replied "They tell you about yourself and others" (p. 161). It appeared that these children were searching in these phenomena for an understanding of their present being – who they were in the here-and-now, and how they might relate to Other. Hy Sun's particular usage of semantics in his sentence structure indicated an immediate temporal horizon. "They tell you about yourself and others." He had carefully chosen his words. His reply was not immediate, but rather ensued after a few moments reflection. He had chosen to reply in the present tense. In other words, Hy Sun seemed to be saying that these

phenomena mattered because they provided him with an identity in the present. For Hy Sun, perhaps these phenomena defined his being and his relationship to Other in the immediate temporal horizon.

Similarly, the Year five children from the suburban school (see p. 162) indicated that values such as freedom and love mattered in the here-and-now. John particularly seemed to be suggesting that freedom was something of ultimate concern in the present time because of a distinct lack of freedom that had been experienced by some groups in the past. "Freedom really matters, because, a long time ago slavery was not illegal, and some people didn't have freedom, which everybody should be able to have" (p. 162). John's semantic structure again indicated the value of freedom in the immediate temporal horizon. Further, his sentence structure suggested the importance of this issue now as the result of certain groups of people not experiencing freedom in the past. In John's sentence – in his carefully chosen words – there seemed to be a clear demarcation between the present ("Freedom really *matters*" [italics added]), the past ("…a long time ago slavery *was* not illegal, and some people *didn't* [italics added] have freedom"), and the present ideal ("which everybody should *be able* to have" [italics added]).

The notion of that which mattered most to the children as being in the immediate temporal horizon was also evident among the Year three children from the rural school (see p. 160). In declaring his thoughts, Tom had stated, "My family *cares* [italics added] for me" (p. 160). Wallace from this same group of children had similarly indicated the present temporal horizon in his choice of words to articulate that which was of ultimate concern for him: "My life *is* [italics added] important to me…the stuff I do *is* kind of daring" (p. 160 - 161). Wallace considered his life in the here-and-now to be that which really mattered. In his comment could be seen something of his existentialism, his living for the moment. There was then a definite sense in which those things that were of ultimate concern to the children were situated in the immediacy of their experience.

In contrast, those things that the children wished for were largely concerned with a future temporal horizon. Wishing, by its very nature, suggests something impending, something that might be hoped to come about. It is future oriented. Wishing intimates a desire for something to be changed or altered in the future because the way it is in the present is somehow inadequate or unfulfilling. For example, a person might wish for more money, or to win the lottery because, in the present temporal horizon, that person experiences a lack of money. The future temporal horizon with which wishing is concerned need not necessarily be the distant future. It could refer to the immediate future. For example, a person might wish for a quiet evening at home at the beginning of the particular evening in question. Even in the fictional case of a Genie granting a wish, the individual wish, and its granting takes place in the immediate future temporal horizon. One wishes (the present) and then it is granted (the future).

The future oriented nature of the children's wishing could, for example, be seen among the Year three children from the inner city school (see p. 162). In giving voice to her altruistic wishes, Charlotte used two particular expressions indicative of a future temporal horizon. She wished for "a happy future" for herself, and for the poor she wished "that they live a good life." These hopes were connected with a sense of future time. Charlotte seemed to know that her altruistic wishes were not going to come to realisation instantly, but that they might be realised at some time in the future.

Similarly, the future oriented nature of wishing was evident among the Year three children from the suburban school (see p. 163). "I would wish for world peace so that we could all be happy" Stacey had stated. "I'd wish for no more war and that all the people who have been hurt or sick would get better" Sally had said. In both of these instances, it was possible to glean the future temporal horizon in which the realisation of those wishes might be fulfilled. Sally's comment particularly reflected the idea of wishing for something to be changed or altered in the future because the way it is in the present is somehow inadequate or unfulfilling. War, pain and illness

are the realities of the present time for many people that Sally would wish to see altered – alleviated – in some future temporal horizon.

In both of the above comments the children were wishing for a future reality, the seeds of which could possibly be found in the present. Realities such as war, starvation, illness and pain are actualities that continue to be addressed by various community organisations, some of which the children may have been aware of, particularly through the media which may have been influential in presenting the social and political contexts. For example, the children would possibly have been aware of the many peace rallies that had been conducted around the time of their value sensing group meeting. Appeals such as the Royal Children's Hospital Appeal (a large scale annual fund raising event in Melbourne, Australia) would have been known to most of these children. Various television appeals addressing the needs of the victims of war and famine were also prevalent in the media around the time of the group meeting. Such appeals, peace rallies and the like serve to indicate the sense in which the seeds of a future reality in which war, illness, and starvation might be to some extent eradicated can potentially be realised. The seeds of their wishing for an altered future temporal horizon were to be found in the present. In this way, their hopes and desires for a better world were already grounded in the here-and-now.

A reflection upon *spiritual questing* guided by lived time also gives rise to the notion that the present temporal horizon abounds with opportunities for *spiritual questing*. Horell (2003) has noted that the current milieu, characterised by a multiplicity of meanings, presents many opportunities for those who seek new and authentic way of relating to others and of being in the world. This could be seen among the Year five children from the inner city school (see p. 161). These particular children indicated that they were searching in the supernatural, in astrology and in clairvoyance for a sense of meaning and purpose, and for ways of relating authentically to Other. The present temporal horizon enabled and encouraged this searching to take place. Whereas once, a time characterised by a

more classical worldview might have clearly indicated where one was to look for a sense of life's meaning and purpose, particularly in the religious organisations, the present time, distinguished by it plurality of meanings, seemed to give licence to the children to search among alternative sources. A multiplicity of meanings suggests that there is no one objective reality. Meaning, for these children, could be found and created from within their specific life contexts.

In a similar way, the Year five children from the suburban school (see pp. 162-163) found their present temporal horizon abounding with opportunities for *spiritual questing*. For these children, their *spiritual questing* in the present emanated from an understanding of past violations of the basic human rights of others. For example, John had said that what mattered most to him was freedom, because there was once a time when not all people were free. In fact, John specifically mentioned a past time when slavery was quite a legal and legitimate enterprise. For John, the present temporal horizon provided him with opportunities to seek and express an authentic way of being in world in which he was able to value freedom for all people. The present time enabled him to engage in *spiritual questing*.

Lived Space

The space in which *spiritual questing* was evident could perhaps be best described as a space of possibilities, and yet at the same time, a space of ambiguity. It was a space of possibilities in so far as *spiritual questing* involves those who engage with it in a search for authentic ways of being in the world and of relating with Other. Such a searching could result in endless possibilities. For example, several of the children in Year five from the rural school (see p. 159) were searching for a sense of unity to their through their deceased relatives. Emily from this group felt a sense of unity with her deceased grandfather, whom she had not known particularly well while he was alive, yet expressed a desire to meet him. The space in which these children were searching seemed to enable this to occur. The space was not one which presented the children with a fixed or rigid set of alternatives for their searching. It was a space that presented an infinite number of possibilities. In

this instance, the children were able to search for a sense of meaning, purpose and to experience unity with their deceased relatives.

Similarly, for the children in Year three in both the inner city and suburban schools (see pp. 162, 163 respectively), the space in which their *spiritual questing* took place enabled them to search for connectedness through their sense of altruism for their fellow human beings. In both of these instances, the children wished that the plight of the poor, the suffering, and those less fortunate might be eased. The space in which these children found themselves seemed to have enabled them to search the infinite array of possibilities and to express their relationship to Other through altruism.

Some of the Year three children from the rural school chose to search in the more traditional domains for a sense of what really mattered. For example, Tom and Michael chose to search in their understanding of the Catholic worldview for a sense of meaning and purpose. Although their questing led them to what might be considered as more customary and time-honoured domains, the space of possibilities did not limit them to this arena. The space in which these children found themselves had enabled them to draw on their own sense of freedom in their searching. In this instance, and encouraged by the space of possibilities, they freely chose to explore in the religious domain for a sense of what really mattered to them.

Yet in some instances, this space was also one of ambiguity. Although providing many possibilities for *spiritual questing*, and for the children to express their spirituality, this space also acted at times to stifle the conversation. The space seemed to indicate that *spiritual questing* was acceptable, but only in small quantities, and only for short periods of time. It was quick to signal the end of the searching time. This was particularly evident in the value sensing meeting with the Year five children from the inner city school (see p. 161). At times it seemed these children genuinely wanted to share with one another that which really mattered to them. There were occasions during this meeting when this did eventuate. Yet, these

instances were often quickly followed by episodes of giggling, sniggering, and of making light of what someone had said, effectually silencing the children's expressions of their searching. While all of the children were responsible for this at different times during the meeting, something in their faces seemed to indicate disappointment at not being permitted to continue to express their searching. It was as if the space was sending a mixed message. On the one hand, it was indicating the many possibilities for searching, and actively enabling and encouraging the children in their *spiritual questing*. On the other hand, the space seemed to quickly indicate that such questing was only to be undertaken in short interludes. It was a space of ambiguity. It seemed to make the children feel uncomfortable and uncertain. Little wonder in this instance then, perhaps, that their faces indicated something of the disappointment at not being able to extend their searching. This space of ambiguity was in control, rather than the children themselves. The space seemed to dictate when the questing was to begin, and abruptly, when it was to cease.

Lived Body

Spiritual questing seemed to be expressed corporeally through the children's desire to *embody* those things that really mattered to them. This could be seen for example among the Year three children from the inner city and suburban schools (see pp.162, 163). These children were searching for a sense of meaning and value that expressed itself through altruism. In particularly, they wished for the struggles of the poor to be relieved financially and for the suffering of the sick to be eased. They also wished for world peace and an end to war. While these children were too young to be able to affect these issues individually, they desired to embody them through their ability to empathise with the less fortunate. This could be seen particularly in Amina's suggestion that to wish well for these people was "doing something for another person" (p. 162). This could also be seen in Stacey's comment, "I would wish for world peace so that we could all be happy" (p. 163). In this statement Stacey was perhaps indicating her embodiment of the value of world peace so that all people – herself included – could live in happiness.

This notion of embodying that which was of importance to the children could also be seen among the Year five children from the inner city school (see p. 161). Amidst the discussion of astrology and the supernatural, Ramsay, who had been relatively quiet during the discourse stated in reply to the researcher's wondering as to what really mattered, "Being myself. I like who I am" (p. 161). In a sense, Ramsey was literally the physical embodiment of that which was of ultimate value – his own being. It was interesting to note that Ramsay did not intimate that he himself was what really mattered. Rather it was the notion of *being* himself that was of importance, that is, his actual way of being in the world. "I like who I am" Ramsay went on to say. He seemed to understand that he embodied his own being – who he was. Further, Ramsay seemed to be contented with his own being. He liked who he was; an individual with his own particular physical traits, with his own gifts and talents, and with his own likes and dislikes, thoughts, opinions and views. In short, he liked all of those features that distinguished him from others and rendered him his own being in the world. He liked and was comfortable with his own Self.

Ramsay's peer Missal in this same group also seemed to indicate that this notion of embodying one's own being was something that really mattered. While she herself did not indicate that she was necessarily comfortable with who she was – her own Self – Missal was quick to affirm Ramsay's statement. "You're unique" (p. 161). Missal had affirmed Ramsay's embodiment of his own being and of his own way of being in the world. At the same time she also indicated that the embodiment of one's own being was in fact something that really mattered to her. Her affirmation seemed genuine. It was possible in this short statement to glimpse something of Missal's searching for an authentic way of being and of relating to Other, in spite of her tendency to trivialise (p. 168) and to mask her genuine sense of what really mattered. Although neither of these two children seemed to want to say anything more about this during the value sensing group meeting, these two basic statements – one a response to the researcher's wondering, the other an affirmation of the given response – reveal the *spiritual questing* of these two children through the embodiment of their sense of being. Perhaps both of these children were on the path

to realising their own true Selves. This accords with the understandings of spirituality which have been outlined in chapter one of this thesis.

Wallace in Year three from the rural school (see p. 160) also exhibited this notion of embodiment in relation to that which really mattered. Wallace had stated "My life is important to me." Although in this instance, he was referring more to his physical safety than to the notion of his being ("and I hope I don't crash!"), Wallace, nonetheless, in a pragmatic way sought to physically embody his lived existence. While at times he was hesitant to say much during any of the group meetings, in listening to what he did say, one might have gained the impression that Wallace was able to live life to the full through the pursuit of his sporting leisure activities, particularly windsurfing. These are sensorial, corporeal experiences which in Wallace's case were apperceived through his embodying of his lived experience. Hence, his life was important for him in order for him to continue to experience and enjoy these activities. His corporeal engagement in these activities enabled him to seek unity with Other in the very elements that made the activity of windsurfing what it was – the board, the mast, the spray of the surf, the wind and the heat of the summer's sun. Through this act of windsurfing, Wallace was effectually *spiritually questing*. He was seeking and experiencing unity between himself and the natural elements. His embodiment of his lived experience was a necessary act for windsurfing and his questing of the other through this activity. His embodiment of life was that which really mattered to him.

Summary and Significance of *Spiritual Questing* for This Study

By way of summary, Table 10 presents a conceptualisation the key insights gained from the above reflections on *spiritual questing*.

Table 10.

A Summary of the Reflection on Spiritual Questing using the Lifeworld Existentials

<div style="text-align:center">Spiritual questing…</div>

Lived Relation	• Searching in the experience of Other for a sense of life's meaning and purpose, especially family and God. • Self searching for unity with Other (Collective Self) – movement towards Ultimate Unity • Expressed through altruism, and a concern for the larger themes and values of life, such as love, justice, and so forth. • Defining reciprocally the unity of Self to Other.
Lived Body	• Embodiment of those things in life that really matter. • Embodiment of one's own being – one's own Self. • A path towards realizing one's true Self
Lived Space	• A space of possibilities • A space of ambiguity
Lived Time	• A concern for the present temporal horizon (based on how things were in the past) and wishing for a future reality. • Present milieu abounds with opportunities for spiritual questing.

Although *spiritual questing* was exhibited in a variety of ways by the children in each of the value sensing group meetings, the reflections above suggest that there were three common threads that seem to underlie this characteristic of children's spirituality. Firstly, *spiritual questing* involves a sense of Other and of how one expresses the unity of Self and Other. Secondly, one's sense of Self – one's identity – is defined by Other, and reciprocally, the identity of Other is defined by Self. Thirdly, *spiritual questing* involves a genuine searching for authentic ways of being in the world, and of relating to others. These are significant for this present study because they accord with the descriptions of spirituality that have been carried forward throughout this study. They accord with the findings of Hay and Nye (1998) and of Hart's (2003) research and his notion of the relationship between Self and Other. However, in taking these understandings further, they particularly accord with the notion of spirituality as involving a movement towards Ultimate Unity (de Souza, 2004a, 2004b), where Self and Other become one. At the deepest and widest levels, such a movement may involve an emergence of Collective Self, in which each individual Self is unified with Other. Self and Other compose this Collective

Self. Spirituality then concerns the outward expression of this unity in terms of how one acts towards Other.

This study has shown *spiritual questing* to be a genuine attempt on the part of the children to search for a greater sense of life's meaning and purpose. Religious education in Catholic primary schools has a critical part to play in nurturing this characteristic of children's spirituality, but its point of entry would not be a presentation and discourse about the Christian worldview. Rather it would need to engage with the genuine questing of the students themselves, and to dialogue from this starting point.

The above reflections also suggest that the present temporal horizon abound with opportunities for children to engage in *spiritual questing*. If it is genuine in its efforts to nurture spirituality, religious education needs to take seriously the present temporal horizon and its multiplicity of meanings. The *spiritual questing* of students, even if lying outside of what may once have been considered the objective reality presented by the Christian worldview, is authentic. Religious education then needs to begin with the immediate temporal horizon of students, dialogue with it, and intertwine within it, the potential relevance of the Christian story to the students' own search for authentic ways of being and relating in the world.

The space in which *spiritual questing* manifest itself was one of possibilities. It was a space that enabled and encouraged *spiritual questing*, yet it was also a space of ambiguity, indicating that in some instances, searching was to be short-lived. The significance of this for the present study is that children are genuinely interested in issues of meaning and value, however, the quality of the space in which such an exploration takes place is critical. In the classroom context, spaces need to be created that are characterised by openness, respect and trust, and in which the many possibilities for *spiritual questing* are encouraged to be present. Students themselves can be encouraged to take some responsibility in helping to create and maintain such spaces. Building classrooms as spaces of trust may be achieved through the

incorporation of Kessler's (2000) seven *Gateways to the soul*, or by Phillips' (2003) concept of the *Theatre of learning*, particularly the notion of "special circles" (p. 57). These are characterised by trust and active listening. However, the achievement of such spaces may be long term. They may not happen instantaneously.

Such space would also be characterised by silence. Silence, stillness and reflective time are necessary in order that children be enabled to contemplate issues of meaning and value – for them to be able to quest spiritually. In contemporary classrooms, with the hustle and bustle of daily activity, silence and stillness are skills that are required to be taught to and practised by children. Again, the practising and mastering of these indicate the long term nature of their acquisition. However, their inclusion in the curriculum and in the classroom routine is necessary if children are to be empowered to contemplate issues of meaning and value. As noted in chapter six of this thesis, opportunities for the personal and professional learning of religious educators would again be necessary in order for such spaces to be devised and maintained at the classroom level. Indeed, educators must be skilled practitioners in the use of silence and stillness in their own lives if they wish to teach children the value of these abilities.

The children in this present study seemed to embody those things that were of ultimate importance to them, and this was frequently expressed through altruism and an ability to empathise with those to whom their altruistic intentions were directed. This is significant for this present study because it accords with Hay and Nye's (1998) notion that spirituality as relational consciousness underpins the altruistic impulses of an individual. As an attribute that has been selected for in the evolutionary process of humankind, the unselfish and humane behaviour of the individual, even though it may be concern for people with whom the individual has no biological or social connection, can be viewed as a function of spiritual awareness. The children in this study embodied their spirituality through altruism.

In some cases, *spiritual questing* was expressed through an embodiment of their own being and their own lived experience. That is, they were comfortable, or indicated the need to be comfortable with their true Self. Some of these children may at times have apperceived experiences in which they were able to transcend their superficial self, and discover something of their true Self. This accords with the literature presented in chapter one of this thesis in relation to spirituality involving a path towards the realisation of one's true Self. In some instances, they were comfortable with this true Self, while in other instances, for example that of Missal, the socially constructed self continued to act as a barrier to the true Self. Affirmation of the child's sense of the Self, or his or her own being, is essential if the child is to develop a positive self esteem, and for the child's relationship and movement towards Ultimate Unity (de Souza, 2004) with Other. In the Christian tradition, the uniqueness and identity of each person is fundamentally valued because each has been created in the image of God, and therefore possesses inherent dignity. Religious education in the Catholic primary school has an immediate point of entry here, and can present students with many opportunities for embodying their own being, and for affirming their own intrinsic sense of worth

This chapter has discussed the characteristic of *spiritual questing* which became evident during the value sensing group meetings. As well, it has indicated the significance of this characteristic for this present study. The following chapter will discuss identified factors which appeared to inhibit the children's expression of their spirituality. These became evident largely during the value sensing group meetings.

CHAPTER NINE
POSSIBLE FACTORS THAT APPEARED TO INHIBIT CHILDREN'S
EXPRESSION OF THEIR SPIRITUALITY

Introduction

This chapter presents a discussion of and reflection upon each of two factors that appeared to inhibit the children's expression of their spirituality. The identification of these factors emanated from the group meetings with children in each of the three Catholic primary schools who took part in this study. They were particularly evident during the value sensing group meetings, where the children were invited to respond to the reflection "I wonder what you think really, really matters?" Each of these factors appeared to act so as to restrict the children to their superficial, or outward self, rather than enabling them to move towards their true Self, or allow their true Self to surface. These factors have been discussed and reflected upon in this present study because if religious educators in Catholic primary schools are to nurture spirituality in the classroom context, an awareness of factors that may inhibit the expression of children's spirituality is necessary.

There were two such factors identified in this present study which appeared to inhibit the children's expression of their spirituality:

- *material pursuit*, and
- *trivialising*

Each of these factors will be discussed, again drawing upon van Manen's (1990) lifeworld existentials as guides to reflection.

The Factor Identified as *Material Pursuit*

Material pursuit became evident as a factor that appeared to inhibit the expression of spirituality among the children, particularly among the Year three and

Year five children from the inner city school, as well as among the Year three children from the suburban and rural schools. This factor suggested that the children's spirituality was inhibited by a belief that what mattered most to them was the acquisition of money and/or material possessions. In response to the question "I wonder what you think really, really matters?" these children seemed to affirm their belief that that which was of ultimate concern to them was acquisition of material possessions and/or money, rather than a desire to relate to Other. For example, Marco and Tran in Year three from the inner city school (see p.165) declared almost simultaneously that their computers and television sets were most important to them. Similarly, Susan in Year three from the rural school (see p. 166) maintained that if she could have three wishes, she would wish for money and a holiday for herself.

Lived Relation

Material pursuit seemed to exhibit itself among the children as a preference to relate to possessions and material wealth rather than to people. This was particularly evident among the Year three and Year five children from the inner city school (see pp. 165-166). Among these children, there seemed to be a sense of mistrust of others, and reliance upon the self – the superficial self – and upon whatever might satisfy the ego. Although snippets of the conversation among these children indicated a wish to connect with Other in relationship and to explore the larger existential questions of ultimate importance, in many cases, the children seemed to succumb to the materialistic desires of the ego, despite the impulses of the inner Self to move towards the Collective Self. For example, among the Year three children from the inner city school (pp. 165-166), Marco, Tran and Ali insisted that computers, television and money were ultimately important to them, in spite of Amina's suggestion that there might be more important things in life. Tran had further stated that he would wish for 164 TVs so that he could watch 164 shows at once. He also wished that he was the richest man in the world and the king of the whole world. Ali from this same group had stated that if he could have enough money, he could buy everything. "I'd spend ten dollars every day" (p. 166). There seemed to be a reliance on the superficial self, and on the spending power of the self,

rather than a sense of connectedness with Other. Among the Year five children from the inner city school (p. 166), Fadde had declared that money was ultimately important. Although Missal in this same group had tried to suggest that love was more important than money, her peers began to snigger. While Missal had appeared genuine in her response, she too began to make light of her own remark (p. 168). She seemed mistrustful of her peers, and their reaction had confirmed her mistrust of them. Fadde and his companions seemed quite serious in indicating the material as being that which was of ultimate importance. It appeared as if they preferred to place their trust in the material rather than in human relationships.

For many of these children, there was possibly a sense in which they felt that a 'relationship' with the material could offer a greater degree of contingency. A relationship with the material could somehow be trusted more than a relationship with people. For example, money is a commodity that one either has or does not have. It is not ambiguous. A Play Station, a television set, a computer game comprise material possessions that, once acquired, remain constant, at least in the eyes of these children. Relationships with people, on the other hand, possess an inherent element of risk and uncertainty. One needs to be able to reveal something of Self to Other, thereby leaving one vulnerable to potential ridicule and scorn. The children in both groups from the inner city school seemed to be aware of this reality perhaps from personal experience. It seemed as though this was territory into which they did not again wish to venture, at least, not with those of their peers who were present during the value sensing group meetings. If one has already experienced a relationship in which the bonds of trust and mutual respect have been damaged through teasing, ridicule, abandonment and the like, then one is perhaps inclined to be mistrustful and wary. Perhaps one may be predisposed to placing trust in those things that appear unambiguous and which cannot disappoint. It seemed that the longer that one places trust in the material, the more genuine one appears to be about this as a source of ultimate value. This inhibited their expression of spirituality and movement towards unity with Other.

For these particular children, it seemed that scientific advances and technology, particularly in the form of computer games, had hampered their social interaction with other people, thereby impeding the path towards a consciousness of the Collective Self. Certainly, social interaction and the ability to be able to enter into relationship with Other could be considered as contributing towards a sense of wellbeing and resilience. For instance, Mountain (2004) identified that children's sense of connectedness, particularly with their family and peer group, are central in building resilience, a trait that is necessary to combat the stresses and problems that most children are confronted with in the modern world. Consequently, the findings of this present study suggest that teachers need to be aware of and respond to the possible impact of technology on the lives of children who do not know a world without it.

Lived Time

Material pursuit became evident as a factor that inhibited the children's expression of their spirituality in a time characterised by what Mercer (2004) has referred to as late capitalist consumerist culture. These children were (and are) living in a time in which society on the one hand appears to support and affirm children with material excess, while at the same time ignoring, or doing harm to their spiritual needs through neglect of their basic requirements, such as their need for unconditional love, their desire to belong, or an affirmation of their inherent worth as human beings. Further, in this consumerist milieu, the notion of children's consumer behaviour has become a trend in western culture. Not only can they spend their own money, but they are capable of influencing the spending of their parents. They constitute a future market as "a group of people with purchasing power in the future who as children are ripe for the establishment of brand loyalty and the development of consumer behaviours that will shape how they spend money as adults" (Mercer, 2004, p. 7).

The consumerist milieu in which these children were growing up places an importance upon the acquisition of money and wealth as being the norm. The

influence of the media in suggesting that it is necessary to purchase the latest in a particular fashion or trend, or the best in an item of electrical or household furniture in order to belong, or to 'fit in' impacts upon the value that is ultimately placed upon those items, particularly those that are desired, but which are financially beyond reach. The time in which these children found themselves was one in which they were effectively consumers in training. They have begun their "consumership" at an early age. Further, it has been noted that when one grows up with consumerism from infancy, one comes to assume its logic and normalcy (Stearns, 2001).

The effects of this consumer time in which the children of this present study live and the inhibiting effect upon their expression of spirituality could be seen in some of the many responses to the question, "Imagine you had three wishes, what might you wish for?" For example, Susan in Year three from the rural school (see p. 166) replied that she would wish for a horse, for lots of money and for a holiday just for herself. She appeared to struggle to give voice to her many possible wishes as they seemed to enter her mind so rapidly. There was a sense in which the consumer choice was almost overwhelming. There was an excitement in this as the many possibilities of consumer choice forged their way into the consciousness of this child, almost like a rush of adrenalin. Similarly, Wallace in this same group wished for a licence to drive his first motor bike, as well as to be the best at windsurfing and skiing – two leisure activities that would be considered expensive to maintain. There was no shortage of possible consumer choices. The children's thought process seemed to be almost instantaneous. It was as if their minds had become suddenly awash with the possibilities of what they could wish for to satisfy the consumer drive.

This temporality served to impact in a destructive way upon the spirituality of children. Having grown to understand consumerism as the norm, that which was of ultimate value to them was often perceived to be the acquisition of material possessions, and the spending power to purchase that which they believe might fulfil their desire. Fuelled by the influences of the media and their peers, these children

appeared to often place their value of consumerism at the expense of human relationship with others. Their sense of connectedness – indeed unity – was being sought not in Other, but rather through the material.

Lived Space

The space in which this inhibiting factor emerged could be considered a dangerous space. It was, in some instances, a space of suspicion and mistrust. It was a space that seemed to actively encourage the children to search elsewhere for a sense of connectedness, and appeared to be successful in doing so. It was a space where the children's lack of trust and wariness in terms of being accepted by their peers for themselves led to their desire and action for acceptance through the possession of material things, a nihilistic and materialistic alternative. It was a space in which the pursuit of material acquisition was valued and seen as that of ultimate importance. This seemed to occur at the expense of genuine human relationships. It appeared also that this was an inescapable space. These children had been raised with images of consumerism from an early age. They had, as noted, effectually become consumers in the making in a space that had been created and that was conducive for this purpose. At the same time, it was a space from which some of these children expressed little desire to escape. For example, Marco and Tran in Year three from the inner city school (see p. 165) seemed quite contented in their attachment to their computer games and television viewing. It was almost as though there was no reason for them to wish to seek an alternative space in which to be. Similarly, some of the other children in this study – Wallace and Susan in Year three from the rural school – seemed to be satisfied with this space in which they found themselves. For these children this space was normal. They had known no other. Having grown up with consumerism from infancy, this space had taken on the deception of normalcy.

The above reflection certainly could be interpreted as children seeking identity and a sense of belonging through their material possessions. As noted in chapter five of this thesis, Maslow's (1970b) motivation theory indicates that until

the basic needs of an individual are met, higher needs will not emerge. In this instance, the basic needs of these children, in terms of food, water, a secure home were mostly met which led them to another level, the search for belonging outside their immediate family unit, a factor necessary for their sense of identity and self, and it would appear that their material possessions had a role in the process. These objects provided them with a sense of identity as well as a sense of belonging, since to acquire these possessions was to 'fit in' with both the peer group and society. These material possessions, then, could satisfy the concerns of the outer self and once these needs were met, there was a possibility that the children may have been in a position to identify those things that really mattered to them, and so be in a position to move beyond the outer self to discover the true Self. However, to achieve this, guidance and mentoring may be required to enable these children to move from the outer to the true Self.

Although this was a space lurking with hidden dangers, it was at the same time an enticing space. The possibility of wealth and consumer choice carried with it a certain temptation and excitement. It was a space in which the children could dream of having their material desires fulfilled. Perhaps in this sense it was an escapist space. It was a space to which the children could retreat from the mistrust and experiences of hurt from others by placing instead their hope – their trust – in the promise of material, or consumer fulfilment. Evidence of this could be seen in the almost immediate responses of the children to the question "Imagine you had three wishes, what might you wish for?" The invitation to enter a space in which to dream about the fulfilment of their materialistic desires was almost too good to be true. They did not need to be asked a second time. The children seemed to take full advantage of the invitation, and, in some instances, were for a brief time almost overwhelmed by the infinite possibilities presented to them.

Yet it seemed that some of the children wished to escape this space so as to discover something more life-giving. For some of these children, there appeared to be a realisation that, although it might be pleasant to dream about wealth and the

fulfilment of their material desires, there were more fundamental values that were of ultimate importance. This could be particularly seen in Missal's response to Fadde's suggestion that money was of ultimate importance because with it, one could buy anything. "You can't buy love," Missal had retorted to this suggestion. She was correct. Some of life's ultimate values cannot be bought or conceived of in monetary terms. Missal had perhaps indicated something of her wish to escape from a space in which the material was considered to be of ultimate value and to enter a space in which an alternative set of values operated. Perhaps she wished to escape the mistrust and suspicion not by retreating to the space of the material, but by seeking to enter a space in which it might be possible to forge genuine relationship with others – a space in which love was an ultimate value.

Lived Body

As a factor that appeared to inhibit the children's expression of their spirituality, *material pursuit* could also be portrayed by a lack of embodiment, or at least a reluctance to embody a sense of meaning and value in relation to Other. In the case of the children in Years three and five from the inner city school (see pp. 165-166), it seemed as though some of their previous experiences had led their *felt sense* to intuit the mistrust present in those particular situations. These bodily sensations may have remained a vivid reality for those children, so much so that they came to the fore of their consciousness in these value sensing group meetings, and in fact, whenever they experienced situations in which they sensed a mistrust of others. For example, the constant sniggering and the awkward silences particularly among the Year five children from the inner city school may have indicated that these children were again sensing the air of mistrust among the group. Rather than embody those values that might lead them to connect in relationship with others, particularly their peers, these children seemed to choose instead to embody a desire and a preoccupation with materialism. They appeared to physically withdraw from their peers and from the space of mistrust to express their reliance upon the self and their pursuit of the material that, in their eyes, might provide the contingency they were seeking.

As well, the material may have provided for these children the sensory and tactile experiences that, in some instances, may have been drawn upon to fill the void created by mistrust and to provide a degree of comfort. That is to say, being wary of entering into relationship with their peers, or with those they did not trust, these children sought a sense of connectedness through their contingent and tactile experiences with their material possessions. For example, it is possible to imagine Marco and Tran in Year three from the inner city school physically manipulating the control panels of the latest computer game, and drawing upon the physical wisdom of their bodies in navigating their way to next level or phase of the game.

Several of the children in Year five from the inner city school (see p. 166) indicated that what they believed really mattered to them were their soft toys, music and books. These items, it seemed, may have been used to replace the connectedness and possible relationships with those they did not trust. Again, it is possible to imagine each of these children in the quiet and privacy of her or his own bedroom curled up on the bed with a soft toy, or quietly reading a novel, or listening to the music pounding through the headphones of a Walkman. Each of these would be considered tactile experiences. Not only that, they are solitary experiences. There is no compulsion to connect with others in relationship. There tends to be a reliance only on the self and upon that which satisfies the self.

The notion of soft toys mentioned by some the children in Year five from the inner city school (see pp. 166) as being that which really mattered to them is interesting. One can imagine these children confiding in their soft toy, telling about the trials and tribulations, the joys and disappointments of the day at school – things about which they did not trust to reveal to anybody else. While, for these children, such conversations may not have been able to be conducted with their peers, or even with other family members, they could tell their soft toy anything because it could be trusted. There may have been a sense in which the soft toy became a projection of themselves. The children were seeking someone they could trust. Because of their reliance upon the self, they may have felt that they could trust themselves. The soft

toy, as a projection of themselves then became something that was trusted, and perhaps relied upon. These items then in fact became what really matter to the children. The value of them became immeasurable.

Summary and Significance of *Material Pursuit* for This Study

By way of summary, Table 11 presents a conceptualisation the key insights gained from the above reflections on *material pursuit*.

Table 11.

A Summary of the Reflection on Material Pursuit using the Lifeworld Existentials

	Material Pursuit…
Lived Relation	• A preference to relate to the material rather than to Other in community. • A reliance upon the superficial self and that which might satisfy the ego. • A sense of disconnection with Other.
Lived Time	• Evident in a time referred to as late capitalist consumer culture (Mercer, 2004). • Western society affirms children in material excess, but ignores spiritual needs through neglect of love, affirmation of their inherent worth as people, and so forth.
Lived Space	• Dangerous space of suspicion and mistrust of others. • Enticing space full of consumer possibilities.
Lived Body	• Reluctance to embody a sense of meaning and value in relation to Other.

The above reflection is significant for this present study. Particularly, it suggests that the types of spaces that are created in classroom are a key in determining whether or not spirituality is nurtured. While spaces of trust and respect are conducive to nurturing spirituality, spaces that reflect the consumerist milieu of western society or in which mistrust and suspicion thrive are detrimental. The latter may lead to factors that inhibit expressions of spirituality, such as *material pursuit*. While perhaps limited in its scope to alter the space created by society, at the

classroom level the context of Catholic religious education then needs to create spaces that encourage mutual respect and trust. This could in part be achieved through the incorporation of Kessler's (2000) gateways into the classroom context. For example, the first gate way – the yearning for deep connection – could be drawn upon by the inclusion of trust building exercises in order to foster relationships that are caring, and in which students are able to feel a sense of connectedness to Other, both their peers and to the Transcendent. Such a classroom environment may then be characterised by a genuine love and respect for each individual.

The notion of a consumerist milieu in which the children of this present study were (and are) living is also significant. This temporality impacts in a destructive way upon spirituality. Fuelled by the influence of the media, their peers and in some instances, popular music, the children often placed their value in consumerism at the expense of human relationships with others. The challenge for religious education becomes one of confronting the values of consumerism, and of presenting an alternative set of values which place an importance on connectedness and relationship with Other, thereby enabling them to embody more life-giving ways of being in the world. While religious education would have a pertinent role in such a process, key learning areas that comprise the broader curriculum could also be drawn upon. Education about the concept of consumerism, both of its constructive and damaging influence, could be addressed at all levels of the primary school through key learning areas such as English, Studies of Society and the Environment (SOSE), as well as The Arts. An integrated approach may assist students to see the whole concept – that English, SOSE and The Arts, as well as religious education contribute to learning in this area.

The Factor Identified as *Trivialising*

Trivialising, as a factor that inhibited the children's expression of their spirituality, became especially evident among the children in Years three and five from the inner city school (see pp. 168-169). These children seemed to indicate a

distinct discomfort in talking about those things that really mattered to them. In many cases, and in the absence of an adequate language to express their ideas (Hay & Nye, 1998), the children seemed to prefer to dismiss that which was too difficult or awkward to speak about by trivialising the subject. For example, when invited to write or draw about that which really mattered to them, Missal in Year five from the inner city school (see p. 168) seemed to be attempting to avoid the task by engaging in trivial activity and complaining. She protested that her chair was uncomfortable and that she didn't have a pencil. She consciously appeared to involve herself in idle giggling and chatting as a means by which to avoid confronting that which was of ultimate importance to her. It seemed easier to trivialise and to "make light" of the invitation to name that which really mattered. Similarly, when the children in Year three from the inner city school (p. 169) were invited to respond in conversation to what really mattered to them, they appeared physically uncomfortable. They avoided eye contact with one another and with the researcher. They began to fidget. They looked embarrassed. Finally, Ali shrugged his shoulders and declared "Nothing…I can't think of anything that's important to me."

Lived Relation

It appeared that the children in Years three and five from the inner city school had effectively masked their inner feelings and values by creating a façade of giggling, idle chatter, and short comical remarks that "made light" of any attempt to explore ultimate values. Perhaps because a sense of mistrust had emerged among them over time, this façade may have served as a means by which each could protect herself or himself from the potential ridicule and teasing from peers. It seemed that the only way these children could relate to one another was through this façade, which inhibited any possible movement towards Ultimate Unity (de Souza, 2004a, 2004b), and thus acted in a destructive way upon their expression of spirituality. There were, however, times in which it was possible to see through the veneer. For example, Missal in Year five from the inner city school stated in reply to Fadde's comment about money as being of ultimate value that "You can't buy love." Momentarily, Missal had taken off her mask, and had revealed to her peers

something that was of genuine value to her – love. She placed a value on love that could not be equated in monetary terms, and this was something that was of ultimate importance to her. However, her peers seemed unable, perhaps unwilling, to relate to Missal in this way. This comment was somehow socially unacceptable among the peer group. Both the other children and Missal sensed that there had been a breaking of convention. As her peers began to snigger, Missal too retreated behind the safety of the façade, and she too began to trivialise her comment by giggling and making light of what she had said.

This notion of a façade created by the children as a means through they seemed to relate to one another is pertinent. In drawing upon Carl Jung's exploration of the archetype, the work of Helminiak (1996) sheds some light upon this inhibiting factor of *trivialising*, and upon the notion of the façade created by the children in masking their values. All human beings possess a desire to belong and to live in relationship with others. Helminiak has maintained that a requirement of this desire is for one to adapt one's own aspirations and inclinations to those of others. Becoming a member of any group, be it family, friends, school or work implies a process of socialisation. While this process enables one to share in the wealth of learning and culture proper to one's society, it also involves one surrendering something of her or his uniqueness. Helminiak has maintained that the reality of this human process manifests itself in the personality of the individual through the archetypes of *persona* and *shadow*.

As an archetype, persona refers to the social role that each person plays in order to fit into the particular group to which she or he belongs. The persona is "the front, the façade, the social presentation, that structures our interactions with others" (Helminiak, 1996, p. 165). It parallels the notion of the superficial self discussed in chapter one of this thesis. As a necessary element of being human, the persona is natural. In as much as a person acts authentically when acting out their persona, the persona becomes a concrete form in which a person expresses herself or himself in

the world. However, when the persona prevents a person from acting authentically, it may become a liability because it exerts excessive control over a person's life.

Helminiak (1996) has argued that the shadow is the underside of the persona. It refers to those under prised aspects of a person which socialisation has pushed into the background. It refers to those features of thought, behaviour and the like that are considered socially unacceptable or suspect within the particular group or social structure to which one belongs. However, this does not mean that such aspects are malevolent. Socialisation often relegates some of a person's most unique gifts or talents to the shadow because they challenge the established societal forms. For example, a person's creativity, or high level of intelligence may be consigned to the shadow because, in some way, they are considered to threaten or undermine the social structure of the group, or even the society.

The shadow then is a threat to the persona. Those feared and repressed aspects of an individual continually surface, demanding to be heard. However, their expression challenges the individual's established role and attempted complacent self-image. In a healthy personality, the shadow and the persona play off against each other. They contribute to "an ongoing unfolding and to a depth and richness of life" (Helminiak, 1996, p. 166). However, as noted, if there does not exist a balance between the shadow and the persona, and the latter has too much control, it may prevent a person from acting authentically.

This sheds some light upon the inhibiting factor of *trivialising* as exhibited by the Year three and five children from the inner city school in this present study, particularly in Missal's response to Fadde's obsession with money. "You can't buy love," retorted Missal. Her persona – her façade – had initially been in keeping with her established role among her group of peers. Her sense of mistrust had led both her and her companions to present an outward showing of complacency and of being superficial. Social pressure, it seemed, had demeaned the deeper issues of meaning and value – at least among the peer group – to the shadow. This was evident in their

reluctance to engage in conversation about what really mattered to them, choosing instead to trivialise by giggling, by making facetious comments, and by avoiding the invitation to write or draw about their ultimate values. However, in Missal could perhaps be seen something of the shadow attempting to surface, demanding to be heard. There was a sense in which Fadde's talk about money seemed to activate the shadow, forcing it to surface almost in a way over which Missal had little control. It had been repressed, but now exploded in her statement "You can't buy love." The shadow, albeit momentarily, had surfaced and threatened her persona. Such an admission of the importance of love on the part of Missal may have been unacceptable, even suspect in the social situation in which she found herself – that of her peer group. The collective persona of her peer group then set about repressing the shadow, and her companions began to snigger. Missal's persona then also set about repressing the shadow which had begun to manifest itself, by making light of the comment, and restoring the façade. The social role played by Missal in fitting into her peer group and been reinstated. This was perhaps an instance in which Missal's persona exerted too much influence, preventing her from acting authentically. Her shadow had challenged the accepted norms of Missal's social circle, and aside from a brief moment, it would have seemed that in this instance the persona emerged victorious.

Similarly among the Year three children (see p. 169) from the inner city school, the notions of persona and shadow were active. For example, when Ali was pressed a little further in conversation relation to what really mattered to him, his persona initiated the most indicative reply of *trivialising*. He shrugged his shoulders, replying, "Nothing…I can't of anything that is important to me." In this instance, his shadow did not appear to surface.

Amina from this same group of students (p. 165) however seemed to indicate that her shadow was demanding to be heard. In response to her peers' materialistic responses, she asked "What about food? You wouldn't be alive if you didn't eat food or drink water." While this comment was perhaps not as compelling as that of

her Year five counterpart Missal, it did suggest Amina recognised another dimension in the basic necessities of life and survival. It seemed that she was attempting to inject a level of seriousness into the triviality of the discussion. Further, Amina did not seem to be inhibited in any way by challenging her peers in this way. Her shadow had manifested itself, and seemed to have successfully challenged the persona. In this instance Amina was able to act authentically. There appeared to be a balance in the playing off of her persona and shadow, resulting in a healthy personality. Her peers did not snigger or make light of her comment. Rather, they simply restated and justified their own position, remaining at the superficial level. For example, Ali responded to her by stating "If I can get enough money…I can buy everything."

Lived space

The type of space in which the inhibiting factor of *trivialising* emerged could perhaps be described as a space of mistrust of the Other. While this is not to suggest that all the spaces in which these children entered could be characterised in this way, it seemed that the particular space that had been created during the value sensing group meetings of the Years three and five children from the inner city school, was at times one of mistrust and suspicion. The mistrust appeared to emerge in relation to the peer group. It seemed that within this space, the children were often reluctant to speak about issues of meaning and value for fear of the reaction that would be encountered from their companions. Evidence of such a reaction could be seen particularly among the Year five children from the inner city school (see pp. 168), who constantly sniggered and made light of the comments of each other. Perhaps this sense of suspicion and mistrust was a conditioned response, learned from their interactions with one another in the classroom context, perhaps from the home environment, or even from society at large. Perhaps even the influence of the classroom teacher, albeit unintentionally, could have contributed to a sense of suspicion and mistrust within the classroom context. For example, through the planned learning and teaching, the teacher could have been setting up situations of

competition, or through facetious or cynical replies to the children's comments in discussion. Equally, their response may have been due to the researcher's presence.

Among the Year three children from the inner city school, this space of mistrust could also been characterised by discomfort. When invited to speak about what really mattered to them, an awkward silence seemed to descend upon the group. Several of the children appeared to be physically uncomfortable . They fidgeted, they squirmed, they avoided eye contact with one another; one child began tapping his pencil, almost as a nervous response to the uncomfortable space in which he found himself. It appeared that the children themselves were suspicious of this space. These children had come from classrooms that, as the researcher had observed, seemed to be filled with constant noise. These spaces were busy spaces. However, they now found themselves in a space that was uncomfortably quiet, and in which they were being invited to consider something about which they had possibly never given a lot of thought. These particular children, it seemed, were not used to spaces characterised by stillness and silence. The space of uncomfortablness perhaps led them to feel vulnerable in the face of ultimate questions of meaning and value. In the classroom space, these children may have felt at home. However, in this space, they were left feeling disempowered by concepts about which they had previously spoken little, and about which they may not have possessed a language to convey their thoughts.

In this space, these children appeared self conscious. They seemed afraid to speak – to say "the wrong thing" in front of their peers for fear of the reaction they might receive from them. They chose their words carefully so that their dialogue would be in keeping with a persona that would have been deemed acceptable within their social peer group. They concealed much of their genuine values behind a façade of materialism and *trivialising*. This seemed to be a means by which the children were able to cope with the space in which they found themselves. It seemed to work. Among the Year five children in the inner city school, each other's *trivialising* and materialistic comments were largely met with further smiling,

giggling and the "making light" of issues. Their chorused singing of "I've got two tickets to paradise" (see p. 169) from a recent episode of *The Simpson's* was perhaps indicative of this, and epitomised the extent of their *trivialising*. It was their way of coping in this space of uncomfortablness, suspicion and mistrust.

At the same time, the space in which these children found themselves was one of ambiguity. While this was discussed in the previous chapter in relation to the characteristic of *spiritual questing*, it is necessary to refer briefly to it here also. For while this space was one of mistrust, suspicion and uncomfortablness, it was also experienced by the children in some instances as a space of searching and of striving to articulate something of that which did indeed really matter to themselves. While the children were fearful of the reactions of their peers, and seemed to operate almost solely from their personas, on those instances when ultimate values were discussed, the children seemed to indicate a genuine searching for unity with Other. In this space, the children seemed to be receiving a mixed message. The message seemed to indicate that it was acceptable to search, to reveal something of the spiritual, of that which really mattered, but not too much! Hence, the space was to some extent ambiguous. It was perhaps little wonder that in some instances the children seemed reluctant to say anything at all. Perhaps they were searching for clues as to what to reveal, or as to what should remain concealed. The ambiguous nature of the space in which they found themselves may at times have rendered these children literally speechless, thereby inhibiting their expression of spirituality. Perhaps they questioned whether they were to act from their persona or from their shadow. The result was that a little of both may have occurred.

Lived Body

The resulting conflict between the persona – the mask or façade created by the children in Years three and five from the inner city school – and the shadow seemed to bring a physical, bodily discomfort. This could be seen particularly among the Year three children from the inner city school (see pp. 169). These children appeared to be physically uncomfortable when invited to speak about that

which really mattered to them. Marco, Tran and Ali began to squirm in their seats. They began to fidget. They looked away from each other, as well as away from the researcher. Marco began tapping his pencil while Tran was fidgeting with an eraser – both as an almost nervous response. Their *felt sense* was one of discomfort, and this seemed to manifest itself physically as a deep down bodily awareness of the situation in which these children now found themselves. Their bodies, as a primal source of knowledge, were effectually communicating to these children the discomfort of the situation, and this was visibly detectable.

Similarly, the Year five children from the inner city school (see p. 168) also displayed signs indicative of this same discomfort. Unable, or unwilling to speak, write or draw about issues of ultimate meaning and value, Missal instead chose to engage in idle chatter and giggling perhaps as a means by which to hide the discomfort she was experiencing. Other children in this same group appeared to use their body language to mask their discomfort. They appeared disinterested. They folded their arms as to cover or conceal the discomfort their bodies were communicating to them. They rolled their eyes and looked away from each other, perhaps as if to draw attention away from themselves and their physical feelings of discomfort. They used flippant and off-hand remarks that seemed to draw responses of giggling and sniggering as a foil to shield their physical bodily feelings of discomfort. The silence that fell upon this group after such remarks seemed awkward in the extreme. Yet in some instances the children perceived what really mattered to people, and voiced this, as was evidenced for example by Missal's outburst "You can't buy love." While the shadow demanded to be heard, the persona was quick to consign it to its "rightful" place. The struggle between the persona and the shadow resulted in the physical uneasiness and discomfort that these children appeared to disguise with their giggling, sniggering, flippant remarks and complacent body language. Perhaps this was the result of the western context in which these children found themselves – a context that promoted the dislocation of the shadow, and in which the persona effectually continued to erode the shadow.

Attempts to conceal this physical bodily discomfort could perhaps also be seen among the Year five children in the inner city school in their endeavour to take up in chorus lines from a song on a recent episode of *The Simpson's*, "I've got two tickets to paradise…" The children sang loudly and boldly. Not only might this be interpreted as an embodiment of trivialising – that happiness could somehow be bought and sold like tickets in a lottery – but also it could be seen as indicative of their collective attempt to conceal their discomfort from one another. That is to say, their *embodiment* of *trivialising* concealed their *physical bodily* discomfort in the situation in which they found themselves, in which their personas were playing off against their shadow. This inhibited their expression of spirituality.

Lived Time

A reflection upon the temporal reality in which the inhibiting factor of *trivialising* manifests itself is also pertinent. The time in which the children of this present study were living was (and continues to be) one that has been described as shifting in terms of the ways in which people generally perceive, understand and make sense of their lives and the world. Such a shift can be conceived of in terms of a movement away from the certainty that perhaps was once characteristic of a classical worldview towards one in which there is a growing understanding that people themselves can define or construct their own understandings of reality from within their own particular life contexts (Horell, 2003). In the classical worldview there was considered an objective reality that could be recognised with a significant degree of clarity. However, the present temporal horizon has seen a shift away from such an understanding. The present time is marked by a multiplicity of meanings and realities for people, depending upon how these are created by individuals within the particularities of their own life contexts. There is no one objective reality.

Horell (2003) has suggested that this shift from certainty towards a multiplicity of meanings can be described as giving rise to a range of attitudes towards life and the world. The notion of *trivialising* (Horell uses the term

"*trivialising* postmodernity") is one such attitude that can arise in relation to life and one's way of being in the world

It could be understood that the multiplicity of meanings indicative of the children's temporal milieu literally rendered them speechless when confronted with issues of meaning and value. With no single objective reality to cling to, the children initially remained silent as they attempted to question what is was that mattered most to them. This was particularly evident among the Year three children from the inner city school (see p. 169). The silence that prevailed was not a tranquil stillness. It was restless and awkward. They filled this silence with the distraction of movement and trivia and were unable to engage with issues of deeper meaning. Rather, these were continually repressed because the children were unskilled in engaging in moments of silence. In the lived time in which these children found themselves, appropriate moments of silence, solitude and stillness were absent and certainly, they are requirements for the process of discernment of what is of ultimate importance and value. Consequently, the children did not possess the necessary skills to engage in such moments of discernment.

As well, this temporal milieu gave rise to *trivialising* in terms of a manifestation of a loss of feeling and meaning. This could be seen particularly in the response of Ali in Year three from the inner city school (see p. 169) to that which really mattered. He shrugged his shoulders. "Nothing…I can't think of anything that is important to me," he had replied. In this particular statement Ali was perhaps questioning whether it was really worth trying to make sense of life or the world. In the face of ambiguity and uncertainty it somehow seemed easier, or less bothersome to trivialise about issues of meaning and value. Perhaps also Ali's statement in some way reflected his minimal expectations in relation to those things that may have really mattered to him. Such negligible and token expectations were summed up in his view that nothing really mattered to him any more. This loss of meaning and feeling was also evident among the Year five children in the inner city school (see p. 168-169). It became apparent in their facetious comments, made both to one another

and to the researcher. It could also be seen in the way they were quick to snigger at the responses made by their peers in relation to that which really mattered. It appeared that many of these children too had adopted the view that very little really mattered any more.

Summary and Significance of *Trivialising* for This Study

By way of summary, Table 12 presents a conceptualisation the key insights gained from the above reflections on *trivialising*.

Table 12.

A Summary of the Reflection on Trivialising using the Lifeworld Existentials

	Trivialising…
Lived Relation	• Masking of inner feelings and values by creating a façade of complacency. • Acting solely through a persona of complacency and superficiality, thereby inhibiting movement towards Ultimate Unity. • Issues of meaning and value are relegated to the shadow, where they are suppressed by the persona
Lived Space	• A space of mistrust, uncomfortablness, ambiguity.
Lived Body	• Physical bodily discomfort in speaking about issues of meaning and value as the result of the conflict between the shadow and persona.
Lived Time	• Characterised by a multiplicity of meanings. • Absence of silence, solitude and stillness. • In some instances, characterised by a loss of feeling and meaning.

The above reflections suggest that, on some occasions, these children seemed to relate to one another almost solely through their persona. Their persona provided the socially acceptable way of acting that often did not seem to include expressions of the spiritual. Such aspects of their personality that were considered suspect or that threatened in some way the social situation of these children, were repressed to the shadow. The result was that these children tended to trivialise issues of meaning and value – issues that might have revealed something of their spirituality in terms of a

movement towards unity with Other – at least when in the company of their peer group.

This is significant for this present study. The notions of persona and shadow can be seen to accord with the arguments that have been presented by Hay and Nye (1998) and by Tacey (2000; 2003), who have maintained that spirituality tends to be repressed, obscured and overlaid by contradictory socially constructed processes. Hay and Nye have argued that although children emerge from childhood with a spirituality that is natural and vibrant, the process of socialisation in western culture has conditioned these children to displace their natural expressions of spirituality. In Jungian terms, the need and desire to belong, to "fit in" with society, or their peer group has led these children to develop a persona – an outward expression – that has, in some instances, relegated the spiritual to the shadow. Tacey (2000) has maintained that while the dominant consciousness – the outward expression of Australian people might appear to be one of secularism and materialism, the inner life is one in which the spiritual yearns for expression. Tacey (2003) has warned that the spiritual cannot be indefinitely repressed, or consigned to the shadow. In writing about what he terms "the rising waters of the spirit" (p. 11), Tacey has likened the emergence of the suppressed spiritual dimension to the flooding of a river in the desert landscape. The "return of the repressed" (p. 24) is far from glamorous. As it rises to the surface it manifests itself in way that cannot be contained (like Missal's outburst).

Religious educators in Catholic schools who seek to nurture the spirituality of children in the classroom context are challenged then to plan within the learning and teaching process opportunities for their students to uncover and express their spirituality, that is, to enable aspects of the shadow to emerge and to challenge the persona. There needs perhaps also to be a realisation that *trivialising* may be feature of the outward self presentation of students to their social context. While in some instances students may be acting authentically when acting out of their persona, there is also a sense in which a healthy balance is struck when the persona and the

shadow play off against each other, contributing to an ongoing unfolding and to a depth and richness of life. A religious education program that seeks to educate the whole person would need to provide opportunities for the spiritual to surface in order for students to engage in a forward movement (both inwardly and outwardly) towards Ultimate Unity (de Souza, 2004a, 2004b).

The temporal milieu in which these children were (and continue to be) situated is also significant for this present study. If spirituality is to be nurtured within the classroom context, there needs to be an acknowledgment of the temporal reality in which the children are located, and the shift that has occurred from a time in which there was considered to be the certainty of an objective reality to a setting now characterised by a multiplicity of meanings. Further, the context of religious education needs to recognise the attitudes held by the students that may be indicative of *trivialising*. In drawing upon such attitudes as the point of entry, that is, by dialoguing with the present worldviews of the students, religious education may be in a position to challenge such attitudes by the presentation of an alternative worldview – the Christian story.

This temporal milieu is also characterised by the absence of stillness, silence, and solitude, a point of significance for this present study. If religious education requires consideration of issues of deeper meaning, then children need to practise stillness, silence and solitude. In many instances, these do not exist in the lived time of children, and so children need to be taught and given time to practise these skills in religious education classes for the discernment of issues of deeper meaning. The implication here is that in order to effectively teach these skills, religious educators too would need to be proficient in them. This may entail opportunities for both professional and personal learning for teachers of religious education.

Summary and Significance for This Research Study

This chapter has explored and reflected upon two factors that appeared to inhibit the children's expression of their spirituality. The two factors have been termed in this present study as *material pursuit* and *trivialising*. While the significance of these reflections on each of the two inhibiting factors identified have been indicated, there are two particular elements that have been revealed by these reflections which have significance for this present research study.

The creation of spaces in classrooms which foster trust, respect, safety and the like have again been reiterated. Spaces which lack these attributes potentially give rise to attitudes of *trivialising*, and devalue the relational nature of the students' interactions with each other. As well, spaces that do not foster such attributes may lead students to act more often out of their personas, thereby relegating their movement towards unity with Other, and hence their expression of spirituality, to the shadow. Without appropriate attention to the quality of space that is established within the classroom context, it will be difficult for religious educators to nurture the spirituality of students.

The present consumerist milieu serves to impact in a destructive way children's spirituality. Not only can it encourage children to place their value in the material, but the current time also presents a setting characterised by a multiplicity of meanings and attitudes towards life. While the notion of multiplicity is not in itself a bad thing, students in the classroom context will require appropriate guidance in sifting through the array of attitudes and meanings that are to found.

An awareness on the part of educators to the possible existence of these factors is necessary if spirituality is to be nurtured within the classroom context of the primary school. Such an awareness may enable religious educators to plan learning and teaching strategies that challenge these factors, as well to create spaces

within the classroom that are conducive to the nurturance of expression of spirituality, rather than the inhibition of it.

Based upon the reflections presented in chapters six, seven and eight that explored the four identified characteristics of children's spirituality in this study, as well as the two factors that may inhibit spirituality as detailed in this present chapter, the following chapter will, by way of conclusion, make some recommendations for nurturing the spirituality of children in Catholic primary schools. It will also outline one possible pedagogical construct that may be useful in achieving this purpose.

CHAPTER TEN
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this present study has been to identify some characteristics of children's spirituality in Australian Catholic primary schools. As a qualitative study situated within an epistemology of constructionism, it has drawn upon hermeneutic phenomenology as the theoretical perspective, and utilised semi-structured interviews involving conversation and observation with small groups of children in Years three and five from each of three Catholic primary schools. These semi-structured interviews were videotaped, and comprised the texts for interpretation in this research. While a range of possible characteristics of these children's spirituality may have been evident, this study has identified four characteristics which appeared to be consistent across each group of children, and were therefore drawn upon for discussion in this thesis. These have been termed, *the felt sense*, *integrating awareness*, *weaving the threads of meaning*, and *spiritual questing*. This present study has also identified two particular factors which appeared to inhibit the children's expression of their spirituality, termed *material pursuit* and *trivialising*. Each of these characteristics and inhibiting factors was analysed using the lifeworld existentials (van Manen, 1990) as guides to reflection. This final chapter begins by briefly summarising the discussion of the findings of this research. It then posits a number of recommendations as the result of this study, including one possible pedagogical framework aimed at addressing the spiritual dimension of learning in religious education, but which could also be applicable to other curriculum areas.

A Summary of the Discussion of the Characteristics of Children's Spirituality

The Felt Sense

The felt sense involved the conscious perception of physical bodily awareness, and drawing upon the wisdom of the body as a primal source of

knowledge. In this conscious perception of their bodies acting upon the tasks in which they were engaged, the children in this study apperceived the experience of becoming unified with their particular activity. In the light of the understandings of spirituality presented in chapter one which have been carried forward in this thesis, this notion of becoming unified with the activity could be understood as one point on the movement towards Ultimate Unity (de Souza, 2004a, 2004b). It was the physical tactile nature of their engagement with the tasks which enabled this to happen. This could be further seen in terms of the disintegration of the space which separated each child from her or his activity. The more these children attended to their chosen task, the more it seemed that there was no space separating the child from the activity. The two had become unified. This experience of unification occurred in the immediate temporal horizon. There was an immediacy of awareness experienced by the children, in which time seemed to stand still. In some instances, the children became unified with Other *in* the common task, for example, in completing the jigsaw task together as a group. In this particular instance, the unification of Self with every other Self in the group was described as a movement towards the emergence of a Collective Self. Each Self appeared to have become unified with every other Self, thereby forming a Collective Self.

The immediate implication for religious educators seeking to nurture the spirituality of their students was then the need to include tactile and sensorial activities within the curriculum, and to allow time for the students to engage in these. Such activities may enable students to draw upon their *felt sense*, allowing them to become conscious of their own bodily awareness and of their unity with Self and with that which is Other than Self. The creation of appropriate classroom space was also discussed, as well as the possibility of enabling students to create their own spaces in which their spirituality might be expressed.

Integrating Awareness

Integrating awareness involved Self's ability to integrate an emerging level, or wave of consciousness with previous levels. Whilst over the centuries

practitioners of various religious traditions have become accomplished at *integrating awareness*, particularly in their efforts to attain unity as a means by which to attain unity with the Transcendent, this present study suggests that children of primary school age are capable of *integrating awareness* at more basic and less sophisticated levels. Self's drive to integrate an emerging wave of consciousness with a previous level through fusion, transcendence and integration in order to connect with Other suggests that the characteristic in this study termed *integrating awareness* could be a characteristic of spirituality. The reflection on this particular characteristic also indicated the need for an appropriate space for this to occur, as well as the necessity of the students themselves to create their own spaces in which this characteristic might emerge. Of significance also was the fact that it was the students' initial engagement in corporeal and tactile activities which seemed to prepare the ground for the emergence of the second wave of consciousness. Without these, students may not have had the opportunity to integrate an emerging wave of consciousness with the initial physical awareness. That is, they may not have had the opportunity to develop their spirituality in this particular way.

The implications for practice in the religious education program are clear. Opportunities for *integrating awareness* need to be intentionally planned and built into the curriculum. An example was indicated in chapter six of how this might be achieved in a unit of work which focused on "Creation". While the educator would not be able to determine with any degree of certainty whether or not *integrating awareness* was occurring, the opportunity for it to occur would have been consciously planned and built into the curriculum, thereby allowing for the possibility of it to occur and be nurtured within the classroom context. The need for the educator to create and nurture relational space, and for the students themselves to be allowed to create their own relational spaces, was also brought to the fore. It may be that in some instances, teachers would need to be willing to remove themselves from this space in order for the students to express and to nurture their own spirituality. Also, the provision of time for students to engage in the present moment of their experience in nurturing and expressing this characteristic of their spirituality

was given emphasis. The provision of such time, in an already crowded curriculum, may prove to be an immediate challenge for religious educators.

Weaving the Threads of Meaning

Weaving the threads of meaning entailed the children entering the space between the various frameworks of meaning to select eclectically those elements from each, which for them, created meaning, and to weave these elements together into a personal framework of meaning. The children chose from a number of different frameworks of meaning, including story/mythology, insights from the secular, television, Aboriginal Dreamtime, as well as their own experience. The Catholic/Christian story was also drawn upon, but it was one of the many frameworks accessed by these children. The reflections upon this characteristic indicated that children in this present study seemed to experience a physical connection to particular elements of the Australian landscape in their creation of meaning. It was also revealed that the children in this present study seemed to weave together the threads of meaning so as to remain connected – unified – with deceased family members, and that they had a heightened awareness of this kinship which extended across the boundaries of living and dead. In some instances the heightened awareness of this kinship could be described as Collective Self, in which despite the boundary between living and dead, Self appeared to be unified with Other.

The implication for religious education here is that the meaning making and worldviews of students in the classroom context cannot be ignored. Rather than imposing a world view that may not make sense in terms of the way in which the students themselves have created meaning (Erricker, et al., 1997) religious education, if it is to nurture the spirituality of students, needs to take account of, and begin with the worldviews and personal meaning of the students themselves. In expanding upon the notion of *responsible partners*, Ota (2001) has suggested that for religious education to act as a responsible partner and to contribute in a meaningful way to children's personal growth, it may require to "engage with pupils, allowing them to share their stories and to contribute to the community's

story" (p. 271). In other words, religious education needs to partner children in entering the space between the authoritative wisdom of the faith tradition and the individually created meanings that offer personal significance for the children themselves. It is in this space that it must engage with children, exploring a range of frameworks of meaning including the Christian story.

Spiritual Questing

Spiritual questing entailed a searching in the experience of Other for a sense of life's meaning and purpose, especially in the experiences of family and of God. It was expressed particularly through altruism, and a concern for the larger themes and values of life, such as love, justice, and the like. *Spiritual questing* also seemed to be drawn upon by the children to define reciprocally the relationship of Self to Other. In some instances, *spiritual questing* involved the children in the embodiment of their own being. They felt comfortable with those features that distinguished themselves from others and rendered each her or his own way of being in the world. That is, each liked and was comfortable with her or his own Self. The space in which *spiritual questing* manifests itself could be described as a space of opportunity. The space enabled many different forms of *spiritual questing*, such as searching for a sense of unity with Other through their deceased relatives, or through horoscopes and clairvoyance. Yet in some instances, this space was also one of ambiguity. Although providing many possibilities for *spiritual questing*, and for the children to express their spirituality, this space also acted at times to stifle the conversation. The space seemed to be in control of the questing, rather than the children themselves. A reflection upon *spiritual questing* guided by lived time also gave rise to the notion that the present temporal horizon, characterised by a multiplicity of meanings, presents many opportunities for those who seek new and authentic ways of relating to others and of being in the world. These reflections are significant for this present study because they accord with the descriptions of spirituality that have been carried forward throughout this study; particularly the emerging notion of spirituality as involving a movement towards unity of Self with Other, Collective Self, and the corresponding outward expression of this in terms of how one acts towards Other.

Of particular significance for religious educators here is that the children in this study seemed to be actively involved in *spiritual questing*, although in some instances, the questing was occurring in domains outside of the typically traditional Christian religious dimension. The implication here is that while religious education has a critical part to play in nurturing this characteristic of children's spirituality, its point of entry would not be a presentation and discourse about the Christian worldview. Rather it would need to engage with the genuine questing of the students themselves, and to dialogue from this starting point. Given that the present temporal milieu can be understood to present many opportunities for children to engage in *spiritual questing*, religious educators have an immediate starting point for nurturing this aspect of their student's spirituality.

The relevance of the space in which *spiritual questing* occurred is also pertinent. While at times the space in which such questing occurs can be encouraging, it can also be ambiguous in that it can dictate the extent to which such questing might be undertaken. In the classroom context, spaces need to be created that are characterised by openness, respect and trust, and in which the many possibilities for *spiritual questing* are encouraged to be present. Students themselves can be encouraged to take some responsibility in helping to create and maintain such spaces.

A Summary of the Discussion of the Factors which Inhibited the Children's Expression of Their Spirituality

Material Pursuit

Material pursuit entailed a preference to relate to the material rather than to Other. It manifested itself in terms of a reliance upon the superficial self; that which might satisfy the ego. The time in which this inhibiting factor was revealed was the contemporary climate in which Western society appears to affirm children in material excess, but ignores their spiritual needs through a neglect of love and affirmation of their inherent worth as people, and so forth. *Material pursuit* became

evident in a dangerous space characterised by suspicion and mistrust of others. Yet, at the same time, it was possibly an enticing space full of consumer possibilities.

There are significant implications for religious education here. The reflections on *material pursuit* suggest that the types of spaces that are created in the classroom are a key in determining whether or not spirituality is nurtured. While spaces of trust and respect are conducive to nurturing spirituality, spaces that reflect the consumerist milieu of western society or in which mistrust and suspicion thrive are detrimental. The latter may lead to factors that inhibit expressions of spirituality, such as *material pursuit*. As well, the consumerist milieu in which this inhibiting factor was present is significant. Fuelled by the influence of the media, their peers and in some instances, popular music, the children often placed their value in consumerism at the expense of human relationships with others. The challenge for religious education becomes one of confronting the values of consumerism, and of presenting an alternative set of values which place an importance on connectedness and relationship with Other, thereby enabling them to embody more life giving ways of being in the world.

Trivialising

The inhibiting factor identified in this present study as *trivialising* was revealed by the children as a masking of their inner feelings and values by creating a façade of complacency. Rather than discussing issues of meaning and value, it seemed as though at times, some of the children preferred to trivialise, and so they acted almost solely through a persona which appeared to be characterised by complacency and superficiality. Issues of meaning and value were relegated to the shadow, where they were suppressed by the persona in a space that appeared to reflect mistrust, discomfort and ambiguity. This is significant for this present study because it accords with the contentions of Hay and Nye (1998) and Hart (2003), who have argued that although children emerge from childhood with a spirituality that is natural and vibrant, the process of socialisation in western culture has conditioned these children to displace their natural expressions of spirituality. They also accord

with Tacey's (2000) contention that while the dominant consciousness of Australian people might appear to be one of secularism and materialism, the inner life is one in which the spiritual yearns for expression. Tacey (2003) has further warned that the spiritual cannot be indefinitely repressed, or consigned to the shadow. It will be recalled that Tacey likened the emergence of the suppressed spiritual dimension to the flooding of a river in the desert landscape. The "return of the repressed" (p. 24) is far from glamorous. As it rises to the surface it manifests itself in ways that may not be contained.

The challenge for religious educators who seek to nurture the spirituality of children in the classroom context is to plan within the learning and teaching process opportunities for their students to uncover and express their spirituality, that is, to enable aspects of the shadow to emerge and to challenge the persona. *Trivialising* may be a feature of the outward self presentation of students to their social context. While in some instances students may be acting authentically when acting out of their persona, it needs to be remembered that a healthy balance is struck when the persona and the shadow play off against each other, contributing to an ongoing unfolding and to a depth and richness of life. A religious education program that seeks to educate the whole person would need to provide opportunities for the spiritual to surface in order to facilitate a possible movement towards Ultimate Unity (de Souza, 2004a, 2004b).

Given that the context of this research has been the Catholic primary school, in which the Catholic culture acknowledges the presence of the Divine, and given the researcher's own acknowledgement of his background in the introduction to this thesis (p. 4), the possible facilitation of a movement towards Ultimate Unity (de Souza, 2004a, 2004b) in which Self becomes one with Other – including the Divine – would be deemed appropriate.

Recommendations as the Result of This Present Study

There are five particular recommendations which have arisen as the result of the reflections upon each of the characteristics of children's spirituality in this present study, as well as the reflections upon the factors which inhibited these particular children's expression of spirituality are set forth below under two broad headings: recommendations for learning and teaching in religious education, and recommendations for professional learning of teachers and leaders in Catholic primary schools. Each of these is now detailed.

Recommendations for Learning and Teaching in Religious Education

There are five particular recommendations in relation to learning and teaching in religious education which ensue from this study.

1. *The creation of space to nurture spirituality*

Each of the reflections in this present study has emphasised the significance of the creation of appropriate spaces within the classroom for nurturing spirituality. Such spaces need to be characterised by openness, trust, and respect. When space is created characterised by such qualities, *spiritual questing*, for example, may occur in which the students may seek authentic ways of being in the world and relating to Other. Such spaces may also enable the emergence of Collective Self, in which Self and Other become one and the same. If the creation of these types of spaces are neglected then it is possible that factors such as *material pursuit* and *trivialising* may prevail, and inhibit both the nurturing and expression of spirituality. Safety is also a key quality of the kind of space. As the reflection on *integrating awareness* has indicated, at times it may be necessary for the educator to remove herself or himself from the space in order to ensure that it remains safe. At other times, it may require the educator to be instrumental in creating spaces that are safe and trusted, and unambiguous. The creation of space for nurturing spirituality within the classroom may be a major challenge for religious educators. While teachers are

skilled at creating spaces conducive for learning and teaching, the challenge may be for them to create spaces in which spirituality can be nurtured.

As the reflection upon the inhibiting factor of *trivialising* indicated, such created spaces also need to be characterised, when appropriate, by silence. As a feature that is frequently absent from the daily spaces in which children find themselves, including the primary classroom, silence is a skill which needs to be taught and practised frequently by the children. It is a skill required in order to be able to contemplate issues of deeper meaning, and ultimately, for one to be able to move beyond the outward self to discover the true Self within.

2. *Time to engage in the here-and-now of experience*

The reflections on the characteristics of children's spirituality identified in this present study have also indicated the necessity of building time into the curriculum for students to attend to the here-and-now of their experience. As a commodity of the school day, time is viewed by educators as a precious resource. In the past the allowance of time for students to reflect quietly, or to play, or to "savour the present moment" were often viewed by many educators as a waste of time – as activities that detracted from the learning and teaching moment. Yet without time to engage in the present temporal horizon, it will remain difficult to nurture the spiritual dimension of children's lives.

The lived time in which the children who participated in this present study found themselves was a contemporary milieu characterised by an absence of silence and stillness. Engagement in the here-and-now of experience requires silence and stillness, as was evidenced frequently during the awareness sensing group meetings, for children to engage their *felt sense*. Again, these are skills that need to be taught and practised by the children. They need to be consciously planned and built into the religious education curriculum. In this way the absence of these qualities from the contemporary time may be addressed.

3. The use of tactile, "hands-on" activities in religious education

The necessity of using tactile and sensory materials in religious education has been brought to the fore. Such activities are central if students are to draw upon their *felt sense* as their body's primal source of wisdom. For some children in the classroom context, these corporeal activities may enable them to become conscious of their bodily perception, and to become unified with Other. Such activities already play a significant part in Montessorian education, and, as was discussed in chapter three of this thesis, they are also an indispensable element of "The Good Shepherd Experience" component of the *To Know, Worship and Love* (2001) series used as the basis for religious education in junior primary classrooms in the Archdioceses of Melbourne and Sydney. However, the use of tactile material in religious education needs to extend beyond this potentially limited context. Such material ought to be drawn upon in all areas of primary religious education, and not limited solely to a *Godly play* (Berryman, 1991) approach. The children in this present study, slightly older than junior primary students, have indicated their ability to engage in corporeal activity, and through it, develop a movement towards Ultimate Unity (de Souza, 2004a, 2004b). This movement may reflect the emergence of a Collective Self.

As well, engagement in tactile and sensory activity provided the foundation in some instances for *integrating awareness* to occur. Without the initial corporeal task in which to engage, it may not have been possible for the children in this present study to integrate the emerging level of consciousness with the previous level of attending to the "hands-on" activity. Chapter six provided an example of how, if the climate is right, *integrating awareness* could be achieved in the religious education classroom by using corporeal activity as the foundation.

4. Religious education needs to begin with the students' personally created framework of meaning

This study has indicated that children create their own personal worldview by entering the spaces between the various frameworks of meaning presented by society, and selecting eclectically from those frameworks elements which create

meaning for them. The Christian story was one of the frameworks drawn upon by the children in this present study, but it was, by no means, the only one or the predominant one. Religious education needs then to begin not with a presentation of the Christian story, but rather by initially engaging with those frameworks from which children derive meaning. Rather than imposing a worldview that may not make sense in terms of the way in which the students themselves have created meaning (Erricker, et al., 1997) religious education, if it is to nurture the spirituality of students, needs to take account of, and begin with the worldviews and personal meaning of the students themselves.

Of relevance here, is Ota's (2001) concept of religious education as a responsible partner. While this notion has been discussed in chapter seven, this present study suggests that if religious education is to act as a responsible partner, then it would need to begin by acknowledging the worldviews held by the students themselves, and to draw upon these as its beginning point in the presentation of the Christian story. Then it would need to accompany students in entering the space between the various frameworks of meaning drawn upon by the students in creating meaning. From there, it would be required, where appropriate, to challenge some of these different frameworks of meaning, and to present the Christian Story as an alternative framework of meaning upon which the students can draw. This may present a challenge for religious educators, and for those charged with the responsibility of developing religious education curricula because it may entail the revisioning and redesigning of such curricula.

5. *Developing a language for expressing the spiritual*

In many instances, the reflections upon the texts of this study indicated that, despite the fact that the children who participated in this study were immersed in a school culture derived from Catholic thinking, they did not have a language for expressing their spirituality. In the same way that programs within various curriculum areas have been developed to provide students with a particular language, for example, language used in expressing one's feelings, so too students'

language for expressing the spiritual is required. In the Catholic context, such a language might include religious language, but should not be limited to this facet. The spiritual is broader than the religious. While a language of spirituality might include religious discourse, it cannot be limited to or merely equated with religious language. A language for expressing spirituality needs to be explored and developed.

A pedagogical framework for religious education in Catholic primary schools

In light of the above recommendations for learning and teaching, the following pedagogical framework is presented as one possible means by which to nurture spirituality through the religious education curriculum (see also, Hyde, 2004c). Of particular relevance also is that this framework addresses Griffith's (2004) notion of situating the activity of religious education within the broader sphere of spirituality. It will be recalled that Griffith argued that situating religious education within the greater context of spirituality leads to a more holistic understanding of the nature of religious education, and offers a more enhanced sense of the purpose of this activity. Griffith's contention has been that knowledge of the Christian faith, while important, is by itself insufficient. The fullness of Christian life "requires embracing one's spiritual potential, integrating one's heart and intellect in a stance of lived faith, and being committed to embodying gospel values in the world" (p. 58). In other words, the cognitive, affective and spiritual dimensions of learning need to be addressed.

The following pedagogical framework then consists of three dimensions which may be understood as being interrelated:
1. Attending to the spiritual dimension
2. Attending to the affective dimension
3. Attending to the cognitive dimension

Each of these three dimensions may provide possible points of entry to a topic or unit of work in religious education. However, each of these dimensions does

not operate in isolation. They are interdependent, and potentially, each dimension may call forth each of the other dimensions.

1. Attending to the spiritual dimension

In drawing upon this as a point of entry to the topic, activities are intentionally planned that could explicitly draw on the characteristics of children's spirituality identified in this research – *the felt sense, integrating awareness, weaving the threads of meaning,* and *spiritual questing.* For example, the religious educator may intentionally plan activities that may enable students to enter experiences of flow and to attend to *the felt sense.* This may allow the children to draw upon their own bodies as a primal and legitimate source of knowledge. Similarly, the religious educator might intentionally plan activities that allow children opportunities to create meaning, such as the reading of a picture story book following by small group discussion. Or, opportunities might be planned in relation to a particular unit of work in which students might be invited to discuss a particular issue of meaning or value. Elements of Phillip's (2003) *Theatre of Learning* or Kessler's (2000) *Gateways to the Soul* could be drawn upon in this phase.

For example, in a unit of work focusing on "Creation", the educator might set the ambiance with quiet music and plan a series of sensory and tactile activities in which the students could engage in the very act of creating. Such activities might include painting, sculpting with clay, or building with materials such as LEGO. In this instance, these activities may enable the body, as a source of knowledge, to experience and name the act of creating, and of what it means to create something beautiful and unique. In deliberately planning for these types of activities to occur, the educator is effectually providing experiences in which students might apperceive the sense of unity encountered by the children described in this thesis. Such experiences may bridge the divide between Self and everything that is Other than the self. This type of activity also enables educators to consciously plan opportunities that may act as a catalyst for the children themselves to create the types of spaces discussed in which their spirituality might be nurtured. Even the space created in the

classroom by the teacher in this moment of the pedagogical framework might be conducive to nurturing children's spirituality. Considerations given to the placement of furniture or the use of music and essential oils to create an ambiance may be drawn upon to achieve this purpose.

2. *Attending to the affective dimension*

Sound educational practice acknowledges the interrelatedness of all dimensions of knowing (de Souza, 2001, 2004a, Krathwohl, Bloom & Masia, 1964; Macdonald, 1995). A well-founded curriculum will present opportunities for addressing the spiritual, affective and cognitive dimensions of learning. The affective dimension of learning is concerned with the attitudes, values, reactions and feelings of students. Addressing the role of such emotions in the lives of students ought to be an important factor in the learning process (de Souza, 2004a).

Addressing this dimension of learning in a unit of work focusing on "Creation" might, for example, entail the educator providing opportunities for students to explore how it felt while creating and how it feels to have created. The initial experience of creating may allow the students opportunities to reflect and name for themselves the feelings associated with creating, and hence the development of positive attitudes and values in relation to creating. This could be undertaken creatively through discussion, through journal writing or drawing, or by drawing upon Berryman's (1991) notion of group wondering, for example, "I wonder how you felt when you were creating…"

3. *Attending to the cognitive dimension*

The cognitive dimension of learning, with its focus upon knowledge, skills and abilities, is a necessary component of the curriculum. The subject matter of the syllabus may also provide a point of entry to a topic or unit of work. Equally, the cognitive dimension may interrelate with aspects of the spiritual and affective dimensions.

For example, and in following the unit of work on "Creation", the educator might, having provided experiences of what it felt like to create, present and explore initially with students the first account of creation from the Book of Genesis, particularly focusing on the repeated phrase "And God saw that it was good." From here, the notion of humankind as being co-creators with God might also be investigated, stressing the integration of the heart and intellect, with a focus on relational life with Self, Others, the environment, and God.

The three dimensions outlined above do not demand any one specific learning and teaching methodology. They have their origin in a spiral, rather than a linear framework of learning (Wright, 2000). In a spiral framework of learning, the students may continually circle around a particular theme or topic, beginning, for example, with the spiritual and moving to the affective and cognitive dimensions, returning to the spiritual with new understandings before moving again to the affective and cognitive dimensions. In this way the students are continually building upon their new learning and understanding.

In the unit of work focused on "Creation", the educator might, for example, return to the spiritual by providing opportunities for students to view a series of art work or panoramic photographs depicting the grandeur of God's creation, thereby engaging the pupil's sense of wonder and awe. This might be followed by an exploration of humankind's general attitude towards the natural world, and some of the ways in which people have and have not cared for creation. This in turn could lead to a study of some of the key phrases from Psalm 148 (*Cosmic Hymn of Praise*) and of the ways in which they might act as stewards of God's creation. In developing the unit along these lines, a relational focus on Self, Other in community, Other in the environment, and Transcendent Other, could be maintained. Figure 4 presents a conceptualisation of such a learning model for addressing the spiritual, affective and cognitive dimensions in the curriculum.

Figure 4. A conceptualisation of a learning model for addressing the spiritual, affective and cognitive dimensions of the curriculum.

Points of entry to the topic

C

A

Point of engagement with the topic
Stimuli: visual, aural, tactile, kinesthetic

S

**Transformation
of
Learning**

S

A

C

Point of engagement with the topic
Stimuli: visual, aural, tactile, kinesthetic
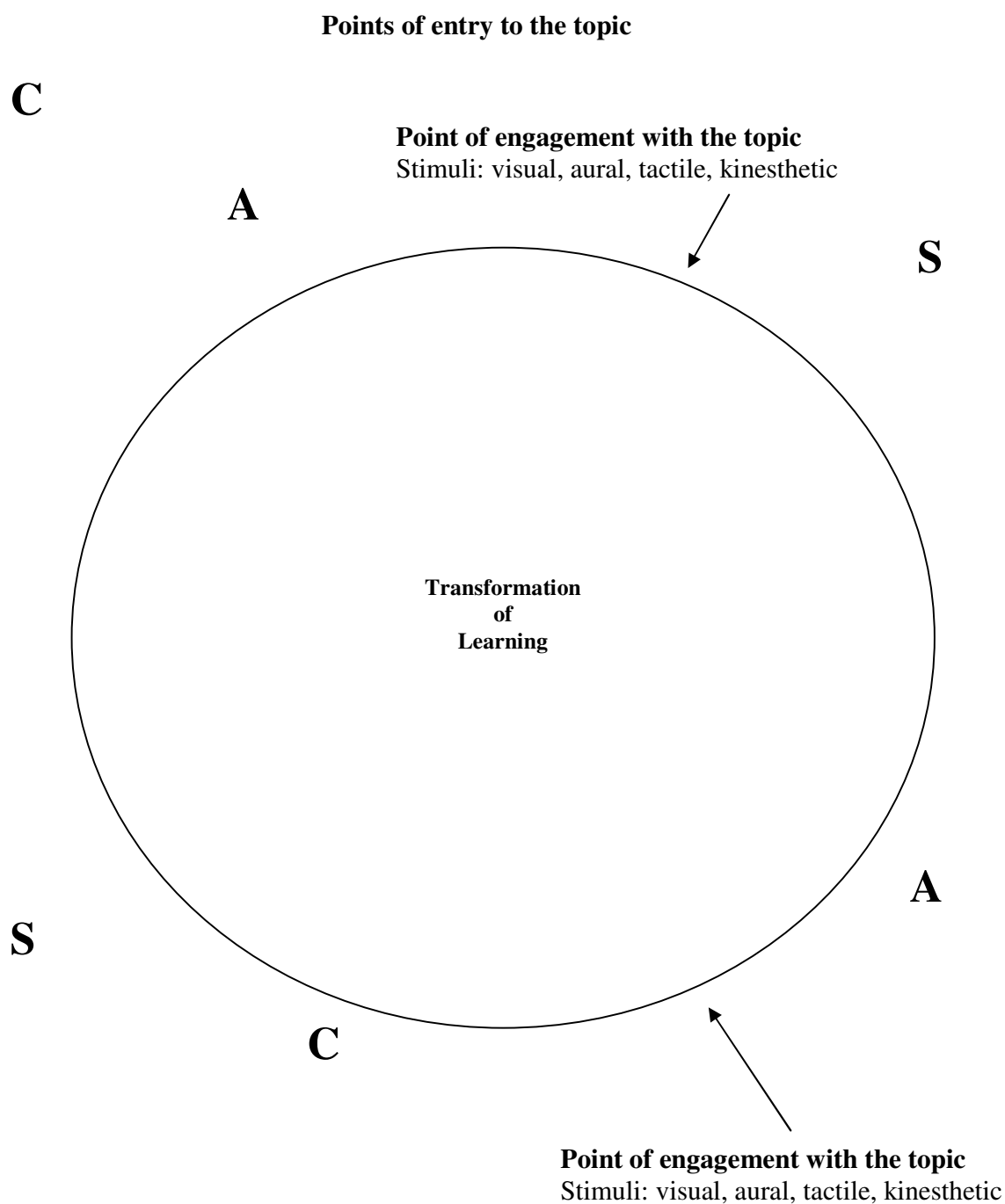
C = Cognitive: *knowledge, skills, abilities, understandings*
A = Affective: *emotions, feelings, attitudes, values*
S = Spiritual: *the felt sense, integrating awareness, weaving the threads of meaning, spiritual questing*

In offering such a framework, it needs to be noted that although the three dimensions of learning have been separated for the purpose of discussion, in reality, no such separation exists (de Souza, 2001; Hyde 2004c). All three dimensions are interconnected. Further, in discussing these dimensions in terms of intelligences, Zohar and Marshall (2000) have argued that spiritual intelligence (to use their terminology) integrates the intellectual (cognitive), the emotional (affective) and the spiritual. Spiritual intelligence "integrates *all* our intelligences [and] makes us the fully intellectual, emotional and spiritual creatures that we are" [italics in original] (p. 6).

While the above framework has been suggested for use with the religious education curriculum in mind, its application is not limited to this subject area. Although, exploring this factor is beyond the scope of this present study, it should be noted that this suggested framework could be applied to and utilised within a wide array of subject areas, such as The Arts, English, Science, and so forth. Perhaps further research studies could be useful in investigating the application of the above construct across the curriculum as an aid to nurturing the spirituality of students in the primary school.

Recommendations for the Professional Learning of Teachers and Leaders in Catholic Primary Schools

Nurturing the spirituality of children in the primary school context ought necessarily to extend beyond the individual classroom teacher. While the educator at the classroom level is indispensable in nurturing the spirituality of her or his students, such a nurturing involves all teachers and leaders in Catholic primary schools. The following recommendations are presented as a way forward.

1. An emphasis on the spiritual dimension of learning in religious education throughout the whole school

If the nurturing of students' spirituality is to be effectively undertaken, an emphasis on this dimension of learning needs to be set throughout the whole school. In this way, a coordinated approach to learning in this dimension can be achieved. In terms of the religious education curriculum, key leadership proponents would need to include the school principal and the religious education coordinator having a shared vision of the importance of the spiritual dimension of learning. These leaders would initially be central in ensuring the high profile of the spiritual dimension. Perhaps also, teachers with an interest in this area could also be included with a view to including within their own classroom practice those elements which might nurture their student's spirituality.

2. Formation and professional learning for teachers of religious education

If teachers in the primary school context are to effectively nurture the spirituality of their students, a whole school emphasis on the spiritual dimension alone will not be sufficient. Educators would need to be provided with ongoing support and guidance through opportunities for personal formation and professional learning specifically in this area. Again, rather than an *ad hoc* approach, a whole school coordinated effort towards such formation and professional learning would be required. This could include whole staff development days which might draw upon guest speakers and outside experts. However, the approach taken would need to go further, and provide opportunities for ongoing development frequently and on a more localised level. The formation and nurturing of the individual classroom teacher's own spirituality would be a necessity. Palmer (1998, 1999) has emphasised this very notion. He has maintained that "To educate is to guide students on an inner journey towards more truthful ways of seeing and being in the world. How can schools perform their mission without encouraging the guides to scout out that inner terrain?" (1998, p. 6). Therefore, if classroom teachers are to attend to the spirituality of their students, they need initially to attend to their own spiritual lives,

and they will require the support of the school and leadership structures to assist in achieving this end.

Healy (2005) has discussed the need for nurturing the spirituality of religious educators in Catholic primary schools through an invitational and generative approach to professional learning. Such an approach would seek to balance the professional needs of religious educators in relation to the spiritual dimension of learning in religious education, with "the need to experience spiritual fulfilment and expression within the experience of being an educator within a Catholic school setting" (p. 29). Healy has maintained that the spiritual growth of staff in Catholic schools may be nurtured and enhanced if:

> it is viewed holistically as a part of a commitment to the total professional development of each staff member…[it] should incorporate the principles of an invitational, collaborative adult learning environment, personal ownership of the inquiry and learning and the integration of professional and spiritual goals (p. 33).

These views indicate the interrelational nature of professional learning and formation. If teachers of religious education are to effectively nurture the spirituality of their students, then they must initially attend to their own spiritual formation. Healy has suggested that the two go hand-in-hand, and that for this to effectively occur, a whole school coordinated approach is required.

3. *Revisioning the curriculum to explore where spiritual development might be addressed across the curriculum*

The characteristics of children's spirituality which have been presented in this present study may be revealed not only during religious education, but potentially through other subject areas in the curriculum. The question then arises as to whether other curriculum areas can, and should, nurture the spirituality of students. The context of education in some other western countries as discussed in

chapter three of this thesis suggested that the spiritual dimension of learning can be addressed across the curriculum through different subject areas. In the light of this, Catholic primary schools may need to revise the curriculum offered to students, and investigate where and how the spiritual dimension of learning might be addressed across the curriculum. While it might be possible for curriculum designers to explore this at a system level, individual school communities are perhaps better placed to do this since they would be familiar with the needs and abilities of their own students. The whole staff of a school, possibly working in teams under the leadership of the principal and curriculum coordinator, could audit each subject area to determine how it might potentially nurture the spirituality of students. While some immediate possibilities may be seen in key curriculum learning areas in Australian schools, such as The Arts, English, Studies of Society and the Environment, and Health and Physical Education, other areas such as Mathematics and Science are possibly in need of such a revisioning.

Limitations of This Study

Although the criteria which sought to establish the trustworthiness of this present study – credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) – have been applied and followed, as with many research studies situated within the qualitative paradigm, this present study has been limited in terms of participant numbers and selection, as well as the number of schools approached to take part and their geographical locations.

This study has focused on a select number of children (35 in total) in Years three and five, aged approximately eight and ten years respectively from three Catholic primary schools. Not only is this age range limited, considering that children in Australia attend primary school between the ages of four and a half through to twelve, but also the total number of participants is not necessarily representative of all children who attend Catholic primary schools in Australia.

As well, the number of Catholic primary schools invited to participate in this present study was limited to three. While this was necessary to ensure the manageability of the research, a wider participation by a larger number of Catholic primary schools may have had some impact on the findings.

This present study was also limited in that it has sought only children who attend Catholic primary schools. While this was again necessary in order to ensure that manageability of the research, it needs to be acknowledged that all children, whether they attend Catholic schools or not, are spiritual beings. Conducting the research in other schooling contexts may have given rise to other characteristics of children's spirituality.

However, having noted the above limitations, it is valid to claim that this study has contributed new knowledge in relation to the characteristics of children's spirituality, specifically within an Australian context. Not only was this study the first to explore the spirituality of primary school aged children in Australia, but, in terms of trustworthiness and the criteria of transferability, the issue of whether or not the finding of this study hold in other contexts, is an empirical issue, and is not the focus of qualitative enquiry (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). The findings of this present study therefore hold true for these participants and for this particular context in which the research was conducted.

Recommendations for Further Study

As the first study to explore the characteristics of children's spirituality in an Australian context, further research is needed in order to extend the findings of this present study. There are many possibilities for further research, and what is offered in this section is an indication of such possibilities. For instance, there is a need to extend this present research beyond the Catholic primary school to other systems of schooling, particularly the state and independent systems. There is also a need to

extend and vary the geographical and cultural contexts of schools involved in such studies.

The findings of this present study have identified four particular characteristics of children's spirituality in Australian Catholic primary schools, as well as two possible factors that appeared to inhibit their expression of spirituality. In this study, the implications these might have for learning and teaching in the religious education curriculum have been articulated. However, further research is needed to determine the implications these may have for the broader curriculum. Given that the educational contexts in both Britain and the United States of America have indicated the possibility of nurturing spirituality through all areas of the curriculum, there exists the potential for the broader curriculum in Australian schools to nurture spirituality. Further research into this area is required for such a realisation.

Further research could also be conducted into the spirituality of younger children in the Australian context, particularly those in kindergarten or preschool, and those in the early years of schooling. In terms of religious education, Grajczonek (2004, 2005) has noted that children in the early years settings have quite particular learning and teaching needs which differ from those of their primary counterparts, and that the pedagogy employed for learning and teaching in religious education for these years of schooling needs to be revisioned. If the spirituality of these children is to be nurtured, research which specifically focuses on this group of children (aged approximately three and a half to six years) needs to be conducted in order to discover whether or not the characteristics of children's spirituality identified in this present study exist within a younger age group.

Also, there exists a need to determine how, given the characteristics of children's spirituality identified in this present study, the spirituality of Australian children might be nurtured in contexts other than Catholic schools or other educational institutions. Such contexts are not limited to, but could include family

groupings, sporting clubs, various faith communities, as well as elements of Australian society in general.

Conclusion

This present study has identified, through conversation and observation, some characteristics of children's spirituality in Australian Catholic primary schools. Hermeneutic phenomenology was used as the theoretical perspective which informed the methodology of this research, and van Manen's (1990) notion of lifeworld existentials were drawn upon as guides to reflection upon the texts of this study. Four characteristics of children's spirituality were identified as the result of this investigation: *the felt sense*, *integrating awareness*, *weaving the threads of meaning*, and *spiritual questing*. As well, two possible factors which appeared to hinder the children's expression of their spirituality were also identified: *material pursuit* and *trivialising*.

As the result of this investigation, some specific recommendations were articulated for nurturing spirituality through learning and teaching in the religious education programs of Catholic schools in Australia. As well, recommendations for the professional learning of teachers and leaders in Catholic primary schools were made in light of the findings presented in this research study.

This study has shown that the children who participated in this research clearly possessed a spiritual dimension to their lives. It has also indicated several possibilities in terms of further research, and it is hoped that these may form the basis of further investigation into the spirituality of children in the Australian context.

Appendices

APPENDIX A
LETTER TO THE DIRECTOR OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION

Australian Catholic University
Brisbane Sydney Canberra Ballarat Melbourne

ACU National

Acting Director of Catholic Education, Mr. Peter Annett
Catholic Education Office
PO Box 3
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

Dear Mr. Annett

I am a postgraduate student at Australian Catholic University undertaking research for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy under the supervision of Dr. Marian de Souza. My qualitative study aims to identify some characteristics of children's spirituality in Australian Catholic primary schools. Spirituality is understood to be a basic quality of all people. Insight into a person's spirituality may be gained by exploring the sense of awareness, wonder, awe, and value that a person attributes to ordinary, every-day experience.

I am writing to seek your permission to approach three Catholic primary schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne in order to conduct this research.

This project would involve me undertaking three meetings with each of two small groups of students: six students in Year 3, and six students in Year 5 in three Catholic primary schools. Each of the three meetings will involve conversation with these students in the form of a semi-structured interview, as well as a short activity in which the students will engage. Each of these meetings will be videotaped for analysis.

Appropriate consent forms have been designed for parents/guardians of students who will be invited to participate in this study. As well, assent forms have been developed for the students themselves. At no time will the students involved or the schools be identified by name. Confidentiality will be maintained at all times. Although interviews with groups of children will be videotaped, any recordings will be viewed only by myself, and will be securely stored. The videotapes themselves will not be used in publication, and will be erased at the conclusion of the project.

The spirituality of students in Australian Catholic primary schools is an area in which there is virtually no published research. This has implications particularly for primary religious educators. Without an insight into the spirituality of children, it can be difficult for teachers to undertake a contemporary religious education that adequately takes into account the world-views and meaning-making of their students. This study aims to provide such an insight. The findings may assist educators in developing appropriate learning and teaching strategies that can be drawn upon in nurturing the spirituality of their students.

Your permission in allowing me to approach Catholic primary schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne in order to carry out this investigation would be greatly appreciated. I would be pleased to clarify any aspects of this research if requested to do so.

Yours sincerely

BRENDAN HYDE
School of Religious Education
Australian Catholic University
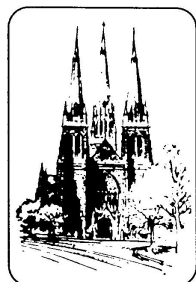
APPENDIX B: 295
Letter from the Director of Catholic Education

CATHOLIC EDUCATION OFFICE   JAMES GOOLD HOUSE
228 VICTORIA PARADE
EAST MELBOURNE VIC. 3002

Telephone: (03) 9267 0228
Facsimile: (03) 9415 9325

CORRESPONDENCE TO: P.O. BOX 3, EAST MELBOURNE VIC. 3002
Email ADDRESS: director@ceo.melb.catholic.edu.au
ABN 85 176 448 204

IN REPLY PLEASE QUOTE:

GE02/0009

5 December 2002

Mr B Hyde
School of Religious Education
Australian Catholic University
Locked Bag 4115
FITZROY MDC VIC 3065

Dear Mr Hyde,

I am writing with regard to your letter of 5 December 2002 in which you referred to your forthcoming research project into primary children's spirituality. I understand that this research is part of your studies for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Australian Catholic University. You have asked approval to approach Catholic primary schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne as you wish to involve students in Years 3 and 5.

I am pleased to advise that your research proposal is approved in principle subject to the following standard conditions.

1. The decision as to whether or not research can proceed in a school rests with the School Principal. So you will need to obtain approval directly from the Principal of each school that you wish to involve.

2. You should provide each Principal with an outline of your research proposal and indicate what will be asked of the school. A copy of this letter of approval, and a copy of notification of approval from the University's Ethics Committee, should also be included.

3. For this type of research, which involves school visits, a Criminal Record check is necessary. You will have to obtain a certificate from the Victoria Police and show this to each Principal before starting your research in schools.

...2

296

4. No student is to participate in the research study unless s/he is willing to do so and informed consent is given in writing by a parent/guardian.

5. You should provide the names of schools which agree to participate in the research project to the Information Services Unit of this Office.

6. Any substantial modifications to the research proposal, or additional research involving use of the data collected, will require a further research approval submission to this Office.

7. Data relating to individuals or schools are to remain confidential. I acknowledge your undertaking to safeguard the videotapes of the structured interviews with students. They should only be viewed by yourself and erased at the conclusion of the project.

8. Since participating schools have an interest in research findings, you should discuss with each Principal ways in which the results of the study could be made available for the benefit of the school community.

9. At the conclusion of the study, a copy or summary of the research findings should be forwarded to the Information Services Unit of the Catholic Education Office.

I wish you well with your research study. If you have any queries concerning this matter, please contact Mr Mark McCarthy of this Office.

With every best wish,

Yours sincerely,

(P. Annett)
ACTING DIRECTOR OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION

✚ACU National

Dear

My name is Brendan Hyde. I am a postgraduate student at Australian Catholic University undertaking research for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy under the supervision of Dr. Marian de Souza. My study aims to identify some characteristics of children's spirituality in Australian Catholic primary schools. Spirituality is understood to be a basic quality of all people. Insight into a person's spirituality may be gained by exploring the sense of awareness, wonder, awe, and value that a person attributes to ordinary, every-day experience.

Further to our initial conversation (date), I am writing to ask you permission to allow me to conduct part of my research in your school. This would involve me undertaking three meetings with each of two small groups of students: six students in Year 3, and six students in Year 5. Each of the three meetings will involve conversation with these students in the form of a semi-structured interview, as well as a short activity in which the students will engage. Each of these meetings will be videotaped for analysis.

It is proposed that this research would be conducted during Term 2, 2003. I would also request to be allowed to spend one two-hour session a week in each of the classrooms from which the participating students will be drawn, over a period of five weeks. This would enable me to build a sense of rapport with the students, ensuring that I am not encountered as a total stranger when interacting with these students during the research. During these two-hour sessions, I would like to offer my assistance to the classroom teacher by, for example, assisting in supervising group activities in the morning literacy block.

Appropriate consent forms have been designed for parents/guardians of students who participate in this project. As well, assent forms have been developed for the students themselves. At no time will the students involved or your school be identified by name. Confidentiality will be maintained at all times. Although interviews with groups of children will be videotaped, any recordings will be viewed only by myself, and will be securely stored. The videotapes themselves will not be used in publication, and will be erased at the conclusion of the project.

The spirituality of students in Australian Catholic primary schools is an area in which there is virtually no published research. This has implications particularly for primary religious educators. Without an insight into the spirituality of children, it is difficult for teachers to undertake a contemporary religious education that adequately takes into account the world-views and meaning-making of their students. This study aims to provide such an insight.

The findings may guide a process of program and curriculum development that includes appropriate learning and teaching strategies that can be drawn upon by educators in nurturing the spirituality of their students.

The Australian Catholic University Human Research and Ethics committee has granted approval for this project. Also, the Director of Catholic Education has given permission for me to approach school in order to conduct this research.
Your consent in allowing me to conduct a part of my research in your school would be greatly appreciated.

I would be pleased to clarify any aspects of this research if requested to do so. Any queries or questions can be directed to:

> Brendan Hyde
> School of Religious Education
> Australian Catholic University
> St. Patrick's Campus
> Locked Bag 4115 MDC
> FITZROY VIC 3065
> Tel: 9953 3296

Yours sincerely

BRENDAN HYDE

⊕ACU National

INFORMATION LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

TITLE OF PROJECT
Identifying some characteristics of children's spirituality in Australian Catholic primary schools.

SUPERVISOR   Dr Marian de Souza   Lecturer: School of Religious Education

STUDENT RESEARCHER   Brendan Hyde Lecturer: School of Religious Education

PROGRAM IN WHICH STUDENT RESEARCHER IS ENROLLED   Doctor of Philosophy

Dear Parent/Guardian,

My name is Brendan Hyde. I am a postgraduate student at Australian Catholic University undertaking research for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD).

The principal of your child's school has given me permission to invite your child to take part in my research study, which aims to identify some characteristics of children's spirituality in Australian Catholic primary schools. In my study, spirituality is understood to be a basic quality of all people. Insight into a person's spirituality may be gained by exploring the sense of awareness, wonder, awe, and value that a person attributes to ordinary, every-day experience.

This research will be undertaken through a series of three meetings involving an interview with small groups of children, as well as a short activity in which the children will participate. Each of the three meetings will be videotaped, and last for approximately 45 minutes.

Participation in this research may encourage your child to reflect upon and engage in experiences of wonder and awe, as well as to reflect upon issues of meaning and value. It may also enhance your child's personal growth and reflective skills.

While the findings and results of this research may be published, at no time will the students or school be identified by name. Confidentiality will be maintained at all times. Although interviews with groups of children will be videotaped, any recordings will be viewed only by myself, and will be securely stored. The videotapes themselves will not be used in publication, and will be erased at the conclusion of the project.

Children who participate will be free to withdraw consent and discontinue participation in this study at any time without giving a reason.

If you have any questions regarding this research project, you may contact either my supervisor or myself as follows:

Dr. Marian de Souza   or   Brendan Hyde
School of Religious Education   School of Religious Education
Australian Catholic University   Australian   Catholic University
Aquinas Campus   St. Patrick's Campus
1200 Mair Street   Locked Bag 4115 MDC
BALLARAT VIC 3350   FITZROY VIC 3065
Tel: 03 5336 5316   Tel: 03 9953 3296

Feedback on the findings and results of this project will be provided to all participants and their school communities.

The Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University has approved this study. In the event that you have any complaint or concern about the way you have been treated during this study, or if you have any query that either my supervisor or myself have not been able to satisfy, you may write to:

> The Chair/HREC
> C/o Research Services
> Australian Catholic University
> Locked Bag 4115
> FITZROY VIC 3065
> Tel: 03 9953 3157
> Fax: 03 9953 3315

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

If you agree for your child to participate in this project, please sign both copies of the Consent form, retain one copy for your records and return the other copy to myself.

Yours sincerely

Brendan Hyde   Dr Marian de Souza

ACU National

PARENT /GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM

TITLE OF THE PROJECT

IDENTIFYING SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF CHILDREN'S SPIRITUALITY IN AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS.

NAME OF SUPERVISOR   DR. MARIAN de SOUZA

NAME OF STUDENT RESEARCHER   BRENDAN HYDE

I ………………………………………….. (*the parent/guardian*) have read (or have had read to me) and understood the information provided in the Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree that my child, nominated below, may participate in this activity, realising that I can withdraw my consent at any time. I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify my child in any way.

NAME OF PARENT/GUARDIAN _____
                                                              (block letters)

SIGNATURE _____   **DATE** _____

NAME OF CHILD _____
                                                              (block letters)

SIGNATURE OF SUPERVISOR

_____   **DATE** _____

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER

_____   **DATE** _____
(Please sign one consent form and return it. The second copy is to be kept by you).

Australian Catholic University
Brisbane Sydney Canberra Ballarat Melbourne

ACU National

ASSENT OF PARTICIPANTS UNDER 18 YEARS

 I ……………………………………………… understand what this research project is designed to explore. What I will be asked to do has been explained to me. I agree to take part in the project, realising that I can withdraw at any time without having to give a reason for my decision.

NAME   OF   PARTICIPANT   UNDER   18
…………………………………………………………

(block letters)

SIGNATURE   ……………………………………   **DATE**
…………………………..

SIGNATURE   OF   SUPERVISOR
……………………………………………………………..

DATE ……………………………………………….

SIGNATURE   OF   STUDENT   RESEARCHER
………………………………………………….

DATE …………………………………………….

THE INTERVIEW GUIDE

Meeting Number 1

Phase 1 (Awaeness-sensing)

Tell a story about a little girl named Susan, who was reading on the grass under the shade of a cool tree. She was so caught up in reading - enjoying the book, imagining the characters - she forgot about everything else…she was aware only of her reading… Some other children nearby began to play a ball game. They called to Susan, inviting her to join their game. But Susan didn't notice them… She felt free…

Q: *Can you tell me about a time when you were so wrapped up in doing something, you forgot about everything else? Didn't notice anything else?*

Q: *Has there ever been a time when you were aware only of what you were doing?*

Q: *Can you tell me about how you felt?*

Q: *Can you tell me about where you were when this happened?*

Q: *Who else was with you?*

Phase 2 (Awareness-sensing)

Invite the children to select, from a number of activities, an activity that they would most like to do:

Activities: jigsaw puzzles, painting/drawing, seed planting, 'bead creations'.

Observe children playing. Look for evidence of awareness sensing.

Meeting Number 2

Phase 1 (Mystery sensing)

Set the scene by burning some essential oil (perhaps eucalyptus) using an oil burner.

Also, play CD "Uluru" (Tony O'Connor).

Tell the story about Max. One evening in early spring, he was watching his dad preparing the Weber (BBQ). His Dad took out a fire-starter, and carefully lit it – like this - (take a fire-starter, place it on a rock, and carefully light it for the children to see). Wow! Max watched the flame gently flicker. He began to wonder about why the flame seemed to dance about. When he had lit candles, the flame was quite still. Why did this flame jump about? Where did the flame come from? Max asked his dad about this flame…

Q: *I wonder what you might have said to Max about why the flame seemed to dance about.*

Q: *I wonder what sorts of things you wonder about.*

Q: *I wonder if you've ever wondered about something you can't explain.*

Q: *I wonder if you have ever seen the stars at night. What do they make you wonder about?*

Q: *I wonder how it made you feel.*

Q: *I wonder what it made you think about.*

Q: *I wonder if you have a special place where you go to wonder about things.*

Phase 2 (Mystery-sensing)

Photo 1: A photograph of a child starring at raindrops on a windowpane.

Q: *I wonder why this child has that look on his face.*

Q: *I wonder what this child is thinking about as he stares at the window.*

Q: *I wonder if this child might be wondering about.*

Photo 2: A picture of two young children crying (Photo Language Kit)

Q: *I wonder why these children are crying.*

Q: *I wonder what you might say to make them feel better.*

Photo 3: A photograph of the Australian landscape (Uluru). (Ken Duncan Collection)

Q: *I wonder what this picture makes you think about.*

Q: *I wonder how this picture makes you feel.*

Q: *I wonder how the rock got there.*

Photo 4: A picture of an Asian woman with three young children behind a cyclone wire fence (possibly refugees) (Photo Language Kit)

Q: *I wonder who these people might be.*

Q: *I wonder why they might be standing behind the fence.*

Q: I wonder what they might be thinking about.

Q: I wonder what you might say to them.

Photo 5: A photograph of a picture frame containing an elderly woman (Photo Language Kit)

Q: I wonder who this lady might be?

Q: I wonder what this picture makes you think about?

Meeting Number 3

Phase 1 (Value-sensing)

Read picture story book *The Tunnel*.

Q: I wonder what mattered most in this story.

Q: I wonder what things are important to you in your life.

Q: Imagine that you had three wishes. What might you wish for. (Nye, 1998)

Phase 2 (Value-sensing)

Invite children to respond through journaling to the reflection *I wonder what you think really, really matters?* (R.Nye, personal communication. May 9, 2002) *I wonder what it is that is really important to you?* (lived space/time/body/relation).

NB: Journals will be 'pre-prepared' to include a front and back cover to ensure that the reflections remain private.

Quiet reflective music – "Uluru" (Tony O'Connor) to play while children are engaged in this journaling activity.

Request permission to take and read what they have recorded.

The following table was used as a tool for recording possible characteristics of children's spirituality for each sensitizing concept, indicating the geographical location and Year level in which the characteristic was evident.

Sensitizing Concept/Geographical Location	Awareness Sensing	Mystery Sensing	Value Sensing
Inner City			
Year 3	*The felt sense*	*Weaving the threads of meaning*	*Spiritual questing Material pursuit* Trivializing**
Year 5	*Integrating awareness*	*Weaving the threads of meaning*	*Spiritual questing Material pursuit* Trivializing**
Suburban			
Year 3	*Integrating awareness*	*Weaving the threads of meaning*	*Spiritual questing Material pursuit**
Year 5	*The felt sense*	*Weaving the threads of meaning*	*Spiritual questing*
Rural			
Year 3	*Integrating awareness*	*Weaving the threads of meaning*	*Spiritual questing Material pursuit**
Year 5	*The felt sense*	*Weaving the threads of meaning*	*Spiritual questing*

* Indicates characteristics which inhibited the children's expression of spirituality.

Awareness sensing
(Year three, Suburban school)

The children excitedly moved to choose the activity of their choice. All six children selected the seed planting activity, and immediately, there a communal flavor to about the task. After establishing a sense of fair play among themselves – insisting on sharing the seeds and potting mix equally – the children set about engaging in their activity. The conversation, which has not really ceased, continued and began to develop freely. The activity seemed to enable this to happen. The children continued to fill their seed boxes with soil and seeds carefully, yet as if without the need to concentrate explicitly on this task. There was a sense in which this activity was able to take care of itself, freeing the children to converse liberally and unreservedly. So free was their conversation that it was almost as if they had become oblivious to the presence of an adult and video camera recording the meeting.

Snippets of their conversation become quite distinct.

"Joseph gets to sleep in the lounge room," declared Stacey.

"I get to sleep in the kitchen!" announced Joseph, who seemed pleased to be the centre of attention.

"No, Jonathan sleeps with Sally!" exclaimed Milly .

"No, I don't!" retorted Joseph.

"As if!" replied a defiant Sally.

"Yes you do!" teased Milly.

"You're being silly," giggled Sally.

Stacey turned towards the camera and said in a more serious tone, "Is this (the video) going to be shown to our mums and dads?"

Trying my best act impartially and not to react to the comments of their conversation, I assured them that the video would not be viewed by anyone other than myself.

"Good," and "That's OK then," came their replies simultaneously.

"Don't you dare tell my mum (that I said that)," cautioned Milly to Emma. "She's going to kill me!"

Awareness sensing
(Year five, Suburban school)

The children proceeded to their selected activity. There was little talking, but the expressions on their faces indicated that there may have been much thinking happening in terms of what each would choose. Adam headed for the seed planting, the materials of which were located on one of the tables. Alicia, John and Cameron made their way to the table containing the materials for the bead creations. Although the three children sat next to each other, there was no interaction between them. They could well have been physically situated in separate countries, or at opposite ends of the earth, for there appeared no dealings between them. Each was engaged and focused on her/his own activity. Each seemed content and, although they were seated within close proximity to one another, each seemed to be oblivious to the presence of her/his peers.

Adam carefully and skilfully engaged in the tactile experience of placing potting mix into the seed boxes. He patted the soil into each of the sockets. Then, delicately, placed one or two of the seeds into each of the sockets, and gently compressed them into the potting mixture. In a way that could almost be described as lovingly, he added a little water to each. Adam too seemed to be oblivious to the presence of his peers at the adjacent table.

Except for the sounds of the beads being placed onto the templates, and the occasional trickle of water from the seed planting, there was almost silence. A pin would have been heard to drop. Their focus and engagement in their chosen activities was at once intense, yet also relaxing. None of the children appeared anxious or stressed. They appeared to be calm, even tranquil, lost in the activity to which each is attending.

Awareness sensing
(Year three, Inner city school)

Eagerly, the children moved to select their activity. Marco headed straight for the bead creations activity. He selected his stencil and began to choose beads to place on it. "I'm going to finish this," he murmured almost to himself as he settled and began to engage in this activity. His focus was almost immediate. Carefully and skilfully, he manipulated the beads, selecting his colours and moving them into position. His actions and awareness seemed to merge as a look of delight came across his face.

Soon, he was joined by Tran, who had been planting seeds. His arrival was unacknowledged by Marco, and so Tran too began to engage in this activity. Quite consciously and gently, Tran ran his fingers across the pile of beads, acknowledging their texture and shape. He selected his beads with thought and care.

"Oh no," whispered Marco. He had accidentally knocked some of the beads from their position on the stencil. Painstakingly, he set about restoring his work. There were one or two short exchanges of whispers between the two boys at this point about which colour beads to select. Yet, quiet prevailed. One might intuit a reverence – almost a sense of the sacred in this activity. It was as though both children desired to maintain the silence and tranquillity of the space in which this activity was undertaken, and which this activity seemed to deserve.

It was interesting to observe these two boys and their absorption in this activity. It was fascinating to see these two boys, who could often be quite active and boisterous, now consumed in the concentration and the quiet that this task demanded.

Hermeneutic Phenomenological Description
Awareness sensing
(Year five, Inner city schools

Most of the children appeared unable to respond to my question. It seemed not so much that they were reluctant to do so, but rather that, for whatever reason, they may never have considered times when they had been completely absorbed in what they were doing. Perhaps they had long given up contemplating such wonderings.

After one or two genuine, yet feeble attempts to please the enquiring researcher, May Ling began to nod her head.

"Once, when I was lining up at the end of lunch time, I was looking at a bird on the ground not far from me. I think it was a sparrow, because it was really little. The teacher must have called for us to walk into class, but I was still looking at the bird. My back was turned away from the teacher and I didn't realize that my line had moved, and suddenly I was standing by myself."

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The children moved to their chosen activity. Initially there was little conversation as the children's concentrated attention was focused on the activity at hand. However, this began to change. As the skills required for the completion of their chosen tasks became 'second nature', their concentrated attention seemed to give way to a sense of the activity taking care of itself, and the conversation among them increased in a way that didn't appear to be self conscious. That is to say, they became lost in the conversation, in spite of the fact that they were being videoed by an adult who, under ordinary classroom circumstances, may not have approved of particular elements of their conversation.

"When we're noisy, you're quiet, and when you're noisy, we're quiet," began Mau Ling, who smiled as her comment was met with laughter.

"Like on camp," interjected Hy Sun. "Our cabin was so quiet, but Wadi couldn't stop snoring!"

"Me and Jack fell asleep straight away," added Ramsay, but "Albert kept on chanting 'Aanthony...Aanthony...'"

There was more laughing, followed by Fadde, who declared "We were the noisiest cabin. Mr. Marks and Miss Pheobe had to shout at us..."

"Those two love each other!" interrupted Missal, to the sound of further giggling.

"We had to get changed in our cabins" continued Fadde, but every time Jack had to get changed he asked us to close our eyes..."

"And you should hear how he blows his nose!" added May Ling. "It is so quiet, but when he blows his nose everyone went, 'ew!'"

"Oops – the camera is listening!" cautioned Hy Sun, who, while looking around, has suddenly become aware of the video and my presence.

Awareness sensing
(Year five, Rural school)

"In Year 3, Kristy and I were reading in the corner of the classroom and it was time to change over to a different activity and we were still reading and we just sat there. It felt like we were in our own world – it's hard to explain.

(immediate response). "I was galloping up the hill on my horse. I was too busy concentrating on my riding and jumped over this really huge log and I didn't realize I'd done it. When I got to the bottom of the hill mum asked me why I'd jumped the log, and I didn't even know that had I'd jumped the log. It felt good – I hadn't galloped before..."

Once I was singing out loud to myself and I didn't notice that all my friends had gathered around me. They asked me what I was doing. I was so embarrassed! They'd been there for ages listening to me singing, like for about 20 minutes. I was in my own little world.

"I with playing with my cousin" began Michelle, "and suddenly it was time to go. I was surprised. It only felt like we'd been playing for 10 minutes, but we'd been playing for over an hour."

"When my sister died," said Michelle. "It doesn't feel like it happened all that long ago, but it's actually been 6 years. I was three when it happened."

"When I was little, we had these really good friends across the road and we used to play this game with them all the time. We'd start straight after school, and mum would have to call us in. It would be 8 o'clock at night and we'd still be playing. We realised it was getting dark because it got harder to see, but we didn't realize it was as late as that."

The three girls set to work on the jigsaw puzzle. They worked cooperatively, although there was no unnecessary chatting. Any talking was directed at the task, and was, for the most part, carried out through whispering. Kristy's finger tips gently run across the individual pieces that were laid out on the floor, searching for the correct interlocking parts. There seemed a need and a desire to honour the quiet – the sacredness – that this activity required.

Soon, the children who were engaged in the seed planting joined the jigsaw group. They began working on a separate section, and it was not long before it was ready to be attached to the original segment. There was some excitement as this was undertaken, accompanied by looks of pride and satisfaction.

My announcement that it was almost time to conclude was met with cries of disappointment. "Oh no!" they lamented as one voice.

Awareness sensing
(Year three, Rural school)

"When I was at the Whittlesea toboggan park, and I was going down on the tobbogan, I was going really fast and I forgot about everyone else who was there. It felt funny in my stomach. Weird, because I'd never done it before."

"I'm a computer freak," began Wallace, "and every time I'm fixed on something, everything turns to total blackness except for me and the thing I'm fixed on. Everything disappears, and only me and the thing I'm fixed on are there. Like, nothing else exists."

"I got caught up in feeding my next door neighbour's horse. It wandered onto our property. Mum saw it and she gave me and my brother Josh a carrot so we could feed it. When I was feeding the horse, I didn't realize that mum or Josh were standing next to me. I felt happy having the horse on our property because I've always wanted a horse."

All children headed directly to the seed planting activity. Immediately there was a sense of engagement. The children's hands began manipulating the potting mix and the seeds, and a quiet descended upon the group. The children seemed aware of each other's presence as they passed and shared the materials. Yet, somehow, there was a need to honour the quiet – the sacredness – of this activity.

After a time, the children move from the seed planting to join the girls at the jigsaw activity. Again there was a sense of almost immediate engagement. There was some initial conversation, as the children divided themselves into three smaller groups to work on different sections of the jigsaw. There was a sense of cooperation, but more than this. There was a sense of relationality. It occurred to me that this jigsaw activity was being completed in relationship with the other. There was a sense of group spirit. All group members were needed, and had an important role to play in completing the task. Various pieces of the jigsaw were passed from group to group, according to the sections that were being worked upon. There was a sense of purpose and engagement in this activity. In this instance, there was a sense in which the activity took care of itself, but only in relation to the other. As the activity proceeded, some conversation was generated, but mostly in relation to the task at hand, and for the most part, it was undertaken in quiet whispers.

As the time drew to a close, each small group brought its part back to the larger group, and carefully they were placed together, ensuring that the pieces interlocked with each other. There were many smiles and looks of pride and satisfaction at having completed the task.

Mystery sensing
(Year five, Suburban school)

Gently and with care, I lit the heat bead which I had earlier placed on a small rock in the middle of our circle. The flame which ensued immediately began to rise, flicker and dance about. The looks upon the children's faces were animated. Wide-eyed, and with mouths opened, they starred at the flame. In fact, they seemed mesmerized by it. They appeared to be in awe, captivated by the simple mystery of a flickering flame. And there was silence. An air of reverence filled the group as they each attended to the sacred.

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I wonder about computer technology. It absolutely amazes me. I just think, "How do they do that?" (John, Year 5, suburban school).

I wonder about how all the languages and people were made. When I was younger I used to think that two people had made up all these words. I find it hard to explain how little words like "a", and "the" came to be. How do you find a meaning for these words? (Alicia, Year 5, suburban school).

Sometimes I think that if you get a tube of toothpaste and you squeeze it all out, well, that would be like our galaxy, but there are a whole lot of other galaxies. That's our little galaxy there (the toothpaste), but there's so many others. What goes past the milky way? (Cameron, Year 5, suburban school).

I went to camp once, and at night, I was looking at the stars. It was really fascinating. (John looks amazed, and literally cannot the find the words he needs). It's huge!

In some books, they say that the stars are like your ancestors who have passed away (Alicia).

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I have always wondered about this, always…you see the rain coming down, but you don't see it evaporate. (John)

Sometimes you can, when It's sunny afterwards, you can see the steam rising. (Adam)

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I produced the large Ken Duncan panoramic photograph of Uluru. The children recognized it immediately.

"I wonder what this picture makes you think about?" I asked.

"The beauty," replied John, "and how the rock was formed."

"I wonder about nature, and how the rock got there and how it was formed," said Alicia.

Danny paused reflectively, and then said, "I wonder why it was put there, right in the centre of Australia, and not somewhere else."

After a short pause, I asked, "I wonder if you could live there."

Cameron's reply was almost immediate. "It's Aboriginal land. It's their land, not ours. They were here first and it's their spot. It's all right to have a town, say 40km away where you can see Uluru, but not to have one right there."

"People climb it," added John thoughtfully. "It would be a good experience to climb it, but its Aboriginal land, and I wouldn't do it."

"You shouldn't go there to climb it," added Danny, "because it is Aboriginal territory."

There was among them, a real sense of the sacredness of Uluru, and a recognition that for the indigenous people, this was sacred ground. They seemed quite willing to accept this.

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I showed the children the photograph of two young children crying. "I wonder why these children are crying" I reflected.

"They look like someone might have died," replied Adam. The rest of the group nodded in agreement.

"I wonder what you might say to make them feel better," I probed.

"I'd say 'Don't worry, they'll still be with you in your heart.'"

"And that you'll always remember them," added Alicia.

"And I'd tell them that they still have each other," stated Adam.

There was a pause in the conversation, so I probed a little further. "I wonder where the person who had died might have gone."

"They're body would still be on earth, because it would have been buried," said Alicia thoughtfully, "but the soul would go to heaven."

As the notion of heaven had been introduced by the children, I decided I would explore this with them. "What do you mean by 'heaven'? Can anyone say some more about this?"

"Well, heaven," began Cameron, "…it's not like you can drive there. It's a thought, it's in your heart if you believe that its there."

"It's like a secret place," explained Danny. "No one has been there except for those who have died. No one knows where it is."

"No one on earth knows what it is or where it is," added John. "And no one has been there and come back to tell us about it."

"People who have died might be there," said Cameron, "but like James says, no one has been there and come back."

"Heaven is…" began John, who was struggling to find the right words to give expression to this thought, "…you can't really imagine it. We go there in our golden years, like, after we turn fifty."

I was eager to take this discussion one step further, but care needed to be taken to ensure that I did not lead the children by introducing religious language that they themselves had already disclosed in conversation. So I asked, "Well, how do you know heaven?"

There was a momentary pause. Then Adam said, "I think Jesus, or Christ, told us about heaven."

I was eager to pursue this a little further, but the conversation was suddenly taken by the children in a slightly different direction.

"I actually think that everyone who has passed away…" began Danny, "well…they have a different heaven. If a person liked painting, then they'd go to a place where you can paint all you want."

"I'm reading a book," added Alicia, "about a girl who is thirteen years old and she dies and goes to this angel academy school in heaven. Once I had read that, I thought that's where people go. They go into separate groups and do what they want to do and what they like to do."

Mystery sensing
(Year three, Suburban school)

Carefully, I lit the heat bead and observed the expressions on the faces of the children. They were entranced and captivated with the flame as it flickered and danced about. This state lasted a short time, followed by an explosion of questions.

"Why is it doing that?" asked one child.

"What's that stuff under the bead?" asked another referring to the oil-like substance that was produced by the heat.

"Is that really hot?" asked yet another child.

The whole group was at once fascinated and inquisitive, curious to know the 'how and why' of what they were witnessing. Their sense of wonder had literally been ignited, and they could scarcely contain desire to engage in it.

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"Wow!"

Such was the general comment when I showed the children the large Ken Duncan panoramic photograph of Uluru.

"I wonder how the rock got there," I reflected.

There was no shortage of responses from this group of students whose sense of wonder was quickly awakened.

"Maybe there was once an ocean there, and when the waves came up and splashed against it, it carved the shape," said Zephania,

"I think it was a volcano," said Joseph, "and when it erupted, the lava came down the side, and that's how it got its curves."

"Maybe the marks (curves) were put there by the claws of a big animal, like maybe a dinosaur!" exclaimed Milly.

"Yes," replied Joseph, "I think it has been there since dinosaurs were alive."

"Maybe God made it," offered Sally.

I took the opportunity of asking Sally what she meant by God. She confidently replied, "God is our Father."

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I showed the children the photograph of two young children crying. "I wonder why these children are crying" I reflected.

"Maybe someone died in their family," offered Stacey.

"I wonder what you might say to the children to make them feel better," I probed.

Joseph was the first to offer a reply. "I'd say, 'don't worry. If they've died, they're all around you.'"

"I'd say 'we'll all be up there one day,'" added Emma.

Again, I took the opportunity to delve a little further. "What do you mean by 'up there'?" I asked.

"Everyone will go up to heaven," replied Emma, "and we'll stay there.

"Yes, and because they're up in heaven, they can look down on you and see you."

"What do you mean by 'heaven'?" I asked. Now that the children themselves had introduced this type of language, I was able to explore it with them.

"It's where God is," replied Joseph.

"It's a cloud, and a place where there is peace, and it's all white," added Stacey.

"It's where nice people go when they die," said Sally.

"I think heaven is maybe a happy place with waterfalls and rainforests," suggested Milly.

"Heaven is like a new world," declared Zephania.

"It is a place where God and Mary and Jesus live," added Stacey.

Mystery sensing
(Year three, Inner city school)

"I wonder about the future…maybe I could be something…maybe I'll travel to lots of places – other countries" (Ammina)

"I wonder about what I'm going to do in the future, what I'm going to be when I grow up, and what its going to be like" (Charlotte)

"(the stars)make me think about the past and make me feel sad, 'cos I think my past was better that it is now. When I was young my parents weren't divorced and I could see both of them at the same time. I remember, I ate cheesecake. It's stuck in my head. I ate cheesecake the day that mum left. I ate cheesecake with my dad." (Ammina)

Uluru

The children's faces displayed expressions of amazement as I showed them the panoramic photograph of Uluru. "I wonder what this picture makes you think about?" I asked.

"It makes me think of Australian animals," replied Tran..

"Why doesn't that picture have Australian animals in it," wondered Charlotte in response to Tran's reply.

"Maybe the animals are in the background, like behind where the camera has taken the picture," offered Rosie thoughtfully. "I wonder how did it get so big," she added.

"I wonder if it is a volcano," said Ali, who seemed to be drawing some recent work in the classroom which had involved an exploration of a volcano that had erupted some time ago.

"No," interjected Rosie, "its just a rock.

"But how did it get there?" wondered Charlotte. There was something about this particular photograph that seemed to have captured their attention.

"Well, maybe it just dropped from the sky," offered Tran.

"Yes, but it's huge!" exclaimed Charlotte.

"It could have fallen, like how hail stones come out of the sky," replied Rosa, "and there could have been so many of them, and the Aboriginals could have stacked them up and painted the rock that red colour."

"But hail, would have melted," said Charlotte, who seemed a little disappointed that Bianca's theory could be flawed so easily.

"Maybe a volcano somewhere erupted," said Ali, attempting to take up and build upon Rosie's theme with his own construction, "and all the rocks came and landed there. A few days later, they somehow got stacked together.

"Well," began Rosie, "maybe it could have been part of a volcano that disappeared, and it just came to be rocks and it was all…mushy…and some people pushed it up and made it tall and it went hard."

"The lava might have made it that colour," added Tran who was eager not to be left out of the conversation.

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"Maybe it's a photo of a lady who passed away," said Rosie. " She got along with people, but then she passed away and they had a funeral for her with a photo like that one."

When I enquired further as to what Rosie meant when she used the phrase "passed away", the children in unison replied that it meant died. So I wondered out loud what might have happened to the lady when she died.

There was a moment's pause as the children reflected, and then Ali said, "Maybe she had a heart attack."

"She might have got cremated," added Rosie.

When I asked if Rosie would like to say a little more about that, she replied, "They put you in a coffin and put it on a fire, and then there's only ashes left and they you put them in a jar and you keep it. Or, sometimes you can tip the ashes out in a spot that she liked."

There followed a short pause, and then Charlotte said, "Maybe she got buried and then her soul flew up to heaven." As she said this, Charlotte placed her hands in the position of wings and fluttered them upwards. Then she quickly added, "Or down to hell or to purgatory."

The other children looked at her, so she added, "She could have been good when she was alive, and went to heaven, or she could have been bad and went to hell. Or, she could have done only some bad things when she was alive, and she could have gone to purgatory."

"That's in between," clarified Rosie.

"Well, it's exactly the same as hell, except one day you go to heaven, replied Charlotte.

"And if you've been really bad, you go to hell," said Rosie, eager to further clarify.

"Can you tell me what you mean by heaven?" I asked.

"Like, say if you're Catholic," began Charlotte, "heaven is a really happy place."

"How would they make heaven happy and hell bad?" asked Tran, who seemed to now be wondering quite seriously about this.

"Do you know what purgatory means?" Rosie asked Charlotte, "It's hard to explain."

*"I now how to explain it," declared Charlotte confidently. "My dad taught me because his mum is **really** Catholic. She has all these statues, and every day she says the Rosary. She loves God. She used to go to church everyday, but now she's too old. She only goes once a week."*

Mystery sensing
(Year five, Rural school)

"I wonder about what sorts of things you wonder about?" I asked.

Michelle was the first to respond. "Sometimes I wonder about God."

"I wonder about why people die and go up to heaven," added Kristy. "I wonder about what they do up in heaven, because, you see shows on TV where people I heaven play games, or can dance – if they were dancers when they were alive. I wonder about that sort of stuff. I wonder why we grow old and die."

"I wonder why some people die at 30 years," said Emily, "and why other people die at 100 years. I wonder why people who die at 30 don't live until 100. One of my uncles died at 27, but my grandpa dies at 98."

"I wonder about why my sister died," added Michelle, "and if there was a reason – I can't really explain why. She pretty much died instantly, and I wonder why our family got someone who died."

"When I look up at the stars," began Emily, "it makes me wonder about all the people up in heaven, and all the people who have died."

This is the second time the children have used the word 'heaven' in their conversation, so I asked them what they meant by this word. After a brief moment of silence, Emily and Kristy smiled. All were searching for the language to express that which is beyond the known.

"It's hard to explain," began Lara. "It's like a second world."

"No one on earth has seen it until they die, "added Michelle.

"One of my mum's uncles, he's been to heaven and come back," remarked Anabelle, who has been quiet, and almost disinterested until now. The other children immediately turn to look at her with great interest. "Well, he thinks he has seen it, because he's been in hospital a couple of times, and he's been in a coma. He woke up recalling hearing music and seeing all his (dead) relatives again."

"My great nana is in an old folk's home," explained Kristy, "She had to be taken to hospital. During the night she wouldn't wake up, and she reckons she's seen heaven as well."

"Sometimes we used to go to Port Fairy lot with my sister Kim before she died," began Michelle, "and one time when we went back there after she died, I thought I'd saw her walking behind me."

*This immediately captures the attention of the other children. One or two of them, who had been fidgeting, now look directly at Michelle for further details. Michelle seems to sense this, and although happy to reveal further, clasps her arms around her own body, as somehow indicating that this is **her** story. That her story is sacred, and that although sharing it with her peers, she is not ready to let go of it just yet.*

"I was amazed," continued Michelle "that I actually saw her again because I was young and I thought I wouldn't see her again until I was really old and had died."

Michelle is convinced that she had seen, or at the very least experienced her sister in this event in a profound way. So I asked if she remembered what Kim might have been wearing, or what she might have looked like.

"I think she had a pink dress on," replied Michelle, "but she was like a faded cloud, sort of…she didn't look alive – it was like a spirit sort of…I was walking behind Tom and Mum, and Kim was behind me."

I showed them the photograph of the baby and I wondered what the baby might have been thinking about.

"They say that babies, when they're young, know all the secrets of the world," began Annabelle, "but when they grow older they cross over, sort of, and loose it all. He (the baby in the photograph) could have been thinking about something ancient."

What did she mean by "cross over" and "something ancient" ? When I probed a little further for more information, it became clear that Annabelle could not find the words to express her thoughts any clearer.

"When they're born," offered Emily, "they know heaps of stuff, but when they turn two, they need to re-learn it all."

"They come from heaven," began Michelle, "but they can't remember heaven once they get older."

Mystery sensing
(Year three, Rural school)

There were looks of amazement as I lit the fire starter and the flame began to flicker and dance about. There were smiles and expressions of wonder. Their eyes seemed to be fixated upon the flame as I told the rest of the story.

Uluru…

The children's eyes widened as I produced Ken Duncan's panoramic photograph of Uluru. The children edge forward get a closer look.

"The rock might be wondering 'Where am I? Why am I here? And why am I so hot and bothered?'" said Michael.

"The rock might be wondering 'Why are all these people climbing all over me – I'm just a rock!'" added Tom. "I've heard that Aborigines don't like people climbing on it because there are spirits there…"

"It's sacred," added Michael.

"They were here before us and it's a part of their culture," reflected Tom. "They will let us look at it, but that's enough. You don't have to climb it."

"Some people say it's a hill," began Michael, "and that there used to be many hills around it, but they fell, and this one was left standing. But I don't really believe that."

I was eager for Michael to say a little more about why he didn't believe this, and about what he actually did believe, but I could sense that at this point, Michael was reluctant to anything further.

"It looks very dry there," commented Imelda.

"Yes, but it doesn't look like the full picture," observed Tom. "Maybe it's not that dry."

"The grass looks dry," added Michael.

"Well." Began Susan, "it would get very hot there – even in winter." Susan thought for a moment, and began to smile bemusedly. "Warm in winter – that's weird!"

The photo of the old lady…

Wallace, who had been particularly quiet commented that perhaps the photograph was of an old lady who was the oldest person in the family.

"She has probably died," added Michael, "and she was very special to them because they wouldn't have bothered to put her photo in that pretty frame if she wasn't important to them."

I wondered out loud what might happen to her if she had died.

"She goes into a grave," replied Susan, "and she'll go up to heaven."

"Depending on how good she was," added Tom.

"Her soul goes up to heaven," said Imelda.

"Its only our soul that goes up to heaven – except for Mary – our soul and our heart are what really care…depending on how good you are. I suggest from the photo she looks like a good lady, so she would go to heaven, not the other place."

I asked the children what they meant by 'heaven'. This was a term they had introduced into the discussion, and I was curious as to what they understood by this word. My request was met initially by shrugs and an embarrassed giggle from Imelda.

"Paradise," offered Michael after a moment's reflection. "Heaven is a paradise because people say 'I'm in heaven' when they're at a good place, or when they're doing something they really enjoy.

"It's a peaceful, loving place," added Imelda.

"She'll (the lady in the photograph) will stay there for eternity," said Tom.

"You can't die again," added Michael.

"A lot of people don't think that there is new life," continued Tom, "but there is actually life after death."

"What about this 'other place'?" I asked. It was interesting that although the notion of an alternative to heaven had emerged in the conversation, no one, it had seemed, dared to speak of its name.

"Hell," said Susan, "It's called hell."

"It is a kind of death after death," reflected Michael.

"It's a ball of fire," said Tom. "Heaven is ruled by Jesus and God, but hell is ruled by the Devil, and the Devil is actually an angel that turned on God…Where there's heaven, there's probably hell too."

"Everyone has a good side and a bad side" explained Michael. "It's like the good side says 'don't listen to him, he's the devil', but the bad side says 'go on, flush your brother's mouth guard down the toilet!'"

At this Tom smiled. I inquired as to how one might know if a person has gone to heaven or to the other place.

Tom's response was almost immediate. "You can pretty much tell. If they believe in God, you know they'll go to heaven. God can forgive any of their sins. But if they don't believe in God, they'll go to hell."

"But say if you did a robbery," began Susan, " or killed someone, heaps of times, you'd probably have to go to hell because you've done lots of bad things, and you haven't heard the good little voice in your head saying 'don't do that.' You've only heard the bad voice."

"If you do a robbery," said Michael, "even if you believe in God, you'd still go to hell."

"But if you believed in God," said Tom, "then why would you do that?"

"Each person has their own life," began Susan, "and God has a book on each life. Each time you do something good, it goes into the book until it's full…"

The lunch time bell sounded, interrupting our conversation.

Mystery sensing
(Year five, Inner city school)

It has been difficult to engage this group of children's sense of wonder. I sense that there is a desire in them to open up, but something seems to be preventing them from doing so. Their remarks are flippant and off-hand. Their body language has, for the most part indicated what appears as almost total disinterest. They fidget. They fold their arms. They roll their eyes at my requests for responses. They look perplexed. They look away from me and from each other. It is almost as though there is a lack of trust with each other, and that the façade of being off-hand and facetious protects their safety zone.

Yet there are glimpses of their desire to engage and to connect at a deeper level. For example, when I showed the photograph of Uluru, their body language changed. They edged forward for a closer look, saying, "It's Uluru, it's Uluru!"

"How did it get like that?" wondered Missal, almost oblivious to the fact that she has broken her façade.

"It's in the middle of nowhere," added Hy Sun, who had become momentarily mesmerized by the photograph.

"Maybe God created it" began Maria, "and it slowly began to grow bigger and bigger…"

This comment alone enabled them to restore their façade by giggling, and a few looks of reassurance at each other. Yet this only lasted momentarily, as the conversation continued.

"Maybe there are spirits there" said Missal, "and people distract them…"

"By walking all over it," interjected Maria, "and the spirits get angry."

"It might have been a volcano" suggested Ramsey, "that was slowly shrinking."

"And it's got that funny red colour," added May Ling, "maybe because of the sun. It's hot in the Northern Territory."

"Maybe the Aborigines painted it," commented Missal to the sounds of relieved laughter. The safety zone had been restored and the children could again return to familiar territory.

There was an immediate reaction when I showed the children the photograph of the old lady.

"She's probably dead," declared Hy Sun.

There were nods of agreement among the group as again, the edged forward for a closer look.

I asked them what they might say to the relatives of this 'dead' lady to console them.

"You'll still have memories of her," said Maria.

"She's with you in spirit," added May Ling. "Just because she's not in front of you doesn't mean she's gone."

"She's in your heart," added Missal.

"You'll have memories of her," said Maria. "Is she good or bad?"

"If she was good," began Hy Sun, "she might be in heaven."

I inquired as to what he meant by the word 'heaven'.

The responses came quickly – "It's a good, peaceful place," "where God lives," "It's where good spirits go."

I tired to get the children to elaborate on this.

"If she was not a good person on earth," explained Hy Sun, "she would remain a ghost and haunt people and their houses."

"Yeah," agreed Fadde, "evil stuff would happen."

"Or" suggested Maria, "she'd go to hell. It's a place of torture with the devil and his pitchfork."

"Like on 'The Simpson's,'" said Fadde.

Value sensing
(Year 3, Inner city school)

"I wonder what things are important to you in your life" I asked this small group of energetic Year 3 students.

After a short pause, there were two simultaneous responses. "My family," said Amina reflectively, and "Me!" declared Marco boisterously.

I directed my first follow-up line of enquiry to Amina. "Can you say some more about that?" I probed.

"They love us…" began Amina thoughtfully, "and, um, we wouldn't be here if…because if my mum didn't want a baby, I wouldn't be born.

At this point, three of the children, Marco, Tran and Ali appeared to look uncomfortable. They looked away from me and began to fidget. Marco began tapping a pencil while an embarrassed smile appeared on Tran's face. I decided to redirect my attention to Tran, and repeated the question to him.

Marco interjected loudly "TV!"

"My computer" said Tran after a brief moment's thought.

"What about you Ali" I asked, noticing that Ali too appeared restless and almost reluctant to contribute.

"Nothing…I can't think of anything that's important to me," replied Ali shrugging his shoulders.

At this, the other two boys decided to coax him a little.

"What about TV?" suggested Marco.

"Your Playstation!" declared Tran.

Shaking his head, Ali said "I'm too lazy…"

"I'm so lazy" interrupted Marco, "I sit like this with my hand on the remote," and he reclined in his chair, pressing his finger repeatedly on his imaginary handset that presumably operated his Playstation.

I gently repeated my question to Ali, "I wonder what is important to you."

He replied "Nothing…OK, money!"

At this, Amina, who seemed to be growing impatient with her classmates' trivial responses, asked "What about food? You wouldn't be alive if you didn't eat food or drink water. What about McDonalds? Isn't that important to you?

Ali shook his head. "If I can get enough money," he began, "I can buy everything. I'd spend ten dollars every day."

I wondered what the possible preoccupation of these boys with materialism could be. The possibility that they were being facetious was quickly set aside by the looks of seriousness on their faces. Although there was some initial giggling by themselves at each other's responses, the more I probed, the more consistent (and insistent) their replies became. I wondered why. Was it because they came from a low socio-economic background? Was it because there was a genuine desire for material possessions that they either did not have, or wished desperately that they did? Were the larger forces/influences of a materialistic culture dictating to these children that which should be considered important in one's life?

I asked another question, "Imagine you had three wishes. What might you wish for?"

Immediately, Marco replied "No homework…I'd have lots of free time!"

"What sorts of things might you do in your free time?" I asked.

"Sit down in the chair in front of the TV. I'd wish for 164 TVs…I'd watch 164 shows at once. I'd also wish that I was the richest man in the world and the king of the whole world."

At this, Tran declared, "I'd wish for more money – I always ask for my mum's money."

Then, almost as if reflecting to herself, Amina said "I wish that I'm really, really healthy and that my parents weren't divorced.

Charlotte added "I'd wish for a happy future, that my family stays together, and that the poor become richer, well, not rich, but average."

"Would you like to say some more about that?" I asked.

"So they don't have to go around asking for money and that they live a good life." This is the second time that Charlotte indicates the importance of a happy future.

"Like, no one's poor in the world" added Amina.

"Why might that be a good thing to wish for?" I probed.

"Cause it's doing something for another person" replied Amina confidently.

Value sensing
(Year five, Inner city school)

"I wonder what you think matters most in your life." The immediate response to my question lies in the body language of these children. They begin to fidget and look uncomfortable. It is difficult to generate conversation. It is difficult for them to translate their thoughts into language.

"Friends and family" replies May Ling.

When I probe for a little more information, Missale interjects "Because they're close to you."

"They help you" adds Maria

"Your family has the same blood" Suggests Missal. She is serious, but her phrasing brings a response of giggling from her peers. She also giggles.

I ask the question again, "I wonder what things matter most in your life."

"Astrology," replies May Ling.

Again, I probe for further information. The responses come both instantaneously and simultaneously – "its star signs", "and clairvoyance", "Cancer, Capricorn…"

"Why are they important" I ask. Certainly I know many adults to speak of astrology, some for fun, others in a more serious nature. But that 10-year-old children would offer this response so quickly and with such certainty was intriguing.

"They're sort of fun reading them" comes one response.

"They tell you about yourself… and others" replies Hy Sun reflectively.

I ask the question again. Ramsay, who has been relatively quiet, says "Being myself…I like who I am."

Missal affirms his response, saying "You're unique."

"Imagine you had three wishes", I begin, "What might you wish for?"

Aaron replies instantly. "A million more wishes!" Everyone laughs. Again the sense of discomfort fills the group. There is more fidgeting and some trivial remarks muttered that produce some nervous giggling.

"Whenever I want something, it just comes to me!" Offers Maria to the sounds of further giggling.

"Like powers" suggests Missal.

"Oooh, magic!" teases Hy Sun, waving his fingers like a magician. More giggling.

"What kind of powers would you wish for?" I ask. I'm not sure where this is leading, but since the children have raised this, I am prepared to enquire further.

Two responses again come instantaneously and simultaneously – "telepathy", "that I can read minds".

"That I can disappear whenever I want…when I'm embarrassed..."continues Maria.

"Like on 'Charmed'" clarifies May Ling, alluding to a popular television show that deals with magic and the occult.

It occurs to me that these students have a fascination with the supernatural. Perhaps this is hardly surprising. Phenomena such as "Harry Potter" and the "Lord of the Rings" are certainly not removed from the lives of these children. In both of these, the themes of good triumphing over evil are prevalent. Even in the popular television series "Charmed", evil is overcome. Perhaps it is also indicative of a searching for something in life of greater meaning. These children are expressing this in the only language available to them, albeit limiting.

"I wonder what things matter most in your life" I ask once more. There is a pause.

"To make the world a better place" says Missal thoughtfully. "I wish that people who are bad people become good people."

"I wish for people who have no homes…to have homes" adds Maria.

As these children set about the journaling task of writing/drawing what it is that really matters to them, Missal frowns. She, like the other children, finds it difficult to communicate issues of meaning and value. She engages in some idle chatter and giggling. "This chair is comfortable" she says, "I haven't got a pencil" she protests. The other children too make similar remarks. Their earlier conversation indicates that they have a need and a wish to engage at a deeper level, to explore what is important and of value to themselves, but lacking an adequate language to do so, it seems easier to trivialize and mask their deeper feelings by façade of idle chatter and giggling.

One small incident supports this notion once the journaling has commenced. Fadde is busily drawing and writing, and states, almost as if thinking out loud, "Money".

At this Missal turns to him and says "Money's not important."

"Yes it is," replies Fadde. "You can buy anything."

"You can't buy love," retorts Missal. She is serious, but as the other children begin to snigger at her remarks, she too begins to smile and laugh, almost as if realizing that she has momentarily broken her façade.

Lines from a song on a recent episode of "The Simpsons" are then taken up in chorus by the children – "I got two tickets to paradise…"

Value sensing
(Year five, Rural school)

Michelle's response is immediate. "The stuff we have of Kim left, and mum's journal that says what we reckon about Kim and our grief that we've had inside." She replies. "When Kim died, dad and mum and I, and Tom did a bit too, we used to have a lot of dreams about Kim, and mum used to write them down in a journal. When we go on a big holiday, mum gives the journal to (a family friend) in case anything happens to the house while we're away." She added, "I've got a teddy bear that she used to love a lot, and some of her ornaments."

Michelle's older sister, Kim, had died when Michelle was about two and a half years old. In each of the meetings with this group of children, Michelle has quite openly spoken about Kim. One gets the impression that Kim is still very much a part of Michelle's life, and indeed, a part of her whole family's life. What is important for Michelle – what really matters – are those remnants that keep her memory alive for her family. These help to maintain an instant connection with Kim. So too does talking about her. The other children in the group, being a part of a close knit community as well as her classmates, are well aware of Kim's death. That Michelle speaks so freely of her seems a quite natural and every-day occurrence. They are

neither shocked nor dismayed. They nod and acknowledge Michelle's statement as quite appropriate.

Indeed, this idea of a connectedness, or at least a longing for connectedness even after death is prevalent in these children. "I'd wish for everyone in my family who has died to come back so I can meet them," says Emily. "My grandpa died along time ago, but he is important to me. Even though I didn't know him very well, I would still really like to meet him, like, probably, now."

The importance of family – both members who have died as well as those living – is valued by these children. All indicate this in one way or another. Two of these children indicate the importance of their family tree, and an inquisitiveness to find out about their ancestors. "I wish I could know about where I descended from, like, a really long time ago, like from Captain Cook and stuff," says Kristy. "I would like to see my family tree from way back," declares Michelle, "like when the earth started, starting with Adam and Eve." There is a genuine curiosity and a desire to connect with their past and present.

Kristy and Michelle also show a concern for world peace. "I wish there was no fighting in the world" says Kristy thoughtfully. "…and for peace all over the world," adds Michelle. These concerns are further evidence during the journaling activity. The conversation turns to Emily's cousin, who has married someone from Vietnam. James looks questioningly at Emily and asks "A terrorist?" At this, Emily, Lara and Kristy begin to refute James' accusation. "Why would she be a terrorist, she's a nice person," says Lara. "Just because she's from Vietnam doesn't mean she's a terrorist," adds Emily. "Besides," declares Kristy, "There's already too much fighting in the world."

Value Sensing
(Year three, Rural School)

…Tom was the first to offer his thoughts. "God and Jesus, and probably my family" he declared. "My family cares for me and everything,   and   God   and Jesus…because…I can't really explain, but they're kind of…"   Tom's   voice trailed as he searches for the language to convey his thoughts.

"Yeah, God and Jesus," affirmed Michael, "…and Mary, because they're the kind of people that, if you could meet them, they'd be really nice.   Also, my family and my pets matter to me."

"What matters to me," added Imelda, "is to take care of my family because they might split up or have a divorce or something. You have to take   care   of   your family and they have to care for you, even if you do something   wrong, and even if they do something wrong to you. You still have to care for   them."

Wallace, who had been thinking quietly, now took the conversation in a slightly different direction. "My life is important to me," he declared, "Because the stuff I do is kind of daring, like mast windsurfing. I've got a new board that's kind of big and fast and I hope I don't crash!"

I asked the children what they might wish for if granted three wishes. Their responses came swiftly and instantly:

"To get a horse," replied Susan quickly, almost struggling to give voice to the many possible wishes that were entering her mind at a rapid rate of knot, "and to get lots of money for a holiday just for me!"

"I would wish for a bigger motor bike," added Imelda thoughtfully, "and to get a new car (if I was allowed to get a car) and to buy a bigger farm."

Michael said that he would like to make it to the AFL and to win a Brownlow Medal. While Wallace, reflecting briefly for a moment, declared that he would wish to be the best at windsurfing and skiing, as well as to get a license to drive his first motor bike.

Value Sensing
(Year five, Suburban school)

John considered my request for information carefully, and responded by saying "Freedom really matters, because, along time ago slavery was not illegal, and some people didn't have freedom, which everybody should be able to have."

"Like the aborigines," said Adam. "They didn't have any freedom – they couldn't vote, they couldn't live wherever they wanted to."

"But aborigines now can do anything that white people can do," declared Cameron… "Because we should treat all people the same way. And we should all have the same amount of the things we like."

Again, searching for the right words was often difficult. As the conversation with this group of children continued, John indicated this difficulty in an explicit way: "Love matters. If you weren't loved, I don't think any of us would be here, cos, you need love and affection, um – how shall I say this – some parents don't care about their children…" (John searches again for the right words) … "They don't send their children to school…they go away and leave their children to do the groceries and stuff. They don't care for them."

Value Sensing
(Year three, Suburban school)

"I would wish for world peace so that we could all be happy," replied Stacey confidently.
"And that all the poor people have money and food and clothes,"   added
*   Zephaniah.*
"I'd wish for no more war," replied Sally, "and that all the people who have been hurt or sick would get better."

Australian Catholic University
Brisbane Sydney Canberra Ballarat Melbourne

APPENDIX I: 336

ACU National Human research Ethics Committee Approval

✛ ACU National

Human Research Ethics Committee
Expedited Review
Approval Form

Principal Investigator/Supervisor: Dr Marian de Souza	Campus: Ballarat
Co-Investigators:	Campus:
Student Researcher: Mr Brendan Hyde	Campus: Melbourne

Ethics approval has been granted for the following project:
Identifying some characteristics of children's spirituality in Australian Catholic primary schools

for the period: 15.11.02

Human Research Ethics Committee Register Number: V2002.03-49

subject to the following <u>standard</u> conditions as stipulated in the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans* (1999):

   (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;

and subject to the following <u>special</u> conditions being met, as stipulated by the Human Research Ethics Committee:
The panel noted what a well thought out application this was.

Gathering, security, disposal of data; dissemination of results
E.3 electronic data (floppy disks and hard drive files, used) to be deleted.

Issues concerning consent (including consent form)
Simplify the language on the assent form so that it is suitable for the age range of the pupils

The Principal Investigator / Supervisor is requested to note the following comments:

Research Design and Procedure
It is suggested that the word "some" be deleted from the title and any descriptions of the study. Also suggest that reference to conversations (such as had been made in supporting documentation), rather than semi-structured interviews, be made in the information letter.

(Expedited Review Approval.dot @ 27.06.2002)   Page 1 of 2

Australian Catholic University
Brisbane Sydney Canberra Ballarat Melbourne

⊕ACU National

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: .22/11/02..........
(Chair, Expedited Review Panel, HREC)

TO BE COMPLETED BY THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR
OR BY THE SUPERVISOR AND STUDENT RESEARCHER

The Principal Investigator, or the Supervisor and Student Researcher, are to sign, date and return this form to the local Research Services Officer. Evidence of compliance with any special conditions set by the HREC should be provided when the form is returned. Please note that data-collection must not commence until the stipulated special conditions have been met.

The date when I/we expect to commence contact with human participants or access their records is: .MAY..O3.............

I/We hereby declare that I/We am/are aware of the principles and requirements governing research involving human participants, as expressed in the Human Research Ethics Committee's *Guidelines*, and I/We agree to the standard and special conditions (if applicable) stated above.

Signed: .... Date: 7/3/03 .
　　　[Principal Investigator or Supervisor]

Signed: .... Date: 12/3/03
　　　[Student Researcher]

TO BE COMPLETED BY THE CHAIR OF THE EXPEDITED REVIEW PANEL

I confirm that the special conditions stipulated by the HREC in relation to the commencement of data-collection have been met and that the conditions to be adhered to in the course of the project have been acknowledged by the researcher/s.

Signed: .... Date: ....

(Expedited Review Approval.dot @ 27.06.2002)　　　　　　　　　　　　Page 2 of 2

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