

THEME Learning in the early years

Belonging, Being and Becoming



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The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia

Learning begins long before children go to school. From birth, the adults in a child's life play an important role in enriching the child's environment and encouraging and supporting development. Adults working in early childhood education and care are usually second only to family members in the amount of one-on-one time spent with children under the age of five. As a result of a number of national and international policy developments, for the first time in Australia we are experiencing the evolution of a nationally coordinated early childhood sector.

In 1990 the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child stimulated discussion and focus around the world on young children, their health, education and welfare generally. This discussion was taken further in Australia by the then Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs and embedded in the 2008 Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians, in which the Australian governments of every state and territory committed to developing and improving early childhood education. Further to this Declaration, in 2009 the Council of Australian Governments signed the National Partnership Agreement on the National Quality Agenda for Early Childhood Education and Care, and since this time early childhood education and care has gained considerable attention after unanimous acceptance of the significance of the early years of life.

The early years before children begin formal schooling are now recognised as important in encouraging and promoting children's learning across all the domains of development: social, emotional, physical as well as cognitive. Research has provided irrefutable evidence to support this re-evaluation of the purpose and direction of all services for young children and their families. For instance, to characterise the work of early childhood staff as 'looking after' babies, toddlers and young children while their parents go to work, is no longer an acceptable description of 21st century professionalism around education and care during these significant early years of life.

This bringing together of both education and care in the early years of children's lives, rather than leaving education in the domain of schooling, is being supported by a range of legislative innovations. On 1 January 2012 a new National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and School Aged Care came into effect. The National Quality Framework covers long day care, family day care, outside school hours care and preschools and is being implemented through two major reforms: The Early Years Learning Framework and the National Quality Standard.

The Early Years Learning Framework describes the principles, practice and outcomes to support and enhance young children's learning. It describes the five principles and eight aspects of practice for effective early childhood education and care, and identifies five learning outcomes for young children:

Principles

- » Secure respectful and reciprocal relationships
- » Partnerships
- » High expectations and equity
- » Respect for diversity
- » Ongoing learning and reflective practice

Practice

- » Holistic approaches
- » Responsiveness to children
- » Learning through play
- » Intentional teaching
- » Learning environments
- » Cultural competence
- » Continuity of learning and transitions
- » Assessment for learning

Learning Outcomes

- » Strong sense of identity
- » Connected with and contribute to their world
- » Strong sense of wellbeing
- » Confident and involved learners
- » Effective communicators

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A splash of colour at Jindera Pre-Kinder

The Principles and Practice have been elaborated further by Margetts and Raban (2011) and the Learning Outcomes have been discussed further in a book I co-authored, *The Early Years Learning Framework in Practice: A handbook for educators and parents* (Raban & Margetts 2012).

In order to know that learning outcomes are being achieved, it is necessary for educators to make judgements about each child's learning through different forms of documentation and assessments, and by monitoring their progress and skill development. This is a process known as assessment for learning. I recently wrote another book, *Assessment for Learning: Documentation and Planning for the EYLF* (Raban, 2011), aimed at introducing early childhood educators to this new requirement of the profession. Further professional development on the Early Years Learning Framework is offered by Early Childhood Australia. ACER Press nationally distributes Early Childhood Australia's *Everyday Learning and Research in Practice* resources.

The second major reform, the National Quality Standard, outlines seven areas that research has shown indicate a quality environment for young children's learning and development. Early childhood services are being measured against the National Quality Standard and the information will eventually be shared on the

government's my child website. The seven quality areas are:

1. Educational program and practice
2. Children's health and safety
3. Physical environments
4. Staffing arrangements
5. Relationships with children
6. Collaborative partnerships with families and communities
7. Leadership and service management

The National Quality Framework has brought about many changes impacting on the profession of early childhood education and care. People working with young children will be called early childhood 'educators' to better reflect the significance of their role in children's learning and development. Staff:child ratios will be improved to enable early childhood educators to interact with each child more frequently and for increased lengths of time. All staff working in early childhood settings will be required to have an early childhood qualification. The exact implementation date of this last requirement is not yet determined but may be as early as 2014. Initially, however, the requirement will be that all staff must be enrolled in at least a Certificate III course. Furthermore, all four-year-old children will have access to

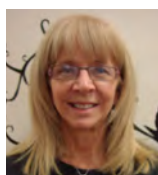
a preschool program staffed by a four-year degree trained staff member.

A new national body, the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, (ACECQA - www.acecqa.gov.au) has been established to facilitate the new national approach to early childhood education and care, and to ensure that services meet the quality standards.

The new national regulations have led to early childhood settings beginning to review their programs and practice. An enormous amount of professional learning, reflection and development has been, and is taking place, both formally and informally. Staff in early childhood centres no longer see a single focus on 'child care' or 'meeting children's needs' as an accurate reflection of the service they are now required to offer. They are focusing their work on recognising children's strengths and capabilities, and changing their experience to reflect a movement away from an industry towards a profession.

This is a challenging time for everyone working in the field of early childhood and for the families of young children. However, this is a moment for excitement and pride as the profession moves towards more appropriate recognition of the important work they all do together.

Building an outdoor learning environment



Diana Gaskell is the Director of St Peters Lutheran Early Learning Centre, Blackwood SA. She is a passionate advocate for early childhood education.

As a result of the school receiving the Australian government's economic stimulus package, the Early Learning Centre at St Peters, Blackwood, found itself with a greatly increased and highly valued outdoor play space.

The whole ELC community—children, educators, parents and ELC committee—combined to contribute a variety of recommendations on how to best utilise this extra expanse.

We were guided by the following elements of our Philosophy Statement:

- » to provide a connectedness with parents and family because working together directly benefits the child
- » to provide equipment and material that stimulates the children's physical, emotional, social and intellectual growth, according to the developmental level of the individual child
- » to create indoor and outdoor opportunities which encourage children to be capable, resourceful, independent and resilient learners

We also embraced the Early Years Learning Framework, Outcome 2:

Children are connected with and contribute to their world, and, Children become socially responsible and show respect for the environment.



The additional space would give the children the chance for more active, spontaneous movement in a protective environment where they could take risks as they consolidate and gain mastery over their motor skills. It could not be assumed that they would all have the same opportunities in their home environment. Nowadays streets are busier, backyards are smaller, and parents often have less time to spend participating in their children's outdoor play because of increased work commitments.

Our new outdoors play environment should incorporate some challenging activities that provide opportunities, under close supervision, for the children to learn new skills, try new behaviors and allow them to test the limits of their physical, intellectual and social development. We believed that this was a chance to provide children with positive risk taking opportunities that may not be available to them in other contexts.

Through exposure to carefully managed risks, children learn sound judgment in assessing risks themselves, hence building confidence, resilience and self-belief qualities that are important for eventual independence. (Children's Play Council, 2004)

The first phase of turning our dream into reality was the design. Various playground design books were referenced, and ideas gathered from Playsafe, government departments and various internet sites.

The unanimous decision was that we definitely did not want synthetic, plastic play equipment because we believed this could stifle the extension of play and not allow for creativity and exploration; once a child has learnt how to use the fixed equipment, it becomes a repetitive action rather than a stimulating and problem solving experience.

The driving force behind the final design was the desire that every nook of the play space must support individual children's learning and development opportunities. It should also be a natural play space which is culturally sensitive to the Kurna people because we acknowledge that we now share the land.

It was agreed that outdoor play was vitally important for our preschool children because it provided opportunities for them to learn and gain competence in a vast range of motor skills. The play space needed to provide chances for all children to explore, manipulate and take risks because many places where young children live and play are almost devoid of vegetation and opportunities for direct contact with nature.

There would need to be hideaway/cubby spaces for children that allowed exploration and discovery, a garden for planting, an increased sandpit area complete with water play, a creative/imaginary play space, real lawn, an amphitheatre, a building construction wall, a music area, paintings, totems, pavers with an aboriginal influence that respected the Kurna people and plants entwined throughout the space.

The next phase was to construct and bring our plans to reality. The accepted design was split into seven stages to be completed through the generous support of parent working bees, coordinated by one of our amazing parents. Completed stages:

1. Build a vegetable/flower/herb garden
2. Increase sandpit space and build grass amphitheatre
3. Build an A-frame for climbing vines and an 'imaginative play' platform/cubby with interchangeable picture panels
4. A climbing log was craned into place and a water feature installed into it

Stages yet to be undertaken:

5. Builder's corner, children's footprint pavers and totem poles
6. Music corner complete with a outdoors xylophone lizard (subject to grant)
7. Sun protection canopy

Stages 5 and 7 are planned for completion by the end of the year.

This project has helped develop stronger relationships between the children, educators, parents, ELC and school committee and wider community.

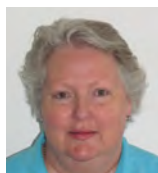
We have created a natural play space environment which includes plants, trees, edible gardens, sand, rocks, mud, water and other elements from nature. (DEEWR, 2009, p. 16)

Our children now have a stimulating and visually attractive outside play space that supplies various opportunities for their developing skills and interaction with nature. It facilitates risk taking, exploring, building, balancing, measuring, weighing, sharing, teamwork, problem solving, creativity, spontaneity, social interaction, expressive language, imagination, role play—all whilst having FUN!

The lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

Genesis: 2:15

Raising the bar: early learning & care in Lutheran education



Mrs Susan Shaw is an Early Childhood professional with over thirty years of experience in the for-profit and community sector, working for corporate organisations, education facilities and stand-alone services. Her role is Chief Executive Officer of Queensland Lutheran Early Childhood Services, a Branch of Lutheran Education Queensland dedicated to the support of early childhood and school aged care services in the Queensland District.



In an Olympic year, 'raising the bar' seems an appropriate catch phrase; one that has been repeated continuously for more than a year as the new national legislation for education and care services has been introduced. Educators are being asked to reflect and look deeper at their practices, improve outcomes for children and families, build cultural capacity and link with their local communities.

With a focus on improving the quality within Early Childhood and School Aged Care services, the new legislation and frameworks promote the importance of an holistic approach to understanding the children in our care. Quality early years programs lay the foundation for lifelong learning and promote competence and wellness.

The National Quality Framework

In December 2009, all Australian governments agreed that they would be partners to a new National Quality Framework that would deliver higher standards of education and care, plus give all Australian children, no matter their location and situation, a better start in life.

The National Quality Framework has the following components:

1. The Education and Care Services National Law Bill which was enacted through the Victorian parliament in 2010 and then adopted as an 'applied law system' by all other Australian states and territories
2. The Education and Care Services National Regulations which were modified slightly by each jurisdiction to allow for transitioning from the old state/territory legislation to the new framework

3. The National Quality Standards comprising seven quality areas
4. An Assessment and Rating system
5. A Regulatory Authority in each state and territory
6. The Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) – an independent statutory body set up to provide leadership for the sector and promote quality across Australia

The National Law and Regulations came into force on the 1st January 2012 and this inaugural year has been one of challenge and learning as we transition into new understandings, new terminology and higher expectations.

About QLECS

The Lutheran Church of Australia Queensland District (LCAQD) has supported children's services for over 47 years, ever since the first Lutheran Community Kindergarten was opened at the Nazareth Church in Woolloongabba.

The church holds a respected name in the community that attracts families to our services and also provides:

- » our legal structure as the Approved Provider (Licensee)
- » land and buildings for our services
- » pastoral care and ministry to the staff, families and children at the services

Queensland Lutheran Early Childhood Services (QLECS) was formed as a governance, administration and management arm of Lutheran Education Queensland (LEQ) in 2000, after an identified need to manage centrally an early learning centre that was experiencing difficulty. QLECS is a Christ-centred organisation with our Moral Purpose being: *Living and Teaching God's Word within the Community.*

As a branch of LEQ, QLECS now administers, manages and supports fifty-five Early Childhood and School Aged Care services across Queensland and northern NSW. The QLECS Operations Team is a small group of twelve professionals providing administration, accounting and educational support to these services. QLECS staff have the delegated authority as the authorised representatives of the Approved Provider to ensure that every service is compliant, to manage areas of risk on behalf of the Approved Provider and to work pro-actively and in partnership with every service, committee, school, college and congregation.

Service Type	No.
Sessional Kindergarten (6 hours p/day)	13
Long Day Kindergarten (kindergarten session plus before and after care)	6
Early Learning Centres (long day care)	11
Family Day Care Services	2
Outside School Hours Care (before school, after school and vacation care)	19
Limited Hours Care (out of scope of new legislation)	1
Pre-school in NSW	1
Occasional Care Services (out of scope of new legislation)	1
Managed long day kindergarten – outside of the Lutheran system	1
New Projects for 2013 - kindergartens and early learning centre	3
TOTAL	58

The QLECS Operations Team has done an enormous amount of work throughout 2011 and 2012 to assist services to understand and integrate into the National Quality Framework—our 'new world':

- » Re-aligned and written over 100 policies and procedures, in line with the new legislation
- » Outsourced the Work Health and Safety component to an independent expert to review the updated policies, help us write and implement a management system and deliver training for all levels of employees, including the development of a training DVD for service staff
- » Organised a very successful Early Childhood Retreat at the beginning of March to train service leaders and staff

Our children's services offer quality, educational programs within a Christian ethos, welcoming to all families, regardless of ethnic origin, gender or religion. Each week, these services look after:

- » over 4,400 children
- » over 4,100 families
- » over 490 staff

These services have links and partnerships to:

- » 23 schools/colleges
- » 18 congregations

Christian Studies in the early years



Anne Dohnt is the Education Officer, Christian Studies for the early years and primary, in the Lutheran Schools Association region.

Do butterflies have ears?

How does spring happen? I mean how do the leaves know to come?

When we go to heaven and be with Jesus will that be like you are with me now?

The questions of children in the early years seem limitless and reflect their natural capacity for wonder and attentiveness to the world around them. As children are actively engaged in exploring and learning about the world they are comfortable with the surprise of a new understanding. In a faith-based learning environment such as a Lutheran kindergarten, Early Learning Centre or day care centre, children's wonder about themselves, others and the world around them also raises questions such as:

- » How does children's natural curiosity about the world relate to their spirituality?
- » How can we nurture the spiritual lives of children in the early years?
- » What does Christian Studies look like in the early years?

Rebecca Nye (*Children's Spirituality*, 2009) has conducted research into the spiritual lives of children and suggests that childhood is a natural source of spirituality. She raises the questions:

- » Is spirituality something you expect in every child?
- » How does this impact on the way we see children?
- » How does it challenge the notion that children's spiritual life only begins once a child has been filled up by us with religious knowledge?

Nye describes children's spirituality as 'an initially natural capacity for awareness of the sacred quality to life experiences. This awareness can be conscious or unconscious, and sometimes fluctuates between both, but in both cases affects actions, feelings and thoughts.' In our early learning settings that comprise children from vastly different religious backgrounds do we recognise that all children have a spirituality aside from their religiosity? Nye encourages educators to have spiritual conversations with children exploring their experience. In

the Lutheran early learning context these conversations can also greatly inform the learning experiences we provide to nurture children's spirituality and develop their understanding of and experience with Christianity.

How can we nurture the spirituality of young children?

David Hay and Rebecca Nye conducted a three year study into children's spirituality. They presented their findings in *The Spirit of the Child* (1998) and identified a 'relational consciousness' at the heart of children's spirituality. This heightened level of consciousness or perception in relational matters focuses on *I and self*, *I and other*, *I and God*, and *I and the world*. This strong relational focus has implications for the learning environment and learning experiences and how they facilitate learning about self, others and the world. It places great importance on the child-teacher relationship and how adults model, through their interactions with the child, a way of being human and a way of approaching and making meaning of life. Sonya Joseph, the Christian Studies leader at Tanunda Lutheran School Early Learning Centre, provides the following description of Christian Studies in her centre with its strong relational focus.

Our Christian Studies experiences provide opportunities for the children to explore their talents, to build on their knowledge, to develop meaningful relationships and to engage with nature.

We ensure that opportunities exist for our children to see themselves as important, able and loved. We hope that in our service to families and their children we model God's compassionate care and love. Relationships are of the utmost importance; families and their children are respected and treated with sincerity and care. This aspect of our Christian Studies program often speaks the loudest. Our Christian Studies program exists within all aspects of our program, but our strong emphasis on relationships and establishing a sense of belonging is the building block.

Hay and Nye go on to propose three categories of children's spiritual sensitivity: *awareness sensing*, *mystery sensing* and *value sensing*. These interrelated sensitivities 'can act as vehicles for spirituality' (Grajczonek & Ryan, 2007, p13) and provide a starting point for considering the learning environment and learning experiences in the early years.

Awareness sensing

Children have the ability to be in tune with an intense sense of the present moment. Awareness sensing relates to how children can act with total involvement in the here and now. 'It is a sense of alertness which might be experienced in moments of stillness and concentration' (Grajczonek & Ryan, 2007, p13). It can occur when listening to music or being at one with nature or when children experience an intense sense of belonging.



Zion Preschool's Gethsemane Garden



A quiet place to sit

This awareness sensing can be developed through activities that require holistic engagement such as contemplative prayer, playing, running, singing or dancing.

At a *Christian Studies in the early years* day, a teacher shared how she sometimes plays Taize music at the beginning of their Christian Studies time, placing different scarves and fabric on the floor. She finds the children happily move into the space, choose a scarf and respond to the music in ways that are expressive of the music. The children are 'in tune' with the music and have this sense of being fully present in the here and now.

At Zion Kindergarten, Gawler, awareness sensing is nurtured through an intense sense of the present moment as children play in the Garden of Gethsemane after hearing the story of Jesus praying in the garden. Children are encouraged to play quietly and, if they choose, to spend time talking with God.

Mystery sensing

Mystery sensing is an awareness that relates to 'the wonder and awe, characteristic of children, as they experience the inherent mystery of the universe' (Grajczonek & Ryan, 2007, p9). This awareness finds expression in children's questioning and fascination with the world around them.

At a school visit, a kindergarten teacher gave an example of how this wonder and curiosity is nurtured. The morning play time had involved a group of interested kindergarten children sitting and conversing with their teacher as they all became absorbed watching the activities of ants. They discussed questions

such as: What does this make you think about? What do you find amazing? What does this make you wonder?

Mystery sensing experiences like this could possibly lead into exploring Christian understandings of God as creator and God and people's relationship with creation. Children could be involved in creating through a series of sensory and tactile activities such as painting, sculpting and building. They could then explore the first account of the creation story and artistically respond to the story while the ambience is set with music. Children may wonder about the mystery of creation as they ponder pictures of the grandeur and minuteness of the universe. Questions or images may lead into a discussion about ways people care and do not care for the planet. Experiences such as this may develop a sense of wonder and nurture the mystery sensing awareness.

Value sensing

'This is the deep emotion, related to oral sensitivity, of delight and despair that express children's sense of goodness and worth, or of their sense of evil' (Grajczonek & Ryan, 2007, p13). When we provide opportunities for children to experience deep emotion and develop their sense of goodness and worth we cater for this sensitivity. Play experiences that nurture collaboration and the use of biblical and secular stories can support children to explore what really matters in life and to begin to make sense of the world and their reality.

Opportunities for value sensing arise as a kindergarten integrates The *Christian Studies Curriculum Framework—Christianity in the*

World, Key Idea 3 (People make decisions using a range of religious perspectives and ethical frameworks) with the Early Years Learning Framework Outcome (Children are connected with and contribute to their world). Children read, discuss, role-play and reflect on a range of picture books and bible stories to explore choices and the different consequences that can arise from different choices. They explore questions such as 'Why do we do what we do?' They also consider Christian understandings of love, forgiveness and reconciliation.

As we reflect on the work of Rebecca Nye and David Hay and the ways teachers in early learning contexts are already nurturing the spirituality of children and developing understandings about Christianity, are there opportunities for greater application in the primary and secondary context? The following questions require reflection and discussion:

- » What are the ways we can help students honour and express their spirituality in light of their varied religious backgrounds?
- » How can we provide a more holistic approach to teaching and learning in Christian Studies that acknowledges the connectedness of the physical, personal, social, emotional and spiritual as well as cognitive aspects of learning?

And most importantly:

- » How can Christian Studies continue to nurture students' wonderings about self, other, God and the universe as they seek answers to their own and life's big questions?

The spiritual dimension of the EYLF document

Implications for educators in religiously affiliated early years settings



Dr Jan Grajczonek is a senior lecturer at the McAuley Campus of Australian Catholic University. Her research and scholarly interests are in the areas of young children's spiritual and religious development and education. Jan has published several articles in the area and in 2010 in collaboration with the Queensland Catholic Education Commission developed the Framework for Early Years Spiritual Development in the Catholic Tradition.

The publication of the landmark document, *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework* (DEEWR, 2009) (henceforth EYLF) is significant, not only because it is the first such document to articulate a national approach to learning for young children, but also because it makes explicit references to the spiritual aspects of young children's lives and learning. EYLF advocates an holistic approach to children's learning which recognises 'the connectedness of mind, body and spirit' (DEEWR, 2009, p. 16). While we may receive such references as both welcome and important, we cannot assume that by the very fact of their inclusion they will be developed, or that because we teach in a religiously affiliated early years setting our religious education programs tick those boxes. No. Much more is required, and these references pose key implications for all educators, including those in religiously affiliated early years settings.

Before we explore these implications, it is useful to consider briefly how the 'spiritual' is constructed in the EYLF document.

An overview of the references to the 'spiritual' in the document

A starting point is with EYLF's perspective on spirituality which is to be found in the glossary where the spiritual is defined as: 'a range of human experiences such as awe and wonder, and an exploration of *being* and knowing' (p. 48). Given the extensive research available on young children's spirituality, this is a limited and rather ambiguous description. A concise definition for spirituality is difficult to articulate.

However, it is helpful to understand that spirituality is innate to all young children (Hay & Nye, 2006) and that it comprises many characteristics including children's sense of connectedness and relationship with self, others, the environment and for some with God or an Ultimate (Hay & Nye, 2006), and a sense of meaning and searching as they seek to find significance in the many experiences they encounter both joyful and painful (Eaude, 2009). This search which is related to children's sense of identity, meaning and connectedness is essential to their happiness, physical wellbeing and mental health (Eaude, 2009). Spirituality comprises children's sense of mystery, transcendence, awe and wonder (Hart, 2003, 2006), imagination (Fowler, 1981; Priestley, 1981), wisdom and knowing (Hart 2003, 2006), as well as their readiness to challenge injustice (OFSTED, 2004 as cited in Ruddock & Cameron, 2010). It is important that all educators are familiar with these aspects of young children's spirituality.

Within the main body of the EYLF document, six references are made to the spiritual which are linked to aspects of children's being in terms of their identity and to their learning:

- » the spiritual is identified as an aspect of children's learning (pp 9 & 16)
- » it is intricately interwoven and interrelated with other aspects of children's learning including the physical, social, emotional, personal, creative, cognitive, and linguistic aspects (p9)
- » educators are called to recognise the connectedness of children's mind, body and spirit (p16)
- » educators' implementation of holistic approaches to teaching and learning must pay attention to children's spiritual aspects of their wellbeing as well as to their physical, social, personal and emotional aspects of wellbeing (p16)
- » the spiritual is acknowledged as an attribute of both children's identity as well as their being (p22)
- » alongside children's cultures, their spiritual lives are also explicitly named as part of their home lives (p33)

It is also useful to note in this overview of the spiritual aspects of young children's lives and learning, that two roles have been assigned to educators: (i) to recognise the connectedness of children's mind, body and spirit, as well

as (ii) to implement holistic approaches to teaching and learning that consider spiritual aspects of children's wellbeing along with the physical, social, personal and emotional aspects. In other words, young children's spirituality is to be intentionally and explicitly nurtured, along with other aspects of their lives and learning.

Implications for educators

The intentional nurturing of young children's spirituality is considered to be of the utmost importance, and further if ignored can fade and/or be lost (Crompton, 1998; Eaude, 2003). This is a particularly significant implication for educators in religiously affiliated early years centres. In the context of early childhood Christian settings, many advocate that the starting point for religious education for young children should begin with, and seek to develop, their spirituality ahead of a more formal religious education (Grajczonek, 2001; Liddy, 2007; Nye & Hay, 1996). The intentional development of children's understanding of the spiritual aspects of their lives enables them to come to a deeper understanding and appreciation of religiosity. This argument is premised on two contemporary realities: first, young children entering early childhood settings reflect our increasingly multi-cultural and multi-religious society; and second, that an increasing number who are not practising members of their own faith communities lack or have limited knowledge and language to engage with specific, complex religious concepts. Indeed Bradford (1999) argued that nurturing and satisfying young children's fundamental needs, which can be simplified as love, peace, wonder, joy and relatedness—that is, nurturing the 'human spirituality'—can lead to the development of a more 'religious (devotional) spirituality' (p3). A critical implication that arises from Bradford's insights is that in the nurturing of these essential needs (which are fundamental to establishing a religious identity of all kinds) a pluralist approach, that would acknowledge and respect all children's religious backgrounds or their diverse religiosities, would be enabled.

When those features or characteristics common to both spirituality and religiosity, are intentionally nurtured and developed in young children (Grajczonek, 2010), the spiritual aspects of children's lives and learning would be attended to along with the intellectual,

physical, social, emotional and cultural aspects. The essential common areas of focus for nurturing both children's spiritual and religious development include approaches, strategies and activities that pay attention to and activate: their imagination and creativity; their senses of wonder and awe, of mystery, of identity and belonging, of connectedness to themselves, others, nature and for some to God or an Ultimate, of security and serenity; their participation in, and contribution to, community and to the wellbeing of family, friends and community members (Adams, 2009; Adams, Hyde, & Woolley, 2008; Baumgartner & Buchanan, 2010; Bellous & Csinos, 2009; Priestley, 1981; Yust, 2003). The creation of a safe and secure environment in which children would feel free to share their spiritual experiences is important (Adams, 2009) as well as the inclusion of both the spiritual and affective domains in the curriculum (de Souza & Hyde, 2007). The use of sensory and tactile materials integrated with story, symbol, ritual and action that would stimulate children's imagination and enable their acquisition of a language to express their spirituality are also pivotal (Adams et al., 2008; Bellous & Csinos, 2009). When such approaches, experiences and strategies are integrated into the daily early years curriculum,

then it can be truly claimed that an holistic approach to learning has been implemented in ways that develop and enhance young children's wellbeing, resilience and sense of agency.

However, this point raises another critical consideration for early years religious educators. While it is important that they do recognise the relationship between spirituality and religiosity, as well as the role that the nurturing of young children's spiritual development also occupies in developing their religiosity, it is equally as essential to acknowledge and develop children's understanding of religiosity at a much wider level. Yes, to understand the religious tradition of the affiliated centre is important but the understanding and honouring of other religions represented in the centre must also be included, as implied in the document's section on Cultural Competence wherein educators are called to 'competently respect multiple cultural ways of knowing, seeing and living, celebrate the benefits of diversity and have an ability to understand and honour differences' (p18). One might also insert here the need for 'religious competence' respecting multiple religious ways.

Conclusion

Overall the Belonging, Being & Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia enables and indeed requires a fresh perspective in considering and activating young children's belonging, being, and becoming. It is important that educators recognise and acknowledge that children's spirituality is central to those three key aspects. For educators in religiously affiliated early years settings, a significant implication is to consider children's spiritual development alongside their religious development, and for some children, ahead of their religious development. All children are spiritual but not all are necessarily religious. Given the rich diversity in contemporary Australian society, not all children in such centres are necessarily Christian, or religious. Intentional and explicit nurturing of the spiritual aspects of their being needs to be at the heart of the early years program. Intentional and explicit development of children's spiritual aspects within the early years religion program needs to occupy an important priority. Educators' understanding of the link between spirituality and religiosity, and the implications of that link for religious education programs in such settings is also an important priority if the outcomes of this document are to be achieved.

Transcendence
Imagination
knowing
wisdom **wonder**
Sense of Mystery **Awe**

Regional news: Lutheran Schools Association (SA/NT/WA)

Hungry to learn, hungry to serve

Today I learnt that every 5 seconds a child dies of hunger. It made me feel sad and frustrated when I heard that. - Jackson, 10, St Michael's Lutheran School, Hahndorf, SA.

This is just one of the confronting and challenging facts presented to 2372 students in Lutheran schools across Australia this year. The students have come together to learn more about the issue of world hunger and what they can do about it.

On arrival, students collect a tea bag, rice, beans, corn and wheat. Stories of three different women are told, linked to the staples in their bag. We think about people who live very different lives to us. Some people never have the luxury of choosing between a need and a want. Their survival can depend on fulfilling their main needs—their basic needs.

It is emphasised to students that people in poor countries do not need people in wealthy countries to do work for them. They are capable, competent and work hard. People in poor countries need to be empowered to improve their own lives, be taught how to make the necessary changes, and then given the opportunity to make them. The group looks at programs in which ALWS helps teach people so they can help themselves, such as pig banks, rice banks and small loans from a village bank.

During the day students are challenged to 'walk in someone else's shoes'. This involves students, by choice, only eating what is provided for them for the day. Morning tea is

a scoop of plain rice which may be all some children get today and lunch consists of more rice and three samples of food from other countries. While some students choose to eat their snack from home as well at morning tea time (they don't want to make mum cross!), Maddie (10) and Lizzie (11) from Springhead Lutheran School both decide to take up the challenge. Maddie says, 'I want to see how hard it is. I want to see if I can survive.'

Through hands-on activities students explore ideas, such as whether there is enough food in the world to feed everybody, how much food we waste each year (3 million tons) and how simple ideas are being used to help children suffering from malnutrition. In one activity students sort bags of pasta, representing all the food in the world, into different piles according to how much each region of the world receives. They do a great job of being fair! But then they're told that the world really ISN'T fair, and they have another go. Once they find out how it really is, they're quite shocked. Asia, with just under a quarter of the world's population, receives only around 5% of the world's food.

Throughout the day the leaders make sure the students know the idea is not to make them feel guilty, but to learn; and through learning how the world really is, many students then want to DO something about it! Jackson wants to write a quiz with some of the facts about hunger he's learnt and hand it out to all the classes. Teacher Darlene from his school thinks it's a great idea, and says: 'We'll be taking this information back to school and

presenting it at assembly to other students. We plan to make some easy to use resources for the teachers and the classes.'

Teachers have also been enthusiastic about the Awareness Week resources provided to them every year, as a DVD of materials and also on the ALWS website at www.alws.org.au/schools.

If your school would like to have a guest speaker from ALWS, or get involved in activities like Awareness Days, please contact Vicki Gollasch (vickig@alws.org.au, 0448 832 263) or Susan Seng (susans@alws.org.au).

Vicki Gollasch

Community Action Officer
Australian Lutheran World Service

A super success at Ocean Forest Lutheran College

On the 18th of August, 2012 (the last day of National Science Week) Ocean Forest Lutheran College at Dalyellup, Western Australia, hosted the inaugural South West Super Science Spectacular. The event was devised by a small committee of people who looked at the falling numbers of students taking Physics in year 11 and 12, both at our college and throughout the south west region of Western Australia. They then paired this with the statistics which were released by the Chamber of Minerals and Energy in February that showed that in a two week period in the south west there were over 1500 engineering positions which could not be filled. These two factors alone indicated to the committee that something had to be done to promote science, not just within our school but within our region. Thus the idea of the South West Super Science Spectacular was born, with funding coming from a variety of local and federal government sources as well as from private business and industry.

During the Science Spectacular the College was transformed into a mini Questacon, with over 50 interactive science based exhibits for families to enjoy. This huge science expo combined schools and universities from the south west region of Western Australia, with business and industry bodies to provide quality interactive, science based activities. Over 5000 people attended the Spectacular, with some travelling over 150 kilometres to get here.

Part of the success of this event can be attributed to the fact that we had two of the *Sleek Geeks*, Dr Karl Kruszelnicki and Ruben Meeran (the surfing scientist), presenting keynote addresses to the general public on



Jackson with an ALWS guest speaker



Just a scoop of rice



Super science in the south west



the day. The enthusiasm of the crowds at their presentations was amazing! Dr Karl wowed the adults. But for many of the children and students Ruben, whom they know from ABC Kids television programs, was clearly the biggest celebrity.

The wide range of science based activities included:

- » chemistry based analysis of unknown substances
- » dissecting and identifying marine creatures, focusing on showing people the internal workings of these and the long term results on pollution in our waterways
- » human skull reconstructions using play dough on skulls
- » robotics creation and display
- » liquid nitrogen activities
- » aeronautics from three sources—plane wing reconstruction to size, aeronautics construction at a model plane level and actual flying course information
- » solar challenges and the Sunwise character who dressed the part and wandered through the event
- » fossil digs
- » wildlife protection displays
- » Surf Science display and electronic surfboard
- » Sports Science activity from the West Australian Institute of Sport
- » electromagnets experimental display
- » Dr Electric (from Australia's Got Talent) with a lightning based creation show

- » 3D digital game creation and the virtual world
- » an astronomy display allowing people to see Jupiter through a telescope

In 2013 the college aims to refine the event based on this year's experience. Feedback from the event has all been positive with several schools making the comment that if we don't want to run it in 2013 they would like to take it over.

Ocean Forest will, however, definitely run this event, but as an off shoot to this several of the teachers and parents from the college have banded together to form a not for profit

incorporated body to promote science within the south west region of Western Australia. This body will be used to bring quality science based activity into our region and to encourage our students to take up more science based courses as they move through the college.

Inga McQueen

Ocean Forest Lutheran College, WA



Super science in the south west

Regional news: Lutheran Education South Eastern Region

Early learning at Hamilton

In 2011 Good Shepherd Hamilton congregation asked Richard Hauser from Queensland to investigate how Good Shepherd kindergarten and Good Shepherd childcare centre as well as Good Shepherd College (P-12) could operate more effectively to fulfil the congregation's ministry and mission aims within the community. This report showed that the kindergarten and childcare centre as well as the college were operating with very little input from the Hamilton congregation. The key question that arose out of this report was why Good Shepherd congregation was operating these centres.

The Hauser report recommended that if the congregation still considered these centres important agencies for mission for the congregation then the two early learning centres should amalgamate to become one and the congregation should then investigate how the college would also be involved.

This year the Good Shepherd congregation decided that the kindergarten and childcare centre are important agencies within the community and in 2014 there will be one centre with a new structure. This structure will hopefully provide congregational involvement in outreach and ministry.

The kindergarten and childcare centres are both operating at their capacity with almost 100 children—reaching into many homes that are unchurched. Good Shepherd congregation have these families waiting to hear the wonderful gospel message.

Les Seiffert

Principal
Good Shepherd College, Hamilton



Jindera Little Saints program

'Little Saints' at St John's

Small in size but mighty in potential!

Little Saints at St John's Lutheran Primary School, Jindera, commenced in 2005 as an innovative pre-kinder class for four year old children. It is a full time yet flexibly based program for children wanting a little bit more stimulation and structure than that of preschool. Whilst play-based exploration and learning are still a part of the program, Little Saints offers so much more—in part simply by being located on, and a part of, the primary school, but also because of the type of instruction offered.

One of the main advantages for the children in such a setting is that they have a fully trained

teacher and have full use of the school's facilities. As such they have a library lesson, PE lesson and music lesson per week, occurring on different days and utilising the school's specialist staff, and some exciting 'larger than life' buddies in year 5 helping to make their time at school even more exciting and enjoyable.

Older siblings love having their brothers or sisters located on the same grounds.

They wear a uniform—different from the rest of the school so that they are more easily identifiable—and their day is loosely structured around that of the rest of the school. For example, they have lunch at the same time as the rest of the school.



Good Shepherd Child Care Centre



Jindera Little Saints program



St John's Lutheran Kindergarten, Geelong

They are considered a normal and integrated part of the school and so will join us for normal whole school functions and events, including whole school chapel and assemblies, sports days and carnivals.

As such, Little Saints is not a pre-school but is an extension of our school which allows for controlled learning for children approaching kindergarten, their first year of formal school learning. There is a curriculum to follow and although some of the activities may be of a pre-school nature, there is a definite structured learning program aimed at preparing children for a life of learning and, in particular, the first year of entry into primary school life.

For more information, visit http://www.stjls.nsw.edu.au/Classes_LS_enrolment.html

Early learning in Geelong

The year 2012 has seen a lot of cause for celebration in the St John's Lutheran School and Kindergarten community as we celebrate 50 years of Lutheran education in Geelong. It has been a time to reflect on how God has continued to bring blessing to our community and the families we have been in contact with over the past 50 years.

St John's Lutheran Kindergarten is situated on the campus of St John's Lutheran School and offers a 4 to 5 year old kindergarten program and a 3 to 4 year old kindergarten program. The majority of our kindergarten students continue on to schooling at St John's Lutheran School.

We are so enriched by being a kindergarten on the site of the school. Not only do we benefit from being able to share resources and space, but being on site allows our children to participate in transition to school activities in meaningful and extended ways. Our kindergarten children enjoy spending time in whole school worship every week and visiting the school library, prep rooms and school playgrounds. They have the opportunity to develop relationships with their buddies and immerse themselves in the life of the school well before they ever formally arrive.

As we continue to work together with the children and families in our care, we give thanks to the Lord for the many blessings that

he bestows on us every day in our community, and pray that as we serve him in this place he would continue to guide and lead us as we head into the future.

Natalie Blackwell

Director

St John's Lutheran Kindergarten, Geelong



St John's Lutheran Kindergarten, Geelong

Regional news: Lutheran Education Queensland

The LORDS Little Wonders

In January this year LORDS (Lutheran Ormeau Rivers District School) Little Wonders Kindergarten opened its doors and welcomed 18 eager young children into its heart. We experienced the trials of rain, mud and flooded roads, but by God's grace and with a team of dedicated volunteers, we managed to be ready on time. Today we have 43 beautiful children attending our kindergarten. My Assistant, Mrs Kirra Hamilton, and I are blessed to have a large, supportive community of parents and extended family members who work together with us to provide a wonderful early childhood experience for the children in our care.

The kindergarten is the first step in the LORDS journey. The team of 20 staff members, led by Principal Ms Jodie Hoff, work together to promote continuity between the Kindergarten and the school as we grow together. The kindergarten children are involved in a buddy program with the Year 3 and Year 4 classes and will soon begin a transition program to prepare for Prep Year in 2013. Our school and local Pastor, Greg Vangsness, visits the kindergarten regularly to read stories with the children, chat about Jesus and join in our play time. This is a highlight in the children's day. They also look forward to visits from Ms Hoff when she drops in to get involved in kindy life and from our school Adopt-A-Cop, Constable Paul Shaw.

The LORDS Gardening Program has taken off with support from families and businesses in our local community. The children are growing and caring for vegetables and herbs which will be used in cooking experiences or sold to school families as a fundraising venture.

We also have a thriving strawberry patch from which the children can pick and eat daily.

As a community LORDS values environmental sustainability and educating towards a cleaner, greener world for the next generations. Nothing goes to waste at LORDS Little Wonders! The food scraps we collect during meal times are fed to the worms in our Worm Farm or sent home with families who own chickens. We make the most of scrap paper and empty cereal boxes and use them to construct something new to play with.

What a blessing it is to be a part of the LORDS community, and Little Wonders Kindergarten. A kindergarten and school that builds strong partnerships with families and the local community and rallies around families in need, offering unconditional love, prayer and support is one to be remembered.

Praise the Lord. He has caused his wonders to be remembered. Psalm 111:1,4a

Sarah Matjac

Director and Teacher
LORDS Little Wonders Kindergarten, Pimpama

Exploring Cultural Understanding

Every afternoon the Outside School Hours Care service at Peace commences with a group time as our transition from school to the centre. During one of these sessions, *Tiddalik the Frog*, an Aboriginal Dreamtime story, was read to the children to follow up on their interest in culture. The children reflected on the story and how the land could change from dry and arid to wet and fertile.

We talked to the children about when staff first moved to the area of the Locker Valley and how, at that time, it was in drought. Ten years later, the area experienced the devastating and tragic flood event of 2011. We told the children that during the flood staff would go to the river at Davies Bridge and check the height of the flood waters by comparing it to the 1974 flood marker on the railway bridge. This information generated a great deal of conversation about the flood level and then a question was asked by the children, 'Why isn't there a flood level sign for 2011?'

This insightful question sparked more discussion and the children brainstormed possible solutions. They decided they should write a letter to the Lockyer Valley Regional Council (the Council). The educators thought this was a great idea and wanted to make sure the children were heard. The letter was to explain the discussion and request an answer to the children's question. We informed the centre's Committee of Management and the Chairperson offered her time to come and sit with the children to assist them in compiling an official letter to the Council.

The letter was drafted with the children who were also curious about future plans for the community in the event of another such tragedy. They asked questions about the environment and the impact this flood and future floods might have on habitat. The children wanted to know what the council would do to prepare and how and if they were better prepared for the future. Happy with the outline of the letter it was finalised and sent to the Council.



Planting and growing at LORDS

The Service was contacted by the Disaster Management Team of the Council and an appointment was made for the team to visit and conduct an information session with the educators and children. Together they discussed the difference between an emergency and an evacuation. The Team spoke about the emergency procedures for the whole community and what the action plans are for evacuation of the community.

On our behalf the Disaster Management Team contacted Queensland Rail which is responsible for the railway bridge and asked permission to have an official 2011 flood level sign erected. Queensland Rail said yes, and we were all very excited about this positive outcome to our enquiry.

We are now waiting for notice of the date when the sign will be placed on the railway bridge for all the community to see. The educators' positive approach to this tragic historical event empowered the children to take action and achieve success on behalf of the community as a whole.

Christine Weidman

Co-ordinator

Peace Lutheran Primary School
Outside School Hours Care, Gatton

Our journey through the National Quality Framework

Grace Lutheran Outside School Hours Care has been operating for 18 years on the campus of Grace Lutheran Primary School at Redcliffe, providing school aged care before and after school and during vacation times.

This service underwent accreditation under the former National Childcare Accreditation System three times, with great results each time. Last year when all the information was being released on the new National Quality Framework (NQF), the only staff member who had been in the sector longer than three years was the director.

In the beginning, the NQF information seemed to be changing weekly with many worrying stories circulating about how much services would have to change in order to comply with the new standards. It was predicted that most current services would only be assessed and rated as 'Working Towards National Quality Standard'. Our team decided to accept the challenge and aim higher.

As preparation to learning and understanding the new curriculum 'My Time, Our Place' (MTOF), each staff member completed a reflection on all eight practices, relaying a situation/incident that demonstrated their understanding of pedagogical learning and how that can be experienced in an after school care setting. The children and staff put displays up throughout the centre on both MTOF and NQF to share the learning journey and experiences.

The team then carried out a full audit against each of the standards and elements listed. This was a hard, time-consuming task yet without it how can anyone really understand how their centre measures up against the NQF?

The team worked on Areas One to Five with minimal input from others as we saw these areas as our main responsibilities; for Area Six we collaborated with the parents/caregivers through emailing each separate standard out over a

period of a month then collating the information returned; and Area Seven was worked on together within the team, the committee and relevant others. The last two areas were the hardest to inspire people to be involved with, but we persisted because the more you talk about what is asked of you the better the understanding of the high expectations your service is committed to. We used this information preparing the Centre's Quality Improvement Plan.

Our assessment and rating visit days arrived and the team reported that within a few minutes they forgot that the Authorised Officer was in the centre and they just did what was their normal practice for the day. The director commented that it was one of the less stressful assessments that she had experienced.

There were no feelings of being judged and of having an intruding presence looking over your shoulder. The documentation requested and the question time occurred like a normal conversation. The team had actually forgotten the due date of the draft report so there was no real show of anxiety when it arrived.

We turned to the back page of the report first to read our overall rating and were ecstatic when we saw 'Exceeding National Quality Standard'! All that hard work had paid off. But that is only the beginning—at each team briefing we use the comments within the report as discussion points to inform our continuous improvement.

Pamela Sealy

Director

Grace Lutheran Outside School Hours Care,
Clontarf



Grace Lutheran Outside School Hours Care



Research possibilities for Lutheran education



Stephen Rudolph is the Executive Director of Lutheran Education Australia

Lutheran Education Australia and Australian Lutheran schools have had significant historical ties with Australian Lutheran College (formerly known as Luther Seminary and Lutheran Teachers College). The theological formation of people, policies and programs has taken place for decades, and today LEA continues to reaffirm and explore its relationship with ALC.

One point of discussion recently has been ALC's intent to establish a research centre which has been named the Australian Lutheran Institute for Theology and Ethics (ALITE). In the ALC publication *Saints Alive* (Issue 1, 2012) Rev John Henderson, ALC Principal, writes:

The Australian Lutheran Institute for Theology and Ethics (ALITE) is a new venture for ALC ... ALITE will deal with projects based in theology and ethics and their contemporary application, to help us engage with a changing world, develop new perspectives in theology and ethics, and generate socially just and biblically informed understandings and practices.

While this sounds ambitious, the intent is for ALITE to begin, and over time make a healthy contribution to the debates and practices of the church [and its schools]. It hopes to engage with many 'stakeholders' in the church who have an interest in developing a greater understanding of how the church [and its schools engage] with the world in its many spheres of ministry (p 10).

In considering ALITE and how it might provide an effective avenue for Lutheran education to research, dialogue and publish, LEA is mindful of ensuring such efforts are focused

on improving our schools and better enabling our educators to meet the challenges of daily school life.

In a recent Christian Research Association (CRA) newsletter (Vol 22, No 3, Sept 2012), Philip Hughes writes about 2011/2012 school surveys conducted by CRA in which thirty Catholic and twenty Anglican schools took part. Hughes writes:

Some of the schools were also surveyed in 2005. Hence, we were able to look at changes across time. In general, we found that there was a small but significant weakening of faith. In general, students prayed less than they did seven years ago. Interestingly, while the proportion attending a church frequently had decreased slightly, so also had the proportion attending church occasionally had increased and, of those who were attending, more were attending a wider range of churches. While many students in the church-run schools have a strong sense of purpose and identity, and sometimes a strong sense of spirituality, there is widespread dissatisfaction with religious education. Overall, close to half the 8000 students we have surveyed have seen religious education as being 'unhelpful' and less than one-quarter of the students have been excited by it (p 10-11).

Might Hughes' survey findings have something to say to Lutheran educators and schools? Does LEA dare engage ALC's new research centre, ALITE, to find out? How can LEA more effectively support our Lutheran school communities in their daily interactions and lives?

There is no doubt that a large portion of student attitudes to Christian education reflects the values and beliefs they bring to it. In spite of this, there is a significant challenge for Lutheran schools in how to 'do' Christian education in a meaningful and relevant way. LEA does not want its schools to provide a Christian education that may be seen as 'unhelpful'.

Rather we would want our Lutheran school principals and teachers to be well equipped to provide Christian education, dialogue and practice which our students and parents will see as relevant, engaging and lifelong.

In recent times I have been contacted by various school and church people who have expressed a desire for LEA guidance and support in relation to several complex social questions. There are many and various social and ethical matters which are a part of the daily lives of many in our Lutheran schools and in an Australian society. Consider such issues as:

- » faith and spirituality
- » same sex relationships
- » depression
- » drug and substance abuse
- » internet interactions
- » sexuality and pornography
- » media control and influence
- » environmental and climate change
- » bullying and social pressures
- » marriage, family and relationship difficulties

How might LEA and ALC/ALITE better support our Lutheran schools in appropriately researching and discussing such issues and supporting our people in the context of our Lutheran schools' daily work? How can we ensure God continues to work through us in our words and interactions so that his salvation through Christ is proclaimed? LEA looks forward to actively engaging ALC and ALITE in further research and dialogue in support of our schools.

I pray we continue to effectively support our Lutheran school communities and through all life's challenges, ensuring that Jesus' salvation shines in all we say and do.

A full list of references for the articles in this issue is available from the LEA office.