

# Researching children's spirituality

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## What is spirituality?

- An innate part of being human
- Unity between Self, Others and the Transcendent
- All children are born with spiritual sensitivity, and possible awareness of the Transcendent
- By about age 10 – usually suppressed or denied
- Need to explore their spirituality through their everyday lives

# My research method

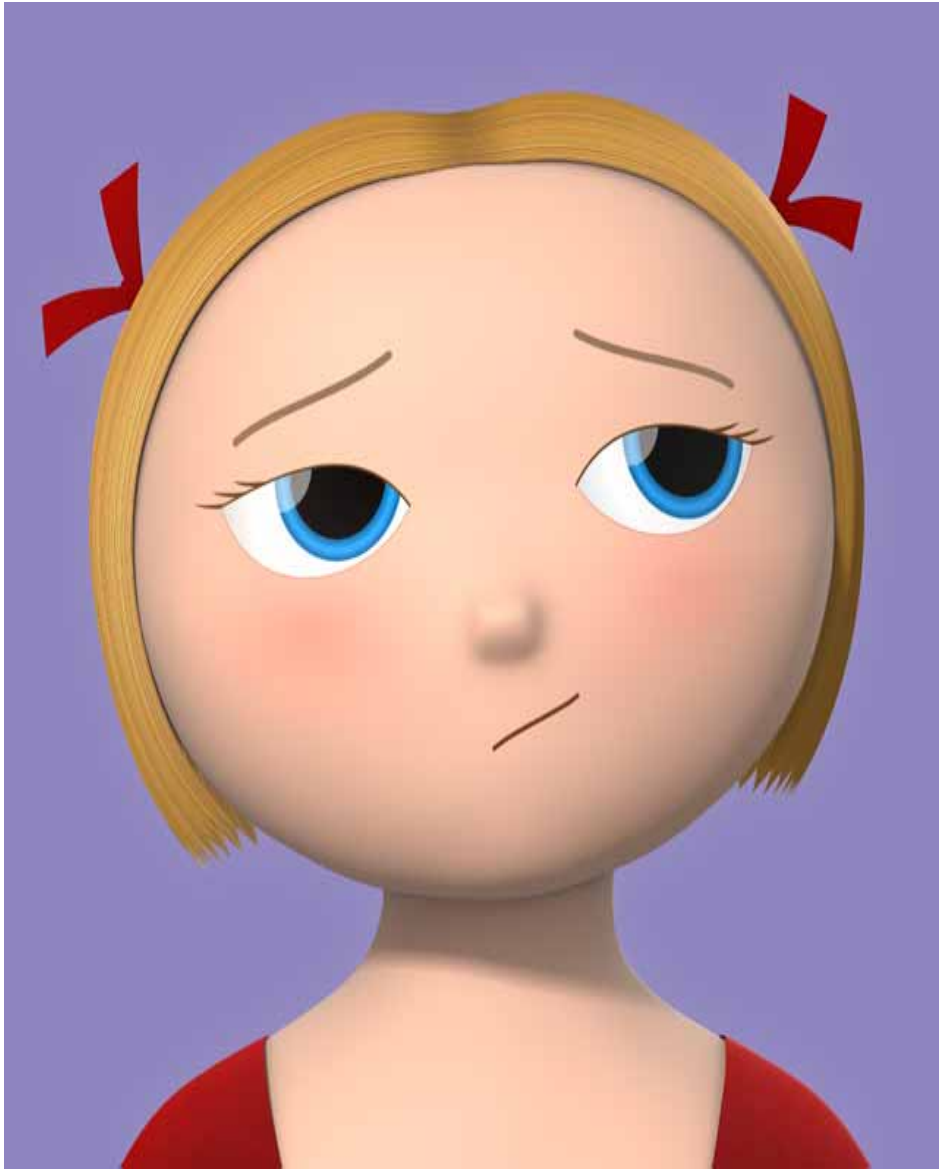
- Three Victorian state schools – provincial, rural, suburban
- 24 children aged 8 to 10 (Grades 3 & 4)
- Semi-structures interviews (videotaped)
- 2 group interviews & 1 with each child individually

## Meeting 1 – Consciousness

- Phase 1 – wondering
- Chose a photo of something amazing
- Discussion – choice of picture, amazing experiences
- Phase 2 – The Big Question
- Cartoon of thinking child
- Discussion - Big Questions, what children find amazing







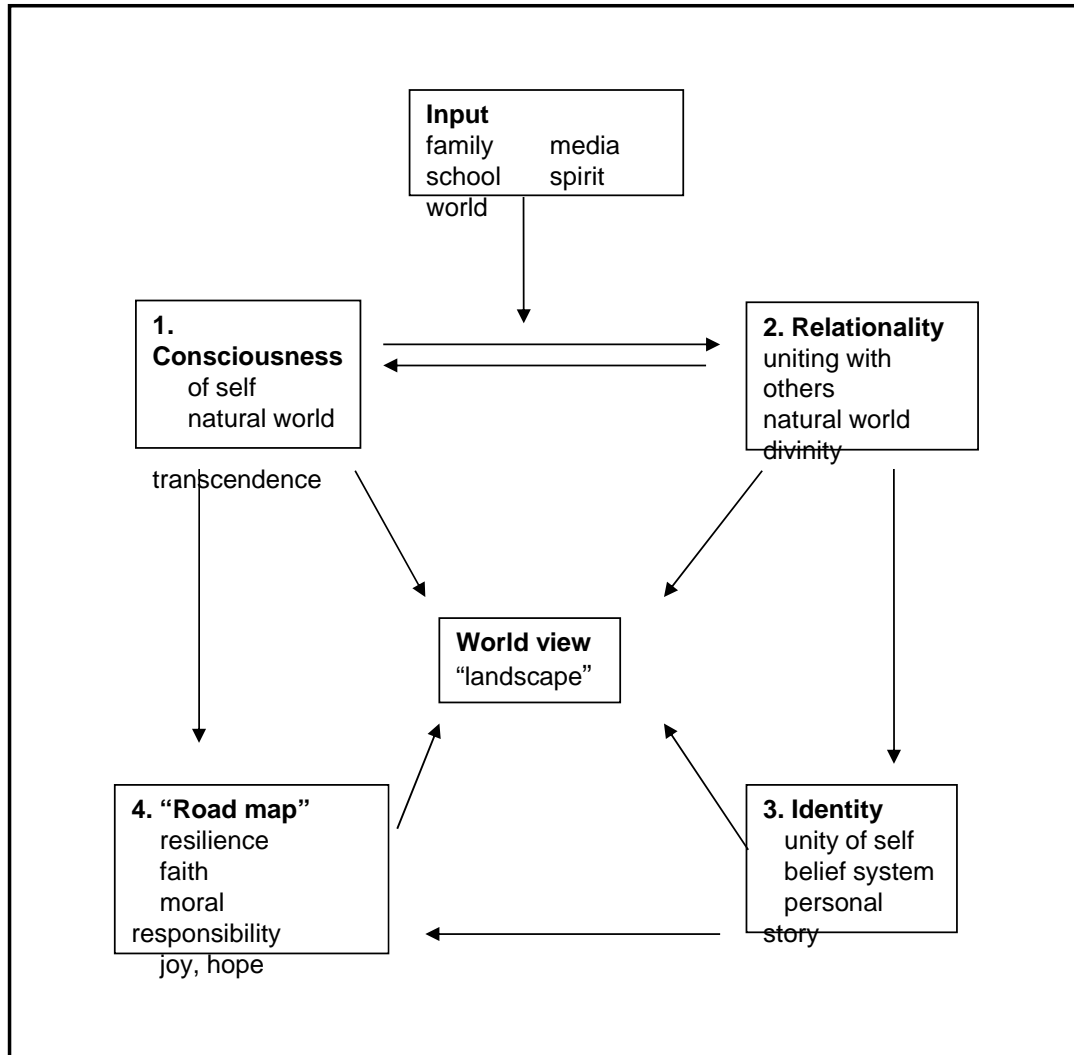


- Meeting 2 – Relationality
- Phase 1 – group activity – jigsaw puzzle
- Discussion about working together, or being alone
- Phase 2 – Read a story – “*The Violin Man*”
- Discussion about the story of a man with no family except his daughter who had died.
- Discussion about feelings, families, friends and death

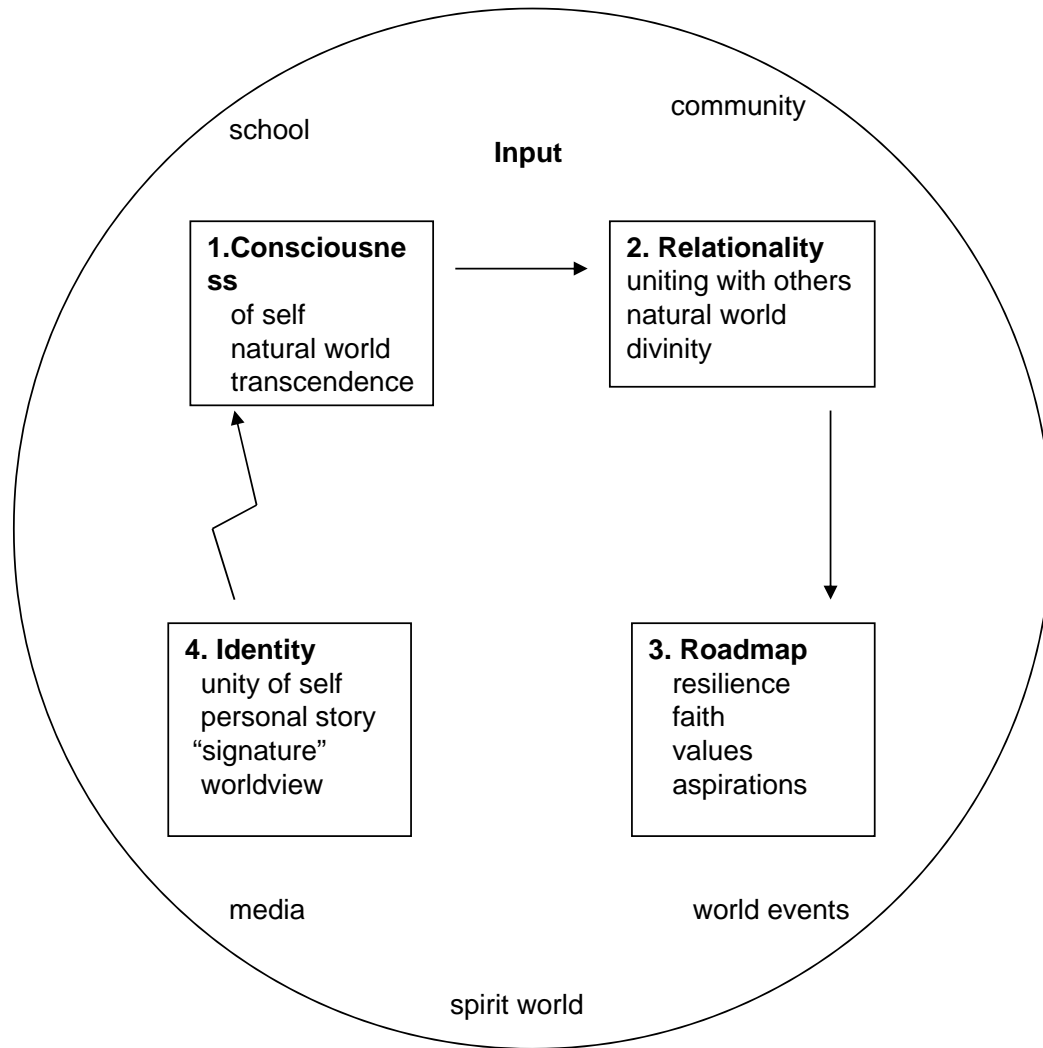
- Meeting 3 – individual
- Phase 1 – Identity – draw a picture of yourself
- Discussion – the drawing, being the same or different from others, being special and having special relationships, imagination
- Phase 2 – Roadmap (values and aspirations)
- Discuss a picture of refugees fleeing, helping people, good and bad deeds, making 3 wishes.
- Draw a picture of your “journey”, real or imaginary, and discuss it



# Research model 1



# Modified Model



# Champagne's *Spiritual Modes of Being*

(Adapted for school age children)

- *Sensitive* – sights, sounds, bodily movement, verbal responses
- *Relational* – to peers, family, nature; bonding, empathy, values
- *Existential* – relations to time and space; big questions about life, death, God, mysteries of creation and human life



# Transcript of a conversation

Pham: I think they are really cute, because, and I actually held a bird once. It was at school. I offered it a worm, but it wouldn't eat it.

Finn: Also I was there with that bird. I think it had bird flu.

W: It was sick, was it?

Finn: It was really fluffed up (demonstrates with his hands, and crouching forward).

Tom: Oh, that's when they're scared.

W: Oh, it was really sick...it might have fallen out of a tree.

(Finn has his fingers in his mouth, looking concerned).



(Hahn has her back to the camera, and is watching the speakers).

Pham: It couldn't actually fly. It was going (makes flapping motion with her hands) just flapping its wings and then it just lie there.

Finn: It just jumped instead of flying (demonstrates jumping).

W: Oh, poor little bird. So how did that make you feel...?

Pham: Um, it made me feel –

Finn: Sad.

Pham: Um.

Finn: Sorry for it.

Pham: it made me feel that I wanted to keep that bird.

W: And look after it?

(Pham nods).

Tom looks bored, not joining the conversation, yawns, and sits with hands on his head and elbows on the table.

Finn: When we were at (another suburb) we were at this house and there was this bird. And you could see its skeleton and all its skin was drying up (touched face, eyes are wide open).

Tom looks interested.

W: It was a skeleton?

Finn: No it was alive, and it was in the house.

W changes the topic of conversation.

# Application

- Observation can assist understanding of the spiritual style, “signature” of individual children.
- Preparing a spiritual profile of individual children.
- Helps to highlight their strengths and weaknesses to
- Adapt teaching approach to enhance the spiritual development of individual children

# Luke's Portrait



# Finn's Portrait



# Pham's Portrait



# Mary's Journey



# Tom's Journey





