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Everyday Spirituality:

Supporting the spiritual experience of young children in three  
early childhood educational settings

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## Abstract

The focus of this research is the spiritual experience of young children in early childhood educational settings. Spirituality is included in the New Zealand early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, but is a relatively unarticulated aspect of educational practice. In order to find out how spirituality is supported in early childhood educational contexts this qualitative case study research took place in three early childhood settings: a Montessori *casa*, a private preschool and a Steiner (Waldorf) kindergarten. The methods used in the research included participant-observation, interviews and focus groups. The teachers were asked to make a video about spirituality to reflect their own context and photographs were taken in each setting.

The metaphor of spiritual landscape is used in this research. In this landscape everyday experience merged with the spiritual to form the concept of *everyday spirituality*. The cultural theories of everyday life supported a realisation that ordinary daily activity can become wonderful and mysterious when the spiritual dimension is realised. The themes that emerged from analysis of the case studies are conceptualised as transformative aspects of learning and relationships. They are aspects of everyday spirituality identified as spiritual witness; spiritual in-betweenness; and the spiritually elsewhere. Representing spiritual experience is challenging. The thesis is written in narrative form and contains core narratives as prose and poems. Using writing as a means of discovery made communicating spirituality through the medium of words a possibility.

Spirituality is proposed to be an inclusive concept that affirms a sense of connection and this thesis found that all pedagogical practices in early childhood settings have the potential to include a spiritual aspect. In Aotearoa New Zealand many children lead their everyday lives in the context of an early childhood environment that includes teachers and parents as part of that community. This thesis argues that when everyday spirituality permeates early childhood contexts that all aspects of the curriculum are realised and the spiritual experience of everyone connected to that setting is supported.



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He tangata, he tangata, he tangata. It is people, it is people, it is people.



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