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Everyday Spirituality:

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

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment  
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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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## Chapter One - Introduction

### The beginning

*Curiosity is a good place to start if one is going to encounter the sacred  
(Bateson, 1994, p.232)*

A beginning is often not the beginning but merely a starting place because beginnings can become blurred and sometimes dissolve over time. The beginning of this research concerning spirituality in early childhood settings is difficult to pinpoint but on reflection there was a time when thinking about spirituality in my own life collided with my work in early childhood education: a meeting of personal and professional worlds. My questions to myself and the questions I have been asked by others about my interest in and experience of spirituality have involved personal narrative, memory, cultural understandings, and the construction of self. Stories that other people have shared, often for the first time, draw on the same sources. Sometimes a discussion about spirituality has been welcomed. At other times the link with religion has meant a reaction to this research has been tinged with suspicion. Spirituality is indissolubly linked with culture, language and identity and it is an emotional topic. Spirituality is never neutral. It is revealed in beliefs, values and the ultimate meaning that is given to life.

I began to consider seriously how spirituality, as part of the early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996), was recognised in practice. Influenced by the work of Tobin, Wu and Davidson (1989) who researched preschools in three cultures I began to plan research that would include different philosophical perspectives and would take place in three settings: a Montessori *casa*, a private preschool and a Steiner (Waldorf) kindergarten. The qualitative case studies that were formed involved working with a rich mix of participants. Children, teachers and parents were invited to contribute. The narratives constructed from these encounters describe experiences of spirituality in all three settings.

The following discussion concerns the ground from which the question that guides this piece of research emerged. The link between spirituality and education is introduced and this leads to discussion about the early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996). Connections with the concepts of holistic



development and holistic education are made. Some preliminary considerations relevant to research and spirituality are presented. This leads to a presentation of the research question. Finally, this chapter ends with an outline of the thesis and gives an overview of this representation of the spiritual landscape.

### **Spirituality and education**

In schools throughout the world education often promotes certain religious beliefs or spiritual values. In these circumstances any doubt about the relevance of spirituality in relation to education would be unusual. Valsiner (2000, p.267) describes the use of spiritual practices in a Krishnamurti school in India to promote a “we-feeling”. These practices include chanting in assembly and watching the sunset and meditation in the evening. He describes an educational context that promotes a sense of unity, a means of constructing the cultural self and the integration of certain practices into the “personal cultures” (p.267) of students. In another setting young children chanted the Koran so that the music of the words would enter their soul at a young age and never be forgotten (Valsiner, 2000). I discovered that such practices did not only exist elsewhere in the world. In a preliminary study carried out in Aotearoa New Zealand I spoke to a teacher in a Christian (Baptist) preschool who said that one of her main purposes was to teach children to talk to God and to be aware of the constant presence of God. She said this would mean that the children would never again feel alone. This kind of intervention is significant and intentionally so.

Religious understandings and spiritual awareness are learned through contact with others and become part of socially constructed knowing. Sometimes they are fostered deliberately and at other times are incidental. Children learn through participation in community (Rogoff, 2003), by their involvement in “cultural systems” (Bruner, 1990, p.33) and in “the ordinary creativity of moving through the world” (Bateson, 1994, p.10). Young children increasingly spend time in a preschool environment, described by Dahlberg and Moss (2005, p.105) as “a system of relationships and communication involving children, teachers and parents”. Religion and spirituality are inevitably part of these systems and part of these relationships. I wondered what this meant for children, their families and teachers in early childhood settings. In Aotearoa New Zealand early childhood education must always be considered in relation to the early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996).

*Te Whāriki* – the early childhood curriculum

If, as Edwards (2003, p.251) suggests, curriculum “is a human endeavour, and like all human endeavours involves the cultural values, beliefs, assumptions, theories and languages of its developers” then *Te Whāriki* was designed to reflect the early childhood educational environment in the mid-1990s in Aotearoa New Zealand.\* This curriculum has provided what Cullen (2003, p.270) refers to as “a coherent philosophy” for the early childhood sector. Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999, p.116) discuss curricula balanced between being “frameworks of normalisation” and frameworks that leave “space for regional and local discretion and interpretation”. In my opinion *Te Whāriki* reflects the latter and it affords space for questions to be asked. In this research certain questions clustered around spirituality as an aspect of the curriculum. Indeed the words of Tilly Reedy (1995, 2003), one of the original contributors to *Te Whāriki*, are a reminder that spirituality is embedded in the curriculum. Reedy (2003, p.72) refers to “the spark of godliness in each human being” and acknowledges the importance of the sacred in relation to young children.

Therefore, the ostensible starting place for this research is supported by reference to the early childhood curriculum, particularly because the founding statement (Ministry of Education, 1996) articulates a wish that children may:

grow up as competent and confident learners and communicators,  
healthy in mind, body and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and  
in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society. (p.9)

The meaning of whāriki is woven mat and the principles outlined in the document form a base as follows:

whakamana	empowerment
kotahitanga	holistic development
whānau tangata	family and community
ngā hononga	relationships

---

\* from now on these names will be used interchangeably. Aotearoa – the land of the long white cloud in te reo Māori

These principles then intersect with the strands of the curriculum. The strands being:

mana atua	well-being
mana whenua	belonging
mana tangata	contribution
mana reo	communication
mana aotūroa	exploration

The weaving together of these elements makes the mat strong, each piece is essential, and there is space between each strand for reflection and innovation. The curriculum document was specific about spirituality and it is particularly mentioned as part of holistic development in both the draft document (Ministry of Education, 1993) and in the document that was accepted after extensive consultation with the early childhood community (Ministry of Education, 1996). *Te Whāriki* has an international reputation (Carr & May, 2000); has been critiqued (Cullen, 1996); and more recently reviewed (Nuttall, 2003).

The companion document that suggested various ways of implementing the curriculum, *Quality in action: Te mahi whai hua* (Ministry of Education, 1998) mentioned spirituality briefly. In a more recent initiative the programme *Kei Tua o te Pae Assessment for learning: Early childhood exemplars* (Ministry of Education, 2004) has been introduced. This document mentioned the importance of engaging mind, body and spirit and includes the voices of teachers, parents and children. The emphasis on assessment may make in-depth discussion of spirituality difficult because spirituality is resistant to being assessed but *Kei Tua o te pae* (Ministry of Education, 2004) acknowledges the complexity of the processes involved in learning and assessment and the importance of looking “beyond the horizon” (p.5).

In 2007 it has been proposed that a compulsory curriculum framework for early childhood settings would be formed from the Principles Ngā Kaupapa Whakahaere and Strands Ngā Taumata Whakahirahira of *Te Whāriki* (Maharey, 2007). This builds on the 10 year strategic plan for early childhood education in New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 2002). While spirituality is usually referred to in relation to the principle of holistic development because it is a relatively unarticulated aspect of the curriculum its links to assessment and statutory implementation could be problematic. The concept of holism itself has diverse applications and is always in danger of

becoming a *portmanteau* word that includes anything and everything. It is possible for words that become part of the ‘taken for granted’ discourse of early childhood education to sometimes lose their deeper meaning.

#### Kotahitanga/ holistic development

Kotahitanga or holistic development is “the recognition of the spiritual dimension of children’s lives in culturally, socially, and individually appropriate ways” (Ministry of Education, 1996, p.41). In this description the metaphor of weaving is continued and it is acknowledged that “cognitive, social, cultural, physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of human development are integrally interwoven” (p.41). Spirituality is always already present in the curriculum and is part of the fabric that connects people, places and things.

The holistic view of development usually includes spirituality (Barnes, Plotnikoff, Fox & Pendleton, 2000; Barnum, 2003; Pere, 1991). Reedy (2003, p.66) refers to the “four dimensions for the holistic development of the child at all times – the physical (tinana), the mental (hinegaro), the spiritual (wairua), and the emotional (whatumanawa)”. Reedy is explicit about spirituality and explains its presence in the curriculum document in terms of power, language, identity, and knowledge of one’s place in the universe. Reedy was an inspiration behind the construction of the curriculum and from her perspective as a Māori woman she acknowledges spirituality as an integral component of well-being that must always be supported in educational contexts.

Spirituality, as part of well-being or hauora, is also included in the New Zealand Curriculum for Health and Physical Education (Ministry of Education, 1999). This curriculum applies to children starting primary education in Year 1 and is followed until children are approximately 14 yrs old in Year 10. The model used to underpin this document is Durie’s (1994) *whare tapawhā*. This model is conceptualized as a four sided house, or *whare*. The four walls are *taha whānau* or social well-being; *taha hinegaro* which is mental and emotional well-being; *taha tinana* or physical well-being; and *taha wairua* or spiritual well-being. Each side of the house must be strong or the structure is threatened. The whole house is worth more than the sum of its parts, and it symbolises shelter, safety and security. This model of well-being is

widely recognised in Aotearoa and provides a way to think about holistic development that includes the spiritual dimension.

The idea of being holistic comes from natural phenomena whereby the whole is greater than the sum of the parts and “the wholes in question have characteristics that cannot be explained in terms of the properties and relations to one another of their constituents” (Bullock & Trombley, 2000, p.400). What this means in an educational context is often vague (Cullen, 2003) but it is a definition that supports considerations of ‘the whole child’ rather than focusing on one aspect of development. The need to be aware of the whole child in the education process is part of the criteria for recognising holistic development. This means that all aspects of the child are relevant and influence the educational project.

A vision of the whole child assumes that the person can be conceptualised as divided into parts and the spiritual, physical, emotional and social aspects of the child become the focus of attention. Education that attends to the whole child implies a broader perspective instead of an emphasis on the cognitive dimension that would seem to be most obviously engaged in learning. The whole child is the focus of different cultural interpretations, for instance, in Aotearoa the whole person may be conceptualised using the model *Te Wheke*, the octopus, with all tentacles (representing different parts) joined to one body (Pere, 1991). This model of holistic development “illustrates the interdependence of all things across the universe” (Pere, 1991, p.58). It includes the spiritual and Pere (1991) acknowledges the ancient teaching and wisdom that shaped her worldview. As Macfarlane (2000, p.48) says “the Maori holistic view of the world is often described as the state where body, mind, and spirit are not separate entities, but are interlinked to capture the concept of ‘wholeness’”. These perspectives influenced my preliminary definition of spirituality, introduced later in this chapter.

In early childhood education in New Zealand all settings are required to follow the early childhood curriculum and to conform to Ministry of Education regulations and legal requirements. Within this policy there is flexibility to accommodate diverse services and philosophies. When setting up my case studies I chose to go to a Montessori *casa*, a Steiner kindergarten and a private preschool. The use of the word *casa* echoes Montessori’s roots in Italy where the first school opened by Maria

Montessori (1870-1952) was called the *Casa dei Bambini* or Children's House (Montessori, 1972). The German word *kindergarten* literally means a 'garden for children' and was introduced by Froebel (1782-1852). Its use with the surname of Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) is a reminder of the beginning of the Steiner, or Waldorf, movement in Stuttgart, Germany. The word Waldorf is sometimes used because the first school began in a factory owned by Emil Molt, the manufacturer of Waldorf Astoria cigarettes (Trostli, 1998). The private preschool followed a partially Froebelian freeplay programme and actively considered the whole child through a well rounded approach to early childhood education.

In their writing the educational theorists Rudolf Steiner and Maria Montessori show themselves to be as interested in the body as the soul. Their holistic approach to education encouraged me to involve early childhood settings inspired by their philosophies in this research. Maria Montessori (1988) referred to the child as a "spiritual embryo" (p.55) and "a miraculous being" (p.110) and through education she hoped to address the unfolding of all potentialities, including the spiritual. Rudolf Steiner's philosophy supports what Woods, O'Neill and Woods (1997, p.27) call "an holistic approach that integrates thinking, feeling and doing". This can be achieved in education through the understanding of a "spiritual science" according to Steiner (1907/1998, p.11).

The third setting, the private preschool, also emphasized the importance of considering the whole child in terms of their philosophical approach to early childhood education. The introductory leaflet to parents referred to *Te Whāriki* and the private preschool's conception of holistic education is local, very connected to the curriculum and seemed close to Durie's (1994) model of well-being. In this context spirituality was implied unlike the other two settings where the literature that informs the Montessori and Steiner contexts is explicit about the spiritual dimension and entire systems for educating holistically are identified and described in detail. This literature, the curriculum and different models of holistic development began to form a background to the research and opened up the possibility of exploring spirituality in early childhood educational settings.

## **Spirituality and research**

In terms of conventional scientific research spirituality poses a problem because it is an aspect of experience that cannot be measured and assessed. Spirituality is ultimately in the eye of the beholder. This is one of the challenges posed by the inclusion of spirituality in institutions not designed to recognise something so subjective and ephemeral (Carr & Haldane, 2003). While spirituality is included in the curriculum document *Te Whāriki* there is often a gap between official documents and what actually happens in educational contexts when a topic like spirituality is relatively unarticulated (Ayres, 2004; Erricker & Erricker, 2000). By becoming involved in early childhood settings I hoped to find out more about this aspect of educational practice. The focus of this research concerns the spiritual experiences of young children, the perspectives of their parents and possible spiritual influences on their teachers. Research designed to include children and their experiences is justified by Greene and Hill (2005) who propose that:

The researcher who values children's perspectives and wishes to understand their lived experience will be motivated to find out more about how children understand and interpret, negotiate and feel about their daily lives. If we accept a view of children as persons, the nature of children's experiential life becomes of central interest. (p.3)

In the specific area of spiritual research with young children the work of Rebecca Nye (Hay & Nye, 1998) has been very influential. In more recent work Nye (Ratcliff & Nye, 2006) has discussed ways of strengthening research in this area. Ratcliff and Nye (2006) direct researchers who seriously wish to explore spirituality to address three requirements for research. These are outlined as follows:

First, they suggest that research will be supported by having a working definition of spirituality. For the purposes of this study my definition was:

*a force that connects people to each other, to all living things, to nature and the universe. Spirituality is a way of appreciating the wonder and mystery of everyday life. It alerts me to the possibility for love, happiness, goodness, peace and compassion in the world.*

This definition is a composite of personal beliefs and ideas that arose from reading the spirituality literature. The focus on connection affirms the influence of Māori and indigenous Pacific perspectives (Manu'atu, 2000; Pere, 1982/94; Thaman, 2002). This definition reflects local knowledge (Geertz, 1983). It is also positive and suited my requirement to undertake research in an area that both contributes to knowledge and affirms the contribution of the early childhood community to education in Aotearoa. While fluid and open to change this definition has remained useful while being influenced by my experiences and reflections throughout the research.

In any discussion of spirituality a distinction is usually made between religion and spirituality. In this research I am clear that while spirituality informs religion (and vice versa) that my study is not about religion. Religious beliefs, like spiritual beliefs, are diverse and may be linked to culture but most religions acknowledge faith through shared worship and liturgy. In my view religion represents the institutionalisation of spirituality but generally they are regarded as entangled and overlapping concepts.

The second point Ratcliff and Nye (2006) make is about the focus of the research. They recommend investigating experience, noting that “given the complexity of the definitional issues, it may be useful, at least for the short term to concentrate on children’s spiritual *experiences* rather than spirituality as a whole” (their italics). They continue “a concentration on experience moves this area of study beyond religious belief or feeling, yet includes the possibility of studying the structure and content of such experiences, as well as their contextual and cultural adaptations” (p.478). The focus of this research is on the experience of young children and the ways that early childhood settings, shared with teachers and influenced by parents, support these experiences.

Finally, (Ratcliff & Nye, 2006) recommend “methodological rigor and concern for the trustworthiness of data” (p.478). The background to this remark is the plethora of literature about spirituality that is based on personal opinion. A look at the shelves in a bookshop or library will reveal that much of the spirituality literature has a ‘feel good’ focus, is anecdotal and is connected with personal improvement. Ratcliff and Nye (2006) argue for a distinction between opinion pieces and research. This particular study involved research in three different early childhood settings and the



research process that evolved in response to my question is described in detail in the following chapters.

This thesis is the result of a qualitative inquiry (Denzin, 2001; Denzin & Giardina, 2006) that used a range of methods in three case studies (Huberman & Miles, 2002). These methods include participant observation, interviews and focus groups. Photographs and videos formed a visual contribution to the research. Spirituality is for many people a part of life that grapples with “the deep subjectivity of all things” (Tacey, 2004, p.67). While not an easy or straightforward topic this research adds to a body of knowledge about spirituality in early childhood settings. In the process it is hoped that research itself as a search for meaning can be affirmed as “both an intellectual and a spiritual pursuit” (Dillard, 2000, p.674).

The question

Curiosity and a spirit of inquiry are aspects of the spiritual and “exploring and discovering is a spiritual experience” (Reedy, 2003, p.73). The will to explore and a wish to see over the next horizon drives research and once I thought of this research question it would not go away. It began with my personal reflections about the role of spirituality in my own life. I realised that the root of my interest in things spiritual was influenced by childhood experiences and wondered about spiritual experience in relation to the lives of children now. I particularly wondered what happened in early childhood settings where a majority of young children in New Zealand spend a large portion of their time. The question I started with was open to change and the qualitative approach meant that the question might have been modified. In the event it proved robust enough to support my inquiry, as follows:

How are the spiritual experiences of young children supported in different early childhood settings?

### **Conceptualising the thesis**

Core narratives – a short cut

The thesis makes use of the notion of “core narrative” (Binney, 2001, p.7). She suggests that these core narratives are like a fan and they are a starting point for a “layered” (Richardson, 2000a, p.942) or “pleated” (Richardson, 2000b, p.153) text.

The following chapter introduces the metaphor of ‘landscape’ and in this thesis the core narratives emerge from the folds in the landscape of spirituality. In Chapter Two various definitions for spirituality are discussed and the landscape of spirituality that forms the background to the research is presented.

The core narratives are markers, they give direction, and they are points where the text can be entered or left. They are signalled by the use of italic font and some are presented as poems. The use of core narratives is an attempt to grapple with the politics of knowledge always present in qualitative research. One of the participants in the research requested that the thesis be written so that she could read it. The presentation of core narratives signals my intention to write *for* and not simply about others. It is unrealistic to expect that many people will read the entire thesis. Not everyone will take the long way round. I visualise the thesis on the shelf in an early childhood educational setting, perhaps being reached for, opened at some point in a busy day; some words catch the eye and are a moment of inspiration. Or perhaps my visualisation should be more virtual – maybe it will appear on a screen... The core narratives are a short cut, a quick way into the thesis, an opportunity for further exploration. Such fresh possibilities presented themselves following a challenge from Denzin and Giardina (2006, p.xxvi) for those who tackle qualitative inquiry to insert themselves and their work “into a practical discussion held on the ground level of everyday interactions”.

The thesis - the long way round

As already mentioned, for those who wish to take the long way round and wander in the spiritual landscape the following chapter introduces the metaphor of landscape. Different definitions and blended concepts that construct current understandings of spirituality are outlined especially in relation to the context of Aotearoa. In chapter Three the literature is reviewed. A sociohistorical approach is taken in this review of empirical studies about spiritual development, spiritual experience and spirituality as it relates to early childhood educational contexts.

The philosophical stance that underpins the approach to this study is described in chapter Four. In qualitative inquiry the position of the researcher and the ethical processes form an important part of the narrative. This chapter also includes a

discussion about validity and the ways that data analysis was approached. A description of the settings, the fieldwork experience and the procedures that generated data are featured in chapter Five. A description of being in each setting and the experiences that shaped the research forms the basis of this chapter. Chapter Five ends with a detailed description of the analytic strategies chosen for this research.

Findings and discussion are intertwined in the narrative account of the case studies that form chapters Six to Nine. The core narratives that appear either in prose or poetry are key illustrations of the findings. The creative aspect of analysis linked to the *poesis* that illuminates everyday life and culture are a feature of these chapters. In chapter Six the concept of everyday spirituality is introduced in more depth. The three early childhood settings are outlined in detail in relation to this overall concept. Then particular themes that connect to everyday spirituality are described and discussed in some detail. The concept of *spiritual witness* is proposed in chapter Seven. The state of *spiritual in-betweenness* is introduced in chapter Eight. Finally, in chapter Nine the *spiritual elsewhere* is discussed. While the cases have not been overtly compared or contrasted there is a cross-over and overlap from one setting to another in all these chapters.

Chapter 10 brings closure to the thesis. This section includes an overview and discussion about the implications for policy and practice that emerged from the research. A series of questions that relate to the main themes discussed in preceding chapters are presented. The thesis is linked to other major studies and recommendations for further research are proposed. The limitations of the present study are outlined and finally philosophical influences on the thesis are acknowledged. It is hoped that the end point of this thesis will become another beginning and that this study will add to the spiritual landscape and become part of the ground for more research in the future. Before appendices and references there is a table that gives details about each setting together with the names of teachers and children referred to in the thesis. Finally there is a glossary of words in te reo Māori with their English translation.

## Chapter Two – a spiritual geography

### **Introduction**

*Another language, a sweet spiritual geography...*  
(Capote, in Clarke, 2006, p.79)

The spiritual landscape described in this chapter includes religious, secular and cultural perspectives. Metaphors of geography are used to link spirituality with context. A personal narrative is included because it forms part of the ground for the study and contributes to my understanding about what spirituality might mean. There are many definitions of the word spiritual. The word is often joined to other concepts and meanings merge and blend; these blends will also be part of the discussion. Within these layers there are other narratives both local and from elsewhere. They form the layers or pleats (Richardson, 2000b) that construct the folds in the landscape or changes in the terrain.

### **The spiritual landscape**

The geography of spirituality (Hay & Nye, 1998) is complex, shifting, labyrinthine, and contested. In order to contextualise this study I wandered in the spiritual landscape (Tacey 1995). This is a place of multiple perspectives, many definitions, and differing opinions. Geographical metaphors connect to the land and this spiritual connection is very much part of the New Zealand story. John Rangihau (1992) describes learning to respect the spirit of the land. He tells the following story:

When I take strangers into Ruatahuna I stop and we get out of the car and I say to them, ‘This is an old Maori custom’. These days, what I ask people to do is stand in silence for a little while and pray in their own way. It doesn’t matter what sort of person I take into the area I do it.  
(p.187)

Armstrong (1996, p.7) suggests that originally a sense of land as sacred was common to all people and that “long before people began to map their world scientifically, they had evolved a sacred geography to define their place in the universe emotionally and spiritually”. The landscape defines how people share space. The word landscape carries connotations that include natural and human endeavours. There is also an inner

landscape: a place of imagination, memory and thought. It is a mix of the literal and metaphorical, a blend of myth and memory. In his work that links landscape with memory Schama (1995) notes that landscape is a product of the mind constructed by “culture, convention and cognition” (p.12). Time and space are recorded and configured in layers of landscape. Because the landscape may reveal connections to the sacred Tacey (1995, p.21) refers to it as a “spiritual laboratory”.

Descriptions of the spiritual are often influenced by the landscape that fostered it. From an Australian perspective Tacey (2004) conceptualises a spiritual landscape that is in need of renewal. This “new spiritual landscape” (p.97) that he envisages will deal with what he describes as the failure of politics and the death of hope for young people. He uses water as a metaphor and describes the response of young people to “the rising waters of spirituality” as like “the flooding of a river in a desert landscape” (Tacey, 2004, p.22). His imagery is connected to where he writes from; to Australia. In New Zealand the land itself, with its rivers, coastline, mountains and forests is considered spiritual. The origin of the land is remembered in myths and legends, and its sacred aspect is passed on through indigenous knowledge of place. Wells (2001, p.224) describes it as a place of “strong physicality, where the spiritual voices from the indigenous culture have always been whispering in our ear”.

When considering the spiritual landscape I am conscious of my personal experiences. Scott (2001, p.120) confirms that “to tell personal spiritual narratives is to act against a strong cultural imperative” and telling spiritual stories is sometimes risky but in order for me to be a trustworthy guide through the landscape my story must be shaken out from the folds. This narrative perhaps makes my current understanding of spirituality as something that is unfixed and open more understandable because this story still lies beneath more recent meaning making: a palimpsest. It is still part of the local knowledge (Geertz, 1983) that makes it possible for me to locate myself in this research and to make connections with others:

*The spiritual landscape of childhood*

*My early memories in terms of religion involve rousing Harvest Festival hymns, carol singing, and Sunday school. These activities took place in a very old church in a small village in the West of England. This village features in the Domesday Book of the 11th Century. Physically and spiritually it is possible to feel the past there and it is reflected in the Anglo-Saxon herringbone patterned Cotswold stone of the church walls. This stone is smooth to the touch; it has absorbed centuries of worship.*

*Children were free to go anywhere in the village including the local graveyard where past generations slept under grass. The ivy covered, crumbling tomb stones were just another play space. It felt peaceful there. We helped put flowers on graves, tied up the church gate at weddings so money could be thrown over for us to catch, congregated for village events and generally participated in the traditional life of the village. Life revolved around the seasons and what was happening on the surrounding farms. Of course the spirit of this place is something that never leaves me and this unchanged landscape is imprinted on my memory.*

*At six years of age I was sent to a Roman Catholic convent school. This was something very different. There was more emphasis on suffering and over-vivid depictions of heaven and hell. I was introduced to the idea that I had a guardian angel which was sometimes comforting, sometimes not. I began to feel constantly watched for the first time and my world became peopled by invisible and visible presences. The nuns seemed to glide around everywhere and despite veils and long skirts they were extremely mobile. It was lucky that the Catholic Church provided opportunities for confession and forgiveness because it soon became obvious to all of us that there would be no getting away with anything. The admonition to 'search your conscience' began to construct a hyperactive concern about the state of our souls. Our souls, like our uniforms and school books, were supposed to be 'spotless'.*

This background informs my 'gaze' (Foucault, 1977) although my viewpoint has inevitably altered over time. However, it still seems that most religions have rules

that cover everything and control the entire way that life should be lived. My early experience constructed a preference for spirituality rather than religion that is far from unique. It is fairly representative of a generation in the West that Armstrong (2005, p.191) suggests favours a kind of “mystical secularism”. This is a form of spiritual experience that does not involve god or a specific religious structure.

The idea of a spiritual landscape supports the construction of knowing as layers of meaning. This landscape is the product of cultural understandings formed by different experiences. In the Catholic context the Catechism emphasized the pervasiveness of God and the correct (and only) response possible to the question “Where is God?” is “God is everywhere”. The question and answer format of the catechism mimics conventional educational discourse. It was chanted in the same way as the alphabet song or popular rhymes. In these ways aspects of culture deemed essential are learned: grammatical rules, verses from the Koran or Bible, routines, good manners and the injunction familiar to young children to ‘use your words’.

As the researcher I am embedded in a landscape of spirituality but am also looking outwards. I am both focused on the horizon and conscious of the inner self. By considering spirituality in geographic terms I found that it began to be possible to think “topographically” (Lather, 2000, p.300) and to embrace the nomadic (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). I took the opportunity to wander in a spiritual landscape that is constructed from a variety of definitions and meanings.

### **Definitions**

While remaining elusive and difficult to pin down, spirituality is nevertheless a connecting thread between people and often provides a seam of coherence and continuity in individual lives (Jung, 1961/95; Moberg, 2001; Pellebon & Anderson, 1999; Wheeler, Ampadu & Wangari, 2002). As a concept spirituality is abstract and open to various readings and is indistinct and amorphous rather than definite and bounded. People often feel defined by their spirituality but find it hard to define in words. Spirituality is a concept that resists definition. It is what Fontana (2003, p.11), whose interest is the psychology of spirituality and religion, calls “a nebulous concept”. This is expressed more poetically by Rabbi Hugo Gryn (1992) who compares spirituality to a bird. He says that “spirituality is like a bird: if you hold it

too tightly, it chokes; if you hold it too loosely, it flies away. Fundamental to spirituality is the absence of force” (p.4). The image of the bird conveys the idea of spirituality as light and free, elemental but fragile.

The difference (if any) between religion and spirituality is often debated. To many religious people the use of the term ‘spirituality’ is a difficulty. The concept of spirituality can bypass having to make definitive statements about beliefs and dogma. It is a concept that remains curiously free. As previously mentioned (Chapter One) one of the challenges of the research was to make clear that it concerned spirituality and not religion – a distinction that had to be made. Many definitions of spirituality either oppose or connect it to religion. Berryman (1997) makes the point that spirituality can underpin religion, he says with some confidence that:

Spirituality usually refers to what animates or makes us vital. It is about consciousness, as distinguished from the purely physical. Often spirituality is considered to be a universal characteristic of human beings. The distinction between spirituality and religion for this discussion is that spirituality is treated as a general potential. When it is expressed in a tradition of language, practice, morality, and by a group of people of any size to support and evaluate its efficacy, then it becomes actual and specific. Spirituality becomes religion. (p.9)

In an interview Noddings (Halford, 1998/9) stated that religion is linked to institutionalisation. She differentiates religion and spirituality:

Spirituality is an attitude or a way of life that recognizes something we might call spirit. Religion is a specific way of exercising that spirituality and usually requires an institutional affiliation. Spirituality does not require an institutional connection. (p.29)

Etymology yields a further difference. The word spirit comes from the Latin *spirare* – to breathe, thus linking spirituality to the miracle of life, the first and last breath. This is a celebration of existence and is celebrated in the Māori phrase ‘Tihei mauri ora’ – behold the breath of life. Spirituality is a way that human beings have always sought to explain the miracle of existence. This has been done through myths and by



linking spirituality to natural phenomena. The word religion comes from the Latin *religio – onis* and means an obligation, a bond, or reverence. The words have different connotations. Religion implies something more contractual than spirituality although people may be committed to both or either. Derrida (2002) points out that the word religion may have two etymological sources: *relegere / religio* – attention, respect, shame, piety, or *religare* – the link, the obligation, the sense of debt between men or between men and God. A religion might involve dogma, specific rules, worship, prayers, and the practice of specific rituals. Holm (1994) explains that drawing a line around a religion is problematic because “religions don’t exist in a vacuum; they are influenced by the social and cultural context in which they are set. This can affect what they strenuously reject as well as what they may absorb into their pattern of belief and practice” (p.vii). In this sense religion is informed by and influences spirituality and vice versa.

The Tao Te Ching highlights a discomfort with trying to define spirituality. It is paradoxically a concept about which “those who know do not talk. Those who talk do not know” (Feng & English, 1997, p.56). From this perspective spirituality might be something that can only be defined by silence because those who know what it is simply do not need to talk about it as they are already enlightened. However, there is no shortage of attempts at definition. Statements about spirituality are sometimes brief: “a natural human predisposition” (Hyde, 2003, p.27); the “thoughtful love of life” (Solomon, 2002, p.7); “spirituality is, in essence, knowing how to live” (Strano, 1999, p.5). Others are more lengthy and become lists of spiritual characteristics, for example, the ability to feel awe, wonder, to be at one with the universe, to be peaceful, creative, fulfilled, and to appreciate meaningful experiences (Hay & Nye, 1998; Kibble, 1996; Suhor, 1998). According to the Unesco-Apnieve (1998) report for the Asia-Pacific region the components of spirituality in this part of the world will include inner peace, reverence and respect for life, confidence in the human spirit and belief in spiritual potential, freedom of thought, calmness, integrity and meditateness.

For some, spirituality is awakened through feelings of oneness with nature and the universe, connecting with the seasons, with birth and death (Berry, 1998; Zac, 1996). For others, it comes through positive relationships and connectedness, even a merging

of self and other, the fusion of the “‘I and Thou’ relationship” described by Buber (Yoshida, 2002, p.128). It is involved in the pursuit of meaning (Roehlkepartain, Benson, King & Wagener, 2006) and colours the way events are understood. Experiences that may appear to be negative can also contribute to spirituality, such as overcoming suffering or experiencing mental or physical pain. A discussion paper from the UK encourages schools to provide spiritual experiences for children as part of the curriculum and says that an essential factor for cultivating spirituality is reflection and “learning from one’s experiences” (SCAA, 1996, p.7).

### Dualities

Spirituality is connected with some of the great debates of philosophy, the idea of “the ghost in the machine” (Ryle, 1949/76) and the mind/body dualism attributed to Descartes. From a philosophical perspective the spiritual self is proposed to be visible through the lens of metaphysics. This is a branch of philosophy concerned with the world beyond the physical. Many belief systems are underpinned by the notion that human beings are somehow ‘more than’ the other works of nature. The metaphysical realm was described by Plato. He thought that human beings inhabit a cavelike world of shadows and the full sun of reality is usually beyond their comprehension. In the metaphysical philosophies it is assumed that there is always something just outside our perception.

The world is seen differently from a materialist, as opposed to a metaphysical, perspective. As the word implies, a materialist view of the world accepts that “all entities and processes are composed of – or are reducible to – matter, material forces or physical processes” (Stack, 1998). This is often described as a reductionist view of human nature. These different perspectives are sometimes seen as encapsulating the difference between Eastern and Western ways of thinking and of experiencing reality. Crook and Fontana (1990) tell the following story that illustrates this particular duality:

Two monks are arguing. One shows a bowl to the other and asks ‘What is the most important thing about this bowl?’ His companion answers ‘It is the shape of the bowl’. ‘Oh no,’ says the first, ‘how superficial you are – it is the space within it that is all-important’. Just then the Master passes by.

‘Neither of you is right,’ he says, ‘yet both of you have given the correct answer’. (p.1)

It is simplistic to continue to perceive dualities between different ways of thinking or between body and soul. Stack (1998) emphasizes that contemporary materialism is complex, conflicting and intriguing. It encompasses the spiritual instead of excluding it. Solomon (2002) supports different ways of looking at spirituality. He points out that constant separation, for instance of heart and mind, is not useful and is only one way of dividing the world. Since the Western enlightenment “not only religion but spirituality has been on the defensive” (Solomon, 2002, p.17). The Enlightenment prioritised reason, truth and rationality in 18<sup>th</sup> Century Europe. It formed a break with older beliefs and superstitions in favour of science and spirituality was thought to be illogical and a symptom of unsophisticated thinking.

The legacy of the Enlightenment has constructed the individual as a rational, logical being, resistant to animistic thoughts and beliefs. This is problematic in New Zealand where people espouse a range of beliefs and values. Thaman (2002) explores the conflict of values that can limit understanding in educational contexts. She points out that as a Tongan person with a professional interest in indigenous Pacific pedagogies she is aware of a conflict between belief systems. She acknowledges a worldview that emphasises the supernatural as opposed to the secular. Different cultural perspectives challenge the basis of New Zealand society as secular, humanist and driven by the “grand narrative” (Lyotard, 1996, p.482) of the Enlightenment, the idea that truth, justice and empirical science is the driving force behind a functioning modern society. On the contrary, Lyotard (1996, p.486) points out that in the postmodern world there is a privileging of the “speculative”.

### The New Age

The influence of other worldviews on the West has seen the rise in popularity of a spirituality known as New Age. Sometimes seen as a form of recolonisation (Smith, 1999) these New Age spiritualities often involve healing through the use of alternative therapies and make use of accessories that include dreamcatchers, crystals and esoteric practices like aura brushing. For some this is anathema and the idea of the world as a spiritual supermarket (Turner, 2004) disturbs many orthodox believers.

Spirituality has become part of the global market place and is subject to commodification like anything else. Again there are different views about this. For some it is negative and has devalued spirituality. For others it means that sharing is possible and desirable in terms of making conflict less likely if the boundaries between people become blurred. From this perspective fundamental beliefs are a dangerous thing. These issues are mediated by McFague (2000) who states that “for the purposes of the planetary agenda, no one tradition needs to claim universality or the whole truth. What is more helpful is to specify the *kind* of insights that are distinctive of different traditions” (p.305).

#### Postmodern *anomie*

The Western perspective is influenced by the colonising idea that everything is available for consumption or can be appropriated. In simplistic or materialistic terms this may appear to be possible but spirituality itself subverts this kind of transaction and it is not so easy to fill what Rushdie refers to as “god-shaped holes” (Rushdie, 1991, p.424). Jencks (1996) defines postmodernism as an historical movement marked by great choice and eclecticism. This very definition marks it as a concern of the West/first/minority world. Along with the potential for freedom comes the state of *anomie* or desolation, and according to Jencks (1996, p.27) “confusion and anxiety become ruling states of mind”. Lee (2003, p.357) proposes that in response to this state the “fragmented self” searches for new identities. Writers of a guide to the Indian spiritual experience recount that they asked T.K.V. Desikachar, a well known yoga teacher, why Westerners continue to come to India and study yoga “ ‘No reason at all,’ he responded. ‘Then why do they keep coming?’ we persisted. ‘Because they are mad,’ he said.” (Cushman & Jones, 1998, p.9). Spirituality has also become another global transaction, a form of tourism.

Ironically this form of spiritual globalisation does not seem to have promoted peace and understanding. Indeed the so called war on terror between the USA and other nations is often referred to as a medieval Crusade. Even countries that try to remain neutral about matters of religion and spirituality become involved. However, in an attempt to promote tolerance educators think that children should have understandings of different beliefs in order to make decisions later and also not to be captured by cults or fundamentalist religions. Noddings (1993, p.39) proposes a state of

intelligent belief and recommends education as a means of achieving this because “to be an intelligent believer one needs to know the weak points as well as the strong points of a religion, the insights and the nonsense, the political and the spiritual”.

#### The rights discourse

As people move around the world as migrants, refugees, displaced people, tourists and, as people have always done, to find a better life, the universal charters that respect Human Rights attempt to give universal guidelines for the common good. With respect to children the UNCROC document, The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, has Articles that mention the right of children to their spirituality, for instance, Article 27 asks that “State parties recognize the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child’s physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development” (UNCROC, 1993). The Convention requires that children be prepared “for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin” (UNCROC, 1993, Article 29).

In Aotearoa New Zealand the founding document Te Tiriti o Waitangi/The Treaty of Waitangi influences attitudes and underpins the construction of a bicultural society. There were always two versions of the Treaty; the version in the English language and the translation into te reo Māori (Ritchie, 2003). While the principles underlying the Treaty are partnership and equity this is contested ground. The Treaty remains controversial because of historical events that undermined the partnership and the debate about what constitutes sovereignty or tino rangatiratanga (self-determination) continues. There are three main Articles that form the Treaty and a fourth Article that is less well known. The history of the so called Fourth Article of the Treaty is not clear because it was an addition to the original document and the motivation for its addition to the Treaty might have been self interest. In one interpretation Moon (2000) describes Bishop Pompalier, a Catholic, coming forward to request that tolerance be accorded to different forms of worship. The situation in England was that Catholics were discriminated against in terms of education and employment and Pompalier did not want the same situation to prevail in New Zealand. From another perspective the right of the Māori people to retain their spiritual beliefs was also an

issue. One wonders what Pompalier would have thought of the categories of religions and spiritual belief systems named in the 2001 Census. There were ten main categories and these were then further divided into one hundred and thirty categories that including Satanism, Wiccan, Earth and Nature religions and the Church of Scientology. In fact it would be hard to find a wider spread. Although there was protest because the question about religious belief was asked at all the result does indicate that within Aotearoa there is tolerance for a diverse range of beliefs. These findings have lead to the creation of a website about spiritual New Zealand that details the “dialogue with a higher power” based on Statistics from the New Zealand Census of 2001 (<http://www.zealand.org.nz/culture>).

### Harmony

The word that is often translated from te reo Māori to mean spirituality is wairua – the meeting of two waters. In this sense spirituality can bridge barriers. It can unite opposites and promote harmony. Pere (1991) describes the concept of wairua in more detail and says:

Wairua is an apt description of the spirit – it denotes two waters. There are both the positive and negative streams for one to consider.

Everything has a wairua, for example, water can give or take life. It is a matter of keeping a balance. (p.16)

Wairua then is something that supports connectedness. Pere (1993) describes her personal approach to spirituality in more detail:

There is respect and understanding given to that which is sacred for each individual or group of people. I never feel completely alone, even when other people are not present. Within this spirituality I can appreciate the meaning of divine guidance and protection, the meaning of sacredness, the meaning of humility, and above all what it means to be a mortal being with so many frailties and weaknesses. (p.276)

Influenced by so many perspectives on spirituality it would be easy to say that it is a concept impossible to define. However, in a discussion about the nature of being, Heidegger (1967) points out that not being easy to define does not signify lack of

meaning, instead “it demands that we look that question in the face” (p.23). While spirituality might be a challenging concept it is obviously something that holds deep meaning for people in many different ways.

### **Changing the landscape**

Sontag (2005) proposes that spirituality changes with society and suggests that spirituality must be regularly reinvented in order to be meaningful in different contexts. In New Zealand it is now a word mentioned frequently by the media. It is a factor in politics, for instance, in the debate about ownership of foreshore and seabed. In this context the notion of reinvention is also problematic because many acknowledge the Māori people as the spiritual guardians of the land and would not agree that spirituality needed reinvention, just recognition and respect. This perspective recognises the spiritual base of Māori people as the indigenous population of Aotearoa. In support of this Cloher (2004, p.56) asserts that “land is our life” in a spiritual rather than material sense and the Māori people are *tanagata whenua* or the people of the land. *Whenua* itself is a word with two meanings: land and placenta (also see glossary). Many people in Aotearoa have a naming ceremony for their child and bury the placenta or plant a tree to signify this tie to the land. Cadogan (2004, p.38) describes *tangata* (the people) tracing their line of descent back to Papatuanuku, the earth mother. She says that Papatuanuku is recognised as “a grand old lady continually bringing to birth and receiving *tangata* back at the end of their life”. According to the United Nations Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2006) Article 25 states that the spiritual tie to the land must be recognised and that spiritual traditions must be recognised in terms of cultural rights.

Tangaere (1997) proposed that in order to support spirituality it is essential that *te reo Māori*, the Māori language, is recognised. Language is itself a *taonga* or treasure and is the basis of spiritual understanding. Any work about spirituality, especially with young children, must recognise that for many Māori people the language and Māori knowledge is the key to that spiritual dimension. It opens up understanding and acknowledges the importance of *turangawaewae* or place to stand. Tangaere (1997) asserts that children must internalise this cultural knowledge through the language and that this will determine how they are in relation to the world. They will learn to

“interact in relation to the spiritual world, to people, to the land, and to the environment” (p.58).

As partners to Te Tiriti o Waitangi it is necessary that Pākehā New Zealanders consider their own spiritual perspectives as a way of supporting social justice. Consedine (2002) proposed this as an “alternative vision” based on the necessity of addressing “the common good, sustainability, wisdom and an holistic spirituality” (p.37) as a means of achieving positive change in the world. The Treaty of Waitangi is relevant to understanding the early childhood curriculum. *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) is a bicultural document that recognises obligations and commitments to the Treaty and requires “respectful validation of te ao Māori and its expression in the ways of knowing and habits of being whānau Māori (Ritchie, 2003, p.100).

Cadogan (2004, p.39) notes the clash between Māori spirituality, and Christianity and colonisation. She explains “one *rangatira* reportedly said, ‘they told us to bow our heads and pray and when we looked up our land was gone’”. In her view the uneasy relationship between Crown and tanagata whenua has meant that some Māori people do not commit their deepest beliefs to writing and have been wary about sharing deep spiritual beliefs. Writing about the Maori Land Court Parsonson (2001, p.28) confirmed that throughout history spiritual understandings often get “filtered out” of the official narrative. This filtering out of the spiritual is typical when a society defines itself as secular and requires its institutions and systems to reflect this.

### The secular

Being secular introduces another layer into the landscape. To be secular is to be concerned with worldly affairs, not sacred (Pearsall, 1999). This is always a place of tension in Aotearoa where the bicultural partnership recognises different values. Robert Coles (1999), whose work is discussed at length in the next chapter, does not oppose secularism to religion and spirituality. He points out that the secular mind is always engaged in a search for “moral, if not spiritual, sanction” (p.7).

Institutions in New Zealand, including educational institutions, are officially secular. The secular educational system supports values, character education and the search for virtue as the basis of the search for the good citizen that has been a Western



concern since Aristotle. These are all aspects of education that might include a spiritual perspective. In any event the question of whether schools are strictly secular is open to question. Sometimes secular is taken to mean Christian although they are not synonymous. Schools in New Zealand are sometimes challenged because non-religious families or families who are not Christian dislike having Christian prayers and “Bible in Schools” at primary school. In the early childhood curriculum spirituality is mentioned rather than religion and this brings a different emphasis to these issues. Before I started this study I did not realise that some religions actively dislike the concept of spirituality and for others the inclusion of spirituality in secular institutions betrays humanistic ideals and ethics. Humanism is concerned with the value of human beings and is traditionally more concerned with temporal matters rather than the religious or spiritual (Bullock & Trombley, 2000).

Notwithstanding being called “the most secular country in the world” (Geering, 2005, p.20) people in Aotearoa can worship whoever or wherever they like. A Member of Parliament is Rastafarian, another Muslim and places of worship proliferate. There is widespread acceptance of cultural and spiritual rites and rituals. It is common for a *karakia* (prayer or chant) to be said before a meeting and as grace before meals. Beliefs overlap and become fused in an amalgamation of cultural and spiritual understandings. A New Zealand Herald poll of 1000 people in Aotearoa (The New Zealand Herald, 2005) 67.7% said that they believed in God although only 20.6% attended church. There was a comment that “religion in New Zealand was becoming more diverse. ‘People are rather eclectic in their beliefs. They construct their own beliefs out of all the religions available’ ” (The New Zealand Herald, 2005, p.4). This kind of poll challenges conventional views about people, for instance, it revealed that 84.4% of Asian people believed in God as opposed to being Buddhist. This is the kind of fact that it is useful for teachers to know when they are communicating with families and children and is a statistic that deflates a stereotype. Information about shared beliefs can be seen as a unifying force rather than something that separates people and this is important to know in a country that is changing fast demographically. If New Zealanders are ‘reinventing’ spirituality they are doing so from a position that affirms pluralism. Pluralism is the recognition and tolerance of the beliefs of others, an acceptance of the many rather than one, and an acknowledgement of minority, and occasionally unusual, beliefs.

At the beginning of 2007 the Prime Minister of New Zealand, Helen Clark, called for a National Diversity Statement to be drawn up for discussion. This document is being written by religious leaders and Human Rights advocates. It is hoped that it will encourage a tolerant society and give direction in terms of beliefs and difference in a society that is changing. In *The New Zealand Herald* Randerson (2007), an Anglican Dean and Asst. Bishop, discussed this and acknowledged that “we live in a society where the affirmation of belief, be it religious or non-religious, is important, but the nature of that belief is not uniform”. He continued:

The proposed diversity statement seeks to affirm the rights of all New Zealanders to hold such religious, philosophical or humanist world-views which are theirs by conviction, to hold them without threat or attack, and to hold them in a way that does not threaten or attack the rights of others. (p.A11)

As this discussion takes on wider significance the role of education in relation to beliefs continues to be questioned. The debate about whether or not spiritual experiences can, or should, be provided in a secular educational context continues (Erricker & Erricker, 2000; Fraser & Grootenboer, 2004). Spirituality is certainly a concept that has only recently been linked to education (Alexander, 2004; Best, 1996; Purpel & McLaurin, 2004) in Western contexts. Parker Palmer (1998), one of the exponents of including spirituality in education, comments from his perspective as a teacher:

In a world stripped of the sacred, the inner landscape holds no mystery, for it has no variety. Travelling through it, one does not move from prairie to woods to water, from desert to mountain to valley, from the plotted and cultivated to the primal and wild. The desacralized landscape is utterly flat, bereft of texture and tangle, colour and flair, and traversing it soon becomes tedious beyond telling. (p.111)

Palmer suggests that the landscape is irredeemably dull if the aspect of the self he calls spiritual has to be kept outside the classroom door. However, the secular/spiritual divide is real and it is worth noting that in many countries, unlike New Zealand, it is not possible to have the debate. It is illegal to introduce discussion

of religion or spiritual belief into public schools in North America (Halford, 1998/9). In many different contexts education is seen as a challenge to traditional religious and spiritual belief systems.

## Blends

In order to blur the lines between what is secular and what is spiritual many blends have been introduced. Blending makes it impossible to keep certain concepts, as Williams (1998, p.563) puts it “in the box” and safely categorised. A variety of blended concepts are beginning to cover all bases, for example, the concept of secular spirituality (<http://www.congregationalresources.com>), secular Christianity (Geering, 2005), and secular fundamentalism (Benson, 2004). The opposite of this latter term is “religious pluralism” recommended by The Dalai Lama (2002, p.11). He urges people not to change religion but to try and follow their own traditions and to appreciate all pathways to enlightenment. However, if that is not possible he proposes that religious pluralism be adopted as a means of promoting harmony and tolerance.

Some of these blends give messages about what is important in Western society that then influences educational discourse, for instance, the growing popularity of the term spiritual literacy (Halford, 1998/9; Williams, 1998). The appending of the word literacy adds respectability to words that might not carry so much weight alone. Jane Erricker (2000) explored the concept of “emotional literacy” in some depth. In my view there is an implication that without the conjunction with literacy areas like spirituality or emotion would not be included in educational discourse. Noddings’ (1993) blend of “intelligent spirituality” is an approach that favours making choices from an intellectual perspective. Interestingly Howard Gardner rejected the notion of a purely spiritual intelligence. His theory of multiple intelligences is based on extensive research and he proposed seven intelligences (Gardner, 1993). To these he later added naturalist intelligence and partially recognised an existential intelligence or concern with “ultimate issues” (Gardner, 1999, p.64). He did not find enough evidence for a spiritual intelligence. Zohar and Marshall (2004) discuss spiritual intelligence or, as they call it, the SQ but they do not reference Gardner. They link spiritual intelligence, spiritual capital and sustainability and their argument introduces the vocabulary of business and economics into the landscape of spirituality. These blends certainly add to the debate about spirituality but whether they are expedient

ways of avoiding controversy and are a dilution of the original word is an open question. Their main function seems to be to make something unpalatable because it is too nebulous (spirituality), more attractive and to give it practical currency (literacy; intelligence; wealth).

### The Way

This research does not begin from the premise that spirituality is something that some people have and others do not have. Rather, it is conceptualised as something that some people may be more aware of than others. Spirituality has the potential to explain us to ourselves. It seems to be a concept that many people choose to explore as a means of answering the big existential and universal questions about the meaning of life (Young, 2003). Sometimes people go to science to look for these answers, for instance, Stephen Hawking believed that physics would enable him to see the face of god (Hawking, 1988). Others take a humorous approach. In *The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy* the computer Deep Thought says that the ultimate answer to the question of the meaning of life is “forty-two” (Adams, 1979/2005, p.184). Instead of looking to the planets the mystical view is that spirituality can only be found by looking within. Inspiration for this perspective is provided by Rumi, the often-quoted Sufi mystic and poet who remarked “knocking on a door. It opens. I’ve been knocking from the inside!” (Rumi, 1995, p.281). But the questions remain. Does each spiritual path lead to the same place and why do so many different ideas inform the spiritual landscape? Does getting on the path earlier in life make any difference? Is it necessary to find a Way?

Many spiritual traditions espouse a Way. To follow the Way is to become enlightened, to be on the right path and to be following teachings that will bring spiritual fulfilment. Growing up in the Christian tradition meant being exposed to Christian iconography and becoming familiar with the concept of the Way. I remember a large and impressive picture of Jesus on a leafy path with heart exposed and glowing. Underneath it was a label with the words “I am the Way, the Truth and the Light”. One hand was beckoning and in my mind it all seemed very simple and inviting, especially as there was only one pathway in the picture. Complexity increases with the inclusion of other perspectives. The Tao Te Ching opens with the statement that “A way can be a guide, but not a fixed path; names can be given, but

not permanent labels.” (Cleary, 1992, p.9) and this sense of not being fixed, that everything is open to change and further questioning underpins this thesis. It represents just one way of thinking about and considering spirituality as it connects to the education of young children. It does not advocate for one true Way. Armstrong (2005, p.328) studied the world religions and suggests that no matter which Way is taken the great spiritual traditions all acknowledge “practical compassion” as the ultimate practice of spirituality and that this concept informs all religions and spiritual beliefs. Being on the Way, therefore, might imply doing more than talking about the spirit. It means living it in daily practice and engaging it in everyday activity. Hanh (2002) points out that it is desirable to:

give up our personal and national interests, and think of the Earth as our true home, a home for all of us. To bring the spiritual dimension to your daily life, to your social, political and economic life – that is your practice. (p.16)

While the Way might more usually be linked with religion it is part of the spiritual landscape. Increasingly ways of life that show concern for the environment or that oppose oppression are linked to values and beliefs that are described as spiritual rather than religious. The spiritual landscape is complex. It reflects the postmodern world: eclectic, various, layered and multi-directional.

The question of whether spirituality should be expressed in education in more overt ways rather than simply being a taken for granted part of the landscape will probably become a question that people will ask more and more. There will be challenges to the perception of education as a reflection of a secular society. As yet New Zealand has remained on the edge of this debate. However, there are rumours and whispers from the margins about issues like ‘what constitutes prayer in assembly?’ ‘Should schools that promote religious belief have special character status and should they be funded by the government?’ The contentious debate about repealing Section 59 of the Crimes Act to make it unlawful to use ‘unreasonable force’ on children has involved values and beliefs about children and their status in society. In this landscape it looks likely that spirituality may become another contested area of the educational system in Aotearoa. In the UK this has been positive according to Clive Erricker (2000, p.37)

who writes that this debate “reinvigorated the concern for the philosophical basis of education and reflection on the historical differences in educational philosophy that have been in tension in Western societies since the Enlightenment”. In Aotearoa the issues will of course be different and it is against this background that the present research takes place.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter the metaphor of landscape was used and the background to the research was explored with reference to a geography of spirituality. This overview of the spiritual landscape included definitions, differences, blends and different cultural perspectives. It included a narrative of personal experience that explained my wish to wander in the spiritual landscape. The nomadic gaze is conscious of the past and present; it looks to the periphery and to the horizon. The wider perspectives of the landscape described in this chapter and the next constitute the ground for the research. Early childhood education takes place against the background explored in this chapter.

The following chapter discusses the question of research and spirituality in early childhood settings. It introduces the literature that relates to spiritual development and spiritual experience and it includes studies that stress the importance of contextual factors. Taking a sociohistorical perspective chapter Three examines aspects of the spirituality literature that address the question asked in this thesis: how is spirituality supported in different early childhood settings?



## Chapter Three – The literature: Aspects of spirituality

### Introduction

*Most experiences are unsayable*  
(Rilke, 1984, p.4)

This chapter explores aspects of research that contribute to the expanding field of empirical studies that include young children and spirituality. The theoretical background to these studies and the evidence from them contributes to the design and direction of this thesis. Diverse pathways meet and converge but the main areas of empirical research concern spirituality in relation to development, to the wider field of spiritual experience and to contexts that support spirituality. Some of the research that concerns religion and faith are included because they form the background to current work in this field. This review acknowledges history and the changes over time that have influenced attitudes and approaches to research concerning spirituality and young children.

The research literature constructs another layer of the spiritual landscape. Empirical research in this area is challenging because the spirit is impossible to measure and is usually thought to be a nebulous concept that resists the scientific eye. However, people articulate their experience in various ways: through literature; in art; in biographies and life stories; in music; through concern for nature; in their way of life and these are all avenues for research. The history of research into spirituality and children has been concerned with what Rebecca Nye (1996, p.111) termed “god talk” and most of the larger scale studies involve recollections about religious experiences (Elkind & Elkind, 1962; Tamminem, 1994). This chapter takes a sociohistorical perspective and outlines the influence of past research and the changing image of the child (Gittens, 2004).

Another feature of the research literature involves a turn towards making God visible. This body of research is focused on representations of God or ‘the Divine’ (Coles, 1990). More recently an approach that favours participation and narrative has become stronger and researchers are recounting stories of spiritual experience (including their own) that fit shifting definitions of spirituality. Studies that acknowledge specific contexts and include the perspectives of adults involved in that setting are relevant to



research in early childhood environments. This chapter closes with a summary that acknowledges the influences on this particular study.

### **Spiritual development**

Garbarino (2000, p.62) recommends that research on spirituality “should be one of the frontiers for child development research”. Although the frontier is always a site of conflict he argues for better understanding of spiritual development, behaviour and experience. Because spirituality is highly subjective and because of its “multidimensionality” (Benson, 2006, p.485) it is no surprise that research in this area is problematic. Despite this, Roehlkepartain, Benson, King and Wagener (2006, p.5) describe spiritual development in positive and inclusive terms as “a developmental wellspring out of which emerges the pursuit of meaning, connectedness to others and the sacred, purpose, and contributions, each and all of which can be addressed by religion or other systems of ideas and belief”. They are the contributing editors of a book that elaborates on current research in the field of spiritual development. Even in this very comprehensive handbook research with young children and spirituality is thin on the ground.

The word development implies change over time and the discourse of development assumes that something will become more rather than less. Development is expected to follow an expectable pattern and to have a discernable “outcome” (Rogoff, 2003, p.23). For many people spirituality is difficult to think about in those terms. Often the spirit is thought of as unchanging and eternal. Some people perceive children as already spiritual beings and feel that contact with the world will only erode that spirituality. Western frameworks of development tend not to include spirituality unlike other worldviews (Dei, 2002; Irwin, 1984; Pere, 1991; Thaman, 2002).

A case study by Gottlieb (2006) highlights this difference. She admits that “most social scientists have continued to assume the irrelevance of early childhood to spirituality” (p.150). Her case study is set in West Africa and her interactions with the Beng tribe of the Ivory Coast highlight the inadequacy of Western developmental theory in relation to other parts of the world. The Beng consider that infancy is the most spiritual time of life and “young children embody the purest spiritual orientation” (Gottlieb, 2006, p.151). This is a fascinating study that outlines the

influence of a belief in reincarnation on the adult attitude to the infant. It is considered that babies remember the world they have come from. They have parents in that world who may snatch them back if they are displeased with the treatment of the baby and infants are considered to be multilingual because they have come from *wrugbe* (the afterlife) where all ethnic groups can speak and understand each other (Gottlieb, 2006). This case study challenges the 'one size fits all' approach to developmental theory. It is very focused on beliefs in that particular context. This approach to research which is very place specific rather than diffuse made me consider the focus of the research and the advantages of case study. Findings from this kind of case study are absorbing because of their uniqueness. They present another perspective while sidestepping judgement on the validity or otherwise of the belief system or way of life described.

In contrast to case studies that are descriptive and detailed the approach to spiritual, or more accurately religious, development has involved large scale studies that have tended to focus on religion and the experience of adolescents. In 1962 David and Sally Elkind asked one hundred and forty four adolescents in the ninth grade at school (13/14 years old) to write a paragraph about when they feel closest to God and to describe an experience when they felt particularly close to God (Elkind & Elkind, 1962). The essays conveyed that these children felt closest to God in church, when alone, at times of fear or anxiety, when worried, when praying or when reflecting on moral actions. The responses to the second question were categorised as experiences of appreciation (being rescued, escaping death), meditation, lamentation, initiation (Holy Communion, Bar Mitzvah), and revelation (when they felt that God spoke to them).

The Elkind's' research explored gender differences and they concluded that further differences in culture and denomination remained to be investigated. Although they felt that the study was inadequate it has been a platform for further study. They commented that having exercised scientific caution and while expressing surprise because these same young people were resistant to attending formal Church activities that "we came away ... with the conviction that the majority of the young people who participated in the investigation regarded personal religious experience as a significant part of their lives" (Elkind & Elkind, 1962, p.111). They attribute this to the

distinction between institutional and personal religion, a distinction that is relevant to the study of spirituality.

In more recent times David Elkind has explored the postmodern world and grappled with the changes that children face. He proposes a 'cosmopolitan' approach to school that would reflect the changing image of the child, noting that "the modern child was regarded as *innocent* and in need of adult guidance and protection. In contrast, the postmodern child is seen as *competent*, ready and able to deal with life's challenges" (Elkind, 2000/1, p.13). This change in conception of the child and the impact of the image of the child on this research is reflected in the recognition of children as participants rather than the more passive subjects of research. It also means that research about religion, beliefs and spirituality has gradually begun to involve younger children.

The work by Elkind and Elkind (1962) was a precursor to another study that took place in Finland. Tamminem (1994) reported a large survey of 3,000 children aged from seven to twenty years old. This study replicated his first longitudinal study that took place in the early 1970s and he acknowledged that "children's religious experiences have been studied only infrequently" (p.62) attributing this to a developmental tradition that linked religious experience to sexual maturity in puberty. In his 1994 study Tamminem asked similar questions to the Elkind's but was more interested in the effect of age on religious experience and also related this experience to personality and the context of home and school.

Although Tamminem researched religion rather than spirituality his thoughts about research in this similar area of study are relevant. The youngest children answered a question about feeling close to God in a personal oral interview rather than in writing. He felt that research by interview or survey was "impossible" and needed to be more personal and "based on what the respondents remember and relate about their experiences" (Tamminem, 1994, p.64). He noted that different levels of verbal ability may limit the usefulness of an interview format. He also noted that experiences are remembered differently and that the recollection depends on the intensity of the experience and the effect of the experience on later life. He stresses that any experience like this will involve interpretation and such interpretations occur within a particular framework. This study influenced my decision not to interview young

children but to observe and interact with them in the context of familiar educational settings.

Tamminem's (1994) conclusions about religious experience were also relevant. In terms of developmental theory he felt that recall "showed a developmental line from concrete, separate, and external to more abstract, general, and internalized" (p.62). While this interested me it is part of a wider debate about the construction of developmental stage theories. I was more influenced by something he noticed in the answers given to the questions. Tamminem (1994, p.82) found that the subjects of his study related their experiences of God and religion "almost exclusively to everyday situations". This finding brought to my attention the importance of spirituality as an aspect of everyday life and reinforced the potential of a naturalistic approach to research about spirituality and young children. I also realised that the landscape is changing as far as involving children in research goes. These early studies showed traces of developmental theories that conceptualised children as 'too young' for spiritual understandings and abstract thought. However, as demonstrated by the work of Fowler (Fowler & Keen, 1978; Fowler & Dell, 2006), attitudes do change over time.

#### Ages and stages

Fowler (Fowler & Keen, 1978) first presented a series of stages that typify the development of faith. Faith is proposed as a process, a metaphor, and Fowler and Keen (1978) discuss the journey of faith and recognise that it is often used as a synonym for religion and belief. Fowler was influenced by Piaget (1929/51) who suggested that the young child reasons in ways that show confusion and lack logic. Fowler's stages are hierarchical and reflect his time and context. His research drew on his own life history and the story of others and these 300 life stories or "pilgrimages of faith" (Fowler & Keen, 1978, p.16) collected from people age 4 to 84 years old, form the basis for his structural interpretation of faith.

Young children from 4 – 7/ 8 years old were conceptualized as being at Stage 1, the Intuitive-Projective Stage, in Fowler's model of faith development (Fowler & Keen, 1978). He considers that this is a period when interest centres on the self and when the world is perceived to be fluid and uncertain. It was felt that the child does not have

inner structures for sorting and understanding new experiences. Later, in the final stage that signified complete “universalising” faith (Fowler, 1978 p.87), the models presented as the “*incarnation* of the imperatives of absolute love and justice” (p.88) are world figures like Mother Theresa and The Dalai Lama. This hierarchical view has been challenged by research carried out with children at a later date. From her research in the health context Alderson (1994) noted that people who were really involved with children had much more faith in the ability of children to make decisions with wisdom and integrity. She points out that “young and old share a partial rationality” and that age does not automatically bring wisdom (p.61). She critiques Piagetian views of the child, the view that influenced Fowler, as limiting and itself egocentric. Her findings might also be applied in educational contexts. The image of the child in some contexts is a rich and capable child (Malaguzzi, 1998) as opposed to the child who is seen as lacking certain skills and attributes. From this perspective children may be seen as already spiritual or with the potential to be spiritual. They are not seen as having to grow up in order to have the “good heart” so valued by The Dalai Lama (2000, p.13). Research by people who closely observe children as they go about the day in their usual settings often provides many examples of goodness, empathy and wisdom (Erricker, 2000; Paley, 1999).

Writing with Dell (Fowler & Dell, 2006) Fowler reviewed his work and the Stages of Faith. As a result of their analytical critique the stage of Primal Faith has been added. This stage, linked to trust, characterises infants from birth to age 2 years. Fowler’s Intuitive-Projective stage is now proposed as appropriate from age 2 years rather than 4 years and the authors add that “contexts of spiritual nurture and practice, coupled with a person’s spiritual aptitude and discipline, may lead some children to a deeper and more rapid development in faith” (Fowler & Dell, 2006, p.36). This view supports a research focus on context and relationships rather than individual drives and predispositions. They address critical perspectives on Fowler’s theory, acknowledge that the world has changed and suggest that a fresh round of interviews to replicate the original study might show more changes in these stages.

#### Finding a starting place

The longitudinal and stage based studies mentioned so far emphasize adolescence and accept a hierarchical view of development. They form the historical background for

research about spirituality that Nye and Hay (1996) felt had no obvious starting place. These studies focused on memories of earlier experiences and interestingly later research suggests that questioning older children about God, their beliefs and their spiritual experience may be problematic because of cultural constraints (Scott, 2001). Hay and Nye (1998) concluded their study with the finding that by approximately ten years old children knew that speaking about such things was culturally unacceptable. Their research took place in the UK. In the preface to their book *The Spirit of the Child*, Hay called the silence around spirituality a form of “culturally constructed forgetfulness” (Hay & Nye, 1998, p.vi). In order to avoid this phenomenon it seemed logical to speak directly to children and Nye’s (1998) research described her direct approach to research with children.

### Relational Consciousness

Hay and Nye (1998, p.58) point out that the task of mapping “a novel spiritual terrain” is challenging in a context predominantly defined by the vocabulary of Christianity. They began by defining what and how they would look for spirituality and proposed three categories of spiritual sensitivity: awareness-sensing, mystery-sensing, and value-sensing. These categories are unpacked in terms of other concepts like ‘the here and now’, imagination, wonder and awe, delight/despair and ultimate goodness. To be spiritually sensitive is a way of beginning to connect with the spiritual in the research context. Their book (Hay & Nye, 1998), together with Nye’s (1998) doctoral research, drew on evidence from conversations with 38 children aged from 6 – 11 years in a primary school in the UK. Children were interviewed individually and the younger children were invited to draw something in the world that was important to them.

Nye notes that at the beginning of the research a case-study approach worked well and “proved to be an illuminating way of appreciating the layers of significance” present in the information she was given (Hay & Nye, 1998, p.94). She also used grounded theory in order to tease out a ‘core category’ and the concept of “relational consciousness” emerged (Hay with Nye, 1998, p.113). Nye found it impossible to separate the idea of consciousness from the relational. Relational consciousness is an aspect of children’s spirituality recognized in conversation by an increased level of consciousness or perception and also by an emphasis on how the child relates to

“things, other people, him/herself, and God” (p.113). She suggests that from this core concept there arises “meaningful aesthetic experience, religious experience, personal and traditional responses to mystery and being, and mystical and moral insight” (Hay & Nye, 1998, p.114). These dimensions of relational consciousness provide a framework for thinking about children’s spirituality. In her doctoral study Nye (1998) defined spirituality as “a quality of human living that interfaces with and embraces the meanings and mysteries at the depths of our experience” (p.119).

Nye (1998, p.94) began to think about the “personal ‘signature’” of each child and her work connects to the personality of individual children. Influenced by this research, Ayres (2004, p.156) teases out the possibilities of a “*spiritual face*” (her italics) and she also used grounded theory in her doctoral research with children and teachers at preschools, schools and colleges in New Zealand. Ayres (2004, p.150) aimed to produce a theory of “spiritually nurturing teaching”. She questioned what it was (or was not) and how teachers did it. This work produced a new diagram of relational consciousness and links consciousness to spirituality and learning. Nine teachers were involved in the research including two early childhood teachers. Ayres (2004) concluded that when the philosophy of an institution is “in tune” with the educational philosophy of the teachers, as was the case in the early childhood setting, that it was possible to discern a “spiritual atmosphere” that was “very difficult to capture in words” (p.165). I noted the challenge of using words and Ayres was honest about the difficulties of presenting research about spirituality. Her thesis was explicit about spiritual links between consciousness and being human. Again, I felt that my conceptualisation of spirituality as a connecting force between all living things including the natural world was broader than many other researchers’ definitions (Ayers, 2004; Hay & Nye, 1998). My research was also less focused on a psychological perspective (Nye, 1998) and more on the nature of experience in context. My working definition of spirituality comes from a specific ‘ground’ and while grounded theory is an element in all qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b) the case study approach reflects local understandings (see Chapter Two, p.xx) that support spiritual experience.

## **Spiritual experience**

The nature of spiritual experience and accounts of these experiences have consistently formed a platform for research. Biography and autobiography can be a rich source of information about spiritual experiences (Frame, 1991; Guest, 2005; Jung, 1995) and this literature informs qualitative approaches to research (Denzin, 2001). Research about spirituality attempts to make something as abstract as spirituality meaningful and available; to be shaped and analysed. Individual explorations of spirituality are supported by the work of philosophers who have traditionally explored the great existential questions ‘Who am I and why am I here?’ (Young, 2003). These speculations are the backbone of Western philosophy. Similar philosophical questions arise for young children who begin to speculate about the nature of the ‘I’ who is having experiences in the world.

The potential of experience to reveal a higher power or the nature of transcendence was articulated by William James. In fact current Western understandings of spirituality probably equate with James’ idea of personal religion. He proposes it to be: “The feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men (sic) in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine” (James, 1901-2/74, p. 50). James took a sensitive look at the nature of religious experience and includes some of the words that build a vocabulary of spirituality in English. He refers to the transcendent, to devotion, the sacred and the divine. In this thesis the word sacred is sometimes used in place of the word spiritual but the word has a slightly more religious connotation and is linked to the word holy (Pearsall, 1999). James discusses religion as a source of joy and happiness, describes sicknesses of the soul, and experiences of conversion, saintliness and prayer.

James, like the great educationalist Dewey, was a pragmatist. This is a branch of philosophical thought that, according to Bullock and Trombley (2000) seeks to interpret belief in terms of its practical effects. The practical effect of acknowledging the inner life from James’ (1901-2/74) perspective is so that people may articulate their experiences of hope, peace and consolation through spiritual or religious means without being considered ill or unstable. James’ reflections are supported by his personal experiences, by autobiographical accounts and by a series of case histories. His work is a precursor to later studies that seek to explore the spiritual experiences of



children by talking to them. The century since he gave the Gifford lectures (1901-2/74) has seen a return to narrative and value is given to the stories people tell about themselves and their experiences. In later studies experience is mediated through context and the lens of culture and community is brought to bear on accounts of experience (Bateson, 1994; Rogoff, 2003).

### Children and their worldviews

The Children and Worldviews Research Project (Erricker, Erricker, Sullivan, Ota & Fletcher, 1997) took a narrative approach to research about children's experience of life in the UK in the early 1990's. This major study addressed diversity and spirituality in relation to the concept of 'the whole child'. This work has contributed to the growth of interest in spirituality and the words of children reflect their concerns and experiences in the world. Fletcher and Ota (1997) interviewed children and S, who is 12 years old, voiced her global perspective about the planet:

- S. Well everything is around life and everything is about life, really like the simplest thing is alive ... it's like when something is dead it isn't here any more and so when you're alive that's the most important thing.
- Q. What do you mean by the simplest thing?
- S. Well, even something like a dandelion ... or a beetle ... it has a life and it lives its life and it has something to do doesn't it? So that's the most important thing, keeping alive. (Fletcher & Ota, 1997, p.116)

This conversation outlined "a vision of life" (Fletcher & Ota, 1997, p.117) as fostered in a New Age community. The Worldviews Project supported thinking about children in a context-sensitive and non-judgemental way. The work that has spiralled out from this research has been very important to the debate about spiritual development and its inclusion in the UK curriculum (SCAA, 1996). Interest in this work also led to the setting up of *The International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, currently edited by Cathy Ota. The existence of this journal has greatly encouraged research in this field. Ten years after Nye and Hay's article (1996) that questioned where a starting place for this kind of research might be this International Journal has articles that include perspectives from different denominations, different nationalities, and a range of ages and educational settings, including early childhood environments.

Sullivan (1997) confirmed that this research project explored the inner life of children and that the findings should encourage adults to gain insight from children's perspectives. According to Sullivan (1997) this happened to the researchers involved in the Project who "learned to respect this inner life and world of children and have come to see it as deeply spiritual in the widest possible sense" (p.170). This research with children took place in "the ordinary day-to-day life of the classroom" (p.171) and Sullivan explains that researchers did not do anything that a teacher could not do. However, he acknowledges that they had time: time to listen and build relationships, to be trusted and to explore the concept of special places. The children they worked with were aged from 5 – 11 years and were in primary schools that the researchers felt were "in tune" (Erricker & Ota, 1997, p.37) with their child-centred, subjective and open-ended inquiry. This approach resulted in fascinating stories, an increased respect for the ability of children to make meaning with others about their experiences and advocacy for space and time to enable children to contribute to educative processes that affect their lives.

The addition of spirituality as an aspect of the curriculum in the UK prompted attention to be focused on research and debate in that area (Best, 1996). McCreery (1996) attempted one of the few empirical studies with younger children and wondered "what notions of the spiritual children have at the age of four and five?" (p. 197). She took spirituality to mean "an awareness that there is something other, something greater than the course of everyday events" (p.197). In order to achieve her aims she paid attention to the contexts of home and school and recognised the influence of popular culture. She points out that "a child of between three and four is beginning to explore his or her world in several places at one time. The most influential places are likely to be: home, school and television" (McCreery, 1996, p.198). Instead of a formal interview and asking questions McCreery (1996) presented children with situations in order to elicit their responses. She acknowledges the influence of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. This theoretical perspective recognises the importance of culture and relationships and Vygotsky proposed that the 'intermental' aspects of learning that happens between people becomes internalised in the individual. Key to the theory is the emphasis on language and Vygotsky (1986, p.84) stated that "the child's intellectual growth is contingent on his mastering the social means of thought, that is, language".

In order to enter the world of children's beliefs McCreery (1996) used three prompts. In her first encounters with the children in the school hall she used pictures of the natural world but this approach was not productive. She then used an invented story and a children's book *Badger's Parting Gifts* and tried to discover what children understand about life and death. I found this problematic because while children may spontaneously mention death it seems intrusive to introduce it as a topic into the everyday life of children if it merely serves the purposes of research. Finally, by using her nephew's picture to encourage a more natural interaction, McCreery (1996) achieved some challenging conversations, for instance, these speculations about the end of the sky:

- D. It goes on for the whole world
- I. Maybe a year – infinity
- Me Infinity – what's that?
- I. That means you've finished all your numbers (p.204)

She noticed that the children were quite happy to talk about abstract subjects and in fact “they challenge my question refusing to give me a tangible answer, and instead offer me a much more abstract concept” (McCreery, 1996, p.204). Her insights offer a glimpse into the imaginative world of children as they grapple with meaning. Her study is useful as she identified possible practical difficulties, for example she found using a tape recorder with a number of children very confusing. Her work with the pictures was not effective but her study affirmed that when researching with young children “the use of stories which relate to their own lives is very rewarding” (McCreery, 1996, p.204). From this study I concluded that when McCreery engaged children in natural conversations in a place they were used to that her findings were richer. When something was introduced from outside the lives of children or they were in an unfamiliar place they were correspondingly uncomfortable with the process. I also gathered that they were more forthcoming once they got to know her and when she was no longer a stranger to them. Building relationships is an important part of the research process and is also an aspect of spirituality. I realised that there would be no point referring to connection in my definition of spirituality if my research maintained a distance between myself and the participants.

The close relationship that teachers have with children in early childhood settings lends immediacy to their observations. Even so, research about spirituality presents its own challenges and the accounts written by experienced teachers bear this out. While she was visiting a kindergarten Vivian Paley wondered how she would recognise the “spiritual event” (Paley, 1999, p.28). Using narrative Paley (1999) engages with everyday life and writes about lived experience including her own uncertainty. Eaude (2005) admits that recognising spirituality in early childhood contexts is a challenge because of issues with definition, the link with religion and the use of older children’s words extrapolated onto younger children. He asked 14 preschool teachers of young children to answer questions about spiritual development and concluded that “it is embedded in everyday practice and yet often remarkable, something really important for all schools and all teachers, yet too elusive quite to be pinned down” (p.245). Adults find spirituality hard to recognise and difficult to define in words. Researchers working with children to find out more about spirituality have often attempted to make their task easier by requesting that children make their thoughts ‘visible’.

### **Making God visible**

A thread that runs through nearly all the research mentioned so far is that children have been requested to draw either a picture of God, the person they consider Divine, or “the most important or special thing to them in life” (Fletcher & Ota, 1997, p.115). The Freudian idea that the image of the father is also the image of God and that this may be more obvious in times of distress was the theoretical basis of research carried out by Ana-Maria Rizzutto (1979) and is outlined in her book *The Birth of the Living God*. This research did not include young children directly but was retrospective and used memories from childhood as the basis for study. In her twenty case studies of 10 men and 10 women Rizzutto (1979) interviewed patients in order to construct a detailed biography about family relationships and God. She also asked her participants to draw a picture of their family including themselves on their first day in hospital and to draw a picture of God on the final day.

Rizzutto’s (1979) request reflected her opinion that children do not learn about God by themselves; she said “God is found in the family. Most of the time he is offered by the parents to the child; he is found in everyday conversation, art, architecture, and

social events” (p.8). Her study is based on psychoanalytic theory and she was drawn to an analysis of family relationships, particularly the relationship between parent and child and the self that is formed as a consequence. In her view the idea of Freud that the image of God is based solely on the image of the parent is too limited. She affirmed context and acknowledged that representations of self and other (parent, God) “happens in the wider context of family romances and myths between parents, grandparents, other children, the religious and political background of the family - in a word, within the entire familial mythologization of everyday life” (Rizzuto, 1979, p.186). Her work ends by completely validating social experience and the power of story, myth, play and illusion, to construct the self.

In the course of this research Rizzuto (1979) realised that she had not given sufficient attention to the participants’ experience of the parental relationship and the closeness with God that her patients were willing to articulate. Her reflections give weight to the importance of listening rather than imposing ideas. The importance of listening is also noted by Coles (1990) in a landmark study that marked the emergence of empirical research into the spiritual life of children. While Rizzuto was influenced by Sigmund Freud it was his daughter, Anna Freud, who told Robert Coles to “let the children help you with their ideas on the subject” (Coles, 1990, p.xvi). Coles pays tribute to Ana-Maria Rizzuto’s research and referred to her idea of requesting an actual representation of God and encouraging children to draw or paint their image of God as part of his study.

#### The spiritual life of children

Coles’ (1990) seminal work *The Spiritual Life of Children* grew from research on a major project called the *Children of Crisis* study where children described their experience of life in America in the 1970’s. This is where he first “learned to talk with children” who he felt were “going through their everyday lives amid substantial social and educational stress” (Coles, 1990, p.xi). His work highlights the heterogeneous nature of society in North America and the diversity of children’s experiences. The uniqueness of each story told by children in this study illustrates the effectiveness of narrative and Coles (1990) asked children directly about their experience instead of relying on adult recollections. His team collected interviews, often more than one, from over 500 children aged 8 – 12, the youngest being 6 years

old. They were from a variety of countries and cultures and from predominantly Christian, Jewish and Islamic backgrounds. He ended with 293 pictures of God mainly from Catholic and Protestant children because visualisations and images of God are forbidden in the Jewish and Muslim religions.

The depth of the interviews and the text that either supports the pictures or stands alone is detailed and wide-ranging. Haroon, a Pakistani boy from London and a Muslim, discussed bullying, the nature of prayer, and the differences between their beliefs. Coles (1990) recognised Haroon as “tolerant, forbearing, forgiving” (p.69) and someone who is able to think about “the vastness of this universe” (p.74). His experience of talking with children caused him to move away from stage driven theories of developmental psychology and into a “phenomenological and existential” (p.39) area of research. His work honoured the experiences that children presented to him in their art, through their talk, and by sharing the stories of their spiritual life.

Coles (1990) writes in the spirit of genuine inquiry; with great respect for the children and their views. He tries not to do what one Hopi girl says that most ‘Anglos’, or Westerners, do, that is “listen to hear themselves” (p.39). She tells him about her view of spirituality as an indigenous person. She believes that god exists in the sky, moon and sun and that “our God is our (the Hopi) people, if we remember to stay here [on the consecrated land]. This is where we’re supposed to be, and if we leave, we lose God” (Coles, 1990, p.25). A sense of mistrust in authority and the damaging effect of not being respected drifts through their conversation together. This child’s words made me reflect on my definition of spirituality as a sense of connection between all things. In not linking spirituality with a specific consciousness or essential self it becomes unlimited and shared rather than being confined to one group or class of people. In Aotearoa the indigenous connection with the land must be acknowledged and the history of the land and the events of the past that might make telling stories or producing artefacts about spirituality inappropriate must be taken into account. Cadogan (2004) points out that “there have been historic experiences of misuse and abuse of such material” (p.40).

Coles (1990) research connected with others who asked children to represent God visually. Landy (2001), for instance, built on this work and travelled the world asking children to draw God. His study was based on the premise that children can see God

and it is also about his Jewish identity and the growing spiritual awareness of his own young children. Curiously his account of the research journey is unreferenced but it is very direct and contains many examples of art and stories that children from around the world gave him. Landy (2001) talked to other parents about their children and people told him about their experiences with children as young as two who show spiritual understanding. He contends that at this age children show their awareness of God through nature and “know that objects in nature hold the powers of good and evil” (Landy, 2001, p.172) but these stories were mainly told by parents and most of his direct conversations are with older children age 4 to 11 years. He says that his frame of reference expanded as he explored other spiritual belief systems and the heart of his research is trust. He began to trust himself and the children he came in contact with and his study affirmed “the power of the image and the metaphor to reveal meaning” (Landy, 2001, p.6).

### **Spirituality in context**

Geographical metaphors highlight differences between contexts (Hay & Nye, 1998). The landscape of spirituality that people are embedded within affects what is seen and what can be communicated to others. This became clear to me when reading a large scale study from the cultural context of the Netherlands. De Roos, Iedema and Miedema (2003) investigated the influence of the religious denomination favoured by mothers and schools on 198 preschoolers’ beliefs. This study took into account the orthodox nature of the schools and hypothesised that children who went to open schools would have a more loving caring God in mind. They also wanted to discover if there would be differences in the conception of God between children aged between 4 and 6 years old, and whether gender would affect this. This study used structured methods to collect information. There was a 45 minute interview, children were asked to draw a picture of God, they completed scales about their construction of self and others and were also given a questionnaire about the potential characteristics of God. Finally, mother-child attachment representations were measured (De Roos, Iedema & Miedema, 2003, p.170). Despite this variety of methods the findings are inconclusive because so many variables intrude. The researchers mention that some mothers probably talk more about God than others. I wondered why mothers were included in the research and not parents. There may also be discrepancies because some children were interviewed at home, others at school. The religious history of the mothers was

not known and another variable concerned differences between schools. As an outsider to the Dutch educational context I found the specific differences between reformed, Pentecostal and interdenominational schools confusing. This study did not tell me very much despite its scientific approach to research. De Roos, Iedema and Miedema (2003) themselves refer to the need for more research in this area.

In a completely different context a qualitative study set in early childhood settings in Japan explored religion in different environments and the effect on curricula and practices. Holloway (2000, p.13) says that her research served to “underscore the importance of understanding how collectively held belief systems inform educational practice”. She stressed the importance of cultural models and said that when these were articulated by the directors of the preschools these cultural models guided curriculum and provided “a vision of appropriate practice” (Holloway, 2000, p.14). Clearly from Holloway’s perspective it is more effective to conduct research in specific environments that are explicit about their purpose and philosophy. The chosen early childhood setting must reflect the research focus and there must be some shared understanding of the cultural model, or the ecology, of that setting. This study influenced my decision to research in environments where spirituality was part of the philosophy. After preliminary work in a number of Christian and Buddhist preschools in Japan Holloway’s (2000) research eventually involved three early childhood settings and she observed children and interviewed teachers. Her work included holding focus groups so that parents and interested others could participate and comment on the case studies that were constructed from her time in these different settings.

This inclusive approach provided a useful model for my research. Because my focus is spirituality not religion I turned to different philosophies that recognise the spirituality of children, albeit in different ways. The Montessori environment, a Steiner kindergarten and a context that recognised ‘the whole child’ suited this approach. Teachers and parents were included in Holloway’s (2000) case studies and this influenced the design of my study.



## Spirituality in everyday situations

Research in specific educational environments enables various religious or spiritual perspectives to be shared with others and this kind of qualitative study has the potential to be richly descriptive and detailed. An account by Borhan (2004, p.378) took “a look inside an Islamic preschool in Malaysia”. The writer involved the reader in a typical day, described routines and practices and fulfilled her aim “to give the reader an understanding of one type of early childhood education that children in Malaysia may go through and to illustrate the different way of teaching values, in this particular case the Islamic values” (p.389). Recent studies set in primary school classrooms reflect culture and context (Fraser & Grootenboer, 2004; Hyde, 2005). Research is becoming focused on current situations in everyday life instead of relying on retrospective accounts and uses multiple ways of finding out what meaning children attach to certain concepts and ideas. This includes listening to children. In order to hear the spiritual the shared language of spirituality moves closer to understandings of language as a metaphor for communication through symbol and gesture (Forman & Fyfe, 1998).

### **Hearing the spiritual**

The possibility of hearing the spiritual begins to lead to the need for a wider interpretation of Vygotsky’s (1986) theory. His theory emphasizes social interaction and culture but is also very focused on speech as a precursor to thought. The link between thought and language as the spoken word may have been overemphasised in some early childhood educational contexts. Spirituality can be described as beyond words and part of more “nuanced” communication that includes gaze and gesture (Rogoff, 2003, p.310). In her research with young children Champagne (2001) suggested that it is possible to focus on spirituality communicated “without words” (p.82). Champagne, like McCreery (1996), wished to know more about the spiritual awareness of young children and when involved in the experience of two very young children she reflected that:

Arielle and Nicolas bring to our attention the very challenge of recognizing what, in our daily experience, has the potential of being an open door to spirituality. They can help us discover where spirituality can be found. The challenge resides in our adult ability to share, even to participate in those

basic life experiences, which are the very substance of spirituality. The challenge of listening to and listening for children's spirituality is double. It holds the challenge of listening to children, and the challenge of recognising spirituality. (p.81)

Champagne's work included the effect on the researcher and emphasized the reflexive challenge. She was transparent about her position and stressed that research in this area cannot simply be focused on participants but that the researcher is embedded in the process. In her work as a hospital chaplain she felt that it is possible to *listen to* and *listen for* spirituality (Champagne, 2001) and stated that "the more attentive to spirituality we become, the more we hear and witness it. Becoming aware of spirituality is undoubtedly one good way to foster it. The challenge is to recognise its presence" (Champagne, 2001, p.82).

In a later study Champagne (2003) discussed preschoolers (children aged between 3 and 6) and their modes of being. She observed sixty children from three day care centres and recorded verbatim one hundred hours of "daily life situations". She notes that "attention was given to words, facial expressions, attitudes and gestures, as well as the *inner dynamics* they expressed in a way objectively observable" (p.45). She acknowledges that "every situation occurring in daily life can be an occasion both for a sensitive, relational and existential perception and response of the child" (p.45). Her engagement in everyday life again indicated that a naturalistic approach is the least disruptive and the most effective when researching the spiritual experience of young children.

The three spiritual modes of being Champagne (2003) presented from this study are sensitive, relational and existential and each mode of being is explored in relation to the spiritual dimension and used a theological method of hermeneutics as an approach to interpretation. Hermeneutics is usually linked to a phenomenological method and is a way of interpreting truth by studying lived experience. The theological framework acknowledges that a framework of Christian values will be brought to bear on the analysis. While phenomenological studies assume that there is a truth or 'essence' that it is possible to find (Hyde, 2005) this is not something I am assuming in this thesis although there is a focus on lived experience. Champagne's (2003) study shows that research can be conceptualized as a means of providing answers to some very

challenging questions: how can spirituality be recognized in preschoolers? How can I recognize what this child is experiencing here and now on a spiritual level? It is also a means of revealing the struggle and the difficulties in communicating and articulating what she called “the spiritual dimension in day to day living” (Champagne, 2003, p.44). Her research affirmed the relevance of attending to everyday life in connection with spirituality and the experiences of young children.

Like Champagne, Hart (2003) also recognised the rewards and challenges of listening to accounts of spiritual experiences but he called the spiritual dimension of children’s lives ‘secret’. The thought that spirituality is secret does not match Champagne’s observations that acknowledge the transparency of young children’s actions and gestures. Champagne quite correctly in my view puts the onus on the researcher to ‘listen to and for’ and assumes that the spiritual is being openly communicated. Hart has conducted in depth interviews with more than 100 individuals and gathered written accounts from hundreds more children and adults. He describes this as a process of “trying to hear the delicate and often very private spiritual moments that can shape a life” (p.4). His work adds to the construction of spirituality as personal, memorable and an aspect of experience that inevitably becomes part of narrative accounts of life experiences. Hart (2003) recognises the importance of research in this area and says that when speaking to adults he realised that childhood moments of spiritual awareness had informed their lives. He adds “these data highlight how relevant children’s spirituality may be for all families and all teachers” (p.7). Supported by Hart’s (2003) conclusions my study acknowledges that families and teachers have an influence on the spiritual experiences of children and that spirituality is something that concerns them and has had an impact on their own lives. All early childhood settings in Aotearoa involve families as well as teachers and children and the case studies for this research were set up to include parents as part of the early childhood community.

Hart’s (2003) investigation revealed five general kinds of spiritual capacity: wisdom, wonder, wondering, the meeting between you and me and seeing the invisible. These categories, like the ‘sensing’ of Hay and Nye (1998) and Champagne’s (2003) modes of being, suggest ways of alerting oneself to the spiritual. Hart (2003) proposed that there is a spiritual temperament or style that is linked to intuition and to these spiritual

capacities. There must also be intuition, on the part of the researcher. His study made me realise that the spiritual landscape definitely includes my own memories and he said that one of the effects of the research is that it helped him to honour and renew his own childhood (p.270). This is something that Landy (2001) also acknowledged when he states that “the children have led me back and will lead me forward” (p.209) and Champagne (2003) suggested that by caring for the spiritual life of children our own may be enhanced.

#### The child as saviour of the world

The perspectives I have outlined so far show the movement of research away from memories of childhood to research that involves working directly with children themselves. Finally, there seems to be another level of engagement and that is the use of children to explain the adult to him or her self. Research that does this reflects the image of the child as ‘redemptive’ (Moss & Petrie, 2002). This child is perceived as capable of saving the world and the souls of adults. Constructions of the child as innocent, whole, spiritual, a product of the material world and a focus for the hopes and dreams of others are implicit in the research described in this chapter. As Moss and Petrie (2002) point out:

understandings of the child as futurity, as innocent and as redemptive agent are closely linked. It is the incompleteness of the child, the lack of corruption, the ability to inscribe the *tabula rasa* and to govern the soul that makes the child such a promising agent of redemption. (p.61)

Research constructed from this image for the child has to be transparent about its impact on children and the related effect on adults. I began to contemplate my own image of the child and to realise that this image might be differently constructed in each case study situation. Ethical issues arose concerning the morality of embarking on research that simply makes adults feel better about themselves. I began to be aware of the pitfalls of an approach that could be perceived as indulgent. On the other hand I knew that this research called for personal resources and an orientation towards spirituality (Champagne, 2001). Because it involves young children it would not be ethical to maintain distance between myself and the participants.

Another ethical issue that arose for me from the literature is the use of stories about death or loss to elicit information from children. Erricker (1997) discussed the mixed responses of children to stories of loss. An account about the death of a grandmother was read out and when asked afterwards if he wished to be interviewed a boy wrote:

NO (Written large to fill the page)

It was stupid of them to come in because it started up memories even  
thow you let your feelings out.

And don't go on about it enymore

NO (p.100)

This seemed clear enough; the use of material to induce feelings of sadness in young children gets a response but there is an element of manipulation that does not seem appropriate. The following research looked in some detail at how spirituality can be nurtured and supported in the early childhood educational context. This is perceived to be an adult responsibility rather than the responsibility of the child to 'reveal' the spiritual to the adult.

### **Spiritual well-being**

Reflection about different ways of researching the same thing (spirituality) made me conscious of wanting to take an approach that contributes to early childhood contexts and that benefits children in that community. The focus of research undertaken recently by Mary Daly (2004) in Ireland is the well-being of children. Daly's (2004) work builds on her doctoral study where she discovered that early childhood teachers acknowledge the importance of spirituality but do not prioritise it in their practice. She explored the emotional, social and spiritual dimension of early childhood education in some detail and stated that attention to these aspects of life are a response to studies about the depression felt by children, a depression that might express itself through suicide in later years. In this respect Ireland is like New Zealand, a small country and fine on the surface but with worrying statistics. Currently New Zealand is third of all OECD countries in terms of child abuse and has one of the highest rates of youth suicide in the OECD (<http://www.msd.govt.nz>). This is not a statistic to be proud of. I share Daly's view that anything that might counteract feelings of alienation from life must be encouraged and if this means emphasising the emotional,

social and spiritual dimension as Daly suggests then this is obviously an important research area.

Daly (2004, p.26) proposes that “the heart of spirituality is being able to look inward in search of meaning”. Her theoretical perspective is Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs and her work reflects the language of Maslow who proposed self-actualisation and peak experiences as the highest level of attainment. However, Maslow’s pyramid encapsulates one of the critiques of spirituality which is that it sometimes implies a search for perfection and the unattainable. Daly herself mentions that only about 1% of people would fit Maslow’s criteria for self-actualisation. She originally sent a nationwide questionnaire out to 622 early childhood practitioners in Ireland. There was a 64% return rate for the questionnaires that asked these teachers about emotional, social, moral and spiritual development. In reply to her question about spiritual development two thirds of the respondents felt that spiritual development was as important as cognitive development. However, when it came to teaching practice only one third felt it should be prioritised in early childhood settings. Daly’s (2004) book is a response to this disparity and she refers to social problems in order to strengthen her argument for the inclusion of spirituality in early childhood settings.

Daly’s cultural background is itself interesting and her work is a brave gesture in Ireland, an officially Roman Catholic country with traditional value systems. Her suggestion that activities like meditation would support spiritual development is an idea that could be quite controversial in the context of a Roman Catholic country. I mention this as someone who was once told by someone who defined themselves as Christian that I would be opening my soul to the devil if I meditated. In a review about Zen and the brain Austin (1999) suggested that enlightenment can be learnt in childhood by means of processes like meditation thus encouraging the individual to be “more *actualized, buoyant and compassionate*” (his italics) (p.47).

Daly’s (2004) work picked up on the importance of having contexts that encourage children to reach their full potential, in the emotional, social, moral and spiritual areas. She recognised the power of teachers to achieve this and includes a range of suggestions for early childhood teachers who wish to encourage spiritual development. A focus on the spirituality of teachers complements studies that concentrate on children. The attitude of teachers and their willingness to engage with

the spiritual is key to encouraging (or not) spirituality in educational contexts (Eaude, 2005; Hyde, 2005; Ota, 2001).

Following Daly's lead three positive concepts present themselves as related areas of research both linked to optimum states that include the spiritual dimension. My working definition proposes that spirituality opens up possibilities for good in the world. The following discussion connects spirituality to resilience, a desirable state that affirms the ability to survive in a difficult world. Secondly it explores the link between spirituality and happiness, the pursuit of which is an often overlooked fact of life. The third aspect of spirituality to be discussed is peace.

### Resilience

In a large international study about resilience subtitled *Strengthening the Human Spirit* Grotberg (1995) defines resilience as "a universal capacity which allows a person, group or community to prevent, minimize or overcome the damaging effects of adversity" (p.4). There is no reason why this capacity may not come from a spiritual source. In a study based on three early childhood settings in New Zealand "spiritual cohesion" (Duncan, Bowden & Smith, 2005, p.52) is mentioned as a source of coping for children and their families. The research literature about health emphasizes the role of spirituality in promoting well being and resilience in life. Spirituality is seen by the World Health Organisation as a means of supporting well-being, it is linked to quality of life and is a source of "self-wholeness and stability" (Boero et al., 2005, p.916). While the health focus is outside the scope of this chapter the link with family makes resilience and spirituality relevant to early childhood educational settings. This is an important strand of research and needs to be acknowledged in education. Ignoring the spiritual dimension of life may be seen as a rejection by families for whom spirituality is a guiding force. In their literature review about healing and paediatric health, Barnes, Plotnikoff, Fox and Pendleton (2000, p.3) suggest that spirituality contributes to a strong sense of cultural identity and admit that "although little of the resilience literature directly examines the role of spirituality, that which does suggests that spirituality and involvement in a faith community can serve as protective factors". They refer to the web of belief that joins culture, community and families and welcome research that contributes to mutual understanding of spirituality and its impact on children.

## Happiness

A related, but different, strand of research has looked at spirituality in connection with happiness. In the introduction to his study about the psychology of happiness, a state that he calls “flow” Csikszentmihalyi (1992, p.2) suggests that “people who learn to control inner experience will be able to determine the quality of their lives, which is as close as any of us can come to feeling happy” and affirms the potential of his concept to illuminate meaningful experience. Research has linked happiness with Buddhist practice and more specifically to control of the mind that induces meditative states (Austin, 1999). This is something that can be learned and various spiritual practices might contribute to this. I am reminded of Montessori’s (1972, p.298) emphasis on silence that contributes in her view to a “spiritual sense” and “inner sensitivity”. Montessori (1972, p.300) felt that the result of her practical approach to religion and the spirit was “a rich source of joy and inspiration” (p.300) to young children.

## Peace

The sense of being at peace can be conceptualized as something that is experienced as an inner quality. It is also something that can be supported in certain environments and Pava (2003) reports that in organizational terms feelings of “incompleteness” are common when people do not feel that their spirituality is recognised. He reviews three research studies from the business world and says that until the potential for spirituality to be “everywhere” (Pava, 2003, p.397) is realised that it will not be revealed in such studies. He recognises that students as well as teachers have the ability to build bridges and foster community in educational settings. In an educational context Elton-Chalcraft (2002) interviewed ten teachers who perceived themselves as supporting spirituality. She identified four categories of spirituality from teacher stories: the inner, the social and moral, the environmental and the transcendental dimension. These teachers’ stories mentioned the importance of encouraging an exploration of the inner self by relaxation and breathing. They expressed possibilities for “the fulfilment of inner peace and calm achieved by a knowledge and love of one’s inner self” (Elton-Chalcraft, 2002, p.315). She links spirituality with well-being and an awareness of self that promotes feelings of inner peace.



Peace is often promoted as a universal value or virtue. Popov, Popov and Kamelin (1995) in *The Virtues Project* present ideas for parents and teachers to work with in order to support the child as “a spiritual being” (p.3). The Virtues Project could be described as a movement towards the spiritual and is used in a variety of educational settings in New Zealand. This project recognises and affirms the spiritual potential of children that is increased when they have a “spiritual companion” (p.42) who may be a family member or a teacher. It is the responsibility of these adults to promote peaceful environments and to encourage children to recognise peace in their daily lives.

### **Wider perspectives**

In her pedagogical practice at a kindergarten Myers (1997) recommends looking at the edge of theory, looking at the margins, in order to find opportunities that recognise spirituality. She shares her observations of relationships in the context of a Head Start Programme. Myers’ life experience leads her to critique theory in terms of cultural difference and to acknowledge sociocultural theories in terms of spirituality. In particular she recommends educators to consider the zone of proximal development as “the space in which transcendence occurs” (Myers, 1997, p.32). Myers’ work, like that of Aline Wolf (1996), a Montessori educator, has been mentioned by Ratcliff and Nye (2006, p.476) as in the genre of “popular books consisting almost entirely of opinions and suggestions taken from personal experiences”. In my opinion their work contributes to the growing teacher research that is bridging any divide between the two activities of teaching and researching (Rinaldi, 2006). In early childhood settings there is a growing requirement for these roles to be seen as the same and as not mutually exclusive. This calls for a broader understanding of theory and the recognition that people are building theory all the time.

#### Risks for the researcher

The literature contains warnings for the researcher. Nye (1998, p. 276) mentioned that her self questioning made her “painfully aware of the dangers inherent in the act of ‘analysing’ spirituality at all”. When Peshkin (1986) investigated the experience of children in a fundamentalist Christian college he put himself at risk. He stayed for a year and recorded the day to day life of the college interviewing teachers and students.

He spent time in the community and felt that he had built a relationship with the teachers but still found that he was regarded not only as an outsider but as unsaved and not one of the chosen. He felt that his study damaged his view of human nature and he experienced prejudice and intolerance. This is ironic in that many studies about spirituality or religion are specifically designed to acknowledge different belief systems and promote shared understandings. However, it does highlight a problem when researching belief systems that are very far removed from one's own. An outside perspective and greater distance from the research does not guarantee immunity. On the other hand the inside eye can mean that research becomes a means of 'preaching to the converted'. In my research I resolved to be very transparent about my intentions and processes in order to find a middle way and to resolve this issue. By constructing three case studies informed by different philosophies the possibility for varying experiences in each setting was presented. Drummond (2000) described a study that explored different environments as "enriching" ( p.1) and in this research the intention was to pursue richness and diversity and avoid the pitfalls described by Peshkin (1986).

#### Choosing a direction

In relation to this thesis my resolve to engage with spirituality rather than what Nye (1996, p. 111) calls "God talk" is affirmed by her statement that there is "a case for taking 'spirituality' seriously in its own right" (p.110). In attempting to do this my decision-making as framed by the literature began not to be about 'will I?' but 'how?' Instead of going wide and approaching a large number of children it seemed potentially more effective to gain in-depth knowledge of specific contexts. As Nye (1996) stated "evidence for children's early spiritual life needs to be sought amongst their perception, awareness and response to those ordinary activities that can act as signals of transcendence" (p.111). Such signals of transcendence linked to ordinary activity are what I wished to connect with.

A challenge of the research would be to find my own level of sensitivity (Champagne, 2003) and intuition (Hart, 2003) towards the spiritual. It is clear from many studies that spiritual (or religious) understandings are linked closely to context (Erricker et al., 1997; de Roos, Iedema & Meidema, 2001) and parents and teachers also influence spiritual experience in early childhood environments (Daly, 2004; Holloway, 2000).

My conception of spirituality is that it cannot be separated from the settings that are inhabited by children in daily life. The stories children tell and the artefacts they produce support this thought. Studies show that they are masterly at finding the wonder in daily existence (Fletcher & Ota, 1997; Hart, 2003). A contextual approach underlines the fact that, as Roehlkepartain, King, Wagener and Benson (2006, p.282) point out, interest in research and spirituality “is beginning to shift its focus from individuals to transactions between individuals, and the various contexts in which they function”. As Dei (2002) acknowledges “spirituality and questions of human/social ecology go hand in hand” (p.343), for instance, in the African context spirituality is based on knowledge of the community. This community also includes the ancestors who “keep a watchful eye on everyday practices and social activities”.

It seemed to me that despite reservations (Nye, 1998) and warnings (Peshkin, 1986) that research about spirituality in the context of early childhood educational contexts is more than justified. Spiritual development is a phrase often linked to a psychological tradition that has not affirmed the spiritual in relation to young children. Spiritual awareness, the presence of the spiritual, spiritual experience and other aspects of the spiritual dimension are phrases more likely to occur in recent research. Over time research has become focused on spaces where encounters with the spiritual are more likely. This requires a commitment on the part of the researcher to participate in the everyday world of children where spiritual experiences take place. These factors all influenced the design of this research and the methodological approach taken in the construction of qualitative case studies in three different early childhood settings.

## **Conclusion**

Historically research about spirituality addressed biography and focused on retrospective personal accounts of spiritual experience. As studies with young children that focus on spirituality are relatively unusual this review also included research that mentioned God or religion instead of, or as well as, spirituality. Many studies involve large groups of people (Coles, 1990; Hart, 2003) and take a wide sweeping view. Spirituality seems to me to be a topic that lends itself to deeper discussion and more detailed study. I also feel that current understandings of spirituality affirm that it is a concept that can be studied in its own right (Nye, 1996)

and need not be joined to religions or specific belief systems. Research about religion or that takes a religious perspective tends to be less inclusive. In this review studies from primary or secondary schools have also been included but in New Zealand early childhood settings are very different from these other educational contexts and so findings from these studies are not particularly useful although some crossovers are inevitable in a field that is growing and is challenging what Roehlkepartain, Benson, King and Wagener (2006, p.3) call “the historic marginalisation of religion and spirituality in the social sciences”. It is encouraging that work that acknowledged the lived experience of children has confronted conventional developmental perspectives and advances in research about spirituality with young children show less concern with memory and more for accounts of direct experience in the context of school or family. In order to involve young children researchers have tried to make the spiritual visible and recently an emphasis has been placed on listening for the spiritual. Research reflects the current image of the child. This image has changed over time and commentary about the image of the child is threaded throughout this socio-historical review of the literature. An image of the competent child who is capable and well aware of the world around him or her is reflected in this thesis.

The literature highlights the effectiveness of researcher involvement in studies that take a qualitative approach. The direction of future research seems to be case studies where children and adults can share spiritual experiences in familiar environments and that is the approach taken in this research. Case studies have the potential to bring different contexts to life (Gottlieb, 2006); to include techniques like observation that are appropriate in early childhood settings (Champagne, 2003; Holloway, 2000) and involve a range of participants including teachers and parents (Daly, 2004; Eade, 2005). Recent studies indicate that research can be transparent about its spiritual focus and that a starting point for research in specific contexts will be local knowledge (Geertz, 1983).

In the following chapter I will explore the methodology for my research and introduce the research design. Influenced by the studies discussed in this chapter I realised that the kind of research that inspires me is qualitative, descriptive, and detailed. This approach engages with the daily lives of children and causes me to reflect on the spiritual in my own life. From the literature it appears that the background for

research about spirituality and young children has been created but there is still space in the landscape for more.

## Chapter Four – Methodology

### Introduction

*Tell me a story, Silver.  
What story?  
The story of what happened next.  
That depends.  
On what?  
On how I tell it.*

*(Winterson, 2004, p.129)*

Van Maanen (1988) discusses a variety of stories from the field, stories available to be told as realist, impressionist or confessional ‘tales’. These tales are shaped by “narrative and rhetorical conventions” (p.5) and decisions are made about “what to tell and how to tell it” (p.25). This particular tale addresses the research question about spirituality in early childhood settings and concerns the methodology that informs the research. My tale has elements of all three of Van Maanen’s categories. He suggests that as well as describing the planning, the ‘being there’, and the gathering of information, that the research narrative must “balance, harmonize, mediate, or otherwise negotiate a tale of two cultures (the fieldworkers’ and the others’)” (Van Maanen, 1988, p.138). This negotiation is central to the qualitative approach taken in this research.

In this chapter an outline of the research design in relation to the question is discussed and the concept of reflexivity introduced. The case study approach, the role of the researcher, aspects of research with children and thoughts about the interpretive community are included. There is an examination of ethics in relation to this study. Finally, an outline of the analytic process and a discussion of validity closes the chapter. A spiritual metanarrative is threaded through the chapter. These spiritual strands are indicated by the use of italic font. They represent connections that informed my decision making throughout the thesis and reflect my working definition of spirituality (see p.16/17). They highlight the spiritual aspect of the research (Dillard, 2000; Lincoln & Denzin, 2005).

## **Research design**

The map

As part of a qualitative research approach I set up case studies in three early childhood settings using a multi-method approach to gathering data. Each setting had a different philosophical base. The first case study involved being in a Montessori school, known as the ‘*casa*’, the second a private preschool and finally I went to a Steiner (or Waldorf) Kindergarten. Although settings one and three are influenced by the philosophies of Maria Montessori and Rudolf Steiner respectively they are of course influenced by and reflect the context of Aotearoa and *Te Whāriki*, the early childhood curriculum. The private preschool focused on ‘the whole child’. In each case study the children, their parents, teachers and also the owner or manager, were invited to contribute. Using a variety of procedures to explore the research question I completed field notes as a participant observer, interviewed teachers and held two focus groups for parents. As well as taking photographs I asked the teachers to make a video for me about aspects of their particular setting that they considered to be spiritual. For a semester (or 10 weeks) I visited two days a week and felt quite immersed in the life of these settings. Additionally, if anything special happened I was invited to come along by teachers. I hoped to have an idea of how the spiritual experience of young children was supported in each setting at the end of this time.

The settings I chose reflected a philosophy that included the spiritual. As described in Chapter One, Maria Montessori and Rudolf Steiner wrote extensively about young children, their education and the spirit. I also wished to find out how the private preschool, a setting that was not underpinned by one of these specific philosophies, recognised the spiritual dimension of education. Steiner and Montessori settings are sometimes perceived as being outside the ‘mainstream’ of early childhood education in New Zealand. Given this possibility I also did not want my research discounted as ‘too specialist’ or as ‘not mainstream enough’. I wanted to explore the tension between the uniqueness of each setting and the factors they all have in common: context and curriculum.

- the map revisited

The map of the research is an ideal version and the research design, a blueprint for action. Through use the map changed and altered. It had “multiple entryways” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p.12) and ways of being read. It reflects the changes that happened as the research progressed. In Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987, p. 12) words the map is “detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group or social formation”. In education, as in other fields, Delamont (1992) notes that writing and reporting the story of the research is all part of the reflexive process. It affords an opportunity to reflect on the research journey, to survey the landscape and revisit the map. Hastrup (1995, p.8) also suggests “itinerary” as a guide for moving forward and “pilgrimage” as a means of denoting effort along the way. There were definitely elements of pilgrimage in this process. Markers, like ethical approval, denoted progress in the search for the spiritual and the journey itself was made in the continual hope of enlightenment.

### **Reflexivity**

Davies et al., (2004, p.364) suggest that “reflexivity opens new ways of addressing old long-standing questions of how and what we can legitimately take ourselves to know and what the limitations of our knowledge are”. They use the metaphor of a hall of endless mirrors constantly reflecting backwards and forwards to illustrate reflexive processes whereby the researcher is “catching the moment” (p.364). These moments are captured in notes and journals and these reflections are part of the process (Flick, 2002). A reflexive approach involves asking questions, being aware and being prepared to be caught off balance. I was constantly questioning myself and noting my subjective entanglement in the research and my response to events always affected the research process. From the literature (see Chapter Three) I realised that my own sensitivity towards the spiritual would be a critical factor (Champagne, 2003). I also wished this research to be inclusive of everyone, including myself. This approach is summed up by Hervik’s (1994) statement that “reflexivity refers to the conscious use of the self as a resource for making sense of others” (p.92).

My self questioning surprised some participants who felt that I did know the answers really but just wasn’t telling anyone. My stance challenged the notion of researcher as



outsider and 'expert'. When we shared a genuine sense of 'not knowing' any threatening aspect of the research dissolved. As relationships were built in each setting it became easier to see things from the perspective of children, teachers and their parents. Aubrey, David, Godfrey and Thompson (2000, p.145) acknowledge these complexities and note that "each human being involved will not only have their own history and expectations of researchers but also their own perceptions of the particular researcher and of the project focus and approaches".

When entering each setting, encountering 'the field', everyone looked at home and I was the stranger. To begin with I felt hyper-sensitive to what was going on around me and needed cues in order to fit in with what was going on. I became aware of the "conversation with oneself" (Ronai, 1992, p.103) that is part of a personally engaged, professionally ethical and non-exploitative research process. She calls this an "emotional sociology" (p.103). There were many points when the research seemed impossible: the ethics processes, finding the right settings, wondering how doing research would affect my work, the intersection of personal crises, and the challenges of being involved with so many people. However, reflexivity reenergises. It gave the freedom to consider myself part of the research process, to take new positions, and to produce "a writing interested in itself" (Derrida, 1972/2004, p.6).

### *Calling on the spiritual*

*In the spiritual sense there is an approach to research that reinforces simply 'being there', or 'going with the flow'. This is a way to be accepted and to begin to find oneself as a researcher, to be someone who is prepared to learn and be surprised. According to the Tao this means acknowledging the beginning or 'becoming' state. Lao Tsu (Feng & English, 1997) warns that being over confident is like "trying to be a master carpenter and cutting wood. If you try to cut wood like a master carpenter you will only hurt your hand" (Number 74). This is not to imply laziness or lack of engagement, on the contrary, like many Taoist ideas it means being completely focused but not intervening, not imposing a personal interpretation or coming to conclusions too soon. It means not setting oneself up as the 'expert'. In each setting when I heard the 'buzz', a busy humming that can be heard in settings when children are absorbed and happy, I began to wonder how it worked and what the 'culture' was and what made it happen. These are questions that were familiar to Maria*

Montessori (1972, p.50) who advised beginning teachers that “it is very difficult to assimilate and to put into practice the idea that life and all that is connected with it go on by themselves, and that it must be observed and understood without intervention if we wish to divine its secrets...”.

Neither Montessori or Lao Tsu urge distance or objectivity, rather they support Reason’s statement (1994, p.11) that “the observer is inseparable from that which is observed”. This calls for a certain way of “being- toward-others” (Heidegger, 1996, p.117), becoming what Heidegger calls the “ontological bridge” (p.117) between self and other. This involves being committed to the inquiry and to the relational aspects of the research encounter. It is about finding out along the way, interpreting in situ, letting it happen, and living the research. Everything is part of the process (Flick, 2002). These factors began to construct this research as a spiritual journey. As Sun Shuyun (2004, p.42) observes when she decides to follow the steps of a holy man “Of course I could have just sat in libraries and read about Xuanzang. But I knew that would not be enough. I did not think I could find a different outlook just by reading. The Chinese have a saying: ‘read ten thousand books; walk ten thousand miles’”. In order to start the walk, it was necessary to enter the world that was the focus of the research.

### **Case Study**

The means of making researching spirituality a reality and of bringing some control (however illusory) to the process became possible by setting up multiple case studies. The effectiveness of case study as “a comprehensive research strategy” to explain and explore different contexts is upheld by Yin (2003, p.14). Case studies capture both the unique specialness of each setting and celebrate different perspectives (Gomm, Hammersley & Foster, 2000; Stake, 2000; Travers, 2001). Case studies have boundaries. They are purposeful and Bryce (2002, p.51) stresses that they are “a way of bounding a variety of approaches to provide a detailed picture of a site for a particular purpose”. There were elements of description, interpretation and evaluation in each one (Merriam, 1998). The three settings were essential to my conceptualization of the research and had to be chosen carefully because as Tobin, Wu and Davidson (1989, p. 10) point out “place matters”. Case study enables lived

experience, everyday life and social interactions to be described and investigated as ‘how’ and not ‘why’ (Denzin, 2001) and this approach reflects my research question.

My starting point for the research design was influenced by the ‘multivocal ethnography’ of Tobin, Wu and Davidson (1989). There were deviations from this study mainly because of ethical considerations. Their study included three early childhood settings in America, China and Japan so the scope was quite different and these countries are geographically and culturally distant. I was also more explicit about forming three specific case studies (Holloway, 2000). Because spirituality may involve deeply held convictions and beliefs there seemed little point in comparing settings although I found myself inevitably doing so as I moved between one case study and another. Tobin, Wu and Davidson (1989) allowed their participants to critique each other by showing a video made in one setting to all the others. Because research about spirituality is sensitive (Renzetti & Lee, 1993) it was not appropriate to do this. I also thought, especially with regard to the Steiner kindergarten, that it would be too easy to make superficial judgements based on visual impressions.

#### The natural setting

As Denzin & Lincoln (2000b, p.3) point out “qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them”. Case studies emphasise a naturalistic (Dunn, 2005; Green, 2002) approach to research that includes young children, as opposed to experimental methods or large surveys. This orientation favours detail (Edwards, 2001), researcher involvement and time to look and listen in contrast to research that involves short experiments with the emphasis on statistical data and number of participants. It is a way “to look at the world in a different, socially orientated way” (Aubrey, David, Godfrey & Thompson, 2000, p.111). The use of the word naturalistic to describe researching the experience of children in context shows a bias towards engagement with the social world. By entering these environments it was possible to observe real life experiences and the reaction of children and adults to those experiences (Dunn, 2005). The word naturalistic can be critiqued in terms of the inevitable influence of the researcher. However, recognition of the effect of the researcher is now almost a commonplace (Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner & Steinmetz, 1991; Wagner, 1997).

Case studies reinforce the importance of the relationships between participants and researcher in context and support a reflexive stance. As researcher I was part of each case study, not outside looking in but looking out from inside my own experience in that setting. In the relationships formed in this process I did not want to overly disturb or impose on these settings. As part of the wish to retain the naturalistic focus I remembered that, as Flick (2002, p.6) points out, the inclusion of “the subjectivities of the researcher and of the studied are part of the research process”. Again, it was about finding balance while becoming part of the field, taking the opportunity to be surprised, and following what might not be obvious. In the case of this research question it definitely meant remaining open to whatever happened in each setting in terms of the spiritual.

### Decision making

Deliberating about these case studies and deciding who to approach and why took a very long time. Ultimately I decided to be intentional, to go where spirituality was acknowledged and to places where a shared cultural background would make a basis of understanding more likely. In New Zealand I identify as Pākehā (a person who is a New Zealander but not Māori) but my European background has been altered and overlaid by time in a New Zealand context. The Montessori and Steiner settings I chose to approach have a European background and are of course influenced by being in Aotearoa. As noted in chapter One, Maria Montessori and Rudolf Steiner have written extensively about spirituality and are distinct philosophies but *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) is a unifying force and has been since 1996. The private preschool was also changing. It had been sessional but was gradually taking on aspects of daycare and more children were being enrolled for the whole day. This reflects the growing demand for daycare in New Zealand. In effect everything becomes hybrid.

Interest in different approaches to the education of young children is growing in New Zealand. This may be a result of teachers being required to have nationally approved qualifications in order to teach young children. In order to facilitate this many teachers who previously specialised in a particular area (Montessori/Steiner/language nests) have had to gain recognised accreditation. In the process their perspectives

have been shared with others. There is now more emphasis on diversity and an acceptance of eclecticism in relation to teaching young children. Diverse pedagogical approaches to early childhood education are part of the networking recommended by Dahlberg and Moss (2005, p. 180) as a way “to draw ideas and inspiration from each other”.

A question I was constantly asked was why I was not going into te kōhanga reo (early childhood settings devoted to supporting the Māori language). In my view this question assumes that spirituality itself ‘belongs’ to certain groups. It is also a means of marginalization. Politically when groups invoke the spiritual to support their perspective about the land or their rights the argument is easily dismissed (Cadogan, 2004). Spirituality, especially as it links to language, is central to the educational project for Māori (Tangaere, 1997) and Pasifica groups. In terms of kōhanga reo my knowledge of te reo Māori would not be adequate and philosophically it is Te Kōhanga Reo Trust policy to conduct their own research. I felt that language would also be a barrier in language nests although interest in the research was expressed. However, given that many children, who are Māori and Samoan, Tongan or Nuiean, for example, are already in a range of early childhood settings and choose to be in those settings for a variety of reasons, it is relevant to wonder how their spirituality is acknowledged. As Ritchie (2003) argues, there is no reason why there should not be change within mainstream institutions to support Māori aspirations. Attention to spirituality and holistic well-being may support positive change.

I also definitely took notice of Smith’s (1999) critique of methodologies in relation to spirituality. From a Māori perspective Smith (1999) acknowledges “spiritual relationships to the universe, to the landscape and to stones, rocks, insects and other things, seen and unseen”. She says that this challenges Western thinking and furthermore:

concepts of spirituality which Christianity attempted to destroy, then to appropriate, and then to claim, are critical sites of resistance for indigenous peoples. The values, attitudes, concepts and language embedded in beliefs about spirituality represent, in many cases, the clearest contrast and mark of difference between indigenous peoples and

the West. It is one of the few parts of ourselves which the West cannot decipher, cannot understand and cannot control ... yet. (p.74)

Smith's discussion made me aware of the limits about what can be known and the danger of assuming the right to research spirituality. This study is informed by Māori research (Bishop & Glynn, 1999; Hemara, 2000; Pere, 1982/94; Smith, 1999) and different conceptions of spirituality have informed my thinking from a variety of perspectives, for instance, Tongan (Manu'atu, 2000). I have tried to be clear about my own position and acknowledge that this means becoming "self-conscious" (Hauser, 1998, p.137). In the contested ground that is (post)colonial New Zealand this research is done in the spirit of partnership and in the hope of equity, always "to come" (Levinas, 1999, p. 34).

While I chose to go to settings that acknowledge the spiritual dimension in early childhood education any difference was constructed by my gaze (Foucault, 1977). I was challenged to make myself 'Other', to become conscious of what defines my 'seeing', rather than from the beginning constructing my research participants as 'Other'. My approach is to find the familiar strange (Crotty, 1998; Delamont & Atkinson, 1995), and to critique my own position as 'strange' if necessary. In his introduction to *The Annals of Everyday Life* de Certeau (1998) refers to a study that focuses on everyday life. He notes that it:

does not seek to chase the living and the dead out of the house of the authors in which they live in order to make them into 'objects' for analysis. It articulates itself by way of the relationship that their strangeness has with familiarity. (p.3)

In the same study Mayol (1998, p.7) mentions "the *murmuring* of the everyday" (his italics) and I challenged myself to listen to this in my own study.

### Becoming...researcher

Throughout the decision making process I was recording the dilemmas, constructing data and using writing as a means of analysis. I was recognising the process of becoming researcher and realising that I was instrumental in the on-going analytic procedures (Ely et al., 1991; Lofland & Lofland, 1995) that permeate qualitative

research. Ely et al., (1991, p.143) point out that this realisation can be “overwhelming, as well as liberating and powerful” and it meant acknowledging that I bring my own background and interests to the interpretative process. Like many qualitative researchers I found that research is like another relationship, it becomes part of life, something that colours all other interactions. I was constantly looking through the layers, challenging my own perspective and always trying to engage the multiplicity of voices that were involved in the research while recognising my own. Loveridge (1999) notes that:

the constraints and possibilities we experience in doing our research belong to the same social world in which we and the people we work with live. If we are not to operate from some privileged understanding about the nature of the practice of researchers and theorists, and the knowledge we produce, it is imperative that we test ideas against our own experience as researchers. (p.3)

In a similar way I noticed the influence of “cultural knowledge” (Loveridge, 1999, p.4) on the perspectives I bring. Sometimes this is made explicit, at others it is simply background knowledge but it is inevitably always there. In the act of becoming researcher I was discovering that it is a contextualised activity. I began to build a sense of what Lincoln and Denzin (2000, p.1052) call “the local, the sacred, the act of constructing meaning”. I discovered that this kind of research calls for a deep sense of commitment.

*Sticking to the wairua (the spirit)*

*Edwards (2002, p.17) describes the process of becoming an elder on the marae. One of the challenges was to be able to karanga. This is the call to welcome visitors onto the marae and acknowledge everyone who has gone before, the spirits of the dead. The karanga is “like a prayer, full of love and compassion”. She was told when preparing to karanga for the first time “as long as you stick to the wairua you won’t go wrong” (Edwards, 2002, p.22). This began to be a mantra for me, to trust my intuition about what could be achieved in each setting and to ‘stick to the wairua’. I told myself to slow down and focus on the spiritual because it was ‘always already’ there if I looked.*

## **Qualitative research**

### *The god's eye view*

Denzin (2001, p.3) confirms that for the qualitative researcher there is no objective certainty, no firm ground. In terms of research, engaging the spirit is about participation with others, it encompasses intersubjectivity as a route to sharing meaning (Rabinow & Sullivan, 1987). Ferrer (2000, p.227) notes that spiritual knowing “can no longer be objective, neutral or merely cognitive” and refers to the “multiplicity” (p.238) of perspectives that challenge universal conceptions of spirituality. He suggests that “fresh eyes” will recognise that “the sacred need not be univocally universal to be sacred” (p.238) and recommends a participatory framework as a means of reaching “emancipatory understandings” (p. 239). By acknowledging the involvement of the researcher when exploring spirituality, as about anything else, Denzin (2001, p.3) explains that “there is no longer a God's-eye view that guarantees absolute methodological certainty. All inquiry reflects the standpoint of the inquirer. All observation is theory-laden. There is no possibility of theory- or value-free knowledge”. In this respect Rabinow and Sullivan (1987) confirm that “there is no outside, detached standpoint from which we gather and present brute data. When we try to understand the cultural world, we are dealing with interpretations and interpretations of interpretations” (p.7).

### Past to future

Denzin (2001) describes an interpretive process that “attempts to bring alive the existentially problematic, often hidden, and private experiences that give meaning to everyday life ...” (p.155). This sums up the complexity of qualitative inquiry in relation to spirituality. My research is informed by Denzin and Lincoln's (2000a; 2005) description of what it means to be a researcher in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century in terms of challenge and responsibility. They outline different approaches to research that have changed over time. These ‘moments’ of qualitative research correspond to historical periods and culminate in what (Lincoln & Denzin, 2005, p.1115) call the “fractured future”. They trace a way of working within the interpretive paradigm that is case-based, detailed, specific, and richly descriptive (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b). This research is designed to fit those criteria and to reflect the accumulation of the



moments in the history of qualitative research proposed by Denzin (2001) and Denzin and Lincoln (2000a; 2000b).

Denzin and Lincoln (2000b) describe the first moment of qualitative research beginning in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. This moment was traditional and embraced the idea that one ‘goes into the field’, usually to an exotic place. In the traditional moment the reports that followed such trips were objective and it was perceived to be desirable to maintain distance between the researcher and the researched. This is not the approach taken in this thesis although as a participant observer in a naturalistic setting this meant going into the field. The next, modernist, moment is reflected in my choice of field. I was doing research in the neighbourhood, close to home in an environment I was familiar with. This choice of field reveals the modernist moment sometimes called “the golden age” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b, p.14). This is the age of romanticism that shows the influence of Marxism, feminism, and critical theory. In the next era of blurred genres the politics and ethics of qualitative research were emphasized. At this point it was permissible for the researcher to be positioned inside the research which is where I see myself in this thesis. While the interpretive paradigm is favoured, Lincoln and Denzin (2005) critique the notion of separate paradigms. They propose that researchers in the present moment have been “shaped by and influenced toward” (p.1115) a variety of turns towards critical, feminist and poststructuralist perspectives.

The crisis of representation explored in this thesis recognises the moment when research and writing became reflexive and self-conscious. Richardson (2000a) proposes that writing becomes a method of inquiry. Influenced by the postmodern period this case study research is also local and specific. Denzin and Lincoln (2000b) say that in this moment “the search for grand narratives is being replaced by more local, small scale theories fitted to specific problems and particular situations” (p.17). A local perspective gives me the “starting point” that Nye and Hay (1996) felt was missing in research about spirituality and young children.

This thesis also shows the influence of the postexperimental period. At the present time research texts as fiction, poetry, or multimedia texts are being explored. Lincoln and Denzin (2005, p. 1116) acknowledge the struggle to describe and interpret “revelatory moments”. In the next two phases that reflect present and future, the

sixth and seventh moments, moral and sacred aspects of research are considered. Many voices are included in the research and multiple realities recognised. Lincoln and Denzin (2000, p.1060) suggest that research in these moments has a variety of stories available, to be told as “dramas, pieces of fiction, fables, memories, histories, autobiographies, poems and other texts to inform our sense of lifeways, to extend our understandings of the Other”.

Lincoln and Denzin (2000) are quite clear that research in the seventh moment is indissolubly linked to ethical and moral thinking and to practices that show respect for others. It requires the researcher to be explicit, to be “socially located” (Olesen, 2000, p.222) and this is a feature of research in the seventh moment that acknowledges knowing from a particular specific and situated standpoint. The influence of gender, culture, background and life history, has to be acknowledged in this kind of research. I had to be aware that these considerations also influence the children, parents and teachers in each setting. Aspects of their family background and life experiences informed their interactions with me. Daiute and Fine (2003, p.68) make the point that “participants do not all see the world as researchers do”. In talk with children, in the parent groups, at staff meetings, or simply in conversations that constantly took place in each setting, shared thoughts and intuitions co-constructed new meanings about spirituality. This process is a feature of research in the seventh moment (Lincoln & Denzin, 2000).

Influenced by the eighth and ninth moments that move into the future this research tries to reflect the heart of inquiry as a decolonising process (Smith, 1999). This is encapsulated in my starting point of spirituality as connection. Spirituality can be recognised and then supported from an inclusive perspective that affirms indigenous world views and not made the focus of difference or the domain of the Other. Research in the future will recognise a diverse cultural world that contains “a rising tide of *voices*” (Lincoln & Denzin, 2005, p.1115). In the context of Aotearoa, Bishop and Glynn (1999) use the whanau metaphor to stress the importance of working in community. According to Pere (1991, p.26) the concept of whanaungatanga (the practise of whanau), is about recognising kinship ties that involve obligations and in a spiritual sense “is the area where one’s aroha (unconditional love based on the same divine presence and breath of life) is tested to the fullest extent”. In the research

context this approach affirms the importance of trust and participation, and is about “commitment and connectedness” (Bishop & Glynn, 1999, p. 172).

This perspective encouraged me to question spirituality as not hierarchical, defined or linked to notions of ‘truth’. Peters and Burbules (2004) uphold this way of thinking and say that from a poststructural perspective:

Poststructuralism inherits a critique of “truth” and a diagnosis and critique of many entrenched binary oppositions (e.g., mind/body, nature/culture, male/female, reason/madness, rationality/emotions) that bedevil Western metaphysics and our ways of thinking. Poststructuralism analyzes and deconstructs these binary oppositions to unmask the way they manufacture hierarchical tables of value that often arbitrarily privilege one set over others. (p.5)

In terms of spirituality and research it is important to critique essentialist positions. Thus statements about a ‘true’ spirituality, a ‘natural’ spirituality, about humanness only realised in spirituality, of spirituality only in terms of religion, can all be seen from the poststructural perspective as going back to old stories and “grand narrative” (Lyotard, 1996, p. 482). In this way of thinking everything becomes explainable by reason, through logic, and by appeals to universal truth. The poststructural perspective does not accept that all dimensions of life can be knowable, labelled and made certain.

The word spirituality itself fits Derrida’s concept of a “shifting signifier” where “word and thing or thought never in fact become one” (Spivak, 1998, p.xvi). In terms of methodology when researching spirituality Moberg (2002) recommends recognising complexity, being particularistic, not imposing a researcher definition, avoiding stereotyping and finally to “bear in mind that identical words do not ipso facto refer to identical epistemological phenomena” (p.57). As I discovered, spirituality had a range of different and shared meaning for each person and in each setting. It meant different things to different people. From this perspective research meant accepting, as Peters and Burbules (2004, p.47) suggest, that “truth is nothing more than the consensus within a community of inquiry”.

## The interpretive community

Early childhood settings are very specific educational contexts and case study affirms the rich potential of the “interpretive community” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b, p.18). When I first approached each setting it was important to be able to form relationships and to build trust in order for participants in the research to work with me as part of the interpretive community. The researcher role also involves accepting that making meaning in each context goes beyond being in agreement with the beliefs of that community (Bruner, 2006). The interpretive approach is a process of negotiation and dialogue.

I noticed that although I introduced myself in the same way in each setting that my role was interpreted differently in each one. This in turn influenced my image of myself. In the Steiner kindergarten the teacher was my ‘voice’ in negotiations with the Management Committee. Her support meant that it was very important that I did not misrepresent the kindergarten and the length of time that I spent there was vital as it gave me a much greater understanding of that particular community. In that context my role was quite different than in the private preschool where I was known to the teachers in my professional role as a lecturer when I have been assessing students on practicum. I felt that this altered the way they saw me and prompted some of their more anxious questions such as ‘are we doing this right?’ and ‘are you getting what you wanted?’ The Montessori *casa* checked me out through colleagues and professional contacts. I had a sense of ambiguity about my role and experienced what Denzin (2001, p.3) calls “shifting identities”.

I realised that the connections that I perceive as spiritual happened throughout the research process. I was already part of the early childhood networks, the connections that form the early childhood community in Aotearoa. A teacher at the *casa* supported my research, she explained to her colleagues (referring to me) that they could use my expertise. Whether I wanted it or not the ‘expert’ label was applied and it became a moral imperative to be involved beyond the official scope of the research. This level of involvement, for instance, being asked to contribute to ERO (Education Review Office) reports, is often unavoidable in the early childhood context. I was seen as part of the early childhood community already. My status in the Steiner kindergarten was different and the teachers were quite happy to educate me about

their space knowing that very few people who are not involved directly with that educational community come into it.

Teachers in each setting wondered what involvement in such a project would actually entail. At this point I had to negotiate, balance my needs with theirs and make sure that we understood each other. The collaborative aspects of research, as pointed out by Goldstein (2000, p.523), are easier to write about or have as an ideal than to achieve and she is honest in her assessment of the nature of her collaboration with a classroom teacher because “when university researchers enter classrooms, some problems are bound to arise because of the issues of power and status inherent in these relations”. It is naïve to think that this kind of research was not going to result in extra stress for teachers and learning to trust the process was already a steep learning curve for me.

I was called upon to be respectful of very different perspectives concerning spirituality. Because of their own beliefs and life experiences parents were very clear that they did not want me to proselytise, they did not want hidden agendas or to be converted. They also did not want me to be a conspiracy theorist or “*a New Age crystal gazer*” as one parent put it. I discovered that spirituality can trigger anger and anxiety. With one parent I shared a personal childhood memory because it was part of my decision making and choice of spirituality as a research topic. He listened and then told me something about his background and the suspicion he had felt on behalf of his child. Another parent had experienced trauma because of religious experiences in childhood. Parents do not walk the same paths as their children, this is not possible, and they cannot walk for them, but by honouring the spirit this research respected their concerns.

#### Research with children

Matthews (1994) considers children to be philosophers, thinkers, problem solvers, worthy of the respect of adults. He recommends respecting children “as partners in inquiry” (Matthews, 1994, p.14). How research and researchers choose to include children will reflect their conception of childhood and children (Alderson, 1994; Lewis & Lindsay, 2000; Smith, Taylor & Gollop, 2000). Childhood is constructed by

others, by statements that make and shape the experiences of young children.

According to Foucault (1969) such statements proliferate, because:

statements are not, like the air we breathe, an infinite transparency; but things that are transmitted and preserved, that have value, and which one tries to appropriate; that are repeated; reproduced, and transformed; to which pre-established networks are adapted, and to which a status is given in the institution; ...they are collected in unifying totalities and the meanings to be found in them are multiplied. (p.135)

Statements about children become accepted fact and create the discourse that informs research. Children can easily be made into objects or receptacles of spirituality and in this research I did not want them reduced to being cute or cherubic, simple reflections of adult perceptions. At the same time I had to be open minded about the image of the child held by others. This socially constructed image (Berger & Luckmann, 1966/91; Rinaldi, 1998) always reflects the values of each context. In turn my own responses were influenced by my own ideas and image of the child.

In their discussion about research with children Greene and Hill (2005, p.5) discuss the meaning of experience. They point out a limitation in that “the nature of any child’s (or adult’s) experience is always in part inaccessible to an outsider, this must be a fundamental premise for the researcher”. This problem is heightened when spirituality is the focus of research. They recommend a focus on intersubjectivity (Greene & Hill, 2005, p.6) and suggest that “this dialectic process applies not only to the development of meaning in children’s daily lives, but also, to the encounters by which researchers seek to understand children’s experiences”. While intersubjectivity is an ambiguous concept (Jackson, 1998) it is an element of the co-constructive process. The focus on experience in a naturalistic study means that participants are not removed from their usual setting for an interview or an experimental intervention. The onus is on the researcher to sift and sort the nature of the experience that will be the focus of the study and this requires attention to be paid to the ethical and moral dimensions of the research.

## Ethics

Ethical thinking is embedded in qualitative research; first, because it is conceptualised as a moral enterprise (Denzin, 2001) and second, because this kind of research has as much potential to harm as any other approach. Qualitative research, albeit undertaken with the best intentions, is always an intrusion into the personal world of others. Shaw (1996) challenges any notion that a qualitative approach to research with children is less liable to cause harm and states that:

proponents of qualitative research have on occasion raised their voices in defence of the argument that qualitative research is in some senses more ethical than experimental or survey traditions, on the grounds, for example, that it is less likely to objectify those on whom researchers rely for evidence. This argument cannot be sustained. (p.28)

In relation to research with children interactions must be ethical and not confuse or pressurize children (Hill, 2005). Particular care was taken in this research to make sure that participants were consulted, were only involved if they wished to be and were listened to and accommodated rather than required to fit into the research framework.

I decided to honour my commitment to children as “active learners capable of co-constructing their own view of the world with caring, familiar others, participating in the creation of knowledge from the moment of birth” (Aubrey, David, Godfrey & Thompson, 2000, p.20) by asking for their consent to take part in the research and to be explicit about my role. In his discussion about the ethics of research Snook 1999, p.75) points out that the consent of management, teachers and parents should be “additional” to the consent of the child. The story about the consent form for children and its reception in the settings involved in this research highlights the difference between each environment and the different image of the child that pertains in each one (Bone, 2005). I tried to be honest in my approach to ethical procedures. The consent form for children gives them permission to change their mind and space to indicate whether or not they wish to be involved. It says, “I am finding out about spirituality – you might like to find out about this as well. I am not sure how to explain the word *spirituality* to you. Perhaps we can find out together” (Appendix 1).

I also decided to be sparing in the use of camera and asked the teachers to make the video in order to be less intrusive. The video is a different way of engaging 'seeing' spirituality (Coles, 1990; Rizzutto, 1979). The philosophy of each setting determined the use of technology. I moved away from asking children to produce pictures because I noted their sense of ownership of the artefacts they produce. Unless children offered me a painting or creation as a gift I did not appropriate their work and in the event collected very little because when children were asked they usually wanted to take their work home. Teachers were also collecting work for portfolios. I decided not to interfere with any of these processes and did not ask children to draw certain things or question them about what they were doing to any great extent. Once a relationship is made children will happily volunteer information and in an ethical and practical sense it was more effective to trust interactions that were driven by the children.

#### No harm - *ahimsa*

It is action in the world that is important and the Buddhist notion of 'ahimsa', to minimize harm, is an ethical imperative. In this study it meant looking, listening and fitting in with each particular context. When trying to foster warm relationships the requirement to be critical is sometimes another difficult 'edge'. Part of the research responsibility is finding a balance between deciding what to share and what not to share in order to maintain respectful relationships (Bryce, 2002). The most obvious example of this is my relationship with one child who had experienced many interventions in his life. I spent time with him, encouraged him to extend his relationships within his peer group and after the formal goodbye I made a difficult decision not to reappear in his life. Certain support systems had been put in place and he was well able to move on with others. I feel that what happened in that relationship could well be interpreted as spiritual but on the whole it sits outside the research for ethical reasons. Most accounts are partial, to tell everything would in itself be unethical and research in early childhood needs to be undertaken in such a way that it remains a positive experience for everyone involved.

My overall intention was to look at what was happening and to consider how spirituality was supported in each setting. In this my study has been successful.



There seemed little point my focusing on moments when the spiritual was not being recognised. Lofland and Lofland (1995, p.153) urge researchers to remember that “all representations of reality of whatever kind must always be taken as mere claims” and this research makes no claim to be the last word. It represents a moment in time for each setting.

### *Ethics and spirituality*

*A mystical approach to ethics and spirituality works on merging the binary of I and you. The great Sufi poet, Rumi(1995) wrote mystic poetry in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century and he articulated the idea that the individual can be incorporated into the All, a sense of spiritual oneness that recognises the merging of self and other. He told his followers “You are the one in all, say who I am, say I am you” (p. 276). This sense of oneness and connection beyond difference is the basis of Buber’s (1958) writing about the reciprocity of ‘I / Thou’ and this concept influenced the work of Levinas (1999) in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. For Levinas the concept of “alterity” (Levinas, 1999, p.101) encompasses responsibilities toward the other that go beyond reciprocity. He proposes that attention to “the face of the other” (p.25) is the beginning of ethical dialogue. He argues for an ethical responsibility that recognises goodness, friendship and ways of being-together. In this research ethical relationships are also recognised in the state of “becoming...” (Deleuze & Parnet, 2002). This is an ethical approach that does not pin everything down but recognises that the I/ you, either/or, child/adult, and self/other are not fixed binaries but are also always becoming and available to be engaged in new ways.*

### *Ambiguities and angels*

Early on in the research I became aware that researching spirituality would not involve visions or revelations but the same work as any other research, and, given the elusive nature of spirituality, might be like wrestling with the angel but as yet without any hard evidence of the actual angel. However, angels did feature in the Waldorf centre, for instance when we celebrated Michaelmas, the feast of St. Michael, in September. St. Michael is the good Archangel who, I later found out, had influenced Te Kooti, the Māori prophet, who used the red cross of St. Michael on his flag (Binney, 1995). Teasing out layers of meaning without making superficial

judgements about symbols, sites, visions, prophets or anything else that might be considered sacred and holy, is not a simple task. Meaning sometimes slides between cultures and different realities. It may be represented in different ways, in different media and may be put to use in new contexts.

Some of the ambiguous moments made me aware of the dangers of assuming that generalizability is an option. The settings were so different. There was not going to be a definitive narrative or a neat and tidy model that could be applied to all contexts. However, changing and adapting is part of the amorphous nature of spirituality. Lather (2000, p.289) calls on angels in her work to challenge the idea of a “comfort text”. This is a text that immediately gets superimposed on the realities of others. It is unproblematic and work that refers to angels troubles this. She used layers to disturb the ground, to make it slightly unsafe and questioned how to represent her research and stay accountable. From a feminist poststructural position she wondered what to do with the stories that she was entrusted with. Lather’s (2000) work challenges conventional ways of representing the words of others and as Denzin and Lincoln (2000b, p.21) point out this consideration is part of the larger question about the (im)possibility “ever to represent the world of lived experience fully”.

### **Analysis**

#### *Becoming ... bricoleur*

In Denzin and Lincoln’s (2000b) terms the task of *bricoleur* in the research context involves putting together disparate elements in new ways, making a puzzle, being a quiltmaker, creating a montage. Data are taken apart, deconstructed, become “messy text” (Lincoln & Denzin, 2000, p.1050), are reformed and ultimately demand an “active audience” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000b, p.5). My analysis has two interlinked activities: themes emerged through engagement with the data generated by the case study and writing was used as a means of discovery and inquiry (Richardson, 2000a). These were concurrent processes. The fact that I realised that I was writing about everything that was right in front of me was key to my recognition of everyday spirituality. The spiritual became visible once I realised this and stopped looking for revelations from elsewhere. The recognition that the spiritual was always already there and I simply had to interpret it and construct a new narrative about it was a turning point in the construction of the thesis.

Denzin and Lincoln (2000b, p.6) suggest that the resulting montage, the *bricolage*, may be “a crystalline form”, or “quiltlike”, a “reflexive collage”. My analysis of data has involved *bricolage*; a process that is made easier by technology. Cutting and pasting is a feature of using a computer. Information is moved from handwritten fieldnotes to notes with comments and connections to the literature. It is possible to use different fonts and to move between documents in order to construct a *bricolage* that is always shifting. It can be changed and remains open to fresh interpretations. It involved being workmanlike. The data are transformed in the analysis and this creative process retains a sense of mystery (Wolcott, 1994). The result of writing and rewriting begins to form a new text and the *bricoleur* then considers how it can become accessible to anyone who wishes to interact with the work.

#### Emergent themes

Emergent themes, according to Van Manen (1990, p.90), are “knots in the web of our experiences” or in more poetic terms “the stars that make up the universes of meaning we live through. By the light of these themes we can navigate and explore such universes”. More prosaically, I focused on finding a thread and begin to join it to others, constructing an account of what is spiritual in each setting. Van Manen (1990, p.91) also describes themes as the “fasteners, foci or threads” that emerge from this analytic process.

Using a different metaphor these themes can be conceptualized as a “rhizome” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p.21), a ball of tangled roots that suddenly shoot underground to connect with others. The rhizome encompasses what Deleuze and Guattari (1997, p. 21) call “all manner of ‘becomings’”. Thinking metaphorically and engaging with these possibilities and connectivities reflects the way I decided to write about each theme. This was a big decision. The decision had to be made to either write about each setting in turn, to write about each data set separately (the interviews, the focus groups, etc.), or to follow the connections between the case studies and write across the sets of data. I chose the latter option. This keeps my focus on the spiritual aspect of the research and the basic question about spiritual experience and how it is supported. Lather (1993) recognises that “rhizomes work against the constraints of authority, regularity and commonsense and open thought up to creative constructions”

(p.680). It could have been, as she discusses, more sensible to write straightforward accounts and it might have been simpler but that is not how my writing turned out. The inclusion of the poetic, the evocative and the descriptive reflects the spiritual aspects of these experiences; the transformative and creative dimension of the analytic process.

#### Discovery through writing

Richardson (2000b, p.163) affirms the power of writing as “a process of discovery”. Besides the field notes, interviews, video and photographs I was also keeping a journal on the computer and visual diaries that have scribbled drawings and brainstorm, lists, and reminder notes. Notebooks of annotated bibliography supported my reading. There were newsletters, posters and reflections that went back to each setting and emails to parents and teachers. Writing involves decision making about what is told and how it is told. Writing also involved engagement with what Coffey and Atkinson (1996, p.76) call the “ethnopoetics” of everyday life. This is a way of writing that includes an aesthetic orientation and creative techniques. The crucial transformation of field notes into a research text attempts to reconstruct the spiritual moment through the writing.

Writing as a means of analysis recognises that the generation of ideas is ongoing (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). There is no going past the data and new meanings continue to be possible at every point of the research endeavour (Richardson, 2000a; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b). Writing is a way of exploring. An incident from the field notes could be written about as a memory, as a poem, in a diary or recounted in a letter to the centre, put on a poster and could be private or shared, figurative or literal. It was in the writing that new conceptualisations of the research data became possible. Richardson (1997) proposes that knowledge of the topic is increased by writing. She recommends “experimentation with point of view, tone, texture, sequencing, metaphor, and so on” (p.94).

When reading an interview transcript I realised that it already looked like a long poem (Appendix 2). I had transcribed the interview using short lines and different spacing. By moving and clustering information new meanings emerged. I referred to Mishler’s (1990, p.430) notion of stanzas as a means of “representing an episode”. In this way,

the words of teachers, parents, or my own notes, could be reordered to create poetry and through this medium I hoped to communicate spirituality. When encountering their words in poetic form the teachers affirmed the power of this medium to capture their intentions. According to Atkinson, Coffey and Delamont (2003) poetry can be “a means of capturing the pauses, rhymes and rhythms of everyday life, enabling the social world to be seen, heard, and felt in new dimensions” (p.178).

Spirituality is not a simple concept available to be shared easily in words. It is more often expressed through music or art and architecture. Writing in the form of poetry makes meaning in a different way. O’Riley (2003, p.38) says it may mean “leaving open space” and I realised that the idea of covering everything with words is only one conceptualisation of writing. I became more confident about leaving space, rearranging space and indicating space in different ways (Appendix 3). This left room for spirituality to enter because usually everything is filled up and already decided. In order to include other perspectives there has to be what Dahlberg and Moss (2005, p.28) call a “stutter” in the narrative, a pause, a space.

Miles and Huberman (1994) consider the poem to be an acceptable way of representing the analysis. They give Richardson’s (1992) poem *Louisa May* as an example and say that it:

brings the reader very close to a condensed set of data, has a compelling flow, and forbids superficial attention by the analyst. You have to treat the data set - and the person it came from - seriously because a ‘poem’ is something you engage with at a deeper level.  
(p.110)

They say that this kind of work might, as Richardson noted, breach norms of academic writing but it also enables the lived experience of the protagonists in the case study to be understood. As they point out, I also discovered that there was no other way I could present so much information in such a condensed way and still retain the deeper meaning. They acknowledge that writing in this way can be seen as “illuminating the ‘core’ of the case involved, engaging the reader (and the researcher) emotionally and shifting the concept of authorship” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.110).

## Core narratives

I have included core narratives throughout the thesis. These passages in italics can be read alone or used in other contexts and otherwise shared. The core narratives are threaded throughout the thesis and represent the spiritual aspect of the thesis. Without using this device the spiritual metanarrative could easily disappear. Some core narratives are represented in continual prose, others in poetry as noted above. Van Manen (2002, p.7) introduces the concept of “phenomenological reflections” whereby one enters the text and catches “glimpses” of meaning from everyday experiences. The core narratives represent those lived experiences that connect to everyday spirituality and this central concept (see chapter Six) began to be present in all aspects of the thesis.

My work is influenced by de Certeau’s (1988) investigations of the everyday. He proposes that through narrative it is possible to do more than describe, saying that narrative does not merely describe or “tell about” a practice or movement but “it *makes it*” (his italics) (de Certeau, 1988, p.81). This connects to the task of the *bricoleur* who is actively making and remaking, inventing, and engaging in what Lincoln and Denzin (2000, p.1061) call “*a restless art*” (their italics). By sharing my process of discovery through writing, and constructing core narratives I have engaged an aspect of research that can be conceived as “simultaneously minimal, existential, autoethnographic, vulnerable, performative, and critical” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p.1052).

## Reading the visual

Part of the analytic process was about reading the visual and it was very useful to compare my analysis of the notes, transcriptions and observations with the visual evidence. The visual data were another text to be read and interpreted and as Moran and Tegano (2005, p.2) point out the visual is another language with “interpretive potential”. The video and photographs produced invaluable information about each setting and when I revisited them they supported my memories of that context, how it looked and what was happening at the time. The visual data restored a sense of the present to my reflections. Teachers and parents were dubious about the possibility of ‘seeing’ spirituality. One of my supports for this in the spiritual sense is an

acknowledgement of the power of *darshan*. In Hinduism *darshan* is a daily reality and means the power of deities to make themselves visible and to see the deity is to worship. In this sense what can be seen or unseen is a matter of social construction as much as physical ability (Jenks, 2005).

In order to communicate the visual through writing I had to call on writing that engages the senses, writing that is evocative. The way that I have constructed the narrative text makes seeing through writing a possibility. This is the aim of evocative and poetic writing. The dictionary defines to evoke, *e(vocare)*, as a way to call up spirits from the dead, a drawing out of responses, feelings, memories and energies (Pearsall, 1999). In its turn, attempting to write in this way called on all my resources and tested my ability to communicate the spiritual meanings that had already been shared visually, orally and experientially.

### **Validity**

The chosen methods of analysis used in this thesis resist any modernist attempt at categorisation that can be rationalised through checking by others (Edwards, 2001). My perspective was intentionally to look at what was spiritual in each setting. Each case study is therefore, like the hologram caught in the cube of glass that I keep on my desk. Everyone involved had the opportunity to contribute a different perspective about the same thing and this allowed multiple views to be reflected back and shared. Perhaps the video made it most obvious that everyone has a different viewpoint. On the same morning with the same children one teacher would choose quite a different incident to film than a colleague. Perceptions of spirituality in each setting were unique but became obvious when we shared them. Just like holding the cube up to the light the image became clearer and came alive. Including everyone as part of a ‘multi’ approach (multi-vocal, multi-methods) gave the community a say in what was valid or not and the opportunity to communicate what they thought about the interpretation of the data. Lincoln & Denzin (2000) propose that the trustworthiness of qualitative research is achieved in relation to community approval of what is represented.

Richardson (1997) discusses validity as a “crystallisation” and suggests that ideas crystallise as they reflect and absorb light from outside and produce it from within. She proposes that the notion of the crystal:

deconstructs the traditional idea of ‘validity’ (we feel how there is no single truth, we see how texts validate themselves); and crystallization provides us with a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial understanding of the topic. Paradoxically, we know more and doubt what we know. (p.92)

I am reminded that people often tap crystal. The phrase ‘does it ring true’ comes from this action. They want to hear whether it is genuine and if it has a ring that echoes and resonates or if it is dull, a fake, imitative, lacking sparkle. An account must ‘resonate’ in order for meaning to be shared. Ota (2000, p.189) mentions “resonance” as a way of validating research and the story told. She appeals to the experience and thoughts of the reader in terms of resonance and says that in her opinion resonance is “the pointer to validity and authenticity”. According to Pearsall (1999) the word ‘resonance’ or ‘to resonate’ means to continue to sound, like a vibration or an echo.

Kvale (2002) notes that validity is a deeply philosophical act and affirms that “the conception of knowledge as a mirror of reality is replaced by knowledge as a linguistic and social construction of reality. There is a focus on interpretation and negotiation of the meaning of the lived world” (p.306). This research is embedded in the theories of social construction. Kvale (2002, p.308) proposes that from this perspective validity is realised “as craftsmanship, as communication, and as action”.

*Theōria* – to look, to behold

My way of looking or theoretical perspective is to conceptualize the world as a web of connection (Ray & McFadden, 2001), as socially constructed and to perceive the self as “a social enterprise” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966/91, p.69). People find meaning and construct meaning with others in a number of ways: through narrative (Bruner, 1990, 2002; Gergen & Gergen, 2000), culture (Geertz, 1973; Williams, 1981), through theories of everyday life (de Certeau, 1988; Lefebvre, 1991), and through their lived experience (Jackson, 1996; Van Manen, 1990) of being in the world. These influences on the research and on my way of looking drew my attention to the possibility of spirituality in everyday life. These connected theoretical perspectives are framed within paradigms that confirm and reflect the values and ethics that underpin the research (Hughes, 2001; Lincoln & Guba, 2000).



Lincoln and Guba (2000) refer to spirituality and research paradigms. They say that the search for a specific paradigm is complex where religion and spirituality are concerned. In their view “defining ‘religion’ broadly to encompass spirituality would move constructivists closer to participative inquirers and would move critical theorists closer to both (owing to their concern with liberation from oppression and freeing of the human spirit, both profoundly spiritual concerns)” (p.169). They point out that different ways of knowing and thinking about research needs to inform considerations of methodology rather than becoming the basis of conflict between different perspectives (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). As a researcher this means being adaptable, crossing disciplines and encountering different ways of seeing the world without being captured, acknowledging as Hirschman (1987, p.191) notes, that there is “an embarrassment of riches” within “the paradigm box”. In this research layers of interpretation are made visible at all levels and they construct and support this particular version of the spiritual landscape.

### **Conclusion**

My methodological engagement with recently realised moments of qualitative research affirms the spiritual as a way of being in the world and an aspect of lived experience. In my explorations it was obvious that boundaries become permeable, my life intersected with the lives of my participants and our histories and memories became part of the *bricolage*, the text that was constructed as the research happened. Case study gives an opportunity to enter new spaces and make new discoveries as part of the research relationships forged with participants. This aspect of research is summed up by Jackson (1996) who describes a way of finding out that:

brings us into direct dialogue with others, affording us opportunities to explore knowledge not as something that grasps inherent and hidden truths but as an intersubjective process of sharing experience, comparing notes, exchanging ideas, and finding common ground. In this process our social gumption and social skills, as much as our scientific methodology, become measures of the limits and value of our understanding. (p.8)

The case study design is inclusive. It featured multiple voices including my own. The concept of reflexivity was a major component of the research and the text itself

reflects this aspect of the methodology. I have considered culture and my own position and linked spirituality to the ethical processes that are synonymous with qualitative research in the present moment (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000a). Some ethical aspects of working with young children and their families in educational contexts have been described. Discussion of ethical processes continues in the next chapter as ethical considerations permeate the research (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). Finally, the analysis in terms of themes and the transformation of data in the act of writing was discussed. The chapter closed with a discussion of validity and an overview of the theoretical perspectives that inform the thesis. Methodology usually dictates the choice of methods. The use of these methods in each setting and what happened next is addressed in the following chapter.



## Chapter Five - Methods

### Stepping lightly

*But understanding is also conditional on our being open to otherness...on one's ability to sustain interaction and conversation with others, in their place, on their terms...*

*(Jackson, 2005, p.32)*

Research about spirituality in the context of early childhood settings called for sensitive or “low-intrusion” (Edwards, 2001, p.129) methods. Choosing acceptable methods that allowed me to take part in the everyday life of each setting with the minimum of disruption was an ethical approach and took advantage of the naturalistic background to the case study design. As Edwards (2001, p.128) points out “case study calls for a balance between rigour and lightness of touch”. In this study rigour is provided by the evidence from a multi-method design and lightness of touch by conducting research in ways that fitted into each setting.

I set up three case studies and in each one I became a participant observer, interviewed all teachers and organized two focus groups for parents in each setting. In addition, photographs were taken and the teachers were asked to make a video about spirituality in their particular environment. This design was vital to the success of the enterprise. Each case study involved many people but because the chosen methods fitted into the context of the early childhood settings it was possible to achieve. While the previous chapter was based on my beliefs about the research and its qualitative and reflexive approach, this chapter discusses what happened in each setting. I have drawn on my field notes and diaries. Examples taken directly from the field notes, interview transcripts and journals are indicated by the use of italics. In this sense the past (what happened) and present (my current interpretations) begin to overlap in the following account.

### Ethical procedures

In order to address my research question certain procedures were put in place and negotiating for ethical consent with the institutional Ethics Committee (MUHEC) began to make the design a reality (Bone, 2005). As outlined in the previous chapter my decision making about who to approach was not simple. It was also only half the story. I began to make connections by talking to people I knew and making phone

calls to settings that might be interested in taking part in the research. Some people were not interested and the main reason given was that everyone was too busy. If they wanted to know more then I sent a letter to the Manager or owner (Appendix 4). Following this I arranged a time to present my ideas, explain the research design and also the ethics procedures.

Everyone involved in each setting was included from the beginning. At the *casa* and the private preschool I attended parent nights and spoke at meetings. By presenting what Smith (1999, p.120) describes as “the seen face” research can be introduced in a respectful way. One of the teachers in the *casa* pointed out that parents were a little surprised by the emphasis on spirituality and said reassuringly, “*reaction from a lot of parents is a bit ‘stunned mullet’ sort of reaction. But it’ll be alright*”. Once they had the Information Sheet (Appendix 5) some parents began to phone or email me and this became another way of reassuring them and building relationships. This procedure was repeated with new families. In the Steiner kindergarten one of the teachers gave out the forms to parents and in this context there was a different attitude to the research. The other two settings had uncertainties about researching spirituality. This was not the case in the Steiner kindergarten. Parents and teachers were unsurprised by my request to come into their setting and untroubled by the focus on spirituality.

Teachers received their own letter (Appendix 6) and completed their own consent form for interview purposes (Appendix 7). They had a copy of the Information sheet and suggestions for interview questions (Appendix 8). After the interviews were written up the transcripts were returned to teachers for checking and corrections. They then signed the transcript and trusted me to make corrections if need be or indicated that my account was an accurate record of our conversation.

Parents confirmed on their consent form whether they wished to be included in the focus groups (Appendix 9) or not. There was always an opportunity for people to change their mind about this. In each setting I made a poster with the time and date of the focus groups and gave all parents details so that they could come if they wished to. There was a specific consent form requesting that material from the focus groups be confidential (Appendix 10) together with a sample of questions for the focus groups to consider (Appendix 11). In addition, teachers and parents were asked to give their

consent for the use of the visual material (Appendix 12) in academic contexts or for research presentations.

One of the innovative aspects of the ethics procedures for this research was the consent form for children (Appendix 1). In the Montessori *casa* and private preschool children who chose to complete their consent form returned it by using a post box that I made especially for this purpose. Twenty-six children responded from the *casa* and eleven from the private preschool. The post box was fun and I was asked to leave it at the private preschool. It encouraged a high level of involvement in the ethics procedures because children encouraged their parents to respond so that they could post their forms. In the Steiner kindergarten one of the teachers made sure that the forms were given to each family and they were returned to her and then passed to me. In this setting the children did not receive a consent form because the decision to carry out the research was taken by the teachers in conjunction with the Management Committee. Parents all had the same forms but the Steiner teacher felt that it was the responsibility of adults to make decisions about research for the children.

It became obvious early on that my decisions, choices and official interactions with Ethics Committees was only one part of the picture (Bone, 2005). A consideration of ethical issues is central to deciding what methods are appropriate for research with young children (Cullen, Hedges & Bone, 2005). Even then, no matter what methods are chosen, ethical decision making continues to permeate every interaction and activity connected with research in the early childhood setting. Guillemin and Gillam (2004, p.261) propose “procedural ethics” or “ethics in practice” as a way of keeping ethical issues in the picture and in their view this is a link with the reflexive approach to research. The influence of this viewpoint will be obvious in the following discussion as ethical considerations continue to thread throughout the research narrative.

### **Settings and participants**

Permission to continue came from the people who allowed me access to their working life and settings, the ‘gatekeepers’. Setting the boundaries of the case is partly personal and includes practical decision making about budget, distance, and accessibility (Bryce, 2002) but getting alongside someone who is helpful, keen and

shares the passion is another matter. The following passages introduce the three settings and are partly in the present tense in order to convey the immediacy of my impressions.

#### The Montessori *casa*

My first contact with the owner of the *casa*, Helen, was a loud YES when I asked if we could do some research together. I went along to the *casa* feeling very curious. It is in a small rural town on a wide street with traditional villas and established gardens. The pathway down to the school is quite shady. I was heartened by the plaster angel above the notice board outside; it seemed a good omen. Inside the school it is always unexpectedly quiet. In the entrance way there are pockets for children with their photos and a low notice board where documentation is placed at eye level for children. This Montessori *casa* is also influenced by work from the preschools of Reggio Emilia. The room is divided into smaller areas so that children can work together or individually. There are silk gauze curtains of pink, white and blue. They fall to the floor and divide the room but are also transparent. There is an emphasis on aesthetics and the teachers talk about their beautiful setting. The windows look out to trees or a rural view of fields. Above the window there is a mural of a waka (canoe) with the words kotahitanga (unity) written above it. There is a fish tank and a light table and pictures on the wall. The shelves are full of equipment and materials and I felt on that visit that there was something interesting everywhere I looked. Everyone changes their shoes and wears slippers inside and this contributes to the peaceful atmosphere.

When I go outside there is a water feature and water falls onto pebbles and artificial water lilies. There is a sandpit, several trees, planks to balance on, a climbing frame and a cube. The ground is textured with pebbles embedded in the concrete paths and tiles, safety matting, grass and small gardens. The outdoor area is not large but later I learnt that it was designed and built with a lot of involvement from the parents. The children often look in the Big Book that records the creation of their new playground with photographs and stories.

Helen dislikes the word owner and likes to work as part of a team with five teachers, Carol, Fipe, Joelle, Suri and Ina, who are at various stages of training or undertaking

extra professional development. They have an interest in Montessori and two of them have some Montessori training and they are all at different levels in their training for early childhood qualifications. There are 52 children involved in this setting. The children attend sessions, some from 9 – 12 and others continue until 3 pm. Some children come just for an afternoon session. Families can enrol when a child is 2 and a half and leave when they are 5 or 6 years old. There is no emphasis on beginning school on the 5<sup>th</sup> birthday which is a cultural norm in New Zealand. The school is predominantly bicultural with families who are Māori and Pākehā and this reflects the population of the town itself. A primary school is nearby but children go on to a range of schools in the area. The emphasis at the *casa* is on friendship and community as well as on concentration and independent learning.

#### The private preschool

The owner of this preschool, Teresa, communicates her passion for what she does when she talks to me. This preschool is in a suburban area that is fast growing and there is increasing competition. However, Teresa is confident about her setting and what it can provide. She shows me the information leaflet for new parents and this affirms that the preschool is interested in “the whole child” and takes a holistic approach to education. Their charter says that they will consider all aspects of children’s learning and development, cognitive, physical, social, emotional and spiritual. Teresa is a qualified early childhood teacher and so are two other staff members, Zoe and Sara. Marilyn is about to start training. There are 38 children on the roll. The preschool is sessional but changing as hours are extended to accommodate full daycare. Most children attend between 9am to 12 noon for two or three days a week. Others come for the afternoon only when it is much quieter. Some already stay all day. The preschool reflects changes in the area and although predominantly Pākehā there are also children from other places, for instance, Japan and Korea. The children can come here at 2 1/2 years old and they go to school at 5 years old. The preschool aspect is quite important here and the owner is proud of the fact that the local school praises children when they get to the primary new entrants classroom. She does her best to make sure that the children are prepared for school and the preschool promotes familiarity with routines and literacy and numeracy skills.



When I come in through the gate there is a straight path up to the purpose built preschool. Some trees have been planted and are growing by the fence to divide the play area from the car park. Inside it is bright and clean. The room is a rectangle of open space divided around the wall by low shelves. It looks like there are all the conventional areas of play: art, family play, blocks in one corner, books, a nature and science table. Paintings are drying on the line suspended across the ceiling. The walls have material pinned up in some places; some has bright hibiscus flowers. This is pretty and there are also posters and art displays on the walls. There is a budgie who is blue and quite noisy when the children are talking or singing. It feels homely and it is warm and sunny. Outside there is a sandpit, a climbing frame with a slide and a boat for children to play in. There are flowers along the side of the fence and it is very easy to see everyone.

#### The Steiner kindergarten

The Steiner kindergarten is in the same grounds as the rest of the school and when I drive through the main gate an older girl standing there gives me a wide smile. I am quite surprised, she looks so friendly and everyone seems very relaxed as they go into their different schools. I have been here before and have already built a relationship with Sylvia, the Kindergarten teacher, who I worked with on a brief pilot study. Walking through the gate to the kindergarten I brush past the lavender and go into a garden with mature trees. They are exotic trees, beginning to lose their leaves and they are very beautiful, the kindergarten seems sheltered by them. The seasons are reflected in the natural surroundings and the planting that frames the kindergarten building. There is no outdoor equipment but tree stumps, shrubs, paths, flowers and stone waterfalls are part of the garden.

When I go inside, the kindergarten room itself is quite breathtaking. The walls are soft pink and light is filtering through high stained glass windows. All the furniture is wooden and this adds to the impression of softness. The high ceiling has exposed rafters and I am later told that this is very unusual in a Steiner kindergarten where the structure of the building is not usually visible. The corners of the room are rounded and the benches and tables have rounded corners. This is intentional. Some of the materials (logs, shells, bark) are in big wicker baskets and shelves are filled with small animals and figures made of wool or wood. The display in the centre of the big

table is very beautiful. There is a soft pink cloth, a candlestick and some dark red flowers. I can smell wood polish and beeswax and a mixture of pine and lemon.

It is easy to be beguiled by the aesthetics of this place. It is especially designed to be tranquil, sweet smelling and soft. Sylvia has many years experience of teaching and is a qualified Steiner teacher. The other teacher, Gaby, has her Diploma ECE and is training to be a Steiner teacher. These teachers work closely together and there is another helper Michele who is not yet qualified. When the children arrive it is quiet for a while but this definitely changes throughout the morning. The session is from 9 – 1 and most children come here when they are 3 1/2 or 4 and move on when they are 6 or 7 years old. There are 28 children on the roll. Families who attend identify as Pākehā, Māori, come from Germany, India and Eastern Europe. The multi-cultural community is reflected in the kindergarten.

### **Participant Observation**

I took the role of participant observer seriously and attended each setting twice a week for 10 weeks. This represents a term in New Zealand. The private preschool was very quiet in the afternoon so I only stayed there for the whole day twice and usually left after the busy morning session that went from 9 – 12. This suited the teachers who then had time to relax with the children. The Montessori *casa* had a seamless 9 – 3 session and while some children left at lunchtime and others arrived there was always a core group of children who remained for the day. The Steiner kindergarten session ran from 9 until 1 and I stayed for the whole morning. In the *casa* and private preschool I wrote my notes up by hand and transcribed them on computer later. Expectations in the Steiner kindergarten were different and that story is included later in this chapter. The role of participant observer enabled me to enter the world of children in a way that was acceptable to parents. Many parents who did not mind me being in the early childhood setting said that they did not want spirituality to be talked about with their children and interviewing children was not an option. Observing children is such a common activity that it is unremarkable in most early childhood settings and observation has a long history as a method of research with children (Dunn, 2005; Podmore, 2006). Being a participant in the early childhood setting is inevitable. It involved becoming an advocate (Denzin, 2001); an extra pair of hands (McCadden, 1998); a confidante and friend. My field notes show that as a researcher

I was involved in the setting and was definitely not somewhere on the edge of the action:

*V. full on. Rick hammering under the school. I do hearts and spirals with Sam, Coral and Kezia. Seem to be accepted. It's all on. Surrounded by children. Sam has nails like banana skins – painted a thick creamy colour. Sit on the mat and the group extends. Leo and Kiri play air guitar and are moved on quite smartly ...*

The question of when to intervene or not was always present. The only criteria for this decision are intuition, safety and the best interests of the child. Sometimes when involved in the day to day events of the setting I could contribute from my privileged stance as onlooker. For instance, in the following incident Kyra is so absorbed that she hardly notices the teacher who did not mind my pointing out something she had not noticed:

*Kyra has made a kite from computer paper and gold. There is a loop on the back of her shoe. She threads the kite string carefully through the loop. Carol, the teacher, begins to stop her and says 'look the kite is caught in your shoe'. I say that I think she did it on purpose. Carol checks Kyra out and realises this is not an accident. Kyra continues her walk, balanced on the stepping stones, and the kite rises and begins to fly attached to her shoe.*

Overlapping roles and the requirement to meet different expectations in each setting is typical of case study research (Yin, 2003). The role of participant-observer gave unique opportunities to liaise with people, to notice the cultural artefacts in each setting and to make discoveries about the specialness of each place.

### Encounters

Because each setting was different there was a sense of dislocation when moving from one setting to another. In each place I was a different researcher and there were different requirements around fitting in and different ways of accommodating me as a stranger. I noticed that everything in the environment reflects the philosophy, the relationships and the atmosphere of each particular setting. In the Montessori *casa* and the private preschool it was expected that I would be taking notes, watching what

was happening and interacting with the children where appropriate. In the Steiner kindergarten the emphasis changed and the role of participant observer had to be adjusted to the requirements and philosophy of that setting, as this narrative fragment illustrates:

*Winding wool*

*My way of being a researcher was challenged in the Steiner kindergarten setting. I was told that it was very important that the children hardly notice me and if they did then I needed to be busy doing something that was useful and in this way I would become part of the centre in a seamless and subtle way. The teacher described this as a process of making me 'invisible'. The first morning I was put on a stool near the entrance to the centre and next to the basket where children find their slippers and say goodbye to their parents. I had a basket of wool, tangled and messy, and my job was to wind the wool into neat balls. In my diary I note that 'S is busy, she settles me by the slippers and gives me a basket of wool to work with. She tells me to turn each ball into a smaller size ball. I begin to do this and am amazed at how the speed of my movements mirrors my feeling of being wound up – I relax, begin to consciously move slowly'.*

*Eventually I found this rather a soothing occupation. However, on that first morning I was sitting there and a parent said hello and asked what I was doing and instead of telling him that I was the researcher they had heard about I said 'oh, I'm just winding wool'. He gave me an odd look and said something polite and left me reflecting that I had not sounded very confidence inspiring and had not even answered the question. Perhaps this was because my occupation did not fit with my notion of doing research.*

*Because I was not taking notes but had to remember everything to write up after the session I felt tired after these sessions and to begin with would sleep afterwards for hours. Perhaps I felt enchanted, under a spell. Many fairy tales mention winding wool or spinning threads as a means of dealing with magic and danger from the world. Sometimes the threads are spun into gold which is exactly what I wished from my activity as I hoped that the tightly*

wound balls of wool would turn into detailed and accurate field notes. Engaging in this kind of activity was unusual for me and highlighted the strangeness of working in a different way in a context that was challenging my preconceptions.

The teacher who directed me to do this was quite right about the invisibility. It seemed to take weeks for some of the children to notice me. One day I realised that I had been joined by a group of children who had fetched chairs and were all winding wool and doing finger knitting. I got quite good at this myself but not so expert as most of the children. If they asked what I was doing Sylvia told me to tell them that I was winding wool so that they did not know that I was researching. In this context research is part of the adult world. The children were helpful because they often commented on the action that was taking place in front of us. After a while they moved on and Sylvia said that I could move around the kindergarten so I continued to wind wool but in different places. I found that in a way I had become invisible and could go anywhere in the kindergarten and the children were not distracted.

Children in the other settings were quite willing to hypothesise about people and they scrutinized me and openly discussed who I was and what I was doing. In the following conversation at the *casa* between Jonathan and Sam they might also have been thinking about spirituality because witches, ghosts and other phenomena were often mentioned in children's first conversations with me, probably as a result of talking about spirituality with their parents when they discussed the consent forms:

*Jonathan and Sam tip the table*

*Sam – the teachers aren't looking (Jonathan laughs)*

*Me – so aren't I a teacher?*

*Sam – (laughs) no no*

*Jonathan – you so aren't a teacher*

*Me – so I'm not?*

*Sam – teacher teacher-reacher ... you could be a witch? (much laughter)*

*Me – yes okay*

*Kaira has been watching and listening with a delighted smile.*

*They tip the table again and a teacher comes over to sort them out saying,  
“You need to sit here and do your work...”*

They had already made a decision about my behaviour and role and predicted, quite correctly, that I would not take a disciplinary approach to their table tipping. In early childhood it is possible to find balance between being a remote or strange presence, taking a teacher role or becoming a child. What happens is part of the culture of the setting. Corsaro (2005) found this out and his work describes the differences between what happened when he took the participant observer role in the US and in Italy using what he calls “the reactive method”. This is when he chooses to “enter a free play area, sit down, and wait for the kids to react to me” (p.52). Cultural context determined how the children reacted to him. It was always obvious to me that the children were the experts in each setting. I learnt from them about all aspects of their environment as the following anecdote about the configuration of the Montessori *casa* shows:

*The floor of the centre was polyurethane particle board, clean, shiny and cold, but there were oases of grey carpet. I found myself irresistibly drawn to standing on the carpet. This seemed logical, it was warmer and more inviting and in most environments the carpet is there to stand on. Gradually I noticed that the children walked carefully around the carpet in their slippers. Obviously this was not about ‘wear’. The children and teachers wore slippers so the carpet would not be harmed. Observing this more closely I saw that children got puzzles and sat on the carpet to do their work. Sometimes they fetched another carpet square and put that on top of the carpet already on the floor. Then they collected their work and sat on the carpet square to complete it. Afterwards they rolled the carpet square up and returned it to the box. If they did not do this spontaneously they were directed to do so by a teacher. It took me a while to notice all this but without any words being said I gradually adjusted to fit in with everyone else in the centre and walked around the edges of the carpet.*

In my experience the participant observer role is influenced by the norms of each particular context and by the attitudes of the teachers involved in each setting. I was grateful for their support and in one note to the teachers at the private preschool I

thanked them and acknowledged their role, especially as they shared with me that it was unnerving having someone looking and writing while they worked:

*What an interesting couple of weeks. Thanks to you all for being so relaxed and just generally getting on with things and not minding too much about me being there. It must be a bit strange looking round and there I am, scribbling away.*

*(Note to teachers in the private preschool)*

On video a teacher in this setting asked the children what they thought I was doing and the children said that I was making a movie although I did not use the video camera. She pressed them to mention the fact that I was writing and they only mentioned this when she said “*she is always wr.....writ.....*” and eventually someone joined in and said “*writing*” but this was markedly less important to the children than to the teachers who associated my note-taking with assessment and being evaluated for their qualifications.

### Choices

It was clear that while adults sometimes tried to orchestrate events that in fact children choose their own relationships and were usually completely in control of what they wanted to do, with whom, how, when and where. Children showed their familiarity with their surroundings in small ways and demonstrated their relational preferences. One field note described the way that “*Kaira gives me a cuddle and says hello and goes to get me a hat because it is a sunny day*”. In each setting the decisions of the children dictated how much time was spent participating and how much observing and making notes. The children’s expectations were gradually superimposed on any plans I had for myself.

Most children were exceptionally helpful and welcoming. If they chose to have a relationship with me they developed their own way of showing this. Leo always came to show me his t-shirt. Everyday he walked across when I arrived and pulled up his jumper to show me his t-shirt or pointed to the picture or colour that he wished me to notice. He then usually told me something about the t-shirt. The children were definitely aware that I was there and Tane, who was a great fan of Harry Potter books and videos, showed the influence of English boarding school language, saying, “*I*

*didn't see you come in...you must have sneaked in while I was outside". It was very special being chosen to be the trusted person and I was surprised myself when Kayla, who had not shown much interest in me, suddenly came over and gave me her treasured woollen mouse to look after while she went on an errand for the Steiner teacher.*

Occasionally the boundaries of my participant observer role reminded me of the intimate nature of the early childhood teacher role. My field notes recorded that:

*Andy walks in a strange way with straight legs. Joelle notices this and checks his nappy. An accident! I am relieved that my researcher status prevents me from having to do this chore.*

Usually everyone was busy and being the other pair of hands and cleaning paint easels or tidying up the outdoor equipment was a way to contribute without being too intrusive. In the Montessori *casa* I was not familiar with the presentation of materials. This is the way that new equipment is introduced to children and is a fairly structured process. One week I spent hours with a small group of children trying to construct an archway out of small bricks without success but usually the children were experts when it came to doing certain tasks with style and accuracy.

## Languages

While exploring children's perspectives about religious belief Nesbitt (2000, p.149) noted that "insight into children's perspectives come unexpectedly, stimulated not by the question designed with that aspect of experience in mind but by a visual cue or by some other question". Presented with this possibility I found the metaphor of "language" (Malaguzzi, 1998, p.248) useful and a means of recognising the unexpected. Children move, make, build, paint, organize themselves, sit, eat, touch, and dream, using many different languages. Sometimes cues were subtle, at other times direct, but in any case something was always happening. Being able to tune into these messages, to change language and be flexible, made it possible to understand what was being communicated. This was most forcibly demonstrated when one day my friend, Harley, was being introduced to his new support person. He showed no expression on his face and was not moving but we were holding hands and his fingers were fluttering in mine like the wings of a trapped bird. The agitation of his spirit



conveyed in the language he chose to use stayed with me for a long time. The language of spirituality created new and often unspoken narratives.

### Connecting

Children who had obviously had some discussion with parents about spirituality when the consent forms were taken home told me stories that they thought were appropriate. One day Wiremu told an enthralling story about the supernatural after looking around to make sure that I was listening. The children thought that the tale about ghostly scratchings in the bedroom was true and were surprised when he suddenly laughed loudly and said that it was a joke. He was delighted with the effect. I continually found myself remembering how important it is to stay in tune with children. This could be challenging and one day I noted the following incident:

*Alice shows me a picture. She is naming parts of the body that are labelled and sounding out the names of body parts. She gets stuck on stomach and she pronounces the ch as in church. Then we talk about the chest and then she points and says choulders instead of shoulders which I suddenly find very funny ... but know that I can't laugh.*

Being sensitive was definitely reciprocal and children sometimes looked after me. Occasionally I felt my hand or arm being patted in a reassuring way because they were thinking about my feelings.

In each setting one or two children became mentors and made my role easier. They told me what to do at certain times and looked out for me. When one of my mentors left to go to school I gave her a card thanking her for her help because I knew that she had made my participant observer role so much easier. She was also aware of the spiritual nature of the research and when playing outside with the watering can she decided to help one of her friends. He was painting a big outdoor cube with water. When Danny asked for more water Julie looked at me, laughed and said, “*no, no Danny, god isn't sending any rain today*”. They were both delighted about this and laughed together before she energetically showered him with water. Something I noticed was the sense of humour that children often have about serious adult endeavours. Their attitude certainly kept things in proportion. They definitely resisted being put into a role that was not what they had in mind. It was not wise to

make assumptions. For instance, a teacher greeted Rea who wore a pink tinsel crown with, “*Hello Rea, oh, you’re an angel*” and Rea replied firmly, “*No, I’m a princess*”.

Moving on...

My experience in the Steiner kindergarten of blending into the background and trying to grow into the centre in an organic way clearly reflected the philosophy of that space. However, there are also researcher responsibilities and my journal recalls some of my thoughts about entering and leaving these different settings. Ultimately leaving the Steiner kindergarten was done as unobtrusively as I had come and without any emotional reaction from the children. This was intentional and the teacher in that setting pointed out that their relationships are “*not about attachment*”. At the Montessori *casa* it was important to say goodbye thoroughly because some of my relationships had become very warm and close. I became an official ‘friend of the centre’ so the connection is maintained. At the private preschool there was a farewell at morning tea but it was a busy time of year and it all became very hectic. I was leaving to go to Europe and rehearsals for the Christmas concert were in full swing at the preschool. My time at the private preschool seemed rushed at the end and I would have liked to see the concert. In these necessarily brief and factual descriptions of joining and leaving each setting perhaps I am glossing over what Lofland and Lofland (1995) suggest is an indicator of emotional engagement with the study. Planning the farewell and negotiating ways to keep in touch is a necessary part of the process when using methods that encourage a sense of “emotional connectedness” (Atkinson, Coffey & Delamont, 2003, p.55). Apart from the point made by Delamont (1992) that it is easier to carry on collecting data than return to “the harsher world of full-time analysis and writing” (p.139) there is also the joy factor of being with young children. After years of being in an academic environment spending prolonged time in an early childhood setting was very grounding and being a participant observer gave the opportunity to reconnect with young children and as Podmore (2006) points out, to have fun.

### **Teacher interviews**

My field notes have described my interactions with teachers in each setting but they do not do justice to the effort and care the owners and teachers took in making sure that my experience was positive, friendly and thoughtful. Part of the commitment to

the research involved time and money. In all cases the owners paid for teachers to be with me for the interviews and the teachers spent their lunchtime with me and I bought the lunch. For most interviews we went to a local coffee shop or café and ate and talked. In order to make the interview run smoothly and feel less intimidating it was semi-structured and there were four starter questions (Appendix 8). Some teachers appreciated having the questions to reflect on beforehand, because they all thought the questions were challenging and thought provoking. One teacher told me that talking about spirituality was useful and affirming because:

*“when you first came I had never thought about it so these things are all new things. It’s an entirely new way of looking at my children that in some ways I did but I didn’t know the name for”.*

If we wandered off topic the questions refocused us. Several teachers had really reflected about spirituality and made notes for us to discuss. Others enjoyed the spontaneity and appreciated the lack of pressure about saying the right thing and one teacher said she enjoyed thinking aloud and commented *“Everyone talks about ‘not knowing’ – that it is okay”*. Something that helped the thinking aloud process was that I was recording the interviews by hand and writing as we went along. This meant a lot of cold cups of coffee but was less intrusive because I was focused on writing and did not have to stare or otherwise become a presence while the teachers talked. It must have been a successful tactic because one teacher who had not particularly wanted to be interviewed stayed on for at least another hour talking in the car on her afternoon off. I am not sure why I decided not to use a tape recorder. I had to rush away after the interviews to transcribe them because writing verbatim is not easy but if done quickly I could still hear the ‘voice’ in my head. I probably did miss some information but at least I was not relying on a tape recorder that might malfunction. Perhaps I wished to capture the spirit of what was said and in common with the Steiner teachers wished to separate technology from the spiritual world. In fact the way I wrote up the interviews was crucial to the analysis and new meanings were revealed in this process.

The words of the teachers created powerful narratives of spirituality that touch on philosophy, family experiences, personal opinion, beliefs about children and their role as a teacher. As noted by Reinharz (1992, p.19), interviewing gives “access to

people's ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words rather than in the words of the researcher". I felt when I read the transcripts that the interview conversation, or dialogue, is sometimes a blend of voices but that sometimes the teachers seemed to be talking to themselves. The responses sometimes become a stream of consciousness. For example, one teacher reflected:

*But what's the spirit all about? ...I covered a bit of Rudolph Steiner, talked and thought about it... I figure its about the real you and the real me, what makes you and what makes me...it's a feeling...is it what drives you? ...can I see it being...*

The broken and unfinished sentences and pauses indicate self questioning. We continued our conversation by email. This disjointedness also reflects the busy lives of women and one email concluded "*I have more thoughts Jane – but I have to cook tea*". Our talk continued after the interviews and in some ways still continues. There are no boundaries to this on-going discussion. The fact that I was not looking for the one true 'jackpot' type answer but admitted my own uncertainty helped this process and it was my experience that interviewing promoted a closer relationship between us.

Something that was noted in nearly every interview was that we did not really know each other until we took the time to sit and talk. The hour for lunch mirrors what Malcolm (1992, p.67) calls "the traditional analytic hour". This assumes that in an hour people can get over the formalities and begin to communicate at a deeper level. The questions gave shape to the encounter but were not easy and spirituality was not, in many cases, what participants had previously articulated. As one teacher said "*no, no, I avoided it, it was too hard*". Many of the teachers returned the question about how spirituality might be defined and asked me the same question that I had asked them. My less than satisfactory response reminded me of a story Bruner (1990, p.37) tells about the anthropologist Evans-Pritchard:

When Evans-Pritchard had finished interviewing his informants about their religious beliefs, he courteously asked them whether they would like to ask him any questions about this. One of them asked shyly about the divinity that he wore on his wrist, consulted each time he seemed to make a major decision. Evans-Pritchard, a devout Catholic, was as surprised by the

difficulty he had in explaining to his interlocutors that his wristwatch was not a deity as he was by the question they had asked in the first instance.

There were definitely surprises. How to explain the teacher (not at the Steiner kindergarten) who talked at length about reincarnation and yet who regularly sang a song about squishing snails and squashing worms at morning tea times? I had to make sense of her personal meaning and experiences instead of rushing to put her words into a *faux* Buddhist framework. I did not want to engage with the binaries of talk vs practice, thought vs action, truth vs fiction, true self vs teacher role. This would have been to make the process superficial. It was deeper work on my part to engage with these contradictions and as Daiute and Fine (2003, p.69) suggest “make sense amid conflicting bits of evidence”.

My prior involvement in each place was useful and because I had been spending time in these settings the teachers were happy to refer to children we both knew and they did not have to describe the context. I could nod or signal understanding and the interview would continue and because of this we seemed to cover a lot of ground. I noticed that on one occasion when the interview took place in the home of a teacher the conversation was more personal and some family history was shared. On other occasions the naturalistic nature of the café as a venue struck me and everyone was happy to talk there because there were people, usually women, talking together at nearly every other table. The fact that I was writing as well was the only difference.

### **Visual Data**

The request that teachers make me a video of what they thought was spiritual in their particular context was perceived by them to be a challenging aspect of the research. By asking for their interpretation I hoped to avoid a limitation of the Tobin, Wu and Davidson (1989, p.7) study where they describe their choice of what to video as a site of negotiation and compromise that reflected their own “culture bound” perspectives. I asked the teachers themselves to film the video for me so that the study was not limited by my gaze and by my understandings. I was also influenced by a study in New Zealand (Haggerty, 1998) that identified a teacher dislike of the video camera and being videoed. By placing the camera in the hands of teachers I hoped that this would be a less threatening approach and it would make us co-inquirers. It advanced

the model of teacher as researcher, and gave us all the surprise of watching a video that included different interpretations of what was spiritual in each setting.

Heath and Hindmarsh (2002, p. 103) recommend using video as a research tool. They suggest that a visual record may “allow us to capture versions of conduct and interaction in everyday settings and subject them to repeated scrutiny using slow motion facilities and the like”. They also make the point that it enables data to be scrutinized by others. In this case the video was made and then watched by me with teachers and again by parents taking part in their second focus group. The Montessori teachers liked it and said that looking at the finished video gave them ‘*new eyes*’ and they began to see the environment and the children in a new way. Teachers in the private preschool were very wary of the video and did not enjoy using it as part of the research although they used video cameras in their private life. Sparrman (2005, p.252) emphasizes the different cultural meanings that attach to the use of video when working with children. She notes that “there is no such thing as objective technology” and reactions to the video camera reflected the different settings. In the following discussion this point becomes clear.

### Visual knowing

The video camera was not introduced into the Steiner kindergarten at all. It represents a technology that the kindergarten does not associate with young children who are being educated through their senses in early childhood. Their stance was like that taken in the following anecdote where Gregory Bateson (Bateson & Bateson, 1988, p.81) describes a religious community who decided not to take part in a film that would feature them praying although to do so might have saved their existence. They decided not to go along with the filmmaker because the intervention of the camera would mean that they were no longer engaged in a sacred activity. This is a valid point and because some parents and teachers were uneasy about the video camera I made adjustments to the research design. I did not insist that the video be made in the Steiner kindergarten. This was a difficult decision but once in the environment I realised why they had misgivings. The softness of the environment and the respect for the imaginary world of the child would have made it inappropriate. There were also ethical issues because although in most circumstances the children would be used to

this technology being used at home they are not familiar with the use of video or camera in the kindergarten.

In the settings where the filming took place it was interesting that even after giving ethical permission that some families expressed concerns about the video and photographs mainly because of the internet. They feared that images of their children might become public. One parent wondered if the video could be accessed for pornography and I realised that there was a lot of fear from parents about the possible misuse of their children's images. Parents are usually consulted about photographs or videos taken for research purposes but it is assumed in many early childhood settings that videos and photographs can be taken, stored electronically, and used for a variety of purposes, so it was a mark of trust that so many parents expressed their worries to me. Even so, a parent remarked when looking at the video "*what a shame that he knew you were there*". In my view it is an intrusion to take photographs of the unaware subject, shades of the Panopticon (Foucault, 1977). I reminded this parent that she would feel uncomfortable if there was a hidden camera in a changing room and she agreed.

#### Children's reactions

Children brought their learning from home into their play and knew all about posing and cultural techniques that are used to ensure that photos are a success. I noted the following exchange at the private preschool:

*There are four girls. They all have babies with them (dolls/stuffed animals) and a plastic camera. The camera is very popular. Cara turns to us (the other teachers and myself) and asks us to "say 'cheese'". We look at the camera, smile and say 'cheese'. The girls involved in the play all say 'cheese'.*

I appreciated the attempts by the private preschool to make the process fun and children enjoyed using plastic cameras to photograph the teachers photographing them. In the Steiner kindergarten if there was an opportunity to photograph the children the teacher told me and then I got the camera and took a photograph. Unlike the contexts where use of the camera is a norm there were a few occasions when the children got quite excited. Their teacher simply ignored this and the camera was put back on the shelf. In the *casa* children were familiar with the digital camera and knew

that they could check their image and have the photograph deleted if they wished it to be.

The visual is definitely another language and involved different decision making:

*Rick & Sean share a book and talk and laugh to each other. They sit opposite each other so Sean is looking at it upside down. They point together and laugh and their heads touch. I decide not to take a photograph. Fascinating though their conversation sounds it suddenly strikes me that I cannot enter their world.*

Early childhood settings are spaces for children, and in this case the enjoyment of the children, their concentration and their unselfconsciousness, took precedence over the requirements of the research.

### **Focus groups**

It is seen as integral to the success of early childhood settings in New Zealand that close relationships are set up with parents and *whanau* or family. Parents were invited on a purely voluntary basis to attend two focus groups. The strength of the focus group, according to Waldegrave (1999, p.231) “lies in the relative freedom that the group situation provides participants to discuss issues and reflect on problems”. As a researcher it gave me the opportunity to construct a social and friendly space. After each discussion we had food and drink and there was always time to be together afterwards in a less formal way. This aspect of research is not discussed very often. In every setting the inclusion of food and drink at all stages of the process oiled the wheels of our interactions. It was a feature of the research that everyone appreciated.

Parents were invited to discuss a series of questions about spirituality and education (Appendix 11) in the first focus group. Six parents attended the first focus group at the *casa*, four came to the private preschool and seven to the Steiner kindergarten. I took notes and the record was typed up, copied and returned to each participant for checking and approval. These first groups involved lively discussions and several parents followed up by email. I liked some of the metaphors parents used to describe spirituality – one said it was like a diamond, light, transparent, many faceted and valuable. Another that it was like a rainbow, you knew it was there but it could not be



touched. A few days after one focus group I was leaving the centre at lunchtime and a parent called from her car “*Hi Jane, have you got the answer to it all yet?*” I really wanted to shout back “yes, definitely” but resisted the temptation and noted that spirituality had become something that we could joke about. These parent groups were insightful and personal stories included information about family values, traditions and culture.

For the second focus group parents were invited to look at the video and comment on it. Those who saw their child or children were often moved and responded emotionally to this. Parents at the Montessori *casa* felt that it gave a wonderful glimpse into the world that their children experience and that they saw their child in a different way. As one teacher remarked, “*children have a school face and a home face*”. The nine parents who attended responded enthusiastically and there were comments, laughter and clapping. They agreed that the teachers had captured something special.

#### The eye of the beholder

In the private preschool the parental response to the video was mixed. Four parents who had not attended the first focus group came along. One parent commented that from a personal perspective there was nothing spiritual in the video. I felt that this raised an interesting point that I had thought about as a participant observer. We talked about whether I would see what I wanted to see in the sense of a kind of projection because as Lawler (2002) states “the kind of knowledge we produce through research will depend on what we set out to find” (p.243). This kind of reproduction through research is a challenging thought. I had hoped that asking the teachers to make the video would reduce this possibility and lessen the power of my gaze. In this setting where spirituality was not directly articulated the parental response was perceived as a criticism and the owner/teacher responded. Her reaction gave me more insight into her own ideas about spirituality and there was plenty of time to talk after a heated focus group discussion.

I began to wonder if that parent had punctured an ‘Emperor’s New Clothes’ scenario and I realised that these focus groups provided a critical perspective on the research. Parental comments in the focus groups engaged deeper thinking about whether

spirituality exists only in the eye of the beholder and if so what does that mean for the sense of community in each setting. Morgan (2005, p.76) writes about the sacred gaze and says that reaching mutual understanding about the visual is a question of “covenanting” and that “a particular covenant stipulates the terms of the gaze that joins viewer and image in a social relation.” In this regard each setting had beliefs and ideas about spirituality that were acceptable in that context and this meant that spirituality was seen in a particular way. The concept of covenant underlines a tacit agreement; what was produced was meaningful at that time, in that setting, to a particular group of people.

No surprises – spirituality in the Steiner kindergarten

In terms of spirituality parents in the Steiner kindergarten had reflected on the spiritual. The spiritual dimension guided part of their lives. They all said that spirituality was the part missing for them in other early childhood settings. Perhaps because they were so confident about their contribution the first focus group was the largest and lasted for the longest time. These parents really enjoyed talking about spirituality because it was the reason for their choice of educational setting for their children. This was obvious in their answer to one of my first questions:

*Me- did your attitude to spirituality influence your choice of educational setting for your child?*

*All - YES (x 7)*

*Parent - that's 7 times YES*

*Me - that's a very clear YES (laughter)*

However, the second focus group was not so successful. There was a mix up about dates. The five or six parents I interacted with were getting ready for an end of term event. Parents liked the photographs but they were not particularly surprised or interested in them. Unlike parents in the other settings no one asked me for copies.

The stereotypical image of the researcher presenting ground breaking findings to amazed parents, like a magician pulling things out of a hat, was completely challenged in this setting. These parents were very confident that the kindergarten was a spiritual place and didn't need this to be confirmed by visual or any other means. In common with other contexts where strong spiritual or religious beliefs are

held there was a sense of ownership or membership in that particular community. They were happy to share it but I felt that in their eyes it was only a matter of time before I simply saw the world as they did. The photographs came from the material world and were an artificial intervention in the life of the children. For the children to be overly conscious of themselves through photographs was not perceived as useful or philosophically sound. Whether this purity of thought will last when there is so much emphasis on visual documentation in early childhood educational settings is not clear.

Because Steiner kindergartens are visually attractive and very distinctive it is easy to construct children as cute or self-conscious in such an attractive space but this is antithetical to the aims of this educational setting. The parents demonstrated this in their reactions and it is always audiences who are unfamiliar with Steiner educational philosophy who are attracted to form over substance and who want more photographs or visual evidence when this is often seen as exploitative by teachers and parents who embrace anthroposophical beliefs.

### **Data Analysis**

In the analysis I was deeply involved in the process of interpretation. Denzin (2001) proposes six stages to the interpretive process. Each stage reflects aspects of the analysis. He points out that this begins when the research question is framed. The work of deconstructing and analyzing prior conceptions of the phenomenon (in this thesis spirituality) happens when the literature is engaged and the research is designed. The phenomenon is then located. In this research the decision to form case studies was decided and multi-method qualitative case study research was engaged in these contexts. Examples of the spiritual were then ‘bracketed’, that is, they were extracted from the world where they exist. Denzin (2001) recommends separating what one has seen from any preconceived notions or definitions. In this phase of my research I found myself constantly thinking, note taking, making diagrams and generally contemplating the data. I also read photographs and video as text. After this immersion in the data there followed a process of “reassembling” (Denzin, 2001, p.79). The following chapters are the result of this process. This period of construction then ends with attempts at contextualisation when the data are connected back into the world. In this thesis the core narratives, both prose and poetry, emphasize this link back into the world of participants and readers.

At the end of my time in each setting many different kinds of data had been generated from the methods described in this chapter: field notes, interview scripts, focus group material, photographs from all three settings and two videos. Two ways of analysing the data complement each other. First, themes emerged from the rich data generated by the case studies. Going back over and over the data means constantly “combing the evidence” (Edwards, 2001, p.132). Themes emerged from each setting and began to converge. Clustering the information formed connections between data sets and between settings. Information was grouped and re-grouped under various headings. At the beginning these categories were experimental and loose (Appendix 13). Then they became more specific and aspects that were shared by the three settings began to surface more clearly (Appendix 14). Finally, there was evidence of a connection between the themes themselves. I began to think of these connections as relational spaces in the everyday life of these settings.

As outlined in the previous chapter the second approach to analysis used writing as an ongoing analytic strategy. Writing as fieldnotes, journals, notebooks, transcripts and visual data was a rich source of material. In the process I noticed that the transcripts of the interviews and focus groups formed patterns on the page. They were configured like poems. The creation of the poems required words to be shifted and new spaces created. Through this “dynamic, creative process” (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) new texts were formed. The journey from interview transcript (Appendix 2) to poem (Appendix 3) is documented. This is a record of *poesis* as meaning making, the process of making something. Throughout the analytic process some of the writing (especially the teacher poems) went back to the participants for approval and suggestions. Finally, the core narratives became written up for this thesis. As findings they become the focus of the next four chapters. These chapters combine the presentation of the data with finding from the research and discussion. The core narratives form focal points of reference in this new landscape.

## **Conclusion**

These methods chosen for this research have enabled me to explore in depth the question of spiritual experience and how it is supported in early childhood settings. This chapter described what happened when using methods suited to qualitative inquiry in early childhood settings. Children and teachers are familiar with participant

observation as a research method. Interviews provided an opportunity to obtain opinions from teachers about their practice as it related to spirituality. The focus groups achieved the same aim with parents and gave more insights about the spiritual aspect of each setting. These groups also critiqued the videos or the photographs. The use of camera and video were a valuable addition and the visual data remain a potent reminder of my time in these settings.

Multi-methods are considered to construct validity in case study research. They are a source of rich information that crystallises (Richardson, 1997) around certain themes. This happened in the analytic processes that included a search for emergent themes and used writing as a means of exploration. Evidence from the data enabled me to work with the emergent concept of everyday spirituality. This chapter ended with a summary of what happened in the interpretive analytic work. In retrospect I realise that analysis was happening all the time. Like ethical considerations the analysis threads through the research and is on-going.

The concept of everyday spirituality is the focus of the next chapter. This is an overarching concept that emerged from my first contact with these early childhood settings. The chapters that follow merge findings with discussion and focus on specific aspects of the research in detail. A number of teachers and children are mentioned in these chapters and the table (see p.255) is available as a reminder of the teachers and children involved in each place. The following narratives construct another layer in the landscape of spirituality and after a discussion of everyday spirituality in the next chapter three themes from the research are presented.

## Chapter Six – Everyday spirituality

### The alchemy of everyday life

*Alchemy – to pursue the transmutation of baser metal into silver and gold;  
transformation  
(Pearsall, 1999)*

This chapter introduces the concept of everyday spirituality and outlines the reasons for my conceptualisation of spirituality as embedded in the everyday life of these early childhood settings. This is not to explain away any sense of mystery. Simply to suggest that spirituality, its wonder and connection to the mystery of life, is something that can become part of our daily encounters. Sometimes the alchemy of everyday life takes over and in these moments of connection it is possible to glimpse something beyond the ordinary.

This chapter serves as an overview and introduction to the case studies. It is a precursor to the three chapters that follow. In this particular chapter the three early childhood settings are described in more detail. Aspects of their philosophy and examples of the practices that influence daily life in each setting are explained. In relation to a discussion about spirituality in action the chapter looks at ordinary routines and rituals and the arrangements that construct lunchtime are described. This discussion takes on broader meaning as the metaphor of ‘breaking bread’ is introduced in relation to each place. One of the core narratives is based on a narrative about pumpkins. It describes the symbolic transformation of this fairly mundane object. I also include a narrative that charts the change that began to happen to me as the researcher. Finally, I suggest that recognition of the spiritual can become radical practice in settings that implement a spiritual approach to pedagogy.

In the following chapters the core narratives are indicated by having a sub-title, by being in italic font and indented. In the discussion before each one is presented there is an indication of whose words, or voice, is in the narrative together with the source, for example from an interview transcript or from fieldnotes. These narratives represent a process of (re) construction by me as *bricoleur* (see p. 86). Straight excerpts from the field notes, transcripts or journals are also in italics. When a word or short phrase is in italics then this indicates that the material is a direct quote from fieldnotes or from the words of participants.

## Influencing everyday life

In the Steiner kindergarten parents are introduced to anthroposophy; a philosophical world-view that includes the spiritual and is the science of studying people (anthro) in relation to wisdom (sophia). Parents in the focus groups said that they were already attracted to Steiner education because of this esoteric philosophical base. In its practical aspects one of the Steiner teachers involved in the study felt that anthroposophy ran through everything she did in the kindergarten. Trostli (1998, p.1) adds that “anthroposophy is not only a means of uniting us with the spiritual. It must also be practical and capable of providing fruitful solutions to the questions of daily life”.

Anthroposophy has been described as “a detailed philosophy of being and knowing” (Woods, O’Neill & Woods, 1997, p.27). It influences health, education and agriculture and encourages a certain way of life. For example, when families join the kindergarten they are encouraged to buy and eat organic food, and if possible food grown in a biodynamic way to reflect the holistic aspects of Steiner’s approach to education. Children are required to wear light coloured clothes because ‘dark colours particularly black are a heavy burden on a child’s unfolding soul life’ according to the information given to parents. Teachers recommend that children do not watch television, play computers or watch videos. While some may find this unusual one of the parents who runs an IT company assured the focus group that she employs people who are creative and who can think. In her opinion Steiner education promotes this. She says that expertise with the mechanics of IT can be taught very quickly. The point she makes is that being educated within the spiritual perspective of the Steiner kindergarten is not a disadvantage in what some might call the ‘real world’. When parents choose a school in the special character category they often have an expectation that the home and school contexts will overlap.

Teachers at the private preschool shared that they had a harder time articulating the spiritual. They returned to the curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) as the basis for their educational direction. They concluded that spirituality was about values for them. Parents noted the practical aspect of this perspective. They said that they really appreciated the care that teachers showed the children. They felt that their

children were respected and they felt welcome. In their focus group they mentioned that:

*- each kid is greeted. 'I'm glad you've come'. 'So glad to see you', they get that here, its really nice.*

*- Yes – someone thinks I'm okay apart from mum – that greeting is important.*

The philosophy statement of the private preschool refers to the holistic underpinnings of their educational approach. This states that teachers will consider all aspects of the child's development 'cognitive, physical, social, emotional and spiritual'. Despite her enthusiasm for her work one of the teachers said that she was always discouraged when parents told her that proximity was the main reason for their choice of preschool. She said that it always surprised her that a place where children would spend so much time and would have so much influence was chosen for convenience instead of being thoroughly checked out. Teachers recognise that time at the preschool takes up a significant and important part of a child's life. In all these settings parents confirmed that children brought learning home and that family life is influenced by the preschool. One parent confirmed that "*values are a whole way of living*".

At the Montessori *casa* one family had moved house to be near the preschool and the parent said that this was because of her respect for the owner. However, some children came because it was nearby or because choice was limited or because the family was attracted to the Montessori philosophy. One parent said that she made her mind up about her child attending the *casa* after coming to the parent night when I introduced myself and the research plan. Not only had she felt interested in the research but one of the teachers worked with a parent to give a demonstration of hand washing. This might seem a very mundane action but it was far from that. The Montessori view is that such demonstrations allow children to learn without judgement and to achieve mastery and "serenity of spirit" (Standing, 1998, p.50). The parents were very quiet as Fipe (the teacher) sat on the mat opposite the parent. Fipe spoke gently and gave instructions with precise movements while she went through the process of hand washing. From a spiritual perspective she showed mindfulness in action. Talking with parents afterwards confirmed my feeling that everyday tasks can



be transformed and transforming. Maria Montessori expressed the wish that her educational method should be comprehensive, not a preparation for school but “for life” (Montessori, 1972, p.322).

Everyday life in these settings is configured through the dimensions of time and space. These configurations are grounded in cultural expectations and understandings of how life should be. This aspect of educational settings is more often opaque and taken for granted rather than made transparent and explicit. In the Steiner kindergarten time passes like a dream. The day is rhythmic, reflecting Rudolf Steiner’s suggestion that “life passes in a rhythmical series of repetitions” (Steiner, 1920/2004, p.23). At the private preschool the notion of ‘getting ready’ or transition is a focus. Routine is important. This is the same at the Montessori *casa* where the notion of ‘order’ is recognised. Montessori (1972) proposed that knowing about time, limits, and boundaries assist “a soul which is coming to life” (p.111). The following narrative about the *casa* is an example of everyday spirituality in action. It happened as a result of decisions made with the intention of including the spiritual in everyday life.

### **Spirituality in action**

The *casa*

The teachers in the *casa* were reviewing their daily routines and they decided to change their lunchtime routine. The word that is most used to describe events in the *casa* is special and sometimes events were described as special rather than spiritual. The teachers discussed spirituality in relation to this study and talked about what they thought spirituality might be in their own context. Their ideas were part of a display on the notice board and they named aspects of education they thought were spiritual. These included experiences of wonder, interactions with the natural world, peace, joy and happiness. In the discourse of the *casa* three strands that construct the spiritual need emphasis: aesthetics and an emphasis on the beautiful, friendship and being courteous to friends and also the idea of specialness. These elements came together in making these changes. The following narrative focuses on the ‘how’ of eating and sharing food in the *casa*. This narrative is based on my observations and I noticed that after this intervention lunchtime became a time to honour the spirit of the child instead of just another routine:

### *Lunchtime at the casa*

*I noticed that after mat time just before noon the children sat up and began to look interested. They were looking alert and one of the older children was praised for offering to take a new child to lunch. Children who leave after the morning session had already gone with their parents. The teachers began to go into the new lunchtime ritual. First of all the children's names were called softly and each child went to fetch his or her lunchbox from their bag. They returned to an area where four small tables had been laid with pretty blue and yellow china plates and an unlit candle placed in the middle of the table. They were invited (always invited in this setting) to take a seat. Carol said "I am inviting you to sit next to your friend Sam today". Children then transferred the contents of the lunchbox to their plate and replaced the box in their bag and returned it to the entryway.*

*When all the children were seated, settled, and ready to begin eating together, the candles were lit and some dreamy music began to play. Everyone began to talk quietly together. There was occasional laughter but mainly I noticed that eating was a serious business. There was no sense of rush. If a packet needed opening a child would fetch a pair of scissors and open it neatly. Wrappers were put in the bin. If they needed help then teachers came over to help. They sometimes joined in the conversations but on the whole this was time for the children to be together. Glasses of water were provided.*

*After lunch anything left over was put in the bin or replaced in the lunchbox. Children collected their shoes and went outside. A teacher put the dishes in the dishwasher and the tables were wiped down and rearranged ready to be used for other purposes in the afternoon. This slight rearrangement signalled the difference between kai (food time) and work. These differentiations may take on cultural and spiritual significance for Māori in Aotearoa where food is subject to certain practices related to tapu and noa, both aspects of the sacred (Pere, 1991).*

*I noticed that aesthetics are always important in the Montessori environment. There is the usual emphasis on a beautiful environment with pretty plates and*

*table arrangements. The candlelight is a special touch. At lunchtime music is important and this really set the scene. The casa is not a setting where background music is played and it is usually very quiet. Children notice the music and it calls to the spirit. One day Jason was singing along with the tape when Helen, a teacher, mentioned to me that he likes this music and Jason says yes, and his mum had bought the CD. Helen confirms that this is true and Jason continues to eat and sing softly while gazing into the distance.*

*Another day our time together is completely changed. It was Alexa's 5<sup>th</sup> birthday. We all sat down and Helen put a tape of rock music on instead of the usual ambient music. There were shrieks of surprise. She indicated 'quiet please' by a finger to lips and the children picked up on this. The tape is familiar to them and they began to mouth the words and do the actions without actually making a sound. During one of the action songs the children clap and stamp in unison, nod heads and twist in their chairs and although they look delighted and eyes are shining this is all done in silence. Very gradually after several silent songs the voices began to join in and when Helen said that everyone could sing they did so loudly and happily. The silent singing was hilarious and when the children went outside to play it was a really rowdy session. The joy of having a surprise definitely supported the high spirits of the children and added to the specialness of Alexa's day. Some of the joy came from the spontaneity and disruption of routine that introduced a touch of magic into the day. Such moments of joy definitely have the potential to spiritually transform everyday life.*

Lunchtime and eating together breaks up the day and is a time to relax and be together. Sharing meals together is an aspect of life that reflects generosity and replenishes the social batteries. How this social time is constructed is part of the decision making that creates daily life and culture. A community defines who it is through its way of configuring social time. De Saint-Exupéry's (1945/94) dialogue between the fox and the little Prince illustrates the importance of rites and rituals:

“What is a rite?” asked the little prince.

“Those are actions too often neglected,” said the fox. “They are what make one day different from other days, one hour from other hours...” (p.66)

## Breaking bread

Because of this experience the concept of ‘breaking bread’ became a metaphor that enabled me to explore other experiences that merge the spiritual and the everyday. I have used the phrase ‘breaking bread’ to signal this connection between the sacred and the everyday in terms of food. Breaking bread is a symbolic phrase from a Western/Christian cultural perspective. The action of breaking bread, eating it, and drinking wine forms the pivotal moment in the Communion service for some Christian denominations. For many believers this signals the moment when the bread symbolises (or becomes) the body of Christ and is the moment of transformation. Breaking bread signals community; it is a way of being together and of recognising a fundamental aspect of being alive. Breaking bread may also signal the end of enmity or the suspension of hostility. The act of breaking bread defines sameness and difference.

Spirituality is realised in ways of being together that acknowledge connectedness through such everyday activities as sharing food together. Breaking bread involves cultural understanding often linked to specific religious beliefs. It highlights the importance of bread to some cultures while for many people in the world bread would not have this significance. Practices in educational contexts reflect cultural values and in early childhood environments the differing beliefs and values of families and children are constantly negotiated in order to encourage a sense of belonging. The idea of breaking bread is not a universal and will not carry the same meaning for everyone. Almon (1998, p.57) points out that in Steiner centres in the Philippines rice is honoured as part of “the daily celebration of life”. This celebration is a moment in the day when children in early childhood settings participate in habits, customs and rituals that contribute to the social construction of self in community with others. The everyday practice of eating reflects who we are and “food is still our ritual relaxation,... the excuse to recreate our humanity as well as our strength, and to renew our relationships” (Visser, 1991, p.23).

## Breaking bread – two examples from the *casa*

In the *casa* friendship was encouraged and children were able to break bread together because of the way that the environment was prepared. The carefully prepared environment is a feature of Montessori philosophy. In the *casa* this directly impacted

on the well being of children and honoured equity in the centre. There was always a small table set with a cloth, a water jug, crackers/biscuits, sliced fruit and cubes of cheese. I noticed that throughout the morning children gravitated to the table if they wished to and either ate alone or shared with a friend if they wanted to be sociable. Sometimes when eating alone this seemed quite contemplative. Children at this table often did not react to events that happened around them but gazed into space. Steiner (1923/98) links this dreamy state to digestive processes. He also says that there is no differentiation between attending to the physical and spiritual when educating young children.

The food table meant that any child who did not have breakfast or who forgot their bag and lunch or who felt insecure could immediately sit at the table and relax without any sense of obligation or expectation. The food table enabled children to become familiar with their own rhythms and to make choices about eating as well as fitting in with the routines of the centre. In terms of everyday spirituality this was a wonderful place for the children to be. Children could feel nurtured and respected. They could exercise choice and practise the skills they sometimes learned together at circle time. They used the water jug and offered food to friends or had time alone. In the Montessori environment there is an emphasis on being calm and this was obviously a place where children could refresh themselves physically, emotionally and spiritually.

As part of daily work in the *casa* the children could take individual trays laid with different materials with which to work. One day a child took a tray with a hard boiled egg, a glass dish and an egg cutter. He painstakingly shelled the egg, placing the shell in the glass dish. He put the egg in the cutter, sliced it and then turned it and divided it again, then ate it slowly and with enjoyment, washed everything up, dried, and replaced the tray on the shelf. After this prolonged period of concentration the video shows him giving a little skip as he chooses something else to do. Colm was aware of the video camera but it did not interrupt him and he gave the task his full attention. When we watched the visual record of this event the parents and teachers were all humbled, as I was, by the precision and mindfulness shown by this young child. We reflected on the last time we had eaten something so simple with such enjoyment. Hay and Nye (1998) liken such instances of intense awareness to *vipassana* meditation and

in this activity there was a definite sense of being in the moment. In the Hindu tradition such moments while eating certain foods are sometimes called *satvic*. This state leads to a sense of spiritual contentment. Montessori noted that this kind of cycle, setting up the work and completing it, using the senses, and affirming practical skills, is the way to achieve harmony. An appreciation of the aesthetic in life comes from balance rather than the experience of “crude pleasures” and “strong stimuli” that have the opposite effect (Montessori, 1972, p. 147). In the Montessori environment spirituality is supported by activities that are calm and peaceful.

#### Everyday hospitality

Everyday spirituality is encapsulated in the wish to be hospitable, generous and welcoming. In the *casa* the spirit of generosity is affirmed on special occasions and on a daily basis. I noticed that because parent nights were social with wine and plenty of food that nearly all the parents came. The teachers found nothing remarkable about this. The room was crowded, everyone was talking and it was an enjoyable social event. Half jokingly Helen said “*food is very important to us in this place*”. For most people it is normal to offer food and drink to visitors in the home, it is part of creating social bonds and signaling friendship. In educational settings it is also possible as Bennett (2003, p.48) says to “invite others into our world”.

Derrida (2002, p.365) states that hospitality is part of a “spiritual adventure”. He proposes that in everyday terms hospitality “has a role in ordinary life: when someone arrives, when love arrives, for example, one takes a risk, one is exposed” (Derrida & Roudinesco, 2004, p.60). The teachers were slightly apprehensive about the changes they made to the lunchtime routine (candles, china plates, etc). They exposed themselves to criticism and misunderstanding although they were always motivated by wanting the best for the children. They decided not to begin to say grace because they felt that spirituality for them was realised in action and in subtle rather than overt ways.

In their creation of what Myers (1997, p.63) calls “hospitable space” they created a place for spirituality to enter. As they welcomed it so the feeling grew and spilled over into home life. One of the parents affirmed that everyday spirituality had the capacity to spread and be shared beyond the *casa*, she said:

*It makes you want to carry on that whole philosophy at home. I had no sense of that at the other centre. Now we light a candle at mealtimes, have a thought for the day – so I'm evolving and growing.*

Later in the focus group conversation more parents acknowledge this. Children have obviously talked about what is happening and teachers have also put photographs on the noticeboard for the parents. Parents acknowledge the spiritual nature of these changes and their impact on everyday life in the home:

*When you have meals more...rituals and planning*

*The celebration of being together, we have food to eat, making it beautiful.*

*Allowing children engrossed in the moment to go deeper is part of spirituality - but also ritual and planning helps create that.*

In the *casa* as far as the children are concerned lunchtime has become a highlight of the day. The first time my friend Tane stays for lunch he tells me all about it first thing in the morning and is really excited. One of the older children shows him what to do and this aspect of hospitality, or *manaaki*, is defined by Pere (1982/94, p.72) as “to show respect or kindness to; to give hospitality, or to bestow”. She feels that children must learn about the concept of *manaaki* because of obligations to others and in order not to cause offence. In early childhood settings Tangaere (1997, p.50) discusses scaffolding, that is, the duty of more capable others to support their peers, and links this to the *tuakana/teina* (older/younger sibling) relationships that she calls “the essence of love and care for one another”. In these ways children are constructed and construct themselves as hospes/host and guest simply by participating in everyday life in the *casa* and they experience an everyday life that includes spirituality.

### **Practical values**

The private preschool

When I used ‘breaking bread’ as a window to spirituality I noticed different aspects of daily life and everyday interactions. In the private preschool there was more sense of transition as most children came for morning or afternoon sessions and only a few

children were beginning to stay all day. One of the aims of the preschool was to prepare children for school and to make them feel independent and able to negotiate that transition. Children collect morning tea and lunch from the bags that are hanging on pegs just as if they were at primary school. They learn to sort out what they will eat throughout the day and to make what the teachers call ‘sensible choices’.

*Everyday spirituality and the virtues*

*At the end of the morning session the teachers make tea and collect their lunch and the children get their bags and sit down with drinks and lunchboxes all together. In this setting parents helped to hang bags on pegs and links with home were affirmed as children brought food for morning and afternoon snacks and lunch. The children unpacked lunchboxes that had tiny parcels of sliced fruit, small boxes of raisins, finger food wrapped in cellophane, out of season strawberries and cherry tomatoes, individual bags of crisps and chocolate biscuits. These foods usually supplemented sandwiches or sushi rolls, the sensible food.*

*The teachers sat with the children and helped them negotiate packaging and bottle tops. They commented on the lunches and added things from the cupboard if a child was not so lucky or had forgotten their lunch. They sat at each table with a small group of children and talked about the day. They made jokes, conversed and were companionable. They talked about the children’s choices as they decided what to eat at morning tea and what to leave until lunchtime. Children discarded, mixed and compared food and chatted or ate silently.*

*In line with their conception of spirituality as the means of encouraging certain values teachers praised children for good manners, for finishing food, clearing up mess and for putting boxes and bottles back in bags. They mentioned consideration and politeness and noticed if children were helpful and showed awareness for the feelings of others. There was an emphasis on cleanliness, obedience and moderation. These values are described by Popov, Popov & Kamelin (1995, p.19) as virtues and in their view practising a range of virtues is an essential means of achieving “spiritual mastery”.*



*As children sat in groups and opened their lunchbox they often began to talk about home, their family or what they had done at the weekend. The talk became more personal and the act of sitting together and eating provided a feeling of community. Sometimes children had notes from their parents tucked into their lunchboxes. One child showed me a note with a heart drawn on it. I wondered if what I was seeing was 'love in a lunchbox'. One of the teachers said that this mother often puts a note in the lunchbox. Suddenly I could recognise the wish of some parents to be with their child 'in spirit' and their desire to communicate this through their food preparation and choices.*

It would have been superficially easy to see the treat food as a problem (too colourful, too fiddly, too junky). I was challenged to look beyond the usual judgements that attach to children's lives about nutrition, calories, colours and additives. I also experienced conflict because of my recognition that "the corporate producers of children's culture, kinderculture, have developed increasingly sophisticated ways to colonize children's desires" (Kincheloe, 2002, p.92).

The private preschool focuses on the whole child and a range of issues are brought to the attention of the teachers. One of the teachers, Zoe, tells me that the area of food is where she adapts to fit in with what parents want for their child.

*Zoe – we had one child who wouldn't eat fruit and their mum wanted him to so it was finding ways, one bite, praise, telling mum and working with her.*

*Jane – so part of the holistic thing, enjoying fruit, fresh, from our environment*

*Zoe – yes and because if the child isn't having the right nutrients they won't feel good.*

This teacher believes with good reason that food has effects on the mind and body and she also wants to affirm the connection between educational settings and home. Like the parent in the *casa* she recognises that nourishing the body supports all aspects of the child's well-being. In spiritual terms the yoga guru Iyengar (1988) describes the idea that the body is temple to the soul in terms of purification and in the past this idea led to a variety of disciplining techniques. Happily in these early childhood settings

the recognition of well-being has gentler implications. However, the construction of good and bad food dominates discussion about nutrition and health in society and the discourse of the early childhood setting reflects this. In the Montessori *casa* and the private preschool foods tended to be categorised. There was treat food to be saved for later and healthy food such as fruit and carrot sticks. I felt that the concept of everyday practices and spirituality would challenge these more simplistic perspectives and tried to look beyond the obvious.

Food is usually discussed in literal terms in relation to health, food pyramids and portion control. Fast foods, globalisation and Macdonaldisation form another focus for critique (Kincheloe, 2002). Children learn about values that attach to food and about what may or may not be eaten and how to eat it. As Germov and Williams (1999, p.1) point out “food habits are not universal, and significant sociocultural variations exist, from the sacred cow in India, to kosher-eating among the orthodox Jewish community ...”. It is part of teacher decision making to emphasise one food or another, to introduce ritual or not, and to choose how to give continuity to children as they move between family and the early childhood setting.

Bell and Valentine (1997) acknowledge that “food has long ceased to be merely about sustenance and nutrition. It is packed with social, cultural and symbolic meanings” (p.3). This diversity of meaning was available to me but I could only look from my own cultural perspective and wondered about the limitations of my gaze. As a consumer was I only looking at the obvious things on the shelf? Chaney (2002) notes that this challenge is necessary because mass culture, the culture I am embedded within, generates a predictable response and:

every aspect of life, including leisure pursuits such as holidays and food and drink, and family relationships and a search for meaning through spiritual guidance, will generate supplementary expertise to explain, comment, and generally guide... (p.107)

I tried to reconnect with the spiritual in everyday life by seeing what certain actions might mean to the protagonists in the research. In this case to the parents and children who tried to remain connected through the medium of food in the private preschool.

## Subjectivity

The concept of everyday spirituality slipped into my life as well and I found myself critiquing my own stance on a range of taken for granted practices. The following narrative illustrates this complexity and what Mansfield (2000) calls the “the sense of social and cultural entanglement that is implicit in the word ‘subject’” (p.2):

### *Making Bread*

*I was in the supermarket and bought a loaf of bread and happened to read the plastic bag put there especially for these rustic looking loaves. The words on the bag introduced me to ‘breadmaking as a ritual’. It outlined ‘the kneading, the slow rise and the beguiling aroma’ and said that this has been unchanged throughout civilisation. There was a description of the creative process of shaping bread by hand. A simple way of life was implied. This was not mirrored in the list of ingredients. The list revealed a rather more complex picture with additives, preservatives and flavourings included in the bread.*

*What appealed, and was meant to appeal, to me, the consumer, was a dream of bread, a fantasy of warm kitchens, deep mixing bowls, of bubbling yeast and crusty, healthy bread. Buying this loaf of bread compensated for all sorts of shortcomings that I suddenly found revealed in myself and I was aware of memories rising in my mind, a cultural memory of ‘how life should be’. There I was, consumed by my research instead of being in the kitchen making my own bread. There was also a sense of denial in that the reality was probably much closer to Sennett’s (1998) study of a Boston baker where “the bakery is now owned by a food conglomerate, and high-tech automation has replaced the hot, noisy, smelly, mildly dangerous hubbub of former times” (cited in Blake, Smeyers, Smith and Standish, 2000, p.30). Instead of facing this reality my story of myself began to merge dangerously close to Pastor Finch’s judgment of Winterson’s mother, that, “You can always tell a good woman by her sandwiches’ (Winterson, 2001, p. 11). In the evening the family ate the bread, no-one mentioned it, it was consumed, it was, after all, just a loaf of bread. But I began to feel some conflict between spirituality and practices that I would not even have noticed before. I felt that there were connections*

*with early childhood settings in this narrative. But some things become so embedded in everyday life that they are invisible.*

I felt the need to challenge myself in terms of how my gaze is constructed by certain practices. These thoughts made me attentive to what was happening in the next setting where a particular dream of childhood was being realised. I felt that I would have to look beyond the aesthetic and not be over-enchanted by the environment. Ironically, the reality was even more disruptive. I began to redraw the boundaries in my own mind about what is possible in terms of spirituality in early childhood settings and my working definition that mentioned connection, wonder and joy began to be something that I witnessed in action.

### **Holistic living**

The Steiner kindergarten

One of the first things I noticed when I arrived at the Steiner kindergarten was the smell of baking. Food was used in this centre as a way of tuning into the rhythms of the day. In this setting baking and sharing bread was a daily occurrence. The Steiner educational experience is designed to construct a dream of childhood and sharing this dream really involves living the philosophy. This brings for many families a new awareness and way of doing things. Activities in the kindergarten include preparing food, weaving and gardening and Rudolph Steiner (1923/98, p.100) writes about pedagogy in the kindergarten as “purely practical”. Teachers, parents and children become involved in a pedagogical approach that grapples with spiritual and moral questions. Steiner philosophy challenges the commodification of children that is so much part of a materialist(ic) culture. According to Sylvia, the kindergartner, through practices like preparing food each day in the kindergarten it is hoped that children will reach an awareness of “*nature, and themselves and others*”. These experiences are designed to have a lifelong influence. In the kindergarten the teacher works with “the entire organism of the child” (Steiner, 1923/1998, p.102).

The spark of life

The emphasis on the living quality of grains and the importance of natural materials reflects the concept of mauri. This is described by Pere (1982/94, p.32) as “the life principle and the ethos of animate and inanimate things”. When the kindergarten

recommends drinking water, eating whole grains and fresh food, and serving organically grown fruit, the picture is intentionally holistic and animistic. The process of hands-on bread making means that the children mix and shape, cut, butter, spread, and serve food to each other. They make elaborate plaits and shapes to be baked. They put the fresh hot bread onto plates and serve each other around the table. This process challenges the health and safety restrictions that ensure many children in early childhood settings receive food from tongs. This food is often dropped unceremoniously onto plates, ‘untouched’, as it were, by human hand, sterile and rendered harmless and ‘dead’. In this particular setting bread symbolises the spark of life that becomes tangible in food. Sylvia told me that she is often asked for the recipe for bread or biscuits. The parents follow it faithfully but then report that the child says that it does not taste the same. Sylvia explains that this is because in the kindergarten there is:

*physical digestion and spiritual digestion, we sit and acknowledge the source of food, grace is not a religious expression but a process of inner appreciation to support the presence of that...it's the way it's made and the way it's eaten together, not the bread.*

Home made food, whether bread, scones or soup, food that is made and eaten together, unifies the kindergarten and affirms the spiritual aspect of daily life.

#### Mother Earth - Papatūānuku

In this kindergarten I had a sense that ‘good’ and ‘bad’ foods were being constructed but if some foods were thought of in terms of being “bad magic” like Edmund’s Turkish Delight in *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe* (Lewis, 1964) this was not voiced to the children. The consumption of food in this kindergarten was a shared ritual, communal, blessed, and offered so that each child could make a choice about whether to eat or not. There was no coercion involved in the activity. Any uneaten food was put into a bowl for Mother Earth and children eventually took this to the compost bin. Thus children were introduced to the cycle of life and death and waste was not an issue. In fact nothing could ever be wasted because it was simply recycled. There is always an association with Papatūānuku, the Earth Mother (Pere, 1991) and practices in this setting affirm the connection.

The aim in the kindergarten is to have reverence for what is eaten, to be thankful. This was the only setting where grace was said and a candle is lit before the children begin to eat. Sylvia explains that “*when you create reverence around food you build up an ideology free religion or religious feeling inside the child which we hope manifests in respect and reverence for life and other human beings*”. This is not something that can be forced and the regular and habitual practices that support eating in this setting ensure that food becomes a part of everyday spirituality. It is also part of the long term plan for the health and well being of children. Steiner acknowledges that “the real secret of human development is that what is ensouled or made spiritual at a particular stage of life is later revealed physically, often after many years” (Steiner, 1923/1998, p.104).

From some Māori perspectives food may be perceived to be taonga; a gift from the earth or sea that is spiritual and to be appreciated. Recognising this means that certain conventions operate in early childhood settings in New Zealand. The most obvious is that food should not be used as a play material. In early childhood settings it is not recommended that food be used for collage. Usually there is no coloured rice or spaghetti and there are no jars of dyed foodstuffs to play with. If children play and shape bread dough they then bake and eat it. This is in recognition of cultural sensibilities. Such prohibitions are a spiritual good. They reflect different perspectives and are an acknowledgement of the hunger that many families experience in different parts of the world. It is a spiritual practice to approach food with sensitivity and mindfulness and to celebrate it rather than taking it for granted.

#### An everyday artefact

In some early childhood settings festivals and celebrations are the sole acknowledgement of spirituality and they are often added on rather than integrated into the life of the school. This has been critiqued from a spiritual perspective as potentially tokenistic (Myers & Myers, 2001). In the Steiner kindergarten I noted that festivals were part of the planning and were woven into the curriculum. Everyday life revolved around the festivals and these seasonal celebrations influenced daily pedagogical practice. They reflect the organic discourse that underpins Steiner philosophy and the rhythm and repetition that is part of the life cycle. While I was at the kindergarten there was a Lantern Festival. My focus, expressed in this narrative,

was not on the lanterns. Instead I began to notice some rather more mundane objects - the pumpkins:

*The Pumpkin Circle*

*The Lantern Festival took place in mid-May. The children were making lanterns, cutting out shapes and gluing in pieces of waxed paper. They were quite large lanterns and were very pretty. In this context things like making the lanterns seemed to just happen in a very effortless and gradual way. Every day a few children would be at the big table making their lanterns.*

*Having a Lantern Festival in the New Zealand autumn made a refreshing change from the usual celebration of Halloween in October when it is springtime in Aotearoa. Perhaps this is why Halloween is a very commercial festival here. The Lantern festival used seasonal and appropriate artefacts – like the pumpkins. Pumpkins are a staple food, like bread. They are a wonderful winter food in New Zealand. Pumpkins add colour to the winter diet. Most pumpkins have bright orange flesh. They are a memory of summer, a way of storing sunshine. Once opened up and when the seeds are scooped out they can become a container for candles and they literally hold light and fire.*

*On the night of the festival I arrive just as it gets dark. Sylvia tells a story about a cricket who collects flakes of sunshine so he can survive the winter. Then the teachers, children and parents walk around the lake with the lanterns on sticks lit from within by tea lights. The line of lanterns looks beautiful but when we return to the kindergarten the most amazing sight is the bonfire and the pumpkins. The pumpkins have been arranged under a tree on some upturned benches that have been covered with cloth. They have been intricately carved and now have candles inside and look wonderful. The parents have obviously been very involved with this. By the light of the glowing pumpkins we eat baked potatoes and the children sing songs that they have sung everyday for weeks at circle time in the kindergarten. The sound goes in a round and when one song fades another begins and starts again.*

*The children keep the singing going and their voices carry into the darkness. We gather around to eat, talk and listen as the fire dies down.*

*While everyone leaves the spare pumpkins are carried into the kindergarten. Tama's mother comes back for her carved pumpkin and says how much she enjoyed making it. The following week the pumpkins are the centrepiece of the big table. They become a focus for play all week as the lantern festival is re-enacted. One day there is a birthday party and the candles inside the pumpkins are relit. The pumpkins glow again. This is special for the child who has the birthday because he could not come to the Lantern night.*

*Everyday the pumpkins are the centrepiece on the table. There is a swirl of muslin cloth and the pumpkins sit on top with a scattering of leaves. They are still a focus and a symbol of continuity. Children sing the song beginning, "golden sun in sky so blue you can warm me through and through". Despite this, and the sunny days, it is getting colder.*

*Towards the end of the following week, two weeks after the festival, the pumpkins are put outside on the compost heap. They are definitely past their best now. The big compost heap is full of garden clippings and leaves. Some of the trees have been trimmed so big branches have been added.*

*A few days later, towards the end of outdoor time, Sylvia tells me to come and look. The tree prunings, some logs and the pumpkins have been dragged out of the compost area. The children have rearranged the pumpkins. When I walk over I can see them on the grass. I am surprised. The pumpkins have been arranged in a circle and inside the circle there is a cross made from two pieces of wood and some leaves. It is very dramatic. I wonder what has prompted this. Sylvia tells me that one of the staff members in another part of the school had a baby who died and the children know about this. This is their response. As the group of children walk back into the other building with their teacher they are talking about this and I hear her reassuring them as they go. The circle of pumpkins is quite amazing.*



*During the next session Luke does a beautiful vivid orange and yellow painting. Gaby comments that it reflects his good heart. Later, there is bright orange pumpkin in the vegetable soup and pumpkin seeds to eat. So it goes on. We are all involved in the cycle of life and regeneration. Children know about the seasons. They know that certain symbols are significant in their culture. They are learning that everything is connected: in the basic sense as part of the food chain and in the caring sense by showing compassion. Spiritually they are able to communicate their concern and inspire hope.*

None of this is articulated by or with the children. They show their deeper understanding in their own way. Everyone is stunned by the pumpkin arrangement. A parent at the second focus group expresses surprise that these children know about the cross as a symbol or a marker of someone passing. I find the inclusion of the pumpkins more interesting. They have become a symbol of eternal life but at a level that is difficult to articulate. At the esoteric level this is what they have been representing for weeks in the kindergarten. They symbolise light in the dark months to come and are a reminder that life goes on.

The children showed that they were making meaning, that they are, as Donaldson (1992, p.143) proposes, able to engage in “values sensing”. This is a way of thinking that engages the spiritual. She says that this kind of understanding is “an attempt to explain things, often amounting to a cosmology, so that thought and emotion have not been separated”. Donaldson’s (1978) early work challenged the Piagetian construction of children as cognitively limited. In recent work she explains that the minds of children are extended through exposure to cultural practices and by education that is intent on “enlarging the scope of relevance” (Donaldson, 1992, p. 259). This does not have to be explicit. In the Steiner kindergarten deeper meanings were not spelt out but activities were repeated and children were simply exposed to certain ways of doing things.

As the narrative describes, the pumpkins came and went for weeks, they were food and not food. Every culture ascribes meaning to certain artefacts. As Inglis (2005) points out, Durkheim described the classifications of sacred and profane. The sacred is “special and literally extraordinary” and profane is “everyday, routine and ordinary” (p.8). Before this time I would have classified pumpkins as very ordinary

objects but my experience collapsed this classification. I began to understand Griffin's (1995, p.151) statement that "when the divide between the sacred and profane falls, everyday life is graced and everything that is holy is heavy with vitality".

### **Spirituality as radical practice**

These narratives about everyday spirituality can be theorised on many levels. On one level I propose that the spiritual approach to daily life is radical. It conceptualizes the early childhood setting as a place for deep learning. A spiritual perspective challenges popular media driven narratives about consumerism. Spirituality in early childhood settings is demonstrated by such practices as engaging with the cycle of life, recognising the good action and being mindful about social practices. This is different from accepting the dictates of consumerism. Kincheloe (2002) suggests that:

Children, adults, parents, and childhood professionals are caught in a zeitgeist of cultural transition in the meaning of childhood. In various countries around the world these parties are struggling to deal with the lived implications of these complex changes. Many people in these diverse locations have wondered how conceptions of childhood innocence intersect with the specific realities of children's everyday lives in the emerging new childhood. (p.109/110)

This is part of the daily conflict that early childhood settings struggle with, particularly in relation to concepts like spirituality. Even when involved with the seemingly mundane there is a question about how teachers position themselves in relation to the complexities that are the lived experience of children. In this sense early childhood communities do not simply reflect the world outside the gates but construct their own world with their own values and their own view of spirituality.

#### Transcending everyday life

It is part of a spiritual approach to pedagogy to reflect upon how memory is being constructed in particular early childhood settings. Memory and identity are intertwined. In this regard, Montessori and Steiner educational philosophies emphasise the sensory. The most well known illustration of the power of the senses in Western literature and one of the most evocative descriptions of a childhood memory

is when Proust (1922/76) tastes the Madeleine, a sweet biscuit. He says, “at once the vicissitudes of life had become indifferent to me, its disasters innocuous, its brevity illusory....I had ceased now to feel mediocre, accidental, mortal. Whence could it have come to me, this all-powerful joy?” (p.58) and he is immediately transported back to childhood and his grandmother’s house. More than that, his description implies a glimpse of the eternal. He has transcended everyday life through this powerful memory. Wertsch (2002, p.48) defines this as “re-experiencing”, and suggests that such memories are involuntary. I felt frequently impressed by the work that took place in these settings to construct meaningful experiences. This is not a small thing to realise about early childhood education. I wondered what memories the children would have. Would they remember sitting at tables with candles, having fun with their teachers, baking bread, receiving notes from their parents? Perhaps these events would enable them to construct a sense of wonder in everyday life for themselves. I also wondered what memories had influenced my understanding of everyday spirituality:

*A memory*

*...walking with my father... I remember that he always pointed out the small things: wildflowers, birdsong, mushrooms like pebbles in the grass, blackberries in the hedge. These were a countryman’s observations and they had the power to transform daily life. These walks, trodden over a lifetime, enabled him to retain a sense of the marvellous. He communicated this appreciation of the ordinary to me and the everyday moments we shared remain vivid in my mind: turning over a leaf to see the first strawberry, breathing in the smell of homegrown tomatoes, leaning on a gate looking at the fields. All in another time and in a different landscape.*

Janet Frame (1991) expresses similar thoughts in her autobiography about growing up in New Zealand. She describes her mother’s ability to transform the ordinary into something sacred and remembered:

When Mother talked of the present, however, bringing her sense of wondrous contemplation to the ordinary world we knew, we listened, feeling the mystery and the magic. She had only to say of any

commonplace object, 'Look kiddies a stone' to fill that stone with a wonder as if it were a holy object. (p.9)

### Spirituality in everyday life

The everyday is especially relevant to the early childhood educational context where many children spend a considerable proportion of their time. My recognition of everyday spirituality came to me when I was observing children and teachers and suddenly realised that I was trying to capture much of what was happening right in front of me. It gradually became clear that spirituality was something I could connect with when I stopped hoping for miracles or worrying that I would miss the signs of inner enlightenment. It seemed that most of the events that were unfolding before me were inextricably part of everyday life and also reflected spirituality. Highmore (2002, p.19) suggests that "the everyday is precisely what becomes remaindered after rationalist thought has tried to exhaust the world of meaning". This comment could also be applied to the spiritual dimension. The spiritual and the everyday inhabit the same space but the spiritual is able to transform the everyday and move it beyond the mundane.

Through the three case studies I expected that different perspectives on spirituality would be revealed. I found myself looking through the lens of everyday life in order to see how spirituality was supported in each context. Mayol (1998) describes this lens as a means of making cultural practices visible. It became clear that practices in each setting were subject to the outside influence of curriculum and philosophy. Meanwhile teachers, children and parents influenced each other to construct the uniqueness of each setting. Spirituality can be defined as a connecting force but it is far from a fixed and immutable concept. Instead it is recognised differently in each setting. These case studies also show that far from being contained in the early childhood setting that spirituality filters into the everyday lives of the families that are attached to them.

In his discussion of everyday life and social practices Dant (2003) notes that:

everyone has an 'everyday life', most of the time. The phrase refers to the ordinary, routine nature of human existence in which tasks are repeated more or less every day and those tasks are linked to keeping the person going -

meeting biological or animal needs and meeting social needs that are distinctively human. (p.66)

The nature of everyday life and the practices that construct it have often been linked to understandings of the spiritual. Rodger (1996, p.46) suggests that spirituality in education becomes concerned with “how human life ought to be lived” thus bringing in a more didactic note. This note is consistent with some of the writings of Rudolf Steiner and Maria Montessori who are quite straightforward about constructing educational philosophies that deal with the question of how to live. The mystics and great spiritual teachers of all persuasions have always known that the spiritual life is forged through daily practice. By recognising everyday spirituality it is possible to see the god of small things (Roy, 1998) as well as being taken up with larger gestures.

Each of these early childhood settings have the potential to be ecologies for the spirit. Within these ecologies a way of life is promoted, usually supported by parents who decide to send their children to specific early childhood settings. In the ecological sense all relationships are reciprocal and parents said that their children’s new learning changed aspects of the home environment. Children naturally take habits and new learning from the early childhood setting back into the home. In this way there is a back and forth between the early childhood setting and the family as practices from daily life are absorbed rather than taught. The practices that construct daily life, now and in the future, become taken for granted. They become patterns and habits that define identity and build culture (Rogoff, 2003).

An important study about everyday life was undertaken by de Certeau (1988) who refers to the Aristotelian concept of *mētis*, or, a way of operating. He also distinguishes between the strategies that construct everyday life and the tactics by which people manage it. De Certeau says that his work pays tribute to the ordinary person. His work is concerned with everyday life and culture and he combined a theoretical perspective with the investigation of taken for granted practices such as cooking or reading (Dant, 2003). Influenced by his work I realised that my analysis shows that it is possible to insert spirituality into the space constructed by everyday life. In de Certeau’s (1988) terms, this becomes a tactic, a way of mastering everyday life with its “proximity and repetition” (Mayol, 1998, p.8).

In terms of spirituality these theories illuminate an aspect of the spiritual that is not as Hay (2000, p.39) mentioned a “self-enclosed, privatized vision of the spiritual life”. Cultural theories of everyday life build on socio-cultural and social constructionist perspectives. Mayol (1998) describes ‘cultural practice’, a concept that informs this perspective, as:

The more or less coherent and fluid assemblage of elements that are concrete and everyday (a gourmet menu) or ideological (religious, political), at once coming from a tradition (that of a family or social group) and reactualized from day to day across behaviours translating fragments of this cultural device into social visibility... (p.9)

These practices, according to Mayol (1998), are concerned with identity within networks of social relations, and these elements “offer themselves for use as vast fields of exploration with a view to understanding a little better the great unknown that is everyday life” ( p.9). Spirituality is challenging as it is part of that great unknown.

In this chapter I realised that I was using theories about everyday life as a lens through which to see the spiritual. My experience was also always being filtered through what van Manen (1990) calls the lived existentials of spatiality, temporality, corporeality and relationality. That is, I am constantly thinking about lived experience and my place in the world. These lived existentials anchor the spiritual. Van Manen (1990, p.103) describes engagement with space as “a category for inquiring in the ways we experience the affairs of our day to day existence; in addition it helps us uncover more fundamental meaning dimensions of lived life”. I was also constantly reflecting about how time is used and divided. The core narratives show that I inhabited the past through memory and lived the present as a spiritual moment then refined the account in a future action. Van Manen’s (1990) concept of corporeality recognises that reactions and feelings are registered in the body. It “refers to the phenomenological fact that we are always bodily in the world (p.103) and relationality is “the lived relation we maintain with others in the interpersonal space that we share with them” (p. 104). As I journeyed through the spiritual landscape I became more conscious of the sensory aspects of daily life in these early childhood settings. The way that space configures relationships between people were also something I became more aware of

in these settings. In the following chapters these dimensions of lived experience and the theories of everyday life inform my reflections.

### **Summary and conclusion**

The recognition of the spiritual was completely part of the culture in these specific environments. In terms of being a unifying or “connecting force” (Baker, 2003, p.51) the spiritual was an aspect of daily life as it was constructed in each place. It was then reflected in the discourses that supported practice in each setting. The spirituality of everyday life was cyclical, rhythmic, and organic in the Steiner kindergarten. The discourse of values and virtues was very much part of the private preschool’s idea of spirituality. At the Montessori *casa* spirituality was part of the routines and rituals, and it was embedded in the order that supports daily life.

My research took me to three different early childhood settings informed by Rudolf Steiner’s anthroposophical practices in the Steiner kindergarten, by Montessori’s philosophy in the *casa*, and by attention to the whole child in the private preschool. These perspectives support different spiritual experiences in unique environments. There are many ways of celebrating the spirit of the child and each setting practised what I am calling everyday spirituality. Everyday spirituality became an obvious theme to analyse. It is a term with its own tensions and what follows from this tension is excitement and challenge. I was challenged to look beyond my own perspective of spirituality and the limitations of my own gaze and my experience in each setting is woven into the text. Spirituality is affirmed in the common practice of sharing food in early childhood settings. In the early childhood context ‘breaking bread’ in its symbolic and literal sense proved an effective means of encouraging harmony, affirming life, and celebrating and renewing the spirit. The sacred and profane aspects of everyday life and spirituality were considered especially when such classifications become blurred, as in the Pumpkin narrative. The creation of memories through experience is an aspect of pedagogical practice that includes the spiritual.

Connecting with everyday spirituality affirms possibilities for wonder and is a way of maintaining harmony between the mystery and magic of life and the daily routines that can flatten out the spiritual landscape. This is an aspect of the working definition that began to be more obvious and I modified my original definition at this point to

include a reference to the everyday. I began to see how spirituality might support connection to all things by bringing a sense of joy to everyday interactions and this realisation gives the definition a more specific meaning in the context of this research.

This overview of spirituality in the three settings introduced the concept of everyday spirituality. This chapter shows how I began to answer the question about how the spiritual experience of young children is supported in early childhood settings.

Aspects of spirituality in these early childhood settings were revealed through the alchemy of everyday life as illustrated in the core narratives. This chapter explored the power of spirituality to transform daily life. The theme of everyday spirituality began to connect the case studies. I wrote narratives and poems in order to discover more about the concept. In the chapters that follow I am exploring in detail certain aspects of everyday spirituality. The themes connect back to the notion of a spiritual geography and the landscape of spirituality. This landscape includes a sense of spiritual 'witness' and that particular theme from the research is discussed in the following chapter.





## Chapter Seven – Spiritual witness

### Introduction

*To be a consciousness or rather to be an experience is to hold inner communication with the world, the body and other people, to be with them instead of being beside them.*

*(Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2002, p.111)*

When talking about spirituality many people involved in the case studies said that they were aware of it when it is present. There seems to be something that happens in interactions and in the relations between people that engenders a sense of the spiritual (Hay & Nye, 1998). This became obvious to me when I looked at the evidence from transcripts and at the photographs and the video. In this chapter an incident is explored in some depth. It happened in the *casa* and is supported by a poem as a core narrative that represents the voice of the teacher. In the private preschool spirituality was reflected through interactions with children and the desire for them to learn. An incident that illustrates this is presented together with other narrative fragments and conversations from that case study. Finally in the Steiner kindergarten I discuss the overall atmosphere of that place. The kindergarten holds the collective wishes and hopes of the parents. It is a microcosm of the world they dream about. Their thoughts are represented in a poem. In this chapter the core narratives as poems or prose (indicated by italics) show how ‘spiritual witness’ is realised in each context.

I explored the spiritual aspect of being together in these settings and contemplating what I saw and felt in these moments marked a change in my way of thinking. I began to think *with* rather than think *about* (Shotter, 2005a, 2005b). According to Shotter (2005b) this calls for a sense of engagement, responsiveness and awareness from within. One of the themes that emerged from my fieldwork is the sense of what I am calling spiritual witness. This kind of witness happens when people are together, in tune, or in touch with each other in a way that can be thought of as connected on a spiritual level. I have conceptualised spiritual witness to be an aspect of the pedagogical relationship that merges intersubjectivity with the spiritual dimension in the everyday context of the early childhood setting. In Bruner’s (2006) terms intersubjectivity implies a meeting of minds and joint attention in order to create meaning. According to Haraway (2003, p.41) intersubjectivity means “*paying*

*attention to the conjoined dance of face-to-face significant otherness”* (her italics).

The spiritual aspect of intersubjectivity is the fusion of I/thou and self/Other.

The concept of spiritual witness was strengthened by the writing process when I was working with the words of one of the teachers, Joelle. In this process her words and thoughts merged with my own understanding of them but I was still aware that they were her ideas not mine. In this intersubjective moment it was possible to really connect with what she had said. How or why was not altogether clear to me. Shotter (2005a) suggests that attempting the poetic also engages mystery. He proposes that such “criss-cross journeyings” (p.154) link back to the everyday practical world and he (Shotter, 2005a) defines “witness thinking” as:

A form of reflective interaction that involves our coming into living contact with the living (or moving) being of another or otherness – if it is a meeting with another person we come into contact with their utterances, their bodily expressions, their words, their ‘works’. (p.145/6)

Sometimes the sense of connection was felt by others who were outside the original interaction. People became affected by events that were (re)presented to them. This was possible through the medium of the video camera. Witness is not about boundaries being breached, it is rather, as Shotter (2005b. p.158) notes, a matter of paradox; he describes the “forming of a unity of *unmerged* views from the two eyes!” (his italics). Exploring witness also brought to light the influence on Shotter’s work of Goethe, the German philosopher who influenced Rudolf Steiner. Goethe, according to Armstrong (2006, p.16) had the ability to bring “loving regard” to the business of everyday life. This thread connects philosophy, pedagogy, cognition, everyday life and spirituality.

Witness is, I found, something that happens when people are in touch with each other, when they are close, physically, emotionally and spiritually. Teachers were very expressive about this sense of witness and one of them described it as spiritual in the following way:

*When I’m with the child something happens to me. I can’t describe it. Every child is important to me and it’s sort of magical when you’re working with*

*them. You sort of get that relationship that they know me inside out and I know them as well. I'm myself but my whole focus is this child. It's like if the walls come down or there's an earthquake I'll be sitting with this child still.*

She expressed a strong sense of connection and acknowledged her ability to be completely with children in the moment. This is a deeply spiritual part of her daily practice. Maintaining a balance between caring and education, fostering well being and positive relationships while encouraging learning is the stuff of daily life in early childhood settings. Learning together and recognising the spirit of inquiry through interaction and the construction of shared meaning is something that many of the teachers mentioned as a 'spiritual act'. The concept of spiritual witness emphasises the spiritual connection

### **Spiritual witness**

The *casa*

On the video that was made in the *casa* there is an episode where Joelle (a teacher) is working with Sana who is nearly four. They are working on a mat with red cylindrical blocks. The equipment would be familiar to Montessori teachers. A series of red cylinders are designed to stack and they form a continuum from wide to very narrow in diameter and the smallest is as thin as a pencil. They must be placed in order so that they balance and so that a tower can be completed. Sana has to try again and again to make her tower. At one point when balancing one red cylinder on top of another Sana looks at Joelle and Joelle nods as if to say "you can do this". They do not talk. Sana tries again to get the cylinders in order. Joelle is obviously willing Sana to succeed but she retains a relaxed body stance. She is simply being with, but in a way that speaks to me, and to other people who see this piece of video, as spiritual. Because of the nature of video as a medium I can go back to see this again and again to see Joelle and Sana's way of being in the world together. This kind of interaction is usually too fleeting to capture.

Joelle is working with Sana in a way that completely balances 'being there' with non-interference. The spiritual aspect of this episode is in the interaction and in the sense of spiritual witness that is communicated. It is not so much about the completion of the tower as about the way the teacher and child work together without obvious

intervention or a lot of talk. The meaning of communion as sharing, participation and fellowship (Pearsall, 1999) is part of the process. They are completely absorbed together in the task. The teacher encourages with eye contact and with body language. She is not looking around at anyone else or otherwise distracted and neither is Sana. Heidegger notes that our ordinary 'being in the world' becomes "dispersed in the multiplicity of what 'happens' daily" (Heidegger, 1996, p.356) and these kind of interactions might easily go unnoticed in a busy early childhood setting. However, this time another teacher is using the video camera and she confirms to me later that there was something she recognised as spiritual in this moment and that this made her continue filming.

While watching this I am aware of Vygotsky's (1978, p.86) "zone of proximal development", a concept that is often seen as too difficult to grasp or too abstract. Vygotsky (1978) stresses the social and collaborative nature of learning. The interaction between Joelle and Sana is the zone in action and the potential for learning is realised in almost silent interaction. This can be connected to the spiritual and Jackson (1998, p.16) refers to the "largely invisible ocean of potentiality" that becomes visible as "intersubjectivity". Bruner (2006, p.231) suggests that intersubjectivity is what makes it possible to "sense that we know what the other is thinking or feeling". When I watch Joelle and Sana on the video I am aware of the wonder of minds overlapping and working together, their will and determination and the sense of oneness they achieve.

There are particular aspects of the Montessori method that are sometimes seen as didactic by outside eyes. It is sometimes perceived as clashing with the discourse of 'creativity' that prevails in early childhood settings in New Zealand. For example the Montessorian practice of *presenting materials* usually involves the child and teacher finding a place for a work mat. Once they have settled on the mat together this space becomes an oasis of concentration. Some new equipment or a new way of doing something is demonstrated to the child and then the child has an opportunity to repeat the exercise. It is not the case that this presentation is only an introduction to a narrow or 'one way only' method. In action this process gives an opportunity for some uninterrupted one to one work and there is time for understanding to be checked and renegotiated. This process respects the spirit of the activity and the integrity of

what is to be done. A parent who witnessed such an activity said “*I was amazed at what was involved*”. The simple is made more complex and the mundane more attractive in work that is undertaken together.

Engaging a sense of spiritual witness does not imply that relationships are forced in the *casa*. I often saw teachers intervene in a very subtle way. They would sometimes softly tell the children what they were doing. For instance, Fipe said “*I’m just going to tuck your chair in*” before doing so. One teacher told me that they do this because the children are “*worth it*” and they “*deserve*” to be comfortable and are then ready to focus on the task in front of them. I began to understand how this worked in a new way, with new eyes. At the *casa* when children wish to work with certain materials, like blocks or puzzles, they get a small mat, put it on the floor and place themselves and their materials on it. This indicates that they are working and builds a culture whereby other children do not interfere with them. They then work with concentration and on completion of their task they return the materials to a shelf and put the mat away. In the same way people might use cultural tools like prayer mats or more technological devices like headphones to indicate that they are doing something that requires solitude and concentration.

Teachers and parents articulated to me that they showed respect for the ability of the child through their expectation that children would approach and complete a task. The teachers were always available to help when asked but were often a quiet presence, moving in only when required. In this sense they fulfil an aspect of witness-thinking that Shotter points out is not about following but also about anticipation and is expressed in the “interplay” (Shotter, 2005a, p.145) that happens between people and with things. In this sense the way that Joelle and Sana exemplify spiritual witness is important. Their interaction reflects something special that they share and that emerges in this particular environment. Joelle was not prepared to let Sana struggle alone. Sana was going to stay with her task even when it got difficult. They stay with each other quietly concentrating. They exist totally in the moment. The construction of the red tower becomes something that is done ‘mindfully’. This is a spiritual way of working. To be ‘mindful’ in this sense of paying attention, of being in the moment, is, as Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh (2002, p.51) describes, “to be calm, insightful, and loving”.

In order to support my interpretation of this as spiritual practice I looked more closely at Joelle's interview to see if she had articulated what made her such a strong and sensitive teacher. Joelle is conscious of spirituality in her practice. Her interview, quite remarkably, covered many aspects of spirituality that other teachers, children and parents talked about in the *casa*. Her words were so clear that I have deconstructed the interview and reconstructed it as a narrative poem, a poetic representation of this glimpse into her life (Richardson, 1997). As described in Chapter Four, I used stanzas, or verses, to cluster information (Mishler, 1990) and on the page the obvious change to poetry is denoted by empty space between words. This poem represents my attempt to stay with Joelle's words. I worked with her words in order to pass on the spirit of her conversation with me. This is her "deep song" (Turner, 2000):

*Joelle's Poem*

*I took the questions home.  
Because since you started here  
I have looked at the notice board  
... and it planted a seed.*

*Spirituality...*

*What it means in the early childhood setting?  
For me I think it's the essence of life.  
The before, during and after life  
- the spark of life.  
It's actually emotional for me to talk about.  
I think we've all got it.  
We're all one and we share the same spirit.*

*The most important thing for me is love -  
Love is it for me.*

*Spirituality...*

*The presence of a higher power within each of us.  
Life and death  
Spirit is life – the lifeforce*

*It creates the bond  
Between mother and child, lovers, families.  
That connected spirit.*

*Life and death...  
I'm remembering my grandmother.  
And when I saw her body  
(I've had a lot to do with death in my family)  
They look like they're sleeping -  
but to me her spirit had gone.  
It's out there somewhere.  
Out there somewhere – I don't know where.*

*Spirituality...  
If a person believes in spirituality  
That person will have an effect on the child.  
It can be linked back to respect and Te Whāriki.  
Māori people are very spiritual.  
That's working within the framework of Te Whāriki.  
It was designed by spiritual people.  
And Montessori -  
Another piece of the jigsaw.  
I wonder if all early childhood educators  
Acknowledge spirituality?*

*I went into a centre after work the other day  
And I walked in  
It was just...  
You could tell it wasn't thought about there.  
That's how I felt.  
I felt sick in my stomach.  
I wanted to leave really quickly.  
It was sad.*

*How does spirituality influence me*



*as a teacher?*

*How does...*

*it influence me ...*

*... as a teacher?*

*I cherish the child.*

*Cherish the child. They will respond.*

*Children are very receptive.*

*Even at an unconscious level.*

*It's up to me to nurture and recognise the spirit within each child.*

*I am more aware now.*

*It's just the type of person I am.*

*Being kind.*

*I'm quite gentle, softly spoken.*

*I treat people how I like to be treated.*

*It's up to us as a team.*

*We have respect for each other.*

*But first would be respect for the child.*

*Children trust us.*

*They come to us.*

*There is no fear.*

*We don't make a point of grabbing and hugging them.*

*We show affection, laughter, sharing,*

*Co-operation.*

*We help each other.*

*It's what they learn -*

*To respect each other.*

*Spirituality...*

*Sliding between realities*

*It goes past barriers*

*Are some things beyond words?*

*I can't put words to my most spiritual experiences.*

*My family are Celts, we know about 'feyness'*

*Family members and ancestors*

*'Feyness' -*

*Flashes of understanding.*

*It goes past the barriers.*

*Some things are beyond words.*

Joelle's words include an echo of Reedy (2003, p.68) who discusses the child and the spiritual dimension as "the divine spark". While she is obviously aware and sensitive to this aspect of the curriculum Joelle sees a link with her own ancestors. She finds harmony in her family background, the bicultural context of Aotearoa and matters of life and death. The poem is also a narrative of spiritual witness. It is obvious that she finds her spirituality supported by her family background, her life experiences, her colleagues and the curriculum for early childhood education. She describes taking the questions that were a starting point for the interview home with her. She wanted to think about them more deeply. This attitude to the research emphasizes that her thinking about spirituality is never compartmentalised but overlaps into all areas of life. Joelle was very much speaking her truth. Although she says that she does not have the words she perfectly articulates a spirituality that constructs the episode in the video, the moment that all people who see the video recognise, the moment when teacher and child are spiritually together. The spiritual is her element, it is both her ground and the wind beneath her wings. Her spirituality gives her the passion for teaching and being with children that everyone recognises in the video.

In relation to her practice Joelle acknowledges the strength of the team and this is obvious in the video interaction. Looking around and watching other children at the same time as being with a particular child is often seen as a skill, a requirement for the early childhood teacher. Joelle can focus with the same intensity as Sana when they are working together because she trusts the team. She also mentions her own particular personal qualities that she finds spiritual; she has a soft voice and is kind. The Dalai Lama describes "forceful loving kindness" (The Dalai Lama, 2002, p.11) as a spiritual trait. In interactions with others kindness builds relationships and is essential when dealing with young children. Joelle also implies that spirituality is about a feeling, almost an intuition. She is aware of its 'absence' and knows when it is not present in another early childhood setting that she visits. People often describe

their feeling about environments in this way; that it had a peaceful feeling, or felt cold or unfriendly. This is often described as the ‘atmosphere’ of the place. Joelle is obviously thinking hard about spirituality and notices when she cannot be aware of it in certain environments. This affects her deeply and she describes a physical and emotional response to the absence of the spiritual. She strongly implies that spirituality is holistic and acknowledges that it is elusive and hard to describe because it is a feeling beyond words.

#### Spiritual witness in community

Within the *casa* when this segment of the video was shown people began to clap when they saw Sana put the last piece on the top of the tower. At such times a sense of it being possible to share the spiritual moment with others is confirmed. This kind of sharing recognises the power of the community. It promotes feelings of ‘we’ rather than ‘I’. Some of the teachers at the Montessori *casa* cried after watching the video that they had made together. It was an emotional moment when they began to remember the history and the two years of preparation it took to prepare the environment before welcoming the children. One teacher had moved her family into the area in order for her children to come to the *casa*. Helen and Fipe have worked together for a long time and remembered the care that went into creating a rich and intellectually challenging environment. They affirmed to each other that seeing the absorption of the children as they went about their work was very rewarding. Parents notice this and in their focus group acknowledged that in the *casa* teachers are not “*bogged down in mat-time, got to go here, go there...*” and another parent agrees “*here if the child is engrossed they will be left to continue*”. The parents perceive this as acknowledging the spirit of the child.

#### Sana and spiritual witness

My notes record that Sana learned about spiritual witness in the sense of learning to be with herself as well as with others. She was given time to discover her own calm spirit. She started at the *casa* with some anxieties and insecurities. She had the confidence to ask for help and once she realised that this would always be forthcoming from teachers and from friends and *whanau* who attended the school she began to enjoy her time there. She also enjoyed concentrating on her ‘work’ which is how Montessori referred to the preoccupations of children and work is what teachers

called the activity of the children in the *casa*. Towards the end of my time in that setting I noticed that Sana had developed an enviable ability to screen out distraction. This ability to engage a ‘one-pointed’ focus is the essence of meditation. It is something that the brain can learn to do. Maria Montessori comments that this kind of concentration is produced through a state of calm and transformation and Standing (1998) notes that the child, like the mystic, is able “to live in a sort of ‘eternal now’” (p.146).

I noticed one day that Sana is absorbed in her collage and that Tracey, a friend, is trying to distract her. Tracey tries talking in Sana’s face and taking things away from her but Sana continues to steadily complete her work and I noted that she is “*creating her own peaceful space in her head*”. In a spiritual sense she has learnt to be attentive. Attention has been suggested by Weil (1982) to be a spiritual aspect of being with things and other people. Joelle and Sana show that they are able to give and receive attention. They attend to each other without stress or strain. Eppert (2004, p.46) describes attentiveness as the “spiritual path” that allows learning to happen and suggests that learning habits of attention should be one of the aims of education. Perhaps this experience of spiritual witness is why Sana, who is now much older and who moved from the area several years ago, still occasionally phones her teachers at the *casa*. She reconnects with them and tells them how she is getting on. As Shotter (2005a) noted, through experiences of witness “new possibilities of relation are engendered, new interconnections are made, new ‘shapes’ or ‘forms’ of experience can emerge” (p.146).

### **Spiritual witness at the private preschool**

#### Mindreading

At the private preschool Ali, who is four, introduced herself to me on my second visit in the following way:

*Ali comes to sit next to me on the bench*

*Me Hi*

*Ali I know your name is Jane*

*Me How do you know?*

*Ali I already know*

*Me Really, you know my name already?*

*Ali Yes, it was in my mind*

*We discuss that she has certain information in her mind. I wonder if she also knows what is in my mind. Ali says she does.*

*Me So – you know what is in my mind?*

*Ali Yes*

*Me So can you read my mind?*

*Ali Yes I can (nods firmly)*

*Me So if I think about what I will have for tea can you tell me?*

*Ali Yes*

*Me Okay, close your eyes*

*Ali closes her eyes and after a while I say ‘ready’*

*Ali Give me a clue*

*Me mmmsssss.....sizzling in the pan*

*Ali sausages*

*I then have a turn at reading Ali’s mind and have to admit that it takes longer for me to get to ‘pasta’ and that her mind reading is pretty good.*

Children are quite happy to talk about their mind, their inner self and the processes they go through. Ali showed her preparedness to think with me. She showed her understanding that minds meet in her demonstration of mind reading. After this experience I considered that our exploration of intersubjectivity was challenging and wondered if intersubjectivity is itself a spiritual concept. Shifting between minds seemed to be something that brought us closer together. Ali became one of my mentors at the preschool. She showed an interest in what I was doing and in the research process. Another day we engaged a sense of spiritual witness in a conversation that included some metaphysical speculation:

*Ali Why do you have to die when you get old?*

*Jane I think it’s because your body wears out*

*Ali And your heart stops beating and you die*

*Jane yes, it all stops*

*Ali and babies being born...?*

*Jane* mmmmm

*Ali* do they all line up and crawl along?

*Jane* well, do you think so?

*Ali* yes, they crawl along, lined up

*Jane* and do you think the mums kind of choose them?

*Ali* yes I think so

I appreciated this vision of babies on a kind of production line and also thought it amazing that Ali was able to balance the discussion about death with her thoughts about birth. She prefaced the conversation by bringing a book and saying that her daddy puts his arm round her when he reads to her and that I can do that as well. The invitation in this case to be physically close and then to share Ali's speculations about life and death was definitely a moment of spiritual witness. Ali was telling me something very important about being chosen. Her feeling was that life is not just a series of random events. Even before she was born she had some agency. Teresa, the owner of the preschool, observed that children need to feel safe and have a sense of security with adults. They need to know that the person they are with can be trusted before having deep conversations and sharing their thoughts. It occurred to me when this happened that being with children when they discuss these great mysteries is such an honour. To be one of a child's "trusted others" (Myers, 1997, p.39) is a form of spiritual witness.

It is surprising that for so long developmental theorists thought that abstract thought was beyond young children (Matthews, 1994). Children are more than happy to discuss the existential questions of life. They notice what is going on, share their thoughts when they feel safe to do so and let their imaginations soar as part of their everyday interaction in the preschool. They bring all sorts of preoccupations from their lives into this setting. Maybe because there is such an emphasis on learning here it appears that many of the children here seem quite happy to talk about the 'mind'. In a spiritual sense the mind is the abstract aspect of the thinking self, less easy to locate than the brain or neurological functions. Conceptualising the mind as synonymous with 'soul' was a belief of the ancient world (Kim, 1998) and I am sure that my friend Ali introduced herself to me with an understanding of this link between mind and spirit. She had completed her ethics consent form and her parents showed

interest and were coming to the focus groups so she was grappling with an idea about what spirituality was and demonstrated her understanding in these conversations with me.

Children do not see their minds as bounded or limited and Ali is quite clear that we are able to have access to each others thoughts. She is not limited by the material world and speculates about life before birth. Perhaps her thinking reflects practices in the preschool that support the idea that learning and being together is always through dialogue and through talk. Teachers say things like “*I know you can do this*” and “*I know what you’re thinking*”. They ask the children to guess certain things about themselves as teachers, for instance “*guess what colour I like the best?*”. Teachers say they are doing their best “*to stimulate and extend them*”. They see this as a spiritual value of the school and their version of spiritual witness reflects this. The video made in the private preschool supports this idea of encouraging learning as a means of affirming the spirit. In Teresa’s opinion encouraging thinking and learning is the reason for being a teacher. This is the aspect of spirituality she includes in her values and this guides her practice. Her dedication in pursuit of this is demonstrated in the following narrative:

*The Parrot narrative*

*One of the popular characters in the school is the budgerigar (Blue). This bird is quiet when necessary and gets excited when noise rises. Perhaps the song of the budgie attracted a new bird because one day another parrot, green and red, very handsome, turned up in the school much to the delight of the children. He was put in a cage in the school until someone claimed him. Later on in the afternoon one of the teachers asks two girls questions about the parrot. The conversation is about birds and making the connection with eggs. Teresa stays ‘with’ them for a long time. The questions and answers go backwards and forwards. There is more thinking, and it continues for about twenty minutes despite the fact that she was also using the video camera. They all seemed to forget about the camera and it focuses on the girls, their facial expressions and records their speech. Teresa stays ‘with’ the children in this conversation, listening and responding, encouraging and challenging them to make meaning and connect their knowing.*

*They discuss the bird's emotions, that he might feel sad or frightened. Sally says "I feel ashamed of him" because he has been captured. Her sympathy for him and her meaning (that it is a shame he has been caught) is clear. They discuss being caged and the different states of being wild or a pet. Sally says that the parrot must feel especially sad because he does not have his mother. Teresa encourages them to take another look at gender, why the bird might have blue feathers and be a girl. Ali says "he looks like he's a girl". They talk about difference and why the bird is different from the budgerigar. They also wonder why a parrot is like a duck but not a duck. Finally they decide that the parrot may have come from an egg although he is not a chicken.*

Teresa stays with the thoughts of the two girls. She does not correct speech or grammatical mistakes. Instead they discuss a stream of thoughts, address new concepts and she challenges them to make new discoveries. In this context talk is a vehicle for learning and language is used as a means of encouraging new learning. This excerpt from the video illustrates Teresa's conception of what is spiritual and demonstrates spiritual witness via the values of the preschool. Teresa talks about extending the children and says *"I would not be who I am today as a teacher if I did not have those values and expectations, you couldn't, you wouldn't...that's the beauty of having so much diversity in one centre and we can give that – that's awesome"*. She relates what she gives children to her own childhood experiences and tells me that the children she is with are *"so lucky"* to be learning in a centre that has *"diverse ways of looking at things"*. Her own experience of being a shy child leads her to try and instil confidence in the children and their abilities. Teresa's description of the school and the sense of trying to do the right thing by children is something that is communicated in conversation with the other teachers. Teresa demonstrates 'devotion' to her work; to be 'devoted' is to be loyal and loving (Pearsall, 1999) and is a concept linked to a vow, to a promise. In a spiritual sense all teachers embody a promise to children, a promise that they will help them fulfil their potential and retain the sense of who they are. From this perspective the kind of sparkling intellectual exchanges that Teresa enjoys with the children is a form of spiritual witness.

During the second focus group one of the parents finds it difficult to 'see' spirituality in the video. This parent has had experiences that make the concept of spirituality in



an educational context challenging. The ability to be spiritually with others is hard if there are negative associations with the concept of spirituality. Teresa explains that she likes children to feel safe and then they can then be challenged. She admits that the idea of spirituality in the preschool may not be shared with everyone and that it is not something that is usually talked about. She acknowledges that the process of making meaning, for instance in the conversation with the bird, is part of the spiritual for her. She sees learning as part of a broader relationship and says that she gives “*another question and they use the brain and the information*”. In her teacher role she knows the skills needed to keep children thinking and working and sees this as a way of engaging the spirit. In that pedagogical role she engages spiritual witness.

Another parent agrees with her and the parent of Sally, who is also featured in the parrot conversation, says that she thinks this episode is spiritual because it makes her think about Sally’s personality. She sees it from her perspective as a parent. For her it is clear that:

*there’s a history, things that I teach her that my parents didn’t teach me, things like how babies are born, my mother would never have talked to me about that, yes - so I see history, ancestors, so that is it for me.*

Parents like the focus on holistic education in the private preschool and in their conversation they mention that this has wide appeal. One parent who identifies herself as a Christian says that for her spirituality is realised in “*a relationship with the Creator and knowing what your purpose is in life and like kids with the centre, its security, knowing what their purpose is and also what your giftings and talents are and that’s very much linked to art and emotional expression and values as well...*”. I notice in the analysis of the conversation in the focus groups that the words of parents in each setting reflect congruity and a sense of witness in terms of the expectations that they have of their particular early childhood setting.

The parents discuss the creativity of children and decide that painting is sometimes a way of giving, “*a way of interconnecting*” and thus a way of being with people who are not present. Parents say that they recognise spirituality in the school through art and music and through personal interactions and communication. For them the

important thing about the preschool is that “*it feels right*”, and that feeling might or might not be the spiritual. They feel that it is too challenging to articulate.

Spiritual witness does not have to be engaged through words as the incident in the *casa* showed so clearly. I wonder in the private preschool if a sense of spiritual witness is encountered through art. Teresa tells me that she has a passion for art and for the way that children express who they are through art. I notice this is one area where teachers express their respect for the creative process. The art area is clean, with good quality paper and paint, and teachers hang the paintings to dry and value what the children produce. On the whole they leave the children here to do their own work. There is less ‘teacher talk’ in the art space and children spend time alone concentrating on their paintings.

Teresa calls me over to discuss a painting one day. Marie is doing a painting. It has a green border and a big yellow cross in the middle. She says “*the big yellow cross is daddy’s*”. Teresa (surprised) says “*a cross – has someone died?*” Marie says yes and adds two more crosses and says they are for the dogs. The painting shows familiarity with religious symbols. Teresa is concerned and discovers later that Marie has just been past the place on the road where her granddad was killed. The creative process is often seen as an expression of the inner self but children do not necessarily paint straightforward representations of reality and may paint for different reasons. There is definitely a possibility for spiritual witness through art. In terms of intersubjectivity, Jackson (1998) proposes that “the field of intersubjectivity includes persons, ancestors, spirits, collective representations, and material things” and continues that in this field “objects tend to become charged with subjective meanings” (p.9). Paint is an expressive medium and in the private preschool and the Steiner kindergarten it was considered a way of expressing the spirit and the emotional self.

Acknowledging spiritual connections that include the inanimate (Pere, 1991) enabled me to see the artefacts that children produced in a new light and parents appeared to recognise these connections. Apart from enjoying the products of the creative process the parents also talk about painting as a means of connecting with family. They appreciate the crossovers between the early childhood setting and home. Although painting is done all the time they like to see art coming home and feel that it gives them insight into their child’s preschool life. One of the parents points out that her

daughter's painting is *"about doing something for someone else, is she getting benefit herself, losing herself in the painting, because her paintings are always for someone...?"* The children often tell me that they are doing a drawing or painting for their mum, dad or grandparent. They express a wish for spiritual witness that extends beyond the boundaries of the preschool.

### **In the Steiner kindergarten**

#### Breathing together

In the Steiner kindergarten before the first focus group starts a parent says that the kindergarten is so wonderful because of Sylvia and her *"devotion"* to the children. Sylvia is also devoted to Steiner philosophy and to what she calls *"a lifelong study"* of anthroposophy. She tells me about the *"karmic connections"* that are forged between teacher and child. This is a specific kind of spiritual witness. In this belief system the teachers and children are meant to be together, their relationship is not coincidental and there is a link to the idea of the reincarnated child. In this version of spiritual witness there is an understanding of intention. Sylvia says that children are *"living out their intention"* on a necessary pathway. In this context spiritual witness is not random. From this philosophical perspective the teachers, children and families who are connected to the kindergarten are meant to be there. They are all meant to be in relationship with each other. This is their unconsciously chosen destiny.

Another teacher articulates her teaching practice. She is very respectful of children because *"I don't believe kids come into the world as an empty vessel, each one has a destiny and you have to help them find that way, his way, not my way, that is something they should think of in mainstream"*. The sense of Steiner education as different is hinted at in this statement. Gaby thinks of herself and her attention to the child's being in the world as different. She is not trying to mould children or to ensure that they learn something that fits her beliefs about what a child should learn. The Steiner teachers articulate the fact that they influence children but say that interfering in the process of destiny would amount to *"spiritual stealing"*. Sylvia remarks that *"we want to be very conscious of what happens in the spirit life between death and rebirth and what happens in the physical world between life and death so we don't rob people of faculties and forces they need for their futures"*.

This does not mean that this is a passive environment, far from it. The teachers acknowledge that in the Steiner kindergarten “*we think that thinking is a spiritual activity*”. They have a holistic sense of spiritual witness that encompasses all activity in the kindergarten and that lasts for life. Sylvia says that “*education is something that is continuous for the entire of life and we try to create a relationship to learning for the entire of life*”. She sees this as a lifelong project, both for herself and for the children. Sylvia uses the word “*holding*” to describe her way of teaching and being with the children and she always refers to this. She explains that this way of being with children is linked to the anthroposophical belief that until seven years old children are perfecting their physical body. It is intrinsic to Steiner philosophy to understand that attention is paid to the physical, etheric and astral body. The physical body is self explanatory, the astral body is “the bearer of abilities” (Schoorel, 2004, p.17) or soul body. The etheric body is the life force “it comprises all life functions such as breathing, biochemical processes and regeneration” (Schoorel, 2004, p.17).

The etheric body is conceptualised as still joined to that of the mother. In the school the children are held by the etheric body of the teacher. While the children are physically busy the feel or atmosphere of the kindergarten is monitored through the awareness of the teacher and she is responsible for what is happening. This is not expressed in an overt or conventional way. Unlike the other two settings this does not mean being a strong physical presence or literally being side by side as in the *casa*. It does not mean talking and questioning children to promote intellectual activity as in the private preschool. The sense of spiritual witness is expressed in a subtle way and only became something I noticed after some weeks in the kindergarten. Sometimes the whole kindergarten was occupied and busy for long periods. The teachers were present but not in a way that imposed themselves on the activities of the children. Gaby and Sylvia usually seemed to be baking and moving quietly around the kindergarten. They were a definite presence and children could join them in these activities, making soup, cutting up the fruit for morning tea or baking bread. These were the practical tasks. Sometimes the teachers invited one of the children to help.

At the same time as being quite unobtrusive the teachers were aware of being a focus for the children who learn by imitation. Imitation and the idea that the lives of others can be an exemplar is a deeply religious and spiritual idea. The biographies of gurus,

saints and holy people are presented as illustrations of ways to overcome adversity and live a good life. This is done by example. These teachers were conscious that education was not only about ‘do as I do not do as I say’, but also ‘do as I am’. According to Rudolf Steiner (1923/1998) the young child learns everything through imitation in the first years of life. For these teachers spiritual witness means being spiritually present and realising that children will be influenced by who they are and not merely by how they appear or what they say.

I notice Sylvia making decisions about the degree of closeness she will have with children and she always brings a spiritual perspective to these decisions. She says that she is continually working with her sense impressions, “*we can see what is on the inside, what’s going on for them*”. Being connected is a spiritual act, it is not mediated through materials and Sylvia says that she is always ‘*awake*’ to the spiritual aspect of education so that she will ‘*recognise that new possibility, the karmic moment*’. This relationship carries a responsibility that she sees it her duty to fulfil, her commitment to the children and to her anthroposophical beliefs. She describes her acceptance of this. She admits that when training she ‘*asked more questions*’. Now she is very sure about her way of being with children, a way that is supported by her philosophy. She says confidently:

*One doesn’t have to go thrashing around trying to keep the role of the teacher in children’s learning – there are a lot of insecure people in the early childhood sector, which is why there is so much overjustification of practice, (I am) not disinterested but have to be secure in relationships with children, to stand back and allow them to learn rather than being in the centre of things as a teacher, and I’m not over impressed by the downward press of the curriculum (The New Zealand Curriculum for primary and secondary schools) to do with bringing the school model of what teaching is into early childhood.*

Acceptance does not mean that Sylvia has lost her critical eye. Her sense of what it means to be with children, to be a teacher, is also “*not about disempowering parents*”. She says that the “*gesture*” is important. Her gesture to parents is “*warm and embracing*” and if they like the spiritual base of the school they can choose to join it. The gesture made to children is about “*protection (particularly of the senses) and*

*guidance out into the world*". This is something that she considers as a Steiner teacher and is part of a spiritual approach to pedagogy. Sylvia is articulate about her position and her personal sense of spiritual witness.

It is a spiritual practice in the Steiner kindergarten to examine the self and not to see oneself as omnipotent. On one occasion Jake is very upset. Instead of rushing in to calm him down Sylvia chooses not to approach him. She asks his friend Eva to talk to him because "*your voice is the one he will listen to*". Later she says to another child, Rowan, "*tell him Rowan because he has ears for you*". Sylvia acknowledges Eva's and Rowan's position in Jake's life. She recognises that she, the teacher, while obviously there, may not be central. She recognises that children have significant relationships with each other. When Jake is in an emotional state she recognises that his relationships with peers are sometimes more important. It was a respectful way of avoiding confrontation and Jake began to calm down when he could tell his friends what had happened. In this sense spiritual witness was in evidence in the kindergarten even when Sylvia appeared to be stepping back.

The children come into the school at 9am and stay inside, literally, until after morning tea at 11. In this time they play with each other. The teachers are there, preparing food, checking, feeling what is happening, aware of the noise levels and very conscious of what Sylvia calls the "*breathing in and out*" of the kindergarten. I began to sense that this was a way of communicating a sense of collective spiritual witness. The atmosphere of each session went in cycles of breathing in and out. On some level it seemed that everyone was having the same experience and then there would be a change. Sometimes this went from a quiet reflective atmosphere to joyous noise and activity. This was the breathing out. There was a spontaneity to this and it was certainly not overtly orchestrated by the teachers. In times of breathing out I often noticed that spiritual witness could be expressed as tolerance and trust of children. If tolerance is a spiritual quality both teachers had it to an extent that is quite remarkable. They trust the children, keep interventions to a minimum and live the radical philosophy of Rudolf Steiner who proposed that the educational context is "well-organized" when "we ignore our rules and regulations, our educational theories and allow the child free rein" (Jaffke, 2004, p.19). Only then according to Steiner will it engage "soul and spirit" (p.18). An understanding that the kindergarten breathes in

and out emphasises the shared sense of spiritual witness that was present. It is significant in this context that spirit and breath share the same etymological root, *spirare* – to breathe.

The parents at the Steiner kindergarten recognise these rhythms of the day as a spiritual aspect of education. A parent said that when experiencing the breath in and out of the kindergarten the children “*learn to express themselves freely, it helps them remember who they are*”. The following poem is constructed from the collective voices of the seven parents who attended the first focus group at the Steiner kindergarten. They discussed what spirituality meant to them and why they appreciated the kindergarten. The poem expresses their collective voices although they were each speaking for themselves in the group. This merging of I/Thou is, as Jackson (1998) notes, an essential feature of intersubjectivity because “without a sense of solidarity with others, one can find no meaning in oneself” (p.10). These parents stress the importance of the spiritual and they obviously value the sense of shared spiritual witness that was evident in the day to day life of the kindergarten:

*A spiritual education...*

*Children learn to express themselves freely*

*Explore each other*

*They learn so much about relationships*

*The hard ones and the good ones*

*To be kind*

*On birthdays they are not always chosen (to be a helper)*

*They deal with it*

*You can't tell who will be chosen*

*And your best friend doesn't choose you -*

*Its hard*

*It's about wanting to play on your own*

*And everyone joins in.*

*Or learning to play on your own.*

*The different dynamics*

*It's never right*

*Children are less covered, exposed,  
Fragile  
Boys don't have to armour themselves here  
They're still soft,  
Let it last.*

*When Sylvia tells a story they go there too  
It envelopes them  
They're living it and don't feel stupid  
They're still okay with that  
Not self conscious*

*Children are captivated in the essence  
Of the moment  
It transcends our understanding  
Their reality is angels and another world  
Spontaneous*

*We heard a baby crying and I said to my daughter  
'Let's go into our heart  
And send some pink'  
We did and closed our eyes and the baby  
Stopped crying*

*The media and TV they are the killer  
It is death  
Killing, dying, hardening  
Disconnected from life and the spirit  
Fake life.*

*We went to another school  
Competitive, graphs on the wall  
For reading and spelling  
Every two weeks the teacher said "I don't want you to cry but -  
We're having another test"*



*What do they achieve at school?*

*Big pressure*

*Trauma.*

*Its more important to put meaning and love*

*Into play*

*I wanted to make sure that where they were learning*

*Saw things whole*

*Children are more than academic potential*

*That is only part of who they are...*

*A whole person*

*Spirituality - it's the meaning and purpose that remains*

*If everything else is gone*

*A relief*

*You can let your children go and huh...*

*It's good*

Parents recognise that they want spirituality to be part of the life of their children, they want education with spirit. They want people who are prepared to be with their children on a spiritual level. Their words sum up their attitude to education. When given “narrative space” (Ota, 2000, p. 192) deeper communication becomes possible and these parents become very clear about their intentions for their children. The words of the parents have not been altered although they have been rearranged. This poem expresses their complete trust in this particular setting. Their image of the child finds a safe haven in this spiritual context. They know that their children can cope and that they will have to go out into the world but the message is – not yet, and then not until they are ready. Their words reflect a particular view of the world. It is natural that given this view that they must have faith in themselves, their children and the teachers at the kindergarten, to support their children spiritually. The collective spiritual witness shared in this kindergarten is reflected in their words. The parents feel that the kindergarten ‘envelopes’ and protects the children and they identify the Steiner kindergarten as Other and different from ordinary schools. They do not feel represented in the popular media and their beliefs about children are different, they

feel that *'their reality is angels and another world'*. They share an image of the whole child as *'more than academic potential'*. Perhaps when read aloud the poem will convey the sense of breathing in and out that is part of the everyday life of the kindergarten. This is especially apparent at the end of the poem where a sense of breathing out can be felt as these parents describe their *'relief'* because the kindergarten is a place where they can let their children go without fear.

Families make a conscious decision to come into the kindergarten and as part of the process the biography of the child is shared. Sylvia says *"Some parents find it amazing, a whole hour talking about their child, they enjoy it, the child's biography...and the parent comes for the entire first morning so the child knows the parent knows...they are not dropped off"*. These activities promote a sense of belonging. The family is also brought in to celebrate birthdays. They share a ritual about the child choosing their particular family. The child chooses their parents and their older siblings before crossing the rainbow bridge to join them. Sylvia calls this *"spiritual evolution, not Darwin, so that through each incarnation we develop our being further"*. This is quite a different way of looking at the relationship of the child in the family. Also the children in the kindergarten are still, in Steiner terms, incarnating. The child in Sylvia's view is *"of both physical and divine origins (out of matter and out of spirit)"*. Spiritual witness definitely crosses boundaries in this context. Everyone involved in the kindergarten moves between physical and spiritual worlds. In this environment spiritual witness is an intended part of everyday life in the kindergarten.

### **Summary and conclusion**

Witness in early childhood settings is expressed in different ways. It is a spiritual experience that builds relationships and community. The sense of spiritual witness between teachers and children and parents and teachers was palpable in the everyday life of these settings. In the focus groups even when opinions were not shared the conversation was respectful and other points of view were welcomed. There was more congruency between parents and teachers in the focus groups of the Montessori and Steiner settings perhaps because these settings share a strong philosophical base.

An early childhood setting is a community, a collective. A sense of collective spiritual witness is the way I conceptualise the different atmosphere or ‘feeling’ that people report experiencing when they enter early childhood settings. It is not something that is always present. When it is present it is almost a vibration, something it is very hard to put into words. Joelle articulated this in her poem. She also conveyed the need for a preparedness to feel spiritual witness. Joelle’s words were a signpost for me, and writing them in poetic form and restructuring the interview was a means of achieving spiritual witness through the writing process. Shotter (2005a, p.154) proposes that witness writing is a way of writing that “like signposts erected at recognizable landmarks, can ‘point to’ what next to expect out in the world of our everyday, practical affairs”.

I notice that Shotter uses witness in connection with thinking (2005a, 2005b) and writing (2006). Witness is an open concept that easily joins with spirituality. When exploring spiritual witness I found myself constantly wishing to differentiate spiritual witness from other ‘witnesses’ and am increasingly critical of this. My urge to separate and categorise is itself a form of disconnection that does not fit my definition of spirituality. It was challenging to become aware of this tendency towards “splitting” (Gardner, 2001, p.338) and to discover that this inclination was so much a part of my thinking. Gardner (2001) regards this as a way of thinking that is different from the “holistic spirit” (p.338) that connects and draws everything together. In Shotter’s (2005b) phrase witness is a holistic concept that “involves coming into living contact with another’s living being” (p.146). He mentions entanglements and intertwining; this is the intersubjective experience. According to Jackson (1998 p.9) intersubjectivity might also “include persons, ancestors, spirits, collective representations and material things”. This inclusive definition is applicable to the experiences outlined in this chapter.

To feel spiritual witness means knowing that reciprocity and respect are a reality and not just a phrase in the early childhood curriculum document (Ministry of Education, 1996). Sana was able to achieve her goal because she recognised someone who would give her time and attention. The parents in the Steiner kindergarten recognised that children will need their ‘armour’ but not at the kindergarten and not until they are older. Until then they will be ‘held’ safely. The two children at the private preschool

were prepared to stay with their teacher and explore the limits of their knowing. When a sense of spiritual witness is felt adults and children can be together and enjoy the moment.

This chapter proposed spiritual witness as a way of conceptualising spiritual moments of togetherness in these early childhood settings. The act of being spiritually with another person is a form of loving attention that emphasizes the spiritual aspect of relationships. In each context this was achieved differently but the intention is the same: to be alongside children and their parents, to help children fulfil their potential, to encourage children to become who they are and will be in the fullest possible sense. I have focused on the interactions between people in each setting. From my own experience and that of others I have proposed that it is possible to feel spiritual witness in everyday situations in early childhood settings. It may sometimes happen as a surprise. Spiritual witness is not a discrete category and is permeable. It flows outwards and may overlap with the themes that will be discussed in the following chapters. The next chapter presents another aspect of the spiritual. It presents core narratives that explore the ‘in-between’ or liminal space in early childhood settings.



## Chapter Eight – Spiritual in-betweenness

### Introduction

*I thought how very easy it is to feel spiritual in a spiritual place.  
(Vega, 2002, p.5)*

This chapter addresses the concept of the spiritual in-between or liminal space (Turner, 1969, 1982). During my time in these settings I was able to experience spiritual in-betweenness. This aspect of everyday spirituality is supported by specific environments. Often the in-between space is created as part of a ritual and it then becomes highly symbolic and planned. Rites and rituals accentuate the in-between, or liminal state; they are designed to do so. The creation of rituals can unsettle the everyday and create a sense of disequilibrium that is completely acceptable in the ritual space itself. These in-between events are still embedded in the everyday life of these early childhood settings. The sense of ‘betweenness’, of being in-between realities, of being not quite in the real world, allows a space for new spiritual possibilities to emerge. In particular, as Deleuze and Parnet (2002, p.32) point out, children “... know how to glide in between”.

The first part of this chapter features the Midwinter ritual in the Steiner kindergarten. The core narrative that describes this is the central point of the discussion. This ritual of spiritual in-betweenness is celebrated by the whole early childhood community. Following this the preparation for Christmas at the private preschool is discussed in relation to memories shared by the teachers. The way that memories of the spiritual in-between contributed to the construction of values at the preschool is the focus of this section. The chapter then moves from the early childhood community to a consideration of individual experience. Sometimes spiritual in-betweenness happens as a shift in the everyday world. It may occur spontaneously and is an unexpected moment that suddenly transforms daily life: an epiphany. The second core narrative is presented as a poem that describes a moment of epiphany experienced by a teacher in the Montessori *casa*. A moment of epiphany is like a ray of bright sunshine on a dull day as it pierces through reality to reveal something new. It is an in-between space in daily existence and is understood in traditional religious and spiritual terms to be a manifestation of the divine.

### **The Midwinter Festival at the Steiner kindergarten**

This is a narrative about an experience of spiritual in-betweenness in the Steiner kindergarten. The teachers and parents created a ritual. They constructed the space, prepared food, and then returned the kindergarten to its usual state for this celebration of midwinter. Children were not involved in these preparations. Only a few parents actually attend the ritual itself but they are all asked to help to prepare it. The Midwinter ritual definitely provided an opportunity for the early childhood community to recognise the sacred in that setting. Again it is worth noting that this ritual happens every year in the kindergarten and is part of the usual planning that constructs everyday life in that setting.

Unlike some of the children this was the first time that I experienced the Midwinter Festival. Instead of being an observer I was given the opportunity to be a participant. On the day of the festival Sylvia, the teacher, was the master of ceremonies. She was the magician, the person who made sure it happened as she wished it to although as Van Manen (2002, p.5) points out “we can prepare for wonder, but we cannot control it”. Because she held this responsibility I was free to participate. It was a very memorable event, so my writing is a personal response to my experience of the spiritual in-between. This writing is not a recipe for a ritual but an example of what can be achieved in the spiritual sense in an early childhood setting:

#### *The Midwinter narrative*

*Towards the end of the term I overhear Sylvia talking to parents but when someone mentions Midwinter she signals them to be quiet. She eventually tells me that there is going to be a surprise. I am really touched that she is including me in this and that she wants me to experience the surprise. There seems to be some talking when parents collect their children but I really don't know what is going to happen. On the morning of the 21<sup>st</sup> June she asks me to come early and I promise to do this. It will be Matariki, midwinter, the shortest day of the year in Aotearoa.*

*On that day I feel a real sense of anticipation as I wait outside the kindergarten with the other parents and children. It is a cold but clear winter morning. No-one is allowed into the kindergarten but we leave coats and the*

*fruit we have brought along in the hallway. I know Sylvia and the parents gathered last night to prepare something – there is excitement in the air. One of the parents reads out our names and we all sit on the bench and wait. Gaby comes out with the fruit and begins to cut it up for later. The winter fruit is so beautiful. Pears, apples, tangerines, dark red tamarillos and orange persimmons glow in the wicker basket.*

*Sylvia appears at the doorway to lead us, she beckons and we go in. It is quite dark inside because most of the windows are covered. The children gasp. Eyes wide, we gaze at the room that has been completely transformed. The furniture has been pushed back and it seems as if the entire floor is covered in a spiral of greenery. The spiral starts at the edge of the room and is made of dark green leaves and branches. There is a scattering of pink camellia flowers and berries. In the centre of the spiral there is a swirl of dark blue cloth with a really large golden candle in the middle and only this candle is alight. The benches are placed so that we can sit down on the outer edge of the spiral. We walk around and then sit down in silence and look...and look. There are dark yellow beeswax candles all around the edge of the spiral in star shaped holders on golden paper*

*Sylvia sits opposite me at the opening of the spiral. She reaches for a wooden box. Inside there is something wrapped in a lavender cloth. She unwraps it and takes out a lute, a small stringed instrument. The silence is amazing, like crystal. We all concentrate on what she is doing. She begins to play very softly, just stroking the strings. Everyone listens and the silence settles again as Sylvia puts down the lute and picks up one of the candles in front of her and begins, very slowly, to walk the spiral. She walks into the centre of the spiral and lights her candle from the one in the middle. She walks back, puts her candle down and sits in her place. She then gestures to Katie next to her who picks up her own candle and begins her walk. Every child, the parent helpers and Gaby walk the spiral, one by one. When the children return Sylvia holds her arms out but does not touch the child. She gestures to them to walk around and go back to their place and beckons the next child forward so that there is continual flowing movement.*



*When it is my turn it feels so peaceful. I find myself really reflecting on my life, the beautiful spiral and my hopes for the future. I also suddenly become conscious of the wonderful spicy smell of the greenery and candles. Walking the spiral seems to take a long time. I remember that in rituals time changes, it stretches and contracts. Even as this time lengthens there is also a sense of time standing still and a feeling of being separate from the outside world. This is liminality. I have crossed a 'threshold' and am 'in-between'.*

*When everyone has walked and the candles are all lit we sit in the circle quietly until Sylvia stands. She begins to sing very softly, the children join in and then we begin to move back outside. The children eat some fruit and begin to talk and go off to play in the garden. The adults inside tidy up, shifting the leaves and branches nearer to the middle of the room so they take up less floor space. They are moving quickly and working hard. The candles are put at each child's place on the table. Each parent sent in a box of home made and decorated biscuits in the shape of stars. They are different sizes and dusted with icing sugar. Sylvia stipulates that they go on white plates next to colourful plates of oranges. Instead of the usual bowls the children have pretty china today and cranberry juice instead of water. When everything is ready the children are called in for the feast.*

*We sit down. Someone is chosen to go around and light the candles with a taper and once lit they are moved to the middle of the table. After grace we begin to eat and this is when Joshua begins to tell me about the day, that it is special and "a great day". He repeats this. I ask if he has seen the spiral before and he says yes, when he was four and five and now he is six. He tells me that he is really happy.*

*After another clear up and more outdoor play for the children everyone comes in and sits on benches and Sylvia tells a story. She lightly strokes the lute and lights a candle and begins. The sun suddenly goes in and it is quite dark again. She tells a strong story about a boy who is naughty. His mother asks St, Michael to give him a breastplate of gold and a scarlet cloak and star. He does so but the star is tarnished because the boy has not been kind. The boy notices that every time he performs a good deed his star begins to shine more*

*brightly. I look at the children. Joel, who has been very challenging for the past few weeks, is absolutely transfixed. He is staring at Sylvia, his mouth is open. He was still like this when the story ended, absolutely still and intent.*

*After the session we put the leaves from the spiral in a sheet and they go straight onto the compost. It is all completely swept away. After other festivals everything is cleared away gradually but Sylvia tells me that she does not talk about this festival, that it carries its own meaning for each child. She says that the children experience the esoteric nature of the ritual and its connection to the birth of the soul of Christ. The light in each one of us is rekindled for the year ahead. She says that the children will be mellow and she will only do sewing and cooking with them for the next few days. She regrets that two of the children were not there but knows that this was not possible and to have so many children there in the middle of winter is something of an achievement anyway.*

*When I drive away it all seems unreal. Trying to explain the experience to other people is hard. It was so dramatic and yet so accepted by everyone else in that setting. Everyone is so dedicated. It was amazing, a blessing, an omen for the year, a miracle, a spiritual event, a dream.*

*The whole community contributed to the creation of this ritual. They brought leaves, flowers, made the candle holders, paper shapes and star biscuits. The space was completely transformed. The space gradually became more like the usual kindergarten again as the morning progressed. The spiral remained imprinted on my mind long after it has been physically cleared away.*

This is a 'seasonal' ritual and according to Turner (1982) participants in seasonal rituals experience "a whole series of changes in the nature of the cultural and ecological activities to be undertaken and of the relationships they will have with others" (p.25). He says that such rituals are "calendrical" (p.25) and like all festivals in the Steiner calendar they are repeated each year. Almon (1993, p.72) points out that these rituals are "a means of sensitizing ourselves to the inner moods of the year and our soul responses to them". Their sameness and predictability are important as they symbolise stability and in the case of early childhood settings such repetition is

comforting and affirms a sense of belonging for children. The celebration of festivals is a key to understanding Steiner philosophy. The festivals recognise the passing of the year and are a celebration of existence and continuity in life.

Batten (1995, p.23) explains that ritual allows people to move on and may be a release that “allows us to leave something behind and to embrace the new, to live in the present moment rather than drag our heels in the past”. I remember the feeling of being in the spiral, of walking, of being in that moment, being conscious of everyone in the circle and yet also being conscious only of myself. Maybe the candlelight that represented the stars of Matariki helps everyone to see with new eyes. Matariki itself is a cluster of stars that some call the Pleiades and the word is Mata – ariki, the eyes of god. It is a festival that marks the beginning of the New Year for Māori people and is beginning to be celebrated more widely in Aotearoa (Hakaraia, 2004, p.15).

Hakaraia (2004) hopes that in reclaiming festivals that are relevant to New Zealand that “one day soon we may all light small fires, sing and dance as we welcome Matariki for another year” (p.7). Batten (1995) notes that for some peoples the stars are where souls return after death. These reminders of European culture, Christianity and esoteric knowledge alongside references to Tane Mahuta (god of the forests) and Mother Earth make for a rich mix in the Steiner kindergarten.

The nature of this ritual and the way that the festivals organize the year in this setting emphasises sociocultural concerns. Steiner education is often critiqued for being Eurocentric but in this case the influence of Aotearoa was obvious; the day itself, June 21<sup>st</sup>, is summer in the Northern hemisphere and here it is celebrated as Midwinter. In this school festivals and celebrations were not decontextualised. Instead this ritual forms what Batten (1995, p.15) calls a “meeting point” that mirrors the meeting of Māori and Pākehā. An advocate for Steiner education acknowledges the importance of this local interest and stresses that a major consideration must be that which “lives in the culture where the school is located” (Moore-Haas, 1993, p.69).

The darkness and candles that symbolise the stars work symbolically with wider community and cultural understandings. We share the sense of being between worlds. In a narrower sense I realise that Sylvia was also working very closely with one of the boys and she affirms that the story she chooses is especially to awaken what might be dormant in his spirit. Sylvia often uses oral storytelling in this way, not to pinpoint or

embarrass a child but as an offering, as a window into another way of being. This way of dealing with behaviour assumes a readiness to hear on the part of the child. Of course if the deeper messages go unheard then the child is simply not ready. On the day of this festival I notice Joel's reaction to the story and afterwards we talk about his face. Sylvia did not notice because she was telling the story but she chose the story carefully. Joel was intent and ready for this. In some ways it was his day. He has not had great life experiences and everything is very risky for him.

When I go back the following week he behaves differently. He holds my hand, says he is Superman, and tells his friend that he loves her. It is suddenly easy to see Joel's good intentions and warm heart instead of disruption and bullying. Sylvia explains that perhaps the spirit is upheld not by effecting change in a person but by bringing out the best in them. In terms of a spiritual reaction to certain behaviours Sylvia's way of dealing with this supports Joel, lifts his self esteem and brings about a dramatic softening in his demeanour. He is no longer so tough all the time and he shows that he cares for others. Perhaps we are all changed and transformed by the ritual and the experience of spiritual in-betweenness. Rituals usually have certain aspects in common, for instance, moving from darkness into light, moving from the sacred to the profane, shifting between worlds. Lindenberg (1993, p.94) notes that the Midwinter ritual is influenced by what is happening in the world and that outside events themselves may create a need "to go into the darkness, spreading the light as we go out".

#### Liminal space

In terms of spirituality I am proposing that early childhood settings can be constructed as 'liminal space'(Turner, 1969, 1982). That is, places of ambiguity, 'betwixt and between', constantly changing, as children and adults act and react with the environment and with each other to create new opportunities for meaning making. Lefebvre (1991) suggests that such ambiguity is "a category of everyday life, and perhaps an essential category. It never exhausts its reality; from the ambiguity of consciousnesses and situations spring forth actions, events, results..." (p.18). It appeared to me that by acknowledging the spiritual in educational contexts teachers and parents make the construction of liminal space a possibility. Liminality is the space that exists between night/day, dark/light, open/enclosed, public/private and in

the case of early childhood settings such spaces open between home and school, work and play, education and care. A liminal space can be likened to being between worlds. Barlow (1991) differentiates liminal spaces (for instance the entrance to the marae) and liminal states. He says that the concept of wheiao is connected to transitional states between the world of darkness and the world of light. Some states are natural, for instance, the phases of the moon or the development of the embryo. Others, like learning, require going “from a state of ignorance to one of enlightenment or understanding” (Barlow, 1991, p.185). This recognises the liminal in education. Tangaere (1997, p.48) uses the metaphor of the poutama (the lattice panel) to draw attention to the “plateau” between encountering new knowledge and full understanding and says that time is a factor in learning as is the cultural context that supports the child. To be in a liminal state, then, is to be between knowings, to be always becoming. As Delueze and Guattari (1987, p.496) point out, the interval and the intermediary “only has a becoming” and their interest is in the movement within that space.

In the Steiner kindergarten the environment is soft, every angularity is removed and the children notice this. They have art paper with rounded corners because as one child told me “*we cut the nose off*”. In spiritual terms this building reflects Gaudi’s architectural statement to the effect that the straight line comes from man, the curved from God. This attention to detail is important for Day (1999) who believes that architecture can be healing and that “buildings can be seen as the third human skin (skin is the first, clothing the second)” (p.42). In terms of spiritual well being Day (1999) suggests that certain environments have the potential to nourish the soul and says that:

when we talk about nourishing the soul, we are talking about finding qualities in the environment that provide the right balance to the imbalance of the moment. Of course, there are a lot of imbalances and a lot of soul needs, and a few are major ones. Sometimes we lack society, stimulation, sometimes we have too much and it is stressful. (p.51)

The design of a school has to bear all these variables in mind and the Steiner environment strives to do this by giving attention to the senses. The day of the ritual I was suddenly aware of colour and smell. The smell of the outdoors, the leaves and

flowers, had entered the kindergarten. Alexander (2002) describes the garden as a boundary, as a liminal space between private and public areas. The inclusion of nature and greenery from the garden inside the kindergarten marked it as a less domestic space with liminal potential.

Visitors often pick up on the soft pink colour inside the school. Colour has always been a marker of the spiritual and specific colours represent aspects of the spirit in different cultures. In Hindu beliefs the chakras (or energy centres) on the body correspond to a certain sound, symbol and colour, so for instance, the heart corresponds to the colour green and therefore, it is assumed, that when in contact with certain shades of green that the heart is uplifted. Colour is a type of energy and according to the Colour Therapy website people who lose their sight gradually adjust so they can receive colour rays through the skin and eventually a person who is blind can differentiate between colours (<http://www.colourtherapyhealing.com>).

Knowledge about the influence of colour on the brain and subsequent behaviour is used commercially. Fast food outlets are usually predominantly red in their advertising and ambiance, while hospitals and dentists are often pastel colours. Colour is highly symbolic. The greenery in the Midwinter ritual represented new life. The power of colour is used by all religions to give different messages. According to Finlay (2002) “the twelfth-century sage, Maimonides, suggested a blue that was ‘similar to the sea which is similar to the sky which is similar to God’s holy throne’” (p.429). This blue on the Jewish *tsitsit* shawl represents the mystical and white represents the logical and “only together can they fully remind us of the wonders of the universe” (Finlay, 2002, p.430). Day (1999) is just as specific. He mentions a form of “spiritual functionalism” and notes that “a Steiner kindergarten room should support imitative and imaginative activity within a warm, supportively secure, almost dreamy environment. The appropriate colour lies in the warm pink range” (p.27). Eventually I noticed that the teachers wore certain colours, pale pink, mulberry and plum, changing to blues and yellow, then on to the green of summer. This change was not arbitrary but reflected the colours that symbolise the seasons. One of the teachers told me that “*colours are important because it has to do with the senses. Every season has a colour*”.

On the day of the ritual the whole atmosphere was different and the predominant colours were deep blue, dark green and gold. This was a complete change from the usual soft pastels. Spirituality in this setting is also acknowledged in the way the environment mediates between waking and sleeping states. This keeps children spiritually in-between. It was felt that children could stay asleep to the world if they were in a setting that avoided hardness, certain technologies and harsh colours. Children are suspended and held by the environment. The 'holding' environment is a metaphor for encouraging security and calm. This is all filtered through understandings of the seasons and connections to the earth. It is a very organic way of interpreting the spiritual and the educational experience is planned accordingly. One of the parents mentioned the "world" that was created in the kindergarten, a world "uncluttered" by adults. Parents said that they felt the environment was about "more than you see" that it goes beyond the sensory and another said that being there at certain moments made her cry because it was so beautiful. These parents experienced the spiritual in-betweenness represented by the aesthetics of this environment.

I am also reminded of the aesthetics of the ritual: the pink camellia flowers on the dark green branches, the scattering of pine cones, the golden beeswax candles that glow even before they are lit. However, the teachers know this and say that they also work beyond the seen, beyond the aesthetic, that they work from within themselves. Sylvia tells me that "*the way we work with children is through imitation, so they have to have an environment and people around them that are worth imitating and that's part of our role to create an environment worth imitating*". To be worth imitating means being deeply there, being aware of what is done and said, being aware of what Steiner (1907/98) calls the "magic" of imitation and example. This includes:

not just what happens around children in the material sense, but everything that occurs in their environment - everything that can be perceived by their senses, that can work on the inner powers of children from the surrounding physical space. This includes all moral or immoral actions, all wise or foolish actions that children see. (p.25)

During the ritual I was aware of the way Sylvia engaged the perception and attention of the children without verbal instruction. She made her intention clear in the walk, in the story that she told, in her instructions for presentation of food and her work with

the parents. She is purposeful and is prepared to be imitated. Sylvia says that she questions herself all the time. She is able to do this because it is calm and she is able to maintain awareness of what she does and how she does it, so she sings instead of commanding, she prays and thanks Mother Earth before food, and she tries to communicate aspects of nature to the children.

The ritual space was a microcosm of the Steiner environment. The morning went in cycles of silence interspersed with periods of free play. This heightened the usual sense of breathing in and out that happens in the kindergarten. The ritual constructed a separation from the world. Sometimes the kindergarten seemed to inhabit a different time but the seasons are regular and the earth is celebrated. The Midwinter festival involved the children and respected their ability to concentrate and deal with the spiritual in-between state. It affirmed the spiritual nature of the work in the kindergarten, the commitment of the community, and the wish to give “pleasure and delight” (Steiner, 1907/1998, p.28) to young children.

### **Christmas at the private preschool**

The preparation for Christmas at the private preschool was completely different from the rituals in the Steiner kindergarten. About six weeks before the Christmas holiday the preparations for the Christmas concert began. The songs chosen were a mix and included a song about the body, another featured butterflies. Children practised singing the traditional carol ‘Away in a Manger’ and another song about a snowman. They danced and clapped hands to the Pancake Polka. The concert was planned to finish with a rousing chorus of ‘We wish you a merry Christmas’. There was a parachute, bells, mime and dancing in a circle. This is a performance by the children for the parents and so this is the reverse of the Midwinter events in the Steiner kindergarten. The children rehearsed every day and it was fairly energetic and noisy. The children gathered every morning in a circle and sang loudly and with enjoyment occasionally getting carried away with excitement.

I realise that the construction of the spiritual in-between represented by the preparations for the Christmas concert is entirely different in this context. It is more closely linked to the Christian year and the in-between state of Advent. These are the weeks before Christmas that are perceived as ‘waiting’. This time is significant for



the children whether they connect Christmas to the birth of Christ or not and a time of anticipation. Despite media mutterings about the materialistic nature of this festival the celebration of Christmas is still important in New Zealand. The children were happy and spirits were light as everyone gathered together to sing and dance. Like all rituals the concert broke with routine but it also gradually became part of everyday life in this setting because concert practice happened every day for weeks.

One day the teachers were talking at lunchtime. Three of them began to reminisce about Christmas in the Netherlands (Holland). Their faces and voices changed. They began to share their stories and describe Christmas celebrations that I know nothing about. At this point they began to re(live) the in-between space as the anticipation of Christmas celebrations in the Netherlands. The years in New Zealand dropped away and they were children again, watching for St. Nikolas on his white horse. They would watch his arrival on television. He came with helpers who one teacher called ‘the black Petes’ who accompany him from the port of Rotterdam. This event signals the beginning of the Christmas celebrations. They said that in Holland there was nothing automatic about present giving. On Christmas Eve parents summed up the behaviour of their children over the past year and remind them about their good and bad deeds. Presents were often home made and held meaning for the individual child. The teachers had experienced this ritual played out as a cultural event and had experienced the trepidation, the play of darkness and light, and then the relief that is common to nearly all rituals.

The opportunity for shared memory was made possible by their participation in this research. It prompted the teachers to reflect about spirituality and its meaning for them. They had not shared these memories before. It seems that memories from the in-between space experienced in childhood influences people for a long time. In the second focus group Teresa is asked where her values come from. She replies “*that’s what I said to Jane, from my parents... and do you remember we talked about the Dutch Christmas, all that stuff?*” She identifies these early experiences as constructing her sense of the spiritual. The teachers at the private preschool did not seek to reproduce their cultural experience but they still wanted a celebration. They were forging new traditions and experiences of the spiritual in-between. Some of the children were beginning to remember the songs from year to year. The Christmas

concert was an event and a highlight of the preschool year that ends in December in New Zealand before the long summer holiday. When the rehearsals for the concert started there was a sense of spiritual in-betweenness in the preschool. Concert practice filtered into daily life but was also out of the ordinary and the children loved it. It was eclectic, joyful and unique to that setting.

### **Spiritual spaces**

My perception of this pre-Christmas time at the private preschool as a spiritually in-between time is different from my perception of the spiritually in-between in the *casa* and the Steiner kindergarten. In those settings the environment itself acts as a liminal space and had the potential to become ‘in-between’. The private preschool is different because it is designed to be transparent. It is positioned just off the main road and the gate opens by the car park and a path leads straight into the preschool. There are two sets of sliding doors that make the main room very light. The bathroom is open and everything is designed to fit in with regulations and requirements for visibility and transparency. There are small shrubs rather than trees and when children are outside or playing inside there are no hidden corners or places that are not open to the direct gaze of others. While this is ideal for practical reasons the emphasis is definitely on the utilitarian. I reflected that it is hard to construct a sense of the spiritually in-between in an environment that was not designed with the spiritual in mind. Montessori, for instance, was explicit about children’s need for a peaceful and beautiful environment. The Steiner kindergarten was planned with the same attention to detail and is intentionally a spiritual space. In the private preschool the emphasis was on safety and surveillance; this interferes with the construction of a space that supports the spiritually in-between.

### **Epiphany**

Between worlds in the Montessori casa

Moments of realisation, of having crossed a threshold, are often described in spiritual terms as an ‘epiphany’. The celebration of a festival might express spiritual in-betweenness for a community. The experience of epiphany is often a private moment for the individual, a spiritual moment of revelation. In this poem Carol, a teacher at the *casa*, describes an epiphany – a moment when she suddenly feels between worlds.

She sees her surroundings with heightened clarity and sometimes this is described as seeing 'as if for the first time' and her poem illustrates this:

*Carol's epiphany – her poem*

*The other day Helen said to me*

*“open up the doors to go outside”.*

*I bent down to get my shoes and just looked up.*

*There were 28 children in that classroom – I could hear the murmur*

*– all busy.*

*I thought if I open up the door they'll all run outside.*

*The murmur of voices, the light shining, they were all content.*

*It all looked beautiful,*

*the crystals shining,*

*just for a little minute –*

*...something driving them (is it the spirit?)*

*I thought - we made this environment for them*

*an environment providing for inner peace.*

*The power of the environment.*

*I set up the environment.*

*I can see spirituality happening there.*

*But I can't see it to grab it.*

*I don't have to go to church every Sunday to have an understanding of the  
word spirituality.*

*I can't pinpoint what about me is spiritual*

*Something just drives me.*

*Some people don't want to...*

*But I like to get deep.*

*I like deep.*

*Māori have a different perspective*

*My family is bicultural*

*If I spoke to the elders they would have thoughts about it.  
I'm glad it's been kept alive.*

*I let the children be themselves.  
As an educator I provide the environment.  
Peace  
Silence  
I just let them be.*

*What was the question again?*

*Letting them be themselves.  
When I stood up and didn't open the doors for Helen that day  
I thought - as a team we provide a beautiful environment –  
Lace curtains  
Crystals  
Chimes.*

*An environment that supports them  
No hustle  
No yelling.*

*The child expresses it by creating all these wonderful things  
Doing wonderful things... aesthetic...  
Aesthetic experiences  
The materials drive them rather than we say 'do this' 'do that'  
Every child is different  
We extend them  
We could do more.*

*Someone came in with a dead monarch butterfly  
We didn't chuck it in the rubbish.  
I've seen that  
We talk about it  
I recognise what we do.*

*It's only been a short time (to be involved in the research)*

*The right time  
It's personal  
It opened a door for me  
It makes me feel good*

*Seeing*

*Feeling*

*We all provide different things, very kind and peaceful.*

*I'm different*

*Helen is different.*

*Its about the real you and the real me.*

*What makes you you and what makes me me.*

*It needs silence, peace, you know.*

*Maybe I just like to think its there*

*Mind*

*Body*

*Soul*

This is a moment of spiritual in-betweenness and Carol is completely present but is not automatically moving and acting. She is caught in the moment. This is her description and my process of constructing the poem from her words was the same as for Joelle's poem and that of the kindergarten parents. These are Carol's words as they were spoken to me in the interview where we shared our thoughts on spirituality and early childhood education.

The poem itself also exists in the liminal space that poetry represents. Reading a poem becomes in itself a threshold (*limen – threshold*) that the reader may choose to cross or not. I hope this poem captures the hesitancy and repetition that happens in conversations when the spoken word is rarely smooth unbroken prose. Carol stops in the middle of her day when Helen (who is also the owner of the school) makes an ordinary request. This is the hinge that supports this liminal moment. Carol is poised to automatically carry out the request and follow through the daily routine. Instead she pauses in mid-action. This pause pinpoints the moment of awareness. In that

moment the decision about whether to open the door and join inside to outside space, becomes a spiritual conflict for this teacher. She describes looking, listening, and making her own decision. By not carrying out the request she privileges her own knowledge of the environment and steps over a threshold where her own knowing is affirmed. She makes a different decision. This happens in a context where such decision making is safe and valued, but it is still a step to be taken, a step over, a transition. Carol realises this and she had already recorded the incident in an email to me before elaborating on what happened again during our interview time. When I eventually gave her the poem to read she said “oh yes, I remember this” many times while she read. Moments of epiphany are inevitably memorable.

This moment leads Carol to think deeply about the meaning of spirituality and her identity. The word epiphany comes from the Greek *epiphaneia* – manifestation, to show (Pearsall, 1999). It is the moment when something is revealed that goes beyond the senses. Carol is aware of the sensory world, the beautiful environment, but she begins to think about difference, about her teaching, about what spirituality means to her. This moment is an interruption and forms a rupture in the daily routine. It is a reminder that the everyday world can produce spiritual revelations. Such moments give people a chance to grapple with abstract concepts and to be intensely self-conscious. These moments permeate literature. Virginia Woolf describes Bernard who is struggling with the notion of eternity and who realises that time is passing and “a drop that has formed on the roof of the soul falls”. In that moment he realises “I have lost my youth” (Woolf, 1971, p.157). In daily life Griffin (1995) notes that it is possible to move beyond the mundane and “one begins to glimpse what lies beyond, a larger coherence to which we all belong” (p.96). This may bring feelings of peace and joy or may signal a change of direction and be disturbing. In the *casa* Carol is able to ‘stay in the moment’ and reflect on it. This leads to a deeper appreciation of her life’s work.

### Crossovers

In the Montessori *casa* the crossover from carpark to school means going down a dark leafy path, a white plaster angel on the side of the porch appears to be the guardian of the place. Once inside the school is light and airy. In my journal I note that on the way out the procedure reverses and write that the path becomes lighter and the cherry

blossom and magnolia in the garden opposite come into view, vivid and suddenly brighter. This marks my transition back into the world. This is an environment that fosters a sense of being spiritually in-between in its own unique way.

Inside the building children recognise their place and parents wait in the entranceway to either say goodbye or wait for their children at the end of the day. This is a crossover space. The children know about their bags, about changing into slippers and they bring their Velcro nametag from their peg and stick it to the strip on the wall. Thus the liminality of the space is marked out and ritualised in this performance, in the space where farewells and greetings take place. The work of the school takes place in as uninterrupted a way as possible once the child walks past this point. The video confirmed to these teachers that this environment was interesting, had variety and contained a seemingly endless supply of work for the children. There was standard Montessori equipment and every shelf has some new delight, boxes and baskets, musical instruments, books, puzzles, trays with materials to take to a table and work with. Everything is at child height. It is a space away from the 'real' world.

Certain ways of behaving are encouraged from the first entry into the Montessori *casa*. The *casa* constructs its own liminal space. Maria Montessori was a passionate advocate for a dynamic and fulfilling environment for children. She wanted an environment where children can be active learners and this is how her spirit is realised in the school. In the Montessori environment the spirituality is in the detail. The aesthetics of this place call to the children. Montessori (1972) describes the voice of the environment, a voice that has the power to speak to children, to attract them. She mentions the eloquence of an environment where "there are various things that 'call' the children at different ages...the brilliancy, the colours, and the beauty of gaily decorated objects are nothing more than 'voices' which attract the attention of a child and encourage him [sic] to act" (p.83).

### Silence

A sense of spiritual betweenness is encouraged in the *casa* by an environment that is quiet calm and occasionally silent. The 'silence game' is a manifestation of the Montessori spirit (Montessori, 1972, p.142). This narrative is constructed from

fieldnotes and my reflection on the experience of the spiritual in-between realised in this regular activity of ‘making silence’:

*Making silence*

*Fipe asks the children to “feel the quiet”. She invites the children to make silence. The children know what to do, they sit quietly and when everyone is ready Fipe turns the egg timer over and they all watch the sand fall through. The time shifts and changes. The 3 minutes seem to last for a long time. A sense of the spiritual seems to rise in the room as the silence builds. Fipe is very relaxed in this in-between space. She does not react to any noise or movement and sits on the mat with the children. She is able to communicate tranquillity. This silence is restorative. Peace fills the room. Collective silence is a powerful experience. Afterwards when the children’s names are whispered they go to their chosen activity like arrows. One of the children tells me that what she wanted to do was already in her mind.*

The silence creates an in-between space. It is a space for focus and a moment when it is possible to relate to the self. These moments of contemplative silence are a reminder that everyday life is packed with activity but that when a small silence is incorporated into daily life it serves to reenergise the spirit. Montessori (1972, p.140) believes that after experiencing the joy of silence children feel happy. She mentioned that silence enables children to experience communication as “union” with others on a spiritual level. These aspects of spiritual betweenness are realised in a setting that is restorative to the spirit. All contemplatives and mystics value silence. The non-coercive silence of the *casa* supports a spiritual in-betweenness that Moore (1994) calls a momentary “retreat”. He writes about the care of the soul in ordinary everyday contexts and notes that:

Spirituality need not be grandiose in its ceremonials. Indeed, the soul might benefit most when its spiritual life is performed in the context it favours – ordinary, daily vernacular life. But spirituality does demand attention, mindfulness, regularity, and devotion. It asks for some small measure of withdrawal from a world set up to ignore soul. (p.211).



These withdrawals are possible in peaceful environments that allow children to discover silence as a way of encountering the in-between in everyday life. Liminal space and spiritual in-betweenness are not achieved without decision making about the environment. To make something like the silence game part of everyday life in the early childhood setting is a deliberate pedagogical act that recognises the potential of the spiritual in-between to be a revitalising space.

Adults create early childhood environments. They construct regulations and they expect everyone to fit in. If children are 'between', they are often described as falling between the cracks or gaps. At this point it is appropriate to look at wellbeing, belonging and the spiritual component of education, education systems and environments. Everyone has times of being spiritually in-between. This might reflect the time of year, a crisis in the family or an unexpected event. Sometimes ritual can take this out of the personal realm and can make the in-between or liminal state fruitful and celebratory.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter described the spiritual in-between state that is also sometimes described as a liminal state or space. I have discussed the possibility that all early childhood settings can be constructed as a liminal space. However, the focus of the chapter was on a Midwinter Ritual in the Steiner kindergarten, Christmas in the preschool and the description of a personal moment of epiphany by a teacher in the Montessori *casa*. I have also discussed the spiritual in-between as a space that can be inhabited anytime by adults and children. Certain environments support this. A task of early childhood education is to make sure that the spiritual in-between can be celebrated and rituals can be constructed to enable this to happen.

In a spiritual sense the uncertainty of feeling spiritually in-between demands a response. Sometimes it may be met by spiritual witness, as in the previous chapter. This kind of close relational support is very much of the now and in the moment. Time and space are experienced differently in the spiritual in-between. People do not usually stay in a state of liminality. Sometimes people are aware of liminal moments as an epiphany. Being spiritually in-between is to be in a state of flux, to be in a space in which openness to change is a possibility and brings opportunities for the future. The following chapter explores what happens when the spiritual inhabits another space: the elsewhere.

## Chapter Nine – The spiritual elsewhere

### Introduction

*Life is lived in transformation.*  
(Ghosh, 2005, p. 225)

This chapter explores the elsewhere as a space that can be accessed by children as part of their experience of spirituality. The elsewhere is proposed to be a transformative space, a place of change and metamorphosis. The spiritual elsewhere enabled difference and possibility to be explored. The spiritual elsewhere is an imaginative, creative space, a space that is open to the process of becoming that is a Deleuzian concept. It affirms the multiple and the various and subverts the binaries of subject/object (Mansfield, 2000), human/animal and adult/child (Deleuze & Parnet, 2002). It is an unfixed position that can be conceptualised as a spiritual aspect of being young. This amorphousness, the ability to be elsewhere and to be a shape-shifter is supported in different ways by these three early childhood settings.

I am proposing that the spiritual elsewhere is an aspect of the unfettered and free self. It is a paradoxical state. It approaches the state of mystical Oneness when a person can feel truly him/her self and at the same time feel connected with everything else in the Universe. It is close to Deleuze and Guattari's (1987, p.506) conceptualisation of "lines of flight". Lines of flight are at once dangerous and uncontrolled and are a source of "creative potentialities" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p.506). Lines of flight are about flying, not escaping, implicated in "teaching the soul to live its life, not to save it" (Deleuze & Parnet, 2002, p.62).

This chapter discusses the notion of the spiritual elsewhere in relation to my observations of spiritual experience in the *casa*, the private preschool and the Steiner kindergarten. The spiritual elsewhere is inhabited by children connecting with animals, mythical creatures and inanimate objects and artefacts. In the *casa* the connection with animals and the ability of children to enter the elsewhere through stories that they hear or create is explored. The influence of popular culture is more obvious in the private preschool. In that setting the video and my field notes describe instances of daydreaming and the children told me about their dreams as part of their experience of the spiritual elsewhere. In the Steiner kindergarten children are

encouraged to be in the spiritual elsewhere. The children explore drama, relate to certain artefacts, witness ‘ensouling’ and play. While describing these instances of the spiritual elsewhere the chapter includes a discussion of metamorphosis as an aspect of spiritual becoming and ends with a discussion about the spiritual elsewhere as an aspect of everyday life.

### **The casa - becoming...Other**

One day when absorbed in the daily activity of listening to a story as part of mat-time before lunch one day in the Montessori *casa* my observations caused thoughts about the elsewhere as a spiritual construction to surface. This spiritual moment is described in the following narrative:

*We are all like swans*

*One of the stories that the children in the Montessori casa loved was The Tale of the Ugly Duckling. The modern, popular, fun version of this tale is about the very hungry caterpillar who turns into a butterfly but it lacks the moral seriousness of the traditional tale. This is the story about the duckling that is rejected by the other ducks in the farmyard. He hides in the reeds only to be teased and pecked by the other ducks. But his time comes. One day he emerges as a beautiful swan and flies off with other swans as they pass over the pond. Suri, a teacher in the Montessori casa, told it with real passion. She provided illustrations by using a magnet board.*

*The children were completely transported by this story, their mouths were open and they were leaning slightly forward, eyes only on their teacher. She tells the story in her own way, for instance, saying that the ugly duckling hides in the reeds in order “to build courage” to go back to the farmyard. When the ugly duckling is again rejected by the other ducks Ronan, one of the children, has tears in his eyes. Following this story Suri talked about it to us and answered questions. The children were obviously thoughtful about the transformation from duck into swan. Anna seeks reassurance, as in the following exchange:*

*Anna* – *Suri... are we all like swans?*

*Suri* - *yes... we are all like swans*

*Pause*

*Anna* - *but the swans...if they have babies will they look after them?*

*Suri (very gently) ... oh yes*

Anna's thoughtful questions remind me that it is essential in some way to believe in the possibility of being a swan. Suri is very clear about this. The part of us that is perpetually swanlike is often called the spiritual. The spirit is often conceptualized as renewable and always beautiful. The spirit might not be recognised or be obvious on first or outward appearances. This motif of hidden identity and of everything not being as it seems is often a feature of children's fantasies and fairy tales.

The incident reminds me of some of the stories recorded by Vivien Paley (1999). After one story she notes that in acts of the imagination children are able to inhabit the world of others and that:

This act of creation, repeated over and over, opens each day to the wondrous possibilities of good things happening, just when it may seem that all is lost. If Harry knows that the sun is shining and the puppies are playing, we need not despair. We are safe for another day. (p.114).

Later in the sandpit the children play with my name, they decide to make JANE out of sand, they begin to play with my name and Rosie looks at me and pats my arm and says that they are only joking. I am conscious of the story we have been told and wonder if this is a factor in her sensitivity and her gesture that shows she is aware that my feelings could be hurt. In their everyday interactions the children demonstrate their deep understanding of everything that this environment presents to them (Rogoff, 2003), interpreting in their own way the lessons of the day.

The story time featuring the Ugly Duckling felt like a spiritual experience, or, as it is called in the *casa*, a spiritual moment. The feeling I have is shared by another teacher

who joins the circle. As often happens we exchange glances after looking around and noting the rapt attention and the hush that has fallen as Suri tells the story. It is obviously important to adults and children to hear about this miraculous transformation again and to be reassured by Suri that “yes, we are all like swans”.

Anna demonstrates that she is thinking hard about this and has realised that there is an element of abandonment in the tale. She needs to hear that the beautiful swans look after their babies and her question demonstrates that their beautiful appearance is not quite enough, she also wants them to be caring. In these settings children play with this idea over and over, becoming parents, babies, dogs and cats, kings and princesses who have to demonstrate that they have special qualities. I notice that when children play or are totally listening that they become the character, animal, or human, who is the focus of their attention. This happens with Ronan who is so involved in the tale that he is almost crying. He has become the ugly duckling and the swan. He has entered the elsewhere as a spiritual state of oneness where there is no separation between him and the birds.

In everyday life this ability to enter the elsewhere is a “tactic” (de Certeau, 1988, p.xix) that embraces different ways of negotiating and making meaning in the world. In childhood these tactics include sliding between worlds and might include “clever tricks, knowing how to get away with things, ‘hunter’s cunning’, manoeuvres, polymorphic simulations, joyful discoveries, poetic as well as warlike” (de Certeau, 1988, p.xix). In the everyday life of children the tactics de Certeau describes might also include play. Play is the everyday route to the spiritual elsewhere.

Another day I notice that Leo is involved in the elsewhere in a different way. He enters the spiritual elsewhere that he has created through his play and with materials that might be found in any early childhood setting. This is a unique mixed up world that demonstrates his spirit of inquiry mingled with creativity:

*A mixed up world*

*Leo has made a very elaborate structure with blocks and animals of all sizes. It spreads along the bench on the edge of the sandpit and for a while Rosa looks at what he is doing. Leo is interacting with the plastic animals not with her and she leaves. At first the animals are in separate enclosures marked by*

*blocks and clumps of plastic grass but as time goes on they escape and general disorder ensues. The dinosaur and tiger become 'meat', although tiger later comes alive again. The dragons breathe fire to cook the meat. The elephant uses his tusk to hold them and sometimes squirts them with water if it gets too hot. Leo tells a dramatic tale:*

*they both have stripes, the tiger and the dinosaur they jump up and sometimes dragons come to catch it on fire to cook it then they throw the hot meat around and the rhino gets it and the zebra and the wrinkly gets it and smashes the rocks so the meat can go in and they eat it, horsey...dogs, hippo comes, white tusk comes and they gobble it up...*

*Freehorn, a dinosaur type creature begins to play quite a part in Leo's story, he is the strongest. Freehorn is helped by two brothers who say "I will give you some help my friend" and Freehorn sees the horse, sheep and camel, says "they're meat" and "smashes their feet off so they get a little bit each". At one point Leo's cat eats the eyes of a creature and Leo remarks that this animal "can't see where he's going". In order to restore order he produces a policeman, the plastic figure is very much smaller than the animals but he says "you have to get away from the meat now...these ones – come along".*

*Leo speaks in different voices as he tells his slightly grisly tale and becomes different animals in turn as he holds them up and moves them, occasionally roaring. His policeman voice is very deep and authoritative. He tells the story to himself completely absorbed in the tale. He becomes a number of characters. Leo has an ambiguous role with these animals as they have a life of their own although he appears to have a 'god like' control over the narrative and moves them around. The policeman is a reassuring touch and shortly after producing him Leo goes inside to join the others. Helen tells him that she will leave the animals out but he does something else after mat time.*

Leo reveals his knowing about animals, what they eat and their different characteristics. He also knows that they die and become something else. In some communities death is part of everyday life. In New Zealand death is not romanticized

and the dead animal often ends up on a dinner plate. Leo grapples with the transformation of animal to meat. He lives in a semi-rural community, the stock trucks go past and animals come and go in the fields. Leo had picked up on the connection between animals and meat. Adults use different words so this is not always obvious, for instance, saying 'steak' instead of 'cow' or 'bull'. He is exploring possibilities and hierarchies, using his day to day knowledge to create a new narrative, moving into a kind of 'magic realism' in his tale. In the elsewhere that he creates many of the animals come alive again. It is like a parallel universe. It seems slightly out of control but Leo can also become an authority figure. I note that "*he can verbalise his imaginative world and he animates everything with word and action*". Leo spends a long time marshalling his thoughts using a collection of creatures, some mythic, some extinct, some animals that he is familiar with. He enters a fantasy world and verbalises his story although he is the only person there. This was a dramatic monologue that enabled Leo to speak about his imaginative world and the blurred boundary between one state and another. In their imaginative narratives children deal with change. Leo reaches some kind of resolution. I decided not to ask him about his experiences outside the story because he is obviously reflecting on some new knowledge himself. He used a lot of energy in his exploration of the elsewhere.

Leo also lets his spirit soar when he becomes what he calls a "*wild roaring beast*" in the playground. As one of the teachers at the *casa* says, she likes the calm but also a bit of 'yeeee ahhhhh' (email communication) and she enjoys the free spirit that Leo embodies when he becomes something else and inhabits an elsewhere that has different rules. The elsewhere brings a freedom from being himself. In Leo's spiritual elsewhere everything becomes somehow loose in the world and slightly out of control. Jung might say that in these moments the shadow is allowed to emerge before the repression of the adult world takes over. In symbolic terms the Self is often expressed as an animal (Jung, 1978). Leo certainly expresses a different world in his narrative grappling with reality and fantasy. His exploration deals with what Jung (1978, p.220) describes as "our instinctive nature and its connectedness with one's surroundings". This is an aspect of the spiritual search for meaning that tries to reconcile disparate facts and information. The elsewhere is a safe place to do this because the usual rules do not apply.

At the *casa* teachers and children usually stand back when children are engaged in certain activities. Children are discouraged from disturbing or interfering with each other. Montessori (1972, p.50) notes that this is important, that a child should be allowed to “open up himself [sic] to life” as part of exploring the inner self. Leo is allowed time and space to explore his narrative. The sense that he is grappling with a major realisation is expressed in his narrative. He was occupied with it for nearly an hour. Leo explores the transformation from live animal to dead meat that is an everyday event for adults. The spiritual preoccupations of children can bring a different perspective to ordinary events. Montessori (1972, p.70) notes the damage to the spirit that can happen when children are exposed to cruelty or unthinking actions and states that “the death of the first dove killed intentionally by a member of his family is a dark spot in the heart of almost every child” and such things are “spiritual ills” that children have to deal with. To children some realities can be disturbing.

I reflected that my working definition mentioned connection with all living things, to nature and the universe. When observing children I realised that this connection was already there and is a feature of the spiritual elsewhere. Leo has uninterrupted time and his spirit roams around a range of possibilities in relation to his current preoccupations. Sometimes adults fail to notice those moments when children are spiritually elsewhere and connecting with everything around them. Occasionally the fragile spiritual component of what is going on gets lost. In the *casa* the following narrative shows that it is challenging to maintain harmony in all moments in the day. I noticed these events and interpret what the children are doing as spiritual because one of the teachers at the *casa* had told me that she finds the connections with family that children make “*very spiritual*”:

#### *The snails*

*One day the children were outside in the sun. Clusters of snails, all sizes, had been discovered on the leaves of one of the bushes. Some of the children were immediately in the elsewhere. Some held the snails and were talking to them. One or two of the children began to make hand movements like horns. The snails were being absorbed into the world of the children and the children were becoming snails. The children began to construct families and the snails were named, father, mother, baby.*



*The snails are soon sliding everywhere and Leo has one on his hand. Simon breathes “he loves you”. A teacher begins to ask questions about snails. Another goes to get a book. When she returns she asks another question and shouting “I know! I know!” Jason steps forward across the bush and stands on a cluster of snails. The children’s faces fall. Jason looks at his foot. The teachers try to rescue the snails but the moment is over. The children leave the snails and gather around to look at the pictures in the book. All except Karl. Karl carefully rescues his snails. He takes them to a quiet spot by the fence and continues to talk to them. He remains completely absorbed for a long time on his own.*

In educational environments we can choose to allow the spiritual to take precedence by asking ourselves whether children are finding joy in the moment. It is also possible to begin to notice if they have spiritually entered the elsewhere. Montessori (1972) recognised that young children have “a sensitive period of the soul” (p.172) and “spiritual longings” to know about the world. She felt that teachers needed to know if the soul of the child was “estranged” from nature (Montessori, 1972, p.69).

Montessori knew that children were fascinated by events like the metamorphosis of insects and would concentrate for hours and report back on any changes like scientists. Children also have their own interests. In the narrative above they were connecting snails to their own world and trying to make links with another species.

The close relationship between people and animals is evident in childhood. It is part of connecting to another world of different creatures and natural phenomena. I noticed that when in the elsewhere children are able to change into fish, dinosaurs, cats and dogs at will. Children are able to live through animals. They are still connected to animals and often have pets and collect soft toys that they become extremely attached to. Animals represent a safe way of expressing the self and can become a conduit for the spirit. This ability is recognised in a variety of cultures through shape-shifting and shamanism. The shaman has the ability to inhabit other worlds in an animal form. Eliade (1964) points out that this is not about pretending or imitating, the shaman actually becomes the animal as part of experiencing spiritual ecstasy and realising the potential for healing.

One day in the *casa* I notice Sara. She has some problems at home. She has placed all the animals she can find on the table and my notes record:

*she is making loud crying noises and holds her arms out dramatically. She is holding the cat and dog. She is telling herself a story quite loudly. Kyra and Moana in the sandpit look at her in amazement but she does not notice.*

Kyra and Moana, the other children, do not comment but just stare. They seem to recognise, as I do, that her spirit is somewhere else. She has become the animals at the same time that she tells the story. I notice that no-one approaches her and she stays there until two of the boys call ‘*Tidy up time*’ in silly voices and she runs inside. In her interactions with the animals she is unleashing emotion in a way that is acceptable in the early childhood setting. Her right to be elsewhere is tacitly recognised by the children and she is allowed to carry on with her solitary narrative uninterrupted.

#### The spiritual moment

One of the teachers at the *casa* noted the ability of children to go elsewhere. She tried to capture this on video because for her this is the spiritual moment. She remarked “*they go somewhere, where do they go?*” The teachers at the private preschool also tried to capture this in the video but it is hard to do this without destroying the moment. When the self/other boundary is blurred the transition back to self-awareness that being photographed or filmed sometimes encourages makes staying in the spiritual elsewhere less likely. Even with this proviso the ability of children to enter the spiritual elsewhere sometimes appears to be involuntary as an incident from the video made in the private preschool shows.

#### **The private preschool - transforming**

Sometimes becoming an animal (or bird in this case) does not seem to be a conscious action. In chapter Seven a narrative involving Teresa, the two girls Sally and Ali and the new parrot was presented. When I looked and listened carefully to the video of this conversation something else was suddenly noticeable and I noted that:

*The conversation began to be reflected in Ali and Sally’s bodily transformations. At one point they are talking about chickens and Ali*

*suddenly and definitely becomes a bird. In mid-sentence she momentarily thrusts her head forward and blinks her eyes. She is a chicken. It is subtle and happens quickly. It is a startling moment.*

Ali's shift from child to bird shows me something that happens quite often when children are talking. They sometimes have the ability to become what they are talking about. In adulthood this happens in a less embodied way. Children transform holistically and bring the shape, emotion and spirit of what they are thinking about into their body. What this fragment of video demonstrates to me is that this is a completely different process from pretending. It is a becoming. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987) note "becoming is never imitating". Instead it is "pure lived experience" (p.305).

### Metamorphosis

Referring to change and transformation Steiner (1924/2004) writes that "whatever approaches children and touches their spirit and soul, becomes their physical, organic organization" (p.47). In other words everything the child encounters becomes part of him or her. Steiner calls this "the wonderful metamorphosis" (p.47). Metamorphosis is a spiritual concept linked to the 'transmigration' of souls, the idea that at the end of life the soul can pass between people and animals. To metamorphose is to change form by means of magic or by natural development, to transform (Pearsall, 1999). Warner (2002) proposes metamorphosis to be a way of exploring the self and considers:

Metamorphosis as divine fantasy, as vital principle of nature, as punishment, as reprieve, as miracle, as cultural dynamic, as effect of historical meetings and clashes, as the difference that lures, as the lost idyll, as time out of time, as a producer of stories and meanings (p.74).

Children are always familiar with stories and myths of metamorphosis, like the Ugly Duckling fairy tale at the beginning of this chapter. The metamorphic state emphasizes the spiritual dimension and with reference to a phrase in *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996, p.225) it acknowledges the special characteristic of young children to "use their imaginations to explore their own and others' identities". I am making a definite distinction between the adult conception of pretending and

metamorphosis or becoming. Children have the ability to merge reality and actually become something else. To become something else is quite different from the adult conception of role-play or pretend play. Metamorphosis, the ability to be in the elsewhere, challenges what Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p.198) call the “rigid segmentarity” that constructs adult life.

*Becoming...rabbit*

*A rabbit visits the private preschool and Una becomes a rabbit and is hopping. The rabbit is Buzzy and she becomes him without effort. The children are very fond of him and enjoy his visits. They discuss the rabbit and when Marlene, the teacher, says that she sees him when she goes home at lunchtime Amanda asks “do you think he sits at home crying?” The children suddenly begin to wash their faces with their paws and momentarily become the rabbit.*

By being the animal for that short time the children learn about being something else, about how it moves, what it might feel. Amanda shows that she can think herself into the elsewhere inhabited by the animal and this ability to change places shows empathy. She thinks herself out of her own skin and becomes a small brown rabbit. This is the beginning of compassion that is widely regarded as a spiritual attribute (Armstrong, 2005; The Dalai Lama, 2002) and is featured in my working definition. When children show through their play and their gestures that they have a connection with all living things it is part of the decision making in early childhood settings to encourage that feeling or not.

It is a Western cultural construction that to be ‘animal’, or to be called an animal, becomes a negative. To become animal from this perspective is to become Other and to be regarded as animal/Other is to be vulnerable and treated differently. It puts one in danger of being treated as less than human. In children’s play the animal state is acceptable. Children become other living things in the spiritual elsewhere. This is a spiritual gift: the ability to enter the spiritual elsewhere and connect to other living things. In turn this may enable them to connect with each other.

## Daydreaming

Sometimes to be spiritually elsewhere is to be in a more neutral state. Some of the incidents given below are of the children on video and others are from my field notes:

*Amy talks to herself, she holds her hands under her own chin and looks up and smiles and talks to herself. Joe is moved (by a teacher) as he has been lying down looking out of the window since mat time started. Amy catches my eye and smiles. She rocks and plays with her hands. Lisa looks out of the window.*

*Olivia looks over at the boys, eyes unfocused, she has the steering wheel but is not here, where is she? She is looking into space. Suddenly she snaps back into it. Turns the wheel.*

*Una balances on the cube She looks into the distance for ages and then flaps her hands like a bird and flips off – she lands on her knees and spends some time brushing them off.*

*The kitten comes in. Everyone looks at the black spot of fur on his head. Then Julia turns to Sam and strokes his hair. They smile at each other (in a world of their own).*

In this last incident the children go into a daydream space together. This space seems to allow them to be together in a different way. Perhaps Sam has become a cat? When Julia and Sam inhabit this dream space together it is a one-off incident as they do not usually play together and certainly don't usually touch each other in this way. Touch is a word used to express spirituality. To touch has literal and metaphorical meanings (Derrida, 2005). In the focus group parents discuss their understanding of spirituality and one parent discusses touch as a metaphor for being close and maintaining relationships:

*- Like feelings, they (children) express them, they're in touch with that. Sadly they have to learn about controlling and mmmm ... as an adult ... we have busy lives and therefore we get out of touch.*

Later the conversation turns to daydreaming and the parents express some sadness that they no longer have time to daydream:

- *Kids are able to do that - they have time*

- *They live much more for the moment not concerned about what to do, what's ahead of them, it's acceptable for them to do painting. We're more...unless we do something structured – yoga, meditation, it's not done to sit and look at the trees.*

- *So sad*

*(the conversation continues with a change of subject)*

Going into the elsewhere is perceived as something children not only do but are allowed to do. Parents obviously see the elsewhere as a spiritual aspect of childhood. This appears to them to be an enviable space, something positive. They sounded quite regretful about the intervention of time that makes daydreaming or being lost in the moment impossible for them. In the elsewhere time takes on different meanings. As the above examples show children may use daydreaming as a preparation for other activities or daydreaming may reflect a simple state of happiness. Sometimes entering the spiritual elsewhere is a means of removing themselves from their environment. Sometimes children are not aware that they are daydreaming, perhaps because it happens so often.

### Nightdreaming

Dreaming at night is different. To dream is to be spiritually in the elsewhere and is a state the ancients had much time for. Dreams were seen as portents of the future or brought messages from the gods. One day in the private preschool Alain, who is just about to go to school, shares the following dream story with me. He does not seem concerned about it although he describes a glimpse of the elsewhere that I would find quite disturbing:

*Alain tells me that sometimes he looks out of the window and he sees a man and the man is not there. Then he looks and he isn't there. He tells me this happens all the time, he sees a man and the man disappears.*

Alain is often daydreaming. In this story his dream world intersects with his life in the early childhood setting. Alain's experience did not surprise one of the teachers at the preschool. She believes that children have access to other worlds and can see into them and that this is an ability that fades as they get older and become less receptive.

Children in all three settings know about the spiritual elsewhere that is the dreaming state. Dreaming can be a problem for children when it becomes a nightmare and the elsewhere becomes a scary place. However, the frightening aspects seem to disappear in the daytime when they tell their dreams. Carola tells me the following story. It is framed not as her dream but the dream that her baby, the doll she is playing with, has experienced:

*The baby is crying all night. It has dreams. It dreams it is in a castle and it can't get away from baddies. The fire brigade have to be called because the baby is in a house that catches fire.*

This dream is quite dramatic but is connected to fairy tales and family life. The spiritual elsewhere of the dreamworld can be risky and Adam tells me about his experience in the elsewhere of the dreamworld that is a frightening place:

*Adam comes up to me, with his hands up to his face like claws –*

*Adam            Sometimes I dream of big cutty cutty nails, on my cheek, going down my cheek and when I'm asleep nails on my pillow*

*Jane            - all about nails? (I am fairly surprised by this)*

*Adam            Yes*

*Jane            where does this dream come from?*

*Adam            dreamland*

*Jane            is it your imagination? If you have a dream you don't like can you switch it off?*

*Adam            no, it just keeps on and on*

As our conversation shows the dreamworld is less easily controlled. It is a repository of hopes and fears, and dreams were recognised by Freud (1940/2003) as the gateway to miracles and mysticism. Later one of the teachers at the preschool tells me that she

works with dreamcatchers. These are circles of wire often decorated with beads and feathers, that ‘catch’ the dreams. She confirms that children often need reassurance and recognises the intervention of visual culture. She speculates that Adam may have watched the movie about Edward Scissorhands.

The blurred reality of real and dream worlds is often described in memoirs and autobiographies. Jung (1961/95), for instance, writes about his early dreams and describes them as a precursor to his interest in the unconscious. Apparently one dream in particular preoccupied him and blended into the reality of his life. In the private preschool the parents were aware of the elsewhere that their children sometimes inhabit and discussed this quite readily. A parent mentioned that her child has imaginary friends “*I’ve got two that live in my house that I can’t see*”. The children can see their imaginary friends and the parents talked about the fact that this is sometimes seen as evidence of a spiritual elsewhere that they can no longer access as adults.

Some children enjoy the sense of being protected spiritually that being in the elsewhere gives them. I notice that Euan dislikes being interrupted and prefers to be on his own. He does not like being told what to do and passionately defends his territory. Going into the elsewhere helps when the spirit rebels against authority. It is easier to simply become an animal or an object. At the private preschool Euan has been having some tantrums and is very sensitive about other people at the moment. He transforms himself into a dinosaur with a long spiky tail made of material. One of the teachers made these tails and the children attach them to themselves with elastic. Zoe, a teacher, noticed Euan change and she tries to domesticate him but he is wise to this and knows his dinosaurs:

*Zoe (to Euan) – here comes a dinosaur with a careful tail that doesn’t flick people*

*Euan – dinosaurs eat people*

*Zoe – I’m not sure*

*Jane – are they vegetarian?*

*Euan – I am a Tyrannosaurus Rex*

*Zoe - yes... I thought you might be*

*Euan continues on his way*



Euan finds it much easier to be someone or something else or to talk through another object. One day I notice that he is proud of his tower and ask if he would like a photograph and he replies “*my building says yes*”.

### Transformers

At the private preschool the children have plastic toys called ‘transformers’ and the idea that children are attracted to this kind of change in their play is not lost on toy manufacturers. These transformers are like plastic robots with heads and arms that change direction and they become something else and change shape. There are different sorts of transformer and they are very popular with the boys in the preschool. The transformers turn up nearly every day when a group of boys are playing together. This kind of play, with the transformers, is quite private and adults are excluded.

One thing I found interesting is that the play transcends the transformers. Sometimes the boys talked through their transformers, holding them up and manipulating their robotic parts. At other times they actually became the transformers. On the occasion that I observed more closely it became apparent that the ability to become a transformer enabled them to engage in behaviour that they are beginning to realise is not socially acceptable. Just a few days before this incident a teacher had called one of the boys beautiful and his dad corrected her. He said that his son was handsome and when she questioned this he repeated “that’s right, we teach him that girls can be pretty and boys are handsome”. This exchange took place at mat-time and the children were listening but later it seemed that becoming a transformer enabled the boys to do anything they liked:

*Sam – I’m playing transformers*

*Mike - I’m number 2*

*Sam - I’m number 7*

*They begin to run around, arms out like planes*

*Sam - I’m the green one*

*Mike goes up to Jo and licks his chest and says - ‘I’m a transformer’*

*Jo takes no notice*

*Sam - I came back... hey I came back*

*They talk in machine voices and begin to build together.*

*Later they all have arms out in the sandpit*

*N – ‘Let’s go transformers’*

*There are 6 of them – they take off together*

Becoming something else in the spiritual elsewhere was an engagement with freedom. All sorts of social constraints can be forgotten in the elsewhere. Later I try to find out more about transformers and note “*it is a whole new world! They name very complex goodies and baddies*”. The qualities of their transformers are not something that any of the boys appear to want to talk about. They simply become them when necessary.

In the private preschool and the Montessori *casa* transformation and entry to the elsewhere is facilitated by characters from popular culture and by books, videos and television. Harry Potter surfaced in all settings including the Steiner kindergarten. At the private preschool I encountered Bob the Builder, Rugrats, Dipsy (a Teletubby), Bananas in Pyjamas and Nemo. At the *casa* there is a selection of Little Ponies that some of the children play with for hours. Children are fairly eclectic in their choices and they pick out characters from film and television who then enter their imaginary play world. One of the teachers at the preschool, Marlene, finds this a spiritual aspect of play. She says that when watching and listening to this kind of play “*you rediscover yourself*”. The parents also discuss this world in their focus group. They wonder if spirituality is connected to “*the make believe world*” and to the tooth fairy and Santa. They think that spirituality emerges in the creative, imaginary world and say that this is different for children. They appreciate this in their children and acknowledge that their “*imagination is amazing, incredible things they say, pretending...*”. This aspect of spirituality is recognised in every setting.

In their everyday life children are always able to enter the spiritual elsewhere. It is a place of inner drama. In the spiritual elsewhere it is possible to be fully oneself and also to become Other. It is a spiritual space for drifting and dreaming. Game (2001) discusses the merging of borders and proposes that in our responses to each other and across species we get “*glimpses of the possibilities of a wonderful mysterious world*” (p.11). Children seem from my observations to be nearer this world, to enter it effortlessly. By doing so they are sometimes vulnerable because their occupation of

the elsewhere is so transparent. They also become spiritually invulnerable in their demonstration that reality can be manipulated and transcended by becoming something else.

### **The Steiner kindergarten – everyday magic**

Playing with visibility is a way of recognising the spiritual elsewhere in the Steiner kindergarten. I have already recounted my experience of being made invisible in that setting (see page 103/4). Another day in response to a child being chased Sylvia put an invisible cloak over him. In popular culture the child magician, Harry Potter, makes good use of an invisibility cloak. Sylvia was not influenced by Harry Potter because she had not read the books and when asked by the children said that she would find the film “*too scary*”. She used this age old invisibility device, as J.K. Rowling does in the Harry Potter books, to provide the hero with respite. The person who had been made invisible goes into the collective elsewhere. I noticed that all the other children responded to this by not ‘seeing’ him and he found himself a space to go and play. It is a way of still being present but not having to be part of the immediate action.

This setting was full of creatures that are usually invisible. The fire fairy is summoned at morning tea when the candle is lit. One day Simon remarks that when the candle is blown out and the smoke dissolves into the air “*my fairy was blue again*” and the teacher passed her hand above his head and said “*well, let me take that away from you*”. When I asked her about this she said that her response was to the colour blue rather than to the fairy. The children in the Steiner kindergarten are familiar with fairies. One day I hear Rosie tell Mara that “*you can be a fairy but you have to hold your breath in for 10 seconds or it hurts when you change back*”. They talk about this. Rosie is adamant about the 10 seconds, and appears to know all about the process of becoming a fairy. In the kindergarten the children interacted with a range of characters who facilitated entry to the elsewhere.

The elsewhere as drama

The pervasive nature of popular culture in the world of the kindergarten would be an anathema to Steiner. Steiner felt that toys based on reality destroy the imagination. The dolls in the Steiner kindergarten are wooden with deliberately featureless faces so

they can become anything the children want them to be. They are beautifully looked after and are always dressed and tucked into bed. There are a lot of smaller dolls made of wool. They are rather amorphous shapes and along with a selection of wooden toys they are used for drama. They become characters who are known to the children and are part of their world. Sylvia said that one character called 'Tip Tap' had been circulating for over a year and his fame seemed to continue even after the group of children who first introduced him as a character had moved on. The children take turns to spontaneously create very complex plays and I noticed the mixed narratives that included Tip Tap along with Jack and the beanstalk, a cow, an ogre and a boat. Sometimes the stories themselves were about transformation and I heard Rosa say that if she touches the giants they will not be bad any more. She repeats "*I will change them, I will change them*".

Sometimes children asked if they could perform the play for everyone and then everyone gathered round towards the end of the morning. When they were ready Sylvia lit a candle and sang "*ting a ling*" in a special way as a signal that the play was beginning. As in all theatre the audience entered the elsewhere and disbelief was suspended. The children who were involved talked through the characters, moving the animals and dolls and talking in other voices. The audience was highly appreciative and listened or talked together until the story ran out. Simon told the story one day and it lasted for 45 minutes. The dramas were fairly loose and when they got too repetitive or so complicated that everyone was lost then Sylvia intervened. The clapping before the candle was blown out marked a return to the present and to reality. The dramas were like a world within a world. They were evidence of the incredible complexity that children bring to the narratives they construct. The children involved in the drama presented their version of the spiritual elsewhere to others through the medium of the play. There was a warm sense of community and all the children took part as manipulators of character or as voices or audience. The children showed that it is possible to be spiritually elsewhere in the company of others.

The ability to share certain characters and to have a spiritual tie to them is encouraged in the kindergarten. One of the characters they share is Mother Earth. This figure is made of sheep wool and each day her presence in the kindergarten gets stronger.

Every day they touch her after morning tea and add leaves and twigs to the wool so that she becomes more and more organic. As an archetype Mother Earth represents the natural world in the kindergarten. She becomes a focus of the children's attention as they add to her blanket that is woven, so Sylvia tells us, from leaves, flowers and the stars.

### Animism

Animism is a belief that the inanimate has life. This sense that everything is alive and has *mauri* or a life force is supported most strongly in the Steiner setting and in the kindergarten animism was accepted and accentuated. Animism is often reflected in language and certain statements show an ambiguous attitude to the animistic, for example, the idea that trees are living or referring to electricity as live. Thinking animistically blurs the line between the binary dead/alive and Piaget (1929/51) noticed that animism is pervasive in the play and stories of young children. There are different degrees of animism and it is part of cultural understandings. For some this may be problematic and there is an argument that animism confuses children and interferes with their ability to think scientifically and rationally. I prefer to think that it simply emphasises a form of spiritual intelligence or mythic knowing that affirms a sense of connection with all things. The recognition of animism as a valid worldview and an aspect of spirituality in early childhood settings extended my working definition to include artefacts or objects that might not be counted as living things or as part of nature. In the space of the spiritual elsewhere inanimate objects have the same status as other living things and this is obvious in the following account.

#### *The wooden sword*

*In the Steiner kindergarten, Gaby is polishing a wooden sword. It is quite long and is made of thick wood. She has some of the children with her. She is almost chanting as she smooths the wood and talks about the sword. Instead of being just another piece of equipment it begins to take on a life of its own. I reflect that the sword in this Steiner context is a spiritual aid to empowerment. The children play with the quite substantial wooden swords. Swords are mentioned in stories and songs and the angels are often described as having them. The use of the sword also goes back to medieval myths when it was a badge of chivalry. The sword was a mark of having attained distinction by*

*pursuing good rather than evil and was the symbol of knighthood. These myths may seem anachronistic in our very different age. However, Steiner education does not shrink from this and recognises certain archetypal symbols and characters. As Gaby talks the sword seems to come alive and the wood is affirmed as precious, something to be grateful for.*

Wood is a special resource and traditionally the rituals that surround the felling of trees showed respect for this resource. The personification of *Tane* as god of the forest and the idea that certain resources are a gift offered by the environment acknowledges nature and the spiritual context of Aotearoa. I am reminded that natural things are taonga (precious) and *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* supports the idea that certain things are not to be taken for granted and are part of a rich cultural heritage.

*Otstranenie* – making the ordinary extraordinary

The power to make the ordinary extraordinary is completely realised in the Steiner setting. In a tribute to Vygotsky Bruner (2004) refers to Shklovsky who described the concept of “*otstranenie*, the ‘making strange of the ordinary’” (p.11). This process is a means of transformation on many levels. Reminded of this I am fascinated on Rea’s birthday because the children are allowed to choose a book to be read at the close of session. There are only a few picture books on a high shelf and the children choose carefully. The teacher wraps the book up in a piece of muslin and the children take it away. They look after it throughout the session and it remains wrapped. It is transformed into a gift and when it is time they unwrap it very slowly and respectfully and the suspension of disbelief is evident in the expressions on the faces of the children. They know it is a book but it has also become something else. It is a celebration of print and paper and the book, although an everyday object, has become mysterious and precious. When the book is unwrapped the story is told and Sylvia holds the book very carefully and turns each page slowly. This is a special event because the story is usually told orally without a book. This is a different experience, an experience that is often taken for granted in other contexts. Another time a teacher uses some muslin cloth. She knotted it and carefully prepared to tell the story of the Enormous Turnip. I suddenly saw that basic material become the characters in the story. The knots become heads and Sylvia made them move and come alive. The possibilities for transformation in this environment are endless. Inanimate objects are

given life and treated with care. I notice how easy it is to be transported to the elsewhere and to exist in the elsewhere in this setting. Everything is designed for the kindergarten itself to be part of the spiritually elsewhere. It is the congruity between the philosophy, pedagogical practices and the environment that gave the sense of a collective spiritual elsewhere that it is possible for everyone to inhabit.

I also noticed that children brought their learning from the world into the kindergarten and they did not always enter a kind of fairyland. One day they played banking for over an hour using bark for money. Another time a child turned a tower of chairs into a crop sprayer. I am amazed one day to look over and notice that two girls had constructed computers. They arranged two large logs of wood so that the flat, cut side was the screen. They covered the back of the log with orange cloth and used flat pieces of wood as keyboards. They were typing and talking completely oblivious to their surroundings, absorbed in the new space they had created. The unstructured nature of the materials in the kindergarten supported this kind of play with baskets of logs, shells and pieces of cloth that could become anything the children wished. In the kindergarten this kind of imaginative, dramatic play lasted a long time and children were completely absorbed in their play. There was no pressure for children to leave this spiritual space. As time went on I noticed that without intervening in the children's world that the teachers did things that supported the spiritual elsewhere and legitimized it. One of these events was called 'ensouling'.

### Ensouling

In the kindergarten there were some very traditional hobby horses. I was familiar with hobby horses from picture books and nursery rhymes. A horse's head with mane, bridle and reins is attached to a pole just like a broomstick but shorter. A short handle is attached crosswise by the mane so that children can hold the horses head up and the longer pole slides down between their feet, sometimes on the ground sometimes not. The child becomes part rider holding the reins and part horse as they share legs and feet. The children greet the horses by name and they are called Chocolate and Stomper. One day a new hobby horse' is 'ensouled'. A hobby horse head was beautifully made by one of the parents and she brought it into the kindergarten. The head was dark grey corduroy with a wool mane. The choosing of the eyes and sewing them in is part of the process of ensouling the horse and this involved teachers and

children. Sylvia told me that some of the children spent a long time choosing eyes for the hobby horse from the button box.

The process of ensouling is very important to one of the children, Tamara, and Sylvia told this story about her. This narrative comes from Sylvia's interview and is told using her words. The horses she refers to were the new hobby horses described above:

*Tamara and the horse*

*Tamara's process was to do with hopes for her own adulthood. So she (Tamara) didn't tell me this when the horses arrived but when Tamara grows up she wants her family to have a circus so the family have entered into this and they will tell you that they will have a circus and Tamara will ride the white horse.*

*So when the first horse arrived, when the horse arrived without eyes and we went through the buttons to find eyes that were right for that particular horse it took 25 minutes.*

*I had the horse in my arms like a baby with the needle and thread and was positioning the eyes and her (Tamara's) whole body moved. She was feeling the needle at a soul level, she was in tears and said that the horse would be blind and it had to hurt the horse that it would be blind and it wouldn't be able to see. And I didn't know about the circus. It took three weeks for the circus to come out and her mother told me, that this is Tamara's plan for when she grows up and she played circus tricks, looked after the horses, made other people look after them. And that's how the horse came into the morning circle (the Pony song), I wrote it for her. A new morning circle to support the possibility of her getting what she hopes for in adult life and it probably won't be a circus but I have given her the possibility that her heart's desire will become real.*

Sylvia recognises that for Tamara this is an important moment in her spiritual life. She talks about Tamara's 'intention' for herself and knows that in the spiritual elsewhere Tamara will have a circus and ride a white horse. Once she knows this



Sylvia is able to meet Tamara on this spiritual level and affirm her wish. Although she did not tell Tamara Sylvia created a special song for Tamara to enjoy and in the morning circle the Pony song is sung and everyone trots around and the pony is shod. These movements are inspired by eurythmy and according to Trostli (1998, p.284) these exercises are what Rudolf Steiner called “ensouled gymnastics”. As these movements are performed the children become part person/part horse. Eurythmy incorporates movements that are “a living synthesis of speech and music expressed through the whole human being in body, soul and spirit” (Trostli, 1998, p.285).

The process of ensouling is an emotional one and the horse then ‘lives’ in the kindergarten. Before the new horse can enter they say goodbye to the old shabby horse. He is stroked and the children say goodbye. This is a sad moment and the children feel it deeply that their much loved horse is leaving them. Then the new one (with the freshly sewn in eyes) enters the kindergarten. The horse is named and the head is attached to the pole so the children can begin riding him. This ceremonial aspect brings a different dimension to the idea of materials and equipment. It challenges the notion of ‘replacement’ and consumerism, the whole idea of ‘let’s buy more’ or just ‘get another one’. The horses are unique and the old one is honoured for the work he has done with the children.

The children love these horses and looking at the physical movements of trotting and galloping with the hobby horses makes me realise how versatile and observant children are. The metamorphosis of child and horse makes links to rhythm and the beat of horses’ hooves is the first beat to be picked up by drummers. In myth the centaur is a half man half horse. People are sometimes seen as being part of the horse, they are described as ‘moving as one’. Metcalf and Game (2002, p.19) call this “interbeing” a state of “universal interconnectedness experienced in an eternal realm”. In her discussion of humans and horses, especially in relation to the mythical Centaur, half horse/half man, Game (2001, p.1) proposes that “through interconnectedness, through our participation in the life of the world, humans are always forever mixed”. By connecting it is possible to explore the “creative processes of coming to be” (p.1). Furthermore, in a statement that is appropriate in the Steiner context, she says that she “can feel the angels” (Game, 2001, p.11) when she is most aware of the human/animal

interface. Becoming...horse, horse becoming ensouled, child dreaming of the circus, anything is possible in the spiritual dimension of the elsewhere.

Sometimes as the adult observing moments of transformation I felt on the edge of being there too, of becoming, of starting over, of rediscovering this other world. However, this is difficult. Yoshida (2002) tells the story of how Martin Buber loved going to the stables to see a horse, he loved it and felt that they were one. Then one day he became conscious of himself stroking the horse. This self-consciousness disrupted their relationship and when he became conscious of the horse as Other he felt that their connection was broken. Buber felt that “The horse became ‘It’, and the ‘I and Thou’ relationship collapsed. There was no more vital exchange” (Yoshida, 2002, p.128).

This story reminded me of Pullman’s fictional account of the changing self in relation to the spiritual world. It connects to his idea that growing consciousness might lessen the ability to inhabit different worlds and to enter the elsewhere. This lack of flexibility is manifested in the state of the daemon, or soul. His main character, Lyra, realises that “as people become adult, their daemons lost the power to change and assumed one shape, keeping it permanently” (Pullman, 1995, p.49). While adults may not be able to enter the spiritual elsewhere as effortlessly as children can they are able to support the ability of children to do so. Transformation is a gift that children have and adults can provide materials and spaces that allow children to enter the spiritual elsewhere unselfconsciously and wholeheartedly. When pedagogical practice (like the sensitive approach used by Sylvia to support Tamara) works in the space of the spiritual elsewhere it is possible to explore transformation and becoming and this kindergarten supported all kinds of “becomings” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 21).

Always becoming...

In the Steiner kindergarten my notes record that children were always becoming..., always entering the elsewhere. Steiner (1923/2004, p.46) remarked that “children up to the age of seven bring outer influences into their ‘inner soul breath’ by incorporating every gesture, facial expression, act, word, and even each thought coming from their surroundings”. Becoming is in this context something that children are, it is their state of being. From my first day in the kindergarten I notice the ‘dogs’

and note that these metamorphoses are part of the environment. There are also sharks, fish and horses but the dogs remain throughout my time there.

The dogs crawl on the floor and yap. One day they add sticks that they hold in their mouths. I record the following incidents:

*...dogs*

*Karl and Justin are dogs all morning. Sylvia says that something is going on at home for Karl and so he needs to be a dog almost all the time. They have a place to sleep, sticks to fetch and shorter sticks are bones. They woof and yap. When the girls make bread they seem to attract Karl and Justin who come over and kneel by the flour bucket. Fleur says “buzz off you dogs, just go along now” but they ignore her. They kneel for ages and Karl puts his head on the edge of the bucket. They are definitely beginning to look like dogs.*

Another day I notice that the number of dogs has increased:

*Sula becomes a dog called ‘Tiger Lily’ and her friend is ‘Snowy’. They are good dogs with little yappy type barks. There are some wilder dogs in the corner. Rosa brings in a white cat and a fluffy brown dog. Over by the bed there are vets.*

Sometimes the dogs intrude into other fantasies:

*One day the girls are Arabian princesses. They have soft cloths round their heads with a knot at the front and a veil at the back. Ida says to me “if they are Arabian princesses they are nothing to do with me” I am quite surprised as she also has the full headdress on etc. and ask “so what are you?” Ida replies “I am a doggie”.*

Sometimes they need accessories:

*Karl and Justin have put small flax baskets on their hands and they put their feet in larger baskets, these are paws and they look very animalish. They can slide along the floor in the baskets and they hold their paws in a special way.*

The dog play gives plenty of opportunity for touching, rolling, crouching, rough play and stroking. The children negotiate who they will become and I listen to a group of girls:

- *She's not a wild animal.*
  - *She's a dog*
  - *I'm terrified of dogs*
  - *I'm only a puppy, I'm only a baby*
- They stroke her.*

Child becoming dog is quite a useful compromise because dogs are slightly unpredictable but also domesticated. The children are familiar with dogs and their mannerisms and their movements reflect this. Traditional fairy tales often mention wolves but wolves are wilder and more frightening whereas the dogs are accepted in the kindergarten and everyone becomes quite used to them. Through the dogs children inhabit the spiritual elsewhere and explore another reality. Dogs, according to Haraway (2003, p.45), have the power to teach humans “otherness-in-connection”. The children use resources in the kindergarten to support their idea of how dogs should be. The spirit of doggishness enters the kindergarten with a lot of sliding, stroking and rolling and patting. When I left the children/dogs continued to inhabit the spiritual elsewhere and to take part in the everyday life of the kindergarten.

I wonder if the popularity of certain animals is explainable through Pullman's (1995) conceptualization of the connection between animals and people. Pullman gives his characters a daemon, an animal that represents their soul. This daemon is completely part of the person and separation from it means terror and death. The daemon is the spirit made visible and is usually the shape of an animal and it has the ability to explore in animal form the emotions and sensations of the person they are attached to. This fictional idea confirms Braidotti's (2002, p.121) opinion that “the animal is traditionally defined as the metaphysical other of man”.

Warner (2002) suggests that metamorphosis is about changing the rules, developing a fictive self that can engage with miraculous escapes and reversals of fortune. In Māori mythology a powerful image is of Maui, the trickster, outwitted only by death. It is often part of the trickster repertoire to be able to change shape. This Protean

(Proteus – a god who was constantly changing shape) skill is proposed by Gergen (2000) to be essential to survive in the modern world, a world Gergen describes as ‘saturated’. In this construction the self must be mutable, transformable, and endlessly adaptable. The ability to go elsewhere is part of this adaptability. Children embody change, they alter and reshape themselves. What they become, whether bird, horse or dog, reflects what Haraway (2003 p.98) calls “the creative grace of play”. In the spiritual sense they transcend the self in the world of the spiritual elsewhere, a place of perpetual becoming...

The notion of becoming encourages me to engage with “thinking about processes, rather than concepts” (Braidotti, 2002, p.1). The four results chapters have grappled with spiritual processes: witness, in-between and elsewhere. These narratives of spiritual experience in three different settings attempted to capture spiritual witness, the spiritual in-between and the spiritual elsewhere as aspects of everyday spirituality. These may be thought of as themes or processes (Braidotti, 2002) that explain how the spiritual inserts itself into the spaces of everyday life.

### **Conclusion**

The preceding chapter concludes the discussion about everyday spirituality in relation to the elsewhere. The spiritual elsewhere is a place of transformation and change that children inhabit and explore. It is a paradoxical space because while in the elsewhere there is the potential to be most conscious of oneself. It is a space of limitless possibility. Children know that they can also be swans, transformers, dinosaurs, a horse or a bird. In entering the elsewhere children access the spiritual and my discussion included a consideration of metamorphosis as a process that affirms the spiritual ability to cross over into other worlds. It is part of becoming...animal (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) and becoming...spiritual.

The early childhood curriculum mentions persons, places and things (Ministry of Education, 1996). The four results chapters have discussed relationships and connectedness (persons). They touched on environments and the spiritual aesthetic of each setting (places). Different materials and artefacts in each of the early childhood setting are mentioned (things). The actions of children, teachers and parents, their thoughts and voices as well as evidence from the video and the photographs have

been included in these narratives and throughout the previous four chapters. The final chapter includes an overview of this study and a reflection on the methodology. It presents questions that occurred to me throughout the research process and addressing these questions has implications for practice. This final chapter discusses my recommendations in terms of more research and outlines the limitations of this study. It acknowledges the influences on this research and closes with thoughts for the future.



## Chapter Ten - Conclusion: Scanning the landscape

### Overview

*Resurrection is the miracle of each instant*  
(Derrida, 2005)

This thesis reflects a particular time and a specific context. In Aotearoa/New Zealand all early childhood settings work with *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996), the early childhood curriculum, a document that includes the spiritual dimension. The curriculum is bicultural and represented different perspectives from the early childhood community in New Zealand at that time. Different worldviews merge, overlap and are challenged in a fast changing society. The early childhood curriculum recognised that “for many communities, theories about the world are infused with a spiritual dimension” (Ministry of Education, 1996, p.44). Even within this particular curriculum framework the spiritual aspect is also the most elusive. In this sense spirituality is paradoxical because it is always already there and yet also “to come” (Derrida & Roudinesco, 2004, p.53).

The research question

The original question addressed by the thesis asked how the spiritual experiences of young children are supported in different early childhood educational settings. Teachers and parents are also part of these settings. A range of attitudes towards parenting and different pedagogical practices contribute to multiple experiences in these contexts. From my own viewpoint some reflection about past experience and careful consideration of my position in relation to the research was required. Scott (2001, p.120) notes that telling personal narratives about spirituality presupposes an appropriate “listening space”. I hoped that the research process would provide that space. Parents and teachers responded readily to my request to talk about spirituality and its connection with education. Sharing spiritual experiences with participants in each setting was revelatory. Derrida (1995, p.207) acknowledges that the word experience “evokes a space that is not given in advance but that opens as one advances”. This describes the progress of the research.

Qualitative interpretive research has to be ethical (Denzin, 2001). It is also reflexive. I was prepared to be changed by the research and to acknowledge my experiences.



While culture and spirituality are entwined (Tisdell, 2003) this research focused on sites for research that fitted my cultural background. I did not wish to take a traditional anthropological approach. Aspects of spirituality are filtered through language (Tangaere, 1997) and my research was conducted in English. These strands and complexities formed a background to the research. The metaphor for this was a geography of the spiritual: the spiritual landscape, convoluted and layered (see chapter Two). Three case studies featured as beacons in this landscape: the Montessori *casa*, the private preschool, and the Rudolf Steiner kindergarten. The research question took on different significance in each setting and a variety of responses opened up new perspectives to explore. The concept of everyday spirituality, described in chapter Six, began to focus the research on the everyday life of children and adults in these settings.

I discovered that spirituality is rarely articulated in early childhood settings unless the setting has a particular philosophy that recognises the spiritual. The Steiner kindergarten espoused a philosophy that is absolutely spiritual. Although Maria Montessori wrote about the spirit the teachers in the *casa* had not talked about spirituality before. Sharing thoughts about spirituality was quite a risk for the adults involved in the private preschool. Ultimately I wished to find out if there are spiritual approaches to early childhood education that would be appropriate for children and their families from diverse backgrounds and hoped that these approaches would support the spirituality of all children in early childhood settings (Reedy, 2003). I wondered if it was possible to discover ways of affirming the spirit that were holistic and inclusive. I was curious to know how the spiritual dimension was included in early childhood pedagogical practices when different philosophies underpinned what happened in each setting.

#### Towards a definition

My original working definition was that spirituality is a force that connects (see page 8) and this was affirmed in my investigation but I now critique my use of the word force and would prefer to say that spirituality is connection and avoid the word force. This reflects a gentler more harmonious approach that was a result of involvement in the research. Spirituality is always connected to elements of early childhood settings; it is always ‘and’, plural and joined to other concepts. I refer to spirituality and the

imagination, spirituality and hospitality, spirituality and pedagogy, spirituality and animal becomings (Deleuze & Parnet, 2002), spirituality and play; spirituality and attention to the Other (Levinas, 1999). Spirituality is multiple and when it is conceptualized as a process (Braidotti, 2002) it has vitality, it connects and is always becoming... Concepts can become fixed and static. I am proposing that spirituality is a dynamic process that can be incorporated into all aspects of everyday life and practice in early childhood settings.

In retrospect the definition I started with did not have the deeper meanings that I now attach to it. It was a fusion of my own thoughts and ideas influenced by the literature. Being in these three settings was an encounter with the spiritual that extended my understanding of spirituality as ‘deep ecology’ and a means of connection to all things, to nature and the universe. According to Desjardins (2006) the recognition of deep ecology involves a “radical transformation in our worldview” (p. 206). It requires acknowledging a sense of connection that merges a macro or global perspective (care of the planet) with the micro realm of intersubjectivity and relationships. A sense of deep ecology is strongly associated with indigenous perspectives about spirituality. The meaning I attach to the definition now includes an explicit awareness of Māori people who may perceive themselves as kaitiaki, guardians of the land and of spirituality (Cadogan, 2004; Pere, 1982/94). In turn I acknowledge my own story and position in Aotearoa. There is a political dimension to this and my awareness of the link between spirituality and social justice has become stronger. Current events in the world make me more concerned than ever to have the spiritual experiences of children supported in early childhood environments. When observing children in the spiritual elsewhere (Chapter Nine) I realised that in most cases human beings learn (or are taught) to disconnect. This thesis argues strongly that there is no need for this to happen and that such disconnection is destructive. When supporting the spiritual experience of young children it is imperative that adults (re)connect with their own spirituality and allow children to remain connected to all things. When this happens then opportunities for peace, love, joy and compassion increase and wonder becomes a source of energy in daily life.

## Reflections on methodology

This study explored spirituality by recognising a ‘poetics’ of everyday life. This approach lifted my perception of everyday life in early childhood educational settings above the mundane and routine aspects and reflected the inspirational effect of spirituality. It also meant literally engaging with poetry as a means of (re)constructing the spiritual through writing. The core narratives in the thesis and the poems created from the words of participants reflect a personal approach to narrative as a way of making meaning (Pillay, 2005). Metaphorically the poetics of everyday life meant exploring the spaces in everyday life that are about connectedness and transformation. The emphasis on transformation forms a critique of the everyday rather than acceptance (Lefebvre, 2002). The emergence of the concept of everyday spirituality exploits the tension between two worlds - the world of day to day life and the mysterious, ephemeral, otherworldly, spiritual dimension.

The construction of qualitative case studies gave an opportunity for the context of the early childhood setting to be the site of research. A research design that involved many people was essential as each setting was an interpretive community (see chapters Four and Five). Spirituality is recognised as part of culturally and socially constructed knowing in this thesis. Rather than emphasising what Hay (2000, p.39) called a “self-enclosed, privatized vision of the spiritual life” these case studies highlight the environment and interactions in specific environments. Within each case study the methods of participant-observation, interviews, focus groups and the use of camera and video generated rich data. Findings are supported from these different sources and the themes emerged from a mix of visual and oral information.

Using writing as a process of discovery (Richardson, 2000a) enabled me to grapple with the poetics of everyday life on another level. The representation of the spiritual can be problematic but as Richardson and St.Pierre (2005) point out “we are fortunate, now, to be working in a post-modernist climate, a time when a multitude of approaches to knowing and telling exist side by side” (p.961). In this thesis multiple voices in different environments and mixed ways of interpreting and ‘telling’ reality are incorporated into the main narrative. Core narratives, prose and poetry, are used as a spiritual metanarrative that runs through the thesis. The core narratives include my perspective interlinked to the experiences of others and the poems represent my

interaction with the voices of teachers and parents. This methodological approach, reflexive and reflective, a *bricolage*, allowed me to affirm a subjective stance and to engage deeply with participants in each setting at a number of levels. In the production of a narrative entanglements between participants and researcher are inevitable and part of a process of *making* (de Certeau, 1988) instead of reproducing and *(re)constructing*, instead of simply referring to, events (Chase, 2005). From this process and from the recognition of everyday spirituality many ways of supporting spiritual experience in early childhood settings emerged.

This thesis is narrative and reflexive. It is grounded in relationships with the participants. One of the teachers in the setting where I was working asked me to write a thesis that is readable. The narrative style achieves this. Dillard (2000) acknowledges this kind of researcher responsibility and suggests that this involves “asking for new ways of looking into the reality of others that opens our own lives to view – and that makes us accountable to the people whom we study, and their interests and needs” (p.662).

## Findings

To realise the spiritual potential of everyday life is to engage whole heartedly in experiences that are offered on a daily basis and to recognise the joy in the here and now. This brings freshness to daily interactions and allows the spiritual to flow into ordinary activity. This thesis reflects the lived experience (van Manen, 1990) of spirituality in the daily life of the three case studies realised as specialness (the *casa*); reflected in values (the private preschool); filled with reverence (the Steiner kindergarten). This thesis recognises all aspects of the curriculum as holistic and spirituality as part of it. It does not argue for a focus solely on the spiritual. Rather it suggests that spirituality is a source of inspiration that flows through all aspects of the curriculum.

Particular attention was paid to aspects of everyday spirituality that appeared across all the early childhood settings although the case study focus appreciates the uniqueness of each place. The following themes emerged from close analysis of the data: spiritual witness (connected to intersubjectivity and shared understanding), the spiritual in-between (as liminal space and moments of epiphany), and the spiritual

elsewhere (the world of the imagination, of spiritual becoming, metamorphosis and transformation). These themes are a synthesis of the evidence. They can be conceptualised as dimensions of a spiritual pedagogy that is supported by philosophy, curriculum and relationships in these early childhood settings. This research found that spiritual witness, the spiritual in-between and the spiritual elsewhere constructed a dynamic sense of everyday spirituality in these three early childhood settings.

### **Looking at the landscape**

#### Connections with other studies

As noted in chapter three there are not a great number of empirical studies that include young children and spirituality. This thesis is a contribution to a field that as Nye (1996) noted has been dominated by ‘God talk’. In the context of Aotearoa spirituality has its own resonance and integrity and in the educational literature of New Zealand the inclusion of spirituality is not unusual (Bishop & Glynn, 1999; Pere, 1982/94; Smith, 1999). Religion, or more specifically, Christianity, has colonial connotations in the Pacific region. The geographical location of this thesis is a point of difference and it differs from studies in the UK, Europe or North America in that it is highly influenced by indigenous understandings of spirituality. From an Australian perspective this aspect of the spiritual landscape is acknowledged by Tacey (2004) and Hyde (2005) but their research focus is on older children. In terms of involving young children, McCreery’s (1996) study is a precursor to this thesis as she focused on the spiritual and recognised that context was all important. Champagne’s (2003) research, like mine, was based more on observation than interviews and took place in three early childhood settings where she looked at spirituality ‘beyond words’.

Hay and Nye (1998) introduced the term relational consciousness. I pick up the term relational but in a slightly different way and the themes discussed in this thesis focus on relational spaces rather than consciousness. I have proposed spiritual witness, the spiritually in-between and the spiritual elsewhere as a means of not only recognising the spiritual but supporting it. I have favoured the word ‘connection’ instead of relational because it is often assumed that relationships only happen between people and this thesis recognises the possibility for wider connections. Hay and Nye (1998) also proposed the themes of “*awareness-sensing, mystery-sensing and value-sensing*” (their italics) (p.87) as a way of exploring the spiritual with children. As they point

out, these sensing categories can act as a starting point for research and in this thesis the ‘spaces’ of spiritual witness, spiritual in-betweenness and the spiritual elsewhere explored in detail in chapters seven, eight and nine in this thesis could perform the same function.

More recently Daly (2004) has included teachers in her work about spirituality and her attention to well-being resonates with the strand of mana atua/well-being in *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) (see chapter One). Like Daly’s study this research includes the voices of teachers and affirms the work of Myers (1997), Paley (1999) and Wolf (1996) who write from their own experience as teachers and address the spiritual dimension of early childhood pedagogies. Because of contextual understandings of community and the influence of the concept of whanau (see glossary) this thesis also includes parents’ views about spirituality. It differs from other studies in this multi-vocal approach and brings a specific contextual and spiritual perspective to the work by Holloway (2000) and Tobin, Wu and Davidson (1989) that were methodological influences on this study.

In New Zealand a study by Ayres (2004) included two early childhood teachers who were participants but her research did not have an early childhood focus. Her study explicitly used ‘relational consciousness’ as a means of exploring “*relating for learning*” (her italics) (Ayres, 2004, p. 160). Ayres (2004) found that compatibility between teachers and philosophy “supports a spiritually nurturing environment” (p. 165), a finding that was upheld in this thesis. I chose to look at early childhood settings specifically and analysed in depth the factors that construct spiritual environments. This study is connected to the early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996), whereas Ayres (2004) discussed The New Zealand Curriculum for primary and secondary schools. She used a different approach (grounded theory) to explore spirituality while this thesis uses narrative and assumes that spiritual stories are always already everywhere.

The narrative aspect of this thesis was influenced by Coles (1990) and by The Children and Worldviews Project (Erricker, Erricker, Ota, Sullivan & Fletcher, 1997). Narrative approaches incorporate multiple perspectives and support personal involvement. Erricker and Ota (1997) drew attention to personal risk, attention to ethics, complexity and the unique research situation. They critiqued the scientific

paradigm and acknowledged the “tenuous” (p.31) nature of what it is possible to know about other human beings. Questions concerning the ethics of research about spirituality will continue to be asked (Smith, 1999) and ethical considerations have been a major part of this thesis (Bone, 2005). This may well be the basis for future discussion. Research about spirituality is not a given and it is no small thing to be involved with the spirituality of others; it is a ‘gift’ and an impossible possibility (Derrida, 2001).

#### Connecting to the holistic curriculum

The early childhood curriculum recognises holistic development as *kotahitanga*. Hemara (2000, p. 73) refers to *kotahitanga* as “unity of purpose”. The holistic perspective affirms that everyone and everything must become part of the picture and the centre (as in child-centred/adult-centred) can shift and be flexible. As Cullen (2003, p. 282) points out in her discussion about holistic aspects of the curriculum “teachers themselves have interests, competencies, and skills that can generate valuable learning opportunities for children”. The necessity for teachers to know themselves and to be personally engaged, is a given of the holistic approach. Relationships, warm interactions, safe places to learn together, places where teachers and children can be themselves and where the past is acknowledged and community is involved: these are aspects of the educational environment that reflect a holistic approach that must include the spiritual.

The conception of holism in terms of unity also affirms the strength that comes from congruity when certain beliefs are affirmed and shared in an early childhood setting. For instance, the parents and teachers in the private preschool held similar values and in the Steiner kindergarten the parent poem (Chapter Seven) demonstrates congruity of belief with the philosophy of that setting. The teachers and parents at the *casa* shared an enthusiasm for the Montessori approach to education. The only critique of this shared purpose would be if it was used to exclude families who were different. Spirituality has been conceptualised in this thesis as inclusive with a focus on connection as “connectedness *and* difference” (their italics) (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p.191). In this thesis awareness of the spiritual challenges the construction of certain people as Other.

## **Pathways in the landscape**

A middle way

As a qualitative researcher I like, as one of the participants reflected, to ‘go deep’. I had to balance this with an awareness of what might be intrusive. A purely ethnographic study in one setting or focused on one family might be useful and give another perspective on spirituality but where young children are concerned James, Jenks and Prout (1998) warn that the accumulation of detail can sometimes be exploitative. Taking an ethical approach I did not set out to interview children but took the role of participant observer. The case studies privileged context rather than personalities or particular belief systems. I am not writing as someone involved in any particular faith community and again, this was not my focus although, as Wolf (2000, p.36) notes, it is not possible to be “spiritually neutral”. The eclectic approach taken by this thesis may support people from specific religious belief systems exploring the spiritual dimension of their faith.

There is always a risk when working with a substantive topic. While spirituality will interest some people and not others, I would suggest that for people working in early childhood settings a lack of interest in spirituality is not an option. Spirituality is embedded in the early childhood curriculum in New Zealand and is an inescapable part of all pedagogical relationships. Organisations that claim to be bicultural or to be culturally inclusive must recognise value systems that include the spiritual (Knox, 2005). This thesis supports Myers’ (1997) statement that:

We are not compartmentalised people nor are our youngest children. If we understand spirituality as the way we ascribe meaning to the deeper level of existence that surrounds us and is in us and our relationships, then we cannot lock spirituality out of any institution that wants to do what is culturally expected – teach, heal, help, serve. (p.62)

In these settings my focus was on the spiritual and in some respects this might be seen as supporting the notion of compartmentalisation. The emphasis on context and connection in this thesis diverts this argument and the proposition that spirituality has the potential to be everywhere in daily life challenges this perspective. Spirituality is proposed to be something that permeates not separates.



A possible critique of the study could be that spirituality seems to be synonymous with ‘good practice’. I have no argument with this and in my opinion recognising the spiritual will always include good practice and vice versa. In the Steiner kindergarten aspects of good practice were often called spiritual whereas in the Montessori *casa* and the private preschool when something could have been called spiritual another word was used instead. In this thesis the spiritual has been articulated and maybe increased use of the word spiritual will make it a word more likely to be used in early childhood settings.

### Limitations

A limiting aspect of this study is its self-consciously cultural perspective. I have chosen to explore one aspect of spirituality only. There is potential for many more studies to emerge that greatly add to the richness of the literature about spirituality. There is an argument for not researching spirituality if such research becomes intrusive, offends certain people or becomes a means of cultural appropriation (O’Riley, 2003; Smith, 1999). However, in an atmosphere of tolerance and acceptance it would be useful to know about different ways of supporting spiritual experience. Research in this area will be a major contribution if diverse views about spirituality are presented that might enhance pedagogical practices that include the spiritual in early childhood settings. There is the possibility for many spiritual stories to be told in a variety of settings and from multiple perspectives and directions.

This thesis focused on spiritual experience in three specific early childhood settings. Making the decision about where to carry out the research was difficult and I hope that this study acts as a springboard for fresh approaches in different places. I went to early childhood settings with very different philosophies. While ostensibly accepting diversity and difference the dominance of the ‘mainstream’ is obvious in early childhood settings in New Zealand. I hope that some new ideas are presented and that this study reflects the inclusive nature of early childhood rather than the less attractive partisanship that sometimes emerges. Different philosophies offer rich resources and I have made the point through the study that each setting is also part of the context of Aotearoa and recognises *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996). The idea that there is one essential early childhood setting that encompasses all needs and answers

all prayers is unrealistic. Such a vision simply excludes those who may wish to see different values reflected in early childhood educational settings.

#### Future directions

The link of spirituality with resilience is growing. This could be explored further in longitudinal studies. The negative statistics in New Zealand concerning child abuse, violence in the home and youth suicide would support interest in any studies that contribute to overall well-being and health. My thesis refers to healing environments, to positive relationships and to connections with the earth that might contribute to resilience and longitudinal studies could build on the ‘window’ represented by this study.

In the future all studies that concern young children and that connect with *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) might be encouraged to include a look through the spiritual lens as a way of bringing the spiritual dimension into focus. Including the spiritual is inclusive and recognises the way that the world is perceived by many people and communities. If the spiritual is accepted and becomes included in research as a matter of course it is then part of the weaving that is the early childhood curriculum’s metaphorical base. Spirituality does not have to be invisible or unarticulated in early childhood settings. Researchers who are aware of something about the atmosphere that is hard to pin down and describe are often holding the spiritual thread already and this thesis might encourage them to follow it.

#### **Implications of the research: suggestions for policy and practice**

Spirituality has a political dimension. In a global sense conceptualisations of spirituality contribute to ecological understanding and affirm the connections between people and the world. From a local perspective this thesis attempts to explore spirituality from a Pākehā viewpoint in recognition of the responsibility of being a Partner to *Te Tiriti o Waitangi*. Policy makers may in the future require early childhood settings to work with spirituality. It is clear that this thesis contributes to any future discussion about spirituality in early childhood environments. While this thesis proposed that spirituality may inform religion but is not the same it does not emphasise these binaries. Spirituality is a means of making connections between people and this research affirms connections that include all things “animate and

inanimate” (Pere, 1982/94, p. 32). Instead of accentuating differences and separations this thesis conceptualises spirituality as the possibility for connection through the shared language of spirituality.

#### Spirituality as another language

The growing recognition of language as a metaphor that can be used in many ways in early childhood settings (Forman & Fyfe, 1998) is relevant to spirituality. Language is a system of symbols that combine to form meaning. Language is literally a vehicle for the spirit and it is also a metaphor for a way to “explore relations” (Forman & Fyfe, 1998, p.249). The language of spirituality was apparent in these settings. It was realised in the relationships that were formed and the connections that this study proposes to be possible between people and between people and other things. The language of spirituality is embedded in the mauri of the everyday (Pere, 1991). The language of the spirit is always available, through touch, sight and sound; it is in scents and sensations. This language, used consciously and unconsciously, is part of each setting.

The vocabulary of spirituality is different. It consists of words that carry different connotations and weight for different people. These are words like reverence, holy, worship, faith, or sacred. They have religious connotations and, as Purpel and McLaurin (2004) note, they need to be used carefully. They do not always have inclusive meanings. The vocabulary of te reo Māori is also available. Words, such as wairua, awahi, manaaki, mauri, express concepts that enrich my understanding although I remain aware that the deeper meanings are diluted by translation. I have tried to use them without appropriating them. This thesis encompasses all these words but the language of the spirit goes beyond vocabulary. The language of spirituality enables the spiritual to be lived and reinvented in relationship to daily life. Anything can be made spiritual, through word or gesture, through a smile or in a particular way of acting. The challenge is to recognise the epistemological force of this language; its ability to communicate spirituality so that it is heard and understood by individuals, between people, in early childhood communities and in the institutions that regulate them.

### Spiritual spaces - for children

Policy that recognises spirituality will ensure that all children in Aotearoa have access to the natural environment. Spirituality connected to an understanding of deep ecology is the ultimate holistic perspective and a way of recognising the unity of all things (Desjardins, 2006). This aspect of spirituality recognises the web of life, Gaia, nature and the earth. It affirms the cycle of life that was such a feature of the Steiner kindergarten. In all three settings there was outdoor play in gardens and sandpits with flowers, trees and shrubs, wood, pebbles and water. There were goldfish and birds. Thus children were able to connect with the natural world. No matter what regulations applied to the inside space the children quickly took over the outdoor area. The outside was connected to the spiritual elsewhere. Having spaces outside gave children opportunities to connect with other living things. When early childhood settings do not have gardens and outdoor areas a specific and contextual aspect of spirituality cannot be realised.

Policy and practice that affirms the spiritual must also acknowledge the need for restorative and calm early childhood settings. Stress and spirituality do not go together. The spiritual approach can be calming and the Montessori *casa* used silence to restore the spirits. The quiet circle time after lunch was when peace descended in the *casa* after energetic outdoor play. The Steiner teachers used song or a musical instrument to restore harmony. The kindergarten was designed to promote tranquillity. In the private preschool the break in the day between morning and afternoon sessions gave teachers a chance to relax and during quiet lunchtime conversations they would catch up with the children and relax.

### Spiritual spaces - for teachers

My case studies revealed that teachers willingly construct special spaces for children but not for themselves. This might not be something that teachers always have control over. This thesis proposes that the processes of spiritual witness, spiritual in-betweenness and the spiritual elsewhere are complemented by sensitive teaching and excellent pedagogical practices. This was an aspect of everyday spirituality in these settings that was noticed and appreciated by children, parents and teachers themselves. However, it was noticeable that none of these settings had a place for teachers to go for uninterrupted time. Any food or drink was taken with the children

and this was shared time. Beyond this I noticed that there was nowhere peaceful to go to reflect on the events of the day or take five minutes break during sessions. When there was physical space it was used as storage or taken up for other purposes. In order to recognise the spirituality of adults as well as children in early childhood settings I would recommend always having places where teachers can rest and if possible a place where parents can speak to a teacher without interruption and in privacy. Under these circumstances adults might be able to reenergize their own spirits and have their well-being restored after busy periods focusing on children.

### Everyday spirituality in action

Putting spirituality into action is possibly harder than writing about it. The research findings show that saying and doing are both ways of realising the spiritual in everyday life. As well as the spoken and narrative aspects of spirituality this research supports living it. The Steiner song affirms ‘good deeds’ and the ability to do good in the world is often through action. In these settings participants were welcoming, hospitable, energetic and attentive. There are millions of words written about the spiritual but I discovered that one action in a day could make a difference to everything and everyday spirituality is a constant possibility. Spirituality in action may mean withholding a sharp word, not stating the obvious, being respectful to everyone regardless of age or size, talking instead of telling, laughing more often and letting things go occasionally instead of rushing in. It means supporting learning for as long as it takes instead of rationing time. It recognises the intimate care in early childhood settings as spiritual, as service, and not just another boring chore. It might mean getting lost in the moment, always being aware of “the face of the other” (Levinas, 1999). He continues “that face facing me, in its expression – in its mortality – summons me, demands me, requires me” (p.24). Spirituality in action recognises this responsibility and respect for the Other.

- kindness

Kindness is the practice of everyday spirituality. Parents noticed when their children were valued and loved and children know when they experience *awhina*, the practice of warmth and kindness, because according to Pere (1994, p.68) it is “spiritually uplifting”. I saw one teacher kneeling to wipe tears away one day for a little girl who was on the move, shuttling between parents and wanting security. She was not

encouraged to be independent, to deal with her own grief, but was being gently supported, her spirits soothed by the touch of another human being. She was able to share her story and knew that it was a safe place to do so. These teachers also shared the joy and happiness of children. I was surprised at how much laughter and enjoyment was visible on the videos that were made in the *casa* and private preschool. There were also so many kind and respectful interactions between teachers and children and between the children themselves. Being kind is the least we can do and parents reiterated their wish for kindness to be part of these contexts. Kindness encourages trust and spiritual witness emerges from kind acts encountered in daily life. It is essential in spiritual terms that adults and children are able to feel and express compassion and through kind acts to make the practice of compassion a feature of daily life.

- social justice

Spiritual practice supports a deeper sense of social justice linked to citizenship, to peace and reconciliation (Moore, 2004). Spiritual processes described in the thesis recognise the importance of inclusive social practice that occasionally challenges the status quo. Doing something with a spiritual intention often means doing something differently and mindfully. Everyday spirituality involves thinking about how to be welcoming, how to be hospitable, how to care for others and be inclusive. It means, in Reedy's (2003, p.51) words, to "implement curricula that enhance the lives of *all* children" (her italics). This may mean not being so involved in the prevailing discourse of early childhood education that parents and strangers feel excluded (Fleer, 2003). The 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries are epochs of diaspora, of global movement, with more people having to be somewhere other than their homeland than ever before. Sometimes this is desired, sometimes imposed. Being affirming of the spirit might be a gift that early childhood settings can give. This means recognising that such a gift might mean grappling with what Derrida (2001, p.102) calls "the possible happening of something impossible". He says that the unconditional act (of hospitality, the gift) "may happen as a miracle...in an instant" (p. 102). The hard thing is not to erase difference but to learn to live together as a spiritual practice.

- spiritual safety

It is important to question whether early childhood settings are places that are spirituality safe. The construction of the child is sometimes suspect and is too often reduced to the merely appealing. Many visual images of children are not spiritual, just intrusive. To encroach on children's right to a place that is private, that might involve worship or the wish to contemplate nature without interruption is not spiritual practice. The privileging of documentation or assessment practices in these circumstances is problematic. Spirituality in educational contexts must above all be ethical (Alexander, 2004). I think this is an area for adults to be very aware of their own perspectives and image of the child. Children will grow up respecting the spiritual space of others if they have experienced this respect for themselves.

I have conceptualised spirituality in everyday life as a process and while processes become part of experience it does mean that there might not be a product that can become another box to tick. Spirituality has the ability to permeate everything: it may be part of an experience with literacy or science, reflected in the precision of mathematical concepts or in the wonder of technology or the natural world. I would find it problematic if spirituality became something to be pinned down. In my experience such initiatives simply remove the spiritual element. While this research troubled my idea of spirituality my intention was not to make trouble for spirituality. I do not think that it can ever be regulated or measured. The themes that emerged in this research are completely free of coercion, there is no possibility of forcing witness, or of ensuring the in-between is experienced or making someone enter the elsewhere. These processes are reciprocal, partially involuntary, and are supported by certain practices in particular environments. They are possibilities not categorical imperatives. The process of becoming spiritual is inimical to regulation. Indeed, I can think of nothing more depressing than someone making anything spiritual into a 'must do'. There is an immediate disconnection.

Spirituality arises from the flax (or grass) roots. Like smoke it is in the air and gone, visible for a short time, mutable, ephemeral, and when it disappears only the effects remain. Becoming spiritual or spiritually aware is a lifetime challenge and is an endeavour that must be part of the culture in order to be felt. It cannot be imposed. Spirituality emerges between people and flows between them. In terms of policy and

practice this thesis is not a recipe book. Rather it shows the strength of what happens when communities come together and children, parents and teachers have shared expectations. It then seemed to me that the wishes of the community are a means of creating a spiritual community. The community is like a *sangha* (Hanh, 2002); a place to be in harmony and find peace and friendship.

- spiritual pedagogy

There was very little that the teachers in these settings did that could not be achieved in any other early childhood setting. The narratives within the text highlight this accessibility and are spiritual moments in the research that are of course unique but they also make connections to all early childhood contexts. In any educational setting a connection with the spiritual can be made. This may be through discussion of values and virtues, by planning around the cycles of the year, by providing beautiful and natural spaces, by talking about and exploring the word spiritual with parents and discovering it with children, by having a myth or spiritual story that inspires the community and by ‘breaking bread’ together. Teachers often said that they extended themselves and challenged themselves in the effort to make something more spiritual, for example, using the voice as an instrument, singing a note instead of shouting an instruction. In relationships with others, personal and pedagogical, an engagement with the alchemy of everyday life reflects the spirit. Lee (1984, p.118), a skilful observer of everyday life pays tribute to the spirit of his mother. She passed on to him the ability to see everything with “the edge of gold around it”. This is a way of seeing the world that transforms it beyond the ordinary. When this happens and is shared through pedagogical practice then education becomes transformative.

### **Privileging the question**

At the beginning of the research I privileged the question and include below some questions that arose throughout the process. Heidegger’s (1977, p.3) statement that questioning builds a way (see Chapter Two) links with Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) concept of ‘becoming...’. These perspectives emphasise that there is nothing out there that will suddenly be revealed, predetermined and inevitable. Spirituality was revealed by questioning, by making new connections, and by affirming those that were ‘always already’ there. The spiritual way (Way) is constructed in dialogue and conversations that demonstrate an inclination to grapple with the complex and



ephemeral. The questions that follow could be asked when a relationship is in place, either between teachers or when teachers and parents are ready to explore the spiritual in the educational context they share. If people feel a sense of connection they will be prepared to engage with these deeper issues.

Everyday spirituality – some questions for parents and teachers

This thesis presents spirituality as a cultural and social practice that is embedded in the construction of daily life. Recognising and living with the awareness of everyday spirituality has changed me and the way I look at life. The reflective questions that I asked myself in regard to the main themes of the thesis are relevant to parents and teachers in the context of early childhood education. These questions will also open up new possibilities regarding the spiritual. Some relevant questions I asked myself with regard to everyday spirituality are:

How do I become aware of the spiritual in my daily life?

Do I show an appreciation for the wonder and mystery of life on a daily basis?

How is spirituality expressed in the everyday context where I live and work?

Does the realisation that I am taking a breath (*spirare*) have meaning for me in my everyday life? Does this help me appreciate the present moment?

Do I encourage children, colleagues and family members to recognise that something often taken for granted, like water or food, is *taonga* and a precious resource?

When I am engaged in everyday activities (welcoming, eating, drinking, cleaning myself or my surroundings, exercising, reflecting on the day) do I acknowledge the spiritual dimension? Is this dimension evident in the education setting that I am part of?

Is there a sense of interconnectedness in my life? How do my pedagogical practices foster the ability of others to feel connected with all things?

How might acknowledging the spiritual aspect of daily life open up possibilities for doing things differently?

### *Spiritual withness*

This connects to intersubjectivity and recognises shared meaning as part of learning and thinking. Meaning making with others contributes to a sense of spiritual withness. It can be felt between individuals and it can help form a community. The following questions are relevant when considering spiritual withness:

When I am with others am I really with them? Are they really with me? How do I know this?

Are my pedagogical (and other) relationships spiritually uplifting?

How does my pedagogical practice encourage people to achieve their full potential?

Can I be silent with other people and feel peace in their company?

Do I critique ways of doing things in educational contexts that are competitive and divisive?

### *Spiritually in-between*

In this state there might be some discomfort. It is a place of paradox, a threshold. To be spiritually between is to temporarily exist in a different state. Spiritual in-betweenness can be felt with others and recognised in ritual. It may be realised by the individual in spiritual moments of epiphany. These questions relate to the process of being spiritually in-between:

How does the environment I am in celebrate the seasons and the natural world? Is the cycle of life acknowledged?

What is the aesthetic of this early childhood setting? Is there space for spiritual withness/in-betweenness and the elsewhere?

Do I understand the point of rites and rituals in early childhood settings? How do they contribute to spiritual experience? Do they emerge from the context of Aotearoa?

In this educational setting are there strong links with tanagata whenua? Do we appreciate the opportunity in events like powhiri (being welcomed onto the marae) to experience deep cultural understandings of spiritual in-betweenness?

Is there an opportunity for the lived experience of spiritual moments that flow into everyday life to be shared and reflected upon?

Is this environment restorative? Am I re-energised after being in this particular place?

### *The spiritual elsewhere*

The elsewhere is a place of imagination and transformation. I connect some of the 'becomings' I witnessed to the capacity to show compassion and to an experience of becoming Other. This is not the same as 'lets pretend'. Children have the ability to actually become, in spirit, something else. When doing this they inhabit the spiritual elsewhere. Questions that support this might be:

Are children given time and space for uninterrupted play?

How do pedagogical practices support the spiritual elsewhere manifested in dreams, daydreaming and the imaginary world?

As a teacher or parent how often do I meet children in the elsewhere by connecting with a smile or gesture rather than using words?

How do I appreciate children becoming animal, becoming bird or becoming Other on a spiritual level?

If children are in the spiritual elsewhere do I resist the temptation to take a photograph that may dissipate the spiritual experience?

If children are revealed to be in the spiritual elsewhere do I treat the evidence of this with respect and resist constructions of children as 'cute' or 'unaware'?

Do I value the spiritual elsewhere in my own life? Am I able to be creative and imaginative? How do I affirm my own ability to transform?

### **Reflexivity and the angel**

This research was a life-changing process and engaging with spirituality as a poetics of existence is not something that it is possible to stand back from. I walked with participants involved in the research through the spiritual landscape. Spirituality flowed from the research into my everyday life and practice. In these particular early childhood environments the entry of angels was no longer a surprise. I found Rudolf Steiner's perspective on the angel useful, summed up in this story told by Glöckler (2000):

Once, when someone asked Rudolf Steiner how we should imagine an angel to be, what an angel was really like, he said: Meditate it the way you can conceive of it for the time being. Maybe the way an angel appears in an old icon – a strong, upright form but light, with wings, to show that this is an etheric form that has no weight. It is light-winged like a thought. And then the eyes! Feel that the angel is looking at you. Simply start with the way you see the angel in paintings, and let this come to mind. The angel itself will then help you to develop more and more the right idea. For the angel is a reality; the angel will help us to be able to think it more and more the way it is in his true nature. (p.38)

Steiner (1918/79) believed in freedom as a spiritual activity and the angel he constructs is the angel of the imagination. The angel is a reflection of ourselves. He insisted that “we can believe only what appears to each one of us in our own hearts as truth” (p.xxvii). Echoing Steiner's approach to truth I think that the lingering idea that any one person, group or culture has a monopoly on spirituality or a superior spirituality to any other is simply not useful. It is imperative that people support each others right to spiritual beliefs. In order to do this it is necessary to have a personal understanding of spirituality and not to assume that some other group will always wish to take responsibility for the spiritual. This can sometimes make that group vulnerable.

## **Influences on the study**

Spirituality is a challenge to Western scientific thinking and an ethos of rationality and reason underpins secular education in Aotearoa. My research recognises that spirituality has had to have its guardians in order to survive. The writing and thinking of Tilly Reedy (1995, 2003) and Rosemarie Pere (1982/94, 1991, 1993) has been invaluable in upholding the spiritual dimension of early childhood education in New Zealand and has been a source of inspiration for this study. Throughout the process of working on this thesis the work of various authors has provided paths through the landscape: the work of de Certeau (1988), Deleuze and Guattari (1987) and closer to home the work of Michael Jackson (1996, 1998, 2005) has informed my thinking. There is always something new to learn and much to be gained by being eclectic, crossing borders and grappling with “the provocation of different perspectives” (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p.23).

I recognise that as Foucault (1990, p.250) points out “it is always important to have a small number of authors with whom one thinks, with whom one works, but about whom one does not write”. In this regard the inspiration of Derrida might not be obvious in this thesis but his philosophy has been a touchstone for reflection and contributed to my critique of definitions, including my own. He questioned the hierarchies that define man/animal (Derrida & Roudinesco, 2004); deconstructed the notion of forgiveness, hospitality and the gift (Derrida, 2001); the poetic (Derrida, 1995); the possibility of moving beyond ‘rights’ (Derrida, 2004); and finally he grappled with the impossibility of definition (Derrida 2005). He explored what he called “my relation to incredible words like ‘soul,’ ‘mind,’ ‘spirit,’ ‘body,’ ‘sense,’ ‘world,’ and other similar things” and continued “how can one have spent one’s life with words as defining, indispensable, heavy and light, yet inexact, as those? With words of which one has to admit that one has never understood anything?” (p.7). He called these “the big bad words” and admitted:

I dream that one day some statistics will reveal to me how often I made use of them publicly and failed to confess that I was not only unsure of their *exact* meaning (and ‘being’! I was forgetting the name of being! Yet along with touch, it is everywhere a question of ‘being’, of course, of beings, of the present, of its presence and its *presentation*, its *self-presentation*), but was fairly sure that this was the case with everybody... (p.7)

This statement seems to be the first and last word and was a statement I read with pleasure. To be not absolutely sure of the meaning means that something can be worked with. Derrida's work encourages me to maintain a suspicion of absolutes, essences and hierarchies. Spirituality itself is, of course, the final (perhaps) uncertainty.

### **Transforming...**

Spirituality blurs distinctions while it maintains connections. It is ultimately transformative. This aspect of the spiritual is summed up in the classic story from Chuang-tzu (Cleary, 1992):

Once Chuang Chou dreamed he was a butterfly. He was happy as a butterfly, enjoying himself and going where he wanted. He did not know he was Chou. Suddenly he awoke, whereupon he was startled to find he was Chou. He didn't know whether Chou had dreamed he was a butterfly, or if a butterfly were dreaming it was Chou. (p.80)

My task was to connect spirituality as abstract, impossible, philosophical, mysterious, and the ultimate line of flight (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), to early childhood education. This task has been fascinating, problematic and transformative in itself.

One of the participants asked recently – what is the answer to your question Jane, in a nutshell? After the brief moment of panic that such questions usually engender I realised that my exploration in the spiritual landscape available to me had enabled the following conclusion to be drawn: the spiritual experiences of young children are supported by practices that acknowledge the alchemy of the everyday. Everyday spirituality is always a pedagogical possibility in early childhood settings. Sometimes spirituality may be called something else and the word or concept does not attract everyone. Spirituality is shared in stories and is reflected in memories and in personal and cultural narratives. The spiritual landscape is worth wandering in because of its potential for the (re)discovery of joy and wonder. Where there is an intention to create transformative space then the processes of spiritual witness, the in-between and the elsewhere will enter educational settings. At such times boundaries dissolve and it is possible to become we and I, the particle and the wave, the butterfly and the dream.



**Table of settings with teachers and children's names**

Setting	Teachers	Children	Information
Montessori casa	Helen, Carol, Fipe, Ina, Suri, Joelle	Jonathan, Sam, Rick, Sean, Leo, Andy, Tane, Anna, Ronan, Simon, , Karl, Sara, Harley, Julie, Danny, Adam, Wiremu, Jason, Alexa, Sana,	52 children on the roll 2 1/2 until 5/6 yrs Session 9 – 12 or 1 – 3 or 9 - 3
Private preschool	Teresa, Zoe, Sara Marilyn	Cara, Anna, Kaira, Ali, Sally, Euan, Marie, Una, Amy, Joe, Olivia, Julia, Sam, Alain, Sam, Mike, Jo	38 children on the roll 2 1/2 – 5 yrs Sessions 9 – 12 or 1 – 3 (extending to full-daycare)
Steiner kindergarten	Sylvia, Gaby, Michele	Rosa, Tamara, Joshua, Joel, Rea, Karl, Luke, Justin, Sula, Fleur, Tama, Rosa, Ida	28 on the roll 3 1/2 – 4 to start and leave when 6 or 7 (when they are ready to go on) Sessions 9 - 1

The names of teachers and children have been changed throughout. Please note that where a name is used it may inadvertently be the same as that of a child in that particular setting but this is accidental and in each incident a pseudonym is used.





## Glossary

from te reo Māori into English

Aroha	unconditional love that knows no boundaries
Atua	(as in ‘mana atua’) the gods, the sacred.
Awhina	positive motives - embrace, cherish, assist.
Hongi	a greeting, a sign of peace and of well-being.
Kai	food
Kaitiaki	guardian, guardian spirit.
Karakia	incantation, prayers “the sacred heart which is instilled into the mind and thought of an individual or thing” (Barlow, 1991, p.37).
Karanga	welcome call onto the marae. Visitors become sacred and the spirits of the ancestors are awakened.
Kōhanga reo	language nests. Have influenced a revival of Maori language, culture and customs.
Kotahitanga	tribal unity. Also to be together, hence holistic.
Mana	power, control, influence, a quality of a person or group. Implies reciprocity
Manaaki	to show hospitality and good will. To be kind and loving towards others.
Marae	community with a meeting house and place to eat. A symbol of Māori identity.
Mauri	the life principle “the ethos of animate and inanimate things” (Pere, 1982/94, p.32). The essence of life in everything.
Noa	ceremonial purification. An everyday that also applies to rituals.
Pākehā	Implies someone of European origin who is not Māori. Meaning links back to original white skinned immigrants (Barlow, 1991, p.87)
Papatūānuku	the primal earthly mother

Pōwhiri	the welcome of people onto the marae. A ritual that symbolises the link between spirit world and the living.
Tamariki	children. “Tama-te-ra the central sun, the divine spark; ariki refers to senior most status, and riki on its own can mean smaller version” (Pere, 1991, p.4)
Tangata whenua	people of the land
Taonga	possessions, highly prized, precious, connotations of sacred.
Tapu	spiritual restriction. Set apart, sacred.
Te ao Māori	the Māori world
Te reo Māori	the Māori language. It has “spirit and mauri” (Barlow, 1991, p.114) and confirms identity.
Te Tiriti o Waitangi	The Treaty of Waitangi, the founding document of this nation.
Turangangawaewae	the place to stand, the ancestral land
Waiora	health and well being
Wairua	spirituality – a dimension internalised in a person from conception.
Whakapapa	the genealogy of all things from the gods, the generations.
Whanau	can approximately mean ‘family’ or ‘extended family’.
Wheiao	a liminal state between darkness and the world of light.
Whenua	placenta. Also the land and body of Papatūanuku

The information to compile this glossary was taken from:

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## Key to Appendices

One	The consent form for children
Two	Interview transcript
Three	Unfinished poem
Four	Letter to management
Five	Information sheet about the research
Six	Teacher letter
Seven	Teacher consent form
Eight	Interview questions for teachers
Nine	Focus group consent form
Ten	Focus group confidentiality agreement
Eleven	Sample questions for focus group
Twelve	Consent for use of visual material
Thirteen	Categories in thematic analysis
Fourteen	Themes across settings



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